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NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND, GALWAY

Comedy Italian style: an evolution of Italian neorealism

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Foreword

For the benefit of the non-Italian speaking reader, I provide translations of Italian sources in the main body of the text. I refer the reader who would like to consult the original text to the relative footnote, in which I may also articulate some of the choices made in the process of translating, if necessary.

I will refer to recognised modes of practice in the history of Italian cinema, such as “*commedia all’italiana*”, “*farsa*”, “*neorealismo rosa*” and “*neorealismo*”, as they are referred to in a number of studies in the Italian language, and, for the purpose of a fluent reading of this thesis, I will use respectively the English expressions “comedy Italian style”, “farce”, “pink neorealism” and “neorealism”. I will use these English expressions also in the context of my translations of existing Italian quotations. The only instances in which I shall present these expressions in the Italian form are either when I am citing another scholar who has chosen to use the Italian form when writing in English or when I am articulating a discourse on the different meanings attributed to those expressions in Italy. In the case of Italian quotations in which “*commedia all’italiana*”, a specific historical canon of Italian films, has been referred to simply as “*commedia*” for the purpose of abbreviation, I shall signal this process in my translation with the marker “comedy [*Italian style*], thus alluding to the fact that the cited text refers to such historical canon and not to the broad concept of “comedy” altogether. I will also refer to groupings of films of the comedy Italian style canon as “comedies Italian style”, in the same way in which they are referred to with the plural expression “*commedie all’italiana*” in Italian. I have kept in the original Italian the expression “*commedia dell’arte*” as there is no English equivalent to refer to this stage practice.

Films will be referred to by their original Italian title and, at least when they are mentioned for the first time, their director and the date of their Italian release will be indicated in parenthesis, although this data may be repeated when necessary for the case of an argument. For further information on each cited film, such as the title by which it was released in English speaking countries, I refer the reader to the extended

filmography, in which the films will also be grouped in different Italian cinematic practices according to where I place them in the canon of Italian film.

Introduction

“Comedy [*Italian style*] is neorealism revisited and modified in order to make people go to the movies”

- director Marco Ferreri (in Giacobelli, *Commedia all’Italiana* 21).¹

“*Commedia all’italiana*” and “*commedia italiana*”: differing notions of an historical canon

This research is concerned with the cinematic practice known as “*commedia all’italiana*”, or comedy Italian style, a comedic genre that flourished in Italy mostly during the period of the Economic Miracle.² It comprises a number of satirical films, most of which feature a contemporary setting. Such films were initially referred to in critical reviews as “*commedie di costume*”³ because they put on screen the peculiar behaviour of average Italian men and, in particular, the vices of the average Italian of the Economic Miracle period, the results of Italy’s relatively abrupt transformation into a consumerist society. The success of Pietro Germi’s 1961 film *Divorzio all’italiana* and the production of a number of films containing the same expression in their titles popularised the definition “*commedia all’italiana*” and, likewise, the English language label “*comedy Italian style*”.⁴ In order to overcome the negative implications associated with the genre because of a number of years of critical underestimation, critics such as Aldo Viganò⁵ and directors such as Dino Risi⁶ have

¹ “La commedia [*all’italiana*] è il neorealismo riveduto e corretto per mandare gente al cinema.”

² The expression “Economic Miracle” is commonly used to refer to Italy’s economic growth between the mid 1950s and the mid 1960s as a result of the Marshall Plan agreed with the United States of America for the country’s recovery after World War Two.

³ “Comedy of manners”

⁴ Germi’s film was released in English speaking countries with the title *Divorce, Italian Style*.

⁵ Viganò entitled his discussion of what he regarded as the best comedies *Commedia Italiana in Cento Film*.

⁶ Risi is quoted on the back cover of Viganò’s volume stating: “Let us quit calling the type of comedy made in Italy *commedia all’italiana*. Why diminish it with such a judgement? Comedies made in America are referred to as American comedies, so let’s call the ones we make in Italy, concerning national issues, simply *commedia italiana*” (Viganò, *Centi Film* IV). (In the original: “Smettiamola di

preferred to use the definition “*commedia italiana*”.⁷ The latter, however, coincides with the way in which one may refer to the totality of comedic films produced in Italy since the beginning of the cinema medium, as would the English equivalent “Italian comedy”. Thus, for historiographical purposes I have chosen to use the conventional expression “comedy Italian style”, which better indicates the fact that I will be discussing a limited number of Italian comedic films which were produced in a given historical period and which generally share a number of characteristics, which will be shortly discussed.

Having addressed which expression I am going to use to refer to the genre and the reasoning behind this choice, it is now necessary to establish what is the historical canon of films I am going to allude to when discussing comedy Italian style. When using the Italian original expression “*commedia all’italiana*” one certainly refers to a corpus of film comedies produced in the early 1960s such as the aforementioned *Divorzio all’italiana*,⁸ Dino Risi’s *Il Sorpasso* (1962) and *I Mostri* (1963) or Luciano Salce’s *La Voglia Matta* (1962). However, the chronological boundaries for distinguishing this canon from other Italian comedic forms have been much debated. Director Luigi Magni stated that “comedies of this type existed already before or during the War” (Pintus and Biarese 131),⁹ singling out a cycle of pre-neorealist comedies starring Aldo Fabrizi which includes Mario Bonnard’s *Avanti c’è Posto* (1942) and *Campo de’ Fiori* (1943) and Mario Mattoli’s *L’ultima Carrozzella* (1943).¹⁰ What is important to note here is that some of the protagonists

chiamare la commedia che si fa in Italia *commedia all’italiana*. Perché questo giudizio riduttivo? Le commedie che si fanno in America si chiamano commedie americane, quelle che facciamo in Italia, su situazioni e problemi nazionali, chiamiamole semplicemente *commedie italiane*.”) It is interesting to note that Risi assumes the expression *all’italiana* to be reductive of the merits of the genre.

Screenwriter Jaja Fiastrì (in Pintus and Biarese 74) and director Luigi Magni (in the same volume, 131) also have pointed out the expression was a result of a derogatory attitude on part of the critics.

⁷ “Italian comedy”.

⁸ Curiously Alfredo Giannetti, one of the screenwriters of the film, does not consider it as an example of comedy Italian style, whilst admitting that “it uses some of its modes [*of expression*]” (in Pintus and Biarese 94). (In the original: “ne utilizza alcuni moduli”).

⁹ “Commedie di questo tipo esistevano anche prima della guerra o durante la guerra”.

¹⁰ In fact, in an interview with Mario Verdone, Italian neorealist director Roberto Rossellini pointed to these comedies saying that in them “what might be called the formula of neorealism began to emerge”

of the genre such as Magni or actress Marisa Merlini¹¹ extended the canon of a practice generally associated with the Economic Miracle backwards to the period between World War I and World War II. Director Luciano Salce instead pointed to the early 1950s and specifically to Luigi Comencini's 1953 film *Pane, Amore e Fantasia* (Pintus and Biarese 165) as the landmark film which initiated comedy Italian style.¹² Similar differences of views arise when determining the end of this cinematic practice. Actress Mariangela Melato referred to her involvement in comedies directed by Lina Wertmüller in the mid 1970s such as *Travolti da un Insolito Destino Nell'azzurro Mare d'Agosto* (1974) as a second wave of comedies Italian style (in Pintus and Biarese 143), while Ugo Tognazzi, one of the stars of the genre, referred in the same collection of interviews to *Mi Manda Picone* (1984, directed by Nanni Loy) as “one of the last positive examples of comedy Italian style” (193).¹³

It is not necessary to mention more examples for the reader to understand that a number of different definitions of comedy Italian style have been attributed to the expression “*commedia all'italiana*” and that, not surprisingly, some Italians tend to use it indiscriminately when referring to any comedic film produced in their country,¹⁴ thus including in the practice even contemporary comedies such as the “*cine-panettoni*”¹⁵ produced every year and distributed during the Christmas holidays from

(*A Discussion of Neo-Realism* 69-70). This interview was originally featured in *Bianco e Nero*, I presented Judith White's translation published on *Screen*.

¹¹ Marisa Merlini references Mario Camerini's comedies from the 1930s and 1940s as the wave that initiated the practice (in Pintus and Biarese 145).

¹² However *Pane, Amore e Fantasia* is widely believed to be the best known pink neorealist film and it will be addressed in this thesis, as an example of a post-neorealist comedic form radically different from comedy Italian style.

¹³ “Uno degli ultimi esempi positivi della commedia all'italiana.”

¹⁴ By using it in such indiscriminate fashion, they are thus incurring in very much the same mistake I want to prevent by preferring the expression “Italian style” to “*commedia italiana*” or “Italian style of comedy”.

¹⁵ The “panettone” is a cake consumed during the Christmas holidays. The audience and the media have come to refer this way to the comedies released during the Christmas holidays starring Christian De Sica, Massimo Boldi and a number of comedians who became popular through television variety shows such as *Zelig*.

the early 1990s to this day. Thus, it is crucial to establish that this research will discuss a nonetheless vast number of comedies produced in Italy during the years between 1958 and the late 1970s, the historical canon of comedy Italian style recognised by critics such as Enrico Giacovelli¹⁶ and filmmakers involved in the practice such as screenwriter Agenore Incrocci (in Pintus and Biarese 17) and producer Goffredo Lombardo (in Pintus and Biarese 116) on the basis of the significance given to films such as Mario Monicelli's *I Soliti Ignoti* (1958) and *Un Borghese Piccolo Piccolo* (1977).¹⁷

¹⁶ Author of one of the most important existing works of criticism on the genre, Enrico Giacovelli wrote:

Roughly, the comedies Italian style [...] belong to a defined period, which we can limit between 1958 and 1980. 1958 is the year of the release of Mario Monicelli's *I Soliti Ignoti*, which rejuvenates Italian comedic cinema, warranting it international notoriety and appreciation. 1980 is the year of the release of Ettore Scola's *La Terrazza*, which consciously closes an era and a genre, as it appears clear from its insistence on certain themes and its summing up of the genre itself (Giacovelli, *Commedia all'Italiana* 11).

(In the original: "In linea di massima le commedie all'italiana [...] appartengono a un periodo ben definibile, che possiamo racchiudere fra le due date 1958 e 1980. Il 1958 è l'anno dei *Soliti Ignoti* di Mario Monicelli, che rinnova il cinema comico italiano, lo sprovvincializza, gli procura apprezzamenti e notorietà internazionali. Il 1980 è l'anno della *Terrazza* di Ettore Scola, che chiude coscientemente un'epoca e un genere, come si può vedere dall'esasperazione di alcuni temi e dal carattere riassuntivo nei confronti del genere stesso").

¹⁷ Monicelli famously coined the expression "la pietra tombale della commedia all'italiana", the 'gravestone' of the genre, in reference to this film. However, he refuted it in some interviews and confirmed it in others such as this one: "I wanted this story to be the most logical and clear cut conclusion of comedy Italian style, that always had its bitter and rough, violent aspects. The ending of the book and of the film somewhat concluded the journey of our comedy [*Italian style*] too" (Faldini and Fofi, *Cinema Italiano d'Oggi* 297). (In the original: Volevo che questa storia fosse un po' la conclusione più logica e chiara della commedia all'italiana, che aveva sempre avuto i suoi risvolti amari e duri, violenti, il finale del romanzo e poi del film chiudevano in qualche modo la parabola della nostra commedia.") Federico Rossin, however, borrows Monicelli's expression to indicate Luigi Comencini's *Lo Scopone Scientifico* (1972) as the 'gravestone' of comedy Italian style (Rossin 188).

Having said this, not all the comedic films produced in the peninsula within these chronological limits can be indiscriminately labelled as comedies Italian style. For example, a large number of farces,¹⁸ slapstick comedies, immensely popular in the 1950s, were still produced in the mid-sixties, an example being Sergio Corbucci's *Gli Onorevoli* (1963). Also, the relentless production of low-budget comedies characterised by toilet humour and increasing portions of screen time devoted to female nudity known as *commedie-sexi*¹⁹ or *commedie di serie b*²⁰ began as early as the first half of the 1970s with titles like Sergio Martino's *Giovannona Coscialunga, Disonorata con Onore* (1973). However, on the basis of the type of humour they pursue and their belonging to a very low-budget productive model, these comedic forms cannot be included in the canon of comedy Italian style, even though they were produced at the same time as some of the best examples of the genre and they are somewhat related to it.

Comedy Italian style is more or less identifiable with the production of directors Mario Monicelli, Dino Risi, Ettore Scola, Luigi Comencini, Luciano Salce, Nanni Loy, Luigi Zampa and Pietro Germi within the given historical period 1958-1977/80. Like Giacobelli's *Commedia all'Italiana*, this study will also consider as comedies Italian style works directed between the 1960s and the 1970s by Marco Ferreri and Antonio Pietrangeli, which are characterised by many more formal concerns and aesthetic values than the average comedy Italian style.²¹ Some of the

¹⁸ "Farse", as they are referred to in Italian.

¹⁹ "Sexy-comedies".

²⁰ Very much like the English expression 'B-movies', this Italian one refers to products made with a smaller budget. 'Serie B' refers to a lower league of Italian football.

²¹ Although because of their aesthetic refinements they are sometimes excluded from the canon of the genre by critics who are prejudiced in this respect. Giovanni Spagnoletti, for instance, describes Ferreri's *Marcia Nuziale* (1965) in these terms: "Thankfully, *Marcia Nuziale* is richer than it appears to be at a first viewing, as it could be read paradigmatically as a crossed fade between two parallel and incomparable diegetic structures: the one peculiar to the director and the other of the most facile "commedia italiana" or comedy Italian style" (Spagnoletti 192). (In the original: "Per fortuna, *Marcia Nuziale* è più ricco di quanto appare a prima vista, in quanto potrebbe essere quasi visto paradigmaticamente come una sorta di dissolvenza incrociata tra due strutture diegetiche parallele e incomunicabili: quella peculiare del regista e quella della più corriua commedia italiana o all'italiana").

works by the listed canonical comedy Italian style directors which were produced outside of the aforementioned historical period also present characteristics of the comedy Italian style genre, such as Pietrangeli's *Lo Scapolo* (1955) or even films as early as Monicelli's and Steno's *Guardie e Ladri* (1951). Mario Monicelli's *Speriamo Che Sia Femmina* was made in 1986 but it would be difficult *not* to consider it a proper comedy Italian style. In addition, directors who are generally associated with other cinematic practices have also occasionally directed comedies Italian style: this is the case of Elio Petri's *Il Maestro di Vigevano* (1963) and Francesco Rosi's *I Magliari* (1959), both directors being primarily identified with the political cinema referred to as *cinema impegnato* rather than with comedy.²² In general it can be said that *almost the entirety* of the comedies Italian style were made between 1958 and 1977 by the afore-mentioned ten directors or by one of the stars of the genre who turned into director, but that there are *some* exceptions to the rule, both in terms of *when* and *by whom*.

In fact, it would be problematic and inaccurate to project an overt authorial point of view on the comedy Italian style films. Not only is this critical framework much debated and controversial but this comedic genre in particular is also defined by different types of creative partnerships and overlapping creative inputs which raise the question '*who is the author of this film?*' more often than it can easily be answered.²³

Is comedy Italian style a cinema of directors, one of screenwriters, or one of actors? This question would need to be answered in order to attempt an authorial reading of the genre. However it would be impossible to offer an answer without omitting significant exceptions. For example, screenwriters Agenore Incrocci and Furio Scarpelli are often considered as the true authors of many films directed by either Monicelli, Comencini or Risi and historian Giacobelli refers to the two as

²² The Italian definition of "*cinema impegnato*" is commonly referred to in English with "engaged cinema".

²³ In fact, it has many times been reminded in the existing criticism of the genre that many of the comedy Italian style directors themselves, such as Mario Monicelli, refused being referred to as '*auteur*' and privileged the expression '*artisan*' (Micchiché, *Mario Monicelli: La Commedia e Oltre* xix).

“probably the true fathers of comedy Italian style” (Giacovelli, *Commedia all’Italiana* 181).²⁴ On the other hand it is undeniable that the peculiar gaze of Risi’s camera, especially when it shoots dancing scenes, is something you would not find in a Monicelli film. There are thus differences in films resulting from an Age²⁵ and Scarpelli script shot by a given director or by someone else, the point being that it is at least debatable if such differences are consistent enough to attribute the authorship of a comedy Italian style to the director rather than to the writer/s. In this genre we have also the case of an unlikely authorial voice such as those often attributed to screenwriter Rodolfo Sonogo and actor Alberto Sordi, the latter being credited by directors such as Mario Monicelli as the decisive factor in Italian comedy’s shift from earlier forms into the comedy Italian style practice.²⁶ The issue is further

²⁴ “probabilmente i veri padri della commedia all’italiana”.

²⁵ Short for Agenore Incrocci, ‘Age’ is how the screenwriter appeared in most of the credits of his films. Incrocci will also be referred to in such way in this study, especially when discussing him and Scarpelli as a creative unit.

²⁶ Discussing the different type of humour that characterised the farces of the late 1940s and early 1950s and the new aggressive and cynical humour proper of comedy Italian style, Monicelli said:

The new comedians [*of the comedy Italian style genre*] subvert this condition, which now becomes aggressive. It is now their overwhelming of others that provokes laughter. The inadequacy [*of the characters*] is not paired with bad luck, but rather with cowardly behaviour, meanness and, at times, simply with stupidity. Arrogant with the weak and deferential with the powerful, the new figure of the comedian surprises the audience, does not allow it to be naive anymore. [...] In this respect, Sordi was so good at capturing the soul of Italians. [...] Sordi unveiled their hidden inner abjectness, hypocrisy, self involvement, to the point of embodying despicable, if not odious characters. It was thus very hard for him to be accepted by the public [*at first*]. Later, it became normal that the protagonist of *Il Sorpasso* could be an unlikeable Gassman [*character*]. Totò, instead, could not have been despicable. He was a *maschera*” (Mondadori 24-25). (With the expression “*maschera*”, Monicelli is here referring to a stronger continuity between the “*commedia dell’arte*” practice and the slapstick attributes identified with Totò’s comedic persona).

(In the original: “I nuovi comici ribaltano la condizione, che spesso diventa aggressiva. Adesso è la sopraffazione a suscitare la risata. L’inettitudine non è più accompagnata dalla sfortuna, ma si abbina alla viltà, alla turpitudine talvolta, o soltanto alla stupidità. Arrogante con i deboli e deferente con i potenti, la nuova

complicated by the fact that Sordi started directing his own films in 1966 and can be considered as the eleventh major director in the genre's canon. The occasional comedy Italian style films by directors associated with different modes of expression such as the aforementioned Francesco Rosi and Elio Petri films star Alberto Sordi. Likewise, the Roman actor was also featured in two early Federico Fellini – the *auteur* of Italian cinema *par excellence* – films, *Lo Sceicco Bianco* (1952) and *I Vitelloni* (1953), which have been retrospectively considered comedies Italian style *ante-litteram*, almost as if it is Sordi's presence that leads critics to make this assessment.²⁷ If the Roman actor had not been involved in these endeavours, such films would have probably never been labelled, maybe not even been associated with, this comedic genre. This is just one example of the fact that the comedy Italian style genre is strongly associated with, sometimes even defined by, the presence of immensely popular male stars such as Sordi, Vittorio Gassman, Ugo Tognazzi, Nino Manfredi and Marcello Mastroianni and female ones such as Monica Vitti and Stefania Sandrelli. This connection is a further obstacle to an authorial discussion of this practice: how can the creative force behind a film be identified when very often directors and screenwriters were structuring their choices around the notion of a certain actor or actress having a long term contract with the producer who financed their project?

figura del comico spiazza lo spettatore e non gli permette più di essere ingenuo. [...] In questo senso Sordi fu grandissimo nel cogliere l'anima dell'italiano. [...] Sordi svelò il suo retroscena di grettezza, ipocrisia, egoismo, fino a mettere in scena personaggi antipatici se non proprio odiosi. E infatti fu durissima farsi accettare dal pubblico. Poi divenne normale che il protagonista del *Sorpasso* fosse un Gassman antipaticissimo. Totò invece non poteva essere antipatico. Lui era una maschera”).

However the cynicism in the humour should not be taken as the primary criterion to define the genre. Sordi's character in Steno's *Un Americano a Roma* (1954) is as mean as Gassman's in *Il Sorpasso*. Steno's film is however indubitably a farce. I will shortly propose a more appropriate definition to determine a film's inclusion or not in the corpus of the genre.

²⁷ Giacovelli offered this definition of the two early Fellini films as “comedies Italian style before their time” (*Commedia all'Italiana* 37).

Theoretical frameworks on cinematic genres, ‘pastiche’ and definition of the comedy Italian style genre

If a list of its most prominent directors is inadequate to define the comedy Italian style genre and if it is true that there are exceptions even to its delimitation within an historical period, what are the unique characteristics that differentiate it from other Italian comedic forms? In order to answer this question some theoretical notions on cinematic genres must be provided. Tom Ryall wrote that

The master image for genre criticism is the triangle composed of artist/film/audience. Genres may be defined as patterns/forms/styles/structures which transcend individual films, and which supervise both their construction by the film maker, and their reading by the audience (Ryall 28).

This view signals the notion that genres are as much categories that inform the modes of conception of given films as they are bound to the audience’s perception of a film or a group of films. What it highlights thus is their dialectal nature. Steve Neale took this notion forward by writing that “genres are not to be seen as forms of textual codifications, but as systems of orientations, expectations and conventions that circulate between industry, text and subject” (Neale 19). Furthermore, he added that “genres, then, are not systems: they are process of systematisation. [...] It is only as such that they can function to provide, simultaneously, both regulation and variety” (51) to highlight how the tropes we identify with a given genre might change, as well as the expectations we might have from a film belonging to a certain genre or being promoted as a text inscribed within a given genre.

In his influential article ‘A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre’, Rick Altman addressed the inadequacy of both the exclusively semantic definitions of genres offered by critics before him and of the exclusively syntactic ones, stating that only a combination of the two approaches is successful and accurate in defining a film genre. The semantic approach is primarily concerned with the recurrence of elements in a given corpus of films such as “common traits, attitudes, characters, shots, locations, sets and the like” (*Semantic/Syntactic* 10), while a syntactic one puts

greater emphasis on “certain constitutive relationships between undesignated and variable placeholders” (10) or, to put it more simply, structural recurrences which characterise the organisation of the previously mentioned elements. As Altman successfully synthesises, “the semantic approach thus stresses the genre’s building blocks, while the syntactic view privileges the structures into which they are arranged” (10). Whether we conceive genres as systems of regulation of the relationship between the makers of a film and its recipients and the film itself or we conceive them as processes of systemisation that, as much as they define boundaries, are also susceptible to the variation of their boundaries, Altman’s definition in my opinion is the most helpful in offering a model by which one can define a given genre. To give a simple example, if we take into account Altman’s tension between content and structure, not all films featuring a sporting event within their content, like a baseball or basketball games can necessarily be codified as “*sport films*”. Baseball or basketball scenes can be featured in other recognised generic practices such as screwball comedies, parodies, romantic comedies, dramas, spy-stories, etc. even in science-fiction or fantasy films. The fact that the protagonist of a narrative overcomes his ultimate obstacle or changes his attitude towards life in the third act of a film does not obviously offer an indication of what genre that film might belong to, as this is a type of structure featured in most recognised genres. Altman suggests that a legitimate cinematic

genre arises in one of two fundamental ways: either a relatively stable set of semantic givens is developed through syntactic experimentation into a coherent and durable syntax, or an already existing syntax adopts a new set of semantic elements (*Semantic/Syntactic* 12).

Therefore, if a film features a major sporting event scene in its third act in which its protagonist either achieves victory over the villain, a competitor that he never seemed to be able to defeat as a result of a long period of training or, in the case the sporting event ends with the protagonist’s defeat, he learns that there is no shame in losing, we can make the assumption, on the basis of the tension between content and structure, that such film belongs to the “*sport film*” genre. Even though Altman developed this theoretical model with Hollywood genres in mind, it proves most helpful in defining comedy Italian style’s uniqueness in the spectrum of Italian

comedy overall. What are the building blocks of the comedy Italian style films and what are the privileged structures for arranging them? Let us confront Altman's notions with the definition of this Italian genre's peculiarities offered by Giacobelli:

- 1) The first thing that characterises comedy Italian style is thus the presence of dramatic elements. [...]
- 2) All of the mechanisms of traditional comedy are present in comedy Italian style but they are mostly subverted. [...]
- 3) Here is the main theme, the obsession of this type of comedy continuously referencing contemporary reality: the solitude of the individual within consumerist society (*Commedia all'Italiana* 10-11).²⁸

The first and the third points raised by Giacobelli seemingly refer only to the semantics of the genre, while the second refers to its syntax. However, listed in such a way, these appropriate observations generate some confusion. The links with contemporary reality and consumerist society listed in point three are not explicit in all of the comedies Italian style, as many of them are set in pre-Economic Miracle Italy such as Mario Monicelli's *La Grande Guerra* (1959) and Dino Risi's *La Marcia su Roma* (1962) or even in historical times which precede the Italian unification, such as Luigi Magni's *Scipione, Detto anche l'Africano* (1972), which is set in ancient Rome, and Mario Monicelli's *L'Armata Brancaleone* (1966), which revisits the Middle Ages. A definition of the genre based on this semantic trait would thus exclude the crucial "*filone storico*",²⁹ the sub-genre corpus of comedies Italian style set in the past, from the canon. Nor is such a description of the consumerist society of the Economic Miracle exclusive to the comedy Italian style genre. For example, the aforementioned Sergio Corbucci film *Gli Onorevoli* is primarily concerned with the marketing, publicity, broadcasting and deception associated with political campaigning in the period and in it we are presented with characters who

²⁸ "1) A caratterizzare la commedia all'italiana e a distinguerla dalla commedia tradizionale è dunque, per prima cosa, la presenza di elementi drammatici. [...] 2) Tutti i meccanismi della commedia tradizionale sono presenti nella commedia all'italiana ma vi finiscono per lo più capovolti. [...] 3) Ecco qual'è il tema-guida, il chiodo fisso di questa commedia dai continui agganci con la realtà contemporanea: la solitudine dell'individuo nella società dei consumi".

²⁹ The "*filoni*" were series of Italian films repeating successful formulas. The "*filone storico*" was a series of comedies Italian style set in the past, literally "historical trend".

struggle with the cynicism of their times.³⁰ However, the film's reliance on the slapstick physical humour of Totò and Peppino De Filippo and on conventional narrative structures qualifies it primarily as a farce.

Similarly, exceptions can be found to Giacovelli's first point. The aforementioned Luciano Salce film *La Voglia Matta* does not include tragic or dramatic events in its plot but it is nonetheless considered a comedy Italian style. Despite the absence of dramatic elements, the unresolved and bitter nature of the plot's conclusion conveys a tone quite atypical of a comedic film. It is therefore appropriate to say that the "dramatic elements" listed by Giacovelli are recurring, but not necessarily present.³¹ In light of the example of *La Voglia Matta*, it can be said that they are as much possible semantic traits as they are the results of an ever-present and therefore defining syntactic characteristic in any comedy Italian style, which should thus be added to Giacovelli's second point: the films' recurring versatility of tone from a purely comedic one to a purely tragic one, in which case dramatic events are included, with possible intermediate instances such as the bittersweet tone, as in the case of Salce's film.

In order to come up with a definition that encapsulates all of the semantic possibilities explored by the canonical comedies Italian style it is necessary to generalise and say that the subject matter of the comedy Italian style genre is the

³⁰ For example, in this film the Neapolitan comedian Totò plays Antonio La Trippa, a candidate for the Monarchic Party. Antonio is a firm believer in the necessity of the King's rule in the peninsula and is about to be elected in light of a strong local following in his native village. However, he finds out that the leaders of his Party have no intention of bringing back the Savoy King but are merely interested in winning one or two seats in Parliament in order to command bribes in exchange for their support to the major political parties in case of a draw in the final outcome of the elections.

³¹ In the film Ugo Tognazzi plays a married businessman whose trip to Rome is interrupted by his encounter with a group of teenagers. The businessman falls in love with Francesca (Catherine Spaak) and progressively takes part in all of the group's rituals, despite finding them displays of immaturity, to prove himself worthy of her. At the conclusion of the film the businessman is abandoned by the group, left asleep on a beach. He thus realises that he was nothing more than a playful amusement for Francesca and drives to Rome, back to the mature life which has now lost meaning for him, having lost his self-respect in the process.

humorous representation of the behaviour of Italians in relation to their society.³² This, as Altman would note, is only one part of the question and it is a definition which would apply to almost any type of Italian comedy, farces, “*commedie-sexi*” and “*cine-panettoni*” included.³³ However, other than the “building blocks”, we must also consider the peculiarity of their arrangement in the case of this specific brand of Italian cinematic comedy. A consistent part of this research will show how the genre’s versatility of tone and its subversion of conventional structures are the results of the adoption of narrative strategies derived from the post-war neorealist mode of production.³⁴ This syntactical trait differentiates the comedy Italian style films from other Italian comedies that present us with similar sets of semantics. In light of this, I will argue in this thesis that, according to Altman’s model, comedy Italian style is a peculiar form of Italian comedy which arose when, after a period of experimentation, narrative strategies derived from neorealism were applied to the humorous representation of the behaviour of Italians in relation to their society.³⁵

This definition is successful in both differentiating the genre from other Italian comedic forms, contemporary to it or not, as most of the films presenting both the semantic and syntactic traits were produced between 1958 and 1980 by the previously listed directors, and allowing for its most significant exceptions such as films produced during the Economic Miracle and set in the past, as well as films produced before or after the given historical period which have been considered part of the canon for their likeness to the main corpus of the genre. In fact, this definition proves to be a much more reliable criterion for the inclusion of a film in the corpus of

³² Not necessarily the behaviour of Economic Miracle Italians *only* and not necessarily *only* in relation to a consumerist society as this would exclude the “*filone storico*”.

³³ Hence, the similarities between these comedic forms and comedy Italian style: all of these forms share a similar semantic universe. However they differ radically in terms of syntax.

³⁴ Specifically in Chapter One. I used the expression “narrative strategies” rather than “narrative structures” because there are a few examples of comedies Italian style which do use conventional narrative structures. However, such films do so for the sake of referencing neorealism by other means. These exceptions to the structural rule will be discussed in Chapter Three.

³⁵ I should specify that the relationship between comedy Italian style and neorealism discussed in this dissertation is circumstantiated to the cinematic practice of neorealism and does not invest other cultural phenomena that have been referred to with this expression, such as literary neorealism or architectural neorealism.

the genre than the simple notions of when a given Italian comedy was made, by whom and which actors appear in it. For example, despite being produced in 1951 and starring Totò, a performer associated with the farces, Steno and Monicelli's *Guardie e Ladri* features an open-ended bitter *finale* and a focus on society, reminiscent of neorealism, while on the other hand Totò is not allowed his usual slapstick histrionics and conveys a toned-down realistic performance. It is thus appropriate that this film has been considered as a comedy Italian style that happened to be eight years ahead of its time. On a similar note, let us consider the case of Carlo Verdone, one of the “*nuovi comici*” who succeeded to the comedy Italian style genre in the 1980s. It would be arbitrary to exclude his films from the canon of the comedy Italian style genre just because they star him rather than Alberto Sordi, simply on a generational pretence. However, if we deploy this new definition we realise that most of his films are not rightfully part of the comedy Italian style canon on syntactic grounds. Some, such as his debut *Un Sacco Bello* (1980), feature him playing a number of different impersonations, or “*macchiette*” (the “*macchiette*” were impersonations exaggerating certain ways of talking in the streets. They were very popular in the variety theatre practice of “*avanspettacolo*” and are still the foundations of Italian television sketches and stand-up comedy), even in the context of one scene, a strategy typical of the farces and inherently unrealistic. Others, such as *Borotalco* (1982), do feature Verdone playing a single character throughout the whole narrative of the film. However, such narratives are distinguished by classic learn-change-redeem trajectories and insistences on romantic elements reminiscent of pink neorealism. In the few instances in which Verdone has replaced these structural traits with open-ended, bitter narratives, as in the case of *Compagni di Scuola* (1988), his films have appropriately been compared to the comedies Italian style of the previous generation. These observations on Verdone's case can be applied to all of the instances of actors or directors who do not belong to the comedy Italian style canon but have occasionally made films that either do or could belong in the corpus of the genre.³⁶ If this study were concerned with replacing the expression

³⁶ The expression “*nuovi comici*” literally means “*new comedians*”. It refers to the generation of comedians such as Verdone, Massimo Troisi, Roberto Benigni who became popular mostly in the 1980s and followed the generation of the comedy Italian style performers. I will present this expression in quotation marks when using it to refer to this specific canon of Italian comedy. In other contexts, such as the Monicelli quotation translated previously, the same Italian expression might be

comedy Italian style with a more appropriate one, the latter would have to be “*comedy neorealist style*”, although there could always be the risk of the corpus of the 1960s neorealist-indebted comedies being confused with films belonging to the canon of post-war Italian neorealism which have a more prominent comedic tone, such as Luigi Zampa’s *Vivere in Pace* (1947).³⁷

My arguments concerning the presence in comedy Italian style of both indicators of its neorealist roots and a satirical point of view or entertaining elements proper to comedy might be misinterpreted as a negation of the fact that comedy Italian style is in fact a genre. Many critics who have addressed the notion of certain comedy Italian style film presenting attributes proper of the neorealism of the post-war period, have used expressions such as ‘blends comedy and neorealism’, ‘fuses neorealism and comedy’, ‘combine’, ‘merge’, etc. These expressions might give the wrong impression and suggest that, rather than being a genre, comedy Italian style is in fact a ‘pastiche’ of the neorealist mode and a non-specific ‘comedy’ genre. This is not the case. In his book *Pastiche* Richard Dyer defines this practice as “a kind of imitation that you are meant to know is an imitation” (Dyer, *Pastiche* 1), meaning that you can apply this categorisation to texts that openly refer to other texts and do so with a certain degree of intentionality. Even though a restricted number of comedies Italian style, which I shall mostly discuss in Chapter Three, openly refer to scenes from neorealist films or mention neorealist directors in their dialogue, the vast

used for its face value meaning, not referring to this particular comedic canon, in which cases it will not be featured in quotation marks.

³⁷ Vittorio Spinazzola includes in this group of actual neorealist films with more consistent comedic tones Carlo Borghesio’s trilogy of films featuring Erminio Macario: *Come Persi la Guerra* (1947), *L’Eroe della Strada* (1948) and *Come Scopersi l’America* (1949). Even though these films are usually referred to as early realistic forms of farces, comparable to the “*Totò neorealista*” series, Spinazzola believes that they embody the fact that “neorealism tried to impose a new humour, realistic in its narrative structure, popular in its setting and characters and dialectal in its linguistic modes. (Spinazzola, *Cinema e Pubblico* 84)” (in the original: “Il neorealismo tentò di proporre una nuova comicità, realistica nell’impianto narrativo, popolare nell’ambiente e nei personaggi, dialettale nei moduli linguistici”). These attributes are very similar to the ones I will detect in comedy Italian style apart from the fact that it will substitute the focus on the lower classes with satire on the middle classes of the Economic Miracle. Watching this trilogy of films, however, I do not agree that they already feature realist narrative structures and hence I consider them as farces.

majority of comedies Italian style display some attributes which were present in the neorealist mode of production but do so without intentionally referring to neorealism;³⁸ they simply display an affinity, showcase their continuity with the neorealist practice; they do not imitate neorealism in such overt terms that the awareness of the antecedent becomes a fundamental part of the audience's viewing experience. Thus, comedy Italian style is not an occurrence of 'pastiche' between neorealism and comedy altogether, but rather a specific comedic genre that is separated from other comedic genres because of its reliance on structural patterns derived from neorealism, as a result of the continuity between these two forms.³⁹ The notion of neorealism combining with other cinematic forms is quite old. Adriano Aprà and Claudio Carabba, for instance, used the expression "*neorealismo d'appendice*" (Aprà and Carabba) to describe Raffaello Matarazzo's production of melodramas featuring neorealist iconography in the post-war period, Jerry Vermilye states that Alberto Lattuada's *Il Bandito* (1946) "serves to combine Hollywood film noir with the styles and insights of neorealism" (Vermilye 39). In this thesis, however, if I shall use expressions such as 'the comedy Italian style filmmakers

³⁸ This limited number of films openly paying tribute to neorealism is not sufficient to define comedy Italian style as 'pastiche'. As Dyer notes most westerns display an awareness of western as a genre or refer to some extent to previously made westerns. This however is not sufficient to qualify these self-aware westerns as 'pastiches'. Spaghetti-westerns, instead, are centred around their referentiality of American westerns, even defined by it. The aesthetic that defines them is that of exaggerating tropes of the American western, so that the awareness of this imitation becomes a fundamental fact in our viewing experience. This degree of intentionality and the frequency of the referencing do in fact qualify spaghetti-westerns as 'pastiches' (Dyer *Pastiche* 92-118).

³⁹ According to Lino Micciché, comedy Italian style should not be conceived as a genre, but rather as a "*macro-genre* in which the period film and the film set in the present, the collection of slapstick based episodes and the melancholic narration such as Pietrangeli's coexist" (in the original: "va intesa quale macro-genere dove convivono il film in costume e il film contemporaneo, la raccolta di gag a episodi e il racconto crepuscolare-malinconico alla Pietrangeli") (*Mario Monicelli: La Commedia e Oltre* xvi). I disagree with this view, which I think is the result of a conception of comedy Italian style that is not closely bound to the historical canon I and others have identified with this expression. In other words, it is "*commedia italiana*" that should be conceived as a macro-genre, not "*commedia all'italiana*" or comedy Italian style. The diversity of solutions adopted in the latter is, I believe, the result of the variety existing within the neorealist mode of production that informed it. The number of comedies Italian style set in the past, anyway, is quite limited in the economy of the genre, and these films represent exceptions which I will discuss in Chapters Three and Four.

marry the neorealist narrative strategies with a satirical depiction of the Economic Miracle'. The reader should remember that I am not doing so to suggest the notion of 'pastiche' between two separate entities, as in the case of neorealism and Hollywood noir or neorealism and the '*romanzo d'appendice*'⁴⁰ but rather using a metaphor to indicate the *continuity* of certain instances of neorealism within its comedy Italian style evolution and the *continuation* of these instances within the genre of these instances in new directions.

The comedy Italian style filmmakers and their perception of the neorealist roots of the genre

Having established the basic notions regarding the much debated historical canon of the comedy Italian style genre and having briefly mentioned some of its defining characteristics, it is now necessary to discuss the main aims of this research which, as will have appeared clearly from its title and the last paragraph, are concerned with the relationship between the Italian neorealist mode of production that developed in the aftermath of World War II and lasted until 1954⁴¹ and the comedy Italian style genre. The existence of such a relationship has been to some extent always hinted at, especially by non-Italian critics. In fact, in his 1959 review following the American release of Mario Monicelli's *I Soliti Ignoti*, the comedy which is canonically considered to initiate the comedy Italian style genre, Henry Goodman stated in *Film Quarterly*: "*The Big Deal*,⁴² which seems to be the latest title of this Italian film, is neorealism at a comic angle, turned on end and parodying itself" (Goodman 49). This research will discuss films such as *I Soliti Ignoti* as a continuation, albeit in a comedic and popular arena, of the neorealist practice, rather than a parody of it. Many of the genre's filmmakers were always outspoken in singling out neorealism as an inspiration for their practice, or at least they were as soon as they were asked. The aforementioned '*putative fathers*' of the genre, Age and Scarpelli, have been relentlessly deferential in attributing the merits of their practice to the example set by

⁴⁰ The popular melodramatic 19th century fiction.

⁴¹ The canon of Italian neorealism is traditionally considered to begin with Rossellini's *Roma, Città Aperta* (1945) and end with the release of Federico Fellini's *La Strada* (1954).

⁴² The film was actually released in the United States with the title *Big Deal on Madonna Street* and can be found in DVD format in the Criterion Collection catalogue under this title.

neorealist screenwriter Sergio Amidei. They have often mentioned in interviews the films in which Amidei transposed in a comedic context “all of the structural and formal⁴³ principles of neorealist cinema” (in Pintus and Biarese 17),⁴⁴ such as the Luciano Emmer directed *Domenica d’Agosto* (1950), as a template for their work. Going back to Magni’s positioning of the beginning of the *commedia* as early as before World War II, this statement is actually related to the fact that he did not differentiate at all between *neorealismo* and the *commedia* and considered them two sides of the same thing. He stated:

Films such as *Campo de’ Fiori*, *L’ultima Carrozzella*, *Avanti c’è Posto* do not only signal an important landmark for the birth of *neorealismo*, but also signal the birth of *commedia all’italiana*. They are two phenomena that go together; *commedia all’italiana* is not born with *neorealismo*’s death, or with the *white telephones*⁴⁵ of *neorealismo*, films such as *Poveri Ma Belli*.⁴⁶ It is not true. *Commedia all’italiana* already existed. It is sufficient to remember Aldo Fabrizi in *Campo de’ Fiori*, an insuperable actor [to realize this]: *commedia all’italiana* lies there and so does *neorealismo* (in Pintus and Biarese 131).⁴⁷

⁴³ With “formal” here Age is not referring to the neorealist aesthetic, which will be later addressed in these terms, but rather to the fact that the comedies Italian style were also shot often on location, putting on screen contemporary social reality by filming its representation where it actually took place.

⁴⁴ “tutti i principi strutturali e formali del cinema neorealistico”.

⁴⁵ By using this expression Magni is referring to pink neorealism, which essentially is a corpus of comedic film that marry the semantic aspects of post-war neorealism, such as the post-war unemployment setting, to the conventional syntax of the “*telefoni bianchi*” comedies produced during the Fascist era. The latter were highly stylised and studio-shot romantic comedies depicting the love affairs of the aristocracies and actually a cinematic form that the neorealists reacted against.

⁴⁶ Dino Risi’s 1957 comedy *Poveri Ma Belli* was one of the most significant examples of pink neorealism featuring an urban setting.

⁴⁷ “Film come *Campo de’ Fiori*, *L’ultima Carrozzella*, *Avanti c’è Posto* [...] non solo segnano una data importante per la nascita del neorealismo, ma segnano anche la data di nascita della *commedia all’italiana*. Sono due fenomeni che vanno di pari passo, la *commedia all’italiana* non nasce dopo la morte del neorealismo o, come disse qualcuno con i telefoni bianchi del neorealismo che erano film come *Poveri Ma Belli*. Non è vero. La *commedia all’italiana* già esisteva. Basti ricordare Aldo Fabrizi in *Campo de’ Fiori* come attore insuperabile: c’è la *commedia all’Italiana* e c’è il neorealismo.”

Interviewed in the same collection, Mario Monicelli is on the same wavelength, as he argues that *Roma Città Aperta*, Roberto Rossellini's 1945 film which is considered to mark the beginning of the post-war Italian neorealist practice, "is a classic comedy Italian style" (149).⁴⁸ However, in such a reading, too many crucial questions remain unanswered: if neorealism and comedy Italian style coincided from the start as a sole unit with defined semantic and syntactic traits, why was the neorealist syntax absent in the comedies produced between Federico Fellini's *I Vitelloni* (1953) and Mario Monicelli's *I Soliti Ignoti* (1958), known as pink neorealism? Why were the comedy Italian style filmmakers ever involved in this form, if they were able to master the syntactical subtleties of neorealism from the start? And why was it that only the narrative strategies of the neorealist mode of production are present in comedy Italian style while its aesthetic aspects are mostly absent? Most importantly, this theory would suggest the notion that neorealism had remained crystallised in the shape it had when *Roma Città Aperta* or *Ladri di Biciclette* (1948, directed by Vittorio De Sica) - two of the post-war neorealist films which inspired the comedy Italian style filmmakers the most - were produced.

It was absolutely not the case. Let us think of the genesis of *I Soliti Ignoti*, the first canonical comedy Italian style.⁴⁹ Age and Scarpelli were initially commissioned by a producer to write an impromptu comedy script in order to re-utilise the expensive sets built for neorealist director Luchino Visconti's film *Le Notti Bianche* (1957). The idea of a studio-shot film clearly clashes with the notions of neorealism we associate with films such as *Ladri di Biciclette*. The comedy Italian style screenwriters' initial inspiration of parodying the French heist film *Rififi* (1955, directed by Jules Dassin) developed into something much more refined, into an extremely funny plot which ventured among the communities who lived at the margins of the Economic Miracle and survived in the outskirts of Rome by means of petty theft and larceny. This realistic script demanded for the shooting to take place, as it did, on the streets of Rome. As will have appeared clear from this short anecdote, it was not simply the case of only one stable, enduring form surviving

⁴⁸ "[Roma Città Aperta] è una classica commedia all'italiana".

⁴⁹ I have desumed the facts from Basoli's interview with Suso Cecchi D'Amico published in *Cineaste* (29-30).

unchanged from the early 1940s up until the late 1970s and the critics not noticing it because they were too busy coming up with multiple definitions. It was rather the case of the post-war neorealist form gradually moving on in a number of directions including the one pursued by Visconti with *Le Notti Bianche*, evolving in a number of cinematic forms which differed fundamentally from it and from each other, one of the most important of which was comedy Italian style.

Thus, this research does not endorse Magni and Monicelli's extremist claim that neorealism and comedy Italian style were pretty much the same thing from the start. This type of assessment leads to generalisations such as "as an approach towards reality and everyday life, comedy Italian style is, more than a genre, a way of being and of telling stories" (Viganò *Dino Risi* 17)⁵⁰ or even conclusions such as 'all Italian cinema is in some way comedy Italian style'. That is not correct. Comedy Italian style is a genre with a defined historical canon, one that continued significant cinematic practices introduced by post-war neorealism. This study recognises the two, neorealism and comedy Italian style, as separate but continuous entities, as different historical canons and it attempts to analyse the processes by which, as suggested by Age and Scarpelli, the latter genre has been informed by the former and the notion that the latter has come to be one the evolutions of the former. Rather than defining in a tautological way *Roma Città Aperta* as a film that already is a comedy Italian style, this study will address Rossellini's film in the terms given by comedy Italian style screenwriter and Sordi collaborator Rodolfo Sonego: "*Roma Città Aperta*, the first film of neorealism, and *Paisà*⁵¹ can be considered as the matrixes of comedy Italian style" (in Pintus and Biarese, 182).⁵²

⁵⁰ "In quanto atteggiamento nei confronti della realtà e della vita quotidiana, la commedia all'italiana è, più che un genere, un modo di essere e di raccontare."

⁵¹ Roberto Rossellini's 1946 film *Paisà* was the second film in the neorealist director's War Trilogy and the follow-up to *Roma Città Aperta*.

⁵² *Roma Città Aperta*, il primo film del neorealismo, e *Paisà* possono essere considerate come le matrici della commedia all'italiana."

Neorealism and comedy Italian style: undeniable instances of continuity

I have listed a number of claims on the part of some comedy Italian style filmmakers of being inspired by neorealism, some of them even expressing the belief that neorealism and comedy Italian style coincide. Most of the previously quoted filmmakers started to be consistently involved in film production after the neorealist mode of production was over or they turned to realism later on, being involved in slapstick forms of comedy first: they might have occasionally collaborated with the neorealists, but their claims, as much as they support the argument of a certain continuity existing between the two cinematic forms, are simply opinions. However, I shall make it clear here that, as my research will explore different instances of such continuity, the very notion of this continuity is not questionable. Its undeniable proof is represented by the very consistent number of filmmakers who had taken part in the post-war neorealist mode of production who later went on to be involved in the comedy Italian style genre. This is an argument for the thesis of an evolution of the earlier form in the later one that is simply self-evident and a non-debatable historical fact. When I deem it necessary in the context of one of the existing chapters, the reader will be reminded of filmmakers who have embodied such instances of continuity between the two cinematic forms by participating in both. However it is important at this juncture to provide some examples.

Most importantly Vittorio De Sica and Cesare Zavattini, respectively director and screenwriter of some of the most important neorealist films of the post-war period, directed four comedies Italian style in the early 1960s, *Il Giudizio Universale* (1961), *Il Boom* (1963), *Ieri, Oggi e Domani* (1963) and *Matrimonio all'Italiana* (1964).⁵³ The second film in particular has been considered as a minor De Sica film

⁵³ In his discussion of Luchino Visconti's longevity as an acclaimed director, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith has stated that "De Sica [...] degenerated as an artist with the decline of the movement that first thrust him into prominence" (*Luchino Visconti* 7). If this supposed degeneration is related to De Sica's involvement in comedy Italian style, or actually implies the notion of comedy Italian style as a degeneration of neorealism, I disagree with this point of view.

for a number of years and will be addressed in this research as one of the most accomplished comedies Italian style.⁵⁴ After having initiated the first wave of films marrying neorealism's iconography with a comedic sensibility known as pink neorealism with his script for Luciano Emmer's *Domenica d'Agosto*, Sergio Amidei the screenwriter of the earliest canonical post-war neorealist films, Rossellini's *Roma Città Aperta* and *Paisà*, went on to replace Rodolfo Sonogo as Alberto Sordi's regular collaborator in a number of comedies in which the Roman actor starred⁵⁵ and in a number of the ones that Sordi directed.⁵⁶ I have already mentioned how the other screenwriter of Rossellini's 'war trilogy' Federico Fellini directed the early 1950s' *Lo Sceicco Bianco* and *I Vitelloni*, which are now considered as comedies

⁵⁴ It should be noted that historically De Sica's comedy Italian style production has been critically underestimated and its value is currently a matter of contention. In 1974 Vittorio Spinazzola defined it as a 'patteggiamento', a term for bargaining used to define financial settlements between two parties to avoid going to trial (Spinazzola, *Cinema e Pubblico* 46). He also wrote that "the positions held by De Sica after 1960 had very negative consequences on the developments and orientations of cinematic comedy and contributed to determining its involution" (291). (In the original: "Le posizioni assunte da De Sica dopo il 1960 esercitarono un'influenza assai negative sugli orientamenti e sviluppi della commedia cinematografica, collaborando a determinarne l'involuzione.") Spinazzola's argument of a supposed involution of Italian comedy in the 1960s is quite bizarre as this is widely recognised as the golden decade of such production. Bruno Torri argues that "after *Umberto D.* De Sica's cinema suffers a serious involution. [...] His contact with reality seems to be interrupted" (Torri 53) (in the original: "Dopo *Umberto D.* il cinema di De Sica subisce una grave involuzione. [...] Il colloquio con la realtà coeva appare interrotto"), while Sergio Grmek Germani instead writes that "with a contemporary, better knowledge of De Sica's filmography that golden neorealist period cannot appear anymore like a centre preceded and followed by periods of a similar lesser value". (Grmek Germani 37) (In the original: "Ad una odierna, migliore, conoscenza della filmografia desichiana quell'aureo periodo neorealista non può più apparire come un centro preceduto e seguito da periodi ugualmente minori.") It should be noted however that the Micciché-edited collection that contains these two essays features a series of textual analysis of De Sica's films but none of his comedies Italian style are discussed.

⁵⁵ Such as Luigi Zampa's *Il Medico della Mutua* (1967) and its Luciano Salce-directed follow-up *Il Prof. Dott. Guido Tersilli, Primario della Clinica Villa Celeste, Convenzionata con le Mutue* (1969), Nanni Loy's *Detenuto in Attesa di Giudizio* (1972), Ettore Scola's *La Più Bella Serata della Mia Vita* (1972) and Mario Monicelli's *Un Borghese Piccolo Piccolo* (1977).

⁵⁶ Such as the 1966 films *Fumo di Londra* and *Scusi, Lei è Favorevole o Contrario?* and the 1970 comedy *Il Presidente del Borgorosso Football Club*. It should also be mentioned that Amidei considered earlier films of his such as *Domenica d'Agosto* already being comedies Italian style (Faldini and Fofi, *Avventurosa Storia 1935-1959* 161).

Italian style *ante litteram*, before he pursued a more authorial type of cinema from *La Strada* (1954) onwards. Rossellini never directed a proper comedy Italian style, although his 1959 film *Il Generale Della Rovere* has often been likened to this genre.⁵⁷ Of all the major post-war neorealist directors Luchino Visconti is certainly the one who had less connections to comedy Italian style, his brand of realism being inspired mostly by the opera among the two main roots of Italian popular culture identified in the aforementioned Viganò quotation, rather than the “*commedia dell’arte*” tradition. It is noteworthy, however, that Antonio Pietrangeli, one of the most aesthetically refined comedy Italian style directors, was Visconti’s assistant director on the seminal realist film *Ossessione* (1943). In fact, the expression “*neorealismo*” was introduced, significantly, with reference to Visconti’s *Ossessione*, by Antonio Pietrangeli himself.⁵⁸ It should also be noted that Age and Scarpelli, who at that point had written a number of farces starring Totò, came up with *I Soliti Ignoti*, the first comedy Italian style, when they were paired in writing with Suso Cecchi D’Amico, one of Visconti’s regular screenwriters who is credited in several later comedies Italian style.

Pietro Germi, the director of internationally acclaimed comedies Italian style such as *Divorzio all’Italiana* and *Sedotta e Abbandonata* (1964), started his career as a director of neorealist works such as *In Nome Della Legge* (1949) and *Il Cammino della Speranza* (1950) and, as Mario Sesti notes, he was one of the first neorealists to realise the possibilities that marrying this practice and genre filmmaking had to offer.⁵⁹ Luigi Zampa, the director of comedies Italian style starring Alberto Sordi

⁵⁷ The film has been defined by Mira Liehm as “the final attempt to integrate a genius into an industry” (161).

⁵⁸ Antonio Pietrangeli’s article was entitled ‘Panoramique du Cinema Italien’ and published in the May 13, 1948 issue of *La Revue du Cinema*.

⁵⁹ Sesti writes: “Differently to what was believed to be necessary for the method and research strategies of the realism of the period, Germi’s films do not negate the traditional structures of cinema (such as the genres)” (54). (In the original: “A differenza di quanto si riteneva necessario per il metodo e le strategie della ricerca di realismo d’allora, i film di Germi non negano le strutture tradizionali del cinema (i generi, ad esempio)”). Germi’s *In Nome della Legge* is considered to be a neorealist film in which the director’s admiration for John Ford’s westerns transpires. Curiously, despite his long lasting strategy of marrying realism and genre Germi never directed a comedic film before *Divorzio all’Italiana*.

such as *Il Vigile* (1960), *Il Medico della Mutua* (1967) and *Bello, Onesto, Emigrato Australia Sposerebbe Compaesana Illibata* (1971), had directed two films with strong humouristic tones already during the post-war neorealist phase such as *Vivere in Pace* (1947, starring Aldo Fanrizi) and *L'Onorevole Angelina* (also 1947, starring Anna Magnani) as well as a series of caustic comedies written by novelist and screenwriter Vitaliano Brancati before the advent of comedy Italian style such as *Anni Difficili* (1953), *Anni Facili* (1953) and *L'Arte di Arrangiarsi* (1954), which radically differed from the contemporary comedic forms of farce and pink neorealism for their prominent social satire.⁶⁰

Finally, the cases of Carlo Lizzani and Alberto Lattuada should be mentioned, as both directors' production is characterised from early efforts which can be included at the margins of the proper post-war neorealism canon, respectively *Achtung! Banditi!* (1951) for Lizzani and *Il Mulino del Pò* (1949) for Lattuada, and long journeys through a series of experiments of hybridisation of neorealism with cinematic non-comedic genres, respectively thrillers in the case of Lizzani's *Il Gobbo* (1961) and melodrama in the case of Lattuada's *Anna* (1951), before directing some of their most accomplished films in the context of comedy Italian style in the 1960s, respectively Lizzani's *La Vita Agra* (1964) and Lattuada's *Mafioso* (1962). All of these examples testify to the fact that the continuity between neorealism and

⁶⁰ Even though Zampa's early films positioning within the neorealist canon has been sometimes questioned, Jerry Vermilye states that "although somewhat less remembered today in the annals of postwar Italian filmmaking, *To Live in Peace* [the English title for *Vivere in Pace*] easily stands alongside more celebrated neorealist classics like *Open City*, *Shoeshine* and *The Bicycle Thief*" (38). Despite being comedic these films firmly belong to the 'proper' neorealist canon in my view and not to the pink neorealist form of which Zampa himself was extremely critical in a 1958 interview defining Risi's *Poveri Ma Belli* "harmless" and an index of the fact that in the period in which pink neorealist films were produced, Italian filmmakers were "as restricted as we [they] were under Fascism" (*The Growing Edge* 10). With reference to the films mentioned, *Anni Difficili* and *Anni Facili* are considered to be part of the 'proper' neorealist canon, just like *Vivere in Pace*. On the other hand, *L'Arte di Arrangiarsi* is considered an early comedy Italian style.

comedy Italian style at the centre of this study is not simply a critical hypothesis, but is underpinned by a series of historical occurrences.⁶¹

Neorealism's evolution into comedy Italian style within the spectrum of Italian film history

It is thus necessary to clarify that this research explores how neorealist films have been the matrixes of the comedy Italian style genre, but does not deny that, at the same time, they also have played this role for other Italian cinematic forms. To put it simply, by investigating the notion of comedy Italian style as one evolution of neorealism, this study does not claim to disprove that neorealism has also evolved in the art cinema or art film⁶² of Federico Fellini, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Michelangelo Antonioni and in the “*cinema impegnato*” of Francesco Rosi and the Taviani Brothers. These trajectories are undeniable and have been consistently researched in existing Italian cinema studies. The overall historiographical view suggested by this research is that neorealism evolved into two main trends, both of which informed by the narrative strategies introduced by the post-war mode of production. This thesis investigates how comedy Italian style reintroduced such innovations in the arena of popular genres and their traditional aesthetic informed by classic cinematic grammar and its immediacy of meaning and married them with a satirical point of view.⁶³ It thus continued the neorealist practice of social commentary by putting on screen the everyday life of Italians. In roughly the same period, the art film practices of the

⁶¹ Even more elements of this kind could be gathered if one expanded the list of such occurrences to editors, directors of photography, professionals who determine the way a film looks and the pace at which it progresses as much as directors and screenwriters.

⁶² For a more comprehensive definition of art film, which transcends the context of Italian cinema, the reader can refer to David Bordwell's seminal essay 'The Art Cinema as a mode of Film Practice'. I will use this expression to identify the activity of these directors after the neorealist period, since the expression “auteur cinema”, the English equivalent of the commonly used Italian “*cinema d'autore*” would require an analysis of each director's activity in order to assess if the concept of *auteurism* actually applies, and this is not the objective of this study.

⁶³ Classic cinematic grammar refers to the norms of ‘*decoupage*’ championed by the likes of American director D.W. Griffith in the 1910s and adopted by the Hollywood studios in the following decades by which an action is broken up into fragments organised in the editing suite in a logical and easily intelligible succession for the benefit of the audience's understanding.

aforementioned directors also relied on neorealist narrative strategies, very often also pursuing the neorealist aesthetic of the *image-fact*.⁶⁴ If this second trend of neorealist evolution displays the further merit of developing the formal concerns of the original post-war neorealism, its discussion of Italian social reality is highly informed by personal points of view depending on each director and is progressively conveyed through varying degrees of allegory,⁶⁵ rather than the straightforward representation on screen of everyday life introduced by neorealist films such as *Roma Città Aperta* and *Ladri di Biciclette* and continued by the comedy Italian style practice. As Geoffrey Nowell-Smith has noted while discussing different trends in the Italian cinema of the 1960s,

where Antonioni is sparse, Fellini is exuberant; where Olmi is reticent, Visconti is operatic; where Pasolini is rough-edged and moves progressively away from naturalism towards the hieratic, Mario Monicelli and other industry stalwarts remain loyal to slick and on the whole naturalistic settings (*Making Waves* 162).

While the relationship between neorealism and Italian art film has been the subject of the majority of the studies devoted to either the first, the second, both or the history of the film medium in Italy altogether, no study has been devoted specifically to the relationship between the post-war neorealist practice and the comedy Italian style genre. This study aims to fill this gap.

⁶⁴ French critic André Bazin named “*image-fact*” the type of ‘*decoupage*’ characteristic of what he considered the best neorealist films, such as *Paisà*. This type of aesthetic is not as concerned with logic and intelligibility as classic grammar is and often privileges ellipses, longer takes and a struggle for the ambiguity that characterises the occurrence of events in real life. Bazin’s considerations on the merits of neorealism in this respect will be discussed at more length in Chapter One, however it is important to note that only some post-war neorealist films fully displayed such aesthetic (Bazin 35-37).

⁶⁵ Let us think of Pasolini’s artistic journey from films set in the outskirts of Rome such as *Accattone* (1961) to adaptations of ancient Greek tragedies such as *Edipo Re* (1967), or Fellini’s own journey from *I Vitelloni*, a film that has been likened to comedy Italian style, to the self-reflexive *8 e ½* (1963).

Critical reception of comedy Italian style

Comedy Italian style's dual intent of offering a realist discourse about Italian society and at the same time an entertainment product has determined two opposite tendencies in its critical reception. On one hand we have those critics who like the previously-quoted Goodman have praised the ability of certain comedies Italian style to continue the neorealist discourse with a light touch; on the other we have those who have considered such ambition, that of pursuing realism in products that ultimately make the audience laugh, intrinsically wrong, arguing that these two tensions simply *cannot* coexist. Whereas Goodman praised the 'tragic relief' in *I Soliti Ignoti*, in his 1964 review of Mario Monicelli's *I Compagni* in *Film Quarterly*, Jackson Burgess wrote that "the film might have survived the obviousness of the story [...] if it were not for the appalling touches of comedy (downright slapstick, at some points), which keep shattering the almost documentary illusion" (46-47). In this view comedy simply denies realism. However, one must ask the question: 'why was this objection not made in the case of Rossellini's *Roma Città Aperta* which also displayed comedic episodes and moments of slapstick?'

Italian criticism at the time of the release of the majority of the comedy Italian style films definitely belonged to the second trend, the one intrinsically against comedy. This was particularly true in the case of the leftist journal *Cinema Nuovo* that was directed by the Marxist critic Guido Aristarco and was definitely considered the most prominent publication on filmmaking in Italy throughout the 1950s and 1960s, its pages often featuring debates between Aristarco and foreign critics of the calibre of Bazin as well as writings from neorealist filmmakers themselves. Even in the case of comedies Italian style that were actually somewhat positively received, the reviewers never restrained themselves from expressing their general disdain for the comedy Italian style filmmakers. In the 1958 review of *I Soliti Ignoti* Vittorio Spinazzola awards three stars to the film, thus considering it 'good', but reminds the reader that Monicelli is "a discontinuous director who is not devoid of failures or compromises" (Spinazzola, *I Soliti Ignoti* 252)⁶⁶ and that if the screenplay "is unusually accomplished and full of efficient lines of dialogue" (252) it must be

⁶⁶ "un regista diseguale e non alieno dai cedimenti e dai compromessi."

because “certainly Suso Cecchi D’Amico’s influence must have positively improved the noxious practice of Age and Scarpelli, who are responsible for some of the saddest farces of our recent cinema” (252).⁶⁷ It is therefore clear that even though *I Soliti Ignoti* is considered ‘good’, actually an “important film because it proves that it is possible to confer some dignity to the dialectal comedy” (252),⁶⁸ most of its filmmakers must be publicly beaten.

In 1962 Guido Fink reviewed *Tutti a Casa*, now considered one of the greatest Italian comedies ever made, as ‘sufficient’ by only granting it two stars (Fink, *Tutti a Casa*); in the same issue De Sica’s and Zavattini’s *Il Giudizio Universale* received the same result in Giulio Cattivelli’s account because “it reveals an unmistakable odour of old stuff” and “it does not belong to Zavattini the apostle of neorealism, but to Zavattini the cultured cartoonist” (Cattivelli, *Il Giudizio Universale* 49).⁶⁹ In the same issue, Adelio Ferrero deems Luciano Salce’s *Il Federale* ‘mediocre’, only granting it one star on the basis that he completely misreads its courageous satire of Fascism as “an equivocal and mystifying compromise between Fascism and anti-Fascism, with an explicit rehabilitation of the former at the expense of the latter” (Ferrero, *Il Federale* 58).⁷⁰

Divorzio all’Italiana, despite being awarded three stars and thus being considered ‘good’ by Lorenzo Pellizzari, reveals the intrinsic preconceptions towards comedy on the part of the critics at the time. Germi’s film is a theorem that denounces the absurdity of the honour code, making a quintessentially topical issue such as the Italian legislature’s tolerance for uxoricide in the case of adultery its narrative premise. In Pellizzari’s view, however, the film’s comedic key “is already indicative

⁶⁷ “[La sceneggiatura è] insolitamente festiva e ricca di battute efficaci (qui l’influenza di Suso Cecchi d’Amico deve essersi positivamente aggiunta alla praticaccia di Age e Scarpelli, responsabili di tante fra le più tristi farse del nostro cinema recente.”

⁶⁸ “un film importante perché dimostra come sia possibile, pur aderendo agli schemi e ai moduli della commedia dialettale, conferire a essa la dignità.”

⁶⁹ “[Il film] rivela un inconfondibile odore di stantio. [...] Appartiene non tanto allo Zavattini apostolo del neorealismo, quanto al letterato fumettista.”

⁷⁰ “un equivoco e mistificatorio compromesso tra fascismo antifascismo, con una esplicita riabilitazione del primo a danno del secondo.”

of an approach, an elusion – conscious or subconscious – of reality, if not even an evasion from it” (Pellizzari 143).⁷¹ This is nothing but a circumlocution to express the idea that such a topic simply *should not* be discussed in a comedic context. In 1963 Pellizzari did not give one single star to Marco Ferreri’s *L’Ape Regina*, now considered one of the masterpieces of 1960s Italian cinema, thus considering it not simply insufficient or not accomplished but “sbagliato”, literally “wrong”.

Over the passage of time the critical reception of comedy Italian style started to change towards positivity. In the 1970s Lino Micciché admitted in his review of Ettore Scola’s *C’eravamo Tanto Amati* that “even though they are specialised in comedy, the two screenwriters of *La Grande Guerra* and *I Compagni* [*Age and Scarpelli*] are still bound to the neorealist experience” (Micciché, *Anni ’70* 218)⁷² and he praised Luigi Comencini, who was once considered a traitor of neorealism for *Pane, Amore e Fantasia*, “for trying to restore, without moralism, an ethic of behaviour” (314).⁷³ As its popular reception has always been enthusiastic and remains so nowadays when Italian newspapers repeatedly publish long series of comedy Italian style DVDs banking on the Italian audience’s affection for this genre to increase their sales, comedy Italian style’s critical reception dramatically improved after the publication in 1978 of Jean Gili’s seminal study in French *La Comedie Italienne*, which was followed by a series of studies published in Italy throughout the 1980s.

Neorealism and comedy Italian style: existing critical notions concerning their relationship

Going back to the Goodman review of *I Soliti Ignoti* I quoted above, it will appear clear to the reader that I am not claiming to be the first to point out the existence of a relationship between neorealism and comedy Italian style. I do believe, though, that existing works of criticism either devoted to comedy Italian style or to the history of

⁷¹ “[*chiave che*] è già indicativa di un atteggiamento, di una elusione – conscia o inconscia, non sappiamo – della realtà, se non di una sfiorata evasione da essa.”

⁷² “Pur specializzati anch’essi nella commedia, i due sceneggiatori [...] sono ancora legati all’esperienza neorealistica.”

⁷³ “cerca di restaurare, senza moralismi, un’etica dei comportamenti.”

Italian cinema after World War II have downplayed such a relationship and that both its extent and the modalities of how one form evolved into the other have not been properly addressed to date. The Italian volumes dedicated specifically to the comedy Italian style genre sometimes refer to neorealism in their introduction, briefly addressing this link matter-of-factly.⁷⁴ However, such works are mostly concerned with dividing the genre into smaller categories and pointing out its best films for the benefit of a disorientated viewer.

After the promising start of the previously quoted definitions, Giacovelli mainly identifies a number of “*filoni*” characterised by recurring settings or recurring themes⁷⁵ and, rather than discussing why certain choices were made or their significance in relation to neorealism, simply recapitulates what happens on screen in the best known comedies Italian style. D’Amico, instead, breaks down his discussion of each decade of production of the genre by grouping the films by actors who star in them, thus highlighting the performative aspects of the genre over its realist merits. Both studies also dedicate a number of pages to the comedy Italian style roots in the theatre tradition of “*commedia dell’arte*”,⁷⁶ in the variety shows of

⁷⁴ Giacovelli offers the Marco Ferreri quotation that opens this introduction and refers to the *Roma Città Aperta* scene in which the priest played by Aldo Fabrizi hits an old man with a frying pan (Giacovelli, *Commedia all’Italiana* 20-21). Masolino D’Amico notes the importance of humour in the rebirth of Italian cinema represented by neorealism: “The Italian cinema of the rebirth [*after World War II*] conquered a unique identity also thanks to having played the card of humour from the start, maybe mostly because of this” (D’Amico 53). (In the original: “Il cinema italiano della rinascita [...] conquistò una sua identità anche, e forse soprattutto, grazie all’aver giocato fin dall’inizio la carta dell’umorismo”) and states that “this comedic component had great relevance in the cinema of proper neorealism, from the start” (in the original: “questa componente comica ebbe grande rilievo anche nel cinema del neorealismo vero e proprio, fin dall’inizio”).

⁷⁵ Some comedies are grouped together in “*filoni*” according to where they are set, such as the “*commedia meridionalistica*” (literally “southern comedy”) or the “*neopaesana*” (this expression refers to a wave of comedies Italian style set in the countryside, in small villages, differing a from similar wave within the pink neorealist form), some according to when the films are set, such as the “*filone storico*” or “*filone cavalleresco*” (literally “chivalrous trend”). Others are grouped together because of their focus on the issue of divorce, others for their focus on women.

⁷⁶ The expression “*commedia dell’arte*” derived from the old Latin meaning of the word ‘ars’ as profession and is thus linked to the fact that the performers of this tradition were itinerant professionals and not ordinary people who performed occasionally. I refer the reader interested in the

“*avanspettacolo*”⁷⁷ and the satirical magazines *Marc Aurelio* and *Bertoldo* published during the Fascist period. By focusing on the neorealist origins of comedy Italian style, this study does not wish to deny the existence of some of its roots in these forms. However, as Aldo Viganò notes: “There are two roots of all Italian popular culture: *commedia dell’arte* and the opera” (*Cento Film* 11).⁷⁸ The entire Italian cinematic production thus, neorealism included, inherits the previously mentioned forms, not only comedy Italian style. To some extent “*commedia dell’arte*” has informed cinematic practices as diverse as neorealism, the art film of Federico Fellini and the spaghetti-western of Sergio Leone, other than of course all of the past and present comedic practices such as farce, pink neorealism, comedy Italian style, “*commedia sexi*” and the “*cine-panettoni*”. Discussing comedy Italian style’s neorealist origins does not exclude the relationships both of these forms have with other non-cinematic traditions, but simply restricts the focus to the strictly cinematic context.⁷⁹ The equal amount of space dedicated to neorealism and these other traditions in both Giacovelli’s and D’Amico’s volumes, however, proves that the comedy Italian style-neorealism connection has not been properly investigated in them, but simply alluded to as a possibility among many others. On the other hand, Maurizio Grande’s study, *La Commedia all’Italiana*, is concerned with applying models of the literary criticism theorised by Northrop Frye to the relationship between Italian society and its sociological responses to be found in this cinematic genre and is not particularly interested in its purely cinematic merits nor its positioning in the canon of Italian cinema.

legacy of “*commedia dell’arte*” in the films of comedy Italian style to Stefano Socci’s article *Eroi e Maschere: Piccolo Dizionario Topologico dei Personaggi* contained in the volume on Mario Monicelli edited by De Franceschi, *Lo Sguardo Eclettico*. Socci’s article divides the characters of Monicelli’s films according to the “*commedia dell’arte*” prototype they descend from.

⁷⁷ “*Avanspettacolo*” literally means “before the show” and was an expression deriving from the fact that such performances would be executed in the movie theatre before the screening of a feature film.

⁷⁸ “Due sono le radici della cultura popolare italiana: la *Commedia dell’Arte* e l’*Opera lirica*.”

⁷⁹ If neorealism derives in part from “*commedia dell’arte*” through the mediation of “*avanspettacolo*” and comedy Italian style derives from neorealism, it is obvious that comedy Italian style is also somewhat a product of “*commedia dell’arte*”. But why investigate its relationship with a tradition that dates to six hundred years earlier and belongs to the context of an altogether different art form, if its relationship with its cinematic antecedent has not been thoroughly examined yet?

Two monographic volumes published on the occasion of the restoration of two Italian comedies feature promising titles concerning the neorealism-comedy Italian style relationship, *Pane, Amore e Fantasia. Neorealismo in Commedia* and *Il Segno di Venere. Quando il Neorealismo Si Trasforma in Commedia*. These promises, however, are unfulfilled as the volumes do not transcend the discussion of the two films in order to analyse the modalities of a broader trend. Also, the two films in question are examples of pink neorealism, the comedic form preceding the wave of comedy Italian style proper.⁸⁰

Edoardo Zaccagnini's *I 'Mostri' al Lavoro. Contadini, Operai, Commendatori ed Impiegati nella Commedia all'Italiana* refers to neorealism in these terms: "thanks to neorealism, comedy Italian style through some important films and other useful and not parasitical ones, has for years kept the pace with our troubles, our dreams, our vices, our mediocrity, our fashions. Simply, with our *manners* [*my emphasis*]" (6). Rather than questioning the genre's positioning within the historical canon of Italian cinema, Zaccagnini's book is mainly concerned with offering an account of comedy Italian style's changing depiction of certain professional categories. As the quotation shows, the value it gives to the relationship between this genre and neorealism is simply that of comedy Italian style being informed by the neorealist mode of production for its description of the Italians' habits. In this way Zaccagnini does not really assess structural affinities between the two forms and simply relies on the formula 'whatever cinematic forms tells us something about Italians *realistically* is somewhat related to neorealism'. Antonio Piotti and Marco Senaldi's *Maccarone M'Hai Provocato! La Commedia Italiana del Piccolo Sé* offers an account of the image of the Italian projected in comedy Italian style and, rather than on the relationship of the genre with neorealism, I find it most interesting on the topic of the relationship between the Economic Miracle Italian and his Fascist past. Mariapia Comand's recently published volume *Commedia all'Italiana* is a study that finally embarks on a critical discourse concerning the genre's structural characteristics, rather than simply offering an account of its history or of its most important films. Although her conclusions regarding aspects of the genre's narrative structures are

⁸⁰ Respectively the aforementioned Luigi Comencini-directed *Pane, Amore e Fantasia* (1953) and Dino Risi's *Il Segno di Venere* (1955).

quite dissimilar from mine, this volume is particularly valuable for its analysis of certain comedies Italian style on the structural level rather than on the level of their subject matter which is what most previous works on the genre have focused on. Comand writes of comedy Italian style filmmakers ‘honouring’ the neorealist lesson with reference to Mario Monicelli’s *I Soliti Ignoti*. (9) However, her structural analysis does not work for the purpose of investigating the genre’s relation to neorealism, which is seldom mentioned in the volume.

The most interesting sources in Italian concerning the relationship between neorealism and comedy Italian style are to be found in two publications, *Commedia all’Italiana. Parlano i Protagonisti*, which collects a series of interviews with the genre’s filmmakers, and in Sebastiano Mondadori’s *La Commedia Umana. Conversazioni con Mario Monicelli*, an extensive interview book in which the director of *I Soliti Ignoti* discusses his films and his views on the comedy Italian style genre. I found both these volumes more insightful than Jean A. Gili’s *Arrivano i Mostri. I Volti della Commedia all’Italiana* which collects interviews with the four main comedy Italian style stars. All these books, however, rely on the opinion and the memories of the filmmakers and are not to be considered actual pieces of criticism. The companion piece to *Commedia all’Italiana. Parlano i Protagonisti* which aims to fulfil this function, *Commedia all’Italiana. Angolazioni e Controcampi*, responds to the many claims made by the genre’s filmmakers of having been inspired by neorealism with Renzo Renzi’s essay *Neorealismo e Sua Eutanasia*,⁸¹ in which comedy Italian style is not even mentioned in the text, but is clearly addressed by the pejorative title as a practice that ended the life-span of neorealism, rather than continuing it.

In an essay dedicated to Italian cinema in David Forgacs and Robert Lumley’s *Italian Cultural Studies. An Introduction* collection, Christopher Wagstaff argues that

Neorealism’s depiction of the ordinary, everyday life of typical Italians owed a lot to the narrative strategies accumulated in the 1930s and 1940s for comedy films (the genre that most often used this type of social setting), and

⁸¹ “Neorealism and its euthanasia”.

it is no surprise to find that in search for wider audiences, neorealist film makers soon found themselves (in the 1950s and 1960s) back in the realm of comedy, which is the route that led to the phenomenon of the *commedia all'italiana*, a satirical and affectionate portrayal of the foibles of stereotyped Italian figures like Latin lovers, insatiable women, possessive mothers, pretentious layabouts, etc (Wagstaff, *Cinema* 227).

Wagstaff, however, has not developed this argument in either a journal article or a monograph specifically on this subject. Also, I should point out that this dissertation will articulate the notion that in comedy Italian style the treatment of stereotypes is quite innovative. The only two volumes dedicated to the comedy Italian style genre published outside of Italy operate in very much the same way as Giacobelli and D'Amico's works, in other words they mention a connection with neorealism but quickly bypass it. French critic Jean A. Gili's *La Comedie Italienne* was the first ever legitimate study of the genre. Gili's volume, however, is a study of "*commedia italiana*", the entire history of Italian comedic cinema from the silent era to the date of its publication, and not solely dedicated to "*commedia all'italiana*" or comedy Italian style. The continuity between the latter and the comedic forms that preceded it is thus implied and focused on much more than the continuity existing between neorealism and comedy Italian style. Rémi Fournier Lanzoni's volume *Comedy Italian Style. The Golden Age of Film Comedies* is entirely dedicated to this genre and in the English language and it operates in the usual way: neorealism is discussed among the forerunners of the genre early in the book by reprising Gili's assessment that "neorealism put the comedy genre back on a road it should have never left, if it were not for twenty years of Fascism: the observation of Italy's social problems by humour, irony, satire" (Lanzoni 19) made in *Arrivano i Mostri*, but an extensive reading of comedy Italian style in light of neorealism is not offered. Lanzoni defines pink neorealism writing that it "never was intended to be a transgression of neorealism; on the contrary, far from being a last interval of its process, it was actually the logical evolution of a genre that had never been able to experience success on a critical level" (23). I agree with the point of view that pink neorealism's relationship with neorealism has been overplayed. I would not, however, define it as an evolution of the comedies produced before neorealism, as structurally the comedies produced in this period do not particularly improve on what

comedies such as *Campo de' Fiori* accomplished in the early 1940s. Most importantly, however, despite the use of the word 'evolution' that characterises this thesis, Lanzoni's book does not clarify if he conceives the neorealism-comedy Italian style in these terms too. In terms of the progression within the comedy Italian style genre itself, he addresses a shift from the 1950s to the 1960s comedies as the result of the substitution of Totò's 'art of getting by' with a much more socially specified and cynical type of conning and then addresses a further shift towards grotesque representation in the 1970s (163).

Angelo Restivo addressed comedy Italian style in a journal article concerning the production of films focusing on the figures of bandits during the Economic Miracle in both Italy and Spain in these terms:

The *commedia all'italiana*, the trenchant social comedies made during the 1950s, were the principal vehicles for exploring the effects of the Economic Miracle, as the earlier neorealist movement was either petering out or moving toward psychological or formal exploration (Restivo, *Bandit Films* 33).

The fact that Restivo mentions comedy Italian style, even though he seems to associate this expression solely with a canon of comedies produced in the 1950s, and then addresses an "earlier neorealist movement" suggests that he might consider the comedic genre as a later incarnation of neorealism very much like this study, one parallel to the art cinema characterised by "formal exploration". His book dedicated to the cinema of the period of the Economic Miracle (*The Cinema of Economic Miracles. Visuality and Modernization in the Italian Art Film*), however, focuses almost solely on the Italian art film and analyses only one comedy Italian style, Dino Risi's *Il Sorpasso* (1962), applying Frederic Jameson's semiotic rectangle⁸² to come to the conclusion that "the principal contrary that the text produces is that between work (and the work ethic embodied by Roberto) and mobility (or the road)" (Restivo, *Economic Miracles* 60). Considering that *Il Sorpasso* is essentially the story of a

⁸² As theorised in Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* as a method for uncovering antinomies within a text. In the case of *Il Sorpasso*, however, these antinomies are already quite explicitly presented in the text itself.

committed student (Louis Trintignant) being dragged away from his books by a lazy man (Vittorio Gassman) for a pointless journey on the road in search of fun, one wonders if such analysis is not redundant. The point is, however, that Restivo does not discuss comedy Italian style in the terms he seemed to have alluded to in his earlier article, as a ‘later neorealism’. The fact that in another essay on *Il Sorpasso, The Nation, the Body, and the Autostrada* he refers to a supposed ‘populism’ of comedy Italian style is also controversial, as in this dissertation I shall refer to this genre as ‘popular’ but use the adjective ‘populist’ to define an attribute of those cinematic forms that did indeed represent an involution of neorealism.⁸³

This genre is mentioned in works published in the English language which discuss wider portions of the history of Italian cinema such as Peter Bondanella’s *Italian Cinema From Neorealism to the Present*, Mary P. Wood’s *Italian Cinema* and Marcia Landy’s *Italian Film and Stardom Italian Style* although it is obviously not their sole concern. All of the aforementioned volumes, from Giacobelli’s to Landy’s, subscribe to the canonical view of neorealism progressively welcoming a comedic outlook, first with its mutation into pink neorealism and then ultimately with the birth of comedy Italian style. Such a reading is implicitly aligned with the criticism put forward by the detractors of the genre and the accusation of a progressive *dilution* of neorealist engagement. It also shows the lack of study devoted to the structural similarities existing between neorealist films and the *commedia*, similarities that are absent in the case of pink neorealism comedies. However, it should be noted that in his new volume *A History of Italian Cinema* Peter Bondanella grants the comedy Italian style genre a much more detailed discussion than he did in *Italian Cinema from Neorealism to the Present*. In his volume on neorealism Mark Shiel states that “in the second phase of neorealist cinema, its struggle with commercial filmmaking intensified. Its own mass-market spin-offs *neorealismo rosa* and *commedia all’italiana* combined with the market power of Hollywood to marginalise it” (79). This study cannot obviously deny the historical fact that pink neorealism occurred in the period in between neorealism and

⁸³ Specifically in Chapter Four.

comedy Italian style⁸⁴ but it will show that it represented a failed attempt to marry neorealism and entertainment and that comedy Italian style should be considered as a much closer relative to the post-war neorealist practice in comparison and as a reprise of neorealist engagement, albeit in a popular context. In other words it will dispute the notion of comedy Italian style as a ‘mass-market spin-off’ but rather re-contextualise the genre as a reprise of neorealism that allowed it a place in the mass-market.

The only study that subscribes to this view, implicitly, as the relationship between neorealism and comedy Italian style is not its primary concern, is Millicent Marcus’ *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism*. The book addresses Comencini’s pink neorealist comedy *Pane, Amore e Fantasia* as “Consumable Realism” (121), inserts Pietro Germi’s comedy Italian style from 1964 *Sedotta e Abbandonata* in the following section entitled “Return to Social Commentary” (228) and concludes its investigation of the heritage of neorealism in films produced in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s decades with Scola’s *C’eravamo Tanto Amati* (1974), ideally and appropriately placing this comedy Italian style as the ultimate reconsideration of the neorealist practice. The objective of this study is that of examining this evolutionary trajectory from *Roma Città Aperta* to Ettore Scola’s *La Terrazza* (1980), by scrutinising similarities and differences between the two realist forms.

In the collection edited by Antonio Vitti *Ripensare il Neorealismo: Cinema, Letteratura, Mondo*, Roberto Ellero has written that “the analysis of the elements of continuity between neorealism and the most accomplished genre of our national cinematic production, comedy Italian style, is largely unexplored” (124-125).⁸⁵ This study aims precisely at filling this gap. The evolution of one of the most, if not the most, revered and studied cinematic artistic modes of practice into a primarily entertainment vehicle, one that immensely surpassed its progenitor in terms of

⁸⁴ If neorealism is canonically considered over with the release of Fellini’s 1954 film *La Strada* and comedy Italian style is considered to begin with Monicelli’s 1958 comedy *I Soliti Ignoti*, pink neorealism is comprised of a series of comedies starting in 1950 with Luciano Emmer’s *Domenica d’Agosto* and ending with Monicelli’s 1957 film *Il Medico e lo Stregone*.

⁸⁵ “Largamente inesplorata [...] rimane l’analisi intorno agli elementi di continuità del neorealismo nella massima e più compiuta espressione della produzione nazionale, la commedia all’italiana.”

popularity, is not simply a curious fact to be hinted at or be taken for granted, but deserves this specific and detailed study. Which characteristics of neorealism survived intact in comedy Italian style? Which had to be changed for the sake of popularity among a broader audience? What were the aspects of neorealism that had to be dismissed, that simply could not be accepted by such audience? Did this evolution occur only for reasons of economic feasibility and audience appeal? Or are there elements to prove that the comedy Italian style filmmakers were actually projecting the neorealist ideals in trying to look for a way forward? Was the cynicism that characterised comedy Italian style the result of a different approach to making films in comparison to the neorealists or simply the result of the Economic Miracle reality?

This study will answer all of these questions. Broadly speaking, the criticism of Italian cinema has been historically divided into two main trends. On one hand, the central positioning of Italian neorealism and the Italian art film in the spectrum of post-war European cinema's challenge to the primacy of Hollywood in the three decades preceding World War II has brought Italian film scholars to focus almost exclusively on the artistic merits of such practices, while traditionally understudying the arena of the popular genres that financed the Italian film industry in the years in which it produced such masterpieces recognised worldwide. On the other hand, a widespread reconsideration of genre production has taken place in the last fifteen years with the indiscriminate rehabilitation of a number of popular practices beyond their artistic merits. This study does not align itself with either of these tendencies. It will address comedy Italian style as an exception, a peculiar popular genre that deserves to be included in the canon of the most innovative Italian cinema in because of its structural similarities with neorealism. Its goal is as much that of proving comedy Italian style to have been a heir to neorealism, as it is demonstrating that other popular Italian comedic forms cannot be attributed such significance on the thin basis that any film made for Italians says something to some extent relevant about them.

An evolution to support economic viability: a comparison of the box office takings of neorealism and comedy Italian style

I shall explain my choice of using the expression ‘an evolution of Italian neorealism’ in reference to comedy Italian style. This notion expresses the fundamental disagreement of this study with the existing conception of comedy Italian style as an ‘involution’ of neorealism similar to pink neorealism, if not worse, as expressed explicitly by Angela Dalle Vacche (123) and implied by others using expressions such as ‘dilution’ of neorealism or ‘mass-market spin-off’. Since this notion of ‘involution’ is put forward by the detractors of the genre, I shall articulate an analogy between the neorealism-comedy Italian style relationship and the Darwinian theory of evolution and its fundamental discovery, the principle of natural selection: an organism evolves for the sake of surviving. It is, for instance, the reason why we human beings have developed opposable thumbs. This occurs very much also in the context of cinematic forms, which acquire certain characteristics for the sake of gaining or regaining spectators and revenues.

Thus, this aspect shall be discussed with reference to box-office results of Italian films belonging to the neorealist mode of production and comparing them to results achieved by films belonging to the comedy Italian style genre, proving that the shift from one cinematic form to the other was motivated by reasons of *economic feasibility*, namely for the sake of popularity and hence of survival within the cinematic market of the time. Differently than what might be assumed, neorealism was an expensive production model and its lack of popularity made *necessary* for reasons of *economic feasibility* the evolution into a form that would guarantee popularity. Whereas other cinematic movements such as the French Nouvelle Vague did indeed introduce, at least for a certain period of time, a lighter productive model that reduced the costs of making a film, this was not the case for Italian neorealism. Back in 1974 Vittorio Spinazzola cited a statement made by Carlo Lizzani on the periodical *Il Contemporaneo* according to which “there was not one neorealist film that was not produced at industry costs, not following normal productive praction, if

not even implementing quite reckless spending” (*Cinema e Pubblico* 8).⁸⁶ According to Gian Piero Brunetta

at the end of the 1940s the costs of a film amount on average to 50 million liras and only in exceptional cases they exceed 100 million. The producer can make the money spent only with the box office gains and with takings which have to be at least five times the production expenditures. Neorealism, actually, does not revolutionise production outflow: *La Terra Trema* costs 120 million, *Umberto D.* and Rossellini’s *Francesco Giullare di Dio* average 200 million. [...] Economically speaking, the producers recollect these films as actual catastrophies (*Storia Politica, Economica e Culturale*, 41-42).⁸⁷

Visconti’s *La Terra Trema* only earned 35,800,000 liras, De Sica’s *Umberto D.* 106.500.000 liras and Rossellini’s film made only 26,800,000 liras.⁸⁸ Keeping in mind Brunetta’s assessment of the costs/takings ratio necessary for the producers to profit, it is easy to understand why the producers of these films were extremely disappointed with their results. In 1956 Renzo Renzi started posing the question of neorealism’s effectiveness as a productive model, publishing the article ‘Impopolarità del Neorealismo?’ in the May issue of *Cinema Nuovo* in which he stated that

the films that have really bowled over the audiences of the whole of Italy, achieving those exceptional results that are the only way to guarantee the

⁸⁶ “Non c’è un solo film neorealista che non sia stato prodotto a prezzi industriali e secondo schemi produttivi normali, o addirittura di economia allegra.”

⁸⁷ “I costi di un film, alla fine degli anni Quaranta, si aggirano sulla cinquantina di milioni, e solo in casi eccezionali raggiungono il centinaio. Il produttore può recuperare una parte dei suoi soldi soltanto grazie ai ritorni erariali e ad un incasso almeno cinque volte superior alle spese. Il neorealismo, in effetti, non rivoluziona i costi di produzione: *La Terra Trema* costa 120 milioni, *Umberto D.* e il *Francesco* di Rossellini si aggirano sui 200. [...] Dal punto di vista economici i produttori ricordano questi film come vere e proprie catastrofi.”

⁸⁸ I refer the reader to the ‘Box Office Results of Neorealist Films’ section in the appendices for a comprehensive list of the takings achieved by neorealismo.

unanimity of consensus despite the opinions and preferences of the critics, have always been outside of this [*mode of production*].⁸⁹

Few neorealist films did indeed manage to enthuse the audiences of the country, among which was Rossellini's *Roma Città Aperta*, that topped the charts of Italian films in 1945, Lattuada's *Il Bandito* (4th in the 1946-1947 season), Genina's *Cielo sulla Palude* (4th in the 1949-1950 season) and De Santis' *Riso Amaro* (5th in the same season).⁹⁰ Many of the neorealist films that achieved the best results, however, were those examples of neorealism that already in the post-war period featured a significant amount of traits typical of generic and more specifically comedic filmmaking: Luigi Zampa's *Vivere in Pace* (6th in the 1947-1947 season) and *L'Onorevole Angelina* (4th in the 1947-1948 season) and Pietro Germi's *In Nome della Legge* (3rd in the 1948-1949 season). However, the canonical neorealist texts that failed were many: Rossellini's *Germania Anno Zero* (1948), *Francesco Giullare di Dio* (1950) and *Giovanna d'Arco al Rogo* (1954) all finished towards the bottom of the charts of their respective seasons while his *La Macchina Ammazzacattivi* (1952) finished at the last spot in the chart of Italian films distributed in the 1951-1952 season making only 5,750,000 liras, whereas that season's first Italian film in the charts, Duvivier's pink neorealist comedy *Don Camillo* earned 1,453,400,000 liras, more than 200 times the takings of Rossellini's film. Even *Stromboli, Terra di Dio* (1950) and *Europa '51*, two films of Rossellini which could count on the star appeal of Ingrid Bergman, did not feature among the top 25 Italian films in the charts of their respective seasons.⁹¹ Rossellini's *Viaggio in Italia* (1954), also featuring

⁸⁹ "sempre, sono stati altri, fuori di essa, i film che hanno veramente travolto le platee di tutta Italia, conquistando quei successi eccezionali che soli garantiscono sulla unanimità del consenso, contro il parere della critica e le sue preferenze."

⁹⁰ The data concerning the box office takings of neorealist films and their positioning in the charts of Italian films distributed between 1945 and 1954 is taken from Callisto Consulich's 'La Battaglia delle Cifre'.

⁹¹ In the light of this result of *Don Camillo*, one could conceive pink neorealism itself as an earlier 'evolution' of the original neorealism for the sake of financial survival. However, the films of this comedic form present structural characteristics typical of pre-neorealist comedic cinema and, thus, cannot be referred to as 'evolved' neorealist films. I will soon discuss the Darwinian principle of *inheritance* as a central aspect of this analogy between the relationship between cinematic forms and Darwin's theory conceived in the study of organisms. With reference to pink neorealism, however,

Bergman, only charted 121st among 173 Italian films in the 1954-1955 season, making only 50,000,000 liras. Similarly Vittorio De Sica's *Umberto D.* and *Miracolo a Milano* were failures, and the director managed to improve *Ladri di Biciclette*'s 11th spot in the chart of Italian films distributed in the 1948-1949 season only by resorting to pink neorealism with *L'Oro di Napoli*, that earned 669,000,000 liras and finished 5th in the chart of Italian films for the 1954-1955 season.

How much did the box office results of realist films improve with the advent of comedy Italian style? In the nine years between 1945 and 1954 neorealist films collectively earned the equivalent of 270,653,908,604 liras of 2001.⁹² The fact that the comedy Italian style genre lasted approximately twenty years, from 1958 to 1977, is already indicative of how it represented a much more solid production model. Even considering only the films produced within the first nine years of this genre, from 1958 to 1967, the difference in takings is overwhelming. In those nine years comedies Italian style earned the equivalent of 1,023,977,400,703 liras, which means

this principle shows that it had a much stronger connection with pre-neorealist comedies than with neorealism itself. It should also be noted that, while the credits of pink neorealist films feature a number of filmmakers associated with either neorealism and comedy Italian style or both temporarily indulging in this more conventional type of filmmaking, they also feature a number of screenwriters such as Ettore Maria Margadonna and Edoardo Anton, who are primarily if not only identified with this cinematic form, which signal its diversity when compared to both neorealism and comedy Italian style.

⁹² I have used the multipliers provided by the Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) for historical researches to calibrate the takings of each film to 2001. Since this data served as a comparison between films produced in the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s and 1970s I decided to calibrate all takings to 2001, the year in which the lira ceased to exist. In this list of neorealist films produced between 1945 and 1954 I have included films that belonged to neorealism on structural or aesthetic merits, such as *L'Onorevole Angelina*, *In Nome della Legge* and *I Vitelloni*, despite the fact that they featured some generic traits such as comedic performers. I did not include examples of farces or pink neorealism such as Borghesio's *Come Persi la Guerra* (1947) or Castellani's *Sotto il Sole di Roma* which structurally reprised the forms of comedic cinema of the pre-neorealist period while featuring some iconographic elements associated with neorealism such as the focus on lower class characters, the shooting in externals, narratives concerned with unemployment and poverty, etc.

that they made 278.33% more than what neorealist films did in an equivalent amount of time.⁹³

Of course even though all of the takings have been calibrated to the same parameter, 2001 liras, in order to compare figures from the 1950s to figures from the 1970s, one should take into consideration that Italians had more to spend in the 1960s, during the Economic Miracle, than they did at the end of the 1940s when the country was recovering from the war. According to Brunetta, in 1950, a year that is perfectly placed at the centre of the nine years of production of neorealist films and represents a balance between the dramatic economic state of the country in 1946 and the flourishing economy of 1954, Italians spent 83.5 billion liras on cinema attendances (*Storia Economica Politica e Culturale* 45), which calibrated to 2001 means 2,371,976,150,000 liras. In 1963 *Il Giornale dello Spettacolo/Borsa Film* published the data relative to cinema attendances in 1960, 1961 and 1962 and assessed that in the latter year, the peak of Italy's Economic Miracle and an appropriate sample year of the first nine years of production of comedies Italian style, Italians spent 240,373,468,000 liras at the cinema, which can be calibrated to 4,473,662,724,988 liras of 2001. The ratio between the money spent on cinema viewing in 1950 and in 1962, if calibrated to the same parameter, expresses an increase of the 88.604% at the peak of the Economic Miracle, which is still a relatively small figure if compared to the 278.33% that expresses how much more comedies Italian style earned in nine years of production in comparison to what neorealist films gained in the nine years between 1945 and 1954. One can easily compare these two percentages and deduce that, even taking into consideration the inflation of the currency and the differing disposal of income between the historical periods in which the two cinematic forms flourished, by evolving into comedy Italian style the neorealist mode of production managed to reach at least three times the

⁹³ The box office takings data of comedy Italian style films is taken from the industry periodical *Il Giornale dello Spettacolo/Borsa Film*, of which I consulted the issues published between 1955 and 1972. I refer the reader to the 'Box Office Results of comedy Italian style from 1958 to 1970' in the Appendices.

public that it did in its original form, therefore becoming a sustainable production model.⁹⁴

This aspect, the commercial appeal gained with the passage from neorealism to comedy Italian style, is also expressed by the individual experiences of the directors who went from one mode of production to the other over the years. The most obvious example is Vittorio De Sica, one of the neorealist filmmakers who suffered the most in terms of popular attendance before 1954. As previously pointed out De Sica's *neorealismo rosa* effort, *L'Oro di Napoli*, already represented a major improvement on the 'catastrophes' that were *Umberto D.* and *Miracolo a Milano* from an industry point of view. De Sica's embracing of comedy Italian style in the 1960s, however, was the move that guaranteed him overwhelming success and the chance to finally top the charts of Italian films distributed in the country with *Ieri, Oggi e Domani*, that earned 1,772,224,000 liras and *Matrimonio all'Italiana* that made 2,237,000,000 liras. It should also be noted that as a business model comedy Italian style allowed for a more consistent production on the part of filmmakers: while gaining 1,772,224,000 liras with *Ieri, Oggi e Domani*, De Sica was also able to release *Il Boom* in the same season and make a remarkable 543,366,000 liras and thus gained almost as much as a third of what *Ieri, Oggi e Domani* did. In the case of neorealism, instead, it was almost impossible for a director to have more than one film on the screens in a given season without one of them failing miserably. In the 1950-1951 season Rossellini's *Stromboli, Terra di Dio* finished 26th in the charts of Italian films and made 312,700,000 liras, while his *Francesco Giullare di Dio* only finished at the 85th spot earning 26,800,000 liras, less than an eleventh of what *Stromboli* achieved. It should also be pointed out that Rossellini's best box office result since *Roma Città Aperta*, 1959's *Il Generale della Rovere* features many comedy Italian style traits and has been likened to Monicelli's comedy Italian style *La Grande Guerra*, released the same year. Very much like De Sica, Luigi Zampa, a

⁹⁴ Whereas Brunetta's data assesses that Italians spent as much as 83.5 billion in cinema going in 1950, Wagstaff writes that the amount spent was only 63,404,220,000, although he does not offer a precise source of this data. Even taking into consideration this figure, comedy Italian style would still have made, within the first nine years of production, as much as two times and a half what neorealist films gained between 1945 and 1954, taking into consideration all of the historical differences between the two periods.

director who already produced neorealist films with a strong satirical tone in the 1945-1954 period, managed to top the box office charts only with a comedy Italian style, *Il Medico della Mutua* (1968) that benefitted from the casting of Alberto Sordi to earn 2,994,660,000 liras which can be calibrated to 44,509,931,046 liras of 2001. This shift towards the commercially appealing, however, should not necessarily be identified with a lack of engagement or intent on the part of the once neorealist filmmakers. Zampa's *Il Medico della Mutua*, an extremely harsh *j'accuse* of the malpractices in use in the Italian health services at the time, is an example of outraged finger-pointing filmmaking that goes far beyond any implicit or explicit criticism of institutions ever featured in any neorealist film of the 1945-1954 period.

It could also be the matter of a different study to assess if this change for the sake of *survival* and *economic feasibility* could by the way also be the reason behind the *other* trend of evolution of neorealism, the one towards the art film of Fellini, Pasolini and Visconti who increasingly deployed aspects of spectacle in their later films: the casting of Italian and foreign stars, narratives set in distant countries or historical settings, elaborately constructed set designs. Visconti's films inscribed within neorealism's original form, for instance, were incredibly disappointing from a business point of view, *La Terra Trema* only finishing 52nd among 61 Italian films distributed in the 1948-1949 season and *Bellissima* charting at the 68th spot in the 1951-1952 season while making 152,700,000 liras, less than a tenth of the takings of that season's number one film, Duvivier's *Don Camillo*. Visconti's move towards the historical spectacle with *Senso* in 1954 already represented a significant improvement, finishing 8th in the 1954-1955 season. It was *Rocco e i Suoi Fratelli* (1960) and *Il Gattopardo* (1963), two films featuring internationally renowned stars such as Alain Delon, Burt Lancaster, Claudia Cardinale and Renato Salvatori, that allowed him to top the charts with overwhelmingly positive results.⁹⁵

In his *Italian Neorealist Cinema. An Aesthetic Approach* Christopher Wagstaff asserts that neorealism's lack of success among the popular audiences has

⁹⁵ Renato Salvatori and Claudia Cardinale were already cast together in Monicelli's *I Soliti Ignoti*. This is just one of numerous instances of performers who played an important role in the international critical success of the Italian art film of the 1960s being introduced by comedy Italian style.

been overestimated because of an uncritical analysis of the box office figures.

According to Wagstaff

another test is to see how neorealist films fared *as a group*, in comparison with other *groups* of films – in this instance generic groupings such as comedy, melodrama and adventure. By this measure, neorealist films fared no worse than any other group, and better than most. [...] The *general* performance of neorealist films has been compared with the *most successful* genre films (such as melodramas), rather than with genre films *in general*. It is easy to receive a false impression of the performance of neorealist films relative to that of melodramas and comedies, because with far more of the latter being made and released in a given year, a handful of each group's best performers totally outnumbers the entire output of neorealist films (*An Aesthetic Approach* 17-18).

There are two major flaws with this argument. The first one is that in order to substantiate it Wagstaff inserts in his list of “Fifty-five ‘neorealist’ films” (435-439) some films that did quite well at the box office but that, on a structural level, cannot be comprised within this mode of production, but rather within popular forms of cinema. For instance, within Wagstaff's list we find Luigi Zampa's *Un Americano in Vacanza* (10th in the 1945-1946 chart of Italian films), a comedy featuring the courting of a school teacher on the part of two American soldiers. As the synopsis shows, the only neorealist staple the film deploys is the fact that it comprises U.S. soldiers among its characters. The action, however, and the way it is depicted, is rather typical of romantic comedies like the ones made in the 1930s by Mario Camerini. Wagstaff considers ‘neorealist’ Castellani's *Sotto il Sole di Roma* (16th in the 1948-1949 season, earning over 170 million lira) and *Due Soldi di Speranza* (13th Italian film of the 1951-1952 season, making over 400 million liras) as well as Luciano Emmer's *Una Domenica d'Agosto* (making almost 150 million liras), three films which are widely considered examples of pink neorealism, neorealism's comedic and more popular generic counterpart. The list features Pietro Germi's drama *Il Ferroviere*, a film produced only in 1955, when, in the historical canon of Italian film, the neorealist mode of production was already over. On the contrary, Wagstaff's list does not include Rossellini's *Giovanna d'Arco al Rogo* and *Desiderio*, two films released in the same season as Visconti's *Senso* (1954-1955),

which is indeed included. Rossellini's two films had particularly bad box office results, finishing respectively 152nd and 153rd in the charts of 173 Italian films released in that season, earning less than 19 million each. Added together these two films only gained one fifteenth of what *Senso* did (571,000,000 liras). Their exclusion is unmotivated: one could reason that *Giovanna d'Arco al Rogo* is not properly neorealist because it was set in the past, however that was also the case of *Senso* and *Francesco Giullare di Dio*. Of course neorealism's performance *in general* is not going to appear poor in comparison to popular genres if some of the genre films that contributed to its commercial demise, the pink neorealist ones, are considered within the practice.⁹⁶

The second flaw in Wagstaff's argument in favour of the commercial competitiveness of neorealism is that it does not consider that cinematic distribution responded to a free market logic, in other words, it was based on demand. One cannot argue that neorealist films only did poorly in commercial terms because they were not shown in enough film theatres or because not enough films of this type were made in comparison with other types of films. If comedies and melodramas were produced in numbers that overwhelmed those of neorealism and were shown on more screens, it was because, unlike what happened with neorealist films, these films were in demand. If Italian producers and distributors were involved in making and releasing a large number of farces featuring Totò it was because they were aware of the extreme popularity that the comedian had reached throughout his tours on the "avanspettacolo" stages, and if the number of Totò films increased by the year it was because these films were doing particularly well in commercial terms, and cost very little to make. Similarly, if tear-jerkers such as Matarazzo's were produced in large numbers, it was because previous examples of this type of filmmaking achieved good results. If they were released in a large number of cinemas, whereas films like

⁹⁶ I should note that I have myself included Visconti's *Senso* and Fellini's *I Vitelloni* and *La Strada* in my calculation of the box office results of neorealism. *I Vitelloni* has been considered an early comedy Italian style and *Senso* and *La Strada* are two films which signal the end of neorealism. In this respect, one could include them in this mode of production or consider them as the first two examples of post-neorealist art film. Since all three films were quite successful in financial terms, if one excluded them from the neorealist canon, the disparity in commercial appeal between neorealism and comedy Italian style would be even bigger than the one I identify.

Umberto D. had a limited distribution, it was because the distributors and the owners of the cinemas realised how much the two types of films were earning in their respective opening weeks or in previews and invested in screening a tear-jerker like Matarazzo's *I Figli di Nessuno* (1951) rather than *Umberto D.* because they had proof that there was public demand for the former and not for the latter.

Additionally, Wagstaff makes an argument about the Christian Democrats' aversion for neorealism pointing out that

the Catholic Centre for Cinema (CCC) applied a 'certification' to films, and gave restrictive ratings to *all* neorealist films. [...] The Church, with Andreotti's support, opened three thousand *sale parrocchiali* (parish cinemas), which in small towns and rural areas were often the only local cinema; all were obliged to honour the certification of the CCC, and none, therefore, ever showed a neorealist film (19).

This makes for a compelling argument, namely that neorealism never had a chance to compete. However in the appendix devoted to the different categories of cinema in Italy, Wagstaff specifies that

although the Catholic parish cinemas (*sale parrocchiali*) numbered 34% of the total [*of cinemas existing in the country in 1953*], their seating capacity was only 20% of the total, while their days of openings were 15%, their tickets sold 7% and *their box office takings only 5% of the total* [*my emphasis*] (ticket prices were considerably cheaper than in first-run commercial cinemas, for example) (419).

In light of this specification what seemed to be a major obstacle to neorealism's commercial viability, the fact that films of this mode of production could not be shown in 34% of the cinemas, becomes a factor that in fact only had a minor if not irrelevant effect, 5%, on the figures of the total takings that Wagstaff aims to disprove. Wagstaff's further argument that the Italian's governmental subsidy of 16% of gross receipts to producers of 'Italian' films instituted first in 1947 was not only devoted to the production of neorealist films, but rather to all films produced is again flawed by not taking into consideration the pressures of a free market type of

competition. Yes, 6-8% was originally destined to Italian films of high artistic quality, but commercial films like the tear-jerkers and the farces ended up benefiting from it as much as neorealist films. Aside from the subsidy's name, "*sussidio di qualità*", it is obvious that the interest of the government was that of defending the competitiveness of the overall national cultural production, not that of assessing the artistic merits of different types of national products. Artistic quality is also quite a vague definition, not necessarily an aesthetic one. If a differentiation between films was made, the government could have easily assessed that there were more qualitative merits in Matarazzo's melodramas than in neorealist films.

What indeed was an objective obstacle for neorealist films was the massive amount of American-distributed films in Italy in the 1945-1954 period. This, however, does not detract from the fact that, apart from a few exceptions, neorealist films did quite poorly even when compared with other Italian films that suffered from the same obstacle. In terms of neorealism's evolution into comedy Italian style and the positive commercial effects it had, one should consider that as much as the comedies Italian style benefitted from a larger number of Italian films being distributed in the country in comparison to the Italian/American films ratio at the end of the 1940s, their popularity was also a *factor* in this increment. According to an analysis appeared on *Il Giornale dello Spettacolo/Borsa Film* in 1964 the percentage of the overall takings obtained by Italian productions in 1957, before the release of the first comedy Italian style, amounted to 30% with 126 new Italian films released on the market. By 1963, when comedy Italian style was an established cinematic genre that had conquered the Italian audiences, Italian films obtained 47% of the total takings and in that year as many as 230 new Italian films were released. **[Figure 1]** Between new releases and ongoing screenings 7,092 films were circulating in the country in that year, 2,300 of which were Italian films, while American films were still as many as 3,151. **[Figure 2]** This means that Italian films' result of gaining 47% of the takings in that year was still remarkably considerable since Italian films only constituted 32% of the films circulating on the market.

IL FILM ITALIANO SUL MERCATO NAZIONALE						
ANNO	Numero film nazionali programmati per la prima volta	Numero biglietti venduti	Spesa del pubblico	Incasso lordo film nazionali (1)	% incasso film nazionali	Prezzo medio biglietto
1954	157	800.733.000	105.172.148.000	38.000.000.000	36,2	131
1955	136	819.424.000	116.690.729.000	40.500.000.000 (37.702.000.000)	34,8	142
1956	84	790.153.000	116.021.155.000	32.800.000.000 (29.980.000.000)	28,4	147
1957	126	758.364.000	112.780.786.000	33.600.000.000 (31.313.000.000)	30,0	149
1958	135	730.412.000	110.774.095.000	36.100.000.000 (33.056.000.000)	32,6	152
1959	164	747.904.000	116.639.557.000	41.940.000.000 (39.173.000.000)	36,6	156
1960	157	744.781.000	120.986.712.000	49.717.000.000 (46.152.000.000)	41,0	162
1961	210	741.019.000	125.650.146.000	52.544.000.000 (48.308.000.000)	41,6	170
1962	238	728.572.000	132.500.000.000	62.000.000.000 (57.373.000.000)	47,0	182
1963	230	697.480.000	140.517.638.000	64.467.861.000 (59.574.261.000)	46,0	201

(1) La cifra tra parentesi si riferisce all'incasso dei film nazionali in programmazione da non oltre cinque anni.

Figure 1: a study in *Il Giornale dello Spettacolo/Borsa Film* showing the percentage of takings obtained by Italian films from 1954 to 1963.

PROSPETTO E — Film in circolazione negli anni 1962, 1963 e 1964 secondo la nazionalità									
Nazionalità	n.	Incasso	%	n.	Incasso	%	n.	Incasso	%
Italiani e di coproduzione	2.127	62.135.346.000	47	2.300	64.467.861.000	46	2.447	68.170.278.000	45,2
U.S.A.	3.198	55.078.180.000	41,7	3.151	50.252.712.000	42,3	3.167	66.054.398.000	43,8
Inglese	418	6.414.805.000	4,9	410	6.278.810.000	4,5	424	3.393.601.000	5,6
Francesi	463	2.678.153.000	2	474	4.388.301.000	3,1	477	2.982.477.000	2
Tedeschi	275	2.019.468.000	1,5	266	2.020.420.000	1,4	265	1.826.254.000	1,3
Altre nazionalità	412	3.876.623.000	2,9	491	3.780.626.000	2,7	519	3.286.780.000	2,1
Totali	6.873	132.200.575.000		7.082	140.266.730.000		7.319	150.803.788.000	

Figure 2: a study in *Il Giornale dello Spettacolo/Borsa Film* showing the number of films circulating in Italy in the years 1962, 1963 and 1964 divided by country of origin.

One should also consider that if neorealist films were mainly in competition with American films and popular forms of Italian filmmaking such as melodramas, farces and pink neorealism, comedy Italian style had as much if not more competition in the range of possibilities offered to the public to choose from in the period in which they were produced: a very large number of farces were still being produced in the 1960s, the ones featuring Totò being now also paired with the ones featuring Franco Franchi and Ciccio Ingrassia. In terms of national film production Cinecittà was now engaging in cinematic genres such as the spaghetti western, the horror films and the pepla spectacles that were not contemplated in the late 1940s and early 1950s. According to *Il Giornale dello Spettacolo/Borsa Film* in the August

1963-June 1964 period, for instance, 12 comedies Italian style were circulating on the screens, while the total of national productions and co-production with a consistent investment on the part of Italian producers amounted to 225 films. [Figure 3, comedies Italian style are referred to as ‘satirici di costume’] This means that comedy Italian style had as much if not more competition as neorealism had years earlier, the difference is that every year from 1959 to 1977 at least three, and many times more than three, comedies Italian style featured in the top ten chart of Italian films, whereas that was not the case with neorealism. Another element of competition was constituted by the non-American foreign films on the market in the 1960s, which featured a very large number of critically revered films such as the films of the French Nouvelle Vague and the films directed Swedish director Ingmar Bergman as well as some immensely popular ones, such as the British James Bond series. Finally it should be taken into consideration that since the mid 1960s films with a strong erotic component, Italian and foreign, comedic and not, started circulating in the country, invading a large number of screens and thus affecting comedy Italian style’s possibility of maximising its takings especially in second or third run cinemas. In the 1963-1964 season, for example, 16 ‘film sexy’ were circulating on the Italian market. [Figure 3]

Prospetto A — Film italiani e di coproduzione programmati sull'intero mercato dall'agosto 1963 al giugno 1964 suddivisi per « genere »

GENERE	N.	%
Drammatici	35	15,6
Satirici di costume	12	5,4
Brillanti e comici	38	16,9
A episodi	8	3,5
Storici - mitologici - biblici	24	10,7
Avventurosi	30	13,4
Cappa e spada	5	2,2
Western	9	4
Polizieschi	10	4,6
Spionaggio	7	3,1
Usi e costumi nel mondo	9	4
Film sexy	16	7,2
Orrore	6	2,6
Con cantanti	3	1,3
Guerra	2	0,8
Per ragazzi	1	0,4
Drammatico - popolari	1	0,4
Documentari di repertorio	3	1,3
Non catalogati	6	2,6
<i>Totale</i>	225	100

Figure 3: a study of the different types of Italian films circulating on the market by *Il Giornale dello Spettacolo/Borsa Film*

Most importantly the main competition that comedy Italian style had, which can be compared to the obstacle American films represented for neorealism in the post-war period, was represented by another medium, television. According to *Il Giornale dello Spettacolo/Borsa Film* 639,559 Italians subscribed to RAI's programmes in 1961, 696,546 more did so in 1962 and 830,820 in 1963, bringing the number of subscribers to 4,789,850 Italians by the end of the year. [Figure 4] According to a survey in the same source as many as 43% of television set owners went to the cinema only once a year or less, 30% of them did between once a year and little more than once a year and only 27% of television owners declared that they still went to the cinema as often as once a month. [Figure 5] Throughout the 1960s, the decade in which most comedies Italian style were produced, television became an increasingly stronger competitor, offering a wider variety of programmes. In 1961 RAI DUE, the second state owned channel, started broadcasting. A study published on *Il Giornale dello Spettacolo/Borsa Film* in 1968 shows that, for instance, cinema attendances lost between 10 million and 20 million liras per day on selected days in comparison to the previous year because television was now broadcasting live important football games. [Figures 6 and 6a]

PROSPETTO G — Incremento degli abbonati alla TV negli anni 1961, 1962 e 1963						
Regioni	Anno 1961	in + rispetto al 1960	Anno 1962	in + rispetto al 1961	Anno 1963	in + rispetto al 1962
Piemonte	252.979	68.445	329.241	76.262	420.346	91.105
Val d'Aosta	3.339	1.133	4.486	1.147	6.268	1.782
Liguria	139.148	31.950	171.493	32.345	208.782	37.289
Lombardia	533.032	128.487	682.651	149.619	860.828	178.177
Trentino-Alto Adige	20.712	5.382	26.412	5.700	34.808	8.396
Veneto	164.023	42.878	213.186	49.163	276.719	63.533
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	50.996	12.836	67.200	16.204	87.781	20.371
Emilia-Romagna	203.306	503.873	266.703	63.397	347.874	81.171
Marche	57.109	15.527	73.801	16.692	94.172	20.371
Toscana	182.893	44.787	233.497	50.604	293.896	60.399
Umbria	32.928	7.932	41.589	8.654	52.471	10.891
Lazio	343.418	67.652	409.393	65.945	482.255	72.892
Campania	245.910	49.943	293.897	47.987	346.546	52.749
Abruzzi e Molise	46.863	12.614	60.470	13.607	77.294	16.824
Puglia	120.037	29.628	152.293	32.256	194.072	41.779
Basilicata	12.827	3.490	16.863	3.836	21.355	4.642
Calabria	49.941	12.999	62.802	12.861	78.023	15.221
Sicilia	155.779	38.603	193.811	38.032	232.432	38.621
Sardegna	44.446	11.510	56.481	12.035	70.848	14.367
Totali	2.639.484	639.559	3.336.030	696.546	4.186.850	830.820

Figure 4: a study in *Il Giornale dello Spettacolo/Borsa Film* on the increase of television subscriptions in the years 1961, 1962 and 1963.

FREQUENZE IN RELAZIONE AL POSSESSO DI UN TELEVISORE

	Totale	Vanno al cinema almeno una volta al mese	Vanno al cinema almeno una volta all'anno	Meno di una volta all'anno o mai
Insieme	2.531=100%	36%	27%	37%
Hanno la televisione	1.040=100%	27	30	43
Non hanno la televisione	1.491=100%	42	25	33
Guardano la televisione ogni tanto	1.091=100%	48	27	25
Non guardano mai la televisione	400=100%	25	20	55

FREQUENZE DEGLI SPETTATORI

Figure 5: a survey in *Il Giornale dello Spettacolo/Borsa Film* quantifying the frequency of cinema going on the part of Italian television subscribers in 1963.

Le conseguenze del calcio in TV sugli spettacoli cinematografici

Città	Mercoledì 23-03	Mercoledì 29-03	Mercoledì 05-04	Mercoledì 29-03	Mercoledì 05-04	Mercoledì 12-04
MILANO	22.544.000	8.707.000	7.782.000	65.913.000	54.228.000	47.118.000
ROMA	16.087.000	5.401.000	7.582.000	34.780.000	48.177.000	34.497.000
TORINO	9.918.000	3.508.000	2.403.000	19.540.000	30.795.000	12.526.000
GENOVA	4.478.000	2.041.000	1.334.000	9.941.000	9.831.000	6.947.000
PADOVA	1.596.000	850.000	682.000	3.381.000	3.896.000	3.780.000
VENEZIA	907.000	637.000	364.000	3.334.000	2.435.000	3.827.000
TRIESTE	851.000	533.000	482.000	2.836.000	2.455.000	2.945.000
BOLOGNA	4.926.000	2.208.000	1.582.000	18.273.000	12.386.000	13.820.000
FIRENZE	3.599.000	2.299.000	1.353.000	16.361.000	12.651.000	7.983.000
NAPOLI	4.889.000	2.551.000	1.986.000	14.613.000	9.294.000	10.892.000
PALERMO	1.288.000	774.000	998.000	2.980.000	3.975.000	3.682.000
MESSINA	1.115.000	748.000	585.000	2.920.000	2.987.000	2.155.000
CATANIA	1.369.000	1.181.000	883.000	4.798.000	5.471.000	4.575.000
CAGLIARI	1.226.000	418.000	453.000	3.348.000	3.163.000	1.378.000
ANCONA	1.222.000	312.000	286.000	2.956.000	2.895.000	2.800.000
Totale	76.963.000	36.354.000	29.825.000	193.863.000	196.569.000	169.256.000

Città	Mercoledì 23-03	Mercoledì 29-03	Mercoledì 05-04	Mercoledì 29-03	Mercoledì 05-04	Mercoledì 12-04
MILANO	29.625.000	44.176.000	21.021.000	10.712.000	10.431.000	7.916.000
ROMA	25.019.000	35.389.000	14.369.000	9.863.000	9.385.000	8.931.000
TORINO	12.145.000	11.785.000	5.259.000	4.211.000	3.575.000	3.387.000
GENOVA	6.918.000	7.496.000	2.586.000	2.455.000	2.163.000	1.295.000
PALERMO	2.754.000	2.675.000	1.300.000	1.155.000	938.000	683.000
VENEZIA	1.422.000	1.628.000	664.000	824.000	589.000	474.000
TRIESTE	1.265.000	1.581.000	668.000	683.000	520.000	577.000
BOLOGNA	7.629.000	8.054.000	3.285.000	2.851.000	2.579.000	1.489.000
FIRENZE	6.782.000	7.671.000	2.765.000	2.527.000	2.287.000	1.611.000
NAPOLI	5.644.000	8.373.000	3.729.000	3.861.000	3.664.000	1.771.000
PALERMO	2.264.000	2.884.000	1.307.000	913.000	1.018.000	568.000
MESSINA	1.817.000	1.516.000	1.221.000	1.084.000	1.089.000	—
CATANIA	2.470.000	2.568.000	1.486.000	1.583.000	1.195.000	958.000
CAGLIARI	1.631.000	2.212.000	595.000	782.000	722.000	373.000
ANCONA	2.265.000	1.900.000	684.000	694.000	526.000	—
Totale	123.681.000	129.898.000	61.111.000	43.848.000	40.194.000	29.262.000

RAFFRONTO CON I CORRISPONDENTI GIORNI DEL 1967

Città	Mercoledì 24-03	Mercoledì 29-03	Sabato 18-03	Sabato 24-03	Domenica 19-03	Domenica 24-03	Lunedì 12-04	Lunedì 18-04
MILANO	13.800.000	7.782.000	24.712.000	14.369.000	42.067.000	34.497.000	10.987.000	8.931.000
ROMA	12.800.000	2.403.000	28.272.000	21.821.000	55.128.000	47.118.000	12.194.000	7.916.000
TORINO	3.226.000	2.403.000	6.310.000	5.290.000	13.083.000	12.526.000	3.499.000	3.387.000
GENOVA	1.902.000	1.234.000	4.371.000	2.586.000	10.985.000	6.947.000	2.638.000	1.295.000
PADOVA	713.000	682.000	2.385.000	1.380.000	7.977.000	5.789.000	1.183.000	683.000
VENEZIA	489.000	364.000	1.486.000	364.000	4.985.000	3.827.000	907.000	474.000
TRIESTE	536.000	482.000	1.270.000	682.000	3.562.000	2.945.000	738.000	577.000
BOLOGNA	2.075.000	1.582.000	4.781.000	3.285.000	9.437.000	13.830.000	2.782.000	1.489.000
FIRENZE	2.214.000	1.523.000	4.588.000	2.765.000	9.285.000	7.983.000	2.083.000	1.611.000
NAPOLI	2.038.000	1.986.000	6.497.000	3.729.000	10.386.000	7.983.000	2.494.000	1.771.000
PALERMO	424.000	998.000	977.000	1.307.000	2.878.000	3.982.000	258.000	568.000
MESSINA	882.000	985.000	1.161.000	1.221.000	2.321.000	2.155.000	747.000	958.000
CATANIA	844.000	883.000	1.389.000	1.686.000	3.386.000	4.378.000	782.000	958.000
CAGLIARI	521.000	286.000	857.000	604.000	2.525.000	2.800.000	456.000	—
ANCONA	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Totale	66.728.000	28.372.000	89.838.000	68.516.000	176.895.000	158.968.000	41.541.000	29.286.000

Figure 6: a study in *Il Giornale dello Spettacolo/Borsa Film* quantifying the difference in cinema attendances between selected days of 1967 and the correspondent days of 1968, in which live football games were broadcasted on television.

Città	Mercoledì 7-6-67	Merc. 5-6-68 Semifinale Coppa Europa
ROMA	9.997.000	7.582.000
MILANO	13.800.000	7.782.000
TORINO	3.230.000	2.463.000
GENOVA	1.902.000	1.334.000
PADOVA	713.000	682.000
VENEZIA	489.000	364.000
TRIESTE	538.000	482.000
BOLOGNA	2.575.000	1.582.000
FIRENZE	2.214.000	1.553.000
NAPOLI	2.620.000	1.986.000
PALERMO	424.000	996.000
MESSINA	862.000	585.000
CATANIA	844.000	883.000
ANCONA	531.000	298.000
	40.739.000	28.572.000

Figure 6a: a detail of the same study which shows a 12 million deficit in cinema revenues on a given day of 1967 and the same day in 1968 because as a result of the live television broadcast of a European Cup football match

All of these considerations bring us to a conclusion: that from a commercial point of view neorealism was not a particularly successful cinematic practice and that, instead, it was unsustainable as a production model. This does not detract from its value as an artistic form, nor does it diminish its importance in the development of Italian cinema in the second half of the 20th century. Whereas in the early 1950s neorealism suffered from the competition of pink neorealist comedies, films that structurally were not any different from those produced during the Fascist regime and that were simply disguised as neorealist by implementing a similar iconography, from 1958 onwards its evolution into comedy Italian style, a cinematic form which, as this study will show, remained neorealist in structure and intent. However, it also acquired commercial potential due to its satirical attributes, thus fulfilling the function of guaranteeing the survival of some of the crucial aspects of neorealism in a competitive market environment as challenging as the one in which they originally emerged.

Structure and methodology: a Darwinian model of the relationship between two continuous cinematic forms

I shall now explain how aspects of the analogy I am making between Darwin's analysis of the processes of evolution of organisms and the relationship between neorealism and comedy Italian style inform the structure of this study. First and foremost I shall explain why, when articulating a discourse concerning the cinematic genre comedy Italian style, I make an analogy with Darwin and his theory, developed in the context of another discipline, rather than relying on existing notions of evolution of cinematic genres. As Robert Altman writes in his *Film/Genre*,

genre critics have long deemed it necessary to construct a model that would properly describe and account for this tendency [*within film genres*] towards variation. Two closely related paradigms, both dependant on organic metaphors have been developed to configure and explain the restricted variations of genre film (21).

Altman then goes on to cite John Cawelti and Thomas Schatz among critics who have compared variations within film genres to changes referred to the life cycle of a living organism, the coming of age as it were, and to cite Christian Metz, Brian Taves and Jane Feuer among critics who refer to the notion of biological evolution. However, all of these theoretical frameworks have been developed within the context of the studies of the notion of 'genres', whereas neorealism cannot be considered as such. In fact, as I will explain in Chapter One, it is problematic to apply even the rarified notion of cinematic 'movement' to neorealism. When I discuss the evolution of neorealism into comedy Italian style, I am not analysing the development within *one* given cinematic genre, but rather how a mode of production that cannot be defined as a specified cinematic genre happened to evolve into a recognised cinematic genre. The fact that, at the same time, neorealism also followed another evolutionary thread to develop into the art cinema of the 1960s too, a form of filmmaking that unlike comedy Italian style cannot be defined as generic, is another proof of how the notion of *one* genre evolving through different stages, which is what existing theories of genre evolution analyse, is inadequate in this instance. As this is not the study of evolution *within* a given cinematic genre, but a study of the

evolution of a cinematic phenomenon that is not generic into a generic one that also recognises a parallel evolution of the same phenomenon into another non generic form, when articulating neorealism's evolution in both comedy Italian style and the art film, it is necessary to go back to how the notion of 'evolution' as it has been theorised in its original context.

The crucial aspect of Darwin's principle of natural selection is that the evolution of an organism to ensure survival in its environment implies both a consistent similarity between the organism in the final stage of its evolution and its initial state at the beginning of it, as well as a degree of variation between the organism in the two stages that can be explained in the context of the pressures that environments offered throughout the process. Darwin exemplified this notion writing that

if we look to the islands off the American shore, however much they may differ in geological structure, the inhabitants, though they may be all peculiar species, are essentially American. [...] We see in facts some deep organic bond, prevailing throughout space and time, over the same areas of land and water, and independent of their physical conditions. [...] This bond, on my theory, is simply *inheritance*, [*my emphasis*] that cause which alone, as far as we positively know, produces organisms quite like, or, as we see in the case of varieties, nearly like each other. The dissimilarity of the inhabitants of different regions may be attributed to *modification through natural selection* [*my emphasis*], and in a quite subordinate degree to the direct influence of *different physical conditions* [*my emphasis*] (283).

Hence, according to the principle of *inheritance* if two organisms are closely related they will display a substantial bond, a number of traits which are presented more or less in both cases. Dissimilarities between these two closely related organisms can either be dependent on a *modification* due to the principle of natural selection, which in the case of cinematic forms would be represented by the struggle for popularity and commercial viability, or due to the *differing conditions* of the environments inhabited by the two organisms. This is the reason why parts of this study shall be dedicated to demonstrating instances of *inheritance* between the two forms, thus

investigating the survival of certain attributes of neorealism in the comedy Italian style genre, very much like certain attributes of primates, such as armpit hair, have survived in human beings. Other parts of this study shall investigate the *modifications* that occurred in the passage from neorealism to comedy Italian style, which were necessary for survival in accordance to natural selection, in other words *modifications* that took place in the interest of popular appeal. In accordance with the notion of *modifications* due to the *differing conditions* of related organisms, other parts of this study shall discuss certain attributes of comedy Italian style, as new elements developed in the context of the genre determined by the fact that the social, economic, political and cultural Italian environment in which comedy Italian style flourished was notably different from the post-war environment in which neorealism was established.

The concept of ‘involution’, instead, pursued by the detractors of the comedy Italian style genre, implies that an organism reverts to attributes belonging to a previous evolutionary stage: going back to the primate-human being example, a man or woman who suddenly started behaving like an ape would represent an instance of ‘involution’. This notion, thus, can be applied to pink neorealism which, as my research will prove, actually displayed reversal towards structural attributes belonging to pre-neorealist cinema, namely romantic comedies produced during Fascism, despite having flourished after the neorealist wave. Comedic forms such as pink neorealism and farce had much stronger bonds with cinematic forms that preceded neorealism than with neorealism itself. They are essentially romantic comedies and slapstick farces like those produced during Fascism which share a number of iconographic traits with neorealism, such as the focus on the lower classes, the depiction of post-war unemployment, etc., simply because they happened to share with neorealism the environment of post-war Italy and its conditions. ‘Involution’, however, cannot be applied to comedy Italian style which, as I shall prove, did not structurally revert to what neorealism had sought to and managed to subvert, namely the type of cinema produced under Fascism. Even Lino Micciché’s to some extent accommodating view that “neorealism lost when it won and won when it lost” (*Sul Neorealismo Oggi* xvii), meaning that it managed to modify the imagery of all Italian cinema, including mainstream forms of it, but lost its identity as a result of this, does not clarify sufficiently why its role in informing something as

popular as comedy Italian style must necessarily mean a defeat. Carlo Salinari argued that “the crisis of neorealism was rooted in an objective general fact: in the involution of Italian society or [...] in the restoration of capitalism in Italy. [...] All kinds of measures were used to disrupt a further evolution of neorealism” (47).⁹⁷ This statement is problematic on many levels. The notion of an *involution* back to capitalism is unclear, as it would be hard to argue the existence of a capitalist society in Italy before 1945. Most importantly, conditioning such as the one referred to by Salinari with the word “measures” is not at all in contrast with the notion of evolution, but one of its very own principles. The fact that a certain shift in environment is precisely what determines an evolution seems to be forgotten too often when this term is applied to cinematic forms. Film scholars who, on the basis of their preference of drama over comedy or on their privileging of stylistic attributes of filmmaking over thematic and structural ones, conceive comedy Italian style as an ‘involution’ of neorealism or a lesser form of realist filmmaking do not offer an argument that takes into account what the concepts of evolution and involution actually imply, but simply express a value judgement.

This analogy with the notion of evolving organisms would not be appropriate in a discussion of changes in the practice of a single filmmaker or a restricted number of filmmakers, which could simply be the result of changing moments of artistic inspiration. However, it is a valid model for the discussion of two broad phenomena such as neorealism and comedy Italian style which, as I previously discussed, feature an extremely large number of filmmakers who have passed from one cinematic form to the other as well as a vast number of filmmakers who have declared that they were inspired by the first cinematic form and that their involvement in the second was motivated by their ambition of continuing such a practice in the context of their contemporary perspective. In fact, I believe, in the case of broad phenomena like cinematic forms this analogy is quite appropriate. If we consider the essential functions of living organisms, it is clear that in order to survive they nourish themselves and they discharge what is not necessary for their survival, they reproduce by intertwining with one another and they react to their environment.

⁹⁷ I have used Mira Liehm’s translation of this quotation, as featured in her volume *Passion and Defiance* (101).

Metaphorically speaking, cinematic forms if analysed on a broad scale, without focusing specifically on the singular impulse of each individual involved within them that is, operate in a similar way. They are nourished by the response of the public, meaning that if a given cinematic genre or practice achieves a certain financial result it is almost guaranteed that films of that given type will keep being produced. On the other hand if nourishment lacks, if the public disregards a certain type of film produced for a certain period, it is unlikely that the production of such type of film will increase in the upcoming future. Metaphorically speaking - I cannot stress this enough - cinematic forms discharge what is not necessary for their survival, meaning that if certain attributes of a given cinematic practice are recognised by the industry not to be necessary for its commercial appeal, or even detrimental to it, in the future such attributes may be dropped and not be featured in upcoming examples of that given practice. Cinematic forms constantly intertwine with each other in the interest of gaining commercial potential, hence surviving, as the many forms of genre-crossing demonstrate.⁹⁸ Finally, cinematic forms are constantly responding to the pressures of their socio-economic environments.

I shall point out that the organism/cinematic form analogy that I am here merely suggesting in order to discuss the notion of the neorealism-comedy Italian style relationship, as well as to challenge the canonical and unsubstantiated view of comedy Italian style as a ‘dilution’ of neorealism and has actually already been adopted as a theoretical model in the context of the humanities. In his *Evolution and Literary Theory* Joseph Carroll dates the implementation of a Darwinian critical paradigm in the field of literature back to Hippolyte Taine’s *History of English Literature*, dating as early as 1867. According to Carroll, Taine

clearly and forcefully propounds a concept of literature that locates its dominant casual terms in the biological interaction of the organism and its environment. He argues that all cultural formations can be reduced to three casual elements: ‘the *race*, the *surroundings*, and the *epoch*.’ By ‘surroundings’ he means ‘physical or social circumstances,’ and by ‘epoch’

⁹⁸ One can think of science fiction films that are essentially westerns set in space, or comedies that parody other genres, such as the *Scary Movie* series, in order to benefit from the commercial appeal of the original.

he means the developmental condition of a culture at any given point in time. [...] By 'race' Taine means the 'innate and hereditary dispositions' that 'are united with the marked differences in the temperament and structure of the body' and that 'vary with various peoples' (16-17).

This model does not differ too much from the analogy I made with similarities and dissimilarities between neorealism and comedy Italian style as obeying the natural selection principles of *inheritance*, *modification* occurred in the struggle for survival and those dependent on the *differing conditions* of given environments. It is not my intention here to establish a similar theoretical model for the field of film studies, which would require knowledge of the latest findings in the study of DNA, irrelevant to the subject matter that I am presently concerned with, Italian cinema from the 1940s to the 1970s. My intention here is simply to propose the idea that if a relationship between two cinematic forms is very intricate and consistent, as is the case with the particular one I will be focusing on in this study, one can consider Darwin's notion of evolution, the principles of *inheritance*, *modification* and *differing environs* in analysing the dynamics of such a relationship in order to pose the questions: 'which aspects of the earlier form survived in the latter?', 'which aspects differ between these two forms?', 'why do they differ? Is it because of a need to redefine the productive model of the earlier form? Or is it because of how the environments in which the two cinematic forms flourish differed?' and lastly 'is the relationship between these two cinematic forms so consistent that the latter cinematic form can be considered nothing else but an evolved version of the latter one?'

I will now articulate how the three principles of *inheritance*, *modification* and *differing environments* inspire the enquiry of the chapters in this dissertation. In Chapter One I shall offer an account of the defining characteristics of neorealism and different critical notions on this mode of production. Among the first I will isolate neorealism's subversion of the narrative principles of mainstream cinema, which I will discuss with reference to David Bordwell's seminal *Narration in the Fiction Film*, as its most important innovation. Thus the majority of the chapter will discuss the similarities in narrative strategies adopted in neorealism and comedy Italian style and show that the peculiarities defining the uniqueness of the comedy Italian style genre among the wider spectrum of Italian comedic production are a result of its

neorealist heritage. The chapter will thus focus on the versatility of tone in the genre's films as well as the peculiarity of their plots' premises and endings with reference to notions theorised by French critics André Bazin⁹⁹ and Gilles Deleuze¹⁰⁰ in their discussions of the neorealist practice, thus showing the *inheritance* principle between the two forms in terms of how they tend to organise narratives, their continuity in this respect. In doing so, I will also address how such similarities are absent in the case of pink neorealism and farce, comedic forms which flourished before comedy Italian style and have thus erroneously been considered closer to neorealism than the comedy Italian style genre itself.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ André Bazin was probably the most important theorist of cinematic realism and he championed neorealist films such as Rossellini's *Paisà* and Vittorio De Sica's *Ladri di Biciclette* and *Umberto D.* (1952), which he discussed in his influential essays collected in the volume *What is Cinema?* A point could be raised on the opportunity of still discussing neorealism in Bazinian terms, his death dating back to 1958 and much having been written on neorealism since then. However, most of the criticism written on neorealist films after Bazin's, which will also be discussed either in the text or in the footnotes when necessary, has been in the direction of minimising the purist implications attributed by Bazin to the neorealist practice. Bazin defined *Ladri di Biciclette* as "one of the first examples of pure cinema. No more actors, no more story, no more sets, which is to say that in the perfect aesthetic illusion of reality there is no more cinema" (60). If I can relate aspects of comedy Italian style to Bazin's purist reading of neorealism, this connection will consequently apply to other readings of the neorealist practice, which emphasise less its exceptionality in comparison to classic narrative filmmaking. Critics of Bazin's reading, also, tend to forget that he highly stressed the fact that the points he made on films such as *Paisà* and *Ladri di Biciclette* did not apply to all of neorealist films and these films should be considered as ideals that the majority of neorealist works tended towards, but did not accomplish (30).

¹⁰⁰ I will not attempt to offer a Deleuzian reading of comedy Italian style, as I believe that aesthetically speaking – in terms of stylistic and visual intricacy – such films cannot be likened to the ones discussed by Deleuze. I will simply address the fact that some of the characteristics Deleuze attributes to the *time-image*, a type of filmmaking introduced with the advent of neorealism, are to some extent structurally present in some comedies Italian style, while they are nowhere to be found in the case of the structures informing other Italian comedic practices. This will reinforce the connection made between comedy Italian style and neorealism.

¹⁰¹ Even though pink neorealism and farce are not the primary concerns of this study, they will have to be consistently address in order to answer the main thesis at the core of this study, that of comedy Italian style being the genre evolution of neorealism. This strategy of re-contextualisation of these intermediate forms in light of their lacking of similarities shared by neorealism and comedy Italian style will be featured to some extent in all chapters.

Chapter Two will consist of a case study focusing on the career of Roman actor Alberto Sordi as an example of the stardom of the comedy Italian style genre. This section will draw again on notions pointed out by Bazin and Deleuze in reference to acting in neorealism in order to define what Marcia Landy has termed “a different, even unsettling relation to the star” (Landy, *Stardom* 128), introduced by the neorealist practice. It will use the case of Sordi in order to show how the comedy Italian style star embodied this renovated conception to its fullest extent, but also offer, at the margins of the discussion of Sordi’s career, examples drawn from the cases of other comedy Italian style stars. This chapter will thus articulate both an instance of *modification for the sake of survival*, the increasing deployment of stars in comedy Italian style in comparison to neorealism for the purpose of increasing commercial appeal, and at the same time of *inheritance*, the continuity between this peculiar type of stardom and notions introduced in the context of neorealism.

Chapter Three will draw comparisons between the treatment of the past and the present in neorealism and comedy Italian style. In doing so, it will prove that the cynical outlook of the comedies Italian style set during the Economic Miracle was a result of their subject matter and did not signal a shift in representational practices from the original post-war neorealist ones, nor a dilution of neorealist social engagement. Close textual analysis of comedies Italian style set in Italy’s recent past will show how even films consisting of exceptions to the narrative strategies discussed in Chapter One, comedies Italian style which do have a resolution and do feature redemptive trajectories, display continuity with neorealism. Thus, the chapter will discuss the *modification* of certain aspects of neorealism, the representational changes introduced by comedy Italian style as a result of the *differing Italian environment* of the 1960s and 1970s.

Chapter Four will offer a reading of some comedies Italian style in relation to the cultural thought of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci in order to prove how the genre’s continuation of the neorealist practice within the arena of popular entertainment did not represent a betrayal of its original ideals but should be rather considered an evolution of the neorealist discourse, one that dismissed the outdated Crocean cultural model that informed much of post-war neorealism and replaced it with Gramscian notions in the attempt of becoming both an expression and an

element of civilisation of its audience, while at the same time entertaining it. It will thus analyse another instance of *modification due to differing environments* determined by a new conception of culture which emerged in the 1960s with the dissemination of Gramsci's work.

Chapter Five will expand notions hinted at by Gian Piero Brunetta concerning the notion of Italian national identity in the post-war period and relate this notion to the use of regional varieties of the Italian language in both neorealism and comedy Italian style (in *La Ricerca dell'Identità nel Cinema Italiano del Dopoguerra*). The chapter will propose Rossellini's neorealist film *Paisà* as an articulation of a concept of 'fractured' national identity and neorealism as the site for the institution of regional varieties of Italian as a narrative element. It will show that regional varieties of Italian, through the functions of '*dialectal duality*' and '*plurilinguism*', assume both these functions, as a narrative element and as an index of discourse over national identity, in comedy Italian style, thus articulating one more instance of neorealist *inheritance* informing the comedic genre. In addition, this chapter will also refer to notions concerning changing linguistic practices in the country as discussed by linguistics scholar Tullio De Mauro in order to discuss how neorealism and comedy Italian style played a role in changing the habits of Italians. It will thus not only discuss attributes of neorealism or comedy Italian style as *responses* to Italian society, but as *offerings* to Italian society and culture.

In the Conclusion I shall suggest possible new avenues of research opened up by this study and other aspects of neorealism's evolution into comedy Italian style that could constitute the object of further study.

Chapter One: The Legacy of Neorealist Narrative Strategies

“*I Soliti Ignoti* features the first [on screen] death in a comedy. Germi had already directed *Divorzio all’Italiana* when Scarpelli and I worked with him and heard him telling us: ‘when I saw Memmo Carotenuto [‘s character] dying under that tram in *I Soliti Ignoti*, I understood that in comedy Italian style everything can happen, even shifting from the most novel and absolutely comedic effect to death”
—comedy Italian style screenwriter Agenore Incrocci (in Pintus and Biarese, 18).¹

What is neorealism?

The subject matter of this dissertation is the evolution of the mode of production known as neorealism into the cinematic genre labelled comedy Italian style. In some of its parts this study will be based on the principle of *inheritance*, namely detecting continuity between these two cinematic forms, showing how some of the practices established in the context of the former are, somewhat surprisingly, also present in the latter, even though the latter is a form of entertainment cinema. Other parts of the study, instead, will be articulated on the principle of *modification*, in other words, they shall show how some of the attributes of neorealism have progressively been modified through its passage to the comedy Italian style form. In order for this discussion to be deemed worthwhile and complete, it is necessary to provide an encompassing answer to the question ‘what is neorealism?’, to give a clear account of those characteristics of this mode of production which distinguished it from the type of cinema that preceded it and the type of cinema that was produced in the country at the same time and which thus define its uniqueness.

¹ In the original:

I Soliti Ignoti annovera il primo morto in una commedia. Germi aveva già girato *Divorzio all’Italiana* quando Scarpelli ed io lavorammo con lui e ci sentimmo dire: ‘quando ho visto morire sotto il tram Memmo Carotenuto ne *I Soliti Ignoti* ho capito che nella commedia all’italiana può accadere di tutto, anche il passare dall’ultimo effetto comico assolutamente risibile alla morte.

The reader of this type of work has certainly heard or read numerous times a somewhat generic list of neorealism's attributes, comprising practices such as the use of non-professional actors and shooting on the streets rather than inside the studios, the use of local Italian dialects in the character's dialogue. In the first years of existence of this mode of production, when its innovativeness was shocking the viewers and when the critical discourse concerning it was not yet very developed, the lists even featured improvisation, the notion that neorealist directors went out on the streets and inspired by reality they shot stories they invented on the spot.² This belief was soon dismissed as fiction, as it appeared clear that, even though in very rare circumstances neorealist filmmakers radically changed their plans to accommodate daily circumstances, neorealist directors shot scripts, written by themselves or others and most of the time by many screenwriters working together, that were duly prepared and planned. Neorealist screenwriter Sergio Amidei said in an interview that "of course there was a screenplay for *Roma Città Aperta*. It was kept by Miss Tinuzzi, the on-set continuity supervisor, with everything written on it, the types of shot, the angles, etc." (in Faldini and Fofi, *Avventurosa Storia 1935-1959* 94-95)³ and that even in the case of Rossellini's *Paisà*, a film that is considered one of the most innovative examples of neorealism, "the screenplay was entirely written, simply Federico [*Fellini*] worked during shooting on some of its elements, giving them a fantasy quality, as is his style"⁴ Similarly incorrect is the belief that, by dismissing the studios, neorealist filmmakers championed low budgets, as did cinematic movements such as the French New Wave.⁵

I shall discuss in Chapter Two how the use of non-professional actors in neorealist films was actually quantitatively quite limited and in Chapter Five I shall

² Lists such as the 'ten points of neorealism' published by the Parisian journal *Films et Documents* in 1952. For their translation in English, I refer the reader to Mira Liehm's *Passion and Defiance* (131-132).

³ "La sceneggiatura di *Roma Città Aperta* c'era e come, tenuta dalla signorina Tuzzi, segretaria di edizione, con tutto scritto sopra, le indicazioni delle inquadrature, degli angoli, ecc."

⁴ "La sceneggiatura di *Paisà* era tutta scritta, soltanto che l'intervento di Federico [*Fellini*] durante la lavorazione ha cambiato certi significati, li ha resi un po' più fantastici, come è nel suo stile."

⁵ As discussed in the Introduction.

expand the notion of ‘dialetti’ and their function in Italian neorealism. As far as the ‘shooting in the streets’ element, this was certainly a widespread practice but also one which was initially imposed by the contingency of the Cinecittà studios being bombed during the War. As the Italian film industry began to recover, it was not unheard-of for portions of neorealist films actually to be shot in the now rebuilt studios. For instance in the case of Vittorio De Sica’s *Umberto D.*, a film widely considered as one of the most ‘pure’ examples of neorealism, Peter Bondanella notes how “the bulk of the interiors were shot in the studios of Cinecittà” (*A History* 90). The significant notion to be pointed out, here, however is that statistically speaking neorealist films did not generally present all of the characteristics generally associated with this mode of production. Very few do so, namely Visconti’s *La Terra Trema*, which according to Micciché “displays itself as an applied *summa* of the whole neorealist formulary” (*Visconti e il Neorealismo* 186),⁶ Rossellini’s *Paisà* and De Sica’s *Ladri di Biciclette*.

The variety of solutions deployed in different neorealist films within the practical spheres of pre-production, shooting and post-production depended on the absence of a theoretical manifesto, one reason why neorealism is not defined as a cohesive artistic movement. In 1941 Luchino Visconti had written an article on the pages of the film periodical *Cinema* entitled ‘*Cadaveri*’, (corpses), in which he denounced the detachment from everyday experience of the Italian film industry at the time.⁷ The article, however, did not propose a programmatical way of overcoming this condition and its chronological distance from the release of Rossellini’s *Roma Città Aperta*, the 1945 film that initiated the wave of neorealist

⁶ “Il film [*La Terra Trema*] si presenta come una *summa* applicata di tutto il formulario neorealistico.”

⁷ *Cinema*, precisely on the June 10th, 1941 issue. Articles such as Sam Rhodie’s ‘A Note On The Italian Cinema During Fascism’ have proposed the argument that Italian cinema under the Fascist regime was not particularly more escapist than its American, French or British counterparts. On the same note, Pierre Sorlin’s article *Italian Cinema’s Rebirth 1937-1943: a Paradox of Fascism* has pointed out that 54% of the films produced between 1922 and 1943 were made between 1939 and 1943 and that is thus hard to discern such a thing as ‘Fascist cinema’. Sorlin also reminds us of three fundamental contributions made to cinema by Fascism, namely the institution of the Venice Film Festival, of the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia and the sponsorship of the Cinecittà studios. The point, however, is that the perception that the neorealists had of Fascist cinema once the war was over was instrumental to their cinematic practice, as uninformed as this perception may have been.

films, certainly narrowed its actual impact on the filmmaking practice. Zavattini's notion of the 'enquiry film', on the other hand, was only formulated by the screenwriter very late, when the mode of production had already entered its 'crisis'.⁸ This lack of a programmatic approach caused a great variety of solutions adopted within the mode of production to the point that Micciché wrote that

there were as many "neorealism-i" [*neorealism(s)*] as there were neorealists. Which means, more or less, saying that neorealism was a sum of phenomena, not one defined or discernable phenomenon (*Per una Verifica del Neorealismo* 27).

Attempting to identify a viable definition in order to single out what distinguished neorealist films from the rest of Italy's cinematic production despite the diversity of practices adopted among neorealist films, sometimes even between different neorealist films made by the same director, critics have defined neorealism with reference to an evaluation of the *intent* which originated the production of the films. Bruno Torri writes that "in the most advanced neorealist films ethics and aesthetics do not simply cohabit, but end up influencing each other, to the point that they seem inseparable. This is perhaps the most peculiar and distinctive characteristic of neorealism" (45).⁹ In the case of De Sica, for example, he writes:

Knowing the origins of his cinema and its continuation after the neorealist phase, it can be said he made a free choice to ignore his instinctive vocation for spectacle [*during his involvement in neorealism*], a choice which did not really originate from aesthetic motivations, but rather from an ethical impulse (43).¹⁰

⁸ I shall return to the notion of neorealism's crisis in Chapter Three.

⁹ "Nei più avanzati film neorealistici l'etica e l'estetica, non soltanto sono compresenti, ma finiscono per influenzarsi reciprocamente, tanto da sembrare inscindibili: e in ciò è forse da vedere il carattere più peculiare e più distintivo del neorealismo."

¹⁰ "Conoscendo le origini del cinema di De Sica, e il suo prosieguo dopo la fase neorealistica, si può subito affermare che la sua rinuncia all'istintiva inclinazione per lo spettacolo sia stata una libera scelta dettata, non solo e non tanto da motivazioni estetiche, quanto da una spinta etica."

The critics' insistence on labels such as 'coexistence of ethics and aesthetics', 'common ethics instead of common aesthetics' or "ethics of the aesthetic" (Micciché, *Per una Verifica del Neorealismo* 27),¹¹ all of which have been used to define the mode of production while circumventing the lack of a common aesthetic present in all of its films, ultimately reflects the notion that neorealist filmmakers had a common goal, that of representing contemporary reality, whereas the majority of the films produced under Fascism had in their opinion avoided doing so. If the modes of such representations changed according to which filmmakers were involved in a project or according to their temporary artistic inclination, in this reading, the ambition of representation was what characterised neorealism as a whole. Mark Shiel, for instance, subscribes to this view by writing that "neorealist films therefore distinguished themselves in their interest in the visualisation of the ordinary events and environments of Italian life" (12). This reading, based on the notion of intent or in more philosophical terms, of 'ethics' or even 'spirit' is supported by quite generalistic assessments on the part of neorealist filmmakers of their practice such as Amidei's claim that

that which has been labelled 'neorealism' and that you critics have identified as beginning with *Roma Città Aperta* was nothing but the joy of telling the truth. Before we had told the truth very little, now everything we said or did was truth, joyful truth, even the war we had lost because ultimately it was Fascism that lost it, not us. This has been the strength of the new cinema, the euphoria of the truth (in Gian Luigi Rondi, *Cinema dei Maestri* 214).¹²

Similarly, early literature on the neorealist mode of production tended to project its merit beyond the practice of filmmaking, giving the impression of neorealism being more a state of mind than a concrete expression of culture. For instance, back in 1956 Brunello Rondi wrote that

¹¹ "[*Il neorealismo fu*] un 'etica dell'estetica'."

¹² "Quello che poi si è chiamato neorealismo e che molti di voi critici avete fatto nascere da *Roma Città Aperta* è stato solo la gioia di dire la verità. Prima la verità l'avevamo detta pochissimo, adesso tutto quello che facevamo e dicevamo era verità, verità gioiosa, anche la guerra perduta perché non l'avevamo perduta noi ma il fascismo. La forza del nuovo cinema è stata questa, l'euforia della verità."

Italian realism is not simply an artistic fact. Even though its tension is detached from ideological preconceptions and its naked concreteness is made of lived experiences and of things represented and expressed in their wholeness, its strength feeds on a secret ideal matrix, a virtue of 'thought' and this rhythm of thought, this moral order, is so rich of wide and renovating modes that it gives Italian cinema a spot among the great experiences of humanity (Brunello Rondi 18-19).¹³

As beautiful and insightful as this assessment is, it does not really offer much information about what distinguished neorealism as a phenomenon circumstantiated to specific historical contingencies from other phenomena or artistic, and more specifically cinematic, practices.

Neorealism's positioning in relation to the cinematic production that preceded it is also a matter of contention. In some critics' accounts this mode of production is considered a clear-cut break, a phenomenon that sensibly departed from the modes of earlier filmmaking. Micciché, for instance, states that

Ossessione prepares and introduces neorealism as it completely dismisses the cinema that preceded it and instantly ages it by comparison, both in specifically cinematic terms and in terms of general culture (*Visconti e il Neorealismo* 69-70).¹⁴

Among the critics who subscribe to the view of neorealism representing a 'break', however, there are distinctions according to the nature of such 'breaks'. P. Adams Sitney, for instance, borrowing an expression from Pier Paolo Pasolini, writes that "it

¹³ "Il realismo italiano non è soltanto un fatto artistico: nonostante la sua sgombra tensione fuori da ogni preconcetto ideologico e la sua nuda concretezza di esperienze vissute e di cose tutte rappresentate e dette, la sua forza si nutre a una segreta matrice ideale, a una virtualità di 'pensiero', e questo ritmo di pensiero, quest'ordine morale, è ricco di modulazioni così ampie e rinnovatrici da dare al cinema italiano il posto che spetta solo alle grandi esperienze dell'uomo."

¹⁴ "*Ossessione* prepara e presenta il neorealismo soltanto nella misura in cui fa piazza pulita del cinema precedente e lo invecchia di colpo sia in termini specificamente cinematografici, sia in termini generalmente culturali."

is useless to delude oneself about it: neorealism was not a regeneration; it was only a vital crisis, however excessively optimistic and enthusiastic at the beginning” (231). This expression thus signifies that neorealism might have represented a ‘break’ only as much as it was the expression of a phase of crisis of the conventional cinema of Italy’s genre production. Other critics, instead, tend to underline the continuity existing between the cinema produced in the 1930s and early 1940s and the neorealist mode of production. Laura E. Ruberto and Kristi M. Wilson write that “indeed, today it is no longer shocking to say that the ‘neo’ in neorealism was not actually anything new, but rather marked a continuation and an evolution of the Italian motion picture industry” (6). Similarly, Carlo Celli notes analysing *Ladri di Biciclette* that “like many other neorealist works [my emphasis], the film owes a good deal to the Italian professional cinema of the 1930s” (*Ladri di Biciclette* 44). Bondanella also traces some of the traits of neorealism back to the 1930s, stating that, with reference to Fascist cinema, “film historians, fearful of praising a period that has long been condemned for its politics, have too often ignored the fact that the search for realism in the cinema in Italy began not in 1945, but in the 1930s” (*Making of Roma Città Aperta* 46). Presently the most widespread conception of the phenomenon, and in my opinion the most correct one, is that of this mode of production having simultaneously introduced innovative elements while also maintaining some of the characteristics of the filmmaking that preceded it, benefitted from this co-existence/contrast. Giuliana Muscio, for instance, notes with reference to *Paisà* that

Rossellini’s film challenges a number of conventional expectations by juxtaposing Hollywood/neorealism, acting/reality, and narrative rules and personal morality, and thus questions national, regional and social stereotypes. Throughout this unsettling experience, the audience is continuously forced to reconsider its own positioning (34).

Along the same lines are the recent reassessments of neorealism made in film criticism published in the English language. For instance, Sidney Gottlieb has noted that

several of the central claims [...] are that neorealism is antirhetorical, antiformalist, and that on any number of levels, in keeping with its designation as ‘neo,’ it embodies and urges a revolutionary break with the past. [...] But much of the brilliance and honesty of the film comes from Rossellini’s awareness that ‘rejection’ is no simple matter, and that the process of creative resistance and opposition includes *incorporation and transformation* [*my emphasis*] (Rossellini, *Open City and Neorealism* 40-41).

In other words, neorealism should not be conceived as a revolutionary break that subverted the whole conventionality of the cinematic canon that preceded it. On the other hand, its innovations should not be dismissed as irrelevant, even if we can now recognise that there were fewer than they were believed to be up until the 1970s. In the context of the recent reassessments of neorealism, Marcia Landy has articulated the point that a crucial aspect of its negotiation between old and new, between conventional and innovative was its treatment of representational clichés. In her analysis of *Roma Città Aperta* she notes that

clichés are tied to habitual perception and to the secure parameters of the predictable world. They function more broadly as an automatic response to events, providing in sound and visual images a sense of commonly shared beliefs in the world. [...] *Open City*’s mixing of styles is not a weakness in execution or a lapse into mere escapism or forgetting, as some have claimed, but a *significant mode of departure* from hitherto prevailing forms of filmmaking associated with Hollywood and with the commercial filmmaking of the Fascist era. [...] The film’s iconoclasm [...] manifests itself as a shattering of clichés by the means of clichés (*Diverting Clichés* 85-88).

In other words, even if in the case of many neorealist films we can find stylised and conventional elements, what we have to consider is their relation to existing forms of representation and how those stylised elements had nonetheless disorientating effects.¹⁵ If one considers Mariapia Comand’s statement that comedy Italian style

¹⁵ Bazin’s conception of *neorealismo*, much criticised for its emphasis on *purity* and now considered outdated, already addressed to some extent this duality. Bazin stated that “the documentary matter of Italian *neorealism* only accedes to the dignity of art insofar as it rediscovers in itself the great dramatic archetypes which found and will always find our participation” (*Qu’ Est-ce Que le Cinema? Vol. 4*

“in an ambivalent way [...] works *with* the stereotype and also *against it*” (*Commedia* 41),¹⁶ one can deduce how this dual representational strategy is the result of its relationship with neorealism, whereas the representational mode of comedic forms such as the farce and pink neorealism is solely clichéd and stereotyped.¹⁷

Neorealism’s negotiation of old and new still remains an extremely significant artistic fact if compared to the other cinematic practices of the period, Italian and not. As Millicent Marcus stated, “neorealism’s hybridity amounts to a frontal assault on cinematic convention” (*Palimpsest of Cinematic Memory* 80) and a similar assessment can be made considering Peter Brunette’s argument that it is precisely in the light of a set of stylised conventions framing them that innovative realist elements become more impactful for the viewer.¹⁸ More importantly, for the

99). I have relied on Christopher Williams translation of this quotation, presented in his article *Bazin On Neo-Realism*.

¹⁶ “[*la commedia all’italiana*] lavora in modo ambivalente con lo stereotipo, *con* ma anche *contro* di esso.”

¹⁷ In this Chapter I will address the clichéd nature of pink neorealism’s narrative structures. In Chapter Four I will address these comedic forms’ stereotypical and clichéd representations of the lower classes and in Chapter Five how linguistic strategies were instrumental to this type of representation. With reference to comedy Italian style’s subversion of clichés and stereotypes many examples can be made, most notably Pietro Germi’s *Divorzio all’Italiana* in which the clichéd expectation of the Sicilian male being horrified by the possibility of being cuckolded is subverted by the character played by Mastroianni, who instead sets in motion a scheme in order to be cuckolded. The same can be said of Mario (Renato Salvatori) in Monicelli’s *I Soliti Ignoti*, who is apparently characterised as the typical Roman ‘mummy’s boy’ by repeatedly buying not one but three presents for his mother every time he has an opportunity to do so. Later in the film, however, Mario is revealed to be an orphan and the presents are revealed to be for the three women who raised him. In a similar way, in the episode of Dino Risi’s *I Mostri* entitled *Vernissage* Ugo Tognazzi plays a character who embodies the stereotype of the loving family man. His purchase of a car is seemingly motivated by his desire to impress his children and offer his wife a better living. In the episode’s twist, however, we find out that the reason for buying the car is that with the vehicle he will be able to hire prostitutes after the Merlin law that banned brothels. These characterisations of Economic Miracle males may seem stereotypical and clichéd today, but if we confront them with representations of Italians in pink neorealism and farce comedies produced at the same time, they actually very often followed patterns of subversion of what audience expectations were at the time.

¹⁸ Brunette discussed at length this ‘reality effect’ in his article *Rossellini and Cinematic Realism*. The crucial notion of this theorisation is that

purpose of this study, this was even more the case when the body of films studied in this dissertation was made. The activity of the directors of the comedy Italian style genre, both those who participated to the post-war neorealist wave and those who were inspired by it, has taken place when the notion of neorealism as a major 'break' was firmly in place and this is an essential fact to be considered.

Beyond all of these considerations on the effective use in neorealist films of some of the characteristics generally listed to define this mode of production and the conflicting critical readings of the phenomenon, there is a characteristic that informs neorealism's diversity from the rest of narrative cinema existing at the time of its institution which is present in the overwhelming majority of neorealist films. This resides namely in the modes by which they dispense with information, recount events, in other words their narrative strategies, which subvert the ones that characterise mainstream cinema.

conventional cinema demands a basic level of plausibility, enough to allow us to put ourselves emotionally into the created world of the filmed representation. It does this through the use of real surface detail (Barthes' *effet de reel*), but even more importantly through 'realistic' acting (which is only tangentially, but in complex ways, related to our sense of the way people act in real life) and through the overt naturalizing devices of narrative technique and structure, with their well-defined beginnings, middles, and ends, clear plot-line, and well-constructed dramatic and emotional building. None of this, of course, could be further from our daily experience of life. We perceive something as 'realistic', in short, when it corresponds to a set of conventionalized expectations (largely derived from previous film or novelistic practice) about what real life is, now doubly represented, not when it corresponds to actual empirical experience. [...]But when we experience with excitement a film as more realistic than usual, it is because it is pushing against the currently accepted boundaries of the realistic, closer toward the dangerous unpredictability of the real. This 'reality effect' seems to stem from the ironic fact that we think an event or image is more real precisely because we have not seen it before on the screen. [...]The thrill of a 'more realistic' film always comes when we sense at some level that an already accepted (and thus tamed) realism is being pushed beyond, toward the real itself, and thus, as in life, screen events are 'out of control' and we cannot predict what will happen (37-38).

Principles of mainstream narrative strategies

Since the novelty of neorealism is by and large constituted by the subversion of mainstream narrative strategies I shall briefly articulate their principles. Aside from documentary cinema, primitive filmmaking and the avantgardes which tended to depart from the notion of narrative altogether, mainstream cinema is articulated around quite a restricted number of principles despite the immensely vast number of films that this concept indicates. American film scholar David Bordwell, whose *Narration in the Fiction Film* I shall use for this discussion, has noted that

the classical Hollywood film presents psychologically defined individuals who struggle to solve a clear-cut problem or to attain specific goals. In the course of this struggle, the characters enter into conflict with others or with external circumstances. The story ends with a decisive victory or defeat, a resolution of the problem and a clear achievement or non-achievement of the goals. The principal causal agency is thus the character, a discriminated individual endowed with a consistent batch of evident traits, qualities, and behaviours (157).

Albeit articulated here in reference to classical Hollywood films, these principles are valid for the all mainstream films which are constructed to resemble to Hollywood model. Borrowing the expression ‘syuzhet’ from Russian formalism to indicate ‘plot’, Bordwell analyses the structures that define the classical mode. The central notion of this analysis is that “in classical fabula construction, causality is the prime unifying principle. Analogies between characters, settings, and situations are certainly present, but at the denotative level any parallelism is subordinated to the movement of cause and effect” (157). The classical mode’s reliance on the principle of causality, its favouring of narratives reflecting the struggles of a single individual participate in investing the resolution of the plot with great significance. Bordwell argues that

there are two ways of regarding the classical ending. We can see it as the crowning of the structure, the logical conclusion of the strings of events, the

final effect of the initial cause, the revelation of the truth. [...] Second hypothesis: that the classical ending is not all that structurally decisive, being a more or less arbitrary readjustment of that world knocked awry in the previous eighty minutes (159).

Either way one conceives the classical ending, a revelation or a readjustment, it must satisfyingly conclude the central struggle. Stephen Neale, who defines narrative as a “process of transformation of the balance of elements that constitute its pretext” (20), notes that

the system of narration characteristic of mainstream cinema is one which orders that dispersal and refiguration in a particular way, so that dispersal, disequilibrium is both maintained and contained in figures of symmetry, of balance, its elements finally re-placed in a new equilibrium whose achievement is the condition of narrative closure (20).

These principles, the solution of a struggle, the principle of causality and the need for closure achieved through an ultimate condition of equilibrium, define the narrative structure of the classical model of mainstream cinema and, as Bordwell notes, they are rooted in cultural forms such as the popular novel, the short story and the stage drama. They are also incredibly resilient: they “have remained in force since 1917” (164).

These principles that define the mainstream ‘shyuzet’ or ‘plot’ - the ordering of events in a narrative - are also reflected in the way in which such events are presented on the screen. Bordwell writes that “the priority of causality within an integral fabula world commits classical narration to unambiguous presentation” (162) and that

classical narration tends to be omniscient, highly communicative, and only moderately self-conscious. That is, the narration knows more than all the characters, conceals relatively little (chiefly ‘what will happen next’), and seldom acknowledges its own address to the audience (160).

The omniscient nature of the narration is reflected in mainstream films by the ability of the camera to move around the action, to be an invisible imaginary witness and not

tightly bound to a given character's point of view and its lack of self-acknowledgment, is reflected in the avoidance in mainstream films of overt camera movements that reveal and enhance awareness in the audience of the mechanical process behind the production of the image on screen and the organisation of shots through logical patterns.

Like most cinema historians Bordwell indicates neorealism as the mode of production that, within the realm of narrative fiction cinema, subverted the classical model consistently, to the point of establishing a category of filmmaking alternative to mainstream cinema with widespread relevance, *art cinema*. He notes that

not until World War II, however, did the art cinema emerge as a fully achieved narrational alternative. [...] Italian neorealism may be considered a transitional phenomenon. Institutionally, films like *Shoeshine* (1946), *Rome Open City* (1945), *Paisà* (1946), *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) and *Umberto D.* (1952) functioned as international reportage, addressed as much to the outside world as to Italians. [...] The Neorealist films broke into worldwide markets (230).

Whereas the classical model suggested a notion of reality organised by coherence, consistency and clarity, neorealism and, in continuity with it, art cinema highlight its transience, its ambiguity and the role of chance in our experience of it by featuring narratives concerning the paradoxical aspects of everyday life, as seen in De Sica's *Ladri di Biciclette* – in which a man is caught attempting to steal a bicycle after being unsuccessful at catching who stole his own- if not the supernatural ones, in films such as *La Double Vie du Veronique*, in which two unrelated identical women exist in Krakow and Paris, their lives mirroring each other.¹⁹

¹⁹ Mark Shiel notes that

Of course, most neorealist films, including those such as *Bicycle Thieves* for whom chance itself was a major theme, were underpinned by some classical narrative structure, following a line from initial stasis to exposition to struggle and resolution, but doing so without the dramatic urgency or storytelling efficiency of classical, especially classical Hollywood, and in films such as *Paisà* or *Umberto D* neorealism came close to dispensing with classical structure altogether (12).

In this Chapter I shall discuss comedy Italian style's reprise of the neorealist subversion of the classical narrative model as a fundamental instance of continuity between these two cinematic forms.

Alternating tragedy and humour: tonal similarity between neorealism and comedy Italian style

Critics have sometimes struggled to define comedy Italian style's uniqueness in the spectrum of Italian cinematic comedy, due to the great number of films that have been recognised as examples of this genre and the large variety of traits that different comedies Italian style offer. However, one singularity that distinguishes comedy Italian style from other cinematic comedy forms has been consistently identified. This singularity is constituted by the recurring presence of tragic elements in a comedic context. In fact, Peter Bondanella notes that "in its greatest moments, the *commedia all'italiana* is closer to tragicomedy than to pure comedy, often bordering on the grotesque" (*A History* 181).

The scene of the abrupt death of Cosimo, the thief played by Memmo Carotenuto in Mario Monicelli's *I Soliti Ignoti* (1958), is one of the main reasons why this film has been pointed out as the comedy that canonically initiates the genre and has been considered as a crucial signal of its realism.²⁰ Similar tragic elements abound in many comedies Italian style throughout two decades of production, up until the final examples of this genre in the second half of the 1970s, such as Mario

I disagree with the notion of a classical structure in *Ladri di Biciclette*. The reconciliation between the characters of the father and the son may satisfy the audience, but there is no narrative closure in reference to the fundamental struggle that informs the 'syuzhet', hence the principle of causality is disobeyed as we do not see on screen the ultimate effect of the cause that set in motion the action.

²⁰ In the review of the film I have discussed in the introduction, Henry Goodman noted:

Monicelli, whether as director or as one of the writers of the screenplay, shrewdly inserted two or three shifts to serious tone and one shocking moment of tragedy [...] they serve, ironically, as 'tragic relief' and keep the story in touch with its realistic sources (Goodman 50).

Monicelli's *Amici Miei* (1975) and *Un Borghese Piccolo Piccolo* (1977). As I have pointed out in the introduction, the presence of dramatic events in a comedic context is as much a recurring possible semantic trait of the genre, as it is the result of a consistent syntactic quality, its versatility of tone.²¹

Many films of the Italian post-war neorealist practice feature a similar agility in alternating tragic and comedic tones, as noted by Massimo Riva.²² This crucial similarity between neorealism and comedy Italian style seems to confirm the continuity between them, as Enrico Giacovelli hinted at by summarising, one after the other, two Italian masterpieces, one for each cinematic form:

Let us consider *Roma Città Aperta*, the film which is considered by everybody to initiate neorealism. At one point, shortly before Magnani's [character's] tragic death, the priest played by Aldo Fabrizi hits the old sick man who refuses to pretend he is dead with a frying pan. It is an exhilarating scene, however *Roma Città Aperta* is not considered a comedy and, in fact, tragic events will soon largely prevail. Vice versa, *Il Sorpasso* is considered by everybody a comedy, but it ends tragically, with even the death of one of its protagonists. The dramatic ending does not erase the fact that in the rest of the film the humouristic and satirical elements outnumbered the dramatic ones to the point that any member of the audience leaves the theatre with the assumption of having viewed a comedy, albeit with a bitter taste. [...] In fact, it is typical of the comedy Italian style genre to reduce the distance between comedic and tragic (*Commedia all'Italiana* 8).²³

²¹ Peter Bondanella attributes the versatility of tone in neorealist films since *Roma Città Aperta* as a legacy of the negotiation between screenwriters Federico Fellini, who had a comedic background, and Sergio Amidei, who had a melodramatic one, in the writing of Rossellini's 1945 film (*Making of Roma Città Aperta* 63-64). Even if such innovation may have been the product of chance, however, the important thing to acknowledge here is that it greatly inspired the production of comedy Italian style.

²² In a review article of a series of books on contemporary Italian cinema, he approaches Roberto Benigni's Academy Award winning film *La Vita è Bella* (1997) by looking back to the neorealist practice: "tragicomedy was one of the fundamental modes of classic neorealism" (Riva 297).

²³ "Prendiamo *Roma Città Aperta*, film universalmente considerato iniziatore del neorealismo: a un certo punto, poco prima della tragica morte della Magnani, il sacerdote Aldo Fabrizi dà una padellata in testa al vecchio malato che non ne vuole sapere di fingersi morto. È una scena esilarante, ma non

As Giacobelli pointed out, the overall tone of each film determines its categorisation as a drama or a comedy.²⁴ Nonetheless, both post-war neorealism and comedy Italian style strategically reduced the distance between those two categories by unexpectedly inserting examples of one in a narrative defined by the other. This common attitude shows similar approaches towards narrative and thus signals continuity between the two practices in this respect.

In chronological terms the comedic form known as pink neorealism fits as an intermediate phase between post-war neorealism and comedy Italian style.²⁵ I will show that, even though the films of pink neorealism relied on an iconography reminiscent of the dramatic neorealism of De Sica and Rossellini, on a structural level they represented a regression to pre-neorealist cinematic forms.²⁶ On the other

per questo *Roma Città Aperta* viene considerato una commedia, e infatti di lì a poco vedremo che vi prevarranno nettamente gli elementi drammatici. Viceversa *Il Sorpasso* è considerato da tutti una commedia, ma si conclude tragicamente, addirittura con la morte di uno dei protagonisti: il finale drammatico non toglie che nel corso del film gli elementi umoristici e satirici sopravanzino a tal punto quelli drammatici da lasciare tutti, pur con l'amaro in bocca, l'impressione di aver visto una commedia. [...] Come vedremo, del resto, sarà tipico della commedia all'italiana annullare sempre più la distanza fra comico e tragico.”

²⁴ Peter Brunette considers the frying-pan scenes in *Roma Città Aperta* as a conventional narrative element (*Rossellini* 44). I do not think that many conceive this moment of slapstick as an hilarious and sophisticated piece of humour. However, it is extremely relevant for its positioning within a dramatic film about the Resistance and, more specifically, just before the tragic death of one of the film's protagonists. As Marcia Landy has noted, the blending of drama and comedy in the film is another instance of its shattering of clichés, this time clichés associated with cinematic genres (*Diverting Clichés* 101).

²⁵ Luciano Emmer's *Domenica d'Agosto* (1950) is considered the first example of pink neorealism. A number of films produced in the nineteen-fifties have been defined by this expression, referring to the practice of transposing elements of the neorealist iconography into conventional love story structures. Dino Risi's *Poveri Milionari* (1959), the last instalment of the *Poveri Ma Belli* franchise is the last film of the pink neorealism genre. Seemingly the emergence of comedy Italian style determined the progressive abandonment of these comedic hybrids. These films rely on a neorealist iconography in the way in which they adopt from neorealism the Resistance and post-war unemployment settings, the location shooting and the focus on the lower classes.

²⁶ In pink neorealism comedies archetypal romance narratives reminiscent of the white telephone sentimental comedies of the Fascist era are inserted in the neorealist post-war milieu. In their love

hand, I will show that comedy Italian style, among all of the forms of post-war Italian popular cinema, was the only genre which was informed by neorealist narrative strategies on a structural level and that the genre's versatility in alternating comedic and tragic elements was a result of this influence. By and large in comedy Italian style the depiction of Italian society at the time of the Economic Miracle substitutes the iconography of the Resistance and post-war unemployment associated with the neorealist practice. However, the neorealist innovations regarding narrative structure are partially maintained in comedy Italian style and adapted to the context of an entertainment genre, certainly a form of mainstream cinema.

Asked to identify the characterising elements of the comedy Italian style genre in an interview, *Amici Miei* screenwriter Leo Benvenuti confirmed:

The [*characterising*] elements [*of this genre*] are the tragic and the comedic mixed together, the adherence to reality of locations, of characters and habits and the non-mechanical structure. The last, I believe, is an element that derives from neorealism (in Pintus and Biarese 26-31).²⁷

Thus, Benvenuti addresses the semantic trait also noted by Giacobelli but introduces the argument of the genre's syntactic peculiarity.²⁸ When he mentions the “*non-mechanical structure*”, he refers to the neorealist subversion of the principles of the classical model, which were largely adopted in worldwide practices of narrative cinema, including Italian pre-neorealist productions.

story plots, all of the examples of pink neorealism adhere to the conventional three act structure I will later discuss. The other main comedic form of the 1950s, the *farse*, present a certain narrative looseness determined by the fact that these kinds of film were essentially collections of physical-humour oriented gags. However in most farces the screenwriters inserted a love story sub-plot involving younger characters, who usually are the sons and daughters of the starring comedian, which follow conventional three act structures. This is the case, for example of Camillo Mastrocinque's *La Banda degli Onesti* (1956) and *Totò, Peppino e... la Malafemmina* (1956).

²⁷ “Elementi [*caratterizzanti*] sono il tragico e il comico mescolati insieme, la verità degli ambienti, dei personaggi e dei costumi e l'impianto non meccanico. Quest'ultimo, secondo me, è un elemento che deriva dal neorealismo.”

²⁸ Although, as the quotation shows, he seemingly neglects to draw a connection between the two, as I do.

Critical notions of neorealist narrative strategies

In the first chapter of his volume *Italian Neorealist Cinema: An Aesthetic Approach*, Christopher Wagstaff gathers together a series of critical considerations regarding the neorealist approach towards narrative that shed some light on the implications of the “*non-mechanical structures*”:

The French theorist Gilles Deleuze discusses at length what he sees as a fundamental change in cinematic narrative and representation ushered in by the neorealists: the abandonment of an essentially antagonistic narrative and a tendency to a *wandering* [my emphasis] approach. In his view the films, rather than being constructed around dramatic conflicts, privilege the representation of time and space as it is experienced both in real life and in the viewing experience (Wagstaff, *Italian Neorealist Cinema* 28-29).

I will discuss the implications of Deleuze’s theory in relation to comedy Italian style’s narrative practices later in this chapter. However, it is important to note that the neorealist innovations are posed in opposition to the *construction* around dramatic conflicts. In other words, the neorealists did not avoid dramatic conflicts on the whole, nor are these absent in neorealist films. However, the narrative of neorealist films are characterised by structures which are not determined in light of controlling the plots flowing through a pre-established organisation of the classic type. Wagstaff continues:

Luigi Comencini explained the unpopularity of neorealism with the public by suggesting that the public wants films that ‘*tell a story*’, while neorealist films ‘*illustrate a situation*’ instead. All these observations converge on neorealism’s attempt to bring art and life closer together, and to distance itself from the conventionality of genre.²⁹ [...] Neorealism’s greatest

²⁹ Wagstaff’s consideration here is somewhat controversial, as he seemingly points out that such innovations in the approach towards narrative are necessarily diametrically opposed to genre filmmaking and cannot be contemplated within it, not even in the case of a somewhat realist genre like comedy Italian style. In a section of David Forgacs and Robert Lumley’s *Italian Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, however, Wagstaff in passing links these innovations to both comedic genres before neorealism and after it, namely to comedy Italian style itself:

contribution to the cinema may, in fact, be these innovations in the approach towards narrative (28-29).

Comencini's distinction should not be received in an absolutist way: of course to some extent neorealist films also "tell a story",³⁰ such as the search for a stolen bicycle, but, differently to the cinema that preceded them, their primary concern is not to "tell a story": it is to "illustrate a situation". When Comencini makes this distinction, he is not arguing that *Roma Città Aperta*, *Ladri di Biciclette* or *La Terra Trema* (1948, directed by Luchino Visconti) do not show on screen a series of significant events in some way linked to each other. He is simply pointing out that these films are not articulated in relation to a system of audience gratification we normally associate with conventional storytelling.³¹ Rather they are articulated by the principle of showing to the audience a realist picture of everyday life in their chosen setting, without having this picture distorted by such a system of audience gratification. However, it is significant that such a clever distinction was made by a

Neorealism's depiction of the ordinary, everyday life of typical Italians owed a lot to the narrative strategies accumulated in the 1930s and 1940s for comedy films (the genre that most often used this type of social setting), and it is no surprise to find that in search for wider audiences, neorealist film makers soon found themselves (in the 1950s and 1960s) back in the realm of comedy, which is the route that led to the phenomenon of the *commedia all'italiana*, a satirical and affectionate portrayal of the foibles of stereotyped Italian figures like Latin lovers, insatiable women, possessive mothers, pretentious layabouts, etc (*Cinema* 227).

³⁰ Even though it has been argued that to some extent they aspired to do without, namely by Millicent Marcus who discussed a "pure state of storylessness [which] is unattainable in actual practice [but which] remains an ideal to which neorealist poetics aspire without ever hoping to arrive" (Marcus, *Filmmaking by the Book* 5-6). The point being that despite the "storylessness" being an ethereal ideal which cannot be proven or found in the practice, the very fact that it is hypothesised confirms the existence of a tendency of refusing the conventional ways in which stories were formed in the cinema medium before neorealism.

³¹ The three cited films, for example, do not present the audience with a conventional and at the time somewhat expected resolution: the father in *Ladri di Biciclette* does not find his bicycle, we do not see the liberation of Rome in *Roma Città Aperta*, nor is the family of fishermen in *La Terra Trema* awarded a way out of their debt in the film's conclusion. These types of resolutions would inform a reward for the audience in a typical storytelling strategy, but would undermine the realism of the films as they would not respond to the social landscape of Italy in those years.

comedy Italian style director. Critiques of neorealist films often emphasise this element of subversion of the principles of classical narration. Carlo Lizzani, who was not only a critic but also a neorealist filmmaker who eventually directed in the context of the comedy Italian style genre too, wrote that “with *I Bambini Ci Guardano*, De Sica subverted one of the most fashionable dramatic structures on stages and screen in those years, the love triangle” (Lizzani, *Cinema Italiano* 85).³²

In order to validate Benvenuti’s claim that comedy Italian style was informed by the neorealist approach to narrative, it is necessary to investigate if the films belonging to this genre also refused the predetermined construction of dramatic conflict which characterises all the other popular cinematic genres. In other words, to prove such a relationship, it will have to be established whether comedy Italian style also privileges *illustrating situations*, often at the expense of the mechanisms that have been conventionally accepted as necessary conventions of the *telling of stories*. Most importantly, in such case, comedy Italian style would not do so in order to, using Wagstaff’s words, “distance itself from the conventionality of genre”, but by adapting this tendency in the context of genre production instead. Is such compromise possible?

To answer this question it is necessary to specify that the most accomplished films of the neorealist practice pursued the refusal of classic cinematic narrative strategies on a dual level, both in the choice and structuring of the events that form the plot and also in the composition of the shots that form each sequence. In discussing the latter, the French critic André Bazin pointed out the characteristics of the ‘*decoupage*’ from classic Hollywood films in opposition to the one offered by neorealist films:

Classical editing, deriving from Griffith, separated reality into successive shots which were just a series of either logical or subjective points of view of an event. [...] It is this ordering of the shots, this conventional analysis of the reality continuum, that truly goes to make up the cinematographic language of the period. The construction thus introduces an obviously abstract element

³² “Con *I Bambini Ci Guardano* De Sica rovescia uno schema consueto della drammaturgia in voga in quegli anni sulle scene e sugli schermi: il triangolo sentimentale.”

into reality. Because we are so used to such abstractions, we no longer sense them (28).

In Bazin's view, these abstractions undermined the realism of the films, but at the same time helped the audience's understanding of the events represented on the screen:

In any case, the film maker does not ordinarily show us everything. That is impossible. But the things he selects and the things he leaves out tend to form a logical pattern by way of which the mind passes easily from cause to effect (35-37).

Thus, the conventional '*decoupage*', a grammar code that was established in the 1910s and progressively became *the* way in which we expect films to behave, proceeds to isolate different aspects of the recounted event in separate shots in order to make it more intelligible, more comprehensible to the audience. Describing the neorealist attitudes towards '*decoupage*' Bazin pointed out a tendency towards longer takes and a less intelligible and more elliptical organisation of the shots which, rather than articulating the strict relationship between cause and effect of determinate actions, resemble the ambiguity that characterises our perception of events in real life, as our senses collect a continuous and indiscriminate amount of information without ever having the possibility of separating a given aspect of reality from its whole continuous occurrence. After analysing this practice in Rossellini's *Paisà* (1947), Bazin coined the term "*image fact*":

The technique of Rossellini undoubtedly maintains an intelligible succession of events, but these do not mesh like a chain with the sprockets of a wheel. [...] Facts are facts, our imagination makes use of them, but they do not exist inherently for this purpose. In the usual shooting script (according to a process resembling the classical novel form) the fact comes under the scrutiny of the camera, is divided up, analyzed, and put together again, undoubtedly without entirely losing its factual nature; but the latter, presumably, is enveloped in abstraction [...] For Rossellini, facts take on a meaning, but not like a tool whose function has predetermined its form. [...] The unit of cinematic narrative in *Paisà* is not the "*shot*", an abstract view of

reality which is being analyzed, but the “*fact*”. A fragment of concrete reality in itself multiple and full of ambiguity (35-37).

The element of ambiguity of the neorealist ‘*decoupage*’ highlighted by Bazin clearly represented a major factor in the lack of popular appreciation for post-war neorealist films addressed by Comencini. Even in the context of the original post-war neorealism this ambiguity manifested itself occasionally and in various degrees, as Bazin himself pointed out that *Paisà* should be held as the most successful aesthetic accomplishment of the neorealist practice and that not all neorealist films share the same level of innovation.³³ Francesco Casetti and Luca Malvasi describe the camera work in neorealist films in these terms: “in this ‘availability’ to be guided by the ‘real’, the camera seems to depart every now and then from the principal plot and turn to recording multiplicity and the accidental without however initiating new narrative paths” (180-183).³⁴ This description gives a good idea of how, aside from Bazin’s theoretical notions, neorealism behaves differently from classical mainstream cinema, in which the camera is logical, syntetical and ‘invisible’, on the practical level.

Comedy Italian style managed to overcome the lack of popular success that neorealism suffered from by narrowing the amount of ambiguity in the ‘*decoupage*’, adopting in most cases classic grammar instead, thus managing to offer a similar intent and similarly unconventional narrative in the context of a viable production model. In other words, in adapting neorealist innovations into a genre context, the comedy Italian style filmmakers maintained instances of the refusal of classic narrative strategies on the structural level, but on the level of the ‘*decoupage*’ by and large they privileged conventional logical patterns in the organisation of separate shots. Popular entertainment being the primary aim of the genre, the filmmakers had to privilege the immediate intelligibility of the on-screen actions, as Adriano Aprà noted in a defence of comedy Italian style directors Dino Risi and Luigi Comencini.

³³ “We will arrange, by implication, the major Italian films in concentric circles of decreasing interest around *Paisà*, since it is this film of Rossellini's that yields the most aesthetic secrets” (Bazin 30).

³⁴ “[...] è importante notare come in questa ‘disponibilità’ a lasciarsi guidare dal reale, la macchina da ripresa sembra allontanarsi di tanto in tanto dalla trama principale per volgere a registrare il molteplice e il casuale, pur senza inaugurare nuovi percorsi narrativi.”

In Aprà's opinion, Risi and Comencini equipped neorealism with "grammar and syntax, which are necessary if one wants to pursue it at a more artisanal level, following less strict regulations" (Aprà, *Elogio del Mestiere* 201-209).³⁵ Thus, the cameras and the editing room went back to behaving in a synthetic and logically oriented manner and the abandonment by most comedy Italian style filmmakers of the more discretionary "*image-fact*" attributed by Bazin to Rossellini in favour of a more classical, and therefore more familiar to the audience, '*decoupage*' allowed a compromise between realism and genre immediacy.³⁶ The continuity between neorealist narrative innovations and comedy Italian style primarily manifested itself on the level of the choice and structuring of the recounted events in the plots with the common refusal of conventional structural strategies constructed around dramatic conflicts.

Neorealism and comedy Italian style writers: continuity in method and collaborations

The fact that roughly a decade and major economical and cultural changes in Italian society separated the height of the post-war neorealist practice from the beginning of the comedy Italian style genre could have represented an obstacle to the continuity between these cinematic forms. However, the writing method and the conditions in which the films' narratives were conceived remained largely similar.

Newspaper stories recounting social injustices such as the ones that inspired De Sica's *Sciuscià* (1946) and De Santis' *Roma Ore 11* (1952) always abound in Italy and also did so at the time of the Economic Miracle, inspiring comedies Italian style such as Luigi Zampa's *Il Vigile* (1961) and *Il Medico Della Mutua* (1968) among others.³⁷ The continuing of the practice of dubbing the dialogue in the post

³⁵ "[...] grammatica e sintassi, indispensabili se si vuole operare anche a livello artigianale, secondo direttive che abbiano un minimo di respiro."

³⁶ As I stated in the introduction, a parallel strand of neorealist evolution consists of the passage from its post-war form to the art cinema of Fellini, Pasolini and Antonioni, which is characterised by the maintenance of the '*image-fact*' aesthetic and the exploration of its formal possibilities. This trend, however, progressively lost the realist immediacy of the post-war neorealist practice, being later characterised by consistent resorts to allegory.

³⁷ On this topic Mariapia Comand writes that:

production of the audio track guaranteed a certain freedom of modifying the screenplays in order to accommodate opportunities and inspirations arising at the time of the shooting.³⁸ As Sergio Amidei recounted in the previously quoted

Comedies Italian style follow quite faithfully the topical events of those years: the train stuck in the gallery in *Tutti a Casa* suggests the Balvani railway accident of the 1940s; the tragedy of Ribolla's miners in the 1950s is a fundamental aspect of *La Vita Agra*; *Il Vedovo* mirrors the Fornaroli murder; the billionaire con conducted by the customs inspector Mastrella and the Fiumicino airport scandal are mentioned in the dialogues of *Il Successo* (Mauro Morassi, 1963); *Il Vigile* evokes the Marzano story, even though the authorities prohibited to openly reference the case; honour code murders inspire *Divorzio all'Italiana*; up to the references to the Sifar secret services in *Straziami Ma di Baci Saziami*, which was shot immediately after the magazine *L'Espresso* published the *Piano Solo* attempted coup; in the same way *Vogliamo i Colonnelli* (Mario Monicelli, 1973) parodies the Borghese coup, which failed in the early 1970s (Comand, *Commedia* 12-13).

(In the original: "Le commedie all'italiana ripercorrono abbastanza fedelmente la cronaca di quegli anni: dietro il treno bloccato in galleria di *Tutti a Casa* si intravede il disastro ferroviario di Balvani degli anni Quaranta; la tragedia dei minatori di Ribolla degli anni Cinquanta è un momento fondamentale di *La Vita Agra*; *Il Vedovo* adombra il delitto Fenaroli; la frode miliardaria compiuta dall'ispettore doganale Mastrella e lo scandalo dell'aeroporto di Fiumicino del Sessanta si affacciano nei dialoghi di *Il Successo*; la vicenda Marzano è rievocata da *Il Vigile*, anche se le autorità imposero di non fare espliciti riferimenti ai fatti; i delitti d'onore motivano *Divorzio all'Italiana*; per arrivare ai riferimenti ai servizi segreti Sifar in *Straziami Ma di Baci Saziami* girato a ridosso dell'inchiesta pubblicata su *L'Espresso* che portò alla luce il colpo di stato noto come *Piano Solo*; come pure *Vogliamo i Colonnelli* fa il verso al golpe Borghese, fallito nei primi anni Settanta.")

³⁸ If it is true that the dubbing practice and the consequent possibility of altering film structures do not solely belong to neorealism and comedy Italian style and that these aspects participate in a certain looseness which characterises also other genre products shot in Cinecittà in comparison to their Hollywood equivalents, it is also true that the looseness of such genre films, like the so called 'sword and sandal' ones, is determined by the economy of financial resources deployed in the making. There are, for example, instances of battle scenes in which the same stock is used for a number of different films of this type. It is clear, thus, that in such cases the narrative looseness is not the result of a conscious choice, aspiring to mirror a tradition, as is the case with some big budget comedies Italian style replicating narrative strategies adopted in post-war neorealism, but simply the result of financial constraint. Also, no matter what the degree of their looseness is in light of these constraints, such

interview, Rossellini and Fellini did just this at the time of *Paisà*, for which the episode set in the Emilia-Romagna convent was written much later than the rest of the script, augmenting the role of chance in the structuring of the film's narratives.³⁹ Screenwriter Age offers an example of this in his own screenwriting manual in which he discusses how what was supposed to be the sixth scene in Monicelli's *L'Armata Brancaleone* "was thus moved between [*scenes*] number 16 and 17. It was an operation made in the editing phase, with the aid of some dubbing adjustments" (Age 78).⁴⁰ At times, comedy Italian style filmmakers have practiced a level of enquiry in the writing comparable to what Zavattini theorised in reference to neorealism in 'Che Cos'è Il Film-lampo' (*Opere* 708-710).⁴¹ Mario Monicelli, for instance, claimed that for the purpose of a faithful representation of the rites of the Free Masons in his *Un Borghese Piccolo Piccolo*, he "went and signed up as a Mason to see how they did things. I [*he*] did not invent anything" (in Young 40).

films almost always feature an audience-reward resolution that neorealism and comedy Italian style films, in light of their realism, do not necessarily pursue and often persistently avoid.

³⁹ For example, *Il Gaucho* (1965) originated in the fact that director Dino Risi and producer Mario Cecchi Gori wanted to exploit the success of Risi's film *Il Sorpasso* (1962) in Argentina and were invited to present it at a film festival at Mar de la Plata. Risi and screenwriter Ruggero Maccari were commissioned to write a treatment about a fictional Italian film crew in Argentina which was going to be shot on location during the actual festival. Once there, screenwriter Ettore Scola spent every night in a hotel redrafting the screenplay according to where the actual film crew was invited to for the following day and being inspired by his experiences during the trip. Having learnt that comedy Italian style star Nino Manfredi was soon to arrive in Buenos Aires to tour the stage production *Rugantino* and was willing to participate in the film, Scola changed the story to include encounters between the protagonist played by Vittorio Gassman and an old friend of his who emigrated years before, played by Manfredi. The sub-plot regarding this friendship became very important in the economy of the screenplay and Risi was able to introduce it earlier in the film through post-production, by dubbing in the scenes at the airport that were previously shot in Rome in which Gassman's character now mentions his friend in Buenos Aires to the rest of the film crew.

⁴⁰ "Fu così spostata tra il n. 16 e il 17 [...] È stato un lavoro di montaggio con qualche aggiustamento anche in sede di doppiaggio."

⁴¹ In this paper, written for the 1952 Viareggio literary prize, Zavattini expressed his notion of neorealism as a type of cinema which would pursue as closely as possible instant representation of facts of life, almost as soon as they occur. This theorisation, however, cannot be considered a manifesto of neorealism, as it is in contrast with the actual filmmaking practice of most neorealist directors at the time. Also, this articulation of his ideal dates to 1952, when the mode of production was almost over.

Most importantly, the practice of writing communally in large groups of screenwriters continued and very often the comedy Italian style screenwriters had the opportunity of observing neorealist writers and learn from them, sometime even participating in their endeavours, as Wagstaff notes:

The credits of a neorealist film tend to list a number of writers. At the time, there existed a body of writers who, as well as working for the cinema, worked on comic magazines (such as the satirical *Marc'Aurelio*), on radio comedy shows, on sketches for the variety theatre [...]. They worked together in cafes and small restaurants, in a mobile community, and their creative sessions frequently embraced the directors and producers at the café or restaurant table. [...] All of this clearly suggests that neorealist films had part of their origins in a creative activity that did not necessarily separate out neorealist films from other forms of popular and mass culture (*Italian Neorealist Cinema* 30).

Most comedies Italian style's writing credits also feature a large number of writers and interviews show that the practice of writing communally persisted in the 1960s. Thus, it is plausible that the fact that the writing method remained the same contributed to a similar approach towards narrative.

It is also possible that collaborations in the mid-fifties between older neorealist screenwriters with the upcoming writers of comedy Italian style may have created the occasions for the former to inform the writing practice of the latter, as Age suggests by regarding neorealist writer Sergio Amidei as both an inspiration and a teacher for him and Scarpelli:

The first foreshadowing [*of comedy Italian style*] can be detected in the films of Sergio Amidei, one of the fathers of neorealism [...] [*who*] can also be considered one of the creators of comedy Italian style. Scarpelli and I wrote a couple of films with him (in Pintus and Biarese 17-25).⁴²

⁴² “Le prime avvisaglie [*della commedia all'italiana*] si scorgono con i film di uno dei padri del neorealismo, Sergio Amidei [...] [*che*] si può considerare uno dei creatori della commedia all'italiana. Insieme a lui, Scarpelli ed io abbiamo fatto un paio di film.”

I have already mentioned in the introduction how another screenwriter of neorealist films, Suso Cecchi D'Amico, was paired with Age and Scarpelli for *I Soliti Ignoti* and many more times after the success of Monicelli's seminal film.⁴³ Similar instances of collaborations between neorealism screenwriters and comedy Italian style filmmakers would be Zavattini's scenario consultation for Dino Risi's *Il Segno di Venere*, a comedy written by future comedy Italian style directors Risi and Comencini and actress Franca Valeri, comedy Italian style writer and director Luigi Zampa's co-writing credit with Zavattini for the 1953 episode film *Siamo Donne* and Risi, Lattuada and Ferreri's involvement in the *Amore In Città* project of the same year, which Zavattini supervised. Rodolfo Sonogo, Sordi's regular comedy Italian style screenwriter, moved to Rome at Rossellini's request and spent fifteen days with the director and screenwriters Fellini and Amidei, even though the collaboration did not result in a co-written film because of the death of Rossellini's son (Sanguineti 17-18). These are just documented instances of neorealism and comedy Italian style filmmakers writing stories together, to which should also be added the fact that they were part of the same community and often discussed their practice in an informal capacity in the restaurants and cafes of Rome where they took their breaks.⁴⁴ Thus, the similarities in the writing method between the two forms and the fact that neorealist and comedy Italian style writers worked alongside each other guaranteed a certain continuity in the approach towards narrative, despite the major changes that

⁴³ Other examples would be Monicelli's *Risate di Gioia* (1962) and *Casanova '70* (1965) and Blasetti's *Io, Io, Io... e Gli Altri* (1966).

⁴⁴ For a more detailed recount of how Italian screenwriters worked together in the period I refer the reader to Comand, M. (ed.), *Sulla Carta. Storia e Storie della Sceneggiatura in Italia* and in particular to Andrea Pergolari's essay on genre screenwriting *Commedia e Dintorni. La Scrittura di Genere negli Anni '60 e '70* contained in the volume. Despite its conventionality, the comedic form of pink neorealism often offered an opportunity for the screenwriters of post-war neorealism and those who were later identified with comedy Italian style to work together. For the former, pink neorealism represented an attempt to explore a more commercial model, for the latter the opportunity of learning the craft. As I previously noted, the credits of pink neorealist films also feature a number of screenwriters such as Ettore Maria Margadonna, Edoardo Anton and Titina De Filippo that do not belong to the other two cinematic forms, which could explain why this comedic form signalled a return to conventionality and thus cannot be identified as a form of 'evolved' neorealism.

characterised the decade between 1948 and 1958.⁴⁵ But how did the refusal of classical narrative strategies manifest itself in comedy Italian style?

Praxis of the classical narrative mode: *Pane, Amore e Fantasia* and pink neorealism's reversal to conventionality

I have articulated the principles of the classical mode of mainstream narrative cinema as defined by David Bordwell. These notions are reflected in the praxis of writing mainstream films. Many volumes explaining how to succeed in writing a Hollywood screenplay have been written by American professionals and are sold all around the world.⁴⁶ These volumes deduce sets of narrative steps from the principles which characterise the plot structuring of Hollywood genre films through existing examples of them and are very useful if one wants to gather the basic structural traits that characterise classic cinematic storytelling. Not that these are narrative steps unique to the film medium, as they are essentially very similar to what Aristotle theorised in his *Poetics* in the fourth century B.C. and Greek 'novelists' put into practice in the Hellenistic period between the first and the second century A.D..

I will articulate the basic steps of classic cinematic storytelling that mostly all of the authors of such volumes agree upon. In most cases, conventional screenplays are centred on a singular *protagonist*. To express the *theme* of the story, writers place the protagonist in a three act trajectory in which some sort of *incident* during the first act provokes a *crisis* in the protagonist and alter his/her understanding of the world surrounding him/her. During the second act the protagonist gains awareness of the

⁴⁵ In this view, we can assume that the return to conventional narrative structures in the films of farce and pink neorealism was determined by the fact that the neorealist screenwriters had not yet influenced the writers of comedies, who were still tutored by the directors of satirical magazines, such as Vittorio Metz, who privileged non-realist humour. It is also fair to presume that it took some years for the writers of comedy to refine their abilities, before they could afford to refuse conventional narrative structures and that pink neorealism and the farces reflected the fact that they were not mature writers yet. After all, the same could be said about neorealist writers and their early conventional endeavours during the Fascist regime.

⁴⁶ Such as Mc Kee, R., *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting*. 1997, New York: Harper Collins or Seger, L., *Making a Good Script Great*. 1994, Hollywood: Samuel French Trade or Vogler, C., *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structures for Writers*. 1998, Studio City, CA: M. Wiese Productions.

change he/she has to undergo to resolve the crisis and obtain his goal, and gradually embraces such change. He/she also has to accomplish a series of tasks and overcome a series of progressively more difficult obstacles, each one undermining the chances of his/her successful *change*. These obstacles are usually provided by one or more *antagonists*, who initially embody the antithesis of the protagonist and are the agents of his/her change. The audience hopes that the protagonist will not give up on his/her journey and fears that he/she will. At the end of the second act, the protagonist is presented with the ultimate task, an obstacle that represents the *worst of the worst* that could ever happen to him/her and seemingly cannot succeed. The third act is constituted by the unexpected victory of the protagonist over this ultimate obstacle and the resolution of all the secondary plots left open during the course of the story.

Despite the fact that they were produced at the same time as the neorealist films that innovatively refused such structures or in the years immediately following the end of this mode of production, conventional antagonistic narratives apply to the post-war comedic films of the canon of pink neorealism. In Comencini's *Pane, Amore e Fantasia* (1953), an archetypal pink neorealist film, the *theme* carried out by the protagonist Marshal Carotenuto (Vittorio De Sica) is 'you should pursue true love, no matter what people say'. The *crisis* De Sica's character is confronted with is the gossiping attitude of the villagers of Saliena, the peasant town he arrives to in the first scene of the film. It is thus established as soon as possible, by a shot of the locals spying on him [figures 7 & 8] and a conversation with his new colleagues about the fact that he is not married, that it will be problematic for the Marshal to find love in such circumstances. The Marshal's struggle with this impediment is underlined by the fact that De Sica's casting suggests that the character is a middle-aged man, someone who will soon be too old to find a companion and by the Marshal's characterisation as a Neapolitan who carries with him a guitar; the film is thus playing with Italian romantic stereotypes associating passion with these traits.

The *inciting incident* is represented by Carotenuto's encounter with the antagonist character played by Gina Lollobrigida, a young woman nicknamed 'La Bersagliera', [figure 9] who encourages the change in Carotenuto with her unruly attitude, by acting spontaneously without being afraid of being considered crazy by the villagers for it. Marshal Carotenuto falls in love with the village midwife (Marisa

Merlini) and slowly embraces the example set by ‘La Bersagliera’ by showing his growing affection for the midwife. [figure 10] *The worst of the worst*, the incident that seems to undermine the protagonist’s change, is represented by the fact that Carotenuto learns that the midwife has a son from a previous relationship. Carotenuto overcomes this ultimate obstacle by resigning from the Carabinieri and announcing his engagement publicly [figure 11]. As the example of *Pane, Amore e Fantasia* clearly shows, in structural terms neorealism did not inform pink neorealism,⁴⁷ which structurally adheres to the broad conventions of classic Hollywood genre films and specifically to those of Italian pre-neorealist comedic forms, such as the ‘white telephones’ of the Fascist era.⁴⁸ It is important at this point of the discussion to return to one of Bordwell’s principles of mainstream narrative, namely that “usually the classical syuzhet presents a double causal structure, two plot lines: one involving heterosexual romance (boy/girl, husband/wife), the other line involving another sphere – work, war, a mission or quest, other personal relationships” (Bordwell, *Narration* 157) and to point out that whereas pink neorealist comedies always feature a plot line of heterosexual romance, comedies Italian style rarely do so.

⁴⁷ This conventional three act structure can be applied to contemporary Italian comedies, such as Carlo Verdone’s *Il Mio Miglior Nemico* (2006), in which the protagonist Achille De Bellis (Verdone) comes to understand how to communicate with youngsters and especially his daughter, after the antagonist played by Silvio Muccino decides to make his life miserable.

⁴⁸ Mark Shiel notes that “with the Christian Democrat victory of 1948, the populist form known as *neorealismo rosa* seemed to give expression to a ‘healthy and constructive optimism’ by incorporating strong elements of conventional romance and comedy while remaining neorealist in visual style (filmed on location in humble rural or urban settings)” (87). I agree with this view, but again what I disagree with is the opinion by that comedy Italian style represents a continuation of this process, whereas I argue that it constitutes a reprise of neorealism in structural terms.



Figures 7 and 8: the peasants of Saliena engage in the most popular hobby, spying on Marshal Carotenuto (Vittorio De Sica) in *Pane, Amore e Fantasia* (Luigi Comencini, 1953)



Figures 9 and 10: Marshal Carotenuto's encounters with la Bersagliera (Gina Lollobrigida) inspire him to court the village midwife (Marisa Merlini) in the same film



Figure 11: Marshal Carotenuto publicly declares his love for the midwife for the benefit of Saliena's gossiping citizen in the same film

Comedy Italian style and the refusal of the classical mode: *Amici Miei, Il Sorpasso, Il Boom*

Comedies Italian style rarely adhere to this structure. First of all, they very often feature multi-protagonist narratives in which the dramatic dynamics are less linear. For example, in *Amici Miei* the five friends of the title all have pretty much the same weight in the story. If one is forced to single out a protagonist, this would probably be Giorgio Perozzi, the journalist played by Philippe Noiret, since his voice-over guides the audience's expectations and introduces the other characters. The film recounts how five aged friends have made pranks their way of life. It does not do justice to the sophisticated melancholic tone of the film to isolate its theme in a sentence, but if one was forced to do so it would be something along the lines of 'you can always be young, no matter how old you actually are'. In a conventional antagonistic narrative one or more protagonists would have trouble enjoying their old age, finding it boring and meaningless. The other friends would be the agents of his/their change of attitude and encourage some sort of rediscovery of past amusements and lost joy.

No such thing happens in *Amici Miei*. When the film opens each protagonist already knows how to embrace his old age playfully. The first scene featuring Perozzi shows him making fun of the customers in a café [figure 12] and each time one of the other protagonists is introduced, they are all ready to happily give up their serious everyday responsibilities and join him. [figure 13] There is no change that any of the five friends has to undergo in order to resolve a crisis. They simply abandon their everyday affairs and have fun together. Nothing can jeopardise their positive if not irresponsible attitude. Towards the end of the film Perozzi is about to die. Instead of redeeming himself by confessing his sins to the priest, he recites the "*supercazzola*", a series of made-up words that the five friends have devised to confuse their interlocutors and make them appear as fools. [figure 14] It is also clear that even Perozzi's death does not change the other protagonists' perspective, as they take advantage of the funeral to continue befooling Righi (Bernard Blier), an old man whom they have previously convinced that they are a group of gangsters. [figure 15]

Perozzi's wife and son, who are characterised by lacking a sense of humour, are not actual *antagonists* in the *structural* sense of the term, since they never remotely manage to change the five friends' way of life. Nor are they the protagonists, since they are never redeemed by Perozzi's serenity, not even after his death. The conventional narrative structure simply does not apply to the film, no matter in which way one wants to read it. The narrative of *Amici Miei* is characterised, instead, by a *wandering* approach reminiscent of what Deleuze noted in neorealist films, as the action sprawls in spatial and chronological terms in a series of vignettes set either in present time or flashback, either in Florence or in the countryside, in which the protagonists never change, nor mature but simply confirm what we know about them since the beginning of the story. In fact, *Amici Miei* is so concerned with *wandering* that the writers had the protagonists refer to their pranks as “*zingarate*”, a neologism that the film introduced and literally means “*gypsy missions*” and openly refers to the wanderings that gypsies are associated with.



Figure 12: Perozzi (Philippe Noiret) pranks the customers of a café in *Amici Miei* (Mario Monicelli, 1975)



Figure 13: Lello Mascetti (Ugo Tognazzi) leaves the family house with an excuse in the same film



Figure 14: Perozzi pranks the priest on his death bed in *Amici Miei* (Mario Monicelli, 1975)



Figure 15: Mascetti, Melandri (Gastone Moschin) and Dr. Sassaroli (Adolfo Celi) laugh during Perozzi's funeral at the expense of Righi (Bernard Blier) in the same film

Similarly, the conventional antagonistic narrative structure does not apply to *Il Sorpasso*, a film that has been considered as the prototype of comedy Italian style. It is hard to distinguish in quantitative terms which one of the two leading characters of the film could be considered the protagonist, since they are both featured in almost every scene of the film. It is similarly hard to identify a protagonist in the conventional structural sense. The shy law-student Roberto Mariani (Jean-Louis Trintignant) is the character undergoing a transformation, fully embracing the “*easy life*” of the Economic Miracle by the end of the film.⁴⁹ However, his change is not rewarded, but punctuated by his death in the car accident recounted in the final sequence of the film. [figure 16] If the theme carried out by Roberto as a protagonist is something along the lines of “embrace life”, the narrative trajectory does not convince us that we should do so, to say the least.⁵⁰ The other main character, Bruno Cortona (Vittorio Gassman), does not undergo any transformation during the course of the film as he is driving as recklessly in the end as he was in the opening scene. He survives the car accident that kills Roberto, but the film ends abruptly after he declares to the police that the other passenger was someone he had just met. [figure 17] The narrative of *Il Sorpasso* is not concerned with letting us know if Bruno is going to mature because of Roberto’s death. As was the case with the analysis of *Amici Miei*, the conventional narrative structure, again, does not apply and the element of *wandering* is strong as the narrative is entirely occupied by the two main characters’ spatial and symbolical journey through the Economic Miracle Italy⁵¹ for

⁴⁹ *The Easy Life* is the title that was used in distributing *Il Sorpasso* in English speaking countries.

⁵⁰ Mariapia Comand, on the contrary, conceives Roberto as the protagonist of the film (*Commedia* 101). Discussing the non-conventionality of this film, she does however note that “this dynamic order is ‘disordered’ by some narrative expedients: the secondary character often steals the scene from the primary one throughout the multiplying of his functions, every statement being made references a different one that denies it” (114). (In the original: “quest’ordine dinamico viene ‘disordinato’ da alcune disposizioni narrative: il personaggio secondario sottrae la ribalta a quello principale attraverso la moltiplicazione delle sue funzioni, ogni assunto rimanda a un altro che ne mina la definitezza.”)

⁵¹ *Il Sorpasso* is for this reason considered as one of the most prominent road-movies and is discussed in this light by Wendy Everett in a journal article considering this type of film:

Various critics and filmmakers identify an Italian film, Dino Risi’s *The Easy Life*, as the first modern road movie, and both Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda have acknowledged the debt owed by *Easy Rider* to this film. It is evident, therefore, that

no specific reason other than they both have nothing better to do and most importantly we do not ascertain if they learn anything at all from it.⁵² Italian critics did not comprehend the subtlety of *Il Sorpasso* back when it was released. On the pages of *Cinema Nuovo* Giulio Cattivelli granted it only two stars, meaning he deemed it 'sufficient' and argued that

this ending has the effect of a sudden heavy blow on the spectator who is not prepared for it and actually misdirected by the overtly hilarious tones of the rest of the work; it ultimately confirms Risi's limitations, he is able to operate in a light register, but less secure when approaching dramatic or complex situations (Cattivelli, *Il Sorpasso* 46-47).⁵³

Nowadays *Il Soprasso* is considered one of the greatest masterpieces of Italian cinema *because* of its "sudden heavy blow" and the fact that it can still be felt after multiple viewings, when one is well aware of what is going to happen in the final scene, proves how sophisticated Risi's cinematic practice actually was.

the narrative form which would eventually be known as the road movie was developing simultaneously in both continents, and that there was a considerable degree of cross fertilization between the two (166).

I do believe, however, that considering the narratives of both *Il Sorpasso* and *Easy Rider*, their categorisation as 'road movies' is reductive if by this notion we refer to a canon of films which recount stories that take place on the road, but obey to the classic learn-change trajectories of conventional antagonistic narratives. These two films take place on the road, but go beyond the system of audience gratification we identify with the codified 'road movie' genre. They are exceptions to the code, as much as Fellini's *La Strada* is. The fact that Risi's film inspired *Easy Rider*, I believe, does not simply signal the cross-fertilisation between European and American road movies, but is rather an instance of comedy Italian style, the genre version of neorealism, being a vehicle for the influence of realism on New Hollywood (Hopper, Scorsese, Coppola, etc.) filmmaking.

⁵² This is a crucial element. I am not suggesting that all narratives which take place on the road are somewhat reminiscent of the *wandering* Deleuze projected on the neorealist practice and the *time-image* cinema that followed it. Most road movies do not convey such sense of *wandering* because the characters' travelling is still connoted by classic structures.

⁵³ "Questo epilogo ha però l'effetto di una brusca mazzata sullo spettatore impreparato e sviato dai toni troppo ilari del resto dell'opera; e conferma in definitiva i già noti limiti di Risi, sempre abile a manovrare su un registro leggero, ma meno sicuro nell'affrontare situazioni drammatiche e complesse."



Figure 16: Bruno Cortona's iconic car crashes at the bottom of a cliff, killing Roberto Mariani in *Il Sorpasso* (Dino Risi, 1962)



Figure 17: Bruno Cortona (Vittorio Gassman) witnesses the deadly accident in the very last frame of *Il Sorpasso* (Dino Risi, 1962)

Most films with a clear single protagonist are no exception to comedy Italian style's mirroring of the neorealist refusal of conventional antagonistic narrative structures. In De Sica's *Il Boom* (1963) Alberto Sordi plays Giovanni Nardi, an entrepreneur on the verge of bankruptcy.⁵⁴ Nardi is recklessly spending the little money he has left because he cannot find the courage to tell his high maintenance wife that he cannot provide her with the expensive items she desires. He keeps asking their mutual friends as well as members of her family for loans and inevitably in the second act his wife learns about his financial troubles. She does not support him, but leaves him instead and says that she will not return until he can provide for her whims. Nardi is encouraged to take even more extreme measures, rather than to change his ways as he would be in a conventional narrative. He ends up agreeing to sell one of his eyes for a transplant to a one-eyed billionaire. Nardi has not learnt to be honest with his wife, as he lies to her and tells her that he made a fortune with a good business investment, without mentioning the surgery he is about to undergo. In the film's ending he escapes from the clinic, understandably frightened, but he is ultimately convinced by the billionaire's wife to go through with the operation and he is walked back towards the horrendous bargain he has agreed upon. Even in the case of single protagonist narratives such as *Il Boom*, the awareness-struggle-change

⁵⁴ I find this film's underestimation frankly appalling and inexplicable. Even Stephen Snyder's article 'Hiding in Light: De Sica's Work in the 1960s' does not mention it, whereas *Ieri, Oggi e Domani* and *Matrimonio all'Italiana* are discussed in length. I suspect that this may be the result of the greater familiarity that International audiences had with Mastroianni and Loren, in comparison to Sordi.

trajectories that characterise the deployment of the theme in narratives of the classical mainstream mode do not apply to most comedies Italian style.⁵⁵ Steven Neale has noted how comedic forms, in comparison to dramatic ones, tend to feature elements of disruption to a greater extent. He has pointed out that

the different forms of comedy work by specifying disruption in relation to discourse itself. Crazy comedy tends to articulate order and disorder across the very mechanisms of discourse, producing incongruities, contradictions and illogicalities at the level of language and code, while social (situation) comedy, on the other hand, tends to specify its disorder as the disturbance of socially institutionalised discursive hierarchies (24).

This notion of disruption should not be confused with my argument over narrative in comedy Italian style. If crazy comedy, or slapstick, sometimes does not even belong to the sphere of narrative cinema, Neale's point about mainstream social comedy is not comparable to the non-linearity I have detected in comedy Italian style as a result of its neorealist heritage. Mainstream social comedy may display disruption at the level of realistic representation, meaning a representation that is respectful of the coherent, consequential and casual conception of reality championed by mainstream cinema and the classical model, but it nonetheless resolves such disruption with narrative closure. What I detect in comedy Italian style is a tendency of displaying disruption without resolving it, without fulfilling its causality, in other words it subverts the narrative principles of classical cinema, thus reflecting its neorealist antecedent and a conception of chance being a major factor in our experience of reality.

⁵⁵ There are some comedies Italian style in which the protagonists do change and redeem themselves, such as Mario Monicelli's *La Grande Guerra* (1959), Luigi Comencini's *Tutti a Casa* (1960) and Dino Risi's *Una Vita Difficile* (1961), but they represent exceptions to the genre's refusal conventional antagonistic narratives. However, the war and Resistance settings of these films express an intentional continuity with neorealism on the part of the authors.

Deleuze's time-image: neorealism and the loosening of cause-effect links

The refusal of these awareness-struggle-change trajectories in the development of the themes mirrors the neorealist refusal of the links between situations and actions, noted by Deleuze, who referred to pre-neorealist cinema by coining the expression 'movement-image'. In the regime of the *movement-image* the links between situations and actions governed the successions of recounted events, following clear cause-effect relations. However, the advent of neorealism introduced the regime of the *time-image*, which is characterised by the loosening of the situation-action links:

Of course SAS [*a Situation generates an Action which alters the Situation*] and ASA [*an Action creates a Situation which has to be remedied by a further Action*] films are still being produced. The most successful commercial films are always within this field, but no longer the soul of cinema. The soul of cinema needs progressively more thought, even if thought starts with undoing the system of actions, perceptions and affections of which the cinema was made up until then (Deleuze, *Immagine-movimento* 235).⁵⁶

Thus, as Deleuze noted, mainstream genre cinema ignores the crisis between these links provoked by neorealism and cannot be inscribed in the regime of the *time-image*, which is characterised by the loosening of these links and is identified by Deleuze with neorealism and post-neorealist art cinema.⁵⁷ The singularity of comedy Italian style is that it reflects this crisis to some extent even though it is a popular film genre. Mostly it does not reflect it within the sequences, on the level of the *decoupage* like some neorealist masterpieces did, because this would generate the

⁵⁶ "Certo, si continuano a fare film SAS [*una Situazione genera un Azione la quale altera la Situazione*] e ASA [*un Azione crea una Situazione la quale deve essere rimediata da un'altra Azione*]: i più grandi successi commerciali passano sempre da qui, ma non più l'anima del cinema. L'anima del cinema esige sempre più pensiero, anche se il pensiero comincia con il disfare il sistema delle azioni, delle percezioni e delle affezioni di cui il cinema si era nutrito fino a quel momento."

⁵⁷ The films used by Deleuze in his articulation of the *time-image* theory are mostly European art films or American films identified as part of the 'New Hollywood' movement.

ambiguity of meaning in the film's grammar addressed by Bazin and would undermine the genre's popular appeal. In this context Deleuze wrote that

what defines neorealism is this build-up of purely optical situations [...] which are fundamentally distinct from the motor situations of the action-image in the old realism (*Cinema 2* 3).

If we analyse comedy Italian style in the light of this strict aesthetic categorisation, we cannot inscribe it among the forms that neorealism's shift towards the *time-image* had generated. At the same time though, such a parameter, if enforced indiscriminately, would also greatly reduce the number of actual neorealist films ever made. Deleuze, however, lists five characteristics of the image of neorealism, namely "the dispersive situation, the deliberately weak links, the voyage form, the consciousness of clichés, the condemnation of the plot" (*Cinema 1*, 210) and if we consider them in a non-absolutist way, in other words if we conceive them as trends that given films aspire to follow, knowing that no neorealist film ever denied entirely the concept of plot either, for example, we can see how these are also characteristics that mark comedy Italian style's uniqueness when compared to more conventional forms of cinematic comedy, Italian and not. Comedy Italian style does reflect to some extent this crisis of the links between situations and actions on the structural level.⁵⁸ There are indeed significant actions represented on screen in the comedies of this particular genre, but there is in it a tendency of featuring actions that are not necessary causes or consequences of the plot premise of each film, which would not be there in the case of other genres, comedic or not.

In this sense we can put into context the quoted statement that opened this study, by director Marco Ferreri who claimed that "comedy [*Italian style*] is neorealism revisited and modified in order to make people go to the movies" (in Giacobelli, *Commedia all'Italiana* 21). In most cases, comedies Italian style are not

⁵⁸ This loosening of causal links is reflected by the episodic pace of most comedies Italian style. As Viganò noted, even the feature-length films of this genre present this episodic character, not only the films that are actually divided into episodes, in order to respond to a productive strategy (*Il Regista Che Non Volle Farsi Autore* 86). This element reflects the episodic pace that narratives also had in post-war neorealism.

preoccupied with showing us characters empowered to alter with an action the situation in which they are stuck. Nor are they preoccupied with showing us that some situations are decisive in the characters nurturing of the idea of doing an action.

Going back to the example of *Il Sorpasso*, its tragic ending is not signified as an event that dramatically changes Gassman's character attitude towards life, as we never are shown what happens to him after the fact. Nor is the deadly accident signified as something that will necessarily happen because of his driving, as we have seen him behave in such a way many times before in the film with no such consequence. It is a significant event which can be read in a number of ways, as the result of a number of the elements that preceded it in the narrative, but not the necessary consequence of a specific one, or even as a purely random occurrence. Deleuze himself noted that his notion of *wandering* should not be taken as simple spatial mobility, because in this case all *road-movies* would have to be considered examples of *time-image* cinema and this is not the case. It is the fact that *Il Sorpasso* and *Amici Miei* display journeys in their narrative that do not simply have a goal to begin with, but also do not signify a closure for any of their characters, that makes them significant examples of the loosening of cause-effect links introduced by neorealism. As Mariapia Comand notes

the journeys in comedy Italian style films seem to be motionless journeys, half-journeys, there is a narrative stasis behind the apparent diegetic movement. For instance, there are many arrivals full of expectations that remain unfulfilled: *La Vita Agra*, *Divorzio all'Italiana* and *La Visita* [1963, directed by Antonio Pietrangeli] begin with the arrival on a train, but their plots do not signify a significant change in the protagonists' lives (*Commedia* 16-17).⁵⁹

⁵⁹ "Sembrano viaggi immobili quelli della commedia all'italiana, mezzi-viaggi, c'è spesso una sostanziale stasi narrativa dietro l'apparente movimento diegetico. Molti sono per esempio gli arrivi carichi di attese che andranno deluse: con l'arrivo di un treno iniziano *La Vita Agra*, *Divorzio all'Italiana* e *La Visita*, le cui vicende poi non genereranno un sostanziale cambio di vita per i protagonisti."

This lack of causality is reminiscent of what Bordwell addressed as the main bequest of neorealism to the art cinema which followed it. According to Bordwell, in this mode of narration

scenes are built around chance encounters, and the entire film may consist of nothing more than a series of them, linked by a trip (*The Silence*, *Alice in the Cities*) or aimless wanderings (*La Dolce Vita*, *Cleo from 5 to 7*, *Alfie*). The art film can thus become episodic, akin to picaresque and processional forms (*Narration* 206).

Comedies Italian style may not be proper art films nor perfect handbook examples of *time-image* cinema because of their reliance on classical grammar at the level of the decoupage and their lack of self-reflexivity, whereas “art cinema narration points to its own interventions”, (233) but they display their continuity with neorealism in the ‘aimless-ness’ of their journeys and their episodic and picaresque plots.

It is no coincidence that comedy Italian style screenwriter Age’s own screenwriting manual, *Scriviamo un Film. La Stesura di un Copione Cinematografico* puts great emphasis on the importance of having good openings as well as strong and unpredictable endings in a script, but does not offer all of the structuring steps and cause-effect shortcuts of its American equivalents. Actions in a comedy Italian style do have causes and effects⁶⁰ and the links between these are not as loose as they would be in films such as Alain Resnais’ *Hiroshima Mon Amour*

⁶⁰ This is also the case of neorealism, in which some conventional residues persist and are blended with new realist attributes. It is the case for example of *Roma Città Aperta* in which the realism that characterise some of the scenes in the streets is blended with the strong conventionality that characterise the Gestapo offices and the stereotyped characters who inhabit it. Even *Ladri di Biciclette*, that Bazin considered one of the best examples of neorealism does show to some extent the heritage of traditional storytelling, as Christopher Williams notes:

De Sica’s *The Bicycle Thieves* is an astute blending of realistic elements – the work-and-theft situation, the central characters, the social relations and some aspects of the ways they are shown – with antirealist ones – the tragic structures, the frequent parallels, the architectural qualities of the treatment, the music (290).

(1959) or *Last Year in Marienbad* (1961), two French films which embody Deleuze's arguments concerning the narratives in the regime of the *time-image* to their fullest extent. However, in comedy Italian style these concerns of consequential logic are less important than in other cinematic genres. In fact, very often in this particular genre the more an action is significant, the looser the narrative links are in order to prevent the audience identifying a single event as the *conditio sine qua non* which determined this significant action, but highlight instead the role of chance that already constituted a major peculiarity of neorealist cinema.⁶¹

This is the case in Antonio Pietrangeli's *Io La Conoscevo Bene* (1965), a film which represents the closest comedy Italian style ever gets to *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. Pietrangeli's film ends with the suicide of Adriana (Stefania Sandrelli), a country girl who has moved into Rome to benefit from the Economic Miracle. Over the course of the film, we see Adriana being repeatedly taken advantage of by a number of men, not achieving the stardom she set out to obtain and we also learn that she had to terminate a pregnancy. The narrative is articulated in a clever series of loose flashbacks, which participate in showing us *many* instances that determine her tragic decision, without singling out a decisive *one*. This is proved by the fact that changing the chronological order of the flashbacks would not undermine the economy of the story, as Carlo Tagliabue noted analysing the film and defining it as

sort of a puzzle, a game of perfectly interchangeable building blocks before achieving the apparent clarity of its definitive conclusion. In a view bound to its cinematic specificity, paradoxically, *Io La Conoscevo Bene* could start at any point of the narrated plot, even from its tragic conclusion, and then

⁶¹ There is a significant presence of narrative elements in the plots of both neorealist films and comedies Italian style which suggest a possible reading of the events but at the same time make the audience second-guess such reading. One can think of the scenes featuring the Signora Santona in *Ladri di Biciclette* and how their indeterminate narrative function is mirrored in the treatment of the Free Masons in Monicelli's *Un Borghese Piccolo Piccolo*. In this film, for a while, we are tempted to think that the murder of Sordi's son is in some way a retaliation of the powers that be for his opportunistic joining of the Masons, which is strongly opposed by the Catholic character of his wife. This impression, however, is never confirmed in the same way in which we cannot relate the events of *Ladri*, for instance the fact that Antonio has found a job, the theft of the bicycle, etc., to what is predicted by Signora Santona and come to a positive conclusion.

progressively ignite without a chronological order all of the pieces of the mosaic representing the many stops of the protagonist's existential journey (123).⁶²

Thus, the loosening of the links between situations and actions should be considered a specific strategy in comedy Italian style, as the example of Pietrangeli's film shows.

Biological necessity over dramatic necessity: comedy Italian style's continuity with neorealism's narrative mode

These films are more preoccupied with showing us actions that *could have* happened, instead of actions that *must* take place. This tendency proves how neorealism has informed the narrative of comedies Italian style, since this element of privileging *eventuality* over *necessity* was introduced in neorealist films, as Bazin noted:

What matters is the creative surge, the special way in which situations are brought into life. The necessity inherent in the narrative is biological rather than dramatic. It burgeons and grows with all the verisimilitude of life (31).

What Bazin is arguing here is that most of the time events follow a recognisable order in realist films, but this order is not determined by the system of audience reward we associate with storytelling since Aristotle's time, dramatic necessity, but is rather the result of the mirroring, or biological necessity, of the order in which a set of certain events occur in real life.⁶³ In both neorealism and comedies Italian style

⁶² “[...] una sorta di puzzle, di gioco a incastri perfettamente intercambiabili, prima di aggiungere lo stato di apparente chiarezza della sua conclusione definitiva. Proprio da un’ottica prospettica legata al suo specifico cinematografico, paradossalmente, *Io La Conoscevo Bene* potrebbe cominciare in qualsiasi punto della storia narrata, anche dalla drammatica soluzione finale, per poi accendere, via via e senza seguire una scansione temporale logica, tutte le tessere del mosaico, che compongono le molte tappe del cammino esistenziale della protagonista.”

⁶³ I feel that this is the appropriate reading of Bazin's statement, which has been sometimes misinterpreted. For example, in discussing Bazin's notation that the realism of the narrative of *Ladri di Biciclette* rests on the fact that in it we are presented with events that *could* happen in the given set-

the biological necessity, the urgency of representing contemporary Italian society prevails over the dramatic necessity of conventional storytelling, whereas in other post-neorealist comedic forms such as pink neorealism this similarity does not arise.

A similar tendency reflects the openness that both realist forms shared, which is informed by their engagement with social reality without projecting onto it an overtly ideological or propagandistic response by structuring the films so that they will simply carry out an instrumental theme. There is of course in both cinematic practices the mutual intent of showing the audience the shortcomings of the institutions, such as a political majority or the Catholic Church,⁶⁴ and the defects of

up of Rome in 1948, such as the son of the protagonist interrupting the search for the bicycle to relieve himself, and not simply events that *must* necessarily happen in a logical and conventional development of the narrative premise, Frank P. Tomasulo has responded with this statement, in light of the fact that the boy actually does not get to relieve himself in the film, as he is summoned by his father to continue the search:

What Bazin sees as the contingency of Bruno's peeing against a wall may actually serve comic relief purposes, as well as show the primacy of economic necessity (in the text's discourse – finding the bicycle) over biological necessity (urinating) (5).

The point, in my opinion, is not if the boy gets to urinate or not, but the fact that he is shown trying to whereas he would not in the economy of the narrative of an American or French film produced in that period. Tomasulo's use of 'biological necessity' here is just a pun instrumental to his argument. His claim that Bazin's statement is incorrect in light of the fact that the narrative of the film does show that some kind of climactic structure does not stand as he indicates the "POINT OF ATTACK [*of the narrative*] – states the problem (Will Antonio Ricci find work?)" (4) and a resolution that does not resolve this initial problem: "RESOLUTION – catharsis of tears and father-son understanding" (5). There is some sort of conclusion, but the conclusion does not fulfil the initial premise, as it would in a non-realist film; this is the point.

⁶⁴ In fact in a review of a book on neorealist director Giuseppe De Santis, Laura E. Ruberto has made in passing the point that

this mission [*the Christian Democrat government's anti-neorealism mission*], led by Giulio Andreotti, strove to ban any Italian-made film that did not reveal a positive image of the country. Italian filmmakers responded to the government in a variety of ways, but most prominent was the development of a new cinematic genre: *commedia all'italiana* (Ruberto, *Giuseppe De Santis* 57).

The thesis that neorealism evolved into comedy Italian style in order to circumvent censorship is an intriguing and fascinating hypothesis. By the time the comedy Italian style genre arose, however, the

Italian mentality, presumably corrupted during the years of the Fascist regime,⁶⁵ but this intent is pursued in realist fashion with the common refusal of conventional narrative structures rather than with their deployment for instrumental purposes.⁶⁶

If a conventional antagonistic narrative was to be adopted, the protagonist's change would allow him/her to overcome these contingencies and triumph over them. However, it would be a deceitful and instrumental representation of Italian

Economic Miracle had removed most of the attributes, such as poverty and underdevelopment, that the Christian Democrats disapproved of in neorealism. The comedy Italian style directors' experience with censorship is also too controversial to prove such a point, most of them having suffered from it in the early 1950s when they were actually pursuing less realist comedic practices than in the 1960s. One of the most prominent cases is Steno and Monicelli's *Totò e i Re di Roma* (1951), in which the Neapolitan actor played a man who lost his job due to the fact that he did not have an Elementary School degree and thus decided to die in order to appear as a ghost to his wife and give her winning lotto numbers to feed their family. The censorship imposed a closing line dubbed over in post-production which reassured the audience that the whole narrative of the film was just a dream the main character had in his sleep. As the example shows the setting is realist but the way in which narrative is developed, even in its original form, is absolutely fantastic. Another example would be Monicelli's 1955 comedy *Totò e Carolina*, which was banned when it was first released for making fun of a policeman.

⁶⁵ There are in fact a number of comedies Italian style which are either set during Fascism, such as Luciano Salce's *Il Federale* (1961) or Dino Risi's *La Marcia su Roma* (1962), or are set during the Economic Miracle but allude to Fascism as a cause for the vile nature of the protagonist such as Dino Risi's *Il Vedovo* (1959).

⁶⁶ The case of *Ladri di Biciclette* is exemplary of how the realist depiction of a given social setting in neorealist films never turns into an ideological and thus closed discourse, as Frank P. Tomasulo noted:

The text [*Ladri di Biciclette*] provides us with certain socially determined representations of post-war Italy (unemployment, alienation, housing conditions, the Church, etc.), but they are divorced from any real conditions to which these representations might refer through the workings of ideology. Elements of the historically 'real' do enter the text, but they are displaced and become, as ideology, present as determined and distorted by their very absences. [...] In *Bicycle Thieves* (and in much of the neo-realist canon), ideology present itself to the text as "Life," rather than as a systems of concepts. [...] The contradictions show but are not resolved within the text, so no perspective for struggle is offered (2-4).

I personally do not view the fact that contradictions are not resolved through the working of ideology as a shortcoming of these films, but actually as an index of their uncompromising realism.

society. In both cinematic forms the realist perspective is, generally speaking, that the institutions have allowed the arising of obstacles that one single man/woman simply *cannot* overcome. These institutions are primarily Fascism in the case of the neorealist films and their Resistance and post-war unemployment settings and primarily the reinstatement of Fascist forms of power after the war in the case of comedy Italian style and the Economic Miracle settings.⁶⁷ As Giacovelli noted, the clash between the individual and society is a recurring narrative in comedy Italian style:

At the foundation of the comedy Italian style genre is, as previously noted, the clash between individual and society. [...] This clash between individual and society, between the individual and the community, is always evident in these comedies, very often even in the way in which the images of the films are set up, and is carried on from start to finish. [...] Here are the two possible resolutions [*of such a clash*]: 1) the individual is absorbed by society, in other words he adapts to it, he integrates in it and we thus have the *comedies of integration*; 2) the individual manages to resist the impositions and the pressures of society, he thus saves himself, does not integrate and we therefore have the *comedies of non-integration* (*Commedia all'Italiana* 145).

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The “*comedies of non-integration*” are narratives in which the protagonist resists change, rather than embracing it, and does not adapt to the social context. The “*comedies of integration*” are narratives in which the protagonist does adapt, but more than recounting an awareness and a change on his/her part, they simply document a surrendering, like Adriana’s suicide in *Io La Conoscevo Bene* or

⁶⁷ I will expand the discourse concerning the continuity between neorealism and comedy Italian style in respect to the representation of past and present Italy in Chapters Three and Four.

⁶⁸ “Alla base della commedia all’italiana, come abbiamo visto, sta il contrasto fra individuo e società. [...] Il contrasto fra individuo e società, fra *solo* e *tutti*, è sempre evidente in queste commedie, spesso addirittura a livello di costruzione delle immagini, e si protrae perlopiù dall’inizio alla fine. [...] Ecco dunque due soluzioni possibili: 1) l’individuo viene inghiottito dalla società, ossia vi si adatta, vi si integra, e abbiamo allora le *commedie dell’integrazione*; 2) l’individuo riesce a sfuggire alle imposizioni e ai condizionamenti della società, dunque si salva, non si integra, e abbiamo le *commedie della non integrazione*.”

Roberto's death in *Il Sorpasso*. Thus, the writers express their negative opinion of the society in which they live in realist fashion without projecting an instrumental resolution. This point of view is not necessarily pessimistic, because a radical change in the institutions could improve the situation, but does express the fact that one man *cannot* alter the situation. However, a conventionally structured narrative would offer some sort of closure, a resolution that the filmmakers of comedy Italian style, like their neorealist predecessors, do not see at hand.

Returning to Comencini's statement, the openness of non-conventional narrative strategies determines that, just like neorealist films, comedies Italian style tend not to "*tell a story*" in canonical terms, which would imply a resolution both to reward audience expectations and to fulfil the filmmakers eventual propagandistic effort, but to "*illustrate a (social) situation*" instead.

Tragical-ironic twists: unveiling the paradox as the intent of Italy's social realism

How does this mutual unconventional deployment of narrative strategies reduce distance between drama and comedy, which neorealism introduced and comedy Italian style turned into its defining characteristic? The privileging of *eventuality* over *necessity* allowed the authors of both cinematic forms to insert dramatic events into a comedic context and vice versa without radically changing the overall tone of the story. If *Il Sorpasso* had a conventional narrative structure, Roberto's death would have taken place earlier in the film and we would witness Bruno's transformation into a responsible man. However, his maturing through a trauma caused by the car accident would undermine the overall comedic tone of the film because we would be forced to participate in the character's painful realisation.

Both neorealism and comedy Italian style are by and large concerned with ordinary stories set in everyday life. However, these narratives usually present an *extraordinary* twist. It is not necessarily an extraordinary event because of its magnitude or its impact on the world represented on the screen, nor because it is unexpected, but it is extraordinary for its *tragically ironic significance* in the context

of the narrative.⁶⁹ Putting aside the aesthetic implications of the film, is it not tragically ironic that Antonio Ricci, the protagonist of De Sica and Zavattini's *Ladri di Biciclette*, is caught at his first attempt of stealing a bicycle, when his obsessive search for his stolen bicycle has been so unfruitful? In the same way, it is tragically ironic that the ultimate decision of Roberto in *Il Sorpasso* to 'embrace life' coincides with his death in the car accident. The new life he has embraced only lasts a couple of minutes.

Tragically ironic twists abound in neorealist films, as they do in comedies Italian style.⁷⁰ Even the episode of Aldo Fabrizi's frying pan in *Roma Città Aperta*, which is farcically comedic, originates from a tragically ironic circumstance as the partisans, who have been so careful about hiding from the Nazis and concealing their actions, risk being executed not because of their own weapons, but because of weapons home-made by the children who live in Pina/Anna Magnani's building. The endings of the Sicilian episode in *Paisà* and Mario Monicelli's *La Grande Guerra* (1959) clearly show the continuity between neorealism and comedy Italian style in their use of the tragically ironic signification of the narrative twists.⁷¹ In *Paisà* Carmela, a Sicilian girl, is found by the Americans who have just landed on the island. She is left with a soldier as the rest of the troop goes on a patrol. Both she and the American soldier left with her are killed by the Germans. However, coming back

⁶⁹ Aldo Viganò has pointed out that in comedy Italian style "humour is not simply finding its expression in the realism of the settings, but is proposed as an actual synthesis of reality" ("in the original: "la comicità non si limita a trovare una sponda espressiva nel realismo delle ambientazioni, ma tende a proporsi come una sintesi della realtà stessa") (*Il Regista Che Non Volle Farsi Autore* 78). This is a good indicator of neorealism's role in informing comedy Italian style if we specify that such humour, already present in post-war neorealism, is a tragically ironic one that explores the paradoxical aspects of reality.

⁷⁰ The tragic-ironic twist in *Io La Conoscevo Bene* is represented by the final scene, in which all of the characters that have briefly met Adriana run into her dead body and declare that they "knew her so well". In fact, if they had bothered to get to know her well, she might have not killed herself. In *Amici Miei* the tragic-ironic twist is represented by the fact that the five friends have always embraced pranking as a way of life to the point that no one can tell if Perozzi is actually dying or if he is just pretending to.

⁷¹ Which reminds us of how Age emphasises the fact that endings should be unpredictable in his screenwriting manual.

from their patrol the rest of the American troop cannot see her corpse and find only the corpse of their comrade. The tragic irony is given by the fact that the soldiers unjustly assume that she has betrayed them and revealed their position to the Germans. Similarly at the end of *La Grande Guerra*, Giovanni Busacca and Oreste Jacovacci, the two cowardly soldiers played by Vittorio Gassman and Alberto Sordi, are executed by the enemy for not revealing the position of a strategic boat bridge. When the Italian troops surprise the enemies by using the boat bridge, they do not see Busacca and Jacovacci's dead bodies and a comment reveals that they assume the two have ran away or found some excuse in order not to participate into the fight.⁷²

Even though *La Grande Guerra* is one of the few examples of conventional redemptive narratives in comedy Italian style, because the two cowardly soldiers do change, the tragically ironic twist represents the continuity with neorealism by openly referring to the narrative of a neorealist film.⁷³ However, usually it is the refusal of conventional antagonistic narratives that allows the tragically ironic twists. If the protagonists were to learn from these extraordinary situations, they would give up the tasks that determine the overall comedic tone of the film. For example, if the group of thieves in *I Soliti Ignoti* was to learn from Cosimo's death, they would not keep pursuing his plan of robbing a pawnshop. The gag of them puncturing the wrong wall once they are inside the next door apartment and ultimately enjoying

⁷² According to Lino Micciché this redemptive ending was devised in response to the pressures that the pre-emptive criticising on the part of the media had exercised during the making of the film. (*Mario Monicelli: La Commedia e Oltre* xiv). The director of the film, Mario Monicelli, stated that, on the contrary, because of such pressures the producers "tried to stop me from having the two protagonists die" (in Toffetti 39).

⁷³ The fact that even these exceptions to the norm are in continuity with neorealism will be addressed more specifically in Chapter Three. I shall point out here, however, that Mariapia Comand conceives the finale of *La Grande Guerra* differently than I do: she believes Busacca reacts simply out of pride and she argues that Jacovacci's gesture, his choice of not revealing the positioning of the boat bridge "is not motivated by any narrative trajectory of the character (which remains a coward), but simply by the fear of being executed in any case" (*Commedia* 67). (In the original: "un gesto che non è motivato da nessuna parabola del personaggio (che era e resta un vigliacco), quanto piuttosto dalla paura di finire fucilato in ogni caso.") Even though this reading would serve my argument on the continuity between neorealism and comedy Italian style in the subversion of the principle of causality of classical mainstream cinema, I believe that there is redemption in this scene and that *La Grande Guerra* constitutes an exception to the main trend of the genre.

pasta and beans instead of the jewels they were expecting to get their hands on, would never arise. It is the refusal of dramatic necessity and conventional narrative trajectories that allowed the authors of both neorealist films and those of comedies Italian style to insert these tragically ironic circumstances and reduce the distance between drama and comedy, because in conventional antagonistic narratives these extraordinary events would definitely overturn the overall tone of the films.

At the same time, the openness in the realist narrative frames pursued in both forms imply an engaged but not propagandistic discourse about the institutions, which are more or less openly referred to, and have allowed for these extraordinary circumstances to take place in the narratives. Again, it is appropriate to specify that these extraordinary circumstances are not *extraordinary* because of the magnitude or the impact of the event itself, but rather for the events' tragically ironic significance. The theft of a bicycle or a deadly car accident on the Via Aurelia were quite ordinary events in Italy at the time of the making of *Ladri di Biciclette* and *Il Sorpasso*. The tragically ironic twists make them extraordinary and, going back to the notion of *intent* of representing the real, or *ethics*, that some critics have identified as a constant in the neorealist mode of production, worthy of being represented in front of an audience. This desire of finding the *extraordinary* in everyday life is the result of Zavattini's contribution to the innovations carried out by neorealism, as Medici notes:

Zavattini himself aimed at the de-structuring of classic narrative in his programmatic statements and his practice of neorealist screenwriter: he first and foremost opposed the cinematic tradition which progressively departed from the real world in the belief of making it more interesting with the creation of out of the ordinary plots; reality, instead, is enormously rich if one knows how to look at it. His work on narrative structures comes from this [*realisation*] (15).⁷⁴

⁷⁴ “Alla destrutturazione del racconto classico mira lo stesso Zavattini nelle sue istanze poetiche e nella sua pratica di sceneggiatore neorealista: egli innanzitutto contesta quella tradizione cinematografica che si era allontanata dal mondo reale credendo di renderlo più interessante con la creazione di trame straordinarie; la realtà, invece, è enormemente ricca se si sa guardarla. Ne discende un lavoro sulle strutture narrative.”

While Zavattini articulated his theorisations of neorealism close to the end of the canonical phase of this mode of production, his interest for non-conventional narratives highlighting the role that chance plays in everyday life and his research for inspiration in the ordinary are already documented in a letter as early as 1942, in which he imagines to make a whole feature length film about an altercation between two strangers who accidentally bump into each other ending with a gun shot.⁷⁵ With the evolution of dramatic neorealism into the comedy Italian style comedic genre, this research of *extraordinary* events in ordinary everyday life continues and intensifies. The frequent production of episode films in the context of comedy Italian style, other than satisfying economical profits for the producers and the industry, mirrors this intensification. Films such as Dino Risi's *I Mostri* (1963) can be considered as entertaining collections of instances of tragic irony, in which the narrative of each episode consists only of such twists.⁷⁶ However, it was the innovative refusal of conventional dramatic constructions in the neorealist narratives that first allowed this reduction of the distance between drama and comedy. Being informed by neorealist practices, comedies Italian style maintained this characteristic and transplanted it in an incredibly popular form through the use of a more immediate '*decoupage*', whereas other post-neorealist comedic forms such as pink neorealism failed to do so. Neorealism's urge to represent Italy's social reality, something that Fascism suppressed, progressively determined the intent of highlighting the paradoxes at the heart of such reality. This tendency increased as the

⁷⁵ His articulation of the concept of "*enquiry film*", '*Che Cos'è il Film Lampo?*', dates back to 1952 (*Opere* 708-713), only two years before the release of Fellini's *La Strada*, which is considered to end the original neorealist canon. Therefore, Zavattini's theories of neorealism should not be considered programmatic nor representative of a cohesive cinematic 'movement'. In this respect, are not discussed at length in my analysis of comedy Italian style's relationship to neorealism, which is focused on the continuity between the two forms at the level of film *practice* and aims to subvert the critical tendency of 'projecting' onto neorealism programmatic or ideological notions, which ultimately contributed to the underestimation of comedy Italian style as heir to the post-war mode of production.

⁷⁶ The first episode in *I Mostri* shows a father, played by Ugo Tognazzi, constantly reminding his son that "il mondo è dei furbi", the world belongs to those who can outsmart others. He preaches the necessity of egoism and cynicism to be successful in modern society. The tragically ironic twist is represented by a newspaper headline telling us that years later the son killed the father to inherit his fortune.

sympathetical point of view towards depiction of the lower classes in the post-war period was substituted by a satirical depiction of the middle classes in the Economic Miracle. Thus comedy Italian style was informed by the same *intent* that informed neorealism, but pursued it through an aesthetic that guaranteed immediacy of meaning and, therefore, a larger public. Despite this disparity in the ‘decoupage’ the narrative similarities between neorealism and comedy Italian style attest the affinity between the two, the later being a more sellable evolution of the former. Director Dino Risi, for instance, highlighted the popular potential of such practice by stating that for him “the comedic is a way to translate tragedy in a spectacle without boring the public” (in Viganò, *Un ‘Mostruoso’ Vitalismo* 1).⁷⁷

In conclusion, the presence of dramatic and comedic elements mixed together can be noted in both neorealist films and comedy Italian style. This similarity suggests that the neorealist innovations regarding narrative strategies continued in comedy Italian style. Being an entertainment genre, comedy Italian style mostly embraced the syntactical structural innovations, but not the syntactical ones on the level of the ‘*decoupage*’. The fact that the conditions in which both neorealist and comedy Italian style plots were conceived remained the same and the frequent partnerships involving writers of the first cinematic form and writers of the latter guaranteed the continuity in these innovative structural practices. The structure of most comedies Italian style mirror neorealist narratives in their loosening of the links between situations and actions, which are often still present but, in contrast with other cinematic genres, not always necessarily in place. The subsequent privileging of *eventuality* over *necessity* as a principle for narrative construction allowed the filmmakers of both cinematic forms to insert dramatic episodes in comedic contexts and vice versa, to an extent that would not be present in cinematic genres which obey the expectations we have developed from classic storytelling conventions. This versatility and openness allowed neorealist and comedy Italian style writers to engage with Italian social reality, Italian institutions and the Italian mentality without projecting a propagandistic point of view. The openness of non conventional narratives was instrumental in expressing these points of view, which find their

⁷⁷ “Per me, il comico non è che un modo di tradurre la tragedia in spettacolo senza annoiare il pubblico.”

decisive articulations in the tragically ironic twists. Among many other innovations, neorealism introduced these twists and in the course of its evolution into comedy Italian style they became the defining characteristic of the genre. The clear continuity between neorealism and comedy Italian style is proved by this *inheritance*: the latter's replication of the subversion of classical narrative principles operated by neorealism, one of the fundamental characteristic of this mode of production that defined its uniqueness.

Chapter Two: Alberto Sordi and the Stardom of Comedy Italian Style

*“You deserve Alberto Sordi!”*¹

– Michele Apicella/Nanni Moretti enraged
with an average Italian in *Ecce Bombo* (1978).

Neorealism with a satirical outlook: Alberto Sordi’s perception of his comedic practice

In this chapter I will discuss the star system identified with comedy Italian style, since the presence of popular comedians in the films of this genre has often been a major factor in its critical underestimation. Most importantly, the entertainment that the comedy Italian style stars provided has been an obstacle to recognising the genre’s direct evolution from the Italian neorealist mode of production. As Peter Bondanella noted, “in sharp contrast to neorealism [*my emphasis*], which often employed non-professional actors, comedy Italian style depended on a large group of unusually talented comic actors and actresses” (*A History* 180). I intend to prove that the formation of the star system identified with comedy Italian style was a result of the neorealist practice and not in conflict with it. In order to analyse the characteristics of the star system identified with the genre and the process of its formation, I will focus on the figure and career of the popular Roman comedian Alberto Sordi (1920-2003).²

Sordi was one of the stars primarily identified with this genre along with Vittorio Gassman, Ugo Tognazzi and Nino Manfredi.³ Furthermore, he started

¹ “Te lo meriti Alberto Sordi!”

² I refer the reader to the footnotes to this Chapter for examples from the other performers’ careers that support my argument.

³ Marcello Mastroianni and Monica Vitti also played a decisive role in the popularity of the genre. However, their careers were also characterised by their frequent involvement in the art films by respectively Federico Fellini and Michelangelo Antonioni. Female stars such as Stefania Sandrelli and Catherine Spaak were also cast in numerous comedies Italian style and, I believe, their importance in

directing in 1966 with *Fumo di Londra* and went on to direct over fifteen feature length comedies as well as a number of short films that were distributed in various episode films.⁴ Sordi's massive popularity with the Italian audience, his presence in over a hundred films and his role in establishing the characteristics of the comedy Italian style stardom granted him an importance in the context of the genre that surpassed the other stars. As comedy Italian style historian Enrico Giacovelli notes,

the others *were involved* in comedy Italian style, he *was* comedy Italian style. His personal history is the very history of the genre, a fundamental document to understand Italian society and history in the 20th century. Without Gassman comedy Italian style would have been less lively, without Manfredi less passionate, without Tognazzi less malicious. But without him it would have probably never existed (*Commedia all'Italiana* 263-264).⁵

Similarly, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, James Hay and Gianni Volpi related a shift in Italian comedy to Sordi, writing that

the rustic style of *Pane, Amore e Fantasia* (and its sequel) was complemented, and eventually replaced, by a more incisive type of urban humour, typified by Alberto Sordi's versatile characterisation of the 'average Italian' in the changing society of the 1950s economic boom (38).

As Giacovelli and Nowell-Smith and his contributors state and as I will show in this chapter, Sordi's involvement was essential for the very existence of the genre, as he established the type, that of the 'average Italian', which more or less all of the

the popularity of the genre is often underestimated. However, Sordi, Gassman, Tognazzi and Manfredi are the four performers canonically cited as the major stars of comedy Italian style.

⁴ Since I intend to discuss the genre's star system and not the issue of authorship, I will here primarily acknowledge Sordi's career as an actor and not his accomplishments as director. However, his contribution behind the camera was more significant than that of the other comedy Italian style stars, who also eventually directed some of the films in which they performed.

⁵ "Gli altri hanno *fatto* la commedia all'italiana; lui è *stato* la commedia all'italiana. La sua storia è la storia stessa del genere, un documento fondamentale per capire la storia e la società italiana del ventesimo secolo. Senza Gassman la commedia all'italiana sarebbe stata più smorta, senza Manfredi più distaccata, senza Tognazzi meno maliziosa. Ma senza di lui probabilmente non sarebbe esistita."

other performers were to exploit.⁶ Most importantly, Sordi himself pointed out that his representation of Italian society in the comedies Italian style of the late 1950s and onwards was in continuity with the Italian neorealist practice of the immediate post-war years:

Our aim was that of resuming neorealism with a satirical outlook. De Sica and Rossellini's films [*of the post-war period*] had told of a poor Italy struggling for survival. After some years, we gathered their heritage to recount, instead, the middle class Italy that was changing, that wanted to make it, to succeed, and we did it our way: being inspired by reality, just like the neorealist maestros, but deforming it by isolating its negative aspects, because only that which has a negative connotation is comedic (in Giacobelli, *Italiano a Roma* 110).⁷

Sordi, therefore, regarded his satirical depiction of Italian society at the time of the Economic Miracle as an heir to the original Italian neorealism of Rossellini and De Sica. Furthermore, he identified this heritage as the element that distinguished comedy Italian style from other forms of Italian comedic films:⁸

⁶ Regarding the notion of social type in the context of stardom Richard Dyer writes that "it is a shared, recognisable, easily grasped image of how people are in society. [...] The star both fulfils/incarnates the type and, by virtue of her/his idiosyncracies, individuates it" (*Stars* 47).

⁷ "Il nostro scopo era quello di riprendere il neorealismo a sfondo satirico. I film di De Sica e Rossellini raccontavano l'Italia povera che lottava per la sopravvivenza; noi, a distanza di qualche anno, raccogliemmo la loro eredità per raccontare però l'Italia borghese che cambiava, che voleva arrivare, che cercava di contare, e lo facemmo alla nostra maniera: ispirandoci sì alla realtà, come i maestri del neorealismo, ma deformandola a scopo satirico e isolandone gli aspetti negativi, perché soltanto il negativo è comico."

⁸ In her study of Italian stardom Marcia Landy has given a different interpretation of Sordi's attitude towards the genre, quoting a Jean Gili interview published on the French film journal *Positif* in May 2003:

Sordi regarded his comedy not as *commedia all'italiana* but as a non dramatic form of neorealism, like the one of De Sica and Rossellini, but basically ironic. 'I intend to present the defects of Italians that make the audiences laugh'. Despite Sordi's disavowal of his form of comedy as *commedia all'italiana*, his film persona was often identified with character types (*Stardom* 146).

Comedy Italian style is a contemporary expression. When I started working it was not called this way. There was the absolutely serious film or the purely comedic one, that of Tognazzi and Vianello, of Macario...⁹ I wanted to make neorealist cinema with a comedic tone, not purely comedic cinema. Nobody thought that later it [*the kind of cinema I wanted to make*] would have been called comedy Italian style (in Pintus and Biarese 191-192).¹⁰

Thus, in line with this study's central argument, Sordi perceived comedy Italian style as an evolution of neorealist practice in a comedic direction. In fact, he perceived his approach to comedy closer to neorealism rather than to the other forms of Italian comedic cinema that preceded him. In his words, his primary intention was to rejuvenate the neorealist practice by steering it in a satirical direction, not to pursue the slapstick comedy or farce that popular entertainers such as Totò and Macario pursued in the immediate post-war years (1946-1954). The farces were not directly dependent on neorealism in their use of stars and the iconography associated with them, even though they became largely successful in the post-war period. They were well established before the release of *Roma Città Aperta*, the 1945 Rossellini film that initiated neorealist practice. For example, the debut of the Neapolitan comedian Totò, the most important performer associated with the farces, dates back to 1937 in the film *Fermo Con Le Mani* (directed by Gero Zambuto). Totò's star image was tightly bound to his slapstick humor and non-realistic comedy, as Livi points out:

Comedic cinema, after all, was clearly separated from the serious one because it was bound to other very old rules: the protagonist had to provoke

Other interviews show no disavowal of comedy Italian style by Sordi and the following quotation I offer clarifies that the actor did not see neorealism and comedy Italian style in opposition to each other, but rather as complementary.

⁹ Here Sordi is not referring to the comedies Italian style featuring Tognazzi, but rather to the comedic films in which he was cast before *Il Federale* (1960), which were farces featuring him next to Raimondo Vianello to exploit the popularity of their TV sketch-comedy programme *Un, Due, Tre*, aired on the then single RAI TV channel on prime-night between 1954 and 1959.

¹⁰ "Commedia all'italiana è una definizione odierna. Quando cominciai a lavorare, non si chiamava così. Esisteva il film assolutamente serio o del tutto comico, quello di Tognazzi e Vianello, di Macario... Io volevo fare il cinema neorealistico con una notazione comica, non il film comico. Nessuno pensava, poi, che [*il cinema che volevo fare*] si sarebbe chiamato commedia all'italiana."

laughter mostly because of his unusual and funnily characterised face (Fernandel's big mouth, Totò's asymmetrical chin, Macario's egg-shaped head [*would be examples of this*]); the plots [*of comedic films*] did not mirror reality, but were rather based on absurd situations which were dilated and repeated to provoke hilarity; the dialogue was also unrealistic, filled as it was with dirty allusions or facetious quips of the joke and *pochade* type. The comedic hero, most often, did not resemble the average man, but rather was liked and admired for his unique abilities (95).¹¹

Between slapstick and satire: Sordi's conflicting early years

Thus, Sordi's involvement in a large number of farces in the years between 1954 and 1957 seemingly disproves his claim of pursuing neorealism in a satirical context.¹² I will show that his roles in this slapstick and therefore less realistic form of comedy were instrumental to the audience's acceptance of his realistic satire of Italian society during the period of the Economic Miracle and onwards. Despite his lifelong ambition to become a film star, Sordi did not gain popularity with Italian audiences at first. In the immediate post-war period, aside from very few appearances in minor

¹¹ "Il cinema comico, d'altro canto, si distingueva nettamente da quello serio perchè era basato su altre vecchissime regole: il protagonista doveva suscitare il riso soprattutto per la sua faccia strana, buffamente caratterizzata (la bocconca di Fernandel, il mento storto di Totò, il viso a uovo di Macario [*ne sono esempi*]); la trama [*dei film comici*] non rispecchiava la realtà, ma era basata su situazioni assurde, dilatate e insistite fino a far scoppiare l'ilarità; anche il dialogo era irrealistico, intessuto com'era di battute scabrose o facete sul tipo della barzelletta o della *pochade*. L'eroe comico, per di più, non assomigliava all'uomo medio, ma anzi piaceva e suscitava ammirazione proprio per le sue capacità diversissime."

¹² The comedic cinema of the farces reached the heights of its popularity in the period immediately after the release of the neorealist films of De Sica and Rossellini. However, as Livi's quotation shows, this type of comedy followed entertaining strategies that were radically in opposition to the neorealist approach. Totò starred in over a hundred farces. Over the course of his career, he was also eventually deployed in some comedies that were reminiscent of neorealism for their post-war unemployment setting. This series, however, defined by Giacovelli as "*Totò neorealista*" (*Commedia all'Italiana* 95) had a very limited impact in the comedian's stardom, since it counted only four films: *Totò Cerca Casa*, *Totò e i Re di Roma* and *Guardie e Ladri* (co-directed by Steno and Mario Monicelli between 1949 and 1951) and *Totò e Carolina* (directed by Mario Monicelli in 1955). As I have pointed out in the Introduction, such films share semantic traits with comedy Italian style, but not syntactic ones with the exception of *Guardie e Ladri*, which can be considered a comedy Italian style *ante-litteram*.

roles,¹³ his contribution to the film industry at this stage was mainly dubbing.¹⁴ At the same time he toured Italy on stage in a number of “*avanspettacolo*” productions. “*Avanspettacolo*” can be considered as a thread that links the stardom of early neorealism with the stardom of both the farces and of comedy Italian style, having produced performers that contributed to the success of all these forms such as Aldo Fabrizi and Anna Magnani in the case of Rossellini’s neorealist film *Roma Città Aperta*, the farces star Totò and, in the case of comedy Italian style, Ugo Tognazzi and obviously Alberto Sordi.

Whereas Totò’s passage from the stage to the screen resulted in a large number of farces characterised by loose narratives essentially to replicate his slapstick gags on film, Sordi’s first role as protagonist confirms his intention of devising a form of satirical neorealism, although nobody suspected such a thing could exist at the time of its release. In 1951 he formed a production company with the neorealist duo Vittorio De Sica and Cesare Zavattini. The result of this collaboration was *Mamma Mia Che Impression!*, a film that featured Sordi as a stubborn member of the Christian Democrat intransigent boy-scout group *Azione Cattolica*.¹⁵ The film flopped, partly because Sordi relied too heavily on the talkativeness of a character that was originally created for his radio broadcast variety programme, partly because – according to Goffredo Fofi (*Sordi 72*) – the audience was not yet ready for its cynicism. This collaboration between Sordi and neorealist filmmakers at such an early stage, one year earlier than De Sica and Zavattini’s neorealist classic *Umberto D.* (1952, directed by De Sica), and the satire that this collaboration produced, reveal that the actor’s intention of steering neorealism in a satirical direction preceded his involvement in the farces. Sordi’s second attempt at realism, this time in Federico Fellini’s debut film *Lo Sceicco Bianco*, was also unsuccessful. As I have pointed out

¹³ Sordi played a black market exploiter in Renato Castellani’s 1948 film *Sotto il Sole di Roma*, a film that was later identified as one of the first examples of pink neorealism with an urban setting.

¹⁴ Sordi dubbed one of the non-professional actors in Vittorio De Sica’s 1948 neorealist film *Ladri di Biciclette*. He also dubbed Marcello Mastroianni in the 1950 Luciano Emmer pink neorealist episode film *Domenica d'Agosto*. His most successful dubbing experience was being selected as the Italian voice for Oliver Hardy.

¹⁵ Roberto Savarese is credited as the director of *Mamma Mia che Impressione*, but Sordi claimed that in fact De Sica directed every scene of the film (in Fofi, *Sordi 78-83*).

in the Introduction, this film, as well as Fellini's subsequent one, is sometimes considered a comedy Italian style *ante-litteram* because it stars Sordi and avoids farcical humour.¹⁶

Sordi struggled to gain popularity as a leading comedian until 1954 when he was cast in Federico Fellini's acclaimed second feature *I Vitelloni* and in the episode film *Un Giorno in Pretura* (directed by Steno) as Nando Mericoni, a Roman youngster obsessed with the myth of America. With this character Sordi finally achieved the mass success he sought and in the same year the feature length film *Un Americano a Roma* (also directed by Steno) was produced to exploit the character's popularity.¹⁷ As the film's narrator states, this film remains essentially a farce.

¹⁶ The notion of these two films being read as either neorealist if one puts more emphasis on Fellini or as comedies Italian style if one perceives them in light of Sordi's presence raises the question of the relationship between stardom and authorship, which I shall briefly discuss. Richard Dyer wrote on the subject that: "Star images and performance are also used by other authors. [...] This notion of the star and the director mutually bringing something out in each other informs much auteurist criticism. This approach does usually privilege the director over the star in their collaborative interaction" (*Stars* 155). Whether one subscribes to an auteurist point of view and conceives the actor as something similar to a musical instrument played by the director or, instead, privileges the stars' input by conceiving directors as technicians who record performances given by actors while interpreting a written script, it can be agreed that, no matter to what extent the actor is overwhelmed or manipulated by the indications of the directors, in interpreting or following such directions the performer is left with a set of choices to be consciously or subconsciously made in accordance to his/her personality, talents and judgement. Having clarified this, I will discuss a number of character traits as results of Sordi's stardom and of his performances, in virtue of King's notion that "the actor is a re-presenter of signs in that he or she activates or deactivates via impersonation those aspects of the general cultural markers that he or she bears as a private individual for character portrayal" (37). In this light, expressions used such as 'Sordi's character' or 'Sordi's approach', etc. should not be taken as statements of the Roman actor's supposed authorship over the director and the writers' creative inputs, but rather the discussion of the displaying in the context of a given film, character or phase of his career of a number of tendencies which consistently characterised his re-presentation of signs over the arc of his entire career.

¹⁷ This film is particularly significant, not only in light of what it meant in terms of Sordi's popularity, but also in light of the fact that it introduced traits peculiar to consumer society such as the myth of America and television in the arena of the Italian comedic cinema, as David Forgacs notes:

However it is a farce reminiscent to some extent of neorealist themes: eight years after Rossellini's *Paisà* (1946), Sordi's *Nando Mericoni* shows how the lack of understanding between Italians and Americans, one of the main themes in Rossellini's neorealist film, was not yet resolved in the mid 1950s.¹⁸ Despite the Marshall plan and the intense political and economical alliance between liberated Italy and the U.S. at the time, Nando's perception of Americanism is distorted by the heroic myths promoted by Hollywood. He is incapable of understanding the Americans visiting Rome or of relating to them, since in real life they never meet his cinema-informed expectations. Neorealism previously challenged the Classic Hollywood formula through its means of expression. *Un Americano a Roma* satirically ridiculed the persistence of the American film clichés in the post-neorealist cinematic landscape.

In fact the film did not only represent a crucial step in the affirmation of Sordi's own stardom, but also reflected a more widespread discourse on the Italian conception of stardom altogether, the early 1950s being the period in which Italian stars were reducing the distance from their American counterparts, as noted by Réka Buckley in her articulation of the role of glamour in the notion of female stardom:

In the 1930s, glamour was still an unfamiliar concept in Italy. Although Hollywood films were widely shown, political and economic conditions meant that the stars were aloof, remote figures who rarely provoked widespread interest. The Italian stars of the time were generally perceived as

It is actually quite hard to determine exactly when the 'consumer society' started to emerge in Italy. Already in a film of 1954, *Un Americano a Roma*, a screwball satire on Americanization directed by Steno [...], one has a representation of something resembling it as well as of the new phenomenon of the 'teenager' (Forgacs, *Cultural Consumption* 275).

However, the introduction of some of the semantic traits typical of proper comedy Italian style cannot obviate the fact that the film, on a syntactic level, remains a farce.

¹⁸ There is an explicit reference to Rossellini in the film, as Nando interrupts the shooting of a television interview of a famous Italian director named Verdolini (played by Ignazio Leone), who is married to a Swedish Hollywood star named Astrid (played by a very young Ursula Andress). This explicit reference to neorealism has surprisingly been rarely mentioned in the existing criticism of the film.

inferior copies of Hollywood stars. This situation changed in the immediate post-war period when Italians were encouraged to believe that America was a model society whose values and techniques could and should be adopted (70).

In a way, *Un Americano a Roma* was offering a new type of Italian comedic film star while ridiculing the process of Americanisation by which Italian stars were now invested with new attributes by reminding the audience that such attributes did not really belong to them at all.

The negative and the comedic: Sordi's 'average Italian' type and the establishment of an unsettling relation to the star in a comedic context

Most importantly, the deployment of Sordi's talents in a farce, a comedic form that the audience was familiar with, allowed the actor to establish negative attributes, the innovative trait of his star persona, without alienating the public. The infantilism, opportunism, cowardliness and meanness of the comedic protagonist were the distinctive innovations that Sordi brought to Italian comedy and they were only accepted after his success in *Un Giorno in Pretura* and *Un Americano a Roma*. Once they were transposed from the *farse* to a realist setting, these characteristics defined the stardom of the comedy Italian style performers, as director Mario Monicelli noted:

The new comedians [*of the comedy Italian style genre*] subvert this condition, which now becomes aggressive. It is now their overwhelming of others that provokes laughter. The inadequacy [*of the characters*] is not paired with bad luck, but rather with cowardly behaviour, meanness and, at times, simply with stupidity. Arrogant with the weak and deferential with the powerful, the new figure of the comedian surprises the audience, does not allow it to be naive anymore. [...] In this respect, Sordi was so great in capturing the soul of Italians. [...] Sordi unveiled their hidden inner abjectness, hypocrisy, self involvement, to the point of embodying unlikeable, if not odious characters. It was thus very hard for him to be accepted by

the public [*at first*]. Later, it became normal that the protagonist of *Il Sorpasso* would be an unlikeable Gassman [*character*]. Totò, instead, could not have been despicable. He was a *maschera* (in Mondadori 24-25).¹⁹

Thus, the “cattiveria”, the ‘*meanness*’ of Sordi’s negative type revolutionised the landscape of Italian film comedy and created a gap with, on one side, the old school of Totò, Fabrizi and Macario and, on the other, the new approach devised by Sordi that eventually other performers like Vittorio Gassman benefitted from.²⁰

Furthermore Sordi was the first farce performer not to rely on an immediately laughable physical appearance. He looked athletic and therefore relied on the caricature of mannerisms he observed in the population of Trastevere he knew so well, more than on physical gags.

¹⁹ “I nuovi comici ribaltano la condizione, che spesso diventa aggressiva. Adesso è la sopraffazione a suscitare la risata. L’inefficienza non è più accompagnata dalla sfortuna, ma si abbina alla viltà, alla turpitudine talvolta, o soltanto alla stupidità. Arrogante con i deboli e deferente con i potenti, la nuova figura del comico spiazzava lo spettatore e non gli permette più di essere ingenuo. [...] In questo senso Sordi fu grandissimo nel cogliere l’anima dell’italiano. [...] Sordi svelò il suo retroscena di grettezza, ipocrisia, egoismo, fino a mettere in scena personaggi antipatici se non proprio odiosi. E infatti fu durissima farsi accettare dal pubblico. Poi divenne normale che il protagonista del *Sorpasso* fosse un Gassman antipaticissimo. Totò invece non poteva essere antipatico. Lui era una maschera.” As I said, I do not intend to discuss here the notion of Sordi as ‘author’. However, I should point out for the benefit of the reader that, in another statement concerning Sordi’s innovative type of the ‘average Italian’, Mario Monicelli has emphasised that “*he* invented this, not his directors” and that for this reason Sordi is “the greatest actor born in the century of the cinema” (in Toffetti 35).

²⁰ As previously noted, Mario Monicelli’s *I Soliti Ignoti* (1958) has been pointed out by Italian film historians such as Enrico Giacovelli and Gian Piero Brunetta as the film that initiated comedy Italian style, for a number of innovations. As regards to stardom, the film’s merit is to have revealed Vittorio Gassman’s comedic potential and thus offered Sordi competition in the depiction of the defects of the average Italian. This friendly rivalry was crucial to the success of the genre and was documented in an early 1960s television sketch within an Indro Montanelli programme. In the sketch, Sordi is fighting with producer Dino De Laurentis because he has been asked to dance in a film. He does not want to appear as “a buffoon anymore”, he says. As soon as he walks out of the stage-replica of De Laurentis’ office, he hears the producer calling Vittorio Gassman on the phone to replace him. Sordi swings back in, displaying one of his famous parodies of American-imported dance routines.

With his revolutionary negative type of the middle-class Italian established in the mid 1950s, Sordi renovated the Italian comedic film production to the point that he was able to claim that the comedy Italian style genre was born because he could not play all the roles he was offered and therefore the ‘Sordi-film’ developed in a formula suitable for other performers:

It was actually the success of my first films to initiate the wave [*of comedy Italian style*]: in 1954 alone I was in 11 [*films*] and everybody wanted to hire me. In a short while I made roughly 200 films. I had so many offers that it was physically impossible to accept them all. So often Manfredi and Tognazzi, who used to work in the purely comedic film with Vianello, were contacted [*to replace me*], very skilled actors who followed a style, an angle that was well fitted for the films which were offered (in Pintus and Biarese 191-192).²¹

Perhaps such claims made by an actor, especially an actor who sought fame as desperately as Sordi did, can be contextualised in a strategy of marketing one’s own star image. The number and quality of comedies Italian style originally written for Sordi and later assigned to different performers fully justifies his claim. However, because of misunderstandings, of prior engagements and most often because of his binding contract with Dino De Laurentis’ production company between 1960 and 1965, Sordi missed acting in *I Soliti Ignoti*, *Divorzio all’Italiana*, *Il Sorpasso*, *I Mostri* and *C’eravamo Tanto Amati*, but he was originally supposed to star in all of them and these films would have never been conceived if he had not imposed his negative type back in 1954.

Sordi’s type of the cynical ‘average Italian’ represented a landmark in Italian comedic stardom, introducing the audience to entertaining characters to whom

²¹ “Fu proprio il successo dei miei primi film a scatenare il boom: solo nel 1954 ne ho girati 11 e tutti sono venuti a offrirmi lavoro. In poco tempo, ho girato circa duecento film: avevo tante di quelle offerte che mi risultava materialmente impossibile soddisfarle tutte. Spesso sono stati contattati Manfredi e Tognazzi, che allora lavorava nel cinema comico con Vianello, attori bravissimi che seguivano nel cinema un taglio, uno stile che si adduceva bene ai film proposti.”

establishing a sense of relationship with was however problematic. Discussing the neorealist contribution to the emergence of a new type of stardom, Marcia Landy states:

In blurring lines between the everyday and the exceptional, the ceremonial and the banal, the real and the imaginary, and the physical and the mental, neorealism was instrumental in giving rise to a popular cinema where the spectator is invited to play a critical role and offered a different, even unsettling relation to the star (*Stardom* 128).

The “unsettling relation to the star” mentioned by Landy seems to reinforce the idea of a relationship between neorealism and Sordi’s comedy Italian style as regards stardom and also suggest that Sordi’s case did not represent an exception, but rather the norm. But were all post-neorealist Italian comedic forms affected by this renovated star image?

In the context of Italian comedy, actually, in the years immediately after the advent of the neorealist practice, stardom was still characterised by forms that preceded neorealism and were by and large not affected by its innovations. The farce performers relied heavily on the entertaining mechanisms of slapstick humour, which can be traced back to the very early years of the cinematic medium. Even though they adopted from neorealism a shift in terms of the class embodied by the stars from the aristocratic fantasy of the Fascist period to the “*popolana*”²² of the post-war context,²³ the sentimental comedies of pink neorealism encouraged the spectator to

²² Literally “peasant lower class woman”.

²³ As noted by Réka Buckley, who writes:

They [*Silvana Pampanini, Silvana Mangano, Lucia Bosè, Gina Lollobrigida*] often played young *popolana* (peasant-type) women. This was quite a contrast to the so-called ‘white telephone’ films of the Fascist period, where the actresses usually played bourgeois, or lower middle-class women. It was also different to the roles performed by women in neorealist cinema. Here, women often offered a picture of misery and a sense of hopelessness, as was the case with Clara Calamai in Luchino Visconti’s *Ossessione* [*Obsession*] (1943) and Anna Magnani in Roberto

hope for a happy-ending resolution of the plot the stars were entangled in, just as in the Classic Hollywood model and the bourgeois comedies of the Fascist era labelled “telefoni bianchi” in this respect.²⁴ It was only with Sordi’s depiction of the defects of the average Italian that the relationship between the audience and the star became an unsettling one also in the context of Italian comedic film production.

Representing on-screen the defects of the average Italian, Sordi established a relation of complicity with the popular audience. At the same time, however, the spectators were mortified by him or by the other comedy Italian style stars when they started copying his lesson of unveiling the audience’s worst habits with cynical precision. As Sordi became more and more popular in the second half of the 1950s, he was progressively able to afford the accentuation of his satire to the point of depicting social monstrosity.²⁵

Rossellini’s *Roma Città Aperta* [*Rome Open City*] (1945). The characters portrayed by the new actresses were women who projected a sense of hope for a new and more positive future for the post-war nation (270-271).

The hope and positivity projected by the pink neorealism stars in comparison to the signs produced by their post-war neorealism counterparts noted here by Buckley reflects the fact that, unlike the original neorealist films, such comedies used the stars as vehicles of conventionality.

²⁴ The casting of Vittorio De Sica in the role of the *Carabinieri* marshal protagonist of Comencini’s *Pane, Amore e Fantasia* (1953), the most famous example of pink neorealism, is an indicator of the influence that pre-neorealist comedies had on this comedic form, as Millicent Marcus pointed out in her analysis of the film:

De Sica’s presence in the film works to undermine Comencini’s realist aspirations in yet another way. When Zavattini articulated the neorealist prohibition against the casting of professionals [...] he did so not only because amateurs turn in a less contrived, more credible performance, but also because professional recitations are necessarily contaminated in the public mind by the memory of characters played by the same actors in the past. This is surely the case with Vittorio De Sica’s Carotenuto who is, in many ways, a middle-aged version of the young ladies’ man who graced so many of Mario Camerini’s 1930s sentimental comedies (*Light of Neorealism* 129).

²⁵ After the success of Dino Risi’s *I Mostri* (1963) the comedy Italian style stars started to be referred to as “*mostri*” for their depiction of the defects of Italians.

Strategies of audience (dis)orientation: Sordi in *Il Giudizio Universale*

Sordi's character in Vittorio De Sica's 1961 film *Il Giudizio Universale* is a clear cut example of the unsettling relationship that the Roman actor established with the audience. The film narrates a series of intertwined episodes set in Naples, as the city is taken over by chaos when a voice from the sky announces that the Last Judgement of humanity is set to take place on that day at 6 p.m. Sordi plays an employee of a child adoption service operating on the edge of legality. He is commissioned by wealthy American families to find in the slums of Naples bankrupt parents willing to give up one of their many children in exchange for compensation.

In his first scene Sordi's character publicly declares that he does not believe in the announcement of the judgement. He showcases his professionalism despite the exceptional circumstances by adopting formal Italian to highlight his detachment from the heartbroken families that surround him: "Ladies and Gentlemen, I will start by saying that as a principle I do not believe in this prank of the Last Judgement!"²⁶ -- he says with a matter of fact, almost military enunciation. As a father slaps his son who is crying at the prospect of leaving, Sordi introduces a Roman dialect expression: "No, no, no... Hey! No one gets hit here, for no reason whatsoever..."²⁷ The adoption of colloquial vernacular in order to stop the abuse temporarily bridges the gap between the public and the character, who is now apparently behaving reasonably and expressing himself like someone in the audience would. As soon as this process of complicity starts, however, Sordi reverts to his formal enunciation and unveils the reasons for the character's objection to violence: "...The kid was purchased healthy and I must deliver him in that condition."²⁸ As he finds out that one of the selected children is missing, the exploiter's true feelings for the unfortunate, uneducated Neapolitan families are revealed: "I understand that you people come from the slums" -- he says -- "but this is no reason for lacking in professionalism when it comes to business and for always giving foreigners a reason

²⁶ "Signori, vi dico subito che, per principio, io non credo a questo stupido scherzo del Giudizio Universale. Sò solo che i bambini devono partire per l'America e io li devo immatricolare!"

²⁷ "No, no, no! Ahò! Qui non se mena. Non se mena pe' nessuna ragione..."

²⁸ "...Il bambino è stato acquistato sano e sano io lo devo consegnare al destinatario."

for forming a poor opinion of us!”²⁹ This affirmation does not simply imply that the child-salesman is judgemental towards those who are weaker than he despite his morally questionable profession. It also reveals that he blames this sentimental unprofessionalism for the low opinion foreigners have of all Italians.

How can the public sustain such an offensive, spiteful behaviour, or even find it entertaining? As he exits the scene to embark on a quest to find the missing child, Sordi's character gives instructions to his American assistant in Nando Mericoni's made-up “*trasteverino*”³⁰ English. It is through this promise of theatrics associated with his previously established character, that Sordi renews the complicity between the audience and his present monstrous impersonation.³¹ Later in the film, the city of Naples is flooded by the wrath of God. In these catastrophic circumstances Sordi's child-salesman eventually promises to find a more morally acceptable job. However, he never fully repents his actions and instead depicts himself as a victim of an ill-devised scheme: “Why do you keep blaming me?” – he asks a woman who is accusing him of being the devil. His defence is: “You cannot judge, because someone like you cannot understand! So I expect to address someone who can. Socially speaking, my profession is part of the system of things, I did not come up with it!”³² At the end of the film, once the flood is over and the city of Naples celebrates, Sordi's character returns to his activity and approaches a woman holding two children. He weighs them as one would do with groceries and feeds them sweets. The comedic resolution is not achieved by the slapstick theatrics of the farce, which, despite his allusions to *Un Americano a Roma*, are never fully delivered by Sordi in this film.

²⁹ “Capisco che siete gente che venite dal basso ma non per questo non si può essere seri e non gettare sempre il discredito in pasto allo straniero!”

³⁰ “from the Roman neighborhood of Trastevere”.

³¹ Although I do not intend to discuss the notion of authorship here but rather just the successive behaviour attributed to the character as manifestations of the signs Sordi is imposing on characters usually conceived by someone else, it is significant that in this case De Sica and Zavattini have credited Sordi for the idea of the child-salesman character, inspired by a newspaper article.

³² “Perché vi accanite contro di me?” “Voi non potete giudicare perchè non capite! Mi appello perciò a chi di dovere. Socialmente parlando, il mio mestiere rientra nel quadro generale, non l'ho inventato io!”

In his study of stardom, Richard Dyer theorised that in classic Hollywood cinema and more in general in commercial filmmaking

the four categories of star/audience relationship that emerge in this classification are thus: *-Emotional affinity*. This is the weakest category and ‘probably’ the most common. [...] - *Self-identification*. [...] - *Imitation*. This is apparently commonest among the young and takes the star/audience relationship beyond cinema-going [...] – *Projection* (*Stars* 18).

However, in *Il Giudizio Universale* and the other comedies Italian style in which Sordi embodied this negative type, the fulfilment of a redemptive narrative arc is rejected. It is the re-institution of a false sense of superiority that ultimately signifies the journey on which Sordi has taken the audience. Once the film is over, the public’s judgemental attitude towards the despicable character is reinstated; though the entertainment that Sordi has provided in depicting him, by using mannerisms he has observed in the common people that eventually form his audience, adds a layer of unsettling complicity between the spectator and the representation on the screen.

As I have said, *Il Giudizio Universale* is a very extreme example of Sordi’s practice; his characters were not always so explicitly evil and he therefore did not have to refer so often to open theatrics to have the audience accept them. As he progressively achieved the status of national icon during the course of his career, he was able to dismiss completely the theatrics of the farce on the silver screen.³³ Originally, though, Sordi managed to make acceptable the cynicism that characterises the stardom of comedy Italian style through balancing the realistic representation of spiteful behaviour with humorous nods to the public.

The centrality of Rome, World War II and the middle class: Sordi’s positioning in Italy’s collective imagination

Sordi’s Roman dialect was instrumental to his success and to the cynicism of his characters. During his first steps as an actor in the Fascist era, his accent had been an

³³ He did however revert back to slapstick humour in television appearances for reasons which I shall discuss soon.

obstacle to his career.³⁴ He reached popularity after the advent of neorealism introduced the use of dialects on the screen. As Claudio Fava has noted, Sordi's use of Roman dialect coincided with a specific stage of the Italian linguistic evolution process. He became the Roman performer per excellence at a crucial time.

[Sordi became popular] in that period in which Italy was about to become 'Roman'. From 1945 to this day [...] a certain detectable basically Roman dialect has spread more and more forcefully, through the radio, cinema and television in the syntax and in the vocabulary of formal and informal Italian (Fava, *Alberto Sordi* 10).³⁵

Sordi benefitted from the nationalisation of Roman vernacular expressions and at the same time he was instrumental to their popularisation.³⁶ He adopted Roman expressions that were easily understandable on a national scale. He dismissed the more locally specific ones that characterised performers like Aldo Fabrizi and Anna Magnani, whose speech was closer to the "*romanesco*" legitimised in the literary works of the poets Belli and Trilussa. Most importantly, Sordi differed from these performers and from Totò and his uninterrupted use of Neapolitan because he adopted Roman expressions strategically. In almost all of his films featuring Roman characters, Sordi mostly speaks in correct formal Italian, although his accent is still recognisable. Recurring Roman "*popolano*" expressions abruptly interrupt this polite flow either to mark an attempt of his character to familiarise with diffident interlocutors, as seen in the example of the first scene from *Il Giudizio Universale*, or else to mark the character's frustration due to the failed circumvention of the interlocutors. In both cases, the novelty in comparison with the dialect performers

³⁴ In 1936 Sordi moved to Milan and was enrolled in the Accademia dei Filodrammatici. His Roman accent was an obstacle to his completion of the course. In 1999 the Accademia awarded him the degree *honoris causa*.

³⁵ "[Sordi divenne famoso] In quel periodo in cui l'Italia si stava avviando [...] a diventare 'romana'. Dal 1945 ad oggi, [...] un certo vago ma percepibile romanesco di base s'è fatto strada in modo sempre più perentorio, attraverso la radio, il cinema e la televisione, nella sintassi e nel lessico dell'Italia ufficiale e ufficiosa."

³⁶ I will discuss the role that comedy Italian style played in the diffusion of an informal Italian language on national scale in a Chapter Five, which is specifically devoted to linguistics and dialects. Here, I will only focus on how the Roman dialect was instrumental to Sordi's stardom.

that preceded Sordi is the fact that the authenticity of his Roman expressions is used to reveal the duplicity of his characters and their opportunistic falsity. At the same time this practice of *dialectal duality*, as Rémi Fournier Lanzoni defines the “immediate discrepancy between dialect versus standard Italian” (26) both used in the same scene, provided comic relief. Again, with his strategic use of *dialectal duality*, Sordi managed to force the spectator to become an accomplice of the characters’ moral ambiguity.³⁷ His physicality, in the meantime, perfectly embodied the pace of the new society, as Brunetta suggests, noting that “Sordi’s anxiety and hyper-mobility are strongly representative of the acceleration at the start of the 1960s, of the push towards new realities, new mentalities, new needs, new geographical horizons, new work opportunities” (*Ricerca dell’Identità* 53-54).³⁸

Enrico Giacobelli has pointed out that Sordi’s success in representing the Italian nation on screen derived from his belonging to the most crucial generation in Italian twentieth-century history:

Born in 1920, Sordi is part of the most important generation among those that survived the 20th century. [...] It is the generation that has lived in the most appropriate ages the crucial moments of Italy’s history. Like many other Italians, Sordi was a child during Fascism, which ultimately was a dangerous form of infantilism. [...] He was a youth in the years of the War and the Resistance. He had the right age to start building a life for himself at the time in which the country was more or less seriously being rebuilt (*Italiano a Roma* 31-32).³⁹

³⁷ I will address extensively the narrative function of *dialectal duality* in Chapter Five. However, I will specify here for a first time that even though Lanzoni coined this expression, the space he devoted to the concept in his study of comedy Italian style is quite limited. I therefore believe that even though I am using a notion and an expression of his, my considerations concerning these uses of dialects in the genre are original.

³⁸ “L’inquietudine e l’ipermobilità di Sordi sono fortemente rappresentative dell’accelerazione a cavallo degli anni sessanta, delle spinte verso nuove realtà, nuove mentalità, nuovi bisogni, nuovi orizzonti geografici, nuove occasioni lavorative.”

³⁹ “Nato nel 1920, Sordi ha anagraficamente l’età della generazione più importante fra quelle che hanno attraversato più o meno indenni il ventesimo secolo. [...] È comunque la generazione che ha vissuto nelle età più adatte, più consone, i momenti cruciali della storia d’Italia. Come tanti altri italiani, Sordi è stato bambino durante il fascismo, che era in fondo una pericolosa forma di

Defining one generation as more important than another, for example the generation that perpetrated the Fascist march on Rome or the one that led the leftist student protests in 1968, is quite arbitrary. The main difference is that Sordi and the performers of comedy Italian style benefited from the work of a generation of screenwriters who were inspired by neorealism to produce comedic material that focused on social criticism and on the depiction of the contemporary issues that arose with the advent of the Economic Miracle, rather than relying on the mechanical entertainment of physical gags. In the case of Sordi, his partnership with the writer Rodolfo Sonego from 1955 onwards marked the actor's passage from the slapstick humour of the farces to the social satire of the habits of the average Italian of the late 1950s. However, as I shall soon show, both the public and the critics kept associating Sordi with farcial humour, continuously misconceiving his realist merits.⁴⁰ On the one hand such misconception by the public allowed Sordi to present contradictory characters without ever losing his audience, as I have shown. On the other hand, however, the same misconception by the critics prevented them from ever recognizing his practice as a satirical form of neorealism.

Other than his misconceived continued association with the farces, another major obstacle in recognising Sordi's comedy Italian style as an evolution of neorealism was the fact that he often portrayed middle-class characters, as he pointed out in the previously quoted interview:

De Sica and Rossellini's films [*of the post-war period*] had recounted a poor Italy struggling for survival. After some years, we gathered their heritage to recount, instead, the middle class Italy that was changing, that wanted to make it, that tried to succeed (in Giacovelli, *Italiano a Roma* 110).

infantilismo. [...] E' stato giovane negli anni della Guerra e della resistenza. Si è ritrovato con l'età giusta per iniziare a costruirsi una vita nel momento in cui si iniziò a ricostruire più o meno seriamente il Paese.”

⁴⁰ This was a misconception, as I shall argue later, somewhat encouraged by Sordi's own publicity strategies in television or public appearances.

The original form of neorealism was closely associated with its focus on the lower classes. It was sometimes even defined by it, since this represented a major discrepancy with the ‘white telephones’ bourgeois comedies that characterised the film production during the Fascist regime. This difference of setting between the neorealism of De Sica and Rossellini and Sordi’s depiction of the “Italia borghese” is not actually a sign of discontinuity between the two forms. Sordi’s comedy Italian style was rather an update of the neorealist practice of social commentary about contemporary national issues.

The neorealist filmmakers reproduced on screen the Resistance and the post-war struggles and gave voice to the lower classes that were most toughly subjected to those traumatic events. The comedy Italian style directors, with the same immediacy, were inspired by the Economic Miracle, the major transformation which characterised their time. Thus, they largely implemented Sordi’s stardom in the representation of the middle classes, the social group that played the role of protagonist in the so-called ‘boom’. As Landy notes:

The late 1950s was a time of greater cynicism than the immediate years after World War II. It became evident to many on the left that there were, after all, no dramatic alterations in governmental power and the makeup of social institutions. In cinema, comedy became a viable instrument with which to capitalize on this cynicism, functioning in a society that was increasingly geared to material success. Comedy became a permissible (and entertaining) weapon against the status quo, particularly in making public what was previously concealed, if not censored (*Stardom* 119-120).

Therefore the fact that most negative protagonists played by comedy Italian style stars were “*borghesi*”⁴¹ was an occasion for satire, but also represented continuity, in ideological terms, with the neorealist ideal of reconstruction of the country on a democratic basis. Rather than a return to the bourgeois comedies of the ‘white telephones’, Sordi’s cynical representation of the middle classes unveiled the reinstatement of old forms of power and the acceptance by the ordinary Italian man of the reinstated status quo.

⁴¹ “Middle-class citizen”.

An example of this can be found in Mario Monicelli's 1955 film *Un Eroe dei Nostri Tempi*. Sordi's cowardly protagonist expressed the lack of political engagement of the average Italian of the time: "I am not on the right, nor on the left. But God forbid anyone from thinking that I am in the centre!"⁴² The specificity of the "I" in the sentence is a form of accusation against the mentality of the middle classes that Sordi represents. On the other hand, Aldo Fabrizi and Totò, who played lower class characters who in theory resembled closely the neorealist protagonists, were characterised by the punch-lines "they say that...",⁴³ "then they say that one goes to the left".⁴⁴ The non-specificity of these expressions shows that even though they were embodying lower-class men, the comedians of the older school of the farces diluted, if not rejected, the instances of social criticism that neorealism had introduced. Therefore, the criteria for distinguishing the influence of neorealism on other cinematic forms should really be based upon the ideological attitude towards the classes and mentality represented on screen, rather than on the character's resemblance to the lower-class neorealist protagonists. In other words, critics made the mistake of confusing the disengagement of Sordi's characters with a message of disengagement that his comedy Italian style supposedly intended delivering to the public. In fact, the message of his satire was in ideological continuity with the neorealist ideal of a democratic reconstruction of the country. Once this ideal failed to become reality, Sordi became an instrument for the comedy Italian style filmmakers to express their disappointment towards the institutions that suppressed it and the people that accepted this status quo.

Critical notions concerning acting and stardom in neorealism

The fact that the neorealist practice has been critically associated with its use of non-professional actors represents a further difficulty in recognizing neorealism's continuity with the formation of the stardom of comedy Italian style. The discrepancy between the use of non-professionals in the original form of neorealism

⁴² "Io non sono né di destra, né di sinistra. Ma non vorrei che si pensasse che sono di centro."

⁴³ "dice che".

⁴⁴ "poi dice che uno si butta a sinistra".

and the massive popularity that Sordi and the other comedy Italian style stars gained in the 1960s is apparently overwhelming. The association of post-war neorealism with non-professionals actors is, however, as Medici points out, statistically incorrect:

As far as the use of non-professional actors goes, even in this case it is necessary to diversify the critical analysis from the neorealist logo. In a survey promoted by *Cinema Nuovo* in 1955, De Sica himself counted only ten or so neorealist films characterised by this practice over the course of ten years (14).⁴⁵

The international critical success of films featuring non-professionals such as De Sica's *Ladri di Biciclette* (1948) contributed to a "logo", a formula that scholars came to identify with the neorealist practice. They did so despite the fact that there never was such a thing as a neorealist manifesto dictating the use of non-professionals and that this type of casting was not so widespread. The French critic André Bazin noted that more often neorealist films tended to cast both professionals and non-professionals at the same time. He defined this practice as "amalgam".

[...] The law that I propose to call the amalgam. It is not the absence of professional actors that is, historically, the hallmark of social realism nor of the Italian film. Rather, it is specifically the rejection of the star concept and the casual mixing of professionals and of those who just act occasionally. It is important to avoid casting the professional in the role for which he is known. The public should not be burned with any preconceptions (22-25).

Although the full "rejection of the star concept" that Bazin referred to was later disproved by studies such as Landy's *Stardom, Italian Style* (91) it is important to note that in Bazin's analysis the amalgam is tightly connected to subverting the audience's expectation of a character previously portrayed by a certain actor.

⁴⁵ "Quanto all'attore non professionista, anche in questo caso è opportuno dislocare il discorso critico dal logo neorealista. In un bilancio promosso da *Cinema Nuovo* nel 1955, lo stesso De Sica contava in dieci anni solo una decina di film neorealisti caratterizzati da questa scelta."

I will show that it is the subversion of audience expectation that represents the continuity between the neorealist amalgam and the stardom of Sordi and the comedy Italian style comedians. Despite its critical importance in the development of international art cinema, Italian neorealism was largely unsuccessful with the Italian mass audience, as director Luigi Filippo D'Amico remembered:

Those were the years in which *Roma Città Aperta* was quite unsuccessful, *Ladri di Biciclette* did not make a penny and *Umberto D.* was taken off the screens in two days (in Pintus and Biarese 58-63).⁴⁶

In the early 1950s then, Italian spectators privileged other cinematic forms, either national ones, such as Italian forms of comedy and melodrama, or International, as soon as American films started circulating again. Post-war neorealism disappeared from the national film production and likewise did its marginal use of non-professionals. In terms of economic feasibility the “star concept” had to be reintroduced into Italian production in order to compete with American imports. After all, Bazin himself recognised the difficulty of a prolonged use of the amalgam practice:

The chemical balance of the amalgam is by necessity unstable, and nothing can prevent it evolving to the point at which it reintroduces the aesthetic dilemma it originally solved – that between the enslavement of the star and the documentary without actors (22-25).

Unlike other popular genres however, the stardom of comedy Italian style maintained the subversion of the audience's expectation of certain types from a certain actor that

⁴⁶ “Erano gli anni in cui *Roma Città Aperta* andò abbastanza male, *Ladri di Biciclette* non incassò una lira, *Umberto D.* fu smontato dopo due giorni.” As the table of box office results of neorealist films in the Appendices shows, however, *Ladri di Biciclette* was not so unsuccessful, finishing 10th in the charts of Italian films in the season of its release. My arguments concerning the unsustainability of neorealism as a production model in the Introduction, however, support the sense of D'Amico's recollections and for the purpose of the argument in this chapter one could refer to the results of different neorealist films and conclude that in most cases films featuring known stars such as Anna Magnani, Aldo Fabrizi, Ingrid Bergman and Vittorio De Sica himself generally did better than ones featuring non-professional actors, with few exceptions, such as *Ladri di Biciclette* and *Paisà*.

neorealism introduced, as a brief overview of Sordi's involvement in the genre shows.⁴⁷

Subversion of the audience's expectations: an overview of Sordi's career and the introduction of new types

I have divided Sordi's involvement in comedy Italian style into four stages. Each stage coincides with the establishment of a new *type* of character, distinguished from the preceding ones on the basis of either moral attributes, or dramatic journeys or the general tone of the story the characters inhabit. The first stage starts with Antonio Pietrangeli's 1954 film *Il Seduttore*, which marks the beginning of the collaboration between Sordi and Sonogo and establishes the type of the "average Italian". This type's cynicism inspired all of the comedy Italian style performers. The second stage spans from 1959 to 1963 and is closely tied to three characters played by Sordi: Oreste Jacovacci in Mario Monicelli's *La Grande Guerra* (1959, co-starring Vittorio Gassman), Alberto Innocenzi in Luigi Comencini's *Tutti a Casa* (1961) and Silvio Magnozzi in Dino Risi's *Una Vita Difficile* (1961). These three characters present Sordi's distinctive negative trademarks for the majority of their dramatic journeys, but redeem themselves in the end. Significantly all three films feature a war or Resistance setting and therefore revisit a *milieu* associated with Italian neorealism. In the years between 1959 and 1963 Sordi alternated this redemptive type with his usual entirely negative one.

The third stage begins in 1963 when Sordi and Sonogo created the new type of the Italian on holiday for Gian Luigi Polidoro's film *Il Diavolo*, set in Sweden. This new type, as Sordi recalled, presents some positive characteristics throughout the entire film:

⁴⁷ The other popular forms that became predominant in the Italian post-war film production were the "*filoni cinematografici*". These genres relied on archetypes established in classical or modern myths, such the Greek and Latin mythologies that inspired the peplum or the Classic Hollywood genres that were revisited in Italian horror and spaghetti western. The casting of stars such as Steve Reeves, Christopher Lee and Clint Eastwood, who constantly fulfilled audience expectation for the repetition of the archetypes they were identified with, proves that these genres were not influenced by the neorealist amalgam in the stardom associated with them.

He was a man who belonged to the generation of *I Vitelloni*, of *Un Americano a Roma* too, but more adult, more refined. He came out of a disastrous post-war period, started a family, purchased a city car. [...] In other words I felt that it was time to present to the public a more positive type who, on the other hand, also had to provoke laughter, because the saint, the hero types have never made anyone laugh (in Livi 132).⁴⁸

This new type was devised in response to the success achieved by Gassman and the other comedy Italian style stars with their appropriation of the entirely negative middle-class Italian that Sordi had introduced to represent the Economic Miracle on screen. The type of the Italian on holiday also allowed the filmmakers to avoid the constant repetition of the Italian urban setting and cut production costs, as often these films were shot by crews of five or six elements with hand-held cameras and without paying legal licenses. In fact films such as *Il Diavolo* and *Fumo di Londra* (1966, the first film directed by Sordi himself) are a good example of a compromise that solves the “aesthetic dilemma between the enslavement of the star and the documentary without actors” that Bazin pointed out. The shooting conditions resemble *cinéma-vérité* and the films have sometimes been defined as documentaries featuring a star.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ “Era lo stesso uomo che aveva appartenuto alla generazione dei *Vitelloni* e di *Un Americano a Roma*, ma più adulto, più progredito. Quello che è uscito da un dopoguerra disastroso, ha messo su famiglia, si è comprato la seicento [...] Insomma sentivo che era venuto il momento di presentare al pubblico un personaggio positivo che doveva far ridere, però, perchè il santo, l’eroe non hanno mai fatto ridere nessuno.”

⁴⁹ Alberto Pesce referred to documentarism in his review of *Il Diavolo*:

Il Diavolo is a cynical, melancholic documentary on Scandinavian femininity every now and then lit by the surprised reactions of a Latin man (a good Sordi with savvy satanic overtones).

(In the original text: “*Il Diavolo* è un impietoso, malinconico, documentario sulla femminilità nordica, illuminata di volta in volta dallo sconcerto di un latino (un buon Sordi con accentuazioni sapientemente satanesche).”)

Similarly Giuseppe Marotta noted the singularity of *Il Diavolo* as essentially a documentary featuring a star:

The fourth and final stage of Sordi's involvement in comedy Italian style starts in 1971 with his first openly tragic role in *Detenuto in Attesa di Giudizio* (directed by Nanni Loy) and ends with a similarly tragic impersonation in *Un Borghese Piccolo Piccolo* (1977, directed by Mario Monicelli). In continuity with the neorealist amalgam, Sordi repeatedly countered what the audience was expecting from him. In the mid 1950s his realistic representations of the vile nature of the middle-class Italian subverted the audience's expectation of a lower class slapstick "macchietta" similar to the ones of the older school of farce comedians like Totò. Once this negative type was established and expected by the public, he kept countering this expectation by introducing new types: the redemptive one, the partially positive 'Italian on holiday' and finally the openly tragic type.⁵⁰

It is not the plot, in this *Il Diavolo*, to make the actor [*shine*], but rather the actor who makes the plot [*do so*]. Without Alberto Sordi, the film would be nothing but half a documentary, although a classy one.

(In the original text: "Non è la vicenda, in questo *Il Diavolo*, che fa l'attore, bensì l'attore che fa la vicenda. Privo di Alberto Sordi, il film non sarebbe che un mezzo documentario, seppure di classe.")

These type of comedies Italian style that feature the journey abroad mirror neorealism's spatial 'openness'.

⁵⁰ In a similar way other comedy Italian style stars subverted the expectations of their audience. Vittorio Gassman, for example, went from being a melodrama villain in Italian and American films produced in the post-war period to a lower class sympathetic loser with *I Soliti Ignoti*. He then embodied the cynical middle-class Italian of the Economic Miracle from *Il Sorpasso* on. He ultimately played an openly tragic role in Dino Risi's *Profumo di Donna* (1974). Manfredi started as nothing but a "spalla" ("sidekick") of Sordi in farces such as Mauro Bolognini's *Guardia, Guardia Scelta, Brigadiere, Maresciallo* (1956) and then entered the realist realm of comedy Italian style by substituting Marcello Mastroianni in the sequel of *I Soliti Ignoti* directed in 1960 by Nanni Loy, entitled *Audace Colpo Dei Soliti Ignoti*. In it Manfredi plays the character of an expert in automobiles who is struggling with the fact that his son is being raised by his wife's new partner. Even though he was largely associated with naive peasant types in the 1960s, his stardom subverted the audience's expectations furthermore when he was revealed to be an unlikely educated shoemaker in Luigi Magni's *Nell'Anno del Signore* (1969) and ultimately when he played an openly dramatic role in the spiritual, almost philosophical, comedy he directed himself in 1972, *Per Grazia Ricevuta*.

A closer look at Sordi's character in *Un Borghese Piccolo Piccolo* shows that his constant subversion of previously established types was significant and not accidental. In this film Sordi plays a state employee named Giovanni Vivaldi. He constantly advises his son to be cynical and encourages him to only think for himself. Giovanni's aggressive behaviour in the Roman traffic is a further reference to Sordi's cynical type of the average Italian of the Economic Miracle. The character's attitude towards politics is also contradictory and reminiscent of Sordi's mid- 1950s cowards. He claims to be eligible for a bigger pension because he fought in the Resistance. Shortly afterwards, however, he tries to inspire his son by quoting Mussolini: "Many enemies, more honour. Hey, someone who had giant balls said it!"⁵¹ The first half of the plot consists of comedic scenes in which Vivaldi tries to have his son helped in passing the state exam and be hired in the Ministry where he himself works. He even joins a Masonic lodge to have a copy of the entrance exam questions in advance. The scene of Vivaldi's initiation to the Masons is a further confirmation of the comedic tone established in the first part of the film. Giovanni is blindfolded and told he will have to face "the test of death".⁵² He is handed a plastic cup, he sniffs and asks the man standing beside him: "what is this?"⁵³ His friend whispers "Amaro Montenegro"⁵⁴ and Vivaldi drinks it in one sip, commenting "Jeez, that is good!"⁵⁵

Halfway through the film, however, after the audience's expectation of Sordi's satirical middle-class type has been confirmed, the tone changes dramatically as his son is murdered by a terrorist in front of the Ministry on the morning of the exam. Sordi's performance undergoes a radical transformation as his character becomes obsessed by grief for this loss. Vivaldi also has to face the consequences of his wife's (played by Shelley Winters) paralysis, induced by the trauma of being apprised of her son's assassination by a television announcement. Eventually Giovanni Vivaldi recognizes his son's murderer and, instead of informing the police, he abducts him. Sordi's character takes justice into his own hands, tortures the terrorist and ends up

⁵¹ "Molti nemici e molto onore. Aò, l'ha detto uno che c'aveva du' cojoni così!"

⁵² "la prova della morte".

⁵³ "Aò ma che è?"

⁵⁴ Amaro Montenegro is an after-dinner digestive drink, somewhat similar to Jaegermeister.

⁵⁵ Ammazza, bono!

killing him. Depicting Vivaldi's dramatic transformation Sordi gave one of the most powerful performances of his career.

Un Borghese Piccolo Piccolo is an adaptation of a Vincenzo Cerami novel and therefore was not originally conceived as a comedy Italian style. Significantly it was Sordi and neorealist screenwriter Sergio Amidei who convinced Monicelli to have comedic situations abounding in the first half of the film and thus subvert the audience's expectation through a powerful dichotomy. The director commented on the casting of Sordi for the part of Vivaldi:

I treated the subject in a violent and mature mode, but I chose Sordi, not Volontè. Sordi is the most loved man by Italians, the actors that entertains them, the prototype of the *commedia all'italiana*. I inserted him in this story to elicit shock in order to demonstrate how easy it is to become a monster when one wants to take justice into one's own hands (in Lanzoni 32).⁵⁶

Monicelli's words are revelatory of how Sordi's starring in the film was instrumental to its realism. It was the presence of a beloved performer identified with realist comedy that brought the spectators to feel that such a transformation could have happened to anyone in the audience during the dark times of the "anni di piombo".⁵⁷

As the example of *Un Borghese Piccolo Piccolo* and the analysis of Sordi's contradictory types show, balancing the repetitive casting crucial to all forms of popular entertainment with a radical subversion of the types established by its stars was a strategy, one unique to comedy Italian style. It thus links this genre's stardom to the neorealist practice of the amalgam and the subversion of audience expectations that Bazin considered crucial to it.

⁵⁶ This quotation appears already translated in English by Lanzoni in his volume.

⁵⁷ Literally "leaden years", this is an expression by which the wave of terrorism in Italy in the 1970s is referred to.

De-negotiating expectations: the ‘curious misconception’ of Sordi’s star image

When I refer to a ‘strategic’ subversion of audiences’ expectations in the case of the stardom of the comedy Italian style genre in general and of Alberto Sordi in particular I am not simply talking about the occasional casting of a performer in an odd role in comparison to the ones he is usually cast in. As Richard Dyer points out, contradictory, developing or ever-changing star images are quite common even in Hollywood:

It is misleading to think of the texts combining cumulatively into a sum total that constitute the image, or alternatively simply as being moments in a star’s image’s career. [...] The image is a *complex totality* and it does have a *chronological dimension*. What we need to understand that totality in its temporality is the concept of *structured polysemy*. By ‘polysemy’ is meant the multiple but finite meanings and effects that a star image signifies. [...] This polysemy is *structured*. In some cases, the various elements of signification may *reinforce* one another. In other cases, the elements may be to some degree in *opposition* or *contradiction*, in which case the star’s image is characterised by attempts to negotiate, reconcile or mask the difference between the elements, or else simply hold them in tension. [...] Images also have a *temporal dimension*. Structured polysemy does not imply stasis; images develop or change over time (*Stars* 63-64).

The peculiar subversion of audience expectation I have pointed out in the case of Sordi’s comedic practice is not simply constituted by the introduction of new types altering his star image over the course of his career. In fact, it is quite the opposite. The peculiarity of this stardom is the fact that even though the public had progressively experienced the establishment of new types which subverted the initial conception of Sordi’s star image, at the moment of the release of a new comedy Italian style the public kept walking in the cinema theatres with that initial conception intact, rejuvenated, as it were. Sordi’s regular screenwriter Rodolfo Sonego noted that

initially [*Sordi*] was used as an actor by me and others – but just for one aspect of his nature, his artistry, his capabilities: that of pure humour, of caricature, of impersonating ability, which is very strong. Then someone, and I think it was actually me, started to believe in other qualities of his, those of an actor who could have been complete. At the beginning he was restricted to the purely comedic, it was believed that he should never be used to discuss a serious or important topic ever, never to deploy dramatic or pathetic tones, etc. Later on it was understood that he had this dual ability. There is a curious misconception that I could never explain to myself, maybe due to the critics, or maybe due to a hidden and confused need of the audience to take and remember only the worst side of Sordi, or at least the most superficial side. Even after films in which he proved to have very skilled dramatic abilities, such as *Una Vita Difficile*. With Sordi, eighty percent of the time the public went [*to the movie-theatre*] just to laugh and it was then confronted with dramatic films (in Fofi, *Sordi* 116).⁵⁸

It is in this “curious misconception” that the exceptionality of Sordi’s stardom resides, in other words in the fact that despite having taken part in the negotiations, reconciliations and tensions which developed the “*structured polysemy*” of Sordi’s star image with his introduction of new contradictory types, the audience constantly reverted back to its original signification, his purely comedic dimension, placing itself back in a constantly *de*-negotiated position in which its expectations could be

⁵⁸ “Dapprima [*Sordi*] è stato sfruttato come attore da me e da altri - ma soltanto in un aspetto del suo carattere, del suo mestiere, delle sue possibilità: quella della pura comicità, della caricatura, della capacità d'imitazione, che è fortissima. Poi qualcuno, e credo di essere stato proprio io, ha creduto anche in altre sue qualità, quelle cioè di un attore che poteva essere completo. Nei primi tempi lo si confinava al comico, si sosteneva che non dovesse mai per un momento toccare un argomento serio e importante, usare tonalità patetiche, drammatiche, eccetera. Poi si è capito che lui aveva questa doppia capacità. C'è una specie di curioso equivoco, che io non sono mai riuscito a spiegarmi, e che forse è dovuto alla critica, o forse a un bisogno nascosto e confuso della platea di prendere o di ricordare di Sordi sempre e solo il lato peggiore, comunque quello più superficiale. Anche dopo film in cui aveva dato la misura di altissime qualità drammatiche, per esempio dopo *Una Vita Difficile*. Con Sordi nell'ottanta per cento dei casi la gente andava [*al cinema*] soltanto per ridere e poi si trovava davanti a film drammatici.”

radically subverted once again, as if it were a canvas that constantly became blank again.

How did Sordi's star image, and to a lesser extent those of the other comedy Italian style performers, acquire this peculiar connotation? The answer does not necessarily reside in his films. As Richard Dyer states,

the star phenomenon consists of everything that is publicly available about stars. A film star's image is not just his or her films, but the promotion of those films and of the star through pin-ups, public appearances, studio hand-outs and so on, as well as interviews, biographies, and coverage in the press of the star's doings and 'private' life. Further, a star's image is also what people say or write about him or her, as critics or commentators, the way the image is used in other contexts such as advertisements, novels, pop songs, and finally the way the star can become part of the coinage of everyday speech (*Heavenly Bodies* 3).

Watching a DVD collection of Sordi's television appearances recently produced by Raitrade and published by the newspaper *La Repubblica* in association with the periodical *L'Espresso*, entitled *Il Grande Albertone: Alberto Sordi in TV*, I noticed that, when walking on the sets of immensely popular variety shows of the late 1950s, 1960s and 1970s such as *Il Musicchiere*, *Studio Uno* or *Fantastico* Sordi mostly delivered his old repertoire from the "avanspettacolo" days or embodied the "macchiette" from his radio shows of the late 1940s, rather than simply promoting the realist comedies in which he starred that were currently playing in the theatres via standard interviews with the television hosts, as is common practice.⁵⁹ He may have chosen to privilege impersonations, musical numbers of song and dance and slapstick gags for his television appearances because he deemed them more appropriate for the media and for the format of the variety shows to which he was invited, or he may have considered television as a 'holiday' from his pursuit of "neorealism with a

⁵⁹ In fact Sordi impersonator Max Tortora exploited the Roman actor's reliance on this old material for his public appearances in his parody of Sordi on the early 2000s television show *Convencion*, in which Tortora gave a humorous representation of Sordi as a senile retired celebrity who constantly interrupted his line of thought shouting non-sequiturs from his gag repertoire.

satirical outlook” within the comedy Italian style genre. Or, alternatively, this may have been a conscious strategy on his part with the purpose of ‘*de*-negotiating’ the subversion of the audiences’ expectation he carried out with his previous film, an attempt to nurture that “curious misconception” his popularity might have depended upon.

It is impossible to know for sure, although biographers such as Grazia Livi report that, despite receiving countless invitations, Sordi limited appearances in public to a minimum but approached those he participated in as actual show performances in which to showcase his talents, rather than simple celebrity events (11). This type of attitude on his part suggests that he was extremely aware of the importance that publicity and promotion off the silver screen had for the popularity of his films and seemingly reinforce the thesis of him ‘strategically’ reminding the public of the more immediately funny aspects of his star image.⁶⁰ Conscious or not, these promotional stances certainly contributed to the “curious misconception” noted by Sonego, as well as Sordi’s choice of keeping to alternate realist roles in comedies Italian style and guest appearances in other forms of comedic cinema.

A time-image comedic stardom: Sordi’s *Il Vedovo* as a medium of the audience’s displacement

Deleuze’s analysis of the role that neorealism played in the history of the cinematic medium is revelatory of the continuity between the function of actors in the dramatic neorealism of De Sica and Rossellini and the stardom in comedy Italian style. Deleuze has associated pre-neorealist cinematic forms with what he has termed the *movement-image*. As regards stardom, according to Deleuze, in the *movement-image* era the star is characterised by the empowerment of altering the cause-effect relations of the events represented on screen. As Landy comments:

⁶⁰ Similarly, other comedy Italian style stars pursued, consciously or not, disorientating promotional strategies of this type. For instance, on the eve of the release of the only film he directed, an investigation of the meaning of faith entitled *Per Grazia Ricevuta* (1971), Nino Manfredi recorded an album of folk songs and played the hit song *Tanto Pe’ Cantà* at the popular song competition of the Festival di Sanremo.

The cinematographic image [...] showed us a link between the man and the world. Hence it developed in the direction of a transformation of the world by man, or the discovery of an internal and higher world that man himself was. And the star was the bridge to that world (*Stardom xi*).

Hence, the function of the star and his/her empowerment of transforming the world he/she inhabits was tightly bound to the perception of continuity, unity and wholeness that characterised the *movement-image*. As discussed in the previous chapter, Deleuze has identified Italian neorealism as the cinematic movement that introduced the *time-image*, a cinematic form that challenged the unity and wholeness that characterised the *movement-image* by loosening the cause and effect links of cinematic narratives. With the loosening of such links, the function of the star became that of a vehicle into the discovery of a radically changed world. Deleuze discussed this new function in these terms:

The fact is that, in Europe, the post-war period has greatly increased the situations which we no longer know how to describe. These were ‘any-space-whatever’, deserted but inhabited, disused warehouses, waste ground, cities in the course of demolition or reconstruction. And in these any-space-whatever a *new* race of characters was stirring, kind of mutant: *they saw rather than acted, they were seers* [my emphasis]. (*Time-image xi*)

What Deleuze is addressing here is a tendency, not an empirical truth which always occurs. Of course even in the case of post-war neorealism and the art film that succeeded it, characters must perform some actions and they are not only shown as perceiving and never doing.⁶¹ However, our experience of the star sign on screen is not constrained by “the transformation of the world by man” anymore, but by a crisis of the star’s empowerment to do so that is directly connected to the shift from a cinema revolving around actions to one in which duration is accentuated instead.⁶²

⁶¹ Although a very restricted number of films, such as Rossellini’s *Europa ’51* (1952), get very close to this. In this piece Ingrid Bergman plays a tourist who witnesses the state of post-war Italy and she is used as a vehicle of the modernity of the narrative, as Ora Gelley notes: “In *Europa ’51* the sign of the star is integral to the depiction of the neurotic, middle-class heroine through whom the director’s modernist vision of the world is viewed” (53).

⁶² Laura Marks addresses Deleuze’s notion of this crisis very well by summing up that

In relation to stardom, this crisis is mostly constituted by the stars and their characters as no longer being agents of the transformation of the world they inhabit: they do perform actions, but we perceive them not as being empowered to make their actions count. Instead, neorealist characters function as a medium of the audience's condition of displacement in the world it inhabits, which is at the same time the same world that is represented on the screen and inhabited by the characters of the neorealist films, who perceive it for us. Their enhanced perception radically changes the audience's relation with the world represented, as Deleuze wrote:

[The *character in the regime of the time-image*] has gained in ability to see what he has lost in action or reaction: he SEES so that the viewer's problem becomes 'What is there to see in the image?' (and not now 'What are we going to see in the next image?') (*Time-Image* 272).

These *mediums* enhance the spectator's perception of reality, but cannot react to this perception with actions that will subvert or alter it; they are not empowered to transform reality in its dramatisation on the screen. As Marcia Landy has summarised, there is a "lack of agency" in the characters embodied by the stars in neorealism. With reference to *Roma Città Aperta*, she notes that "not only Pina, but all of the characters are incapable of actively altering the events" (*Diverting Clichés* 89) and this might be said of most of the characters of neorealist films.

I argue that the stardom of comedy Italian style is in continuity with this *medium* of audience displacement function that the neorealist characters acquired, a function that substitutes the agency of characters in the *movement-image* cinema. I identify Sordi's negative type of the middle-class Italian of the Economic Miracle as the first instance of characters playing a similar function in the context of Italian

What Deleuze calls *time-image* cinema is, he argues, a revolutionary moment in the history of western philosophy, in which it has become possible to make an autonomous image of time. It is distinct from *movement-image cinema*, in which frame follows frame according to necessities of action, subordinating time to movement (244-245).

popular genres. The *time-image* established by neorealism has informed the art film, both Italian and other, but its *crisis* has not involved popular genres which are still characterised by the character's empowerment to affect cause-effect relations. Even in the context of post-neorealist Italian comedic forms, the stardom of the farces and pink neorealism was still linked to the function of stars in the *movement-image* era.⁶³ Sordi's middle-class Italian is the first instance of *time-image* stardom in the context of Italian genre films and therefore links the stardom of comedy Italian style to the neorealist practice.

Dino Risi's *Il Vedovo* (1959) is a good example of how the negative type devised by Sordi and Sonogo acquired the function of *medium* of the audience's displacement. The film was partially inspired by a true story and is set in Milan. The aspiring entrepreneur Alberto Nardi (Sordi) is facing bankruptcy and depends on his

⁶³ The stardom of Totò, the archetype of the farces performer, was still indebted to the *movement-image*, as Landy noted:

Associated with the "*commedia dell'arte*" and with Neapolitan comedy, he [Totò] was a consummate mime. [...] Gaunt, angular, with large sad eyes and a crooked nose, he is, like other comic stars, associated with physicality, with characteristics and gestures that link stardom to earlier cinematic images that I have identified with the *movement-image*. [...] As an incarnation of the oppressed little man, heir of the "*commedia dell'arte*", he manages to triumph over adversity (*Stardom* 221).

The non-professional actress Maria Fiore with her performance as Carmela in Renato Castellani's *Due Soldi di Speranza* (1952) established the type of the '*unruly woman*' that became a constant presence in the rural pink neorealist comedies. In terms of iconography, there are elements of continuity between the "*popolana*" image that Anna Magnani established in her neorealist works and the '*unruly women*' of pink neorealism. Both types are identified with lower class backgrounds, Mediterranean physiognomies, regional connotations and raging outbursts in their native dialects. The actual function of the '*unruly women*' in the post-war settings they inhabit is, however, directly indebted to pre-neorealist cinematic forms. The primary quest of the '*unruly woman*' type is a quest for love, and her lack of education and struggle in terms of economic possibilities enables her to articulate her feelings more passionately and overcome the obstacles to her romantic fantasies. In *Due Soldi di Speranza*, for example, Carmela's recklessness forces her fiancé Antonio to challenge her father's authority and marry her without the approval of both families. Even though neorealism was influential on these characters in terms of iconography, their empowerment to affect cause-effect relations is a residue of the *movement-image* that preceded the neorealist mode of production, namely the sentimental comedies of the Fascist period.

multi-millionaire wife's (Franca Valeri) support to pursue his fantasy of success. An error in the news leads Alberto to believe she has died in a train accident and thus to experience care-free life as a widower entitled to her fortune. When she reappears, he arranges to kill her but he ultimately ends up being the victim of his own ill-devised plan. A first level of displacement is the geographical one: Nardi, characterised by Sordi's Roman accent, lives and works in Milan. His attempts to familiarise himself with the community of northern entrepreneurs by adopting Milanese expressions from time to time are constantly ignored. In 1959 this element of geographical displacement mirrored the phenomenon of immigration that involved large numbers of southern Italians, who migrated to the north of the country to be hired in the factories in the Turin and Milan areas and thus benefit from the Economic Miracle.

As the synopsis shows, a second level of displacement is represented by the fact that Sordi's character struggles with the fact that his wife is the economic driving force of the family. The discussion of redefined gender roles and the new gender dynamics are central to the humour of comedy Italian style and the deployment of its stars.⁶⁴ The period of the Economic Miracle was characterised by new forms of consumerism that redefined the dynamics within Italian families. Sordi's character satirically represented the masculine displacement of Italian middle-aged men at the time, who struggled with the subversion of the patriarchal organisation of society they were raised into.

Further displacement is constituted by Nardi's desperate quest to be recognised as part of the Economic Miracle elite, a social context he clearly does not belong to. Throughout the film, his business of elevator engineering is threatened by

⁶⁴ Maggie Gunsberg notes how the realism of comedy Italian style reflected the new gender dynamics of the society of the 'boom':

The socioeconomic context of the boom resulted in a sharp focus in comedy Italian style on the relationship between people and goods, and also, in particular, on the way goods mediate in relations of gender and class (61).

Jacqueline Reich also alludes to the role that Sordi's stardom played in this re-examination of gender roles in the context of comedy Italian style, as she points out that he "ridiculed national mythologies of virility and power" (22).

mechanical failures, but he desperately insists on investing all his resources on it. When he believes his wife has died, he examines the estate he is apparently going to inherit. Despite the fact that his wife's dairy farms are producing massive revenues, he intends to sell them and reinvest in elevators. This shows that he clearly misidentifies modernisation as the unique driving force of the 'boom'. He underestimates the fact that primary goods are the business that never goes out of fashion. His attitude towards production is that of the superficial observer, who only recognises the most prominent characteristic of the Miracle but ignores its larger picture. In his superficiality, Nardi mediates the audience's attitude, enriches its perception of the dynamics of consumerism. But Nardi himself never comes to an understanding that empowers him to improve his own condition, as stars do in the regime of the *movement-image*. The bitter irony of the film's ending is that he ultimately accepts his failure as an Economic Miracle entrepreneur by planning the murder of his wife and using one of his defective elevators as the murder weapon of choice, but it is he who is eventually killed by it instead.

Finally, Sordi's star image is used in *Il Vedovo* to convey ideological displacement; Sonogo described the inspiration for Sordi's character in an interview:

I remember that I once explained [to Sordi] what hysteria can be in a man. The Nazi-type hysteria applied to the character in *Il Vedovo*, a semi-impotent man who owns a business that is falling apart and who has a wife whom he conceives as an enemy. [...] This type is a man in his thirties, very often Roman, who engages in different activities, but his principal trait is one only: cowardice, the one that Fellini appropriately defined as the cowardice of the young man who was raised during Fascism and has been thrown into a democracy he does not understand. He is, thus, a confused character, because the swift shift from dictatorship to democracy in the age in which he was growing [as an individual] has prevented him from becoming a man in a coherent and mature way (in Fofi, *Sordi* 107-111).⁶⁵

⁶⁵ "Una volta mi ricordo che gli spiegai [a Sordi] che cosa può essere l'isterismo in un uomo. L'isterismo di tipo nazista applicato al personaggio del *Vedovo*, un tipo semimpotente che ha un'azienda che va a rotoli e una moglie nella quale vede un'avversaria. [...] Questo modello è un uomo sui trent'anni, quasi sempre romano, che può avere attività diverse, ma la cui componente del carattere è una sola, la viltà: quella che Fellini definisce giustamente la viltà tipica del giovanotto

Sonego's words clarify that *Il Vedovo* did not simply aim at making the audience laugh at the expense of a Fascist character. It is a film mainly concerned with representing the ideological displacement of a generation of Italians who have been deprived by the institutions of the opportunity to mature.⁶⁶

Allusions to Fascism abound in the film. In a visit to his mistress' house, Alberto Nardi says: "You see, my dear, in my opinion the greatest men in history have been three: Dante Alighieri, Napoleon Bonaparte and then there was a third who, despite his collaborators, remains a genius".⁶⁷ When his mistress' younger sister asks about the identity of this third historical figure, Nardi replies: "Lolita, once you could name him, but today unfortunately you cannot name him anymore".⁶⁸ This is clearly the Fascist leader, Benito Mussolini, who cannot be named anymore. He also accuses the Jewish community of an international scheme to close and open the Suez canal at their discretion in order to hinder his speculation on oil imports.

Further analysis of the film shows that Nardi, negatively characterised by Sonego and Sordi for satirical purposes, at the same time denounces the political context of post-war reconstruction as decisive for his moral and political displacement. At a dinner party, he meets his wife's business partner, the old millionaire Carlo Fenoglio (Ruggero Marchi). This character's physical appearance is reminiscent of the image of Mussolini; he is bald and features thick eyebrows. His poses clearly mimic the ones Il Duce was famous for displaying in public speeches. **[figures 18 and 19]** This is an allusion to the reinstatement of old forms of power after the Resistance was over, as Fenoglio is clearly characterised as a right-wing

cresciuto sotto il fascismo e buttato dentro una democrazia che non capisce. E` quindi un personaggio confuso, perché il passaggio repentino dalla dittatura alla democrazia, proprio nell'età della formazione [*come individuo*], gli ha impedito di farsi uomo in maniera matura, coerente."

⁶⁶ Brunetta noted, that not only the character of *Il Vedovo*, but many Sordi characters "lived as if they did not know that they lived in a democracy. They never wondered what the duties involved in liberty might be" (*Italian Cinema and the Hard Road Towards Democracy* 345).

⁶⁷ "Vedi cara, per me sono stati tre i grandi uomini della storia: Dante Alighieri, Napoleone Bonaparte e poi ci sarebbe stato il terzo che, malgrado i suoi collaboratori resta sempre un genio."

⁶⁸ "Lolita, una volta lo si diceva, adesso purtroppo non lo si può più dire."

businessman who managed to maintain his privileged position. The Fascist characterisation of Fenoglio suggests that Nardi's failure is not determined by his ideology. It is determined rather by the fact that during the advent of democracy the young Nardi was unable to conceal his political agenda and readapt it in the context of the restoration of the early 1950s, as older businessmen such as Fenoglio did. Sordi's negative type is thus mainly characterised by the fact that his upbringing during the Fascist regime has deprived him of the cognitive instruments necessary to recognize the opportunity to adapt to new forms of leadership.

The film therefore manages to articulate the displacement of this generation of middle-class Italian towards those institutions that caused this deprivation, the same that are currently denying it. After a nervous breakdown consequent on his wife's 'resurrection', Nardi spends some time in spiritual retirement with a priest he has known all his life. As he is about to return to the city, Alberto says goodbye to the priest and expresses his gratitude: "You always give me good advice, Father Agostino, even during the war when you encouraged me to fulfil my duties."⁶⁹ The priest replies: "But without taking it so far, my son, like you have done."⁷⁰ What Sordi's character still perceives as "duty" is now minimised by the very institutions, in this case the Church, which indoctrinated him to pursue it.



Figure 18: Businessman Fenoglio (Ruggero Marchi) at a party in *Il Vedovo* (Dino Risi, 1959)



Figure 19: Benito Mussolini gives a speech in one of his iconic poses

⁶⁹ "Lei mi ha sempre consigliato bene, Padre Agostino, anche durante la Guerra quando mi spinse a fare il mio dovere!"

⁷⁰ "Ma senza esagerare, figliolo, come hai fatto tu."

As this analysis shows, Sordi's star persona is used in *Il Vedovo* as a *medium* of the different levels of displacement of his audience: displacement because of migration, because of the subversion of the patriarchal organisation of society, because of new forms of productivity and because of the institutions. The world represented on the screen is the same Italy of the Economic Miracle that the audience inhabits. Rather than being empowered to overcome his difficulties and transform this world, Sordi's character's function is similar to that of the characters of post-war neorealism. He, too, enhances the spectator's perception of the world he/she inhabits, it is simply that the Economic Miracle has substituted the Resistance and post-war unemployment as the reality represented on the screen.

Similar examples of this function in the deployment of his stardom in the comedy Italian style genre can be seen in Sordi's roles in Ettore Scola's *Riusciranno i Nostri Eroi a Ritrovare l'amico Misteriosamente Scomparso in Africa?* (1968), in which he plays a Roman businessman who is dissatisfied with modern life and embarks on an unfruitful journey of self discovery in Africa with the excuse of looking for his missing brother in law; in Luigi Comencini's *Lo Scopone Scientifico* (1972), in which he plays a poor man from a Roman shantytown who engages every year in a series of card games against a billionaire despite knowing that he can never win because she can raise the bid indefinitely and he cannot; in the previously mentioned *Il Diavolo*, in which he plays an Italian tourist in Scandinavia who is at the same time fascinated by northern beauty and incapable of actively engaging with its diversity; and in his own directorial debut *Fumo di Londra*, in which he plays an Italian antiquarian who flies to London to fulfil his fantasy of being a Victorian gentleman and is faced instead with the new England, characterised by hippie and beat mannerisms. In all of these films, Sordi is nothing but a vehicle for the audience to perceive aspects of changing social reality, a reality in which the audience is displaced, a reality that Sordi's star sign mediates but is never empowered to successfully challenge. With reference to Monica Vitti's stardom in the art films by Michelangelo Antonioni, another evolution of neorealism informed by the shift from *movement-image* to *time-image*, Marcia Landy has written that

while Vitti's image [...] evokes images of elegant middle-class femininity trapped in a world of social conventions, bored, frustrated, in quest of sensation, her role and appearance in these films invite scrutiny for other ends. She is conduit to the films' meditation on the sights and sounds of modernity (*Stardom* 213).

These considerations can be easily applied to Sordi's stardom in the films featuring the 'Italian on holiday' type such as *Riusciranno i Nostri Eroi* and *Fumo di Londra* in which the spatial journeys of the protagonists spawn out of similar quests. In Scola's film, for example, Sordi plays a businessman named Fausto Di Salvio, who leaves Rome and goes to Africa in search of his brother-in-law Titino (Nino Manfredi). The way in which Fausto makes this decision, however, is indicative of the fact that the search for Titino is nothing but an excuse for Fausto to leave the pressures of modernised Rome, as we are shown that he announces his sister he is going to embark on this quest after he has had a public breakdown at a dinner party. At the party, his aristocrat friends force him to take part in a game during which they all sit in a circle, banging their hands on their knees. In turn every one of them has to come up with a random word somehow related to the word cited by the previous person; being distressed by both the mindlessness of this activity and the pressure of having to come up with something original, Fausto abandons the circle shouting at his guests. After a long journey in which Fausto's romanticised notion of Africa's primitivism has been subverted, during which the audience has been exposed to both the narrative involving Fausto and a series of documentary-like safari footage shot across the African landscape, a technique reminiscent of neorealism's use of documentary images, Fausto ultimately finds Titino posing as a shaman in a village. As they are sailing away from the village on a boat, the local tribe starts celebrating Titino, clapping their hands and chanting a series of syllables which presumably should mean something in some African language but actually sound like a phrase in the Roman regional variety of Italian: "Ti-ti nun-shea lash-à, ti-ti nun-shea lash-à", as in "Titi nun ce lascià", which means "Don't leave us, Titino!" Scola cross-cuts this chant with a flashback of the word-game at the Roman party with an increasing rhythm, creating a growing sense of distress that lasts until Titino abruptly dives from the boat and starts swimming back towards 'his' tribe. However, Titino never experienced that party, as he was already missing from Rome. In a logical

organisation of the events, it should be the character embodied by Sordi, Fausto, who makes a knowing choice of changing his life and not return to Rome. What we have, instead, is Fausto's flashback apparently inspiring Titino's decision, a grammatical connection that is incoherent on the logical level. The explanation is that Sordi's character here, his flashback and his experience across the African continent, does not act much as an "agent" of the events in the narrative, but rather as a "sign" of displacement towards modernity. Shortly after Titino's dive, Fausto is tempted himself to swim back towards the village but stops. This time Scola cross-cuts this interrupted action with a fast paced montage of the safari documentary footage, footage which we were previously not made to presume it was necessarily Fausto's point of view. So, again, we have an instance of a flashback that does not necessarily make sense on the logical level of the fictional narrative, but is coherent if we consider Sordi more as a "medium" of a growing distress towards modernity than an empowered agent in a consequential succession of events in the narrative. At the end of this montage, Fausto is asked by his assistant Ubaldo (Bernard Blier) what is going to do and Sordi's character can only answer "I am not sure what to do" and remain hanging with one foot standing on the pavement of the deck and the other leg across the ledge of the boat. This exemplary "lack of agency" and the way in which Sordi's star sign is used as a medium in the spatial *openness* of a narrative charged with alien visual and sound elements is reminiscent of the way in which Vitti's stardom acquires the function of "conduit of the sighs and sounds of modernity" in Antonioni's art films.

Sordi's comedic skills provided the satire of Italian society during the Economic Miracle and onwards. Spianazzola comments on the novelty of the actor's approach:

Completely incapable of autonomous choices, the character Sordi is always destined to endure the events of life: his anarchic aspiration, which is characteristic of all of the greatest comedians, Italian and foreign, is still well alive in him, but it does not have the strength to be fulfilled. Hence his own

perennial unfulfilment and his consequent condemnation to frustration
(*Cinema e Pubblico* 222).⁷¹

Spinazzola's words are revelatory. Sordi's "anarchic aspiration" is what provides the entertainment, the comedic relief, the humorous nods to the audience. What critics have not yet recognised is that his depiction of "characters incapable of autonomous choices" is in continuity with the neorealist *time-image*, the closest the stardom of a performer associated with a popular genre ever got to Deleuze's notion. Sordi's "velleitarismo perenne", his perennial unfulfillment, his inadequateness, the ineffectiveness which innovatively substituted the empowerment that characterised the comedians who preceded him and informed the stardom of all the comedy Italian style performers.

Of course a lot of comedic cinema is characterised by actions that are misdirected or do not obtain the desired effect and a lot of comedians' types are characterised by ineptitude for humouristic purposes. However, ultimately other forms of cinematic comedy feature a transformation of the world as a result of the characters' actions, conscious or inadvertent as they may be or the characters' goals somehow being obtained, they do not feature "a lack of agency" comparable to the one seen in many comedies Italian style.⁷² It is the perennial attribute of the unfulfillment of Sordi's peculiar stardom that aligns it with attributes of the Deleuzian *time-image* stardom and thus to neorealism, the cinematic practice that introduced it. His negative type of the middle-class Italian of the Economic Miracle is the first instance of *time-image* stardom in the context of the Italian genre films. It thus shows the continuity between the neorealist practice and the stardom of comedy Italian style.

⁷¹ "Del tutto incapace di scelte autonome, il personaggio Sordi è sempre destinato a subire gli eventi della vita: l'aspirazione anarchica, caratteristica di tutti i grandi comici cinematografici, italiani e stranieri, è ancora ben presente in lui, ma non ha più la forza di realizzarsi. Di qui il suo velleitarismo perenne, e la conseguente condanna alla frustrazione."

⁷² The French comedy *Le Diner de Cons* (1998, directed by Francis Veber) and its American counterpart *Dinner for Schmucks* (2010, directed by Jay Roach) would be the obvious examples of this solution, that of inadvertent change caused by an unaware character.

On the trail of Sordi's example, the other stars of the genre have also been deployed in this direction, as ineffective and somewhat frustrated perceivers of the changing reality of the Economic Miracle. Ugo Tognazzi's role in Salce's *La Voglia Matta* is characterized by masculine displacement similar to the one Sordi channelled in *Il Vedovo*, this time with a greater emphasis on the challenge posed against the average, 'respectable' middle class traditions by the emerging youth culture, embodied by Catherine Spaak's teenage character.⁷³ His roles as a committed police chief in Ettore Scola's *Il Commissario Pepe* (1969) and as a similarly minded judge in Dino Risi's *In Nome del Popolo Italiano* (1971) signify the inadequateness of the institutions, the two characters embodying their ineffectiveness when confronted with the modern consumerist subject.⁷⁴ This peculiar type of stardom finds its ultimate development in the characters of the 'comedies of integration', in which the star sign is connoted by an attempted resistance to the pressures of consumerist society which ultimately fails the test of time.⁷⁵ Tognazzi's role in Lizzani's *La Vita Agra*, Stefania Sandrelli's role in Pietrangeli's *Io La Conoscevo Bene* and Jean-Louis Trintignant's iconic role in Risi's *Il Sorpasso* are the perfect examples of such renewal of the new attributes introduced by Sordi in the field of Italian comedic stardom and of the unsettling relation between star and audience that neorealism initiated and comedy Italian style took to its fullest extent.

⁷³ Tognazzi's character journey is characterised by his progressive fascination with the young and his progressive abandonment of the rationality and appropriateness that characterise his initial behaviour in order to conquer the affection of Catherine Spaak's character. However, in the film's end Tognazzi is left alone on a beach, as nothing but a used toy which ultimately bored its owner after an initial phase of fascination. Tognazzi's character is thus condemned to return to adult life, having perceived the emerging world of youth culture, frustrated by his unsuccessful sexual quest and by the awareness of having humiliated himself.

⁷⁴ In *Il Commissario Pepe* Tognazzi plays a police commissioner on a moralising mission, committed to free his local northern town from indecency and inappropriate sexual behaviour. His narrative arc is, however, characterised by ineffectiveness and frustration as he progressively finds out that pretty much everyone in the town engages in such activities, and the citizens who seemingly support his task do so the most. In *Il Nome del Popolo Italiano*, the judge played by Tognazzi cannot find evidence to arrest the corrupted businessman played by Gassman for his illegal trades.

⁷⁵ As discussed in Chapter One.

In conclusion, Sordi's form of comedy informed the stardom of all comedy Italian style performers. The characterisation of his negative type was essential to the very existence of the genre. His temporary involvement in the farces was instrumental to the audience's accepting his form of realist satire in comedy Italian style and functional to the unsettling relationship of complicity he established with the spectator. His impersonation of middle-class characters did not signify disengagement from social criticism, but was instrumental to the ideological continuity between the neorealism of De Sica and Rossellini and the criticism of the 'boom' society that the comedy Italian style author pursued. His strategic subversion of the audience's expectation is a result of the neorealist practice of the *amalgam*, as identified by Bazin. His function of *medium* of the audience's displacement towards the major changes brought by the Economic Miracle links his stardom to the *time-image* Deleuze has identified with neorealism. All these elements contribute to validating his claim of having devised a satirical form of neorealism and clarify that the stardom characterising comedy Italian style was not in conflict with neorealist practice but rather in continuity with its most innovative instances.

Furthermore, other than confirming the notion of neorealism's evolution into comedy Italian style, the analysis of the stardom of this peculiar cinematic genre and of the role Sordi played in its establishment brings to the fore a series of considerations that go beyond the area of study this thesis is preoccupied with. Namely the considerations that the notion of "star", which we tend to identify with pre-constructed representations and conventionality is not necessarily in contrast with the notion of 'realism' and that comedy Italian style's representation of modernity is not simply either celebratory or satirical, as the existing criticism of the genre maintains, but, through the deployment of non-conventional star signs, can occasionally operate on a stratified level not dissimilar from analogue representations in the Italian art film of the period.

Chapter Three: Satirising the Present and Mythologising the Past. Comedy Italian Style's Dual Approach towards Social Reality and Its Neorealist Roots

*"We wanted to change the world but the world changed us instead!"*¹ – Nicola/Stefano Satta Flores regrettfully looks back to the Resistance and neorealism in Ettore Scola's *C'eravamo Tanto Amati*.

Commedia di costume: a dilution of neorealist engagement?

In this chapter I will discuss the ways in which different types of comedy Italian style films articulate the social reality they aim to represent on the screen in order to prove how the Italian neorealist practice informed the comedic genre's engagement with social issues. The fact that many comedies Italian style championed a bitter commentary on Italian society in the period between 1958 and 1977, in opposition to the large part of the comedic production of the early 1950s and also in opposition to the vast majority of genre films produced in Italy in recent times, is a strong indicator of the impact that neorealism, which introduced social criticism in Italian film production, had on its filmmakers.

However, some of the film critics who reviewed the comedy Italian style films at the time of their release received such comedies with disappointment, considering the introduction of social engagement in genre products as a signal of a betrayal of neorealist practice, its characteristic social commentary being diluted in entertainment.² The detractors of this genre maintained that in most comedies Italian

¹ "Volevamo cambiare il mondo ed invece il mondo ha cambiato noi!"

² The expression that was often used by my militant critics to criticise comedies Italian style was the adjective "bozzettistico", deriving from "bozzetto", which means "quickly drawn sketch". This term suggested that according to the detractors of the genre the depiction of society in the genre was too

style the element of social criticism was confined to the description of new social habits and referred to them as “*commedie di costume*”, implicitly diminishing the scale of such films’ engagement with social reality by reducing it to an analysis of habits. For example, Giulio Cattivelli criticised in these terms Luigi Zampa’s 1960 film *Il Vigile*:

Even though the dramatic *Processo alla Città* remains his best film, Luigi Zampa’s most spontaneous and genuine vocation is that of the satirical moraliser, ready as few others to interpret some universally recognisable aspects of our public life in the mode of *comedy of habits*. It is, let us be clear, a minor satire: its effectiveness is limited not only by the director’s own cultural and artisanal limitations, but also by his insistence on a vignette-like narrative, on picturesque and superficial caricature, which translate in the long run into the dangerous tendency towards an apathetic kind of criticism, in contrast with his sincere civic engagement. (Cattivelli, *Il Vigile* 53).³

The fact that the reviewer was preoccupied first and foremost with reminding us that Zampa’s dramatic effort in his opinion surpasses the comedic films that form most of the director’s filmography is already an indication of a general underestimation of things humorous on the part of the critics at the time which the comedy Italian style filmmakers often denounced. Cattivelli then refers to ‘cultural limitations’ as well as ‘artisanal’ ones of the director without supporting his argument with factual evidence.

bound to the analysis of manners. In response to this attitude, which he believed to be biased, Mario Monicelli said that, ultimately, all that “*bozzettistico*” meant was that “the subject matter had not been approached in the way that [Cinema Nuovo *editor*] Aristarco would have approached it” (in Toffetti 40) (in the original: “significava che il soggetto non era stato svolto nel modo in cui lo avrebbe fatto Aristarco”).

³ “Anche se il suo film migliore rimane il drammatico *Processo alla città* (1954), la vocazione più spontanea e genuina di Luigi Zampa è quella del moralista satirico, pronto come pochi altri a interpretare certi aspetti universalmente riconoscibili della nostra vita pubblica in chiave di frizzante commedia di costume. Si tratta, beninteso, di una satira minore: a circoscriverne l’efficacia concorrono non soltanto i limiti culturali e artigianali del regista, ma anche il suo indulgere all’effetto vignettistico, alla caricatura pittoresca ma alquanto superficiale, che si traducono a lungo andare nella pericolosa tendenza a un tipo di critica un po’ qualunquistico, contrastante con il suo sincero impegno civile).”

He thus mentions a supposed 'vignette-like' and 'superficial' character of the narrative, ignoring the fact that this was actually based on real events.

In the eyes of the detractors of the genre, the description of the new habits introduced in the period of the Economic Miracle and the fact that these comedies often presented to the public, through the casting of popular stars, bad examples of social behaviour in a sympathetic manner was an indication that comedies Italian style could have very much promoted such behaviour while satirising it. For instance Adelio Ferrero delivered a so to speak 'pre-emptive' bad review of *La Vita Agra* in light of Tognazzi's casting in the part of the protagonist that reads:

Lizzani, instead, starting with the revealing choice of Tognazzi that diminishes any possibility of a critical relation between character and audience to one of condescending complicity, took the easiest path, which most likely will assure the film a certain commercial success but makes it completely irrelevant even on the level of sociological enquiry into manners (Ferrero, *La Vita Agra*).⁴

Because of a widespread underestimation of the *popular*, and an uncritical assumption that something with a *popular* audience necessarily implies a *populist* point of view, Italian critics of the period were fully devoted to discussing how the neorealist practice informed the responses to Italy's rapid transition into a consumerist society with the advent of the Economic Miracle within the Italian art film of the period, the Fellini, Visconti, Antonioni and Pasolini output of the 1960s, and the often allegorical discourses implied within them concerning the socio-political and cultural junctures that characterised, if not determined, the outcome of such transition. However, they disregarded comedy Italian style, the cinematic form in which such discourses were carried out as explicitly as the neorealist discourses concerning the post-war period were in the post-war period. This point of view, unfortunately, still exists to some extent among critical discourses of the Italian

⁴ "Lizzani, invece, fin dalla scelta rivelatrice di Tognazzi che avvilita ogni possibile rapporto critico fra il personaggio e lo spettatore a rapporto di condiscendente complicità, ha imboccato la strada più facile, che assicurerà probabilmente al film una discreta fortuna commerciale ma lo rende del tutto irrilevante anche solo sul piano dell'indagine sociologica e di costume."

cinema of the period. Angelo Restivo's *The Cinema of Economic Miracles: Visuality and Modernization in the Italian Art Film*, for instance, only analyses one comedy Italian style, despite the fact that this genre is the primary site of cinematic representation of the Miracle, on the premise that

the Italian art film of the sixties differentiates itself from the 'low art' [*with this expression Restivo refers to popular and profitable genre films of the period, comedy Italian style included*] insofar as it self-consciously addresses itself to a national cinematic tradition: *the tradition of neorealism* [*my emphasis*], so crucial to the process of national reconstruction after the war (9).

Comedy Italian style's journey into Italy's recent past addressed such tradition as self-consciously as the art film did, as an analysis of the differences between strategies adopted in comedies set in the present and comedies set in the past will exemplify. As Mariapia Comand notes, in commenting on a television debate between Mario Monicelli and Nanni Moretti conducted by Alberto Arbasino, this dilemma between the engagement that putting forward social issues implied and the entertainment that was guaranteed by laughing at their expense always undermined the critical assessment of the genre.

At a certain point Arbasino asked if comedy Italian style contributed to maturing the Italians' political consciousness of something other than their habits or if, instead, it absolved them from the vices it sought to stigmatise. [...] Arbasino's question is ever-recurring in historiography, a fixation that polarised the discourse on comedy Italian style, reducing it to a binary dialectic (*Commedia* 20).⁵

⁵ "A un certo punto Arbasino chiede se la commedia all'italiana abbia contribuito alla maturazione della coscienza politica e del costume degli italiani o se al contrario abbia finito con l'assolverli proprio da quei vizi che intendeva stigmatizzare. [...] La domanda di Abrasino è un eterno ritorno, è una costante fissa nella critica e nella storiografia, una fissazione che ha polarizzato il discorso intorno alla commedia all'italiana riducendolo a un ragionamento binario."

For example, Italian novelist and intellectual Italo Calvino stated that “the more the caricature of our social behaviour aims at being merciless, the more it ends up being complacent and sympathetic.”⁶ The fact that such characters were presented with a series of attributes which encouraged the audience to laugh at their expense and that the narrative patterns of the comedies Italian style often punished such behaviour, however, are proof that the genre's filmmakers were actually doing everything they could to make sure that their satirical characters would not be mistaken for role models.⁷ Aldo Viganò subscribed to this view back in 1977 by posing the question: “sharp satire of national society or disengaged spectacular role-playing conducted by expert artisans? These questions have accompanied the activity of all the comedy Italian style directors” (*Dino Risi* 7)⁸ and answering it:

The ideological and methodological weight of the *neorealist mortgage* weighs on all Italian cinema. From this, in fact, derive the still existing contrasts/oppositions between an artistic-engaged cinema and a commercial-entertainment one. [...] Those who paid the price were actually those directors – such as Risi, Pietrangeli or Rossellini – who kept working outside the *theoretical conditioning* of the neorealist movement, trying to establish a direct contact with the audience (7).⁹

⁶ “Quanto più la caricatura dei nostri comportamenti sociali vuol essere spietata, tanto più si rivela compiaciuta e indulgente.” Calvino's statement originally appeared in his *Autobiografia di uno Spettatore* and it is recurrently quoted in *Commedia all'Italiana. Parlano i Protagonisti*, in which the genre's filmmakers are asked to respond to it in their interviews.

⁷ Schemes such as murdering one's wife in Dino Risi's *Il Vedovo* or planning a robbery in Monicelli's *I Soliti Ignoti* are shown never to succeed. The acceptance of the 'care-free' lifestyle of the Economic Miracle on the part of the characters results in death in the case of Risi's *Il Sorpasso* and suicide in the case of Pietrangeli's *Io La Conoscevo Bene*. In fact, according to Lino Micciché comedy Italian style was to some extent defined by this moralising aspect in the articulation of the tragic endings of its films, that mirrored the strategies of the cautionary tale (*Mario Monicelli: La Commedia e Oltre* xii).

⁸ “Satira graffiante delle contraddizioni strutturali della società nazionale o disimpegno gioco spettacolare condotto da abili mestieranti? Interrogativi come questi hanno accompagnato l'attività di tutti i registi della commedia all'italiana.”

⁹ “Su tutto il cinema italiano grava il peso ideologico e metodologico dell'*ipoteca neorealista*. Ed è, infatti, proprio da questa che derivano le ancora ricorrenti contrapposizioni-opposizioni tra un cinema artistico-impegnato e un cinema commerciale-d'evasione [...] Chi ne ha fatto le spese sono proprio quei registi – come Risi o Pietrangeli o Rossellini – che hanno continuato a lavorare al di fuori dei

Viganò's expressions "neorealist mortgage" and "theoretical conditioning" suggest that what burdened the comedy Italian style filmmakers was not the neorealist heritage in itself, which as I shall show they actually embraced, but rather the ideological weight inappropriately projected onto neorealism by the majority of the critics.

In the extremism of its plot's premise Geremi's *Divorzio all'Italiana* is a straightforward example of the viewer's positioning when watching a comedy Italian style. As John David Rhodes notes,

the film creates an ironic subject position from which viewers must consume it: in identifying with its charming but ridiculous protagonist we perforce bestow legitimacy on his unsavoury actions. Again, this is always happening in a comic key, and the film is not actually trying to persuade its viewers of the legitimacy of uxoricide (118).

Rhodes' words can be applied to most comedies Italian style in that, as much as they present vices through sympathetic performers, they never legitimise such vices by rewarding the characters who pursue such behaviour. In Geremi's film, for instance, the closing shot hints that, after all his scheming to freely pursue his love story with his cousin Angela, the protagonist played by Marcello Mastroianni is going to be betrayed by the object of his desire.

My argument is that the comedy Italian style filmmakers did not betray the neorealist ideal, replicated the neorealist practice of representing social reality on the screen. In other words, in my opinion it was not comedy Italian style as a genre that betrayed or diluted the neorealists' handling of social commentary, but rather the country itself that failed to fulfil their hopes for the reconstruction of the country after World War II and the end of Fascism. Lino Micciché criticised the genre, writing that it was the result of an ideology which was "monolithically and

condizionamenti teorici del movimento neorealista, nel tentativo di stabilire un contatto diretto con il pubblico, sulla base di una reinvenzione ludica o dialettica del quotidiano."

triumphantly middle-class" (*Anni '60 e Oltre* 91).¹⁰ In Chapter Four I shall challenge this notion by showing how the genre was informed by a progressive re-conception of culture. At this stage, however, it should be pointed out that, despite the fact that they chose the lower classes as the protagonists of their films, neorealist filmmakers too belonged to the middle-class and thus were prevented from ever truly going beyond a somewhat stereotypical representation of the lower classes. As Spinazzola noted

a bitter anti-bourgeoisie critique is a central fact of neorealism's ideological universe. This explains why one of the main objectives of its struggle was the destruction of the romantic-comedic cinema that was considered the most insidious form in terms of the middle class on screen. However, the need to overcome the stereotypes through which popular filmmaking mystified the needs of the lower classes remained unfulfilled. Thus the cinema destined to be consumed by the lower strata of the audience managed to survive the great historical changes of the period and soon was back there competing against neorealism (*Cinema e Pubblico* 16-17).¹¹

Spinazzola is here referring to pink neorealism's resuming of the structures that typified the 'white telephone' comedies of the Fascist era. As I will discuss in Chapter Four, neorealism's representation of the lower classes did not manage to challenge such structures altogether, containing within it to some extent the seeds of populism if reverted into a comedic context. Carlo Lizzani wrote that

neorealism disappears with the disappearing of that society characterised – still in the first years of the post-war period – by the problematic persistence

¹⁰ "[*La commedia all'italiana è il frutto di un'ideologia*] monoliticamente e trionfalmente piccolo-borghese."

¹¹ "Dato centrale dell'universo ideologico neorealista è un acre risentimento antiborghese. Ciò spiega perché l'obiettivo primario della battaglia fu la distruzione del cinema comico-sentimentale, considerato la forma più organica di presenza dei ceti medi sugli schermi. Restò invece in secondo piano l'esigenza di un superamento degli stereotipi attraverso cui il film popolare mistificava le richieste provenienti dalle classi subalterne. Così accadde che il cinema destinato al consumo degli strati inferiori di pubblico uscì in larga misura indenne dal grande rivolgimento storico e presto ebbe buon gioco nel contendere spazio alle opere del neorealismo."

of the rural issue with all of its ramifications: namely the misfortunes of the masses that migrated to the big cities as a consequence of the war and the post-war hardships, the stories of the refugees who came to the metropolis even before the industrial Miracle (*Quando è Finito, Quello che Resta* 98).¹²

In this perspective, comedy Italian style is nothing but the continuation of neorealism in its analysis of the transformation of that society into the society of the Economic Miracle, an analysis pursued through satire. As Mary P. Wood noted, the films of this genre ultimately “explore the clash of modernity with tradition and the breakdown of community into individual selfishness” (47). In the light of this, in fact, the satirical point of view granted comedy Italian style a more cohesive social discourse, as argued by Comand who writes that

the political dimension of comedy Italian style follows a precise perspective, isolating clear targets (the government's and the Church's powers, the economic one), giving voice to an enlightened and secular middle-class culture, the one that in the last analysis its authors ultimately came from (*Commedia* 46).¹³

Thus, despite the fact that they chose a different class as the subject matters of their films, the comedy Italian style filmmakers reacted to this failure of the ideal of democratic reconstruction of the country by representing through satire the institutions which promoted the reconstitution of old forms of power after the war and the majority of Italian people who accepted it. In fact this attitude was already present in post-war neorealism towards the end of this mode of production, as Mark Shiel notes analysing *Miracolo a Milano*:

¹² “Il neorealismo si eclissa con l'eclissarsi di quella società caratterizzata – ancora nei primi anni del dopoguerra – dalla prevalenza della problematica contadina e di tutti i suoi addentellati: cioè le vicende delle masse immigrate nelle grandi città in conseguenza della guerra e del dopoguerra, dei profughi venuti nelle metropoli non per il miracolo industriale ancora da venire.”

¹³ “La dimensione *politica* della commedia [*all'italiana*] si muove secondo una prospettiva precisa, individua bersagli chiari (il potere governativo ed ecclesiastico, quello economico), dando voce a una cultura borghese, illuminata e laica, quella da cui provengono in ultima analisi i suoi autori.”

Satirically [my emphasis], De Sica contrasted the tramps' shanty town of cardboard and scrap timber huts with the sophisticated city centre of Milan in order to suggest, in line with *Shoeshine* and *Bicycle Thieves*, that there had been only superficial change in the fundamental social structure since the end of Fascism (91).

De Sica did so, according to Shiel, *satirically*, hence adopting the same representational mode that the comedy Italian style filmmakers were going to adopt after 1958 in order to express the very same point of view.¹⁴

Similarly Micciché argued that the metacinematic nature of Visconti's *Bellissima* is related to the self-awareness, on the part of the director and of Zavattini who wrote the screenplay, of neorealism's own failure in actively intervening in changing Italian post-war society:

The thesis is [...] that what drove Visconti towards this treatment was his will to expose [...] a very different historical truth: that Italian post-war cinema had ceased being the interpreter and ambassador of the national-popular sentiment; that the neorealist utopia did not have even some precarious foundation left; that the relationship between 'people' and 'cinema' was nothing more than the relationship between an unrealisable illusion and a relentless machine (*Visconti e il Neorealismo* 205).¹⁵

¹⁴ The founding text of satirical humour is obviously Petronius' depiction of vice at the time of the Roman Empire in the prose of his *Satyricon*. The Roman population and Roman culture in the specific are particularly bound to this type of humour, for example one can think of Giuseppe Gioacchino Belli's dialectal poetic production from the 18th and 19th century or Trilussa's own dialectal poetry in the first half 20th. As both the neorealist wave and the comedic cinema that followed it are characterised by a large number of filmmakers, such as Fellini, Pasolini, De Sica, Monicelli, etc. moving into the Capital, one could conceive an argument, in a different discussion of the cinema of the period, to theorise this move towards the satirical in both neorealism and comedy Italian style as the product of the progressive 'Romanisation' of these artists.

¹⁵ "L'ipotesi è che [...] ciò che ha spinto Visconti verso quel soggetto [*Bellissima*] sia stata la volontà di fare filtrare [...] una verità di ben altra portata storica: che il cinema italiano del dopoguerra aveva cessato di essere il portatore e l'interprete della coscienza nazionalpopolare; che l'utopia neorealistica non aveva più nemmeno qualche precario fondamento residuo; che il rapporto fra 'popolo' e 'cinema' era ormai soltanto il rapporto tra un'illusione irrealizzabile e una macchina inesorabile."

Comedy Italian style's satirical renewal of this theme, that of the return to old forms of power after the parenthesis of the anti-fascist ideals of the Resistance, is augmented by the growing consumer capitalism of the 1960s that signified an even more marked discontinuity with the ideals for the democratic reconstruction of the country. As regards Visconti's metacinematic discourse on neorealism's failure to establish a relationship with a popular audience, a similarly metacinematic comedy Italian style, Ettore Scola's *C'eravamo Tanto Amati* resumed it: in fact I shall later argue, in my discussion of this film, that Scola's film attempts to put forward the idea that it was this comedic genre that succeeded to establish such a relationship.

I will make this argument by pointing out the differences in narrative and representational strategies between comedies Italian style with a contemporary setting and comedies Italian style which revisit the neorealist setting of the Resistance and the immediate post-war period. In order to do so, I will have to first and foremost briefly discuss the neorealists' attitudes towards the socio-political reality they represented on film.

The contradictory relationship between neorealism and ideology

An articulation of the neorealists' attitude towards the social reality of the immediate post-war period is somewhat problematic. It is to some extent because that period of Italian history was cluttered with defining and contradictory events such as the referendum between the monarchy and the Republic in 1946, the long-lasting confrontation between political forces in the drafting of the Republican Constitution and the first democratic elections won by the Christian Democrats in 1948. Most importantly, it is impossible to define a clear-cut uniform ideology shared by the neorealists, as Peter Bondanella points out:

Certainly the cinema neorealists turned to the pressing problems of the time – the war, the Resistance and the Partisan struggle, unemployment, poverty, social injustice, and the like – but there was never a programmatic approach to these questions or any preconceived method of rendering them on celluloid. And the phenomenon was clearly unlike other avant-garde movements in the sense that it never adhered to a governing manifesto or

even felt one was necessary. In short, neorealism was not a 'movement' in the strictest sense of the term (*From Neorealism to the Present* 34).¹⁶

The lack of such a programmatic manifesto and the presence among the neorealist filmmakers of diverse personalities like those of Visconti, De Sica and Rossellini determined a plurality of approaches towards the pressing social problems of the time in neorealist films. Shiel notes

Visconti's interest in the transgression of social and moral norms and his mixing of issues of class antagonism and human fate; Rossellini's strongly moral and spiritual neorealism, reliant on subjective characterisation; and De Sica's warmly sentimental neorealism, given to an inter-personal ethics of tolerance and understanding rather than a political programme (47).

All of the neorealist filmmakers certainly participated in the overall rejection of Fascism.¹⁷ As Geoffrey Nowell-Smith wrote, "when the neorealist films did start appearing it was in the context of a culture eager to throw off the legacy of Fascism, not just its pomp and propaganda but its conformism and narrow cast of mind" (*Making Waves* 29). Despite the mutual reaction against Fascism and the type of cinema they identified to be an expression of Fascism, the neorealists had very diverging attitudes towards Italian society, but some of the critics made the mistake of judging neorealist films and directors solely on the ideological implications of each release, rather than by evaluating their aesthetic accomplishments, as Wagstaff notes:

¹⁶ Which is why I refrained from using this term when referring to neorealism.

¹⁷ I shall refer the reader interested in understanding this cultural climate to Franco Fortini's influential article *The Writer's Mandate at the End of Anti-Fascism*. Articles such as Giovanni Sedita's *Vittorio Mussolini, Hollywood and Neorealism* have emphasised the relationship between soon to become neorealist directors and the regime during the Fascist years, especially that of Rossellini. However, I believe that when considering the attitude of neorealism towards the regime one should disregard the state of things before the end of the war. Some neorealist filmmakers may have underplayed the relationships they had with Fascism for reasons of opportunity, or because of a genuine ideological shift. However, what ultimately matters is their positioning against it at the time in which neorealist films were actually being produced and how Fascism was represented in such films.

Ideology played an important part in the battle for neorealism [...] One of the flagships in the battle for neorealism was the journal *Cinema Nuovo*, under the dictatorship of the Communist critic Guido Aristarco, which gradually developed a Marxist historicizing theory according to which neorealism should evolve from chronicling every-day life to being a more substantial and literary representation of the great historical and ideological movements of contemporary history. In this light, Rossellini was seen as already regressing into Catholic mysticism and consolation with *Germania Anno Zero*, and De Sica's *Ladri di Biciclette* was faulted for not inserting its proletarian protagonist into the processes of production, but instead projecting the petit-bourgeois image of the 'victim'. For Aristarco, Visconti's *Senso* (a historical film recounting the bourgeoisie's betrayal of the democratic thrust of the *Risorgimento*) pointed the way forward (*Italian Neorealist Cinema* 78).

As Wagstaff's analysis shows, Aristarco's position on the neorealist filmmakers' handling of social commentary was not informed by an evaluation of the narrative and representational attitudes expressed in the existing works, but motivated rather by a projection of what neorealism *should*, in his opinion, become.¹⁸ As I will show later, this kind of reading also determined the perception of comedy Italian style's social engagement as a betrayal of neorealism.¹⁹

¹⁸ According to Peter Bondanella, "the crisis was merely a reflection of a certain kind of film criticism that attempted, fortunately without success, to force artists to tow an ideological line" (*La Strada* 78).

¹⁹ Fellini's *La Strada* (1954) also famously suffered from Aristarco's position. Bazin and Fellini replied to *Cinema Nuovo*'s harsh criticism of the film by saying that neorealism did not have to necessarily coincide with social realism, but that the mode of production's aesthetic could be used to investigate other aspects of reality such as the metaphysical one. In fact, *La Strada* can be conceived as the film which initiates the evolution of the neorealist practice into the art film of Fellini, Pasolini and Antonioni. As I argued in the Introduction, this thread of evolution of neorealism is parallel to the evolution of neorealism into comedy Italian style which this research is concerned with and the one does not exclude the validity of the other. Structural and narratological similarities between comedy Italian style and the art film of the time show, by virtue of the Darwinian principle of *inheritance*, how they shared neorealism as a progenitor. Whereas comedy Italian style represented an evolution of neorealism that obeyed the principle of *modification* for the sake of survival, less profitable examples of Italian art film benefitted from the solid commercial foundation the comedy Italian style business

Since it would be inaccurate to single out a common ideological position towards the social reality of the post-war period on the part of the neorealists, it is more correct to identify recurring attitudes to the representation of such reality. According to Tag Gallagher, "if we can speak of at all of a 'neorealist ideology', it is Rossellini who is at its centre, and the tendentious Left that is peripheral to it" (87) precisely because "he accepted the necessity of rejecting all rhetoric and every ideology" (93). In fact, according to Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, even in the case of Visconti, one of the most politicised neorealist filmmakers, the temptation of propaganda was always mitigated by the realist impulse. According to Nowell-Smith, in the making of *La Terra Trema*,

resisting the temptation to turn Aci Trezza into the location for an imaginary revolution, which would have been a total violation of the reality of a film conceived first and foremost as a document, Visconti recast his story in a more pessimistic and 'realistic' form (*Luchino Visconti* 32).

As I pointed out in Chapter One, tragically ironic twists abound in neorealist films. Rather than proposing a solution to the social problems they reproduce on the screen, neorealist films tend to focus on the ambiguities that these problems imply, privileging *eventuality* over dramatic *necessity* in the construction of the plots. In other words, as Comencini famously stated, neorealist films "*illustrate a situation*" but do not go as far as presenting us with a social or political alternative resolution. In his analysis of De Sica's *Ladri di Biciclette*, Bazin pointed out this *openness* and praised the filmmaker for avoiding a rhetorical approach:

A propaganda film would try to prove that the workman could not find his bicycle, and that he is inevitably trapped in the vicious circle of poverty. De Sica limits himself to showing that the workman cannot find his bicycle and that as a result he will be unemployed again. [...] Although on the basis of the workman's misfortune we have no alternative but to condemn a certain kind

model represented for the whole of the Italian film industry at the time and from the resources, in terms of both profits and personnel, it offered.

of relation between a man and his work, the film never makes the events or the people part of an economic or political Manicheism (51).

The tragically ironic twist of the film is that the protagonist is himself caught trying to steal a bicycle, after his search has proved unfruitful. Rather than offering us a petit-bourgeois image of 'victim', as Aristarco objected, De Sica and Zavattini are careful to contradict the heroic rhetoric of pre-neorealist productions and confirm that even Antonio Ricci is fallible.²⁰ His desperate attempt is justifiable because of the social context of post-war unemployment, but nonetheless he is as driven to error just as the thief who originally stole his bicycle.

Whereas Bazin praised the *openness* of films such as De Sica's as an index of their realism, other critics have to some extent mirrored Aristarco's position and have denounced the lack of ideology in examples of neorealism as a shortcoming of the post-war practice, an unfulfilment of their promise of engagement with social reality. In his analysis of *Ladri di Biciclette*, Frank P. Tomasulo wrote:

In *Bicycle Thieves* (and in much of the neo-realist canon), ideology presents itself to the text as "Life," rather than as a systems of concepts. [...] The contradictions show but are not resolved within the text, so no perspective for struggle is offered. *Bycicle Thieves* offers several (inadequate) solutions to the problems raised. [...] There is no class analysis at all; rather, this sort of analysis is displaced to a moralist/idealist (even a Christian) critique of social injustice (2-4).²¹

²⁰ In fact Robert S.C. Gordon's article 'Notes on the Screenplay of *Ladri di Biciclette*' testifies that "more anchored elements of politics and class analysis, with a root in a conception of film as investigative journalism" were present in earlier drafts and dropped closer to shooting (286).

²¹ Regarding Tomasulo's comment concerning a critique of social injustice of the Christian type transpiring in the film, the argument has been made in fact for the Christian connotations of neorealism, both in terms of Christian iconography in some of its texts such as *Roma Città Aperta*, which shows us the priest played by Aldo Fabrizi dying in a pose reminiscent of a *Pietà*, and in terms of the Catholic Church's actual involvement in the production of a film that foregrounded the practice, discussed by Daniela Gennari and Marco Vannelli's article *Did Neorealism Start in Church? Catholicism, Cinema and the Case of Mario Soldati's 'Chi è Dio?'* I believe instead that neorealism is characterised by the coexistence of both Catholic and anti-Catholic signs, which are another index of

Tomasulo's comment that "no perspective for struggle" is featured in the film denotes a certain expectation of one, this expectation being unjustified because of the absence of a programmatic statement on the part of the filmmakers. However, what is most important in Tomasulo's analysis is the notion that the contradictions of contemporary social reality "are not resolved in the text" and that the film is characterised by the absence of adequate solutions to the problems raised. In other words, the social reality of 1948 Rome or more generally of post-war Italy is not articulated through a narrative that rhetorically offers a course of action to be taken *in order to* subvert the negative aspects of such reality, *in order to* transform it.²² In fact De Sica goes as far as to negate openly the possible programmatic reading of the film in the scene of the *dopolavoro* meeting in a local branch of the Communist Party in which, as Carlo Celli notes:

The song, 'Se mi volesse bene veramente' ('If she really loved me'), suggests the meaning of the situation: if the Party really loved Antonio it would offer him more help. Instead, the communists and the vaudeville troupe argue about who has the right to use the stage, leaving the impression that like stage performers, the Communist Party is only interested in putting on a show (46).

The articulation of social reality is organised instead by the progressive demonstration of the paradoxical nature of some of its aspects, as we are shown in

the *openness* that characterised this practice's articulation of social reality. Tomasulo himself noted this duality in *Ladri di Biciclette*:

The weeded churchyard, the Austrian priests, the continual presence of crucifixes and religious icons, (even at Signora Santona's), the tracking shots of darkly lit poverty-stricken worshippers in the church (in sharp contrast to the overdressed lady and the elegant young man), and the irony of the *Pietà*-like scene of the thief and his protective mother all seem to point to anti-clericalism. But this over-determination is ultimately undercut by the true Christian underpinnings of the film's ideological compromise (12).

²² This aspect reflecting Deleuze's notion of neorealism as the practice which initiated the regime of the *time-image*, which is exactly characterised by the lack of empowerment in transforming the world they inhabit on the part of the characters, as discussed in Chapter Two.

the ending that *even* a just man like Antonio Ricci resorts to theft to overcome unemployment and as we were previously shown that *even* the original bicycle thief, whom we perceived as a villain throughout the film, was motivated by poverty.²³ In this reading, *Ladri di Biciclette* is more a paradoxical parable commenting on Italian post-war identity rather than a programmatic engaged theorem. As Peter Bondanella notes,

a realist reading of *The Bicycle Thief* must emphasize the film as a politically engaged film combining a presentation of contemporary social problems with an implicit denunciation of a particular socioeconomic system. Closer analysis, however, will reveal that this interpretation is only one of those possible and not even the most persuasive, for De Sica's vision also includes a pessimistic and even fatalistic view of the human condition, as well as a philosophical parable on the absurdity of life, human solitude, and the individual's loneliness in a society composed of equally alienated individuals (*A History* 86).

Similarly, as Jerry Vermilye points out, De Sica's 1946 film *Sciusià* "offered no solutions to the problems it reflected" (37), meaning that it did not seek to represent social reality through a rhetorical resolution in the narrative.

The most accomplished neorealist films set in present day, those documenting the immediate post-war period, tend not to impose rhetoric on the situation they illustrate, but rather resemble *Ladri di Biciclette*'s articulation of social reality in a paradoxical form: *even* starting his own business does not allow 'Ntoni, the protagonist of Visconti's *La Terra Trema* (1948), to free his family from a spiral of debt owed to their former employers; *even* if his survival depends on it, the protagonist of De Sica's *Umberto D.* is not capable of putting his dignity aside and begging on the streets; in Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero* (1948) we are shown that

²³ In his article 'The Legacy of Mario Camerini in Vittorio De Sica's *The Bicycle Thieves*', Carlo Celli states that because of the presence of themes "that were staples of their earlier collaborations with Camerini" (3) and of a depiction "of proletarian unions and political institutions along the lines established in [*Camerini's 1930s comedy*] *Signor Max*" (9), the film did not represent a break with the past. The film does represent a break, as Celli notes, in featuring ambiguous endings (15) that reflect neorealism's narrative *openness*.

even after World War II is over the generation of Germans who have perpetrated Nazi crimes is not willing to accept responsibility for it and, paradoxically, it is young Edmund, who does not belong to that generation, who has to pay with his life for the sins of the fathers.

In fact the very realism of these films depends on this strategy. When some kind of rhetoric is imposed on their social commentary, the authenticity of the film often suffers from it. This is the case of Pietro Germi's *Il Cammino della Speranza* (1950), a film following a group of Sicilian out-of-work miners who attempt to migrate illegally to France to find work. The representation of their strike in Sicily, which opens the film, is convincing and so is their despair as they are forced to wander around Rome, looking for an alternative means of transportation as they have been caught on the train by the authorities. However, in the final scene of the film, as the miners cross the Alps, a voice-over comments on the unexpected welcome that they will receive from a French border patrol:

[Narrator]: On the borders you will always find soldiers, soldiers of both sides, with different uniforms and different languages. But here where loneliness is great, men are less lonely and surely closer than in the streets and cafés of our big cities where people bump into each other and mingle without looking into one another's eyes. Exchanging a cigarette, offering a sip of wine have up here a true sense of human warmth, they express a need for brotherly love that often men forget but always grows in their hearts. Because borders are drawn on maps, but on Earth as God has made it, no matter how long one navigates the oceans, no matter how long one looks along the river streams and up to the crests of the mountains, there are no borders on this Earth.²⁴

²⁴ "Lungo i confini troverete sempre i soldati, i soldati dell'una e dell'altra parte con differenti uniformi e diverso linguaggio. Ma quassù dove la solitudine è grande gli uomini sono meno soli e certamente più vicini che per le vie e nei caffè delle nostre grandi città dove la gente si urta e si mescola senza guardarsi in faccia. Lo scambio di una sigaretta, l'offerta di un sorso di vino hanno quassù un senso vero di calore umano, esprimono un bisogno di fraternità che sovente gli uomini dimenticano, ma che sempre fermenta nei loro cuori. Perché i confini sono tracciati sulle carte, ma sulla Terra come Dio la fece, per quanto si percorrano i mari, per quanto si cerchi e si frughi lungo il corso dei fiumi e sul crinale delle montagne non ci sono confini su questa Terra."

The rhetoric of “*fratellanza*”, of brotherly love, imposed as a solution for the miners’ unemployment is unconvincing and both the expressive means used to convey it, the voice-over which is introduced for the first time in the last two minutes of the film, and the tone of its delivery suddenly disrupt the impression of realism that the film had previously established.²⁵ Vittorio Spinazzola subscribed to this view arguing that

Il Cammino della Speranza aims at being a film-manifesto that is able to show the path necessary to find a full contact with the audience without resorting to commercial shortcuts. The project was that of deploying an outraged critical discourse, but its meaning collapsed in a generic tribute to the value of brotherly love (*Cinema e Pubblico* 31).²⁶

Rossellini’s *Roma Città Aperta* seemingly uses the same paradoxical approach to the depiction of the Resistance. The Nazi occupation of the capital is such a terrible experience that *even* the children in the city organise their own Partisan action. Freedom is such a priority that Don Pietro, the priest played by Aldo Fabrizi, is determined not to confess to the Gestapo when captured *even* if that means favouring the Communist partisans who, as he is reminded by the German officer during his questioning, will eventually be opposing the Catholic Church once the war is over.²⁷ Resistance fighting is the only imperative imposed on the characters, but it

²⁵ The imposition of the rhetoric of ‘brotherly love’ is controversial. Are the filmmakers telling us that French people are better than Italians? Why were the miners not offered a similar welcome anywhere in the peninsula? If it is so easy for Italians to be welcomed into France without documents and find work there, why is nobody else doing it?

²⁶ “*Il Cammino della Speranza* vorrebbe essere un film-manifesto, capace di indicare la linea necessaria per ritrovare un pieno contatto con le platee, senza concessioni alla facilità commerciale. L’indicazione consisteva nello svolgere un discorso risentitamente critico, ma per annullarne il significato in un generico atto d’omaggio ai valori della fratellanza morale.”

²⁷ Peter Bondanella argues that Rossellini does not avoid hinting at this conflict writing that “while he fuses Catholic and Communist elements of the Resistance into a coherent storyline, he never avoids the hints of tension between the two major sources of anti-fascism, two groups who will oppose each other when the struggle against the Nazis has ended” (*A History* 67). I, however, do not subscribe with this view and I shall soon show how the narrative of the film effectively seeks to resolve this tension, showing it is not threatening.

is a form of fighting pursued *in order to* end the horrors of the war, as the conversation between Pina (Anna Magnani) and Francesco (Francesco Granjacquet) on the night prior to their wedding shows:

[Pina]: How long ago it was [*that we met*]! And yet the war had already started!

[Francesco]: That's right! We all fooled ourselves into thinking that it would be over soon and that we would have only seen it at the movie-theatre! Instead...

[Pina]: When will it be over? Sometimes I just cannot take it anymore! It seems like this winter shall never pass!

[Francesco]: It will end, Pina, it will end! And spring will come too. And it will be even more beautiful, because we will be free. We must believe it, we must hope for it!²⁸

As expressed in the dialogue, the ethical contrast freedom/dictatorship is indeed a rhetoric imposed by the neorealist filmmakers in their social commentary of the events taking place shortly before World War II ended, the union of all the segments of the Italian people fighting in Resistance being necessary *in order to* achieve it. As David Bruni notes, the representation of the Resistance in *Roma Città Aperta* is a somewhat rhetorical manipulation of the historical reality of the last year of the conflict:

Roma Città Aperta privileges only one of the possible readings of the Resistance, choosing not to allude, not even in passing, to its origin and its birth bound to the dramatic twenty years of Fascist dictatorship, nor to the hopes of all its participants for a future that would be different also from the sociopolitical point of view. Rather it focuses solely on its ethical motivation, ignoring the complexity of the positions existing within the coalition of those who opposed of the Nazi-Fascist dictatorship, sublimated in function of a

²⁸ [Pina]: Com'è lontano quel tempo [*she's referring to when they met*] ...eppure c'era già la Guerra!
[Francesco]: Già! Tutti si illudevano che sarebbe finita presto e che l'avremmo vista solo al cinematografo! E invece... [Pina]: Ma quando finirà? Ce sò dei momenti che proprio nun ne posso più! 'St'inverno sembra che non debba finì mai![Francesco]: Finirà, Pina, finirà! E verrà pure la primavera. E sarà più bella perché saremo liberi. Bisogna crederlo, bisogna volerlo!

cohesive national unity, on the basis of principles shared by the most which are identifiable with Christian virtues (136-137).²⁹

David Forgacs agrees with this point of view, pointing out that Rossellini's film "involves the working up of certain pieces of raw material into a selective myth or legend to the exclusion of other memories: those, notably, of political divisions among Italians, guilt over non-resistance, cowardice or collusion" (*Space, Rhetoric and the Divided City* 109). This ethical reading of the Resistance characterised simply as a struggle between 'good' and 'evil' is confirmed in the last shot of the film, showing the group of children who witnessed the execution of Don Pietro marching back towards the city with Saint Peter's dome towering in the background. [figure 20]. Overall the neorealist films set during the Resistance express the ethical rhetoric of freedom pursued at any cost through Resistance fighting, with the Americans represented as liberators but at the same time highlighting that the communication between Italian partisans and Allied soldiers is somewhat problematic, as is the case in Rossellini's following neorealist film *Paisà* (1946).



Figure 20: the children walk back towards Rome after the execution of Don Pietro in *Roma Città Aperta* (Roberto Rossellini 1945)

²⁹ "Roma Città Aperta privilegia solo una delle possibili interpretazioni della Resistenza, scegliendo di non alludere, magari anche solo di passaggio, alla sua origine e alla sua genesi legate al drammatico ventennio di dittatura fascista, oppure alle speranze nutrite da molti suoi militanti in un domani diverso anche dal punto di vista sociopolitico. Ma punta esclusivamente sulla motivazione di ordine etico, ignorando la complessità di posizioni rappresentate all'interno dello schieramento degli oppositori alla dittatura nazifascista, sublimata in funzione di una coesa unità nazionale, individuate sulla base di principi condivisibili dai più e tali da essere identificati con le virtù cristiane."

Summing up the attitudes of the neorealists towards the element of social commentary in their films, it is correct to posit that they shared an idealistic hope of a democratic reconstruction of the country and that they conceived cinema as a powerful tool in representing social injustice and therefore to contribute to such reconstruction. However, if in the neorealist films set during the war the ethical rhetoric of a uniformly unified Resistance was instrumental to this ideal,³⁰ the films set during the post-war struggle do not feature such rhetorical manipulation. They feature the lower classes who suffer because of the poverty and unemployment caused by Fascism and the war and rather than openly attacking the institutions or suggesting a socio-political alternative, they are characterised by *openness* and are limited to showing us a progression of paradoxical circumstances, signifying the social reality they represent on screen as a context in which *even* these are possible eventualities.

By and large neorealist films refuse to offer or allude to a solution for the characters or the institutions in solving the social problems they represent, thus avoiding the risk of having their realism compromised by ideology.³¹ On the contrary, they tend to insert episodes, such as Ricci's theft of a bicycle, that allude to an inevitable complicity, forced by the extreme circumstances, on the part of the common people in accepting and perpetrating the status quo, using these paradoxes to highlight the ambiguous and contradictory nature of the social problem they reproduce on the screen. Thus, it is correct to identify a dual approach towards social commentary in neorealist films: the films narrating the Resistance offer us a distorted view of the historic phenomenon, imposing an ethical reading of the phenomenon.

³⁰ Rossellini's *Paisà* and Luigi Zampa's *Vivere in Pace* (1947) operated very much in the same way as *Roma Città Aperta* did, by showing us heroic Italians dying in poses reminiscent of Christian iconography and, on the other hand, barely mentioning or ignoring the Italian Fascists that the Resistance was fighting against and the struggle between Communist and more moderate Partisan groups. In fact, Tomasulo addresses the "continual neo-realist displacement of blame onto Nazism, rather than homegrown Italian fascism" (8) and I agree with this reading.

³¹ The Crocian conception of culture and history that informs some of the early neorealist efforts of Rossellini and De Sica is more of a cultural background for the directors than an ideology they strategically deploy through their films. As for Visconti's Gramscian Marxist perspective, it will be addressed in Chapter Four.

The films set during the post-war struggle avoid imposing rhetoric on the social context they depict and highlight its paradoxical aspects.

Satirising the present and the 'success at any cost' rhetoric: *I Mostri* and *La Vita Agra*

The element of complicity is strongly present in the comedies Italian style set during the Economic Miracle, which replaced with harsh satire, as Gianni Canova notes, the optimism that characterised the comedic forms of the early 1950s, such as farces and pink neorealism, or "*commedia di integrazione*" - as Canova defines the comedies produced during the early years of the Republic, in the early 1950s - which are not to be confused with those comedies Italian style produced in the 1960s that feature individuals being absorbed into consumerist society, defined by Giacovelli with the same expression:

If the "*commedia di integrazione*" found in marriage and the acceptance of work the two main gateways by which the individual subject could enter civil society, paying the price of integration with the abandonment of the excess of desire (or with the restriction of that which was desirable within the limits of what was dutiful): both of these [*marriage and work*] seem limiting and unacceptable to a new individual subject [*the comedy Italian style one*] who, after integrating, actually aspires – in accordance with the ethics of success at any cost – to escape from the body of society (and the anonymity it imposes) by distinguishing himself from it and dominating it from the height of his supposed exceptionality (36).³²

The pressing demands of consumerist society are one of the main objects of satire for the comedy Italian style filmmakers. As Canova's analysis shows 'success

³² "Se la *commedia di integrazione* individuava nel matrimonio e nell'accettazione del lavoro i due principali varchi attraverso cui il singolo individuo poteva fare il suo ingresso in società, pagando con la rinuncia alla smodatezza del desiderio (o con il contenimento del *desiderabile* entro i confini del *doveroso*) il prezzo dell'inserimento, queste due stesse figure appaiono come limitative e insopportabili a un soggetto individuale che – dopo essersi integrato – aspira piuttosto- in sintonia con l'etica esibizionistica del successo ad ogni costo - a uscire dal corpo sociale (e dall'anonimato che questo comporta) per distinguersi e dominarlo dall'alto della propria presunta eccezionalità."

at any cost' is not the *ethos* promoted by the filmmakers, as the detractors of the genre objected, but rather the *ethos* of the society shaped during the Economic Miracle. To this transformation comedy Italian style reacts with a criticising satire far more bitter than the one implemented in earlier comedic forms, which were characterised by rhetorical uses of narrative stereotypes such as marriage and coming-of-age.

A good example of this practice is Dino Risi's 1963 film *I Mostri*, a film comprised of a number of episodes featuring a series of characters that are examples of the 'new individual subject' of the Economic Miracle who are depicted, as the title implies, as embodiments of social monstrosity. The film opens with the episode entitled *L'Educazione Sentimentale*, in which a father (Ugo Tognazzi) indoctrinates his son (Ricky Tognazzi) about the importance of opportunism as a way of life. "The world is round and he who cannot float, sinks."³³ – he keeps repeating, encouraging his son to "farsi furbo"³⁴ to justify his violations of every rule of the street code, as well as his theft of pastries from a café and his pretending to be disabled to pay a cheaper ticket at an amusement park. Shortly after, during a car ride, the father and son are stuck in traffic and see a series of electoral campaign posters on the walls of a building. Explaining what they are, the father bursts into a criticism of the Italian current political forces:

Those who ought to think about the public interest, only think about their personal gain. Because unfortunately there is this tendency of dishonesty, this tendency towards deceit. So if you want to succeed in life, you should never trust anyone, not even Daddy.³⁵

His speech reflects a lack of faith in institutions. However he behaves the opposite to how he preaches, as shortly after he forces his son to pretend he is ill and

³³ "Il mondo è tondo e chi non stà a galla v'è a fondo."

³⁴ This expression corresponds to the English "wise up" but also connotes conning, the notion that "wising up" goes hand to hand with exploiting others.

³⁵ "Quelli che dovrebbero pensare agli interessi pubblici, pensano invece agli interessi propri. Perché purtroppo c'è questa tendenza alla disonestà, questa tendenza alla malafede. Perciò se vuoi fare bene nella vita, non bisogna mai fidarsi di nessuno, mai, neanche di papà."

to flag a handkerchief out of the car window, in order to avoid the traffic jam by leading the drivers in the opposite lane to believe that he must rush to hospital.

As was the case in most neorealist films and even more so, this average Italian is shown as actively be a part of the social problem, the opportunistic mentality generated by the Economic Miracle, that political, cultural and industrial institutions have allowed to flourish. In post-war neorealist films such as *Ladri di Biciclette* complicity was forced by the extreme circumstances of poverty which annulled the possibility of a moral choice; in *L'Educazione Sentimentale* wealth is shown to be just as powerful. In the episode's tragically ironic twist, a title card reading "ten years later"³⁶ appears on the screen and the image cuts to a newspaper title: "Kills his father after having robbed him."³⁷ A photograph of Ugo Tognazzi as the victim of the crime [figure 21] confirms to the spectator the effectiveness of the father's teachings. His indoctrination of his son about the value of opportunism in the society of the Economic Miracle was so successful that *even* the father himself has become a victim of the 'soggetto individuale' he raised.

As was the case in most neorealist films, Risi and the screenwriters do not attempt to offer us a solution to the social problem they depict, but rather put on screen its paradoxical nature: the average man is at the same time both victim and culprit. The bitter satire of this new Italian of the Economic Miracle is achieved through the same narrative scheme used in neorealist post-war films: a narrative openness that, rather than seeking to propose a resolution to the social reality represented on the screen, highlights the complicity between the common man who inhabits such social reality and the institution that have determined it and that fulfils the exploitation of the paradox at the core of this complicity for comedic effect.

³⁶ "Dieci anni dopo".

³⁷ "Uccide il padre dopo averlo derubato".



Figure 21: a newspaper story covers the murder of a father (Ugo Tognazzi) by the hand of his own son in *L'educazione sentimentale*, the opening episode of *I Mostri* (Dino Risi, 1963)

Two episodes in Risi's film refer to neorealist signature landscapes and are further indicative of the comedy Italian style filmmakers' positions towards the current socio-political landscape. In the first one, entitled *Che Vitaccia!*, a ragged man (Vittorio Gassman) walks towards a wooden shed that is falling apart. The high multi-storey buildings in the background confirm that the episode is set during the Economic Miracle. [figure 22] However, when the man walks in the shed, we find out that his numerous family lives in it. This setting amongst the poor reminds us of neorealist films concerning post-war unemployment. [figure 23] A doctor is examining one of the man's children, who is sick. Throughout the examination Gassman's character keeps complaining about his misfortunes and about the family's limited budget. "The milkman will not add to our tab anymore!"³⁸ – he explains and when he is told by the doctor that his son may need some antibiotics, he sarcastically asks his wife (Angela Portaluri): "What are we going to eat tomorrow? Medicines?"³⁹ However, throughout the scene, the conversation between the man and his wife foregrounds the fact that there is *somewhere* the man *must* go and that paying the doctor for the call will not leave him enough money for this non-specified journey.

³⁸ "Il lattaiò nun ce fà più credito".

³⁹ "E che se magnamo domani? Le medicine?"

The wife insists: “You must go... there, we will manage somehow”⁴⁰ and convinces the doctor that he will get paid some other time. The Gassman character reluctantly leaves, repeating that he is not in the right state of mind to go *there*. In the episode's twist, the image cuts to the Olympic Stadium where the football club A.S. Roma is playing an important fixture. Gassman's character actually proves to be having no problem at all in enjoying the spectacle, as he responds with a long lasting cheer to his team's goal. [figure 24]

The episode alludes to the fact that the consumerist goods that the Economic Miracle offers have become a priority, coming *even* before the goods necessary for everyday survival. As the reference to the neorealist post-war unemployment setting implies, *even* the poor have been embedded in the new socio-economic order. Gassman's over-acting the part of the unfortunate poor man suggests that the filmmakers are actually parodying neorealism with *Che Vitaccia!*, the exaggerated accents used in this depiction of poverty being almost a caricature of a neorealist trademark.⁴¹



Figure 22: a poor man (Vittorio Gassman) returns to the shed in which he lives from *Che Vitaccia!*, the seventh episode of *I Mostri* (Dino Risi, 1963)

⁴⁰ “Ce devi annà... là, in qualche modo c’arrangeremo...”

⁴¹ In reference to Rossellini's *La Macchina Amazzacattivi*, Peter Brunette notes that in the film the director “refuses to assign blame solely to the rich, and his ‘condemnation’ assumes the global, exculpatory dimensions of ‘that’s the way people are’” (Rossellini 106). In this strategy, “a moral position [...] substitute[ing] a political one” (106), *Che Vitaccia!* and other comedies Italian style which are not restrained in their grotesque depiction of the poor, such as Ettore Scola's *Brutti Sporchi e Cattivi* (1976), do not depart from neorealism either.



Figure 23: the man worries about his starving family, from the same film



Figure 24: the man leaves his sorrows behind and enjoys a football game in the newly built Stadio Olimpico of Rome, from the same film

The impression of a parody of neorealism is seemingly confirmed by the short episode of *I Mostri* entitled *Presa dalla Vita*, in which an old lady is abducted from her home every night and taken to Cinecittà where she is filmed while repeatedly falling into a swimming pool and the title is revealed to be a pun.⁴² However, in the episode entitled *Scenda l'Oblio* Risi and the screenwriters Age and Scarpelli refer even more openly to neorealism and implicitly clarify that, as much as they are playing with the audience's notions of the post-war neorealist practice in the

⁴² "Presa dalla vita" is an expression generally used for its meaning "she is enjoying life", but it literally means "taken from life", which is of course a reference to the neorealist practice of using non-professional actors. After all, even a critically acclaimed neorealist director such as Luchino Visconti played with this notion in his 1951 film *Bellissima*, in which a mother (Anna Magnani) desperately tries to have her daughter cast in a film.

direction of parody, they are also appreciative of neorealism as a defining cultural phenomenon and as the expression of an unfulfilled ideal and they align themselves as its heirs.

The episode opens with a shot of a German soldier riding a side-car motorcycle alongside a wall. As we hear him shouting to a comrade in the background, the camera moves backwards to reveal that this is actually a film which is being projected in a movie theatre. The camera singles out a rich couple in the audience, played by Ugo Tognazzi and Luisa Rispoli. [figures 25 & 26] On the movie theatre screen, a group of ragged Partisans is captured by the Nazi soldiers and lined up against the wall. This execution scene inevitably reminds us of the neorealist films set during the Resistance. The impression that the film projected on screen is in fact a neorealist film is reinforced by its soundtrack, an orchestral piece with a tuba highlighting the tragic nature of the scene, very much in the style of Renzo Rossellini, the brother of neorealist director Roberto and composer of many soundtracks of neorealist films.⁴³ The disparity between this piece, which is only played when the shot is entirely occupied by the film projected on the movie theatre's screen, and the rest of the music that accompanies *I Mostri*, consisting of jazz rhythms and contemporary Italian pop music, confirms that Risi is strongly indicating that the rich couple is watching a neorealist film. It could be a foreign war film, but this possibility is denied as one of the partisans lined against the wall attempts to escape and another one refers to him in dialect: "Run, Giuanìn, run!"⁴⁴ In the meantime, Tognazzi's character, who is watching the film, is characterised as the typical vicious Italian of the Economic Miracle élite that many comedies Italian style

⁴³ According to Louis Norman, "perhaps nowhere is the melodramatic quality [*of Roma Città Aperta and Paisà*] more apparent than in the musical accompaniment which seeks to intensify our response to the action" (11). I personally find Renzo Rossellini's heavy-handed scores quite alienating, a stylised element that sometimes overwhelms the realism of the image on screen. It is extremely problematic to articulate a connection between this use of music in post-war neorealism and the use of music in the comedy Italian style genre, which does not only feature a large number of popular songs from the Economic Miracle period, but also significant compositions by talented composers such as Armando Trovajoli, Riz Ortolani, Piero Piccioni and Piero Umiliani.

⁴⁴ "Scappa, Giuanìn, scappa!" The regional form 'Giuanìn' instead of 'Gianni' suggests that the events depicted by the film within the film are taking place somewhere in the Pò valley, a recurring setting of neorealist Resistance films.

satirised, as he is smoking in the theatre and when he hears coughing from the back of the hall, rather than throwing away his cigarette he turns around and shouts "Enough!"⁴⁵ demanding silence. He brings the cigarette to his lips and inhales. Immediately after, the image cuts back to the neorealist film projected on the screen which also closes up on a man smoking, the German soldier ordering the execution. As the volume of the soundtrack rises, he orders fire and the partisans are shot to death. The two shots of the smoking men, that of Tognazzi's character in the audience and that of the German soldier in the neorealist film, cut one after the other, imply an association between the two. As the image cuts back to the audience once the partisans in the neorealist film are all lying on the ground and the wall they stood against is again visible, the Economic Miracle spectator points his finger towards the screen and says to his wife: "There, you see, I would make the wall of our villa just like that one. Simple, with just tiles on the top!"⁴⁶ The filmmakers are implying that the impact of the neorealist film is completely lost on the new "soggetto individuale" of the Economic Miracle period.

Furthermore, the association between Tognazzi's character and the German soldier in the film, achieved through montage, suggests that the Italian of the early 1960s has forgotten he once was the Resistance fighter of 1945. The neorealist ideal of reconstruction of the country on a democratic basis has failed. The comedy Italian style filmmakers did not betray it, as they refer to this particular man's indifference to it as 'oblivion', but rather are witnesses to this failure, which they bitterly satirise to voice their disapproval to the lengths of proposing a comparison between the new social subject and the Nazis of fifteen years earlier. Antonio Piotti and Marco Senaldi argue that "the fact that what happened with Fascism is also occurring in the case of the resurrected democratic Italian Republic is the *key fact* [*my emphasis*] underlined by comedy Italian style" (37).⁴⁷ As the examples show, the depiction of the social reality of the Economic Miracle in *I Mostri* is very much articulated in ways that

⁴⁵ "Basta!"

⁴⁶ "Ecco, vedi, il muretto della nostra villa lo farei proprio come quello. Semplice, solo con le tegoline sopra!"

⁴⁷ "Il fatto chiave che però la commedia all'italiana sottolinea è quello che è successo con il fascismo vale poi per la risorta Repubblica democratica italiana."

replicate the patterns of post-war neorealist films with a contemporary setting: narrative solutions for overcoming the pressures of consumerist society are not offered; the 'soggetto individuale' is shown to participate in this status quo as much as society and its institutions which pressure him; the paradoxical aspects of this reality are exploited for comedic effect and are negatively characterised, as we are shown that a father's teachings are so effective that his son *even* kills him, that *even* the poor have come to put consumerist goods before the primary one and, most importantly, that *even* neorealist films are not shown the respect they deserve.



Figure 25: a German soldier drives his Motorcycle towards a villa in *Scenda l'Oblío*, an episode from *I Mostri* (Dino Risi, 1963)



Figure 26: the war setting is revealed to be a neorealist film, seen by a middle class couple in a movie-theatre during the Economic Miracle, from the same film

La Vita Agra (1964), the film adaptation of Luciano Bianciardi's autobiographical novel of the same title, is a comedy Italian style that openly challenges the problem of the new social subject of the Economic Miracle era. The film is directed by Carlo Lizzani, who was previously a minor neorealist director, and adapted for the screen by Luciano Vincenzoni, a comedy Italian style screenwriter, with former neorealist screenwriter Sergio Amidei, thus confirming once again the strong relationship between the two cinematic forms. The plot follows Luciano Bianchi (Ugo Tognazzi), an intellectual from the small village of Castelnuovo, seeking different means of employment in Milan. At the opening of the film we learn that the actual motive that originally brings Bianchi to the capital of the North is revenge. Forty-three miners from his home village have died in an explosion

and he is determined to blow up “il torracchione”,⁴⁸ the skyscraper owned by C.I.S., the company that caused the tragedy. In a flashback we learn that Bianchi used to work as a Cultural Assistant for C.I.S. in Castelnuovo, running the library and organising cultural events for the miners. During a visit, Bianchi's friend Libero (Giampiero Albertini) warns the President of C.I.S. that unless the excavation route is changed, the methane in the mine is going to cause a natural explosion. The request is ignored, the miners killed, thus causing Bianchi to plan his terrorist action. Bianchi is employed to work within “il torracchione” and secretly gathers information about the building's air conditioning pipes, which he intends to use for his attack on Christmas Eve. However, he is soon fired and has to look for another job. In the meantime he meets Anna (Giovanna Ralli), a Communist militant from Rome, and falls in love with her. As Bianchi reveals his plan, Anna convinces him that the age of the anarchists is long gone and that he should attend some seminars organized by the local P.C.I.,⁴⁹ before making his mind up to set his plan in motion.

What is interesting about the scene of the party seminar is that the filmmakers refer to Aristarco's positions in *Cinema Nuovo*, as Bianchi's voice-over comments: “We heard lectures on everything, on Brecht, [...] on doping, on the passage from neorealism to realism, but not a word about the revolution!”⁵⁰ The passage from neorealism to ‘realismo’ is the Marxist historicising theory that Aristarco championed and which informed his appreciation of Visconti and his dislike of other neorealist directors. The party's predicaments, though, are shown to be lost on the audience as an attendant behind Bianchi asks: “Have you ever seen these films?”⁵¹ Bianchi replies he has not and the gentleman comments: “No, me neither, but they told me they are quite heavy. You know, I go to the cinema to have fun, if you don't

⁴⁸ This is a neologism coined by Bianciardi which sounds something like “the big ugly tower”.

Bianciardi's expression suggests that the skyscraper is in fact Il Pirellone, the Pirelli building which still stands in front of the Stazione Centrale in Milan.

⁴⁹ Partito Comunista Italiano, the Italian Communist Party.

⁵⁰ “Sentimmo parlare di tutto, di Brecht, [...] del doping, del passaggio dal neorealismo al realismo, ma della rivoluzione nemmeno una parola!”

⁵¹ “Ma li hai visti questi film?”

mind!"⁵² The new "soggetto individuale", the filmmakers argue, privileges entertainment and is confused by the quarrels within the cultural intelligentsia.

Furthermore, the filmmakers suggest the notion that providing entertainment through the casting of popular stars and a comedic outlook in the evolution of neorealism into comedy Italian style does not constitute a betrayal of neorealist practice, but rather a necessary mediation so that the impact of its social criticism is not lost on the popular audience. On the other hand *even* the Communist party is shown to be embedded in ineffectiveness, as its speaker, despite sitting between a picture of Marx and one of Lenin and thus supposedly duty bound to encouraging the passage from socialist theory into revolutionary action, [figure 27] is mainly concerned with the supposed betrayal of neorealism "but not a word about the revolution!" Throughout his everyday life in Milan Bianchi develops a growing hatred for every instance of industrialisation and the new mentality of success at any cost, conveyed through long voice-over comments that faithfully replicate the prose of Bianciardi's novel.

However, a manipulation on the part of the filmmakers of the narrative in the novel is a further indication of the use of paradoxes in the depiction of the new social subject of the Economic Miracle. The novel ends with the protagonist trying to make ends meet by translating American literature for a Milanese publishing company, thus sticking to Bianciardi's own life experience. The film adaptation of *La Vita Agra* adds a further narrative layer by having Bianchi become an advertising copywriter and being re-hired in the 'torracchione' as director of C.I.S.' advertising division. At the end of the film, Libero, who survived the explosion of the Castelnuovo mine and has continuously encouraged Bianchi to fulfil his mission, visits the protagonist in Milan, carrying a heavy suitcase which we are led to believe contains explosive. When Bianchi finally finds the courage to confront him, the suitcase is revealed as simply containing poultry from the countryside. In the following scene Bianchi and the President of C.I.S. are celebrating Christmas Eve in a building with a view of the "torracchione". Bianchi counts down and, rather than

⁵² "Io no, nemmeno io, ma m'hanno detto che sono un po' mattoni. Sai, io al cinema vado per divertirmi, abbi pazienza eh!"

blowing up, the skyscraper is lit up by festive fireworks. Bianchi started out as an anarchist *in order to* unveil the monstrosity of the new social order and ends up becoming the enemy he set out to challenge. If the character were to fulfil his initial goal, if the narrative solution were included, the film would acquire a propagandistic connotation in contrast with its neorealist antecedents.

What the filmmakers imply with this added layer of narrative inserted in their screen version is that *even* a determined and cultured man is inevitably assimilated by the spiral of consumerism and integrated in the Economic Miracle élite. Their alteration of the original text is thus motivated by the articulation of the social reality they represent on screen through a paradox that mirrors the post-war neorealist films with a contemporary setting.



Figure 27: a P.C.I. bureaucrat channels Aristarco's view on the 'crisis' of neorealism in *La Vita Agra* (Carlo Lizzani, 1965)

As I have shown in my analysis of *I Mostri* and *La Vita Agra*, the comedies Italian style set in present time mirror neorealist films set during the post-war period in the use of narrative *openness* and paradoxes in the articulation of the social setting they depict. Both cinematic forms, rather than proposing a uniform ideology or imposing rhetoric on the narratives, privilege depicting the contradictory and ambiguous nature of the social problems they engage with by posing a forced

complicity or acceptance of the status quo on the part of the common man. However, the satirical tone characterising the 'new individual subject' and the reconstitution of old forms of power in comedy Italian style signals its filmmakers' regret for the failure of the neorealist ideal of the reconstruction of the country.⁵³ Since the narrative and representational attitude remains the same in both forms it is incorrect to read comedy Italian style as a betrayal or dilution of neorealist engagement on the basis of uninformed expectations of uses of ideology in the post-war neorealist practice, which were neither present in the films, nor theorised programmatically. On the contrary, the transposition of such engagement in a comedic genre context and the mirroring of the strategy of representation of social reality previously adopted by the neorealists marks an attempt to reinforce the impact of the social criticism and to convey it to a larger audience.

Revisiting the past: redemptive narratives and nostalgic references to neorealism

I will now discuss the comedies Italian style that revisit the neorealist Resistance setting to engage further with the genre's position towards the neorealist model. In the years between 1959 and 1963 a series of comedies set during either the war, Fascism or the Resistance were produced by the comedy Italian style filmmakers. It should also be noted that in the same period the filmmakers of the original post-war *neorealismo* pursued the same strategy of revisiting the past. Rossellini cast De Sica in his *Il Generale Della Rovere* (1959) and De Sica himself in 1963 made *La Ciociara*, a film set during the hardships of wartime that

returns to the gloomy period of wartime and resistance, but reveals a deeper, more violent trauma that will be impossible to fully remedy. By 1961, Italy had entered a new historical moment, one that even if accompanied by stress and conflict, promised prosperity. Yet despite the possibilities glimpsed ahead, the memory of the trauma and what war and its aftermath had cost Italy were still visible in the recent past (Nerenberg 90).

⁵³ As seen also in the analysis of Dino Risi's *Il Vedovo* in Chapter Two.

The shared intent of exploring the traumas of the past on the part of both filmmakers of neorealism and comedy Italian style during the same period of time is further proof of the relationship between these two cinematic forms.⁵⁴

Mario Monicelli's 1959 film *La Grande Guerra* was the first comedy to attempt this operation successfully, although it was not set in the second World War but the previous one, the Great War taking place in Europe between 1914 and 1918. Nonetheless, the film marks an attempt to rewrite history from below,⁵⁵ from the lower classes' perspective, very much in the same way as the neorealist films set during the Resistance. The tendency of revisiting Italy's recent past in this period was actually an element of convergence between the comedy Italian style filmmakers and the original neorealist ones, who had by now surpassed the post-war phase and were seeking new directions into which to carry on their practice. In fact *La Grande Guerra* won the Leon d'Or at the Venice Film Festival *ex aequo* with Rossellini's *Il Generale Della Rovere* of the same year, which marked a similar historical operation.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Lino Micciché was extremely critical of the outcome of this wave of films revisiting the Resistance in the early 1960s. Once again the fact that he addresses that many of these films were comedic as an index of "lack of ideology" shows a biased position against the genre (in the original: "la carenza di quel filone fu soprattutto ideologica [...], assunse non a caso connotazioni da commedia") (*Anni '60 e Oltre* 47-48).

⁵⁵ The notion of 'rewriting history from below' as a practice of the 'national-popular culture' theorised by Antonio Gramsci will be discussed in Chapter Four, as well as *La Grande Guerra*'s Gramscian subtext.

⁵⁶ In fact Rossellini continued his journey back in history with his educational documentaries made for television, such as *La Presa del Potere da Parte di Luigi XIV* (1966), *Socrate* (1971) and *L'Era di Cosimo de' Medici* (1973). In a 1965 interview for *Filmcritica* conducted by Adriano Aprà and Maurizio Ponzi, translated by Judith White and reprinted on the *Screen* film journal, he discussed this practice as a further index of his realism and anti-propagandistic *openness*:

History has been written, in all good faith, in order to educate. Education is both a beautiful and an ugly word. It comes from 'ducere', to lead - in other words to grab someone by the scruff of the neck and drag him off wherever you please. This is how many of our history text books are written. [...] Propaganda isn't an invention of this century by any means. It's because we can see this today that it's possible to try to re-write some parts of history in a way that's much closer to the truth (118).

As I pointed out in the Chapter One and Chapter Two, this film represents the introduction of a redemptive narrative arc, something that is typical and recurring in cinematic genres but quite unusual in the peculiar case of comedy Italian style. Inspired by the Guy de Maupassant short-story *Deux Amis* and pieces of World War I literature,⁵⁷ Monicelli and screenwriters Age and Scarpelli set out to recount the war, following the misadventures of the two cowardly Italian soldiers Oreste Jacovacci (Alberto Sordi) and Giovanni Busacca (Vittorio Gassman). The two, as typical objects of the comedy Italian style filmmakers' satire, are constantly shown to be finding excuses to avoid combat and work. However, the film's ending subverts the audience expectation from this comedy Italian style as Jacovacci and Busacca come to learn a piece of information of strategic importance and are executed by the Austrians for refusing to share it. As I pointed out in Chapter One this scene openly refers to the Sicilian episode in Rossellini's *Paisà*. [figures 28 & 29] As the Italian troops charge in battle, they do not notice Busacca's and Jacovacci's dead bodies in the background and assume that the two cowards have once again avoided combat, thus providing the typical comedy Italian style bitter ending. The reference to *Paisà* in the case of such an unusual narrative for the genre, a redemptive one, and the introduction of two, again very unusual and unlikely positive heroes suggest that the comedy Italian style filmmakers had an acute awareness of post-war neorealism's representational strategies.

⁵⁷ In an interview Monicelli cites Jahier's *Con me e con gli alpini*, Comisso's *Giorni di Guerra*, Alvaro's *Vent'anni*, De Amicis' *La Vita Militare*, Barbusse's *Il Fuoco* and other novels (in Mondadori 108). Mariapia Comand mentions Emilio Lussu's *Un Anno Sull'Altipiano* and Carlo Salsa's *Trincee, Confidenze di un Fante* (*Commedia* 64).



Figure 28: a girl's (Carmela Sazio) sacrifice goes unnoticed in *Paisà* (Rossellini, 1946)



Figure 29: soldiers Jacovacci (Alberto Sordi) and Busacca (Vittorio Gassman) get the same fate in *La Grande Guerra* (Monicelli, 1959)

Luigi Comencini's *Tutti a Casa* (1960) confirms this impression. The film's opening is set on 8th September, 1943, the day that the then prime minister Badoglio announced Italy's armistice with the Allies. Alberto Sordi plays Lieutenant Alberto Innocenzi, a Roman ranking officer who firmly believes in the rhetoric of the "Patria"⁵⁸ promoted by Fascism. Initially his belief in a victorious outcome of the war for the Italian army is so strong that, when his regiment is attacked by the Nazis during a parade, not having heard the radio bulletin announcing Badoglio's armistice, he immediately thinks that it is the Germans who have switched sides and joined the Allies. He calls the local Italian army base of operations and announces: "Sir Colonel, sir, something incredible is happening: the Germans have allied with the Americans!"⁵⁹ This famous line not only perfectly represents the turmoil that shook the nation and the army on that historic day, but also characterises Innocenzi as a man incapable of understanding the events have turned out very differently to the way promoted by the Fascist rhetoric in which he was raised, very much like Sordi's character Alberto Nardi in Dino Risi's *Il Vedovo* (1959), discussed in Chapter Two. Lieutenant Innocenzi's loyalty to the Italian army is challenged throughout the first act of the film as he tries to lead his regiment to the North in order to join the rest of the troops which are now fighting the Nazis, while the majority of his men mutiny and are bound South back to their families.

⁵⁸ "Homeland".

⁵⁹ "Signor Colonnello, accade una cosa incredibile: i tedeschi si sono alleati con gli americani!"

Typified as the established comedy Italian style opportunistic average Italian, very soon Innocenzi also decides to get rid of his uniform, initially unseen by the few soldiers who stand by him and later discovered and ridiculed by them, and turns back towards his father's house in Latina. This town, founded by Mussolini during the Ventennio, is a stronghold of the Fascists who remained loyal to the Duce. Rather than welcoming his son's return, Innocenzi's father (Peppino De Filippo), starved by the war and unwilling to renounce his son's army salary, enrolls Alberto in the reformed Fascist army of Mussolini's Repubblica di Salò in the North. This scene operates very much in the same paradoxical direction seen in the comedies Italian style set during the Economic Miracle, articulating the reality of war to be so disastrous for Italy that a father is *even* willing to put his son's life at risk for his everyday bread. However, the narrative of *Tutti a Casa* continues on an unexpected path. Having witnessed during his journey the state of anarchy that possesses the country, Lieutenant Innocenzi leaves his father's house during the night going South.

At this point in the film three readings are left open for the audience. The first reading is that Innocenzi's decision is motivated by loyalty to his regiment, as he previously promised to the Geniere Assunto Ceccarelli (Serge Reggiani) that he would escort him to Naples and witness to the local authorities that he lost the document proving Ceccarelli's discharge. The second option is that as a typical comedy Italian style 'average Italian' Innocenzi is running away due to cowardice and opportunism. The third and least probable option for a comedy Italian style film is that Innocenzi has matured during his journey, and has developed some ethical belief in democracy, an unusual narrative for this genre. However the film's ending confirms this third reading. In Naples, a few metres away from Ceccarelli's home, the last man of Innocenzi's regiment is killed by the Nazis before the Lieutenant's eyes. Seeking protection from the open fire Innocenzi finds himself in a trench next to a partisan. Seeing that the man is not such a good shooter, Innocenzi takes his place handling the machine gun in the last frame of the film, thus signalling that he is going to join the Resistance, despite the way in which he was previously characterised.

As the analysis of the film shows, in revisiting the neorealist milieu this *commedia all'italiana* adopts the ethical reading of the Resistance, that of the pursuit

of democracy at any cost, pursuing it through a mythical depiction of Resistance fighting just like the neorealist films it shares its setting with. This similarity is even more exceptional considering the fact that in order to impose this rhetoric the film adopts the conventional crisis-understanding-change narrative trajectory, which is absent in the comedies Italian style set in the present day. This exception is exclusively present in the narratives concerning the war and the Resistance, as it is absent in comedies Italian style set in other historical times such as Luciano Salce's *Il Federale* (1961) and Dino Risi's *La Marcia su Roma* (1962) which depict the 'average Italian' of the Ventennio Fascista very much in the same way as the 'average Italian' of the Economic Miracle, thus replicating the same satirical comparison seen in the episode *Scenda l'Oblivio* from Risi's *I Mostri*. These early comedies Italian style set in Italy's recent history mirror the mythical perspective that neorealist films depicting the Resistance had and subvert the *topoi* of "cowardice" and "collusion". If these memories were excluded by Rossellini's account of the Resistance, as pointed out by David Forgacs, it is also very appropriate that they became established clichés of comedy Italian style's representation of the Italians from the Economic Miracle present and from the Fascist past.

Thus, fifteen years later, comedy Italian style replicates the neorealist representational approach towards the depiction of the social context of the last years of the second World War, adopting an alien narrative structure to impose the rhetoric of a unified Resistance. The distance between the narrative solutions and the characterisations of the protagonists adopted in the comedies Italian style set during the Economic Miracle and those adopted in the comedies which revisit the Resistance confirms that, rather than betraying a supposed neorealist ideology, one that was ultimately projected by the critics and not pursued by the post-war neorealist filmmakers to begin with, this comedic genre closely mirrored neorealism's dual approach towards social commentary.

**Bridging the myth of the Resistance with the satire of the Miracle:
Una Vita Difficile, C'eravamo Tanto Amati as statements of
continuity with neorealism**

This dual approach of the comedy Italian style genre towards social reality, on one hand its narrative *openness* and insistence on its paradoxical aspects in the case of films with a contemporary setting and in the other the rhetoric of an idyllic and unified Resistance imposed on the representation of the struggle against Nazi-fascism, is best embodied by two films in which the mythical aspects of the Resistance are supported by overt references to neorealism which implicitly convey a statement by the comedy Italian style filmmakers of continuity with their neorealist forerunners. Both films bridge this representation of the Resistance, address its mythical character and contrast its significance with the social reality of the Economic Miracle.

The first one, Dino Risi's *Una Vita Difficile* (1961), is one of the most accomplished comedies Italian style produced in the early 1960s and its narrative covers the period between the Resistance and the Economic Miracle. In other words, the filmmakers set out as their goal for this film that of bridging the comedies Italian style which revisited the neorealist milieu, such as *Tutti a Casa*, and the more common comedies set in present day, such as *I Mostri* and *La Vita Agra*. The protagonist Silvio Magnozzi (Alberto Sordi) starts out as a partisan, although he is a very different kind of partisan from the ones seen in previous Italian films. In the opening scene he is sent by his comrades in a small village in the North to ask the locals for provisions. Silvio arrives at the local hotel, but the woman who runs it refuses to help him because she heard that the partisans are renowned for stealing salamis and such from the locals. This statement gives us an indication that the representation of the Resistance in this film is going to be different from the overtly manipulated interpretation of the historical phenomenon that *Roma Città Aperta* offered. Silvio is discovered inside the hotel by a Nazi soldier and taken into the garden where he is going to be executed. Lined up against a wall, he waits for a shot that however never comes. As he turns around he finds out that Elena (Lea Massari) has killed the Nazi soldier using a flatiron. This scene again refers to *Roma Città*

Aperta, specifically to the scene in which Don Pietro (Aldo Fabrizi) knocks out an old man with a frying pan. The intentionality of the reference is confirmed by the fact that in both scenes the camera does not record the hit, but the spectator learns about it through the comment of a character who witnessed it. In *Roma Città Aperta* it is the altar boy who says to Don Pietro: “Jeez, Father Piè [*Roman vernacular abbreviation for 'Pietro'*], what a frying-pan you gave him!”⁶⁰ In *Una Vita Difficile* it is Silvio who addresses Elena: “You killed him? With the cast iron?”⁶¹ [figures 30, 31, 32 & 33] This frame-by-frame mirroring of Rossellini's film indicates the neorealist films recounting the Resistance as the model that Risi is going to exploit.



Figure 30: Don Pietro (Aldo Fabrizi) and an altar boy (Vito Annichiarico) stage performing the last rites on an old man in *Roma Città Aperta* (Roberto Rossellini, 1945)



Figure 31: the altar boy reveals how the old man has been put to sleep for the benefit of the Fascist inspection, from the same film



Figure 32: Elena (Lea Massari) lifts her iron in *Una Vita Difficile* (Risi, 1962)



Figure 33: Silvio Magnozzi (Alberto Sordi) is surprised that the iron has used been to kill his executioner

⁶⁰ “Ammappalo, Don Piè che padellata che j’ha’ dato!”

⁶¹ “L’hai ammazzato? Cor fero da stiro?”

In *Roma Città Aperta* the frying-pan scene immediately precedes the death of Pina (Anna Magnani), in one of neorealism's most successful alternation of comedic and tragic tones. Risi's film does not yet adhere to this narrative solution, reinforcing instead its unusual representation of the Resistance as Silvio is taken by Elena to an old mill to rest and promises he will leave the following morning to join his comrades. Once he is comfortably lying on the mill's bed, however, the camera pans from his head looking above to a number of salamis hanging from the roof. The film fades to black and cuts to Silvio lying in the bed but with Elena now next to him, thus confirming his opportunistic mutiny of the partisans' cause. With the excuse of bronchitis Silvio only leaves the mill much later on and rejoins the partisans when the conflict is almost over.

Up to this point the film seems to be contradicting the tendency on the part of the comedy Italian style filmmakers of mythologising the historic period documented in neorealist films and to be reinforcing the impression of a parody of neorealism. However as the film's narrative progresses alongside the most defining episodes of the first few years of the post-war period, such as the liberation of Rome, the referendum between the monarchy and Republic, the attempted assassination of Communist leader Togliatti and the first democratic elections in 1948, Silvio's distorted and self-informed perception of his 'active' role in the Resistance leads him to political activism and an exceptional moral integrity. Back in the capital, as the crowds cheer the American liberators, he works on the militant newspaper "*The Worker*"⁶² and triumphantly shows to his editor the title for the next issue: "Americans, get out of Rome!"⁶³ On the eve of the 1948 elections he is determined to unveil a scandal of huge proportions concerning a case of industrial corruption. One of the businessmen implicated, Commendator Bracci (Claudio Gora), offers him a bribe to silence him and, despite the fact that he's struggling to provide for Elena who has now joined him in Rome, Silvio refuses. The elections are won by the

⁶² "*Il Lavoratore*".

⁶³ "Via gli Americani da Roma!" The fact that this slogan is advertised by Sordi, whom the audience recognised as the American-obsessed Nando Mericoni of Steno's 1954 farce *Un Americano a Roma*, is not only a clever pun on the audience expectation, but also a sign of the distance between comedy Italian style and other less realist Italian comedic forms.

Christian Democrats, *The Worker* is shut down and Silvio arrested for libel. Silvio is excluded from the Economic Miracle élite because his integrity clashes with the new mentality of success at any cost and his integrity has been shown to be the result of his mythical perception of his own role in the Resistance. In other words, despite the comedic tone given to the early scenes for the purpose of entertaining and despite the fact that the audience is aware of his true role in the Partisan struggle, the character of Silvio keeps alive the fantasy of having been part of *Roma Città Aperta*'s Resistance and the fantasy informs the exceptionality of his behaviour during the Economic Miracle. Despite the comedic signification of the early scenes mirroring Rossellini's film required for entertainment purposes, reflecting the dual attitude towards clichés and stereotypes, the character of Silvio *does* perceive his experience as a Partisan as an heroic, mythical one.

In a recurring comedy Italian style genre dynamic, very similar, for example, to De Sica's *Il Boom* discussed in Chapter One, Elena has left Silvio because of his inability to provide her with the commodities she desires and Magnozzi goes to Viareggio determined to re-conquer her. Risi's camera pans on the crowded beach and singles out Silvio wearing a full suit. The contrast between his outfit and the naked bodies lying on the sand, as he looks for his wife, perfectly represents the clash between integrity and the new individual subject of a pleasure-oriented society, which is reinforced when Silvio tells his now estranged son: "It is not true that I have bad luck, the truth is that I have never tried to get lucky!"⁶⁴ The sequence's ending, in which Silvio gets drunk because of Elena's refusal to come back and he is left on the Via Aurelia spitting towards the cars that swing by him, establishes the automobile as the status symbol of integration. At this point it should be pointed out that Elena's progressive interest in Rome as a glamorous alternative to her rural life in the Northern village, manifested in conversations with Silvio inside the mill earlier in the narrative, had already exposed her character as a subversion of the selfless and practical ideal of *popolana* femininity channelled by Anna Magnani in neorealist films such as *Roma Città Aperta* and *L'Onorevole Angelina*.

⁶⁴ "Non è vero che non sono fortunato. La verità è che io la fortuna non l'ho mai cercata!"

Because of this premise, in the following scene we are led to believe that, as in *La Vita Agra* and most comedies Italian style set during the Economic Miracle, Magnozzi too is inevitably going to be integrated. He returns to the village in the North where he once 'fought' the Resistance during the funeral of Elena's mother, but this time he is driven in a limousine. The pure sadism conveyed by Sordi's solemn gestures leads us to believe that *Una Vita Difficile* will align itself with 'comedies of integration'⁶⁵ such as *La Vita Agra*.⁶⁶ Indeed, we soon learn that he has finally accepted Commendator Bracci's offer and he is now part of the Economic Miracle élite. But *Una Vita Difficile*'s ending operates in the opposite way than the narratives of *La Vita Agra* and *Il Boom*. Elena and Silvio are invited to a party in Bracci's villa and he is publicly humiliated in front of her and sprayed with champagne. The two exchange a knowing glance, and in a memorable shot Magnozzi slaps his boss so violently that he pushes him into the pool. [figures 34 & 35] Having witnessed with her own eyes the cost to Silvio's integrity of his integration, Elena now stands by him and rejects the offer of a car ride as the two leave the party, thus signalling through the refusal of the previously established *status symbol* a renunciation of the success at any cost imperative unusual for a comedy Italian style set during the Economic Miracle. As Giacobelli points out the ending of Risi's film is ambivalent, on one hand offering an ethical solution unseen in other representations of the Economic Miracle society and on the other hand conforming to the genre's characteristic bitter tone on a different level:

In comedy Italian style one can consider as an happy ending some endings which actually are not that happy, such as the one from *Una Vita Difficile*,

⁶⁵ Giacobelli uses this expression to indicate comedies produced during the 1960s which feature individuals who are ultimately absorbed into consumerist society despite their initial resistance against it.

⁶⁶ Not only has Silvio's arrival has coincided with the funeral of his mother-in-law, who consistently opposed him throughout the film, but it is also raining and the villagers, Elena included, are getting soaked during their procession behind the coffin. Silvio takes one of his hands off the wheel, gazes at the sky and puts his hand out so to feel the rain pouring down. Thus, not only does the pace of Sordi's body language deliver the purely ceremonial nature of his action, the fact that is putting on a show for Elena to watch, but he is also wearing a leather glove which certainly prevents him from feeling the rain on his skin. Once Elena has noticed him, he activates the retractable roof function of the limousine. It is an absolutely hilarious scene which deserved to be described.

with Sordi's slap to the businessman: a happy ending from an ideological point of view, but not so much in the narrative sense (in the best case scenario Sordi will be fired) (*Commedia all'Italiana* 10).⁶⁷

However, the exceptionality for a comedy Italian style set during the Economic Miracle is the fact that the ending is happy "from an ideological point of view". The motif of this unusual solution resides in the fact that the film's narrative starts with the revisiting of the Resistance. The allusions to *Roma Città Aperta* and the representation of the Resistance which do not match the neorealist model after hinting at it in the beginning of the film highlight Magnozzi's nostalgic and mythicising perception of his role amongst the Partisans' fight. This distorted view informs the character's integrity and his refusal to conform to the mentality of the Economic Miracle. Unlike many other Italians, he is still the partisan of 1944 - someone he maybe never really was.

However, through the uniqueness of Silvio's redemption, in *Una Vita Difficile* we have an ending which is at the same time the Economic Miracle's equivalent of the ending of *Ladri di Biciclette*. Elena and Silvio's family unit is restored, as was the father and son unit in De Sica's film [figures 36 & 37], however the socio-economic premise of the film is, in neorealist fashion, left unresolved: will Silvio be able to provide for his wife the next day?⁶⁸ Is surviving with moral principles intact

⁶⁷ "Nella commedia all'italiana può considerarsi lieto al massimo qualche finale che proprio liettissimo non è, come quello di *Una Vita Difficile*, con lo schiaffo di Sordi al signor commendatore: finale lieto da un punto di vista ideologico, ma non altrettanto dal punto di vista narrativo (nella migliore delle ipotesi Sordi verrà licenziato)."

⁶⁸ Back in 1962 Vittorio Spinazzola did not grasp this nuance, referring to a "overt vulgarity of the final scene, effective on the level of propaganda but full of a rhetoric worthy of some minor 19th century novel" (In the original: "plateale volgarità della scena finale, propagandisticamente efficace ma intrisa di una retorica degna di qualche romanzo d'appendice ottocentesco") in his review of the film in *Cinema Nuovo* (Spinazzola, *Una Vita Difficile Review* 144). In light of this, one asks the following rhetorical questions: 'Were comedies Italian style criticised for their political indeterminacy and they were also criticised for being overly-programmatic? Were they simply going to be criticised no matter what, back then?' However, in more recent times the subtlety of the film's ending has been re-appreciated by critics such as Mariapia Cormand who agrees with my reading by noting that "on the narrative level Magnozzi wins, but he loses in ideological terms: he will not sell himself, but stay

possible in the Italy of 1961? The open-ended aspect of Risi's film in relation to these central questions it posed very much mirrors the question *Ladri di Biciclette* purposely renounced answering: will Antonio Ricci be able to feed his family without a bicycle in 1948 Rome? In this respect *Una Vita Difficile* displays the same "openness" featured in the Italian art cinema representations of the Economic Miracle, such as Antonioni's *La Notte*, which were always recognised to be indebted to the neorealist tradition, whereas comedy Italian style was not.



Figure 34: Silvio (Alberto Sordi) is humiliated by his employer Bracci (Claudio Gora) in *Una Vita Difficile* (Dino Risi, 1962)



Figure 35: Silvio regains his ideals by slapping Bracci in the same film



Figure 36: Silvio and Elena walk away from the Economic Miracle in *Una Vita Difficile* (Dino Risi, 1962)



Figure 37: Antonio Ricci (Lamberto Maggiorani) and his son Bruno (Enzo Staiola) walk away from the Stadio Flaminio where Antonio has tried to steal a bicycle in *Ladri di Biciclette* (Vittorio De Sica, 1948)

poor" (*Commedia* 8). (In the original: "Narrativamente parlando Magnozzi vince, ma sul piano ideologico perde: non sarà un venduto, però resta uno spiantato.")

Magnozzi is in fact an embodiment of comedy Italian style's dual tendency towards social commentary of mythologising the past and satirising the present. His unconscious re-signification of his own role in the Resistance, to match the rhetoric of an ethical unified struggle proposed in neorealist films, marks the comedy Italian style filmmakers' conscious choice of replicating neorealism's dual attitude towards social engagement. His uniqueness as a successful role model of uncompromised social behaviour proposed by the genre is a statement against the accusation of betraying the neorealist ideal and diluting the neorealist engagement in the simple description of new habits informed by cynicism. In the light of the overt reference to *Roma Città Aperta* and of the mythical aspects of Rossellini's original representation of the Resistance acquired, *Una Vita Difficile* works like a theorem formulated by the comedy Italian style filmmakers against their detractors: we believe in the validity of neorealism as a positive model, even in its more distorted and mythical aspects. It is not us filmmakers who have betrayed its engagement; it is our subject matter that has, today's Italians. In this film we give you an Italian from today who still thinks like an Italian from the post-war period, even better he thinks how you and us believe the Italians from back then *should* have thought and our tone changes accordingly, dismissing cynicism and satire in favour of integrity and redemption. But we all know he is an exception! In other words, in light of its knowing reference to *Roma Città Aperta* and its adoption of a peculiar solution for the genre, the film's ending, mirroring Landy's notion, is a "shattering of the clichés" of the comedies Italian style set in the present "by the means of the clichés"⁶⁹ associated with neorealism's depiction of the Resistance. Its exceptionality in the spectrum of comedy Italian style for championing a positive protagonist, even more so exceptional because he is embodied by Alberto Sordi, the star who changed the Italian comedic landscape by introducing the type of the coward and cynical Economic Miracle middle class man, contributes to the idea that the text's diversity among the comedies Italian style produced at the time is the result of its self-conscious addressing of the neorealist tradition. Thus, even in the exceptional cases of narratives which feature redemptive

⁶⁹ As pointed out in Chapter One, Landy used the expression "shattering clichés by the means of clichés" in reference to *Roma Città Aperta*'s own dual positioning between old and new modes of representation.

narrative trajectories that are seemingly in contrast with the narrative strategies inherited from neorealism such as *La Grande Guerra*, *Tutti a Casa* and *Una Vita Difficile*, the comedy Italian style genre confirms its continuity with the post-war neorealist practice.

This thesis is confirmed by Ettore Scola's *C'eravamo Tanto Amati* (1974). The film shares with *Una Vita Difficile* the objective of bridging the narrative of the Resistance and the depiction of the Economic Miracle, following the parallel lives of three friends who fought together amongst the Partisans. In fact the three male protagonists of Scola's film mirror three phases of Magnozzi in Risi's film. Nino Manfredi plays Antonio, a hospital orderly who is constantly demoted within the public institution he works for because of his allegiance to the Left, thus reminding us of the uncompromising Magnozzi who refuses the bribe. Vittorio Gassman plays Gianni Perego, a once idealistic lawyer who agrees to work for the corrupt industrialist Romolo Catenacci (Aldo Fabrizi),⁷⁰ just as Magnozzi did for Bracci before the unexpected redemptive ending of Risi's film. Stefano Satta Flores is Nicola Palumbo, an intellectual who, like Magnozzi, is a journalist and lives in a mythicised version of his past informed by his love for Italian neorealism. In fact, Scola's film overtly refers both to neorealism's mythical representation of the Resistance, through visual cues such as the use of documentary footage in the style of Rossellini's *Paisà*, and to the system of processes by which the cinema offers to the audience an illusion of reality in a series of flashback scenes in which we see the three friends pursuing a partisan military action and receiving the news of the end of World War II.⁷¹ These scenes are shot in black and white and thus openly clash with the present day segments of the film's narrative which are in colour, making the

⁷⁰ The casting of Fabrizi, who played Don Pietro in *Roma Città Aperta*, is an obvious reference to neorealism. The character of Catenacci is particularly odious and thus subverted the pious image of Fabrizi established by neorealist films. In person, however, the ageing Fabrizi had apparently become as unlikeable as the character of Catenacci, this being the reason why the new generation of comedy Italian style filmmakers seldom cast him in their films and he was mainly confined to television work throughout the 1960s.

⁷¹ This reference to the re-construction of reality in film is not at all in contrast with the notion of comedy Italian style as an evolution of neorealism, since many films of the original post-war neorealist practice such as Rossellini's *La Macchina Ammazzacattivi* (1952) and Visconti's *Bellissima* were similarly concerned with the investigation and the unveiling of these processes.

audience aware of the manipulation of the images perpetrated by the filmmakers, as Michael Seitz notes:

Scola's film is, to the most extraordinary degree, a celebration and elucidation, not just of a human reality, but of *how* the cinema represents reality. [...] It is this self-consciousness – this heightened consciousness of the nature and impact of the cinematic image – which constitutes the film's second text. [...] This [*the Rossellini-like flashback representations of the Resistance*] may not have been the real world, but it is reality as we remember it in the movies, and this cinematic illusion of reality has formed our historic consciousness (45-47).

Seitz's comment on the "cinematic illusion of reality" which forms our "historic consciousness" is reminiscent of what we witnessed with Silvio Magnozzi in *Una Vita Difficile* and his perception of having experienced something that closely resembled *Roma Città Aperta*'s Resistance which is crucial to the filmmakers' implicit statement of continuity between neorealism and their practice.⁷²

Through the character of Nicola, references to neorealism and in particular to Vittorio De Sica abound in *C'eravamo Tanto Amati*. Nicola loses his job as teacher in his home town of Nocera Inferiore in the South because he publicly defends *Ladri di Biciclette* against the Christian Democrat-informed authorities which accuse the film of representing post-war Italy in a bad light.⁷³ He moves to Rome where he becomes a junior film critic who signs his reviews of supposedly minor cinematic releases as 'substitute reviewer', leaving his wife and son behind. His job position as substitute film reviewer suggests that he is a reviewer of film comedies, since comedies Italian style were often not considered worthy of the head critic and reviewed by the 'substitute'. In fact, learning about Nicola's new job, Antonio comments: "So you are 'Substitute Reviewer'? Then you must work a lot!"⁷⁴

⁷² The explicit statements being the several ones I quoted in the Introduction.

⁷³ Christian Democrat politician Giulio Andreotti famously commented De Sica's film with the statement: "Dirty sheets should be washed within the privacy of one's family." ("I panni sporchi si lavano in famiglia".) The censor in Scola's film uses the same expression.

⁷⁴ "Ah, sei tu vice? Allora lavori un sacco!"

Later in the film, Nicola has the chance to get rich answering questions concerning Italian film history in the television quiz-show *Lascia o Raddoppia?* However Nicola loses the prize he has accumulated because of *Ladri di Biciclette* itself. When asked why the boy in De Sica's film cries at the end of the film, Nicola mistakenly over-intellectualises his answer explaining how the neorealist director placed some cigarette butts in the child-actor Enzo Stajola's pockets and accused him of being a tramp, thus achieving the tearful reaction required for the scene. The moderator Mike Bongiorno is instead asking for the face-value answer: 'the boy cries because he surprises his father trying to steal a bicycle'. Nicola's over-intellectual approach suggests that, as a critica, he may be one who disregarded the face-value fact that comedy Italian style replicated the modalities of neorealism's engagement with social reality and instead projected an idea of neorealist betrayal.

This impression is confirmed when, ridiculed by Antonio for abandoning his wife and son, he shouts back with a sense of superiority: "L'intellettuale è più oltre!"⁷⁵ and again when he attends a rally where De Sica himself, who played a cameo in the film before he died and to whom the film is dedicated, recounts the cigarette butts anecdote. Asked by a friend why he does not approach the director and tell him about the television quiz incident, Nicola refuses to do so and argues: "I should speak to him about so many things... illusions, hopes, disappointments... we wanted to change the world and the world has changed us instead!"⁷⁶ [figures 38 & 39] The word "disappointments" spoken by Satta Flores in the soundtrack over a close shot of De Sica's face refers to De Sica's own contradictory relationship with neorealism, the director being both on the one hand the author of some of the most accomplished neorealist films and on the other an actor cast in the pink neorealist comedies that first diluted neorealist practice as well as director who supposedly

⁷⁵ This is a voluntarily incorrect use of grammar, which I can only translate as "the intellectual is the *bestest!*" The comedic effect is achieved by the fact that the supposed intellectual mishandles language.

⁷⁶ "Dovrei parlargli di altre cose... illusioni, speranze, delusioni... Volevamo cambiare il mondo ed invece il mondo ha cambiato noi!"

'switched sides' by directing some comedies Italian style, such as *Il Boom* and *Il Giudizio Universale* in the early 1960s.⁷⁷

The impression of Nicola as being obsessed by the betrayal of neorealism on the part of the Italian film industry which privileged the production of comedies Italian style and on the part of De Sica himself is confirmed by an interview in which Scola revealed to Jean Gili the original inspiration for the film with Nicola as sole protagonist:

He abandoned his work, his family, and came to Rome to try to meet De Sica. The film was to be only the story of a long trailing after [De Sica] which lasted thirty years: the character followed De Sica and became for him... a veritable obsession. De Sica always encountered him and this man put him in the presence of moral problems, of problems of conscience. De Sica, as we know, produced alternately great works and rather mediocre ones in which he lent himself as an actor. There was, then, this 'talking cricket', this conscience that followed him, reprimanded him, persecuted him (*Le Cinema Italien* 191-192).⁷⁸

Screenwriter Furio Scarpelli confirms this account saying that this character embodies "a passion for the social that was furious and incorruptible. The cult of his own personality, that had embodied a cult of the collective, to the point of consuming himself and affection of the people surrounding him" (108).⁷⁹ Scarpelli's words underline the paradox existing within the character and the fact that the target of the filmmakers was the ambivalence of the critics, their inevitable bias towards films that fulfilled attributes of their own personality.

⁷⁷ As this study shows, the pink neorealist comedies did indeed 'dilute' neorealism, or rather 'masqueraded' their conventionality and stereotyped representation by adoptin the iconography associated with neorealism, but comedy Italian style did not.

⁷⁸ Gili's interview with Scola is translated in English and quoted by Millicent Marcus in her study *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism* (414). I kept the existing translation in this case.

⁷⁹ "[*Il personaggio di Nicola*] era la passione furiosa e incorruttibile per il sociale. Culto della propria personalità che aveva il culto della collettività. Fino a consumare se stesso e l'affetto delle persone che gli erano care."



Figure 38: De Sica plays himself at a political rally in *C'eravamo Tanto Amati* (Ettore Scola, 1974)



Figure 39: Nicola (Stefano Satta Flores) in the crowd watches De Sica's speech, from the same film

At the opposite side of Nicola, Nino Manfredi's Antonio is characterised instead by being uncultured, ignorant, a simple man who only understands the face-value, direct implications of entertainment products, as Millicent Marcus pointed out, summing up the scene in which he takes Luciana (Stefania Sandrelli) to a performance of Eugene O'Neill's *Strange Interlude*:

By spotlighting the character who is to reveal himself or herself, darkening the rest of the stage and having that individual speak, O'Neal is giving his own highly stylized version of the theatrical aside. 'They couldn't hear each other's thought,' Luciana says of the rest of the characters on stage during these soliloquies. 'But if we heard them from the last row?' objects Antonio, whose inexperience with the medium causes a certain literal-mindedness. 'They heard, but pretended not to. It's a convention,' Luciana explains. By making explicit the mechanism of theatrical conventions, Scola is doing several things. He is emphasizing the contractual nature of the aesthetic experience, which involves a tacit agreement between author and public about what constitutes 'truth' within the work of art (*Light of Neorealism* 408).

Thus Scola characterises Antonio as a member of the popular audience, who often ignores the cultural implications hidden behind certain spectacles, but simply evaluates the implications of the events reproduced on stage or screen. He is so naive that, running into Gianni in a parking lot and seeing him helping an old lady get out of a parking spot, he assumes his friend is now unemployed and attends parked cars in exchange for spare change, whereas Gianni is in fact trying to free his own luxury

car so he can leave. However Nicola does not even come close to suspecting this: for him good is good, bad is bad, funny is funny and boring is boring. In these terms he resembles the popular audience that filled the movie-theatres to see the comedy Italian style films.

Vittorio Gassman's Gianni replicates the comedy Italian style type of the 'average Italian' integrated by the Economic Miracle mentality of success at any cost. The price Gianni pays is love, as he renounces Luciana, whom he previously managed to 'steal' from Antonio, and marries Catenacci's daughter for convenience. Towards the ending of the film, Gianni regrets his choice and confesses his mistake to Luciana, who has now married Antonio. Throughout the thirty years of Italian history that its narrative covers, *C'eravamo Tanto Amati* visually references neorealism as well as other forms of Italian films such as Fellini's and Antonioni's art films.⁸⁰ If visual references to existing comedies Italian style are absent, it is because the discourse over the validity of the genre is carried on by the dynamics between the three friends who respectively embody the subject matter of the genre, its public and its detractors.

This reading of a meta-characterisation of the three friends in function of a self-reflexive discourse is not simply a speculation on my part in light of their similarity with different stages of Sordi's character of Silvio Magnozzi in *Una Vita Difficile*, but actually something that Scola himself shows us and puts right in the face of the audience from the very first scene. The film opens in the present day, with Nicola, Antonio and Luciana who get out of their car and approach the villa where Gianni lives. We will learn later that they get there because Gianni left his driving license, which shows his home address, with Antonio after having run into him and having spent the night with his old friends, pretending to be poor like them, which is the reason why they expect him to be employed as a servant in the villa. The footage of the three getting closer is intercut with footage of Gianni walking out in the

⁸⁰ Fellini and Mastroianni play themselves in a cameo in the film, more specifically in a scene in which Nicola runs into Luciana who is waiting to be Anita Ekberg's body-double for the famous Trevi fountain scene of Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (1960). Antonioni is referred to in a scene in which Gianni is visited by the ghost of his now deceased wife, who starts talking to him about alienation, a concept she became familiar with by watching Antonioni's films starring Monica Vitti.

garden, taking off a robe and preparing himself to dive into a swimming pool. As he finally does dive the image freezes, with him suspended in the air [figure 40], and the series of flashbacks that constitute the body of the film begin. Through an editing device, thus, the image is revealed to be the product of a mechanical process of reproduction, the cinema.

The specific subject matter of this one peculiar image, that signifies all of the other images in the film, is Gianni, who thus becomes 'The Subject Matter' in a broader sense. Antonio is shown to be watching Gianni's dive from behind the fence of the villa and is thus characterised as 'The Spectator' [figure 41]. Nicola is also initially shown to be watching Gianni. As the film freezes, however, the image cuts to a close-up of him, - the only one allowed to move - who delivers the warning: "Spoiler alert! Gianni will complete his dive only when the film will be over..."⁸¹ [figure 42] He is thus characterised as someone who dissects, analyses and interprets the film for the benefit of the public, 'The Critic' or as we later learn the Critic of neorealism's evolution into comedy Italian style. Luciana, instead, is shown to be restlessly turning her head around right before the image freezes, alternatively looking at Antonio [figure 41], watching Gianni and gazing at Nicola in the hope of an explanation. Her positioning in relation to 'The Film', and thus in relation to the comedy Italian style genre, is unspecified and her constant shift from one of the friends to the other is introduced.⁸²

⁸¹ "Avvertenza! Gianni terminerà il suo tuffo quando il film sarà finito..."

⁸² Peter Bondanella, instead, gives a reading of the film that emphasizes the class struggle within the country: "The three men represent three separate social classes (middle class, intelligentsia, proletariat), with the woman they love symbolizing Italy herself, and their evolving relationship reflect in microcosm the broader social and political interactions among Italy's major social classes" (*A History* 208).



Figure 40: Gianni's (Vittorio Gassman) is freeze-framed at the start of the film *C'eravamo Tanto Amati* (Ettore Scola, 1974)



Figure 41: Nicola, Luciana (Stefania Sandrelli) and Antonio (Nino Manfredi) observe Gianni's dive, in the same film



Figure 42: Nicola looks into the camera and addresses the audience with his spoiler alert, in the same film

The casting of three stars of the genre such as Vittorio Gassman, Nino Manfredi and Stefania Sandrelli and the characterisation of the three once-partisan friends suggest that, just like *Una Vita Difficile*, Scola's discourse over the validity of the genre, which he championed for over twenty years as screenwriter and later director, is carried on by the dynamics between the characters who act, as Magnozzi in Risi's film, as embodiments of the possible interpretations of the genre's social engagement and its relationship with the neorealist model. Nicola embodies the critics reading of comedy Italian style's engagement as a betrayal of neorealism. Gianni embodies the genre's depiction of the new "soggetto individuale" of the Economic Miracle, which is articulated through paradox according to the model of neorealist films with a contemporary setting (*even* Gianni, who started out as the most devoted of the three to the ideals of the Resistance, is corrupted if given the opportunity), a subject which has often been satirised but conceived by the critics as being represented in a sympathetic manner. And Antonio embodies the genre's popular audience and the notion that through its naivety it will be able to understand the filmmakers' articulation of social reality without over-intellectualising it, laughing at it if he is supposed to laugh at it, forming its own judgement of what is shown on screen in accordance to the face-value connotation given to reality, bad or good, funny or boring, etc. The frequent scenes in which the three characters are shown to

interact in social situations, such as the recurring dinners at the 'Half Portion'⁸³ Hosteria and the picketing in front of the school where Gianni forgets his driving licence, have the function of signifying the characters as the chosen examples of three different perspectives of an experience that all Italians have witnessed willingly or not, knowingly or not, the phenomenon of neorealism's evolution into comedy Italian style.⁸⁴

As a want-to-be actress who daydreams of the *dolce-vita* she sees on the cinema screens and is ultimately confronted with the reality of the hardships of life the character of Luciana has been identified as an embodiment of Italy, of the nation as a whole.⁸⁵ The conclusion of the three protagonists' narrative trajectories, revealing that Antonio has conquered Luciana, the prize all of the friends contended, and that he is the only one left at the forefront of the battle against social injustices, picketing a school so that his children will receive equal education, expresses Scola's faith in the validity of the genre's engagement and reaffirms its relationship to the neorealist model. Scola argued in an interview with Mino Monicelli:

Neorealism... can be considered as the father of Italian comedy, even if the latter was born precisely as a reaction against neorealism. Neorealism tried to restore the dramatic and authentic face of the Italy of those years, while the Italian comedy, with opposing solely evasive intentions, tried to fabricate a conciliatory, rural, Don Camillesque Italian picture of 'bread' and 'love'.

The Italian comedy began thus, in a rather false way. Little by little,

⁸³ "Mezza porzione". Gianni Gianni nicknames the tavern where they meet this way, because what the three friends can afford is always just a half-portion of any given dish.

⁸⁴ This strategy of passing from a singulative to an iterative mode of narration for the sake of making explicit the broader validity of the social reality represented on screen was also noted in the case of post-war neorealism by Roberta Piazza who wrote: "In De Sica's *Ladri di Biciclette*, the camera panning on the endless piles of sheets at the pawnbroker's suggests that what we are witnessing is not the exceptional story of Antonio Ricci, but the strenuous fight for survival of most Italians at the time" (48).

⁸⁵ By Peter Bondanella, who argues that "the woman they love symbolises Italy herself" (*An History* 208). As far as the analysis of what the characters of the three friends represent, Bondanella argues that it is "three separate social classes (middle class, intelligentsia, proletariat)" (208). My meta-cinematic reading of the characters does not contradict Bondanella's class reading but expands it on a different level.

however, it grew, it took to following even more closely and critically the process of society. It registered its changes, illusions, realities, from the 'boom' to the 'crack', it contributed to corroding some of those taboos of which Catholic Italy is the victim, taboos of family, sex, institutions (Monicelli 139).⁸⁶

Scola's reference to "bread" and "love" and "Don Camillo" address the early 1950s comedic forms of farces⁸⁷ and pink neorealism as pure evasive products in contrast with neorealism. The director's statement regarding the maturity of its later engaged form, comedy Italian style, proves the genre's filmmakers genuine belief in the validity of the neorealist model and in the need to re-contextualise neorealism's strategy of social commentary within an entertainment product with popular appeal. Proposing Antonio, 'The comedy Italian style Spectator', as the victorious social subject remaining faithful to the ideal of the Resistance in *C'eravamo Tanto Amati* confirms the genre's faithfulness to the cinematic form which inspired it. "We wanted to change the world and the world changed us instead!" The transition from the hopeful post-war period to the Economic Miracle and the crisis of the 1970s has challenged the intellectual, the honest lawyer. But by carrying on the neorealist practice and channelling it to the people comedy Italian style has left some hope for its audience, *even* through those troubled times.

In conclusion, I have identified two tendencies in neorealism towards the representation of the social context it depicts. In neorealist films narrating the Resistance, the rhetoric of an idyllic unified struggle is imposed to fulfil the hopeful ideal of the reconstruction of the country. Neorealist films depicting the troubled post-war period are instead characterised by *openness* and the filmmakers tend to avoid rhetoric and instead use paradoxes in highlighting the contradictory and ambiguous nature of their current social landscape. Comedy Italian style implements the same paradoxical articulation in its depiction of the social subject of the Economic Miracle period, while at the same time satirising the habits of the new

⁸⁶Scola's interview appears translated in English in Marcus' *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism* (393). I have presented it in the existing translation.

⁸⁷ The *Don Camillo* was a series of film adaptations of Guareschi's novels and an example of the pink neorealism comedy genre.

'average Italian' in order to express its regret for the failure of the neorealist ideal. The comedies Italian style which revisit the Resistance mirror neorealism in imposing the rhetoric of a unified struggle in the depiction of the war and thus reveal a sense of nostalgia for the hopeful times of the reconstruction of the country. More complex comedies Italian style such as *Una Vita Difficile* and *C'eravamo Tanto Amati* articulate both the narratives of the Resistance and of the Economic Miracle and, when one reads their metacinematic subtexts, they carry out statements in order to disprove the accusation of their supposed betrayal of neorealism and reinforce the genre's position as truthful heir of the neorealist practice and as the only possible way to revive in the popular audience the neorealist ideal of representing social injustices on screen as a means of improving the social landscape. Furthermore, films such as *Una Vita Difficile* and *C'Eravamo Tanto Amati* mirror the 'openness' of neorealism in their treatment of Italian history, which becomes the site of the characters' wandering, very much like the ruins of the country in the post-war period reflected in spatial terms the *openness* of neorealist narratives.

Ultimately, comedy Italian style's dual attitude in the representation of social reality, depending on either a focus entirely dedicated to the present or a rivisitation of the past, does not only attest the genre's *descendance* from neorealism. It is proof of an elaborate awareness on the part of the comedy Italian style filmmakers of neorealism's representational strategies that goes beyond a straightforward continuity, a mindless repetition of a practice in a different historical context. It rather denotes a knowing reconsideration of the original neorealist practice after almost two decades and marks an attempt to resolve the contrast between the neorealism declined in the present tense of films such as *Ladri di Biciclette* and the historicising trend of realism declined in the past tense introduced by Visconti's *Senso* for the purpose of asserting the validity of the comedy Italian style genre as a cultural model despite an adverse critical reception.

Chapter Four: From 'Populist' to 'National-Popular': Comedy Italian Style and Gramscian Thought

*"I believe that divorce would have never been legalised, if Divorzio all'Italiana was not made"*¹ – comedy Italian style screenwriter Leo Benvenuti (in Pintus and Biarese, 26-31).

The 'Crocean conception' and the seeds within neorealism for a return to a populist and escapist representation

The relationship between neorealism and comedy Italian style is evident due to the historical proximity between the two phenomena and the large number of screenwriters, directors, actors and professionals in general who were involved in both cinematic forms. I have argued that the comedy Italian style genre did not simply have a strong relationship with neorealist practice, but constituted an *evolution* of it. Comedy Italian style overcame the lack of popular appeal which neorealism suffered from in its original form by borrowing neorealist innovations such as the developments of non-classic narrative structures, of a new type of stardom and of a dual attitude towards the articulation of social reality and by adapting them in the context of genre production. This evolution was certainly in the direction of entertainment and popular appeal, motivated by reasons of economic feasibility. Did the passage from one form to the other also represent an evolution in cultural terms? Whereas I argue that this process constituted an *evolution* of the neorealist practice during the period in which the comedies Italian style were produced, at the time critics tended to consider these films merely as a complacent dilution of the neorealist engagement.²

¹ "Secondo me non ci sarebbe stata la legge sul divorzio, se non si faceva *Divorzio all'Italiana*."

² As discussed in Chapter Three.

In the late 1970s the comedy Italian style genre started to be rehabilitated due to the appreciation shown by French critics such as Jean Gili³ on the pages of the film journal *Positif*. However, even in recent years, when confronted with the relationship between comedy Italian style and neorealism, Angela Dalle Vacche has considered the first as an *involution* of the latter:

The involution of neorealism into pink neorealism, in the 1950s, and into comedy Italian style in the 1970s, indicates the strength of the parameters of Italian cinema (123).⁴

I partially agree with Dalle Vacche on pink neorealism, having pointed out that it only featured the iconography of the dramatic neorealism of Rossellini and De Sica and ignored by and large its structural innovations in favour of a reversal towards pre-neorealist types of comedic forms. However, such neorealist innovations were indeed instrumental in the success of the comedy Italian style genre and have determined its uniqueness in the context of Italian genre production.⁵

Such hybridisation between neorealist innovations and a humorous, albeit tragically-ironic, type of storytelling certainly represented a shift in the direction of entertainment, but does this necessarily constitute an *involution*? An involution would imply a return to a pre-neorealist type of comedic form, as was the case with pink neorealism and thus a reversal to the *escapism* that characterised the Italian film production during the Fascist era, not merely a shift towards a realist breed of *entertainment*. Dalle Vacche maintains that it was, in fact, escapism:

³ Gili's engagement with the subject eventually led to the publication on his part of the first legitimate study of the genre and a more widespread appreciation for it in recent times.

⁴ Dalle Vacche's circumstantiating of comedy Italian style within the 1970s decade is not justified, as most of the films of this genre, according to any meaning ever given to the expression "*commedia all'italiana*", were made in the early 1960s. This confusion makes it even harder to understand her argument of a supposed 'involution' of neorealism, as no examples of films are made to justify this claim.

⁵ As discussed in Chapter One.

Thanks to the economic boom of the late 1950s and early 1960s in the aftermath of the Marshall Plan, escapist comedies crowded the screens, while a superficial optimism prevailed. The fluid life of the street returned to the rigid moulds of picturesque statuettes. These embodiments of populist types in post-war Italy were as artificial as their counterparts in the 1930s (182-183).

If such a claim may be partially accurate for the immediate post-war period and the first half of the fifties when comedic forms characterised by happy-ending narratives and slapstick humour such as farces and pink neorealism dominated the Italian comedy film production, watching the bitter, tragic endings of comedies Italian style such as *Il Sorpasso*, *I Mostri* or *Io La Conoscevo Bene* would be sufficient to establish that, in the case of comedy Italian style, optimism was substituted by fierce cynicism and that the genre filmmakers' depiction of the Economic Miracle was infused with critical satire rather than superficiality. In the same way, as discussed in Chapter Two, the neorealist-informed acting of comedians such as Alberto Sordi, Marcello Mastroianni and Vittorio Gassman provided the entertainment factor required by a popular product but at the same time also marked the difference between their realist ironic embodiments of the boom's *average Italian* and Totò's and Macario's farcical "statuettes".

Dalle Vacche's claim of comedy Italian style being an *involution* of the neorealist practice is not simply the result of a general tendency of undermining the importance of comedic films in comparison to dramatic ones, as was the case in the period when the major comedies Italian style were produced.⁶ She relates the

⁶ As seen in the quotation of Cattivelli's review of Luigi Zampa's *Il Vigile* featured in Chapter Three. The genre's filmmakers often denounced this preconceived opinion by the critics and the traditional underestimation of all humorous cultural forms. For example, Mario Monicelli said:

Critics in general, not only Italian ones, give more importance to dramatic, engaged films because making someone laugh or even smile is considered escapist. Even if it is boring, a non-escapist film is considered important (in Pintus and Biarese 151).

supposed *involution* of neorealism with the uncritical depiction of the lower classes in the early neorealist efforts by Rossellini and De Sica which, in her view, contained *in nuce* the seeds of a return to *populist* representation:

The integration of an old historiographical discourse with a new comedic scale suggests that neorealism was split between continuity and change. The ties of neorealism to a Crocean interpretation of Italian History resurfaced during the involution of this film style (182-183).

In this reading, the rhetorical representation of the Resistance as a unified movement for peace sought by all segments of society in Rossellini's *Roma Città Aperta*, for example, is an indicator of the cultural impact that philosopher Benedetto Croce (1866-1952) had on the director and is related to Croce's conception of national unity *beyond class and regional differences*, as exemplified in the character of Communist Partisan Manfredi in the film who, as Dalle Vacche notes, "embodies the nation as a whole, not just the working class" (182-183). Mark Shiel subscribes to the notion of a Crocean influence on Rossellini's neorealism, noting that in films such as *Roma Città Aperta* and *Paisà*

the view of Italian history projected [...] has often been related to that of Benedetto Croce. [...] Croce put forward a highly influential liberal-humanist account of the unification of Italy and its emergence as a modern nation-state, and his idealist perspective led him to regard the rise of Fascism as a perverse aberration from the positive course of Italian history (50-51).

As I will show, comedy Italian style abandoned this interpretation of the unification of Italy and attempted to offer a more analytical account of the rise of Fascism.⁷ In

In the original text: "La critica in generale, non solo italiana, dà maggior peso al film drammatico, *impegnato*, perché il solo far ridere o sorridere è ritenuto *evasivo*.

Anche se noioso, il film non *evasivo*, è considerato importante."

⁷ According to Croce and Gramsci scholar Michele Maggi, initially "Croce participated in that atmosphere of dissatisfaction for the mediocrity of popular commitment, which spread in the first decades after the unification. [...] Croce's assessment of these experiences were changing on the eve of the Great War and finally reached, as is well known, the overall re-evaluation of the [*early Italian Prime Ministers*] Depretis and Giolitti period in the *Storia d'Italia*" (In the original: "Croce partecipa

the context of the hybridisation of neorealism's focus on the lower classes with cinematic comedy forms such as farces and pink neorealism, however, the "Crocean interpretation" persisted and, according to Dalle Vacche's reading, led to *populism*; in other words it informed an uncritical humorous representation of the life in the streets without taking into account class and regional differences and the impact these differences had on the social and economic landscape of the nation. To put it simply, in a comedic context the "Crocean interpretation" implied *populism* which consequently determined a return to *escapism*.

If this reading is valid for earlier post-war comedic forms, I believe that this is not the case with comedy Italian style. I will argue that in the process of evolution of post-war neorealism into this comedic genre the "Crocean interpretation" was progressively removed and replaced with notions of the cultural, historical and political thought of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), thus resolving the *populist dilemma* and the *escapism* it determined in favour of a critical, albeit entertaining, representation of the impact that class and regional differences still had in Italy during the period when comedies Italian style were being produced.⁸

di quell'atmosfera di delusione per la mediocrità dello spirito pubblico, circolante nei primi decenni postunitari. [...] Il giudizio di Croce su queste esperienze muterà già alla vigilia della Grande Guerra, e finirà poi con l'approdare, come si sa, nella *Storia d'Italia*, a una vera e propria rivalutazione dell'epoca di Depretis e Giolitti") (15-16). The positioning of World War I as a turning point in Croce's conception of the early unification years suggests that, perhaps, his re-evaluation depended on the depiction of the victorious outcome of the war in the media and cultural artefacts of the time that Monicelli's *La Grande Guerra* only subverted in 1959 and that I will shortly discuss. This, however, is only speculation on my part.

⁸ I must point out that this study does not attempt to show Gramsci's philosophical thought as necessarily surpassing Croce's. In fact Richard Bellamy makes very good points in a journal article on how some of Gramsci's claims of having resolved contradictions in Croce's thought are inaccurate (*A Crocean Critique of Gramsci on Historicism, Hegemony and Intellectuals*). My study is concerned with the shift from one cultural conception to the other and the role this shift played in the evolution of neorealism into comedy Italian style. Its aim is thus not to establish if one philosophy is better than the other, but simply address the fact that they are different and that the comedy Italian style filmmakers' shift to Gramscian conceptions proved that they were much more culturally aware than they were generally believed to be. I will, however, outline here the major point of contention, as I understand it, between the two systems of thought. In the essay entitled 'Ciò Che la Filosofia Non Deve Essere: la Filosofia Tendentiosa', Croce addressed as "biased", that philosophy which "becomes

The dissemination of Gramsci's thought and its positioning within Italian film studies

Born in the underdeveloped region of Sardinia in 1891, Gramsci was awarded a scholarship to study at the University of Turin, in the North. He was one of the founders of the Italian Communist Party and was arrested by the Fascist regime in 1926. When he was transferred to a prison near Bari in 1928, he received the permission to write. There he drafted notebooks on cultural and political subjects until he died in 1937. These works were published in 1948 as *The Prison Notebooks* primarily thanks to his sister-in-law's efforts. Although many of the neorealist films of the immediate post-war period were produced after 1948, very few of the neorealist filmmakers were aware of *The Prison Notebooks* as they were widely disseminated only in the 1960s.⁹ Thus it was only natural that the neorealist directors

a practical matter, it takes a stand in the struggle of the social and political passions and fights and, pretending to unveil a universal truth, preaches a given attitude" (245-246). (In the original: "diventata una cosa pratica, che parteggia nel contrasto delle passioni e nelle lotte sociali e politiche, e, sotto specie di affermare l'universale verità, predica uno o un altro particolare atteggiamento.") The central notion here is Croce's definition of politics as a "passion" rather than a category of philosophy, which, instead, he thought should remain confined in the theoretical realm. Gramsci's Marxism, which as I shall soon explain, encouraged the formation of a stratum of 'organic intellectuals' who would spread philosophical notions among the working classes for their benefit in the political and hegemonic struggle, was obviously opposed to this concept. Michele Maggi, however, is among the scholars who argue that Gramsci misconceived Croce's words, noting that "fighting in the biased philosophy the false unification of the theoretical and the practical (by direct and straightforward controversy against Fascism and Nazism, but also involving Soviet Communism) is entirely different from contrasting thought and action, intellect and will, men of culture against labouring men" (27) (in the original: "Combattere nella filosofia tendenziosa la falsa unificazione di teoretico e pratico (con una polemica diretta in prima linea contro fascismo e nazismo, ma coinvolgente anche il comunismo sovietico), è tutt'altra cosa che opporre il pensiero all'azione, l'intelletto alla volontà, gli uomini di cultura agli uomini di forza"), the latter being critiques moved by Gramsci against Croce's philosophical conception.

⁹ Saveria Chemotti's article 'La Problematica Gramsciana e la Questione del Neorealismo' specifies that the identification made between neorealism's engagement and Gramsci's proposition is inaccurate and that there are no documents proving the reading of Gramsci's work on the part of any neorealist filmmaker before the mid 1950s, apart from Visconti's. Even if they were, the very nature of neorealism as a circumstanced phenomenon bound to the historical contingency of the immediate post-war period would have prevented it to become an example of national-popular culture as

were mostly still informed by Crocianism, the major cultural current in Italy during the first half of the century.¹⁰ In fact, Vittorio Spinazzola maintained that if only neorealists had been aware of the instances of Gramsci's thought earlier on they could have prevented the mode of production's lack of popular appeal and ultimately its demise, writing that

it was beyond the possibilities of such a young movement, so recently rooted, to support the weight of such pressures from many sides. The essential condition for doing so would have been the tightening of the relationship with the mass public, considering its needs and desires, the objective level of its cultural background, not by passively adapting to them but re-elaborating them in a different perspective. This was the essential meaning of Gramsci's proposition, which back then was just starting to be known. But it was not yet the time to apply it (*Cinema e Pubblico* 54).¹¹

However, the wide dissemination of Gramsci's work between the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s radically challenged the reigning conceptions of culture and history.¹² David Forgacs and Robert Lumley have noted that

theorised by Gramsci, as Michael P. Rogin points out: "Gramsci had put national-popular culture in the service of the gradual penetration of society, what he called a war of position, whereas neorealism emerged in the context of a short-term contest for political power, Gramsci's war of maneuver" (140). In this respect, comedy Italian style's positioning between the 1950s and 1970s was more appropriate to carry out such a function.

¹⁰ In a 1960 article Visconti addressed in retrospect the reading of Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* as an influence for his early 1948 film *La Terra Trema*. Micciché, however, maintains that "this reading was presumably not influential in respect to *La Terra Trema*, for the very good reason [...] that such reading could have not occurred yet" (*Visconti e il Neorealismo* 85).

¹¹ "Reggere il peso d'una simile battaglia su più fronti era compito sproporzionato alle forze d'un movimento di così recente nascita e poco profonde radici. Condizione essenziale per riuscirvi sarebbe stato il consolidamento dei rapporti con il pubblico di massa, rifacendosi alle sue esigenze e attese, cioè al livello oggettivo della sua formazione culturale, non per adeguarvisi passivamente ma per rielaborarne i termini in una prospettiva diversa. Era questo il significato essenziale della proposta di Gramsci, che proprio allora si cominciava a conoscere. Ma i tempi non erano maturi per applicarla."

¹² On the impact of the dissemination of Gramsci's writing, Antonio Vitti writes:

Regardless of its theoretical merits, the discovery of Gramsci's oeuvre opened a debate in Italy which forced many writers to make certain choices and unveiled

The neo-idealism associated particularly with the philosophers Benedetto Croce (1866-1952) and Giovanni Gentile (1875-1944) [...] identified culture with intellectuals, cultural history with intellectual history (3).

Gramsci's work challenged this conception and its dissemination was reflected in many works of Italian cinema. If neorealism put great emphasis on the lower classes it was in terms of the lower classes being a subject matter of culture, and this was reflected in the first attempts to transpose it into a comedic context such as the farces and pink neorealism comedies in which, devoid of the dramatic connotation of the Resistance and post-war struggle, the lower classes returned to be chosen mainly for their bizarre attributes for the sake of escapism. It was only with the dissemination of Gramsci's work that Italian culture, and thus Italian cinema, started to conceive the lower classes not simply as a subject matter of culture, but also as protagonists of cultural history and as potential recipients of cultural artefacts. Since the neorealists had not read Gramsci, back in the late 1940s Laura E. Ruberto and Kristi M. Wilson's consideration that "these films seemed to show filmmakers how a national identity could be shaped and/or defined by cinema (an idea akin to what Antonio Gramsci called a national popular culture)" (3), should be considered an analogy, rather than an argument in favour of a Gramscian reading of post-war neorealism.¹³ Since then, and in the case of neorealist director Luchino Visconti since 1954, Gramscian thought has been inspiring for many filmmakers, as Marcia Landy notes:¹⁴

unresolved aspects of Italian culture such as the issue of linguistic unification and the historic role of the intellectual from Dante onwards (*Ripensare il Neorealismo* 13).

("La scoperta dell'opera gramsciana, a prescindere dal valore teorico, aprì in Italia un dibattito che condizionò e costrinse molti scrittori italiani a fare delle scelte e portò allo scoperto aspetti irrisolti della cultura italiana come la questione della lingua [*unitaria*] e il ruolo storico dell'intellettuale a partire da Dante.")

¹³ I do agree that neorealist films did in fact articulate a discourse about Italian national identity, which I will discuss in Chapter Five, but this does not necessarily imply they were informed by Gramsci.

¹⁴ Visconti has been identified with Gramscianism on account of his early discovery of the *Prison Notebooks* to the point that he has been defined by Roberta Piazza as "an organic intellectual of the official left of Togliatti, Trombadori and Alicata" (59). Since an 'organic intellectual' in Gramsci's

The name of Antonio Gramsci is as important for cinema as it is for Italian political thought. No other figure's ideas played such a large role in the development of the post-World War II Italian cinema. Gramscian issues may not have been obvious in the cinema of the immediate post-war era, but they dominated the cinema of the late 1960s to the 1970s. His influence is most evident in the works of such filmmakers as Luchino Visconti, Bernardo Bertolucci, Mario Monicelli, Ermanno Olmi, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and the Taviani Brothers (*Italian Film* 149).

The influence of Gramsci's views on post-neorealist Italian art film has been the subject of a large number of academic studies, mainly dedicated to Visconti, Pasolini and the Taviani Brothers.¹⁵ However, apart from Landy's reading of Mario Monicelli's *I Compagni* (1963) in *Italian Film*, the presence of Gramscian themes in the comedy Italian style films has not been thoroughly analysed. I argue that

terms is someone who participates in the professional activity of the working class and shares its experience for the purpose of challenging its conception of the world, I have problems in referring with this expression to any given filmmaker, even more to one with an aristocratic background such as Visconti's or to one who produced films as distant from the popular audience as *La Terra Trema*. If the influence of Gramsci's thought is definitely more apparent in Visconti's work than in the comedies Italian style I will discuss, one should however consider the efficacy of his films in delivering Gramscian notions on the popular audience. It should be pointed out that Visconti films with Gramscian undertones of the 1960s such as *Rocco e i Suoi Fratelli* and *Il Gattopardo* were indeed successful commercially speaking. However, studies in *Il Giornale dello Spettacolo/Borsa Film* showed that Visconti's films gathered most of their earnings in the urban centres, while achieving quite poor results in rural areas, whereas the earnings of comedy Italian style films were more evenly distributed across the country. In light of this we can assume that Visconti's films were seen by educated Italians, who were already aware of certain cultural discourses, whereas the strength of comedy Italian style was that of being able to channel such discourses to segments of the population that were not aware of them to begin with.

¹⁵ Pasolini publicly acknowledged the importance that Gramsci's writings had for him both as a writer and a director when he published a collection of poems entitled *Le Ceneri di Gramsci*. A Gramscian reading of Visconti's *Senso* is featured in Millicent Marcus' *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism*. Marcia Landy dedicates a chapter to Gramscian themes in the work of these directors in *Italian Film* and an extensive analysis of the major Taviani Brothers' films 'in the light of Gramsci' in her volume *Film, Politics and Gramsci*. In his article entitled 'Marxism and Formalism in the Films of Luchino Visconti', Walter K. Forte Jr. goes as far as saying that "the dialectal tension between Gramscian Marxism and formalism" is "the problematic centre of all of Visconti's work" (11).

Gramsci's conception of *national-popular* culture and of the function of intellectuals, his views on Italian history and his articulation of the *Southern question*, which were all at the forefront of the cultural debate when the comedy Italian style films were being produced, transpire in many of the genre's films and that, as a result of the re-discussion of the parameters of Italian culture provoked by Gramsci's writings in that period, the comedy Italian style filmmakers managed to devise a non-populist and non-escapist hybridisation of neorealism and entertainment, an updated engaged representation of the country and the contradictions within its society which granted the room for enough popular aspects for it to survive, thus representing an evolution of neorealism in Darwinian terms.¹⁶

Intellectuals, education, hegemony and the Risorgimento: essential notions of Antonio Gramsci's thought

Gramsci's writings developed from his political engagement in the Communist Party. He questioned himself on the forms in which political struggle was taking place in Italy at the time of his imprisonment and on the historical reasons that had previously undermined the possibility of a proletarian revolution of the Soviet type and determined instead the Fascist rise to power after World War I. Despite the fact that the conditions in which the *Notebooks* were written did not encourage a systematic

¹⁶ Even though Gramsci developed these concepts as a result of his political engagement, his philosophical thought had a cultural relevance that transcended the restricted area of politics or party agenda. Thus I am not arguing that comedy Italian style films are overtly ideological texts which promote Marxist doctrine as an alternative for Italy's well-being. As I previously noted in Chapter Three, the comedy Italian style filmmakers, in neorealist fashion, generally do not provide solutions to the social issues they depict on screen through closure in their films' narratives. They are entertainment films of a realist breed, which maintain an *openness* towards these social issues derivative of the genre's neorealist antecedents. What I argue here, however, is that the choice of the social issues they depict on screen through the articulation of paradoxes is a result of the popularisation of Gramsci's thought at the time, very much in the same way that Tag Gallagher discussed Rossellini's Crocianism not as a result of a certified reading of Croce's writings on the part of the director, but on the basis that "an Italian of Rossellini's generation no more had to be a philosopher to absorb the essential attitudes of Crocianism than he had to be a priest to absorb Catholicism" (90).

approach,¹⁷ Gramsci stressed that all of the national questions, such as the problem of the unity of language, of the nature of Italian culture, of the backwardness of the South, etc. were linked to each other:

The intellectual and leading classes in Italian society have never been aware of the fact that there is a connection between these problems, one of co-ordination and subordination. Nobody has ever presented these problems as a coherent and connected whole, but each of them has periodically reappeared, according to immediate and not always clearly expressed polemical interests, with no desire to look deeper. Therefore, they have always been treated in an abstractly cultural and intellectualistic form, without a precise historical perspective and hence without a coherent and concrete socio-political solution to them ever emerging. [...] It seems undeniable, though, that none of these problems can be resolved individually (in that they are still current and alive today). It follows that a critical and dispassionate treatment of these questions [...] can provide the most useful approach for reconstructing the fundamental characteristics of Italian cultural life, and the needs they point to and for which they demand solutions (*Cultural Writings* 199-200).

The crucial passage here is Gramsci's denunciation of the impossibility of discussing each of these problems separately. In order to overcome this shortcoming which he had noted in previous approaches to these questions, Gramsci's writings featured an extremely organic character and transcended an exclusively political goal, thus offering an overall redefinition of the parameters of Italian culture. Gramsci's considerations on the role of the intellectuals were at the basis of this process. On this subject Gramsci wrote:

All men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals. When one distinguishes between intellectuals and non-intellectuals, one is referring in reality only to the

¹⁷ He had difficulties in obtaining some references in prison and because of this sometimes he had to interrupt certain arguments by noting that he recollected the existence of relevant pieces of work being published on a particular subject but that he could not double-check the information. Likewise, he often had to use nick-names and circumlocutions when referencing leftist thinkers and pro-Marxist doctrines in his writings in order to avoid the censorship of the prison guards.

immediate social function of the professional category of intellectuals [...] There is no human activity from which every form of intellectual participation can be excluded: *homo faber* cannot be separated from *homo sapiens*. Each man, finally, outside his professional activity, carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a 'philosopher', an artist, a man of taste, he participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought. [...] The traditional and vulgarized type of intellectual is given by the man of letters, the philosopher, the artist. [...] In the modern world, technical education, closely bound to industrial labour even at the most primitive and unqualified level, must form the basis of the new type of intellectual (*Prison Notebooks* 9).

With these words Gramsci sought to liberate Italian culture from what in his view was its élitist heritage; all men from any social class, if given the instruments, are capable of contributing to sustain or modify the existing conception of the world even if they are not intellectuals in the traditional sense, in other words even if intellectual activity is not their actual professions. In opposition to the *traditional intellectuals*, Gramsci hoped for the formation of a stratum of *organic intellectuals*,¹⁸ who by participating in each class' professional activity could be more aware of the people's necessities and give them the instruments to participate in a new conception of the world.

Why this insistence on the function of intellectuals? Because, even though he stressed that all men participate in intellectual activity, he felt that the majority of the people carried out this activity in "a chaotic aggregate of disparate conceptions" (*Prison Notebooks* 421-422), which he alternatively referred to as *folklore* or *common sense*. If *folklore* is the ensemble of residues of different conceptions of the world that have succeeded each other in history, *common sense*, as Gramsci scholars Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith note, is a similarly "uncritical and largely unconscious way of perceiving and understanding the world that has become *common* in any given epoch" (322). Thus *common sense* should not be confused with the

¹⁸ The "new type of intellectual" referred to in the previous passage.

practical but not necessarily scientific attitude that it usually is referred to in English. It is rather “philosophical folklore” (Gramsci, *Cultural Writings* 189) in that it is the most widespread conception of the world of man, obtained from *folklore*, in a particular time in history. He believed that, without guidance, the lower classes’ reliance on *folklore* and *common sense* contributed to their own socio-economic and political subordination. Thus, Gramsci’s challenge of the traditional role of Italian intellectuals was related to their lacking of engagement with the lower classes and the effect that this practice had in the people’s misfortunes throughout the cultural and political development of the nation. In debating the detachment of the Italian intellectuals, he wrote:

One could only have had cultural stability and an organic quality of thought [...] if the intellectuals had been organically the intellectuals of those masses, and if they had worked out and made coherent principles and the problems raised by the masses in their practical activity, thus constituting a cultural and social bloc. [...] Is a philosophical movement properly so called when it is devoted to creating a specialized culture among restricted intellectual groups, or rather when, and only when, in the process of elaborating a form of thought superior to *common sense* and coherent on a scientific plane, it never forgets to remain in contact with the *simple* and indeed finds in this contact the source of the problems it sets out to study and to resolve?¹⁹ Only by this contact does a philosophy become *historical*, purify itself of intellectualistic elements of an individual character and become *life* (*Prison Notebooks* 330).

The lack of “cultural stability” due to the “intellectualistic elements of individual character” which characterised Italian culture throughout history had, in Gramsci’s view, determined the social and political underdevelopment of Italian society, as he often posited that certain cultural tendencies had an impact on the outcome of social and political struggle within a nation. Discussing the relationship between culture and government he wrote that “every state is ethical as much as one

¹⁹ In opposition to *common sense* Gramsci used the term *good sense* to indicate a philosophy that managed to achieve the goals he sets out in this passage, as he also wrote that “philosophy is criticism and the superseding of religion and *common sense*. In this sense it coincides with *good* as opposed to *common sense*” (*Prison Notebooks* 326).

of its most important functions is to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level", (*Prison Notebooks* 258) thus highlighting the State's role as *educator*.

Therefore it is clear that Gramsci put great emphasis on the relationship existing between what he perceived to be a fundamentally "bookish concept of culture" in Italy²⁰ and the fact that, unlike other countries, Italian society had never completed throughout history the process of separation from an aristocratic-feudal organization of power. Every relationship of *hegemony*,²¹ he wrote, "is necessarily an educational relationship" (*Prison Notebooks* 350) which "exists between intellectual and non-intellectual sections of the population, between the rulers and the ruled, élites and their followers, leaders and led, the vanguard and the body of the army" (*Prison Notebooks* 350). Thus, linking *cultural hegemony* to *political hegemony*, he analysed how the élitist tendency of Italian intellectuals shaped the socio-economic order. He dated this cultural trend back to the Renaissance:

Every intellectual movement becomes or returns to being national if a *going to the people* has taken place, if there has been a phase of *Reformation* and not just a phase of *Renaissance* and if these two phases *Reformation-*

²⁰ Gramsci used this expression to indicate and denounce the self-reflexivity of Italian intellectual efforts, as he wrote:

It is noteworthy that in Italy there is a purely bookish concept of culture: the literary journals deal with books or the people who write them. Articles containing impressions of collective life, of ways of thinking, 'sign of the times' or changes occurring in people's behaviour are nowhere to be found (*Cultural Writings* 273-274).

²¹ On Gramsci's use of the term 'hegemony', David Forgacs clarifies:

It is defined precisely by an expansion beyond economic class interest into the sphere of political direction through a system of class alliances. In the prison notebooks this meaning of 'hegemony' remains but the term is extended in two ways. Firstly, it is applied not just to situations of proletarian leadership but also to the rule of other classes at other periods of history. Secondly, it is qualitatively modified: hegemony comes to mean *cultural, moral and ideological* leadership over allied and subordinate groups (Forgacs, *Glossary* 423).

Renaissance follow one another organically instead of coinciding with distinct historical phases (*Cultural Writings* 275).

According to Gramsci, despite its cultural significance, the Renaissance in Italy was a movement confined to the aristocratic segments of society due to the use of Latin, which remained mostly the language of choice of the intellectuals despite its not being spoken nor understood by the people,²² and to the repressive function of the Catholic Church. It lacked a phase of *popularisation*, whereas in non-Catholic European countries this phase was represented by the Reformation.²³

During the Risorgimento, Italy's process of unification into a State under the royal hegemony of the House of Savoy, the historical fracture between the cultural élites and the people determined the movement's outcome as "a revolution without a revolution" (*Prison Notebooks* 59). This expression signals Gramsci's belief that the intellectual and leading forces within the unification movement missed the opportunity of extending the struggle within the realm of social reformation in favour of the popular classes. Despite the great emphasis given to the phenomenon of the

²² On the elitist nature of the Renaissance due to its Latin heritage Gramsci wrote:

Every language is an integral conception of the world and not simply a piece of clothing that can fit indifferently as form over any content. Well then? Does not this mean that two conceptions of the world were in conflict: a bourgeois-popular one expressing itself in the vernacular and an aristocratic-feudal one expressing itself in Latin and harking back to Roman antiquity? And is not the Renaissance characterised by this conflict rather than by the serene creation of a triumphant culture? (*Cultural Writings* 226)

²³ From the phrase 'a phase of' it is clear that Gramsci is referring to *Renaissance* and *Reformation* both as separate historical periods and also as categories by which to define the effectiveness of a cultural trend. A movement of the *Renaissance* type remains confined to the intellectual stratum of society, a movement of the *Reformation* type manages to involve all segments of society. Marxism in Italy, for example, was a movement which, he felt, lacked a "phase of Reformation", although the term obviously has actual connections with the Reformation as an event in the history of Christianity. David Gilks has written an article on how these two historical phenomena came to acquire a broader significance in Gramsci's writings ('Riforma e Rinascimento. Protestantism and Catholicism in Antonio Gramsci's Writings on Italian History').

volunteers in the post-unification literature,²⁴ he believed that there existed “a certain tendency to overestimate the contribution of the popular classes to the Risorgimento” (*Prison Notebooks* 89). In fact, he challenged Croce’s conception of unity *beyond* class and regional differences and reinterpreted the Risorgimento as a war of expansion on the part of Piedmont,²⁵ facilitated by the local aristocratic élites’ will to prevent class unity between the factory workers in the North and the rural workers in the South:²⁶

In reality, what was involved was not that throughout the peninsula there existed nuclei of a homogeneous ruling class whose irresistible tendency to unite determined the formation of the Italian national State. These nuclei existed, indubitably, but their tendency to unite was extremely problematic [...] These nuclei did not wish to *lead* anybody, i.e. they did not wish to concord their interests and aspirations with the interests and aspirations of other groups. They wished to *dominate* and not to *lead*.²⁷ Furthermore, they wanted their interests to dominate, rather than their persons; in other words, they wanted a new force, independent of every compromise and condition, to become the arbiter of the Nation: this force was Piedmont and hence the function of the monarchy (*Prison Notebooks* 105).

The key passage here is that the unification, in the way in which it was achieved, answered the local élites’ wish of not having to be confronted with “the needs and aspirations of other groups”, of the lower classes. This strategic lack of

²⁴ Especially with the rhetoric of martyrdom associated with the ‘Mille’ who fought with Garibaldi.

²⁵ As Dalle Vacche notes, Gramsci read the Risorgimento in this way “instead of as a popular revolution, like the French in 1789” (12), which was how intellectuals tended to represent it before him. For Gramsci the Risorgimento was rather “masterminded by the politician Cavour”, (12) who sensed the possibility of it becoming a popular revolution and “neutralised it in the interest of the Piedmontese aristocracy he represented” (12).

²⁶ As Gribaudi points out, Gramsci’s insistence on the importance of the achievement of such unity differentiated his articulation of the ‘Southern question’ from the autonomist ones previously proposed by Dorso and Salvemini (78).

²⁷ In the original text Gramsci uses here the Italian expressions ‘dominare’ and ‘dirigere’. ‘Dominare’ entails that the fundamental concern of the ruling class is that of maintaining its privileged position. On the other hand ‘dirigere’ presumes a type of ruling that both parts, rulers and ruled, might benefit from.

unity between Northern industrial workers and Southern rural workers had, in Gramsci's opinion, a decisive role in the *backwardness* of the "Mezzogiorno"²⁸ and is heavily featured in his articulation of the *Southern question*. Rather than encouraging an economic and cultural development of the South, the North's hegemony in the unification process via the function of Piedmont created a scenario in which "the North concretely was an *octopus* which enriched itself at the expense of the South and its economic-industrial increment was in direct proportion to the impoverishment of the economy and the agriculture of the South" (*Prison Notebooks* 71).

To add insult to injury, the hegemonic and intellectual élites of the North, according to Gramsci, disseminated a fatalistic rhetoric which effectively prevented the possibility of the cross-national class unity he hoped for ever occurring:

It is well known what kind of ideology has been disseminated in myriad ways among the masses in the North, by the propagandists of the bourgeoisie: the South is the ball and chain which prevents the social development of Italy from progressing more rapidly; the Southerners are biologically inferior beings, semi-barbarians or total barbarians, by natural destiny; if the South is backward, the fault does not lie with the capitalist system or with any historical cause, but with Nature, which has made the Southerners lazy, incapable, criminal and barbaric (*Gramsci Reader* 57).

Again, the efficacy of Gramsci's articulation of the *Southern question* lies in the organic character of his conception, in not simply confining the issue within the realms of economics or history and rather taking into account the relationship between these two and broader cultural trends.

From a 'bookish' to a 'national-popular' conception of culture

Italian socio-political development, Gramsci felt, was dependent on a re-definition of Italian culture out of its intellectualistic and elitist tradition. A new culture, a '*national-popular*' culture was necessary for a new social order:

²⁸ Literally meaning "Mid-day", 'Mezzogiorno' is an expression by which Italians refer to the South of the country.

Today, this contact is lacking: our literature is not national because it is not popular. A paradox of the present. [...] There must be a specific moral and intellectual content which is the elaborated and finished expression of the deepest aspirations of a given public, of the nation-people in a certain phase of its historical development. Literature must be at one and the same time a current element of civilisation and a work of art (*Cultural Writings* 264).

Even though in this passage and in most of his writings Gramsci challenged the lack of an Italian *national-popular culture* within the field of literature, he also wrote that “the question must be extended to the entire *national-popular culture* and not just restricted to narrative fiction” (*Cultural Writings* 209).

However, as Gramsci scholars David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell Smith noted, his striving for a culture which is an “expression of the deepest aspirations [...] of the nation-people” should not be confused with a *populist* agenda:

National-popular [...] is a recurrent term in the *Prison Notebooks* and one whose meaning has been a subject of dispute. In Italy, particularly in the 1950s, it tended to become diluted into a cultural slogan and was more or less collapsed into *neorealism* or *social realism* in the arts, while in the 1960s it was used by new left intellectuals as a sort of courtroom exhibit with which to accuse Gramsci of *populism*, *idealism* and *intellectualism* [...]. In reality, not much of this stands up against Gramsci's texts themselves and the accusations of *populism* and *intellectualism* actually identify the concept with two of the things he employs it to attack (*People, Nation and Culture* 196).

The authors' mention of *neorealism* is tied to Dalle Vacche's analysis of this cinematic form's links to a “Crocean interpretation” and the *populist* representations carried out in some post-neorealist comedic forms. A cinematic or literary narrative's *setting* among the lower classes is not sufficient in order to constitute a *national-popular* text. In fact, long before the accusation of *populism* mentioned by Forgacs and Nowell Smith, Gramsci had made this basic distinction:

The life of the peasantry occupies a large space in literature, but here, too, not as work and toil but as *folklore*. The peasants are treated as picturesque representatives of curious and bizarre customs and feelings. For this reason the *peasant woman* is given even more space, with her sexual problems dealt in their most external and romantic aspect and because the woman, through her beauty, can easily rise to the higher social classes (*Cultural Writings* 213).

This quotation, which originally referred to literature, perfectly describes how earlier post-neorealist comedic forms operated with a *populist* approach. In pink neorealism films such as Renato Castellani's *Due Soldi di Speranza* or Luigi Comencini's *Pane, Amore e Fantasia* series the peasants are treated as "picturesque representatives of curious and bizarre customs and feelings" in the way that their conception of the world based on superstition is represented as an amusement and not challenged in its social, historical and economic implications. In these examples of pink neorealism there is also a strong emphasis on the figure of the peasant woman and her passionate and rebellious sexuality. However, the happy endings of the romantic plots which characterise comedic forms such as farce and pink neorealism reinforce the idea of the narrative being a journey into an archaic, alien but essentially overjoyed world, rather than an investigation of the socio-economic factors of its backwardness.

On the accusations of *intellectualism*, again Gramsci's concept of '*national-popular culture*' was actually devised in opposition to the tendency of reaffirming the intellectuals' superiority which he noted in existing Italian texts set among the peasants, such as Alessandro Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi*²⁹ with its use of the expression "the humble" to indicate the uneducated lower classes:

²⁹ In fact the ending of Castellani's pink neorealist comedy *Due Soldi di Speranza* features a striking similarity with Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi*. Manzoni's insistence on 'divine providence' rather than social struggle as the solution against Don Rodrigo's opposition to Renzo and Lucia's wedding in the novel is echoed in Castellani's film by the final shot in which, after the two protagonists have decided to get married despite the opposition of the father of the bride, and despite the fact that the groom is unemployed, the camera moves from the characters to the Church and finally to the sky, suggesting that God will reward the couple's faith with earthly goods.

For the Italian intellectual the expression 'the humble' indicates a relationship of paternal and divine protection, the *self-sufficient* sense of his undiscussed superiority. It is like the relationship between two races, one considered superior and the other inferior, like the relationship between adult and child in the old schools (*Cultural Writings* 293).

National-popular culture, in Gramsci's conception, could not be limited to featuring the lower classes or laugh at their expense because of their backwardness. Rather it had to engage with their *folkloric* conception of the world and relate this to the cultural, political and historic instances which informed it and function as "as a current element of civilisation"; in other words to challenge the *folklore* by pointing out its implications on the social order.³⁰ In 1954, neorealist director Luchino Visconti challenged the *folklore* of the Risorgimento as a patriotic struggle for national unity in *Senso*, a narrative informed by Gramsci's reading of it as a *war of expansion*. He thus abandoned his adherence to contemporary social reality which characterised the neorealist mode of production since Rossellini's *Roma, Città Aperta* and tried to move his investigation of Italian society away from a *setting* among the lower classes in present day Italy and into an analysis of the *historic factors* that participated in determining such social landscape.³¹

³⁰ In this sense, the neorealist film that attempted to engage with the lower classes in such a way was De Santis' *Riso Amaro*. According to Vitti it

demonstrates De Santis' primary concerns to promote a national cinema that could appeal to and communicate with any audience and this motivated his decision to use the American cinematic forms that Italian moviegoers knew and enjoyed the most. Unsurprisingly, the majority of his works make use of spectacular cinematic effects to tell stories of moral concern. This original strategy is fundamental in understanding his view of filmmaking and his role within neorealism and its aftermath (Vitti, *Riso Amaro* 60).

³¹ Even though *Senso* is set in the 19th century, some argue that it nonetheless articulates a discourse on Italy's recent past. According to Anne Hudson, for instance, "with it, he [Visconti] linked the betrayal of the Resistance ideals to the betrayal, almost a century before of the Risorgimento" (95).

***La Grande Guerra* and a non-populist representation of the lower classes**

In a similar way, in 1959 Mario Monicelli represented the Great War of 1914-1918 on screen with his film *La Grande Guerra*, which initiated the historical *filone* within the context of Italian comedic forms. If *escapist* forms such as farce and pink neorealism only produced films set in present day, in the case of comedy Italian style the Italian past was challenged from the very beginning of the genre. As shown in Chapter One and Chapter Three *La Grande Guerra* is a key text of the comedy Italian style genre, one which constitutes an exception to its adoption of neorealist narrative strategies and at the same time openly refers to neorealism through its exceptionality. It is not merely an exercise in parody, but rather a successful attempt of *rewriting history from below* in Gramscian fashion by not simply featuring the lower classes as the protagonists of an historical landscape, but also challenging the public's *common sense*, its most widespread conception of such past.³² Monicelli's and screenwriters Age, Scarpelli and Vincenzoni primary goal was that of producing an entertaining film, but they nonetheless also wanted to challenge the reigning heroic rhetoric that informed the common people's perception of the war, as the director recounts:

An army marched next to the two protagonists: we were thus putting on screen an entire generation [*of Italians*]. And we took a marked position against the traditional heroic version of the performance of our army in the war of 1915-1918. A version that had been sustained by Fascism with the distortion of the greatness of the Homeland and of war, of monarchic

³² According to Vincenzo Buccheri, there is to some extent a revolutionary objective implied in this re-writing history in comedic terms, as "laughing of history means, thus, adversing the lies of the establishment" (in the original: "Ridere della storia, in questo senso, equivale a contestare le menzogne del potere") (*Il Pennacchio e la Storia* 166). I would not necessarily conclude that the adoption of a Gramscian conception of culture in some comedies Italian style implies a "revolutionary" intent. Certainly it denotes an engagement with pressing social issues that can be equated to neorealism's.

nationalism in an anti-socialist function, which was shared by all segments of society (in Mondadori 103).³³

What is most interesting in Monicelli's words is the fact that not only do they denounce a perpetuated manipulation of historical events on the part of the reigning authorities, the intellectual and political hegemonic élites as Gramsci would have called them, but they also confirm that before the film was released this version was accepted as an indisputable truth for "all segments of society". In other words it was *common sense*: the rhetorical version of the events promoted by the monarchists first and Fascists later had sedimented as the most widespread conception of the war. During the filming stages of production it became clear that not only the past monarchic institutions were challenged by the filmmaker's operation, but also the present Christian Democrat ones were, as they withdrew the resources that were previously agreed upon with the production company:

The criticism came from all sides as soon as we started shooting. They were offended by the fact that such comedic two-timers could approach such an important subject. They feared an infamous farce, what was even worse written by me and two modest writers of comedies, as Age and Scarpelli were considered back then. It was Andreotti, who was Minister of Defense and had previously approved the script, who withdrew the support of the army. He was supposed to make tanks and cannons available, as well as other weapons and accessories which were also used during World War II (in Mondadori 103).³⁴

³³ "Accanto ai due protagonisti sfilava un esercito: per forza ci trovammo a raccontare un'intera generazione. E prendemmo una posizione decisa contro la visione agiografica del comportamento eroico del nostro esercito nella guerra del '15-'18. Una visione alimentata per anni dal fascismo con l'esaltazione della patria e della guerra, dal nazionalismo monarchico anche in funzione antisocialista, ma condivisa a tutti i livelli della popolazione." Monicelli refers to World War I as "the war of 1915-1918" because Italy's involvement in it started in 1915, whereas in other countries it is referred to as the 1914-1918 war, due to the fact that, on a broader scale, it did indeed start in 1914.

³⁴ "Le critiche fioccarono appena iniziammo le riprese. Si sentivano oltreggiati per il solo fatto che la gentaglia della commedia affrontasse un argomento così alto. Temevano una farsa immonda, perdipiù scritta da me e due scribacchini di film comici, come erano ritenuti allora Age e Scarpelli. Fu Andreotti, che allora era ministro della Difesa e aveva in precedenza dato il benestare al copione, a

Even the press of the time was sceptical because of the subversion of the notion of the outcome of World War I that the filmmakers were seeking, as Mariapia Comand notes:

In the newspaper discussions [*on the making of La Grande Guerra*] at the time, the humiliation of national pride, anti-patriotism, scorn for the army, the crime of offending the Homeland were feared; the cinema was accused of covering the nation with mud, as neorealism had done before (*Commedia* 60-61).³⁵

The filmmakers' challenge to the heroic rhetoric associated with World War I is clearly stated, starting with the opening credits, which open and close with a close up on ragged boots walking in the mud. [figure 43] Throughout the film the Italian army is shown to be poorly equipped, disorganized and unmotivated. However, Monicelli's subversion of the existing perception of the outcome of the war is not simply associated with a lack of economic resources, but deeply connected to the Gramscian notion of Italy's unification as a *war of expansion* that lacked class unity between the workers of the North and the South. The regional differences among the soldiers are highlighted from the very first scene of the film, set in a military recruitment centre, where the two protagonists Oreste Jacovacci (Alberto Sordi) and Giovanni Busacca (Vittorio Gassman) are introduced. Busacca, a Milanese, approaches Jacovacci believing him to be a recruiting employee because of his Roman accent. "The Italian at the front" - Busacca says - "and the Roman in the administration office!"³⁶ - expressing his Northern suspicion towards Rome's privileged position as the centre of political power of the unified nation. In a typical comedic reversal of roles, Jacovacci is given the upper hand when Busacca tries to corrupt him in order to be declared unfit and not sent to the front. "What should I say now?" - Jacovacci asks -

ritirare l'aiuto dell'esercito. Avrebbe dovuto metterci a disposizione i carri armati, i cannoni, quasi tutti utilizzati anche nella Seconda guerra mondiale, altre armi, equipaggiamenti e diversi accessori."

³⁵ "Nelle diatribe giornalistiche [*sulla lavorazione de La Grande Guerra*] del tempo si paventa l'umiliazione del sentimento nazionale, l'antipatriottismo, il vilipendio dell'esercito, il delitto di lesa patria; si accusa il cinema di gettare fango sulla nazione come in passato ha fatto il neorealismo."

³⁶ "L'italiano in fanteria e il Romano in fureria!"

“That the Roman is healthy and drafted and the Milanese discharged?”³⁷ As Gassman’s character is indeed enrolled in the army, his words to his comrades furthermore indicate his lack of understanding of his lower class counterparts from the South. He addresses a Sicilian member of his regiment as “Romano” and when he is corrected he argues: “What is the difference? South of Parma you are all Romans... and gangsters!”³⁸ The numerous dialects spoken within the regiment that the narrative follows throughout the film show the lack of cohesion between the different regional identities that were united in the army such as Romans, Milanese, Sicilians, Venetians, etc.

Throughout the film the soldiers are mostly joined together by their common criticism of headquarters which do not provide them with the necessary resources.³⁹ The only ‘heroic’ soldier, Bordin (Folco Lulli), is motivated by financial need rather than patriotic spirit, as he often volunteers for dangerous missions in the place of other soldiers in exchange for money to send home to his family. The two protagonists, a Milanese and a Roman, do not have anything in common apart from the continuous expedients devised to avoid combat, a major concern for both of them. The Sicilian soldier’s only topic of conversation with his Venetian counterpart is the Italian silent film star Francesca Bertini, this type of cinema being a perfect meeting point between their radically opposed regional and linguistic backgrounds. [figure 44]

³⁷ “Mò che dovrei di io?” “Er romano abile e aruolato, er Milanese riformato?”

³⁸ “Che differenza c’è? Da Parma in giù, tutti Romani... e camurristi!”

³⁹ Curiously Gramsci also had a similar conception of how things had gone at the front during World War I:

The soldiers were quite ready to risk their lives when necessary, but on the other hand they would rebel when they saw themselves overlooked. For example a company would be capable of going for days without food because it could see that it was physically impossible for supplies to get through; but it would mutiny if a single meal was missed as a result of neglect or bureaucratism, etc (*Prison Notebooks* 145).



Figure 43: broken boots sink in the mud in the very first shot of *La Grande Guerra* (Mario Monicelli 1959)



Figure 44: two soldiers from different regional backgrounds discuss the beauty of Italian silent film star Francesca Bertini, in the same film.

Whereas the soldiers' lingo reveals their regional differences through their accents, the army officers in charge command their orders in formal Italian, thus revealing an upper-class upbringing. However, when Busacca repeatedly disobeys his Sergeant's orders, the infuriated officer addresses him in Piemontese dialect. This dialectal choice signals how Gramsci's conception of the Risorgimento as a *war of expansion* led by the Piedmontese House of Savoy, which on the eve of the 1960s, when the film was made, was circulating due to the dissemination of the *Prison Notebooks*, for the first time had come to inform a comedic film.⁴⁰ The filmmakers'

⁴⁰ It should be pointed out that Alessandro Blasetti's *1860*, a film that recounts the Italian Risorgimento, was exceptional for its time in featuring different Italian 'dialetti'. This use, however,

insistence on language both as an obstacle to the unity among the soldiers and as an instrument of the leading classes' hegemonic position represents a landmark of a new attitude towards *folklore* in Italian cinematic comedy. Language is the most immediate and concrete expression of one's *conception of the world* and Gramsci himself listed the lack of linguistic unity as one of the national questions which could not "be resolved individually" (*Cultural Writings* 199-200), thus highlighting the connection between language and the social, political and cultural shortcomings of the unified State.⁴¹ By pointing out the social and hegemonic implications of the coexistence of multiple dialects within the army, the filmmakers of *La Grande Guerra* transcended the picturesque connotations given to the *folklore* of the lower classes in previous comedic forms, in which dialect was merely a bizarre attribute.⁴²

The common soldiers are not only characterised by their regional and linguistic differences, but also by the widespread illiteracy among them. One of the soldiers, for example, is forced to involve a lieutenant in his love life, as the officer is the only

did not reflect a Gramscian discourse, nor could it have as it was filmed in 1933 when the *Prison Notebooks* had not been published yet.

⁴¹ It should be remembered that Gramsci's initial intellectual activity was within the context of linguistics as he was enrolled at the University of Turin for an unfinished PhD in historical linguistics. Franco Lo Piparo, in *Lingua Intellettuali Egemonia in Gramsci* has suggested that Gramsci's conception of hegemony as a result of consent given to a group in light of its prestige stemmed from the similar way in which neo-linguists such as Matteo Giulio Bartoli, Gramsci's supervisor, conceived language change as "a process in which a dominant speech community exerted prestige over contiguous subordinate communities" (Forgacs and Nowell-Smith, *Language, Linguistics and Folklore* 164).

⁴² Very seldom in farces and pink neorealist comedies do people with different dialects encounter each other. When it does happen the socio-economic aspects of the lacking of a unity of language are not investigated. This is the case, for example of the 1956 farce directed by Steno Totò, *Peppino e la Malafemmina*. As the two protagonist wander through Milan, they ask a policeman for directions. However, they are not understood and not because of their Neapolitan accent, but because they have been trying to express themselves using alternatively German, English and French phrases since they have mistaken the officer for an Austrian soldier. Later in the film the romantic connotations of the dialect substitute its bizarre ones as Totò and Peppino's nephew, played by Teddy Reno, serenades his girlfriend by singing *Malafemmina*, the song composed by Totò. I will discuss the bizarre connotations given to dialects in farces and pink neorealism as well as comedy Italian style's use of dialects as strategic narrative elements in Chapter Five.

person he can trust who is able to read the letters he receives from his sweetheart in his local village, letters which are penned by the local priest for the same reason. The relationship between illiteracy and lack of education and the non-existing class unity between Northerners and Southerners, a central issue in Gramsci's writings, transpires in the character of Busacca who, from time to time, mumbles his confused socialist beliefs to his comrades. "Have you people not read Bakunin?"⁴³ – he repeatedly asks, citing the theorist of collective anarchism and being ignored. "What screws you non-emancipated people" – he argues - "you believers in fairy tales, that's fatalistic losers' attitude!",⁴⁴ thus associating the underdevelopment of the South to a magical and superstitious conception of the world. Here Monicelli and the screenwriters show a further debt to an understanding of the relations between socio-political and educative-cultural discourses of the Gramscian type. The "fatalistic attitude" mentioned by Gassman's character is evocative of the "ideology [...] disseminated in myriad ways among the masses in the North, by the propagandists of the bourgeoisie" (*Gramsci Reader* 57) regarding the supposed innate inferiority of Southerners.

An obstacle for the unity between lower classes, language was also, in Gramsci's view, an hegemonic instrument in the way it provided possibilities for a manipulation of their *common sense*, as Marcia Landy notes:

Gramsci too was concerned for the ways that language study was central to any understanding of the solidification of meaning and the creation and maintenance of hierarchies. Gramsci's exploration of language, his complication of the nature of representation through his conception of the sedimented and multifarious nature of common sense, is a critical examination of the notion that grand narratives are naturally and inevitably constructed (*Film, Politics and Gramsci* 3).

What is Landy referring to when she mentions "grand narratives" which "are inevitably constructed" and their role in shaping *common sense* and in the

⁴³ "Non lo avete mica letto il Bakunin?"

⁴⁴ "Quello che vi fregaa voi popoli non emancipati che mangiate il sapone è il fatalismo rinunciatario!"

“maintenance of hierarchies” in Gramsci’s thought? She refers to, essentially, the relationship pointed out by Gramsci between the lacking of “cultural stability” and “organic quality of thought” in favour of a type of culture which took advantage of the “chaotic aggregate of disparate conceptions” which is the people’s *folklore* in order to facilitate a *domination*, rather than a *leading*, of the lower classes. “Narratives” can be rhetorical instruments of language which participate in shaping the *common sense*, often for the benefit of the cultural and political hegemonic group.

Rather than simply deploying a lower class *setting* which leaves their *folklore* unchallenged, the filmmakers of *La Grande Guerra* put on screen the role of language in the manipulation of *common sense*. They did so by articulating two sets of grand narratives which participate in the “solidification of meaning” and in the consequential *common sense* perception of a victorious Italian army. On one side there are the songs of the Alpine corps which introduce each chapter of the film. Albeit partially rhetorical as any military chant is, these songs are an actual expression of the soldiers’ concerns. They document the everyday experience of being at the front and offer insights from within on such events as waiting for letters from relatives or having to resist for a number of days on limited rations.

On the other side of the spectrum are the narratives constructed from outside the army and the language associated with them, to which two crucial scenes are dedicated. In one of these scenes, Busacca and Jacovacci’s regiment attends a ‘Patriotic Committee’ event in a nearby village during a temporary leave. [figure 45] Here a woman reads in public a poem that offers a depiction of the war which is radically different from what we have seen on the screen so far. The language is constructed in the epic vein and refers to heroism, virtues and passion attributed to “all of the fighters of our glorious and undefeated army”⁴⁵ to whom the poem is dedicated. Jacovacci, who knows that the army is all but undefeated, having himself already experienced battle, exploits the Committee’s misconception and organizes a collection for the sake of the regiment, planning to keep the proceeds for himself. In another scene the soldiers are directly confronted with the depiction of their experience in the national media, as they receive at the front a copy of the weekly

⁴⁵ “tutti i combattenti del nostro glorioso e invitto esercito”.

periodical *La Domenica del Corriere*. [figure 46] The magazine features a vignette on the cover dedicated to the temporary cease-fire. As Bordin looks at it among the snow-covered trenches, he comments: "These are supposed be us... in a villa, we are all happy..."⁴⁶ The unfaithfulness of the piece is reconfirmed again as he adds: "We are here while whoever is writing is sitting comfortably at home!"⁴⁷ and for the third time when another soldier closes the argument: "They can write what they want at home, but they should quit writing these lies in the newspapers. Not for my sake... but for the sake of those poor souls who know how to read!"⁴⁸ Inserting into a film set in World War I narratives created at the time from both within the army and outside it and underlining the differences among the types of language used in the two, the filmmakers abandon the *populist* approach characterising earlier comedic forms which only focused on the bizarre and amusing connotations of *folklore*.⁴⁹ Instead, a deeper focus on the relations between culture, language, education, *common sense* and socio-political hegemony of the Gramscian type transpires in the film.

In conclusion, it can be said that, albeit being primarily a popular entertaining film, this comedy Italian style genuinely challenged the widespread conception of this part of Italian history which existed up until its release and that, if not openly at least in its subtext, Gramscian notions concerning class and the regional unity lacking in Italy mediate between the entertainment required by the genre and the engagement derived by its neorealist antecedents. The opinion that *La Grande Guerra* contributed "to making points of view emerge which were different from the falsely positive depiction of the patriotic interpretation of the war, an interpretation that still existed

⁴⁶ "Questi saremmo noi... stemo dentr' an villino e semo tutti contenti..."

⁴⁷ "Noi stemo quà e chi scrive stà a casa!"

⁴⁸ "Possono pure scrivere a casa, basta che chi scrive non continuano a scrivere balle sui giornali. Non parlo pe' me... ma per quei poveracci che sanno leggere!"

⁴⁹ Some of these strategies were borrowed from the literary sources listed earlier, which were consulted for the writing of the film's screenplay. Despite the fact that some of these solutions might have not been originally conceived by the filmmakers, the novelty of *La Grande Guerra* resides in the fact that they were indeed used, whereas they would have not been in previous Italian comedic films, very much in the same way that the narrative of De Sica's *Ladri di Biciclette* is in fact the result of a literary adaptation does not undermine that film's realism, nor does it make Bazin's comments regarding the film's innovative open-endedness invalid, as *Ladri di Biciclette* remains nonetheless one of the first examples of this literary practice in the field of cinema.

when it was filmed” (Labanca 118)⁵⁰ is not just Monicelli’s or mine, but a fact testified by Nicola Labanca, an Italian historian. Through this mediation between entertainment and neorealist engagement reviewed through a Gramscian conception and the abandonment of the “Crocean interpretation”, the film never collapses into *escapism* but manages to challenge its audience historical perspective. As Vincenzo Buccheri has written,

in the Italy of the early 1960s, the historical “*filone*” of comedy Italian style (not only Monicelli’s) has indeed played a social role: that of giving to the popular urbanised masses a modern historical knowledge, and most of all that of giving them the consciousness of having been active subjects (as much as vexed ones) of Italy’s history (174).⁵¹



Figure 45: the regiment attends a rally in a nearby village in *La Grande Guerra* (Mario Monicelli, 1959)

⁵⁰ “[*La Grande Guerra ha contribuito a*] far emergere e a diffondere punti di vista assai diversi rispetto all’oleografia dell’interpretazione patriottica della Guerra, un’interpretazione ancora in vigore quando fu girato.”

⁵¹ “Nell’Italia dei primi anni Sessanta il filone della ‘commedia storica’ (non solo Monicelliana) abbia svolto una vera e propria funzione sociale: fornire alle masse popolari urbanizzate una moderna consapevolezza storica, e soprattutto la coscienza di essere state soggetti attivi (per quanto angariati) della storia d’Italia.”



Figure 46: the soldiers at the front read a magazine article about the cease fire, from the same film

La Marcia su Roma: a case-study on the relation between rhetoric and political hegemony

Dalle Vacche writes that “it would seem that the *filone* is a genre that degrades itself into empty redundancy; it does not achieve that meaningful layering which [...] lives on across Italian culture in the spectacular-allegorical styles of *opera* and *commedia dell’arte*” (55). If this is true of most of the Italian “*filoni*” within genres, the historical “*filone*” within comedy Italian style proved to be an excellent opportunity not merely of repeating the operation of rewriting history from below of *La Grande Guerra*, but of taking this discourse further, showing links between different historical periods and the cultural and social landscapes which participate in the consolidation of old *hegemonies* or the establishment of new ones. This is exactly what happens in the Dino Risi film *La Marcia su Roma* (1962), which recounts the Fascist rise to power between 1919 and 1922. Screenwriters Age and Scarpelli were able to build on the new *vulgata* of World War I offered with *La Grande Guerra* for their critical examination of the modalities by which Fascism became hegemonic.

The film opens with footage from a “*cinegiornale*”, a newsreel recounting the end of the Great War. Over the images the commentator declares: “Italy sits victorious at the peace-treaty negotiations!”⁵² However, as *La Grande Guerra* informed us, Italy’s victory is simply a consequence of its allies’ success, whereas

⁵² “L’Italia siede vittoriosa al tavolo della pace!”

almost every battle in which the Italian army was involved resulted in a disastrous defeat. After this introduction the image cuts from the “*cinegiornale*” to Vittorio Gassman, who plays Domenico Rocchetti, a Roman war veteran approaching the people on the streets in Milan and asking for money on account of his heroic gestures at the front. As he fortuitously meets Paolinelli (Roger Hanin), his own Captain in the regiment he fought with, the heroic rhetoric promoted by both Gassman’s character and the “*cinegiornale*” that opened the film collapses as Rocchetti’s medal is revealed to be a fake and the two openly converse about the difficulties they have encountered at the front. Rocchetti blames the fact that he has to resort to conning the authorities who enrolled him in the army and left him unemployed once the war was over. Thus, Captain Paolinelli invites him to turn his complaints into actions and join “a group of true Italians, true patriots”⁵³ which is forming in the area. He invites Rocchetti out for lunch in an eatery, where he is presented with a Fascist programme instead of the menu.

At this point of the film it is clear that Age and Scarpelli are using their own challenging of the rhetoric associated with World War I, which was popularised through the success of *La Grande Guerra*, as the premise for a similarly non-populist analysis of Fascism.⁵⁴ If neorealist texts and post-neorealist comedic forms which are informed by a “Crocean interpretation” tend to represent the lower classes solely as the victims of the regime throughout the Resistance and the post-war period, this example of comedy Italian style investigates further the role of the lower classes in the establishment of the Fascist power. How does a *dominant* group exercise its

⁵³ “un gruppo di veri Italiani, di veri patrioti”.

⁵⁴ It seems that Gramsci made a similar connection between the outcome of World War I and the rise of Fascism as he wrote:

Conditions in a State before and after a war. It is obvious that, in an alliance, what counts are the conditions in which a State finds itself at the moment of peace. Therefore it may happen that whoever has exercised hegemony during the war ends up by losing it as a result of the enfeeblement suffered in the course of the struggle, and is forced to see a ‘subordinate’ who has been more skilful or ‘luckier’ become hegemonic. This occurs in ‘world wars’ when the geographic situation compels a State to throw all its resources into the crucible: it wins through its alliances, but victory finds it prostrate, etc (*Prison Notebooks* 264).

power? According to Gramsci it does so through its deputies who fulfil the hegemonic functions in two ways:

1. The 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.
2. The apparatus of state coercive power which 'legally' enforces discipline on those groups who do not 'consent' either actively or passively (*Prison Notebooks* 12).

Thus it is not just a matter of enforcing domination, but also the process of gaining consent through a position of cultural and social prestige over a group of people. This is exactly what happens in the context of the formation of the Fascist Party in Risi's film's dramatisation of the events, where a *populist* perspective of the lower classes solely as the victims of a coercive *domination* is abandoned and a Gramscian perspective transpires through a narrative also concerning the consent given by the lower classes to an hegemonic group.

In fact the film dramatises this process twice: as the unemployed Rocchetti awards his consent due to the dominant position that Captain Paolinelli had in his regiment and again when Umberto Gavazza (Ugo Tognazzi), the second protagonist of *La Marcia su Roma* is introduced. Tognazzi embodies a rural worker from the North, who used to be enrolled in Rocchetti's same regiment and by chance runs into his old comrade. At the beginning he is quite sceptical of the Fascists, as he considers them to be unlawful and undemocratic. However, Rocchetti convinces him to hear them out on the premise that the Fascist programme of San Sepolcro promises that the agricultural lands will be awarded to the people who work on them. Gavazza remains dubious about the Fascists' position, but as soon as he runs into his old Captain Paolinelli he lacks the courage to articulate his dissent and he is enrolled in the party's "*camicie nere*".⁵⁵ Even though the Fascist rise to power was also associated with acts of violence, of coercive *domination*, which Risi's film also

⁵⁵ "Black shirts" as the Fascist were referred to because of the colour of their uniforms.

shows mainly in the figure of the brute goon Mitraglia (Mario Brega), the way its narrative is structured suggests that the filmmakers here are interested in examining both the ways in which *hegemony* operates, dismissing the populist approach of earlier comedic forms which was solely interested in projecting an image of the lower classes as victims in this process. As Marcia Landy notes, Gramsci

does not see power as an overarching monolithic phenomenon but as a matter of dispersal among different centres, requiring analysis of various and dispersed discursive formations. Gramsci's conception of hegemony as formed of various strata in society, including various subaltern groups, is opposed to traditional (and *common-sense*) notions of power as exercised univalently and coercively by the few controllers of wealth in conjunction with hereditary and newly created aristocracies (*Film, Politics and Gramsci* 95).

The choice of two World War I veterans, one from a rural background and the other one from an urban one as the protagonists highlights the role of subaltern groups in the formation of the Fascist hegemony. Furthermore, once Gavazza is lured into the Party by the fascinating promises of the programme of San Sepolcro such as the institution of the Republic, the abolition of aristocratic titles, disarmament and the awarding to rural workers of agricultural lands, the narrative is punctuated by the recurring gag of the Fascist groups' actions denying their initial socialist positions in order to gain power on the territory and Tognazzi's character progressively crossing out with a pen the initial resolutions from his copy of the programme. This narrative strategy is highly entertaining but again, as it was the case with *La Domenica del Corriere* in *La Grande Guerra*, it goes beyond parody and highlights the manipulation of *common sense* through rhetoric language and the role of *common sense* in the creation of a new hierarchy. As Jacobitti points out, according to Gramsci hegemony is "*common sense* instrumentalised, so that a minority can, without resort to violence, dominate a majority *by imposing upon it a common sense*" (370). The San Sepolcro programme is shown to be a political tool which exploits the people's widespread conceptions of present social injustices and instrumentalises them in order to gain consent, although in the case of the Fascists resorting to violence is necessary from time to time.

The filmmakers do not justify nor praise Fascism. In fact the film ends with Rocchetti and Gavazza witnessing Il Duce's inauguration as leader of the government and, having experienced the forceful and undemocratic methods of the "*camicie nere*", getting rid of their own Party uniforms. However their narrative journey, showing them actively participating in the Fascists' actions, implies that we cannot dismiss them as mere victims. What Age and Scarpelli actually do is subvert the *populist* notion of Fascism as something other, a "monolithic phenomenon" imposed on the unconscious Italian people from day to night and offering a critical examination of the Gramscian type of Fascism as a form of hegemony by dramatising in a comedic context the growing consent gained by the movement.

Replacing the folkloric representation of the 'Mezzogiorno' with an analytical one: comedy Italian style and Gramsci's 'Southern Question'

Other comedies Italian style of the historical "*filone*" are preoccupied with *rewriting history from below* and with challenging the *common sense* perception of given historical periods by rejecting a purely folkloric spectacle of the *populist* type.⁵⁶ However this tendency of the genre is not confined to this "*filone*". The Italian South has always been a privileged *setting* for Italian comedies. With the exception of numerous comedic films featuring the Roman urban landscape due to the capital's central positioning in the process of film production because of the Cinecittà studios, the majority of the farces and pink neorealist films were set in the South and in particular in the Naples area.⁵⁷ The pink neorealist comedies highlight the liveliness

⁵⁶ Monicelli continued his practice of rewriting history from below and challenged the rhetoric of the noble cavalry associated with the Middle Ages in *L'Armata Brancaleone* (1966) and *Brancaleone alle Crociate* (1970). He also investigated the relationship between the Catholic Church and the aristocracy against the revolutionary struggle instilled among the population by the arrival of Napoleon's troops in *Il Marchese del Grillo* (1981). The historical trajectory initiated by *La Grande Guerra* and followed by *La Marcia su Roma* found its natural completion in Comencini's *Tutti a Casa* (1960) and Risi's *Una Vita Difficile* (1961), which I have analysed in Chapter Three.

⁵⁷ The choice of Rome and Naples was also dependent on the regional origin of the most popular comedians of the period: Sordi and Fabrizi were closely associated with different characteristics of the Roman citizen, De Sica and Totò with the Neapolitan tradition.

of the South through the focus on the passionate figure of the peasant woman and the farces revolve around a slapstick comedian, almost always Totò, who embodies the South's *picturesque* through his connection to the tradition of "*commedia dell'arte*". Thus both forms effectively confine the South in its folkloric dimension and avoid challenging the socio-economic and cultural instances of its *backwardness* or its relationship with the North, despite the fact that the time in which these films were produced deeply reflected the historic economic disparity between these two entities.⁵⁸

However, the comedies Italian style of the Sicilian "*filone*" present a radically different approach to the South's *backwardness* in comparison with that of these earlier and non-realist comedic forms. Most famously Pietro Germi's *Divorzio all'Italiana* (1963) and *Sedotta e Abbandonata* (1964) engage with the '*backwardness*' represented by the Sicilian code of honour and initiated a long series of comedies set in that region. Rather than representing the *archaic* character of the South and its customs as an element of *liveliness*, as was the case in earlier comedic forms, Germi uses a style that highlights *grotesque* tones to depict the paradox of its inadequacy at the time of the Economic Miracle-informed modernisation of the North of the country. However, Germi's *grotesque* gaze should not be simply dismissed as a self-assessment of superiority, a paternalistic attitude of the type that Gramsci noted and criticised in, for example, Manzoni's depiction of the 'humble'. The scenes of *Divorzio all'Italiana* set in the local Church and in the court of law, thus not only referred to the population but also to the cultural and political institutions, present the same stylistic connotations. In fact Germi addresses the rhetoric promoted by such institutions as a fundamental element in the persistence of the backward *common sense* which is the honour code. Rather than challenging it, the local priest paradoxically uses the honour code as an instrument in gaining political consent as he addresses voting for "a party which is of the people, and thus democratic. And thus respectful of our Christian Faith. A party, in conclusion, which is Democratic and

⁵⁸ According to Gianpiero Dalla Zuanna, "in 1951 the net per capita monthly income in the regions of the northwest was 315,000 lire, versus 206,000 lire in the northeast, 210,000 lire in central Italy, and barely 128,000 lire in the south" (197).

Christian”⁵⁹ as a necessary premise for the safeguarding of family values.⁶⁰ Furthermore, the Church is shown to oppose new cultural, but at the same time popular, discourses such as the cinema because of their power of challenging the *common sense* of the people, as in the scene in which the priest blames the cuckolding of Fefé, the protagonist played by Marcello Mastroianni, on Fellini’s *La Dolce Vita* (1960) which has been screened in the village and has amused the citizens with its provocative showing of Anita Ekberg’s body.

In the same way the trial scenes, both those imagined by Fefé and introduced by his voice-over and the ‘actual’ ones taking place as a result of the crimes occurring in the narrative, feature Fefé’s lawyer as an astute orator who manipulates the Sicilian *folklore*. The lawyer projects the image of his client as a victim of his own typically Southern passion, rather than the cold calculating schemer unveiled by Mastroianni’s voice-over throughout the soundtrack of the film and thus refers to the ideology, denounced by Gramsci, of the Southerner being backward “by natural destiny”. Whereas *populist* comedic forms tend to address superstition, archaic rituals and gossip as folkloric obstacles for romantic narratives which ultimately conclude with similarly values-oriented happy-ending marriages, in Germi’s Sicily the juridical and cultural-religious institutions are shown to actively participate in the sedimentation of a backward *common sense*.⁶¹ As Marcia Landy notes, “the film indicates that the law *conspires with* community morals to maintain intact the concept of *onore*, and that violence is justified in the name of family respectability” (*Italian Film* 220). The discrepancy between Fefé’s meticulous planning of the murder of his wife and the way in which his crime is addressed as an act of passion by the institutions and society denounces that the Southerner *would be* capable of rational judgement if he were not allowed, encouraged even, to act otherwise by rhetorical discourses devised

⁵⁹ “Un partito che sia popolare. E cioè democratico. E quindi rispettoso della nostra fede cristiana. Un partito, per concludere, che sia Democratico e Cristiano”.

⁶⁰ The existence of only one Christian Democratic Party in the spectrum of Italian politics in the 1950s and 1960s suggests that the citizens are not actually invited to vote so ‘freely’.

⁶¹ In Comencini’s *Pane, Amore e Fantasia*, for example, the Carabinieri Marshal Carotenuto, who has been struggling with the peasants gossiping throughout the film, decides to resign from his official position so that he will be able to marry the town’s mid-wife, as discussed in Chapter One. Thus, Carotenuto does not challenge the folklore of the Southern village, but rather adapts to its customs.

in the interest of the maintenance of existing hierarchies. As John David Rhodes points out, “*Divorce, Italian Style* suggests implicitly that the Sicilian condition [...] is perhaps only an exaggerated version of the state of things throughout the entire country” (113). The bitter end, typical of the comedy Italian style genre, of *Divorzio all’Italiana* features Angela secretly flirting with a sailor on her long-awaited honeymoon with Fefé and openly clashes with the happy-ending connotation given to marriages in *populist* comedic forms. This cliché of narrative is now articulated as yet one more paradox of the social reality depicted in the film. It thus marks a decisive break with the folkloric depiction of the South as a fundamentally overjoyed satellite of the rest of the country openly denouncing the naivety of such representations and their by and large *escapist* character. The grotesque elements are thus not used to highlight the South’s separateness from the rest of the nation, as it was the case with pink neorealism. On the contrary, as Mariapia Comand notes “the grotesque tone and the series of clichés (patriarchal family, the theme of honour, the representation of facts for the benefit of the stage that is society) are hooks that Germi uses to confront the issues of the nation in its *entirety* and its *concreteness*” (*Commedia* 42).⁶² In her reading, Germi’s Sicilian films are the index of the director’s anticonformism:

He understood before others the evolution of the proletariat [...] and he faces certain issues, such as marriage, family, the subordinate position of women in Italian society at the time, going back to the deep religious and cultural roots which determined them, that are made worse by the problems of the present: illiteracy, unemployment and the influence of the Church (*Commedia* 82).⁶³

Comand’s point that Germi relates the issues of the present with their “deep cultural roots” can be taken forward and likened to Gramsci’s notion of the relation between cultural and political hegemonies informing the submission of the proletariat in

⁶² “Il tono grottesco e l’universo dei cliché (la famiglia patriarcale, il tema dell’onore, la rappresentazione dei fatti a uso e consumo del palcoscenico sociale) sono dei grimaldelli che Germi utilizza per affrontare i problemi del Paese nella sua *interezza e concretezza*.”

⁶³ “Intuisce prima di altri l’evoluzione del proletariato [...] e affronta certe tematiche – il matrimonio, la famiglia, la posizione subordinata della donna nella società – risalendo alle ataviche radici religiose e culturali che le determinano, aggravate dai problemi del presente: l’analfabetismo, la disoccupazione e l’influenza della Chiesa.”

Italian history. It should also not be forgotten that *Divorzio all'Italiana* was in fact a film that did initiate social change, as it has been recognised as having played a role in a shift of custom and, ultimately, in the Italians' vote in favour of divorce in the 1974 referendum by critics such as Stephen Gundle who wrote that it "undoubtedly propelled the issue to the forefront of public debate" (*From Neorealism to Luci Rosse* 195-224).⁶⁴

If in the farces and the pink neorealist comedies, the South is represented as a world confined in itself, in comedy Italian style there is a greater focus on its relationship with the North. For example, in Alberto Lattuada's *Mafioso* (1962) the ongoing issue of organised crime is not singled out as a Southern phenomenon, but instead explored in its relation with the industrial North. The protagonist, Antonio Badalamenti (Alberto Sordi), is a high level manager in a factory in the North who is summoned back to his local village in Sicily by the boss Don Vincenzo (Ugo Attanasio). Before landing in Sicily he is shown to be fully integrated into the Northern community and during the ferry boat ride to the island he even indulges in the stereotypes associated with his people by quoting Monicelli's comedy Italian

⁶⁴ It seems to be another result of criticism biased against comedy the fact that *Divorzio all'Italiana*'s unique role in effectively affecting a political outcome is always underestimated. In his article 'Lina Wertmuller: The Politics of Private Life', for instance, Peter Biskind states that:

All the important first- and second-generation Italian directors, Rossellini, De Sica, Antonioni, Visconti and Pasolini, participated to one degree or another in the transformation which overtook neorealism during the Christian Democrat or NATO phase of Italian film when the pressing problems of postwar reconstruction had been overcome and the bourgeoisie had re-established its prewar control. A director like Pietro Germi, originally a Communist like the others, began his career with films on urban unrest, and moved on to commercially successful but *politically innocuous* [my emphasis] farces like *Divorce Italian Style* and *Seduced and Abandoned*. 10-11

Firstly, Biskind's use of the word farces in reference to these films is inappropriate. Secondly, I do not see how Germi's films can be considered politically innocuous in comparison to other post-neorealist films, as I do not know of any other Italian films of the period having such a concrete impact on the changing of legislation.

style *I Soliti Ignoti* (1958): “the *ferribotte* has just arrived!”⁶⁵ – he says at the insistence of his daughters and receiving shameful gazes by the Sicilians on board. However, once he reaches his local village his behaviour changes radically, adhering fully to Sicilian customs, and he often does not even offer an explanation for his actions to his confused wife Marta (Norma Bengell). She, in return, does not hide her opinion of Sicily as a place entirely foreign to her. “It is obvious” – she states – “that we have left Italy behind.”⁶⁶ Her’s and her two daughters’ relationship with the in-laws and the locals is strongly characterised by *otherness*. All female members of Badalamenti’s Milanese family are played by platinum blonde actresses, thus highlighting their *alien* nature among the dark-haired citizens. The linguistic and cultural barrier between Marta and the in-laws undermines the possibility of any type of relationship, peaceful or troublesome, as all she receives are silent judging glances from her mother-in-law and equally silent but desiring glances from her father-in-law. The only action that receives some sort of recognition from Antonio’s family is her removal of her sister-in-law Donatella’s (Cinzia Bruno) moustache with wax. If the unity between North and South is an apparent one, rather than a cultural one, this gesture signals an attempt to mitigate the differences between Antonio’s Milanese family and his Sicilian one on the level of appearance.

If the film strongly punctuates the *otherness* of the South in comparison to the industrial North by insistent shots that highlight the differences of both bodies and landscapes of the two, the connection between them is manifested in Antonio’s mission. He, we learn, has acquired his managing position in the Milanese factory thanks to the power connections of his local boss Don Vincenzo in the North and is now due to repay his debt by killing a traitor of the Mafia in New York. Antonio is not a gangster, nor a professional killer, but he cannot refuse to pay his respects and do his duty. In the closing scene of the film he is back in the Milanese factory, where he remembers to return a pen he previously borrowed from the owner who hired him at Don Vincenzo’s insistence. “If only” – the Northern entrepreneur states – “there

⁶⁵ “Uora, uora arrivò o’ ferribotti!” The pun is on the fact that Sicilians use an Italianised version of the English word ‘ferry-boat’ and that a Sicilian character in *I Soliti Ignoti* was named ‘Ferribotte’ after this expression.

⁶⁶ “[...] è chiaro che non siamo più in Italia”.

were more people like you, the world would be better off!"⁶⁷ The surviving cultural and anthropological differences between North and South are conveyed in the film through Marta's experience within the narrative and Antonio's duplicity, namely the discrepancy between his behaviour on the mainland and his respect for his homeland's customs on the opposite side of the ferry's journey. However, in the connection between the Sicilian criminal hegemony represented by Don Vincenzo and the Northern hegemony represented by the industrial productive apparatus of the Economic Miracle, a Gramscian consideration of the North as "an octopus which enriched itself at the expense of the South" transpires. As was the case with the bitter end of Germi's film, the paradoxical compliment received by Antonio in the final scene of *Mafioso* assumes the tone of a counter argument against the *populist folklore* of previous representations of the South. Its *backwardness* cannot be conceived *just* as something *other*, something detached and defined in itself *only* on account of objective regional differences. It must be approached with an understanding of its broader cultural, historical and hegemonic instances. By expanding their focus on its relationship with the North, comedy Italian style films such as *Mafioso*⁶⁸ tend to disprove this *common sense* conception of the South as a picturesque satellite, by pointing out the added layer of the convenience its backwardness has represented and represents for the socio-economic powers that be.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ "Se ci fossero più persone come Lei, il mondo sarebbe un posto migliore!"

⁶⁸ Other examples of comedies Italian style featuring the relationship between South and North would be Monicelli's *La Ragazza Con la Pistola* (1968) in which Monica Vitti plays a Sicilian woman who goes to London to murder the man who has dishonoured her and Pietrangeli's *Io La Conoscevo Bene* (1965) in which a young girl played by Stefania Sandrelli moves from her countryside village to Rome to find fame in the society of the Economic Miracle, with tragic consequences which have been discussed in Chapter One.

⁶⁹ In an article entitled 'Picone's Tragicomical Dual Life: Revisiting the Southern Question', Antonio Vitti discusses Nanni Loy's articulation of the issue in a late comedy Italian style, *Mi Manda Picone* (1985), set in Naples. The article, however, is not framed in a Gramscian perspective. I have preferred, for the purpose of this dissertation, to analyse mostly comedies Italian style that belong to the canonical periodisation of the genre (1958-1977).

'Organic intellectuals' enter the comedic landscape: *Per Grazia Ricevuta* and *Nell'Anno del Signore*

Not only do the earlier post-neorealist comedic forms tend to feature the peasant landscape closed in itself, with no relationship to the rest of the country or its political, cultural and economic instances; they also tend to feature the lower classes as the sole social unit within this landscape. Local officials of various types, such as policemen, Carabinieri or priests are featured in the farces and in the pink neorealist comedies, but by and large, rather than directing the aspirations of the lower classes by challenging their *folklore*, their conception of the world, these characters are shown as participating in this conception either to their own lower class upbringing or due to their need to adjust to the lower classes' folkloric way of life. In comedies Italian style, instead, there is a greater tendency to feature among the lower classes figures of educated men whose struggle is that of articulating the lower classes' needs and provide them with a form of thought superior to *common sense* for the benefit of their social struggle.

This is certainly the case of Mario Monicelli's 1963 film *I Compagni*, which recounts a strike in a textile factory in Turin in the 1890s. In this film Marcello Mastroianni plays an intellectual named Professor Sinigaglia whose mission is to articulate the factory workers' demands for better working conditions. As Marcia Landy⁷⁰ has noted, with its emphasis on the relationship between socialist struggle on the part of the industrial proletariat *and* on the part of intellectuals and its setting in Turin, the city in which Gramsci carried out his political career before imprisonment, *I Compagni* is a comedy Italian style that engages with Gramsci's proposition of a formation of a stratum of *organic intellectuals*:

⁷⁰ Landy's analysis of *I Compagni* is the only existing Gramscian reading of a comedy Italian style. To avoid replicating her entire argument I will look at other comedies which figure characters of the *organic intellectual* type, although Monicelli's film is the most literal example present within the genre.

I Compagni is not merely a document about the 1890s but an ongoing investigation (relating to the 1960s) of major Gramscian positions: What is the relation of the intellectual to the workers? How is the viewer to understand the conflict between traditional values and the emerging conditions that are the inevitable concomitant of modern, industrial life? What is the connection between education and politics? What role does history or an understanding of the past play in understanding social and economic relations? (*Italian Film* 160)

Monicelli's film is without a doubt the comedy Italian style which most explicitly refers to the Gramscian notion of the *organic intellectual*.⁷¹ However other films of the genre are preoccupied with posing the same questions, especially in challenging "the traditional values" surviving in the *common sense* of the lower classes and feature characters that fulfil a similar intellectual function.

Nino Manfredi's *Per Grazia Ricevuta* (1971), for example, examines the role of religion as an element of *folklore* and challenges the traditional values promoted by Catholicism through the figure of Oreste Micheli (Lionel Stander), a cultured pharmacist who tries to convert the protagonist Benedetto Parisi (Nino Manfredi) to his anti-clerical views. If it is hard to make an instrumental argument about Manfredi, an actor, actually reading Gramsci, it can nonetheless be said that the film is a product of a cultured climate that completely differs from that of the 1950s. As Manfredi noted in an interview, despite its rural setting, the film represents a shift in the representation of life in the countryside in comparison with the pink neorealist comedies which shared such a setting. "I wanted to approach a theme which I considered crucial, very current." – he said – "In a country like Italy, a Catholic country, the home of the Vatican, nobody ever had the courage to discuss religion, God, and it was that which interested me" (in Gili, *Arrivano i Mostri* 83).⁷² The

⁷¹ Jackson Burgess, however, did not share Landy's appreciation of the film, as he wrote in his review that "the film might have survived the obviousness of the story [...] if it were not for the appalling touches of comedy (downright slapstick, at some points), which keep shattering the almost documentary illusion" (47).

⁷² "Ho voluto affrontare un tema che consideravo impellente, molto attuale. In un paese come l'Italia, paese cattolico, sede del Vaticano, non si era mai avuto il coraggio di enunciare un discorso sulla religione, su Dio, ed era questo che mi interessava."

partially autobiographic narrative,⁷³ set in a rural village, features the lower classes and their superstitious approach to life. This is clear as Benedetto, an orphan child raised by his aunt, is constantly threatened with damnation because of his sexual curiosity. When he survives falling down a cliff, however, the peasants swiftly change their opinion of him and celebrate his survival as a miracle by Saint Eusebio, the patron saint who has been assigned to Benedetto by the local priest distributing holy pictures to the children. Following this event, Benedetto is raised in a convent by monks and here he shelters himself from his now-adult urges by living segregated from the community and crafting papier-mâché statues of the saint he believes he owes his life to. However he cannot escape “the emerging conditions that are the inevitable concomitant of modern, industrial life”, as is perfectly represented in the scene in which he sits at the driving seat of a van owned by a hawker and, pretending to drive the vehicle, he rolls up the side window and unexpectedly reveals a poster of a naked woman. Due to his growing distress and his doubts about actually being chosen by the Lord, Benedetto decides to enter modern life. Working as a hawker too, he meets Oreste, who embarks on a mission to de-catechise him. “The only proven miracle” – the pharmacist says – “is the extreme ease with which people believe in miracles.”⁷⁴ Oreste is successful in his attempt at de-contextualising sex from sin in Benedetto’s conception of the world and his victory is apparent when Benedetto and Oreste’s daughter Giovanna (Delia Boccardo) renounce getting married. The scene in the church where the couple happily celebrate their decision to pursue their love without blessing is, again, a perfect shattering of the happy-ending marriage cliché featured in *populist* comedic forms. Oreste’s death, however, complicates things as Benedetto witnesses his mentor receiving the Extreme Unction. “In the end – Giovanna is told by Benedetto, who paradoxically has lost all faith in the non-existence of faith – he decided on getting a ticket for the afterlife too!”⁷⁵ After Oreste’s death, Benedetto is once again tormented by his fear of having lived in sin and jumps off a cliff.

⁷³ Manfredi survived a near-death experience in his childhood and was revered by his parents as a “miracolato”, the recipient of miracle.

⁷⁴ “L’unico miracolo accertato è l’incredibile facilità che ha la gente a credere ai miracoli.”

⁷⁵ “All’ultimo momento ha deciso di annà all’altro monno pure lui!”

In the final scene of the film his life is saved by a doctor. Was he spared by Saint Eusebio despite his sins? The screenplay, written by Luigi Magni, Leonardo Benvenuti and Piero De Bernardi, is incredibly clever in leaving both possibilities open as the doctor tells Giovanna: "I think *we* have saved him, but it was *just like* a miracle!"⁷⁶ [*my emphasis*] We, as in 'the scientists', saved him, but it was 'just like' a *miracle*. *Per Grazia Ricevuta* is a comedy which investigates the dualism between body and soul and is careful in leaving the audience room for discretion and for interpretation, by replicating the *openness* typical of neorealism, using the notion discussed in Chapter Three. In the figure of Oreste, however, it features the problematic struggle of an intellectual in challenging the *common sense* of the lower classes. The struggle is amplified by the dogmatic nature of the Catholic religion and by its positioning within *common sense* and the downside of a folkloric and superstitious conception of religion among the Italian lower classes is confronted in a way unprecedented within the context of *populist* comedic forms.⁷⁷

Luigi Magni's *Nell'Anno Del Signore* (1969) is another comedy Italian style that features the struggle between intellectuals and the *common sense* promoted by the Catholic Church.⁷⁸ As was the case with Monicelli's comedies of the historical "*filone*", Magni's film draws a connection between the period in which it was produced and the historical detachment of Italian intellectuals which, according to Gramsci, informed the socio-economic and political subordination of the lower classes. The film is set in the Rome of 1825 in which a group of intellectuals of a Free Mason-type secret society, the '*Carbonari*', are conspiring against the reigning Pope. Two of the Carbonari, Leonida Montanari (Robert Hossein) and Angelo Targhini (Renaud Verley), are arrested for the attempted murder of Filippo Spada, a

⁷⁶ "Penso che l'*abbiamo salvato* ma è stato proprio un *miracolo*!"

⁷⁷ Gramsci wrote that "religion and *common sense* do not coincide either, but [...] religion is an element of fragmented *common sense*" (*Prison Notebooks* 325).

⁷⁸ Magni did not consider his films as proper comedies Italian style. In an interview he said: "I have used certain materials proper of comedy Italian style but I had a different interest" (in Pintus and Biarese 135) (In the original text: "Ho usato certi materiali della commedia all'italiana ma ho avuto un interesse diverso"). However, the casting of actors such as Alberto Sordi, Vittorio Gassman, Ugo Tognazzi and Nino Manfredi and the use of Roman dialect of the 1960s in films set in disparate historical periods have led the majority of the critics discussing the genre to consider his films as part of its historical "*filone*".

member of the organisation who is suspected of being a spy for the clergy and has to be silenced. The two, *traditional intellectuals* by caste, are constantly opposed in the narrative to a shoemaker named Cornacchia (Nino Manfredi),⁷⁹ who initially collaborates with their cause by revealing Spada's betrayal. When he is asked about his political positions, Cornacchia replies: "What do I think? I don't think. I am not an intellectual like you people!"⁸⁰ His lack of education apparently prevents him from participating in the political struggle, as recognised by Montanari who says: "You must excuse him, he lacks education."⁸¹ However Cornacchia is smart and identifies the Carbonari's own shortcoming by adding: "And you lack [*the support of*] the people!"⁸² This is the first indication of the problem concerning the relationship between intellectuals and lower classes discussed by Gramsci to transpire in the film. In an interview Magni said: "The ineffectiveness of the revolution of two intellectuals who had no support from the people was the theme of the film and was part of the debate of 1969" (in Pintus and Biarese 131-135).⁸³ He was thus referring to the impact of Gramsci's writings in the context of the students' movement at the end of the 1960s.⁸⁴

The issue is further investigated later in the narrative as Cornacchia is revealed to be himself an unlikely *organic intellectual*. He is not uneducated at all as he can write and he actually is the latest incarnation of Pasquino, a mysterious poet who for

⁷⁹ The name of Manfredi's character is not casual. 'Cornacchia' in Italian means 'crow' and refers to an existing imagery of crows voicing the discontent of the people. Pasolini's *Uccellacci e Uccellini* (1966) would be a relevant cinematic antecedent. In this film Totò and Ninetto Davoli run into a talking crow which a reading card explains is "a leftist intellectual". The fact that, to my knowledge, no one has made this obvious connection between the two characters and thus articulated an analysis of *Nell'Anno del Signore* in these terms is a further proof of the underestimation of the cultural validity of the comedy Italian style genre.

⁸⁰ "Come la penso? Nun la penso, mica sò dottore come voi!"

⁸¹ "Bisogna capirlo, gli manca l'istruzione!"

⁸² "E a voi ve manca er popolo!"

⁸³ "La velleità della rivoluzione di due intellettuali senza un seguito popolare era il tema del film ed era nel dibattito del '69."

⁸⁴ As Mary P. Wood noted, this was a period in which specifically the re-evaluation of Gramsci's thought had assumed particular relevance: "The major periods of reassessment of his work can be seen to have taken place after the primary phase of Italian neorealism and in the period immediately after 1968" (*Hidden City* 151).

over four centuries has been channelling the Roman people's discontent for the government of the clergy through satirical sonnets attached on a statue in the Parione district.⁸⁵ [figures 47 and 48] The casting of two foreign actors as the Carbonari and of Manfredi, a comedy Italian style star, as Cornacchia reinforces the idea of a detachment of *traditional intellectuals* in opposition to the "contact with the *simple*" which characterises *organic intellectuals*. Later in the film Cornacchia has to choose between revealing his identity as Pasquino in order to save the Carbonari or let them be executed. In his lower class upbringing, his being *organic* to the Roman population, Cornacchia/Pasquino understands that the Carbonari's revolution is not the people's revolution *yet* and that, furthermore, if the clergy spares them, the people will be appreciative of its mercifulness. The result of his choice and his latest poetic composition is that the people indeed assault the prison where the Carbonari are held until they repent for their sins, not to save them but rather to demand that they be executed as soon as possible.⁸⁶

In the final scene of the film, Magni's camera zooms in on a commemorating plaque standing in present day Rome, the capital of the unified Italian State, which reads: "The Democratic Association G. Tavani Arquati arranged [*this plaque*] as a warning of the will of the people in the memory of the Carbonari Angelo Targhini and Leonida Montanari, who composedly faced the death sentence ordered by the Pope without evidence no trial on November 23, 1825."⁸⁷ [figure 49] The plaque, "a warning of the will of the people", reinforces the idea that without Cornacchia's understanding of the lower classes and the effect that martyrdom had on them the anti-clerical liberal message of the Carbonari would have never been popularised, it would have lacked a phase of "*going to the people*" to put it in Gramsci's words.

⁸⁵ The statue of Pasquino actually exists and for over four hundred years Romans have attached satirical epigrams on it.

⁸⁶ An excellent Alberto Sordi plays a cameo in the part of the humble priest whose faith is shook by the Carbonari's prolonged refusal of being confessed.

⁸⁷ "Alla memoria dei Carbonari Angelo Targhini e Leonida Montanari che la condanna a morte ordinate dal Papa senza prove e senza difesa in questa piazza serenamente affrontarono il 23 Novembre 1825. L'Associazione Democratica G. Tavani Arquati per volontà ammonitrice di popolo qui pose."



Figure 47: shoemaker Cornacchia (Nino Manfredi) repairs the boots of Captain Nardoni (Enrico Maria Salerno in *Nell'Anno del Signore* (Luigi Magni, 1969)



Figure 48: the statue of Pasquino in present day Rome



Figure 49: the plaque in the last shot of *Nell'Anno del Signore* (Luigi Magni, 1969)

Other examples of comedies Italian style featuring characters of the 'organic intellectual' type facing the pressures of marrying their cultural agenda are Elio Petri's *Il Maestro di Vigevano* (1963) and Luigi Comencini's *Lo Scopone Scientifico*.⁸⁸ The former, an adaptation of a Luciano Mastronardi novel, is the only comedy Italian style directed by Petri, a director known for political cinema and this is obviously not a coincidence. Here Alberto Sordi plays an elementary school teacher who has to give up his profession because the entire town of Vigevano, as well as his own wife, is more interested in making money with a shoe factory than in their children learning how to read. The latter, a film in which Alberto Sordi and Silvana Mangano embody a sub-proletarian couple from the 'borgate' of Rome who play a series of card games every year against an American billionaire widow helplessly hoping to finally climb the social ladder, features Mario Carotenuto in the role of a 'Professore', an intellectual who lives among the poor and instructs the couple how they should gamble for the benefit of the community. Rodolfo Sonogo,

⁸⁸ In fact Federico Rossin has noted that in this film Comencini manages "to avoid the red tape of so called *cinema impegnato* and the superficiality of the *comedy of habits*" (187) (in the original: "evita[re] le pastoie del cosiddetto cinema impegnato e la superficialità della commedia di costume"), suggesting that in this new cultural dimension comedy Italian style reached the balance between entertainment and engagement.

the screenwriter of the film, defined *Lo Scopone Scientifico* as an 'anti-capitalist apologue' about "the relation between power and the people, the emotivity of the people's feelings and the grand rationality of power" (Sanguineti, 113).⁸⁹ Carotenuto's character attempts to instil rationality among the people, but he is overpowered by the poor people's immediate need of primary goods.

In conclusion, I have shown how the comedy Italian style genre surpassed the "Crocean interpretation" that informed the *populism* of the earlier post-neorealist comedic forms and how notions of the cultural, social and political thought of Antonio Gramsci, such as his conception of the existing relationship between cultural trends, language and education with socio-political hegemonies, his articulation of the Southern question and his proposition of the formation of a stratum of *organic intellectuals* working side by side with the lower classes, which were at the forefront of the Italian cultural debate when these films were produced, transpire in several examples of the genre. Through this influence, the comedy Italian style filmmakers challenged the existing folkloric representation of the lower classes which determined the *escapism* of other comedic forms and therefore this genre does not constitute an *involution* of the neorealist practice back to the *escapist* production of the Fascist era which neorealism challenged. Neorealism innovatively featured the Italian lower classes as the protagonists of its cinematic landscape. Due to the nature of the current social reality of the Resistance and the post-war unemployment period it represented on screen, its emphasis on the lower classes determined an unprecedented *engagement*.

Comedy Italian style has suffered in its critical reception because of its supposed lack of engagement due to its entertaining nature. If confronted with the type of entertainment promoted in other comedic genres and if analysed for the modalities by which its entertainment channels a critical discourse concerning Italian culture, history and society, however, the comedy Italian style genre should actually be considered an *evolution* of the neorealist engagement in the way that, rather than replicating the Crocianism which informed the cultural upbringing of post-war neorealist directors, it seeks to update its representation of Italian social reality with

⁸⁹ "[...] il rapporto tra potere e popolo, l'emotività del popolo e la fredda razionalità del potere".

instances of the new cultural discourse of the 1960s. In its ability to reach the public that, in most cases, post-war neorealism failed to reach and in carrying on neorealism's non-conventional enquiry, comedy Italian style proposed itself to be *the* Italian national cinema.⁹⁰ It may be inaccurate to project a political reading of the influence of Gramsci's thought onto comedy Italian style, a programmatic one as it were, but the emergence of the re-discussion of the parameters of culture of the Gramscian type from the 1960s and onwards can explain how this film genre managed to offer an articulation of social reality with an increasing awareness of hegemonic and rhetorical discourses in both Italian history and Italian contemporary society, thus avoiding the populist representation carried on in other post-neorealist comedic forms. As Jean A. Gili wrote

in these last years comedy Italian style has become increasingly more and more multi-faceted. [...] It is an ever more politicised genre, not in the sense of the support of a given political party, but in the sense of an increasing will to approach the most serious issues of contemporary Italy. [...] The dominating ideology has the role of dissimulating the contradictions within a society, negating class rivalries, neutralising conflicts, masking problems. [...] Spectacle [...] can either act as a support of dominating ideology or a critique of it. In its best results comedy Italian style, and the best Italian

⁹⁰ In his article 'The Concept of National Cinema', Andrew Higson pointed out that:

Crucial among these discourses is the tension between, on the one hand, those intellectual discourses which insist that a proper national cinema must be one which aspires to the status of art (and therefore adheres to the current dominant definitions of cinema as an art form), discourses which, from a particular class perspective, dismiss Hollywood's popular cinema as culturally debilitating; and on the other hand, those more populist discourses where, in effect, the idea of 'good entertainment' overrides questions of 'art' or 'nationality'. This latter discourse suggests that a cinema can only be national, and command a national-popular audience if it is a mass-production genre cinema, capable of constructing, reproducing, and re-cycling popular myths on a broad scale, with an elaborate, well capitalised and well resourced system of market exploitation. (45)

Comedy Italian style seems to be perfectly positioned between these two poles, as it dismisses aspects of Hollywood cinema, as a result of its relationship with neorealism, but at the same time manages to be a mass-production genre-cinema.

productions with it, developed as a system of critical supervision through spectacle (*Appunti* 185-186).⁹¹

Gramsci was an advocate for the development of an Italian '*national-popular culture*', an "expression of the aspirations of the public" and at the same time "an element of [*its*] civilisation". Whereas other popular genres of the period in which his writings were disseminated such as the spaghetti western, the Italian horror and the peplum have inherent *escapist* attributes because of their setting within the realm of foreign or ancient history or within the fantastic, comedy Italian style and the post-neorealist art film, with their emphasis on Italian contemporary reality and recent history from the unification and beyond, had the possibility of fulfilling this function in the context of Italian cinema. However the latter's reliance on the neorealist form and the consequent lack of immediacy determined a difficulty in reaching a popular audience. On the other side, comedy Italian style reached such *national-popular* audience, but its *cultural* validity was not recognised on the basis of a moral dilemma; in embodying the vices of the '*average Italian*', be it the Italian of the Economic Miracle, of backward Sicily, or of the end of the 19th century, do Gassman, Sordi, Manfredi, etc. offer a satire of a negative social behaviour which should be ridiculed and banished? Or does this example, offered by such popular performers, instigate the replication of such negative stereotypes on the part of the spectator?

There is no better way to resolve this dilemma and prove the *cultural* validity of the genre than quoting Gramsci himself:

The premise of the new literature cannot but be historical, political and popular. It must aim at *elaborating that which already is*, whether *polemically* or in some other way does not matter. What does matter, though,

⁹¹ "Durante questi ultimi anni, la commedia all'italiana è dunque diventata un genere sempre più multiforme; [...] è un genere sempre più politicizzato, non nel senso di un'adesione a un partito politico ma nel senso di una volontà crescente di interessarsi ai temi più gravi dell'Italia contemporanea. [...] L'ideologia dominante ha il ruolo di dissimulare le contraddizioni di una società, di negare gli antagonismi di classe, di neutralizzare i conflitti, di mascherare i problemi. [...] Lo spettacolo [...] può dunque agire sia come sostegno dell'ideologia dominante [...] sia come critica dell'ideologia dominante. Nei migliori dei suoi prodotti, la *commedia all'italiana*, e con essa il miglior cinema italiano, si sviluppa come un sistema di vigilanza critica attraverso lo spettacolo."

is that *it sinks its roots into the humus of popular culture* as it is, with its tastes and tendencies and with its moral and intellectual world, even if it is *backward and conventional* [my emphasis] (*Cultural Writings* 102).

Comedy Italian style does “sink its roots into the humus of popular culture”, putting on screen its backward morals. But it does so polemically and not complacently, challenging *folklore* and *common sense*. In doing so, it indeed *attempts* to be “an element of civilisation” of its audience and its relationship with neorealism can be thus recognised as an evolution of the post-war practice towards a new cultural arena. This study is not concerned with reception and, even if it were, more than thirty years after the end of the comedy Italian style canon, it would be impossible trying to assess if, by simply being more popular, hence being seen by a larger number of Italians, the comedy Italian style films did effectively *manage* to “civilise” their audience and change its “conception of the world” to an extent that neorealist films did not reach for lack of popularity. However, the same can be said of other types of Italian filmmaking that have been critically revered for their recognised *attempts* to do so.

Furthermore, the role that, as a continuation of neorealism’s innovations in this direction, comedy Italian style played in offering a new notion of national identity by participating in a linguistic transformation of the country, and therefore also a societal transformation, which I will discuss in the next chapter, can be interpreted as a major index of this cinematic genre’s stratified and prolonged active interplay with Italian society.

Chapter Five: Dialectal Duality, Regional Varieties and a 'Fractured' National Identity. The Journey of Language from Neorealism to Comedy Italian Style

*"The primary revolution of neorealist cinema first, and of comedy Italian style later, is principally that of the language, as in all cultural revolutions"*¹ - comedy Italian style screenwriter Rodolfo Sonego (in Pintus and Biarese 187).

'Dialects' and 'regional varieties' in post-war neorealism

One of the main innovations attributed to the wave of neorealist films produced in Italy in the immediate post-war years was that of the use of local Italian dialects on screen on the part of the almost always lower class characters featured in the films of this mode of production, in opposition to the use of the official and unitary language that characterised the majority of the Italian film productions before World War II.² Comedy Italian style screenwriter Rodolfo Sonego indicated Roberto Rossellini's *Roma Città Aperta* and *Paisà* as the films which initiated "the use of dialects" (in Pintus and Biarese 187)³ and recounted how the opening line of the latter, a Sicilian accented "Americani sono!", had a shocking effect on Italian audiences at the time of the film's release, some members of the public shouting out that the performers did not know how to act and that this was not 'proper' cinema.⁴ He defined it "a gesture of extreme courage, of extreme recklessness" (in Pintus and Biarese 187)⁵ and, as

¹ "La rivoluzione del cinema neorealistico e poi della commedia all'italiana è principalmente quella del linguaggio, come tutte le altre rivoluzioni culturali."

² The official national language is the Florentine dialect used by Dante, Petrarca and Boccaccio in the thirteenth century, which survived almost unaltered in Italian literature up until the nineteenth century because of the lack of its oral use outside of Tuscany and Rome until the unification of the country in 1861.

³ Sonego speaks of "uso del dialetto" for both films, although this was not actually the case, as I will briefly explain.

⁴ The inversion of the regular order of the words in the sentence "they are American!" with the verb concluding it is typical of Sicilian speech.

⁵ "Un gesto di estremo coraggio, di estrema incoscienza."

the quotation that opens this chapter shows, he noted a strong continuity between post-war neorealism and comedy Italian style in revolutionising language, one of the major innovations carried out by both cinematic forms. Before I discuss this continuity which will be the main subject of this chapter, I will clarify some notions concerning how language was effectively used in post-war neorealist film.

Even though pre-neorealist Italian film production is heavily characterised by the adoption of the literary unitary language in dialogues, it should be noted that, however, some films which preceded Rossellini's *Roma Città Aperta* attempted to replicate the 'spoken' language of the streets: in 1930 the Roman comedian Ettore Petrolini was featured in a cinematic rendition of his dialectal stage production *Nerone* (directed by Alessandro Blasetti) and *1860* (also directed by Blasetti), a 1933 cinematic narration of Garibaldi's expedition in the South of Italy during the Risorgimento, stood out "among films of the era for allowing its characters to speak their 'natural' tongues, 'Sicilian', 'Tuscan', 'Roman', 'French', 'German' and 'Italian' are among the languages linked to the film's characters as listed in the final script" (Ben-Ghiat 25). In the early 1940s Aldo Fabrizi starred in working class roles in a trilogy of comedies set in Rome, Mario Bonnard's *Avanti C'è Posto!* (1942) and *Campo de' Fiori* (1943) and Mario Mattoli's *L'Ultima Carrozzella* (1943), in which his characters were allowed a heavily accented Roman colloquial speech. In linguistic terms, these examples not only show us that other entertainment forms such as the "*avanspettacolo*" stage productions which inspired all of the above cinematic comedies were more experimental in replicating the spoken language than the cinema of the Fascist era, but also that Rossellini's early neorealist efforts, as Tullio De Mauro and Sergio Raffaelli have noted, "did not represent a break"⁶ in the

⁶ In a round table discussion of language and dialects in the comedy Italian style genre, Italian Linguistics scholars Diego Carpitella, Tullio De Mauro and Sergio Raffaelli look back to the language used in neorealist and pre-neorealist productions. Raffaelli states that "there is no dramatic linguistic break between the few neorealist productions and the films that were being made during the war and under the [*Fascist*] regime" (in Carpitella, De Mauro and Raffaelli 164-165) (in the original: "non esiste una frattura linguistica totale fra l'esigua produzione neorealista e certa produzione di regime degli anni di guerra"), noting however that, before neorealism, dialect "is not yet an element of truth, but just a populist strategy of appeal" (164-165) (in the original: "si pensi come [...] il dialetto non sia ancora fattore di 'verità' bensì concessione populistica"). De Mauro agrees on the notion of a continuity in the use of spoken language between the films produced before the end of World War II

use of a non-literary language, as Sonego said, but that rather they did so for the role language assumed in such films. In fact, Rossellini's own films of the Fascist trilogy presented an attempt in this direction. As Peter Bondanella notes, Rossellini's *La Nave Bianca* (1942) represented a "bold attempt" for having "every soldier (Italian, Greek, English) speak his native language, without providing translations in the original film's subtitles" (*Making of Roma Città Aperta* 54), thus anticipating the practice of *plurilinguism* associated with his neorealist production. For the purpose of the present discussion of the role of language as an instance of continuity between neorealism and comedy Italian style, it is also worthy to note that most of the films which preceded Rossellini's in adopting 'spoken' lingo in opposition to the literary unitary language belong to the realm of comedy.

It should also be noted that, even though the approach to language on the part of neorealist filmmakers has been commonly and repeatedly referred to as a widespread "uso dei dialetti", this notion is actually incorrect. As De Mauro and Lodi noted, what French and English speaking countries refer to as 'dialects' are actually termed in Italian linguistics "regional varieties", (13-14)⁷ different ways in which one speaks a language according to the local area of origin. Italian 'dialetti' are quite different; De Mauro and Lodi specify that

and those made in its aftermath, attributing such continuity to the ongoing reliance of Italian cinema on "*avanspettacolo*" materials.

⁷ "Varietà regionali". De Mauro defines them as such in his *Storia Linguistica dell'Italia Unita*: "Regional varieties of Italian [...] can be considered, in a synthetic account of the phenomenon, a new result born out of the combination of the Italian linguistic tradition with the multiple dialect traditions: in other words, they started being formed progressively as the areas used to dialect as the sole language (especially in the case of the spoken use) attempted to use the common language" (142) (In the original: "Le varietà regionali di italiano [...] possono considerarsi, volendo dare una rappresentazione sintetica del fenomeno, come una nuova risultante nata dal comporsi della tradizione linguistica italiana con le molteplici tradizioni linguistiche dialettali: in altri termini, esse si sono andate formando a mano a mano che gli ambienti abituati al monolinguisimo dialettale (specie per quanto riguarda l'uso parlato) si sforzavano di usare la lingua comune"). Jana Vizumiller-Zocco's definition "Italiani regionali" could also be used to refer to the same linguistic fact, it meaning "the intermediate stages of a continuous learning of Italian on the part of those who spoke dialect" (in the original: "gli italiani regionali illustrano gli stadi intermedi di un continuo apprendimento dell'italiano da parte dei parlanti dialettali") (469).

We refer with this word to lingos of local areas that *differ* [my emphasis] from the common language, which is a more widespread lingo that can be and is utilised in all of the areas of the country (13-14).⁸

Thus, Italian 'dialetti' are only understood in the context of local areas and cannot be utilised in the rest of the country, whereas 'regional varieties' are accented versions of the common language which feature a varying number of words or expressions borrowed from local 'dialetti'. In light of this specification it should be noted that the large majority of neorealist films of the post-war period feature a number of regional varieties of Italian according to the local area in which the action of each film is set, with varying degrees of expressions derived from actual 'dialetti' being used by the films' characters. In this respect, Antonio Vitti writes that neorealist characters spoke "not really in a strict 'dialetto' which could have made the South incomprehensible to the North and viceversa, but in an Italian language that was contaminated, that was accented, with lines in actual 'dialetto' here and there" (*Ripensare il Neorealismo* 13).⁹ This notion coincides with that of "regional varieties" as defined by De Mauro and Lodi. As P. Adams Sitney pointed out, Luchino Visconti's *La Terra Trema* is "the single instance of a major post-war Italian film in which the actors speak exclusively in dialect" (62-63) with reference to the Italian notion of 'dialetto'. In fact, the 'aci-trezzano'¹⁰ featured in Visconti's film differed so much from the common Italian language spoken at the time and even from more widespread forms of 'Siciliano' that the film, which also featured a voice-over commentary in formal Italian, had to be subtitled for its dialogue to be understood in its own country of origin.¹¹

⁸ "Noi intendiamo con questa parola una parlata di ambito locale, distinta dalla lingua comune, che è invece parlata comunque più che locale, utilizzabile ed utilizzata in tutte le regioni del paese."

⁹ "non tanto in un dialetto stretto che poteva rendere incomprensibile il sud al nord e viceversa, ma in una lingua italiana che fosse contaminata, che avesse un accento, con qua e là ogni tanto la battuta direttamente in dialetto."

¹⁰ Form of Sicilian 'dialetto' spoken in the village of Aci-Trezza where the film is set by the local fishermen who Visconti hired to play in the film.

¹¹ Micciché, however, maintained that the widely held opinion that the commentary was devised as a support for the audience because of the difficulty of the 'dialetto' used by the characters was "as widespread as it is unverified" (*Visconti e il Neorealismo* 173) (in the original: "tanto diffusa quanto è errata").

Not only does Visconti's experimental approach in this film constitute an exception among a wide range of neorealist films featuring regional varieties of Italian, but a large number of neorealist classics were set in Rome and therefore privileged a Roman regional variety of Italian, as was the case with the dialectal comedies produced before the end of World War II and many farces, pink neorealist comedies and comedies Italian style produced after the wave of post-war neorealism was over. This particular regional variety is even closer to the national unitary language than others, due to a number of historical factors, such as the central positioning of the capital in the peninsula. The large number of dignitaries present in Rome for the purpose of political and commercial exchange between the Vatican and all of the different States located in the peninsula prior to Italy's unification in 1861 and the city's proximity to Tuscany where the local spoken language and the unitary language inherited from literary traditions and especially Dante's '*volgare*' almost coincide, were other reasons why the '*dialetto romanesco*'¹² came to be influenced by the linguistic exchange which went on for centuries in its area of origin and gradually featured more and more expressions derived from other 'dialetti', especially central and southern ones. As a result of this, the Roman regional variety largely featured in post-war neorealist films such as *Roma Città Aperta* and *Ladri di Biciclette* or in comedies which preceded them such as *Campo de' Fiori*, or which succeeded them such as Luigi Zampa's *Il Vigile*, was virtually understood everywhere in the peninsula by the majority of the public at the time of their respective releases, the language spoken on the screen being an accented mixture of institutional literary Italian and expressions derived from a 'dialetto' that was extraordinarily close to it to begin with.¹³

¹² "Roman dialect".

¹³ In light of the distinctions made above, I shall explain here how I will refer to the different linguistic categories discussed in the text for the benefit of the reader. In the case of quotes from texts written in English that refer to regional varieties of Italian in films I will leave the English words 'dialect/s' when they are used, as the English notion of 'dialect' coincides with the Italian notion of regional variety. In my argument, however, I will use the expression 'regional varieties' to indicate I understand the distinction between the 'dialetti' and 'varietà regionali' and that I am aware that no comedy Italian style features anthropologically correct Italian 'dialetti', in the scientific sense of this Italian term. In the case of Italian quotations translated by me I will leave the words 'dialetto' and 'dialetti' in Italian in the translated text, as no English expression coincides accurately with the Italian

Despite the fact that, as I pointed out, some films featuring regional varieties of Italian preceded neorealism and despite the incorrectness of the much abused formula “uso del dialetto” in reference to neorealist films, it is without a doubt that this mode of production marked an attempt to render dialogue in a form closer to how the majority of the Italian population actually communicated at the time of their release and that post-war neorealism is the cinematic mode of production which radically popularised the use of regional varieties of Italian in film and determined the reliance on such linguistic modes of a large portion of the Italian cinematic production in the second half of the 20th century. As Tullio De Mauro noted in his *Storia Linguistica dell'Italia Unita*, in 1951, when the post-war neorealist mode of production was coming to its end,

more than a third of the Italian population (35.24%, meaning more than 15 million people) had abandoned the use of ‘dialetto’ as the sole instrument of communication, but only a little more than one sixth (18.5%, meaning 7,825,000 people) had completely given up ‘dialetto’: for more than four fifths of the Italian population ‘dialetto’ was still habitual and for almost two thirds (63.5%, meaning 26,846,000 people) it was the idiom normally used in any circumstance (130-131).¹⁴

However, the use of varying degrees of authentic regional varieties of Italian in most post-war neorealist films, or of anthropologically correct ‘dialetto’ in the case of

meaning of such terms. If such words are used appropriately, as was the case of De Mauro and Lodi’s discussion of their meaning, I will feature them in inverted commas, as I have done so far. However, if they have been used incorrectly by the author of the text that I shall be quoting, in other words if an Italian film historian or a filmmaker has improperly used the Italian word ‘dialetti’ to refer to the regional varieties of Italian featured in either neorealist films or comedies Italian style, I will indicate this in the text by featuring the words ‘*dialetto*’, ‘*dialetti*’ in inverted commas and also in Italics, in order to alert the reader to the original error.

¹⁴ “[Nel 1951] oltre un terzo della popolazione italiana (35,42%, pari a oltre 15 milioni) aveva abbandonato l’uso del dialetto come unico strumento di comunicazione, ma soltanto poco più d’un sesto (18,5%, pari a 7.825.000 individui) aveva rinunciato completamente al dialetto: per oltre quattro quindi della popolazione italiana il dialetto era ancora abituale e per quasi due terzi (63,5%, pari a 26.846.000 persone) era l’idioma d’uso normale nel parlato di ogni circostanza.”

Visconti's *La Terra Trema*, was not simply a straight-forward mirroring of the process ongoing at the time by which strata of the population who used to rely on 'dialetti' were slowly coming into contact with either the national language or other 'dialetti' in the major urban areas, nor a reflection of how such a process had not invested marginalised local areas in specific instances. Neorealism's steps towards featuring a 'spoken' language on screen, rather than a literary one, were determined by reasons intrinsic to cinematic production and also by the filmmakers' artistic ambitions.

The major factors inherent to cinematic production that favoured the use of regional varieties of Italian were the neorealist casting strategies. On one side, the occasional reliance on non-professional performers playing major or minor characters in neorealist films and embodying the working classes with their physicality for the purpose of social realism would have been useless if this practice had not been legitimised by a soundtrack featuring aspect of the idiom spoken in everyday circumstances. In some instances the non-professionals' lines of dialogue were recorded while filming on location, more often, as was and is common practice in the Italian film industry, they were dubbed in post-production either by the performers previously recorded on film or by professionals specifically hired for their regional accents. In fact, as I mentioned in Chapter Two, the first cinematic encounter between neorealist filmmakers Vittorio De Sica and Cesare Zavattini with future comedy Italian style star Alberto Sordi occurred in this capacity, as Sordi was hired to lend his Roman accent to a second hand market vendor shot in the Piazza Vittorio scene of *Ladri di Biciclette*.

In the case of the casting of professionals, neorealist filmmakers favoured performers from the stage variety tradition of "*avanspettacolo*", namely Aldo Fabrizi, who was cast in films such as *Roma Città Aperta*, *Il Delitto di Giovanni Episcopo* and *Vivere in Pace*, and Anna Magnani, who starred with Fabrizi in *Roma Città Aperta* and was later cast in Zampa's *L'Onorevole Angelina* (1947) and Visconti's *Bellissima* (1951), but also lesser-known performers in minor parts. *Avanspettacolo* performers relied on regional accents in their stage acts and brought such qualities to the screen when they were cast in neorealist films. The filmmakers of post-war neorealism sought these performers in pursuit of authenticity, working class traits and

the realism conveyed by that peculiar effect achieved when an actor known for a comedic type of role is featured in a dramatic film.¹⁵ It must also be said, however, that “*avanspettacolo*” performers were also cast as a concession to the popular audience and a means of gaining commercial appeal for the films.¹⁶

Neorealism’s use of different regional varieties of Italian, as well as the inclusion of foreign languages in some of the post-war films, especially those recounting the Nazi occupation of the country and its liberation with the Allies’ aid, also had a function related to the artistic and stylistic choices made by the filmmakers in other aspects of production. According to Medici, Rossellini’s use of multiple linguistic levels in his 1946 film *Paisà* is not only a result of the subject matter of the feature, but also a complementary element to the narrative solutions the film introduced in its structure and ‘*decoupage*’:

Rossellini’s *plurilinguism* is a stratified operation, being at the same time a material condition of human relationships in specific historical contingencies, a strong mechanism of characterisation and also a *meta-linguistic reminder of the difficulty in decoding reality* [my emphasis] (15).¹⁷

¹⁵ See the considerations made on Bazin’s notion of ‘amalgam’ and the importance of subverting the audience expectation in Chapter Two.

¹⁶ One can think of two scenes featuring the character of the grandfather in *Roma Città Aperta*. This character was played by Turi Pandolfini, a Sicilian character actor specialised in portraying senile old men, who went on to be featured in a number of farces in the 1950s. In Rossellini’s film, Pandolfini’s character is shown to be obsessed with food, as his major concern regarding an eventual cancellation of Pina’s wedding is that he will not get to eat the wedding cake, and also bad tempered, as he does not understand that he needs to pretend he is dying when the Fascists are about to search his apartment and cries out that he is ready to teach the Fascists a lesson single-handedly. The connotations of his role in this neorealist film are not too distant from the ones given to the character he plays in the 1957 farce directed by Mario Costa *Arrivano i Dollari!* in which Pandolfini plays an old servant who is repeatedly punished by Alberto Sordi and forced to eat prison food (“il pappone”) and walnut shells (“le cocce de’ le noci”). Even though in Rossellini’s 1945 film Pandolfini’s “*macchieta*” is inserted in a more plausible context, its function is the same, that of comedic relief or plain slapstick.

¹⁷ “Il plurilinguismo di Rossellini è un’operazione stratificata, essendo insieme una condizione materiale delle relazioni umane in certe contingenze storiche, un potente meccanismo di connotazione dei personaggi e il rimando metalinguistico alla difficile decifrabilità del reale.”

When he mentions the “difficulty in decoding reality” unveiled by neorealist films, Medici is referring to the non-linearity of narrative structures that did not necessarily obey cause-effect relations, which were introduced by neorealism, and the *ambiguity* effect pursued by an ‘*image-fact*’ type of editing in some neorealist films in opposition to a logical grammatical ordering of shots in classic Hollywood films, pre-neorealist Italian films and the majority of mainstream cinema produced after the neorealist wave.¹⁸ Thus, Rossellini’s use of multiple languages in the context of the same film is, according to Medici, a subtle reinforcement of these notions at the level of the characters’ dialogue, in other words, an element which reinforces the films’ visual style as much as it does with its subject matter.

The ‘purist myth’ of the Fascist era

Aside from all these considerations, the neorealist adoption of regional varieties which were closer to spoken language was also a response to the type of cinema produced during the Fascist regime and its attributes. Towards the last years of World War II the filmmakers who were about to participate in the neorealist phenomenon came to perceive the films produced at the time as an expression of Fascist propaganda and, above all, despised the ‘white telephone’ comedies of the period for their detachment from contemporary social reality. In 1945 Carlo Lizzani, who was soon to become a neorealist filmmaker himself and later on a comedy Italian style director, commented on his viewing of Rossellini’s *Roma Città Aperta* with the sentence “we have finally seen an Italian film! And by an Italian film we mean a film which tells things that belong to us, our experiences, facts regarding us” (*Film d’Oggi*).¹⁹ These words show very simply what the opinion of the neorealists was regarding the majority of films produced in Italy under Fascism and how much their own cinematic practice was a result of their reaction to it. One of the main attributes of the ‘white telephone’ films that alienated the neorealists was their reliance on literary Italian, a language that, as shown by De Mauro’s statistics quoted above, still had no street value in terms of everyday conversation in ordinary circumstances, this

¹⁸ See Chapter One for Bazin’s notion of ‘*image-fact*’ and *Paisà*’s central positioning in the context of this neorealist innovation.

¹⁹ “Finalmente abbiamo visto un film italiano! Intendiamo per film italiano un film che racconti cose nostre, esperienze del nostro paese, fatti che ci riguardano.”

being an element leading filmmakers such as Lizzani to not consider the viewing of one of these comedies as “seeing an Italian film”. If the Italian Fascist government is widely considered as having scarcely engaged with propaganda in the context of the film industry, in which it mainly sought escapist productions to distract the masses, in contrast to its efforts in other media such as the radio and the press, the reliance on the unitary language for film dialogues was in fact one element it did enforce.

Since the unification of the country the problem of linguistic unity had been a major one for the political hegemonies which succeeded each other at the government. Obviously the popularisation of the unitary language had been in the best interest of all political forces. However, the approach to the ‘dialetti’, and the extent to which they should be marginalised to achieve this effect, varied. As De Mauro and Lodi note, on one side a *populist myth* developed, according to which ‘dialetti’ should be preserved as they represented “a more beautiful, more authentic, more popular way of speaking than Italian” (7).²⁰ Whereas the *populist myth* was mostly supported by intellectuals and writers, the institutions in charge of regulating education discriminated against the ‘dialetti’, in the belief that their very existence radically excluded the possibility that the unitary language would become commonly used. As De Mauro and Lodi sum up,

the *purist myth* is even stronger [*than the populist one*], it conceives ‘dialetto’ as a deviation, an error, corruption, a sign of ignorance. It is the idea, as late 19th century pedagogy expressed it, of ‘dialetto’ as a weed that school should remove from its roots (8).²¹

The Fascist regime strongly subscribed to the *purist myth* to the point that “it declared war on the ‘dialetti’, or even more against the very fact that one could speak of the

²⁰ “[*I dialetti sono stati definiti*] come un modo di parlare più autentico, più popolare, più bello dell’italiano.”

²¹ “Ben più forte [...], è il *mito puristico*, che vede il dialetto come deviazione, errore, corruzione, incultura: è l’idea, come si disse nella pedagogia del tardo Ottocento, del dialetto come ‘malerba’, che la scuola dovrebbe provvedere a sradicare.”

existence of the 'dialetti'" (De Mauro and Lodi 7).²² One of the major battlefields of this war was the Italian film industry. As Ruth Ben-Ghiat notes in reference to the exceptionality represented by Blasetti's *1860* use of popular lingo, "the Fascist government had prohibited the use of dialect in the mass media, and was discouraging the use of foreign language words as well" (25).

In this context, neorealism's use of regional varieties of Italian should be understood as a facet of this mode of production's reaction to the type of cinema that preceded it and, most importantly, an ongoing opposition against the rhetorical discourse promoted by Fascism in its attempt to shape a national identity intrinsically defined by the regime. The insistence on the unitary language on the part of Fascist authorities and the monolithic imposition of it in the large majority of films produced during the "*Ventennio*" with the consequent attempt of ignoring the existence of 'dialetti' and of the fact that they were the way in which most Italians expressed themselves was felt as a defining element of the 'fiction' the regime imposed on the Italian population, a 'fiction' that the end of the war and neorealist cinema sought to unveil. As Antonio Piotti and Marco Senaldi point out, "Fascism in Italy represented an attempt to build [...] a consistent fiction of Power. [...] With the end of Fascism any chance of believing in a symbolic fiction of Power collapsed"²³ The regime's insistence on marginalising 'dialetti' was an attribute of such fiction, thus the championing of dialectal attributes on the part of the neorealists should be considered as a reaction to the its collapse. In the light of these notions concerning the cultural and political climate in which neorealism championed regional varieties of Italian on screen, I shall argue that, on par with reasons connected to casting strategy, popular appeal and artistic ambition, the role of language in most neorealist films was that of promoting a notion of Italian national identity which radically challenged the one proposed by Fascism's cultural and political hierarchies. I shall discuss this notion first and then develop an argument showing how comedy Italian style completed this process, whereas other comedic forms that succeeded post-war

²² "[*Il Fascismo*] dichiarò guerra ai dialetti, o persino al fatto che si potesse parlare dell'esistenza dei dialetti."

²³ "Il fascismo, in Italia, aveva rappresentato un tentativo di costruire [...] una fiction consistente del Potere. [...] Con la fine del fascismo crolla ogni possibilità di credere ad una fiction simbolica del Potere."

neorealism and adopted regional varieties of Italian have not developed it, thus proving that it is not simply a matter of featuring these linguistic forms that counts, but the function which they are assigned by the filmmakers. The fact that neorealism and comedy Italian style both assigned this crucial function to the same element, the regional varieties of Italian in the dialogues, will be further proof how this comedic genre acquired attributes that separate it from other types of Italian popular cinema, in light of its descentance from neorealism.

***Paisà* and the notion of 'fractured' national identity**

Angelo Restivo refers to Pasolini's notion of "neo-italiano", the literary language finally becoming actually 'spoken' and understood in the entire country as a result of the diffusion of the television medium, as an index of a new Italian national identity emerging as a result of the modernisation of the country during the period of the Economic Miracle.²⁴ Restivo writes that

in 1965, Pasolini coined the term *neo-italiano* to refer to the emergence of a new national language, one that threatened to displace once and for all the regional dialects that had had, throughout Italian history, defined the parameters of reality for "national subjects" who had remained essentially regional in their primary affiliations. At the time, few Italians were more aware than Pasolini of the ways in which language itself constructs subjectivity; thus, we can argue that Pasolini's neologism can be applied not only to the emergence of a new, hegemonic national language but also to an essentially new *subject* – precisely, the "Italian" – constructed out of the rapid modernization of the nation brought about by the economic boom of the late fifties and early sixties (*Cinema of Economic Miracles* 45).

Pasolini's theorisation of the role played by television in the process of threatening regional identities by the means of eradicating regional dialects was indeed extremely insightful. However, it should be pointed out that in the very early years of development of the television medium in Italy, its limited distribution in an initial stage and its intense relationship with other media such as radio and cinema during

²⁴ Pasolini's essay 'New Linguistic Questions' appears in his collection of criticism *Heretical Empiricism*.

the 1950s, makes it impossible to consider television as the *only* site of emergence of *neo-italiano*, both as a language and as a “subject”, a product of an emerging notion of national identity. As much as television programmes such as news broadcasts fulfilled the function of displacing regional attributes of language and identity, large portions of television programming had a strong relationship with practices that championed regional varieties as a solution of entertainment. For example, extremely popular variety shows such as Mario Riva's *Il Musichiere* often featured comedians such as Alberto Sordi as guests and, conversely, Riva often appeared in mid 1950s and early 1960s comedies such as *Arrivano i Dollari!* (Mario Costa, 1957) and *Ladro Lui, Ladra Lei* (Luigi Zampa, 1960) as Sordi's sidekick. The comedy sketch show *Un, Due, Tre* featured Ugo Tognazzi and Raimondo Vianello, who were also heavily involved in cinematic comedies at the time. Most importantly, television programming relied on a series of comedic authors who were previously employed writing for Alberto Sordi's radio show or in the satirical magazines *Marc 'Aurelio* and *Bertoldo* and thus pursued a regional based humour. In light of this, the emergence of a new Italian subject as a result of modernisation was not simply signified by a monolithic erasure of regional attributes as a result of television, but rather by a stratified process of negotiations between a linguistic unifying tension and a perseverance of regional varieties in the cultural arena. Most importantly, this emergence cannot be restricted to the context of television and to the period of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Broadening the analysis to the context of the role of language in the cinematic landscape, which was instrumental in determining how this process was going to continue with the popularisation of the television medium, one must go back to neorealism and the novelty it represented in this respect.

Italian film historian Gian Piero Brunetta hints at a connection between the role of language in neorealist films and national identity in his essay 'La Ricerca dell'Identità nel Cinema Italiano del Dopoguerra'. Brunetta argues that the sudden collapse of the Fascist regime during World War II and the consequent failure of its attempt to shape an Italian national identity caused the post-war Italian citizen to be virtually devoid of one, a condition intensified by the chaotic events following the armistice declared on September 8th, 1943 and by the civil war nature of the struggle between the Resistance and the reformed Fascist Repubblica di Salò in the North of the peninsula. According to Brunetta,

the strongest impression is that the new Italian, born from war and the Resistance struggle, does not possess any type of history nor official identity, and that he is the victim of a deep amnesiac state from which he will only re-emerge at the beginning of the 1960s (*Ricerca dell'Identità* 19).²⁵

In this sense neorealist films participated in the cancellation of the monolithic fictional identity promoted by Fascism and at the same time attempted to provide a new one. Brunetta hints at the role of language in this process, as when he explains how Italian cinema sought to provide a new national identity immediately after the war is over:

The perception of the possible achievement of a national identity which was capable of respecting ideological plurality and the linguistic diversity is an immediate fact. The journey of moral rising featured in *Paisà* is needed to show phenomena of progressive reduction of distances, of recognising the other, of communion, sacrifice and purification (*Ricerca dell'Identità* 17).²⁶

Once again Rossellini's 1946 film is addressed as the most ambitious neorealist project in terms of the function of language. Divided into six episodes set in different areas of the peninsula and documenting different stages of the liberation of the country by the Allies and the Partisans, *Paisà* focuses on the communicative difficulties between these two entities and the population or alternatively between these two entities themselves. The film features both *external plurilinguism*, Italian, German and English are all present on its soundtrack, and *internal plurilinguism*, with different regional varieties of Italian such as Sicilian, Neapolitan and Venetian among

²⁵ "La sensazione più forte è che l'italiano nuovo, nato dalla guerra e dalla lotta di Resistenza, non abbia alcun tipo di storia o identità anagrafica, sia colpito da stati amnesici profondi da cui riemergerà solo all'inizio degli anni sessanta."

²⁶ "La percezione di una possibile conquista dell'identità nazionale capace di rispettare il pluralismo ideologico e la varietà linguistica è un dato immediato. Il viaggio di risalita morale che si compie in *Paisà* serve a mostrare fenomeni di progressive riduzione delle distanze, di riconoscimento dell'altro, di comunione, di sacrificio e purificazione."

others which mark the narrative progression across a geographical trajectory from South to North.²⁷

If the choice of adopting regional varieties of Italian in this film was not as innovative as Sonego recollected, the centrality assigned to them was, dialectal overtones not being exploited as elements of comedic relief but rather, as Giuliana Muscio notes, “gain[ing] absolute parity with other national languages” (37). For the purpose of this argument, the most interesting point made by Brunetta on the film is this notion of a national identity being “capable of respecting [...] linguistic diversity” within its social discourse. In this reading, the linguistic and cultural disparities that separate the different local areas in which *Paisà*'s episode are set, do not at all negate the notion of national identity, as may seem, but rather suggest the existence, or possible existence of such a thing only through the refusal of the monolithic and alienating version of it imposed by Fascism and promoted by Fascist cinema productions. If *Paisà* is considered one of the films in which the subversion of conventional narrative strategies typical of the neorealist mode of production is most evidently manifest, it is exactly in this discourse concerning language and identity that the film follows a progressive logic, as Medici notes:

In the case of its dialogues [...] it is possible to trace in *Paisà* a progression from the shy attempts to overcome the gap between speakers in the first episode to the Partisans and American soldiers' communal belonging, in the last one, to the same fight and the same death (105).²⁸

Throughout the gaze of the characters of the American soldiers and the linguistic disparity between each episode, the national identity described by Rossellini distinguishes itself by its 'fractured' nature. This fracture between different local components does not negate the concept of national identity as such, but rather

²⁷ For a discussion of the two kinds of *plurilinguism*, I shall refer the reader to Tullio De Mauro's essay 'Linguistic Variety and Linguistic Minorities' in the volume edited by David Forgacs and Robert Lumley, *Italian Cultural Studies. An Introduction*.

²⁸ “Nel caso dei dialoghi [...] è possibile tracciare in *Paisà* una progressione che va dalla timida rottura della quasi estraneità tra i parlanti, nel primo episodio, alla condivisione, nell'ultimo, della medesima lotta e della medesima morte in cui si trovano accomunati partigiani e soldati americani.”

defines the peculiar identity intrinsic to post-war Italy. After the failed monolithic attempt made under Fascism, the consciousness of diversity, of being a part of a non-uniform ensemble of many 'others' and the progressive amalgamation of many 'others' is the defining character of Italian national identity after the war and neorealism first and comedy Italian style later assume the role of witnesses of both its 'fractured' nature and the progressive re-composition of such a fracture as well as the role of active agents in this process.

Mark Shiel agrees with the notion of Rossellini's early neorealist practice being informed by a reaction to Fascist rhetoric, writing that "Rossellini begins to build a new mythology of Italian national identity whose humility and humanity contrasts with the bombast and corporatism of the Fascist era" (50) and Laura E. Ruberto and Kristi M. Wilson expand this discourse stating, with reference to all neorealist films, that "these films seemed to show filmmakers how a national identity could be shaped and/or defined by cinema" (3). *Paisà* is the neorealist film which focuses on this notion the most. In fact, its very episodic structure confirms it if we consider it to be an answer to the question implied in the film's title. *Paisà*, the word used by American soldiers to address Italian citizens. What is a "*paisà*"? What does it mean to be 'Italian'? Metaphorically speaking, through a narrative, and not simply a characterising, use of regional varieties of language, the notion of national identity proposed by the film likens the 'Italian' to a crystal composed of multiple facets, each one of them facing in a different direction. As Gribaudi notes, usually

an identity is the product of a comparison, Whenever one imagines an 'other', one starts with categories and images which reflect the culture of the society in which one was born and lives, and one translates that Other into familiar terms (72).

The peculiar national identity suggested by *Paisà*'s plurilinguism is not a coherent whole defined by a foreign 'other', but, instead, a fragmented one informed by multiple 'others' existing within, getting to recognise each other and struggling to uniform to each other. Over the course of the following thirty years, Italian cinema will show how this faceted crystal progressively eroded tending towards a spherical shape, but never entirely smoothing its edges. If the issue of a new national identity

alternative to the attempts made by Fascism in this direction can be considered as one of the main themes in *Paisà* and one of the primary function of the *plurilinguism* featured in its soundtrack, some examples will show how language acquires the same function in the case of regional varieties of Italian used in other post-war neorealist films as well.

Roma Città Aperta, L'onorevole Angelina and Il Cammino della Speranza: other examples of language as a function of narrative in post-war neorealism

Geoffrey Nowell-Smith has pointed out how Rossellini's neorealist cinema is a form of filmmaking mostly interested in assessing existing dialectic patterns communication/non-communication, in a progressive "opposition between an 'Italy' and a 'non-Italy'" (*North and South, East and West* 13). In this constant examination of boundaries, his post-war cinema was a progressive definition of identity, very often through language(s) and perhaps this discourse could even be extended to something as early as *La Nave Bianca* (1943). *Roma Città Aperta*, Rossellini's first Resistance film, is another example of how language, through the use of regional varieties of Italian, is elevated to a narrative element in the neorealist mode of production. To begin with, there is a strong linguistic dichotomy in the characterisation of two of its settings: the Roman regional variety dominates the scenes set on the streets of the city and especially the housing complex in which Pina lives, while the Gestapo office is a space occupied by conversation in formal unitary Italian, alternated to orders which are obviously given in German. If this is quite expected in the case of the character of Major Bergmann (Harry Feist), it should be noted how the unitary language also characterises the Roman Police Commissioner, an ally of the Nazis who repeatedly visits Bergmann and informs him of episodes of insubordination in the city. The unitary language is thus chosen as the linguistic attribute of the authorities against which the positive heroes of the film actively or passively fight.

The Church, which is assigned a positive, unifying role in the struggle by Rossellini, is characterised by, linguistically speaking, a certain elasticity: the sexton Agostino (Nando Bruno) speaks with a Roman accent and Don Pietro, who tends to

mask his lower-class upbringing behind a correct but quite conversational form of unitary Italian, resorts to the Roman regional variety when he reprimands either Agostino, in the scene in which he suspects the sexton of participating in the assault of a bakery, or the neighbourhood children, for example during the football game in the courtyard.²⁹

The point of view of the children, who are all linguistically characterised by the Roman regional variety, plays an important role in establishing language as a characterising element of the national identity that will have to be formed once the war is over: religion and the Church, which in its broad meaning of keeper of Christian values is assigned a fundamental role in the reconstruction of the country and the construction of Italian identity in Rossellini's finale in which the children walk, after Don Pietro's execution, on the Via Trionfale towards the dome of San Peter's towering at the centre of the final frame, are not seen by the children as ethereal concepts, but rather, through the practical nature of the Roman variety of Italian, as concrete facets of everyday life.³⁰ This is why the children, with their

²⁹ Don Pietro asks Agostino "che c'hai là sotto?", "what do you have under your garments?" as he spots him hiding a loaf of bread. The form "che c'hai" is the Roman variety in place of the grammatically correct "che cosa hai". When Agostino comes up with the excuse that the bakery was giving out bread for the feast of a minor saint and Pina's son asks Don Pietro who this saint is, Aldo Fabrizi embodies perfectly the duality of the character's means of communication as he seems to be about to reply with the Roman "boh", and then restrains himself and replies to the child with a grammatically correct "mah, non saprei...", "well, I wouldn't know..." In the football game scene, Don Pietro's mastering of the Roman regional variety is even more apparent as one of the children keeps running towards him in search of the football even though he has stopped the game with the blow of a whistle. Don Pietro addresses the kid with the dialectally accented admonishment "levete, tu!", "you, move away!"

³⁰ The Via Trionfale, literally "the Triumphal Way", is the road on which the Roman armies used to re-enter the city in ancient times after victorious wars, parading in front the inhabitants of the city the treasures and slaves conquered abroad. Rossellini's choice of placing the children in this strategic point of the city for the final shot of the film suggests that the shot announces the victory of the Resistance against the Nazi-Fascists, which took place six months after the timeframe in which the film is set and had taken place roughly four months before Rossellini started shooting. The presence of the children, the future of the nation, the Triumphal Way and the dome of Saint Peter's in this significant shot suggests that Christianity will be, in the director's view, a central element of Italy's

Roman sensibility, nickname Agostino the sexton "Purgatorio", as he clearly is not as righteous as Don Pietro and therefore not quite worthy of Paradise. Again, through language and its regional characterisation, another important investment of identity occurs in the film, in the conversation between Pina's son Marcello (Vito Annichiarico) and her husband-to-be Francesco (Francesco Grandjacquet), on the night prior to the wedding. At the beginning of the exchange Francesco expresses himself in Italian and then, understanding the child's prudery at revealing a secret to him, he progressively adopts a Roman accent until Marcello asks him if he should call him "papà" from the following day and confesses that he is fond of him. So the regional variety of Italian acquires the function of an element which is necessary in either recognising or assigning an identity.

In this reading, it is not coincidental that two of the most important characters in the film who speak in formal Italian are signified by a renouncing of their identity: Marina, who has given up her upbringing, the connections with her family in exchange for luxury by becoming an escort for German officials and Manfredi who, instead, has had to give it up for the sake of the Resistance; the Gestapo's investigation reveal that he is at the same time Giorgio Manfredi, Luigi Ferraris,

democratic future. As for the inherent practicality of the Roman regional variety of language, I refer the reader to Goffredo Fofi's consideration that:

Roman humour, just like Roman song [...] seem to be, both in the comedic and the pathetic modes, incapable of being subtle, of idealisation, of euphemism, metaphor, synecdoche, litotes: in it concepts are expressed in direct fashion, in rough manners, a rose is a rose, a thing is a thing, a gesture is a gesture, the body is the body and the soul is not worth much. There is no solemn concept, which can be transfigured as is the case of the Neapolitan song, which favours the subtle comparison, lyric transposition, poetic euphemism, which is poetical rather than substantial (*Sordi* 58).

(In the original: La comicità romana, come la canzone [...] sembrano, sia nel comico che nel patetico, incapaci di sottigliezza, idealizzazione, eufemismo, metafora, sineddoche, litote: vi ci si esprime in modi diretti, in modi brutali, una rosa è una rosa, una cosa è una cosa, un gesto è un gesto, il corpo è il corpo e l'anima conta poco. I concetti non vi sono aulici, non sono trasfigurabili come avviene per esempio nella canzone napoletana, che ama il paragone sottile, la trasposizione lirica, l'eufemismo poetico, che è poetica e non prosastica.)

Giovanni Episcopo; he has three or even more official identities and therefore he has got rid of his regional accents in order to avoid revealing his continuous masquerades.

Going back to the notion of 'fractured' national identity discussed in the analysis of *Paisà*, two characters in *Roma Città Aperta* and the regional varieties of their speech are particularly relevant. The local 'brigadiere', the policeman who works in the area of the city in which Pina's tenement is located and who is seen to be quite friendly with Don Pietro, is assigned a Neapolitan accent, while the Fascist who accompanies the Germans in their rally of the building has a Tuscan one.³¹ Both characters are part of the security forces in a local capacity and, in the particular historical circumstances, support different factions of the current political struggle. However, the distance between both of their regional varieties and the formal unitary language spoken by the Police Commissioner in the Gestapo offices suggests that their positioning at opposite poles, which represents the major fracture within Italian society at the time, is the result of the will of the political hegemonies, in other words the doing of the Nazi-Fascist ideology.

This narrative function assigned to language and regional varieties of Italian is not limited to the neorealist films set during the Resistance, but is also featured in films set in the aftermath of the war. This is the case of Luigi Zampa's *L'Onorevole Angelina* (1947), which is set in the 'borgate', the outskirts of Rome while black-market goods were still being sold in the immediate post-war period. The character of Angelina (Anna Magnani) as well as the entire premise in the film's plot of a popular representative for the working classes, is tied to the very notion of Roman regional variety.³² Angelina's protests, which are initially directed against the black market racket and eventually re-directed against a lobby of real estate profiteers, are defined

³¹ As I previously noted in Chapter Three, Rossellini's version of the Resistance is a particular one: Catholic and Communists are shown to be united in the struggle and Italian Fascists seldom appear in his films. This Tuscan character, thus, represents an exception in this respect.

³² This premise is only apparently Gramscian in its theme. It should be noted that when Zampa produced his films, Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* were not well known and also that the character of Angelina ultimately embodies the impossibility of being both actively involved in politics and true to the working class values, which, on the contrary, would be an attribute of Gramsci's notion of 'organic intellectual'.

as 'baccajate' a Roman dialectal term with no synonym in formal Italian.³³ In the film's conclusion, after a series of events that have led to her imprisonment and threatened her marriage, Angelina decides to abandon politics in an official capacity and delivers a public speech to the people of the 'borgate' in which she promises to keep on with her 'baccajare' for their rights outside of the political arena, thus really doing it on the side of the people. In this way, she explains, she will reunite her family and stay true to herself on an ethical level. "This way" – she says – "I will be truly 'onorevole'!"³⁴ Using this term the filmmakers play on its double meaning in Italian: 'Onorevole' is the title used to refer to Parliamentary representatives, but it literally means 'honourable'. In Magnani's speech, through this stratagem of dialogue, the distance between unitary language/hegemonic elites and regional variety/common people is exposed: in the first instance words do not coincide with the meaning they promise, while in the second words and meaning coincide, the word's identity is not betrayed. Thus, Zampa's film explores one of the basic notions of the concept of national identity that Italian cinema will offer through linguistic experimentation in the following thirty years and which I shall discuss in the analysis of the role of language in comedy Italian style: the Italian citizen's identity might be fractured in its different regional components, but one of its unifying elements is the general distrust of the political institutions which ought to represent the people.

Part of the narrative of Pietro Germi's neorealist film *Il Cammino della Speranza* (1950) explores the dichotomy inherent in the concept of 'fractured' national identity offered by neorealism for the post-war Italian. The group of Sicilian miners that the film follows throughout their journey towards France is hired by a landowner to work in his fields in exchange for food, a place to sleep and a small fee. They find a group of workers from Bergamo in the inn where they are invited to sleep who have also been hired by the same landowner. Despite a couple of 'terroni' and 'polentoni', exchanged with smiles on their faces as regional accents reveal the 'otherness' of both groups of workers, they are shown familiarising with each other easily and rapidly as a Sicilian with a guitar and a Bergamasco with an accordion

³³ "Baccajare" suggests at the same time yelling, being loud ("fare baccano") and barking ("abbaire").

³⁴ "Così sarò onorevole pe' davvero!"

improvise a melody for everybody to dance to.³⁵ In this case, the linguistic fracture, highlighted by the two groups' different regional varieties, is instantly recomposed. However, in the next scene, the Sicilians are insulted and attacked by local farm workers, presumably from Emilia-Romagna, for having exploited the need for a work force caused by the locals' strike. As the Sicilians reply to this accusation with an accented cry, they are insulted for their southern background. In this case the fracture is not recomposed but the Sicilians are actually arrested by the police and forced to abandon their temporary occupation. By the juxtaposition of these scenes, Geremi's film is successful in showing us both sides of the notion of 'fractured' identity as well as both its possible outcomes through the narrative use of regional linguistic varieties. Italian cinema and comedy Italian style in particular, continuously explores this tension.

In conclusion, apart from reasons of productivity and its pursuit of realism and authenticity, neorealism adopted regional varieties of Italian and elevated language to a narrative element in order to offer a concept of 'fractured' national identity for the post-war Italian, a concept radically opposed to the monolithic version of such an identity that Fascism and Fascist cinema, by the adoption of the literary formal language in the majority of the films produced during the 'Ventennio', attempted to impose and that historical events had put into crisis.

Language between neorealism and comedy Italian style: the return to a folkloric dimension of the regional varieties of Italian

Before I discuss how comedy Italian style continued the neorealist practice of assigning a narrative function to language and its regional varieties as a means of propositioning the concept of 'fractured' national identity, I shall discuss the use of the linguistic element in the intermediate forms known as pink neorealism and farce. In 1956 Luigi Chiarini wrote an article entitled 'La Questione del Dialetto' on the

³⁵ "Terroni" is an insult by which Northern Italians refer to the Southerners. Its root is "terra", which means "earth" and thus refers to the fact that the Southerners are identified with rural work. Conversely "polentoni" is an expression used to refer to the Northerners and comes from "polenta", a semolina based dish from Northern Italy.

pages of the film journal *Cinema Nuovo*, in which he addressed these forms' use of 'dialetto' in these terms: ³⁶

This expanding use of 'dialetto', when it is not actually a language, a speech therefore restricted to a specific popular setting or, as often happens, to certain members of organised crime, should be related to that degeneration of *neorealismo* that we have denounced many times and can be traced back to Castellani's *Sotto il Sole di Roma* (213). ³⁷

How did an attribute which was conceived as positive, if not quite revolutionary in the case of post-war neorealism come to constitute a worry for critics in such a brief lapse of time, as an index of its degeneration? Once again, it is not a matter of the use of a linguistic form, but rather of the function it is assigned. On this matter, Chiarini explained:

We are also against such a use of 'dialetto', and mostly I would say, because it is an index of a mentality that should be fought, a mentality, as it were, that is *dialectal* by which life becomes folklore and comedy and [by which] ignorance, vulgarity and an illegal way of life become the subject matter of a spectacle (214). ³⁸

If Chiarini's complaint about "life" becoming "comedy" denotes that inherent disdain for the latter that Italian intellectuals had at the time and his mentioning of "an illegal way of life" is exaggerated since pink neorealism and farce comedies do not show anything more serious than expedients and minor cons, such as selling fake Roman

³⁶ Once again, I shall remind the reader that I presented the word 'dialetto' in italics to indicate that it has been used improperly, as Chiarini actually examines in the article the use of regional varieties of Italian in these films.

³⁷ "Questo dilagante uso del dialetto, quando addirittura non si tratta di un gergo, una lingua, cioè ristretta a un preciso ambiente popolare o, come più spesso accade, a certi elementi della malavita, è da mettere in connessione con quella degenerazione del neorealismo che abbiamo più volte denunciate e i cui germi già si avvertivano in *Sotto il Sole di Roma* di Castellani."

³⁸ "Siamo contro un tale impiego del dialetto oltretutto e soprattutto, direi, perchè indice di una mentalità che va combattuta, una mentalità, se così si può chiamarla, *dialettale* per cui la vita diventa folklore e commedia e l'ignoranza, la volgarità, la mascalzonaggine divertente materiale da spettacolo."

coins to American tourists (*Tototruffa* '62), in order to survive in the post-war unemployment period, his notion of a folkloric use of '*dialetto*' should be addressed and explained.

Luigi Comencini's *Pane, Amore e Fantasia* is the best known example of pink neorealism and the entire film features different combinations of the comedic possibilities of the regional varieties of Italian. The peasants from the village of Saliena in which the film is set speak with a *ciociaro* accent,³⁹ the Carabinieri Marshal played by Vittorio De Sica sometimes uses a Neapolitan regional variety, one of his subjects expresses himself in the Roman variety (Memmo Carotenuto) and another one in the Venetian one (Roberto Riso). Since the beginning of the film, in which Carotenuto arrives to the village and is greeted by the local authorities, the filmmakers exploit the *funny* elements of regional speech and give them a *backward* connotation. Carotenuto, for instance, asks the Roman subject Baiocchi what was his job before enrolling in the Carabinieri. Baiocchi replies: "Studente." The answer comes as a surprise to both the Marshal and the audience, since it was unusual that someone who pursued higher education would choose this kind of career, in particular in 1953 when very few Italians had access to university studies. Marshal Carotenuto then asks Baiocchi what kind of degree he was pursuing and the subject's reply is "quinta elementare", an elementary school diploma. It is clear that Baiocchi should have said that he used to be a "scolaro", someone who has abandoned compulsory education to make a living, rather than a "studente", which implies he was seeking higher education. Baiocchi's mistake provokes the comedic relief and the Roman regional variety comes in the picture to substantiate the irony, as Baiocchi adds a heavily accented reply: "Well, I continued by myself..."⁴⁰ This phrase, which should be Baiocchi's defence mechanism to prevent the Marshal and the audience from mistaking him for an ignorant man actually works against him as the use of a regional variety signals that he has indeed remained illiterate. In other words, the Roman dialectal allusion is used to laugh at Baiocchi's expense.

Later in the film the local priest Don Emidio is addressing the peasants on issues of morality. Seeing that his audience is quite lost when he uses imagery from

³⁹ Ciociaria is a mostly agricultural area located south of Rome.

⁴⁰ "Eh, ma poi ho continuato pe' conto mio..."

the Gospel as a frame of reference in his speech, he resorts to a practical metaphor and exhorts the peasants to 'hand wash' their souls and have them 'ironed' for the coming festival of the patron saint of the village. This choice on the part of the character, which reinforces the idea of the "ciociaro" regional variety spoken by the citizen of Saliena as an indicator of their ignorance, is proved to be appropriate as the Bersagliera (Gina Lollobrigida) leaves the Church saying: "Don Emidio even knows how to do laundry!"⁴¹ Again, this expression in a dialectally accented form is used to confirm the backwardness of the peasants, their living in a folkloric dimension.

Later on in the film a local businessman of Saliena is feeling sick after trying to run after the Bersagliera who has stolen a basket of fruit from him. This character is hated by the community because most of the peasants owe him money. As he sits down to catch his breath, Comencini's camera pans on the right side where three old villagers are seemingly saying the rosary. After a few seconds of the repetition of indistinguishable syllables, it becomes clear that if these are separated at the right points, the old villagers' cant is actually saying "pozza crepà", "may he drop dead", over and over again. The prayer has been substituted with a wish in the local regional variety for the businessman's death. This solution, repeated later in the film by the Bersagliera, reinforces the idea of the peasants of Saliena as gossiping, envious and superstitious folk. As I previously mentioned, the film features a number of different dialects. However, unlike Rossellini's *plurinlinguismo*, in this case they do not participate in a realistic effect of *ambiguity* or in a social contextualisation of the 'fractured' identity of the post-war Italian, but they simply sum up in characterising Saliena as a place full of *'vitalità'*, an overjoyed environment. Marshal Carotenuto's expressions in the Neapolitan regional variety, too, signal the progressive abandonment of the part of this 'foreigner' of the composure proper of his official position and his acceptance of the customs of the village, as in the film's ending in which he decides to resign in order to marry the midwife and, asked what the people of Saliena will think of this he says, without restraining himself from dialectal accentuation: "They'll say that the Marshal has lost his mind for the midwife!"⁴² As these examples show, in the case of pink neorealism the regional varieties are a key

⁴¹ "Don Emidio sà puro lava li panni!"

⁴² "Dirà cche lu Marescialle s'è 'mbazzitu pe' la levatrice!"

element in painting a *folkloric* rather than realistic picture, an attribute of *backwardness* rather than a narrative element.

This is also true in the case of most *farse*, the other comedic form that dominated the Italian cinematic landscape in the 1950s, which generally feature a large number of wordplays exploited by the head comedian, who very often is the Neapolitan Totò. In Mario Mattoli's *Miseria e Nobiltà* (1954), for example, Totò plays Felice Sciosciammocca, a street scrivener who tries to make a living by writing letters for illiterate people in exchange for cash. A client approaches him and starts dictating him a letter by expressing himself in the 'pugliese' regional variety: "Dear Giuseppe, nephew and relative..."⁴³ Totò has trouble trying to make sense out of what he is dictated and, every time he hears his client making a mistake, he punishes him by splashing ink into his eyes. The regional accent is constantly ridiculed to the point that the client dictates: "Send me some money, as I don't even have the sum to pay the scrivener for this very letter!"⁴⁴ The peasant gives out a crucial piece of information which he should have kept for himself, the fact that he cannot afford to pay Totò. As was the case of Baiocchi in Comencini's film, dialectal attributes are used here as a means of laughing at the expense of an ignorant character.

Because of the emphasis on wordplay that the comedic genre of the farce champions, we also have instances of regional varieties of Italian which are not only exploited for their possibilities of giving a backward connotation to a character, but even for their intrinsic ironic characteristics. This is the case for example in a scene of Camillo Mastrocinque's *Tototruffa '62* (1961), in which Totò and Nino Taranto are two conmen who impersonate a series of characters in order to disorientate their landlord to whom they owe three months rent. Totò is dressed up as a woman and is flirting with the landlord when Taranto walks in dressed up as a Sicilian Mafioso, who demands revenge for his/her honour. However, Taranto has trouble in imitating the phonologic characteristics of Sicilian dialect as he openly stumbles on his line: "Ie' tti, cosa fetusa, pottattiddi... pottattiddi... pottattiddisonore in casa mia!", which means "you, nasty thing, you brought dishonour into my house!" After a few seconds,

⁴³ "Care Giuseppa cumbarenipote..."

⁴⁴ "Manname 'nu poche de sordi cha nun tenghe manc' lu denare pe pagà lu shcrivane che me stà a shcrive la lettera presende!"

the audience realises the objective difficulties that such a sentence's pronunciation would provoke in anyone who is not a native Sicilian speaker. In other words, the joke is not at the expense of a character who speaks in a regional variety, but at the expense of the regional variety itself.

Totò has been credited many times with an important role in ridiculing on screen archaic and pompous forms of the literary unitary language and therefore actively fighting for the benefit of the public the inadequacy of aspects of such language for a popular scale. As Vittorio Spinazzola notes

another one of Totò's battles occurred in the field of verbal expression: he ridiculed 'official' Italian by mingling solemn refined expressions and bureaucratic formulas together. This way a pretentious, unspeakable and clumsy lingo was born, reminiscent of court-room orators and more generally of etiquette, of the small talk figures of speech of the Southern middle classes, with his 'bazzecole, quisquillie, pinzillacchere', his 'tampoco', 'eziandio', his 'a prescindere'. Using them out of context, Totò exposed their mannerist formalism (*Cinema e Pubblico* 95).⁴⁵

However, these ridiculing effects are often achieved because of the actor's Neapolitan regional accent in the pronunciation of these terms. So, once again, even though the ultimate effect is that of exploiting the pomposity of certain aspects of the unitary language, the regional variety is given a backward connotation and used as an index of the character's ignorance. This is particularly evident in the occasions in which Totò mangles formal Italian expressions such as "è d'uopo", transformed in "ha

⁴⁵ "Un'altra bella battaglia combattuta da Totò aveva luogo nell'ambito specifico dell'espressione verbale: era la ridicolizzazione dell'italiano 'ufficiale', compiuta incrociando preziosismi aulici e formule burocratiche. Ne nasceva un linguaggio goffo e pretenzioso, imparlabile, che rimandava all'oratoria avvocatessa e più in generale al galateo, al frasario di convenienza della piccola borghesia meridionale, con le sue 'bazzecole, quisquillie, pinzillacchere', i 'tampoco', gli 'eziandio', gli 'a prescindere'. Usando a sproposito, Totò ne fa esplodere il formalismo perbenistico."

d'uopo"⁴⁶, or when he replies to the use of the word "faceto" with the exhortation "fà l'olio!"⁴⁷

In conclusion, as was the case with pink neorealism, in the farces too, regional varieties are used to give a backward and folkloric connotation to the characters and are exploited for their intrinsic funny-sounding diversity and their distance from the correct forms of the national language, which eventually are also laughed at in result of these associations. In both forms, they are not elevated to a narrative use, at least none but that of signifying that the characters in the narrative are ignorant, and they are not treated as an index of Italian national identity. Through the popularity of these films, some of these regional characters have become part of Italy's collective imagination, but if one considers the strategies by which the filmmakers inserted their regionally accented speeches and the signification they have given them, one concludes that they do not, as was the case with post-war neorealism, inform an articulate discourse over the problematic identity of the Italian in the post-war period, but simply denote a bizarre attribute and an instance of continuity with neorealism that simply invests the iconographical level, rather than the structural, thematic and ideological ones.

Sordi's 'dialectal duality' and the return to a narrative use of the regional varieties: 'fractured identity' and *Il Boom*

I shall now discuss how in the case of comedy Italian style language and linguistic variety returned to acquire a similar function to the one they had in post-war neorealism, thus representing a further proof of the fact that continuity this comedic genre is much closer to neorealism than comedic forms that preceded it, such as farce and pink neorealism. Mario Monicelli noted that, even though dialectal elements had always been present in Italian comedy, what differentiates comedy Italian style from previous comedic forms is the fact that in it such elements were, very much like it was the case in neorealism, elevated to narrative element:

⁴⁶ Totò plays on the similarity between "è d'uopo" which means "it is necessary" and "a dopo" which means "see you later".

⁴⁷ 'Faceto' is the Italian word for 'facetious'. Totò is characterised as ignorant by confusing it for two distinct words 'fà' and 'aceto', 'make' and 'vinegar' to which he replies with 'make oil'.

'*Dialetto*' had always been present in Italian comedies, giving them in fact a diminishing connotation. Usually only one '*dialetto*' was used at the time. *Romanesco*, because they were usually set in some Roman 'borgata' or a Neapolitan one in the case of Totò and Peppino, or maybe a Sicilian one. But '*dialetti*' only had a picturesque function, whereas comedy [*Italian style*] transformed '*dialetto*' into a narrative element (in Mondadori 28-29).⁴⁸

Again, it should be noted that Monicelli is referring to '*dialetti*' inappropriately, because, as was the case with post-war neorealism, the comedies Italian style featured instead what, in terms of Italian linguistics, are considered regional varieties of Italian, since the audiences were not able to comprehend '*dialetti*' if they were used in their pure and anthropologically authentic forms. In fact, the late 1950s and early 1960s, the years in which comedy Italian style became the major comedic genre produced by the Italian film industry, was the period in which '*dialetti*' increasingly vanished as a result of the influence on common speech of cinema itself, television and, most importantly, internal immigration which forced citizens with different regional backgrounds to develop a common means of communication for everyday use. As Mariapia Comand notes, "between 1955 and 1970 almost 25 million Italians moved from one town-hall register to a different one, about 10 million people left their native region. Immigration was mostly from the South to the North or from small towns to bigger urban centres" (*Commedia* 15)⁴⁹ and many comedies Italian style reflect these phenomena as well as their linguistic results in everyday speech.

As has often been the case with comedy Italian style, one of the earlier protagonists of this innovation in the field of Italian comedy, the elevation of language to a narrative element was the Roman actor Alberto Sordi who, after exploiting the bizarre attributes of language through expedients similar to Totò's in his radio programme *Vi Parla Alberto Sordi* and in early farces such as *Un*

⁴⁸ "Nelle commedie italiane il dialetto è sempre stato presente, anzi dava una connotazione diminutiva. Di solito si utilizzava un dialetto soltanto. Il romanesco, perchè perlopiù si svolgevano in qualche borgata di Roma, oppure il napoletano nel caso di Totò e Peppino, o ancora il siciliano. Ma i dialetti avevano una funzione, per così dire, coloristica, mentre la commedia [*all'italiana*] trasformò il dialetto in un elemento narrativo."

⁴⁹ "Fra il 1955 e il 1970 quasi 25 milioni di italiani si spostano da un comune a un altro, circa 10 milioni lasciano la propria regione. Ci si sposta prevalentemente dal Sud al Nord o dai piccoli centri alle grandi aree urbane."

Americano a Roma, developed in the comedies written by Rodolfo Sonego a new type of alternation between unitary Italian and Roman regional variety that informed the linguistic practice of the entire genre.⁵⁰ This practice on Sordi's part, that Lanzoni defined as '*dialectal duality*', embodied the new condition experienced by the Italians of those years, as a result of immigration and the other phenomena listed above which contributed in a progressive detachment from one's local regional identity.⁵¹ As Vittorio Spinazzola wrote back in 1974, "the Roman actor belongs to a generation and a class of citizen who master equally 'dialetto' and the national language: they cannot recognise themselves fully in either" (*Cinema e Pubblico* 213).⁵² As the last sentence hints, Sordi's '*dialectal duality*' is the index of a discourse about identity, a discourse that carries on, from a satirical point of view, the notion of post-war Italian raised by neorealism and his condition of "not possess[ing] any type of history, nor official identity" and his "amnesiac state" as a result of the collapse of Fascism, as discussed by Brunetta. It is relevant to point out the circumstance, initially noted by the reviewer of Steno's *Mio Figlio Nerone* (1956), that most of Sordi's characters lack a father figure: they come from homes with mothers, aunts, but very seldom older males.⁵³

It is therefore appropriate to quote Brunetta's critical notations on Sordi's linguistic practice, contained in *I Mostri e gli Altri Animali*, his preface to Jean A.

⁵⁰ In *Un Americano a Roma* Sordi deformed English very much in the same way Totò used to deform archaic Italian forms. In his radio programmes he exploited the petulance intrinsic to formal Italian mannerisms through the characters Conte Claro and the Compagnuccio della Parrocchietta, who often included a vast number of polite terms of endearment in their sentences without ever expressing an idea or even distorting the sense of the interlocutor's lines for the sake of rhyming them with their catchphrases "comprende l'importanza" or "in quel di poi".

⁵¹ Remi Fournier Lanzoni came up with this expression to define Sordi's slippage from Italian to *romanesco* for comedic purposes in Luigi Zampa's *Ladro Lui, Ladra Lei* (1960). (26) I once again remind the reader that, despite the fact that this notion should be attributed to Lanzoni, his discussion of it is quite limited and marginal, whereas I shall discuss the merits of comedy Italian style's practice of *dialectal duality* in length here.

⁵² "L'attore romano appartiene a un cetto e una generazione che si son fatti egualmente padroni della lingua nazionale come del dialetto: solo che non sono in grado di riconoscersi per intero né l'una né nell'altro."

⁵³ The review appeared on issue number 93, published in November 1956, but did not feature the name of the reviewer.

Gili's volume of interviews to the comedy Italian style stars *Arrivano i Mostri: i Volti della Commedia all'Italiana*:

His is always a second-hand lingo, in which copying the speech of others functions as a camouflage of his true identity. Sordi establishes the figure of a character who speaks several forms of language and avoids, as much as he can, showing and revealing his own personality. His linguistic strategy is that of a binary duplicity, of a public and social discourse that can easily play the soloist and the chorus. [...] He does not ever fully remove dialectal forms or accentuation, but, however, what characterise him and his characters is an extreme linguistic mobility and the effort to remove such dialectal identity (26).⁵⁴

In other words, Sordi embodies that aspect of 'fractured' national identity of the post-war Italian in his occasional and strategic use of the Roman regional variety which testifies to his hidden, true 'otherness' and at the same time he embodies the "progressive reduction of distances, of recognising the other" typical of the society of his time, only in this case these processes are not motivated by "communion, sacrifice and purification" as was the case in Rossellini's *Paisà*, but rather imposed by the Economic Miracle opportunist mentality that the filmmakers satirise. In fact Mariapia Comand has noted how "the question 'what makes us Italians?' marks the difference between the Italian comedy of the 1950s and the comedy Italian style of the 1960s" (*Commedia* 38),⁵⁵ the genre pretty much posing the very same question that *Paisà* implied with its title in a comedic context.

Vittorio De Sica's comedy Italian style, *Il Boom* (1963), in which Alberto Sordi plays the Roman entrepreneur Giovanni Alberti, is a perfect example of Sordi's 'dialectal duality'. Alberti becomes increasingly indebted in order to meet his

⁵⁴ "Il suo è un linguaggio tutto di riporto, in cui la mimesi dei linguaggi altrui serve per lo più di mascheramento alla sua identità reale. Sordi istituzionalizza la figura di un personaggio che parla più linguaggi ed evita, per quanto può, la dichiarazione e lo svelamento della propria personalità. La sua strategia linguistica è quella per lo più del doppio binario di un discorso pubblico e socializzato che può praticare con facilità sia il canto che il controcanto. [...] Sia pure non rinnegando mai le cadenze o le forme dialettali, ma ciò che lo caratterizza e caratterizza i suoi personaggi è l'estrema mobilità linguistica e lo sforzo per rimuovere la propria identità dialettale."

⁵⁵ "La domanda 'cosa siamo noi Italiani' marca la differenza tra la commedia italiana degli anni Cinquanta e la commedia all'italiana degli anni Sessanta."

aristocratic wife's high standards of living and ends up selling one of his eyes to a billionaire for transplant in exchange for a fortune in cash. Alberti is a Roman character, however, for almost the entirety of the film he speaks in perfect, formal Italian. The instances in which Sordi recurs to expressions in the *romanesco* regional variety are few, but very significant. He uses it when communicating with his parents, who come from a lower class background and always speak in it. He uses it when he loses control, as in the scene in which he is denied an extension on his loan by a finance company executive, who exhorts him to make his wife do the dishes instead of buying household appliances. Enraged, Alberti abandons the formal Italian he used to find a diplomatic solution with the businessman and replies: "You make your wife who is a laundress wash the dishes, mine is a lady!"⁵⁶ Similarly, when he loses control after getting drunk at a party to celebrate his recently acquired fortune, he addresses his wife's aristocratic friends who previously refused to help him with the Roman expression "ve la prendete tutti in saccoccia!", which resembles the English expression "in your faces".

What is even more interesting is that, apart from these few instances in which dialect expressions signal that Alberti is removing his polite, posh businessman mask in public, the character's internal voice is also in the *romanesco* regional variety. The opposition between Italian as the language for public appearance and the Roman variety as the lingo of true feelings is made manifest in a scene in which Alberti is trying to convince his father in law (Federico Giordano) to embark on a business venture with him and, as the old man refuses and walks away from him, Sordi's dialogue shifts from the first mode of expression to the second: "I would have liked to work with you, but you are.. *a big cuckold!*"⁵⁷ The insult is delivered once the old man cannot hear Alberti anymore and conveys the character's intimate feelings for his wife's father.

⁵⁶ "Falli lavà a tu moje che è lavannara, la mia è na signora!" The abbreviation "lavà" in place of "lavare" is typically Roman, as is "moje" instead of "moglie". "Lavannara" is the regional equivalent of "lavandaia".

⁵⁷ "Mi avrebbe fatto molto piacere farlo con lei perchè sò che lei è... è 'n gran cornutaccio!" "Un" is shortened in an "n" sound and the "-accio" ending is an indicator of a Roman pejorative of the Italian insult "cornuto".

The scene of the procession reinforces the idea that Sordi's character 'true' language is the *romanesco* variety and that his use of formal Italian is nothing but a social mask, as this scene is the only instance in which Alberti's voice-over is featured in the film. While the crowd is chanting a ritual prayer for the Virgin Mary, Alberti is professing his own silent prayer in his accented thoughts, hoping that something will occur to the billionaire he now owes an eye to and to the man's wife, who arranged the bargain: "My dear Madonna, what should I have done? I gave my word after all... Only you can help me! Make them change their mind... make them die... no? Maybe an illness, you know best... give them a scare so they give up!"⁵⁸ The fact that Alberti talks to his wife in Italian, rather than with *romanesco* expressions, reinforces the idea that their relationship is false, that Giovanni has been acting as someone else to win her over. This is evident as he is still hiding his debt from her and, having been asked to book a holiday accommodation at the beach for the summer, he procrastinates in formal Italian but, once he is alone in bathroom, he asks himself in the mirror in a Roman accented fashion: "What do I tell her now?"⁵⁹

However, unlike what happened in the case of Totò's farces, the regional background of Sordi's character in *Il Boom* does not go hand in hand with a manipulation or alteration of Italian, which is spoken perfectly and naturally, signifying the character's perfect mastering of it, nor does it give Alberti an ignorant or *backward* connotation. Sordi's regional expressions therefore are not an index of a folkloric dimension and the audience is not encouraged to laugh at the expense of his character's bizarre attributes, at his 'otherness', but rather laughs because it has been made aware of its own progressive concealing of 'otherness', as well as the vile connotations given to the character's continuous scheming. As Antonio Piotti and Marco Senaldi note, the awareness of one's own 'otherness' is in a way an indicator of the realisation of such a thing as national identity, although one defined by a certain degree of shame for its 'fractured' nature: "Paradoxically, it is this refusal of one's identity, the 'let us not make a show of ourselves', 'let's not behave like typical Italian stereotypes' statements, that becomes the most typical trait of Italian-ness"

⁵⁸ "Madonna mia, io che dovevo fà... d'artronde me sò 'mpegnato... Solo tu me puoi aiutà! Faje cambia idea... falli mori... no? 'Na malattia allora, vedi tu... Faje mette paura 'n modo che rinunciano!"

⁵⁹ "Mò che je dico?" in which the Roman "mò" substitutes the correct Italian form "ora".

(59).⁶⁰ In this comedy Italian style, and more generally in all of the examples of the genre in which Sordi or other performers play the type of the 'average Italian', this "*dialectal duality*" is used to convey the characters' duplicity in the subtext and the overall duplicity of the society of the Economic Miracle, in which formal appearance has become a need, a survival skill in the process of integration. In this respect, it does become a narrative element as it was in post-war neorealism, an element of the characters' motivations, an index of their identity and a driving force in the development of the plots, as well as an instrument in the films' social criticism.

Another example would be the previously analysed *Il Giudizio Universale*, in which the use of *romanesco* expressions has both the functions of a *captatio benevolentiae* towards the audience, of a reminder of the beloved characters established by Sordi in the farces devised to make the audience accept a morally despicable character and of indicating the character's duplicity. A similar practice is present in those films such as *Il Seduttore* (1955, directed by Antonio Pietrangeli), *Il Marito* (1957, directed by Nanni Loy), *Il Vedovo*, etc., in which Sordi established the type of the average Italian and in which *dialectal duality* is a tool used to reveal the vile and opportunistic nature of this type and to contradict his ambitions of publicly appearing each time as the irresistible seducer, perfect husband, inconsolable widower, and so on.

The fact that the hidden regional variety of Sordi's characters in these films is instrumental to a satirical discourse over the problematic national identity of the post-war Italian is also confirmed by the other 'secret' the Roman actor's 'average Italian' type usually conceals as well as his regional background, his Fascist past, which is more or less openly alluded to in a number of films. As discussed in Chapter One, the displacement of Sordi's character in *Il Vedovo*, a former Fascist who tries to become part of the Economic Miracle élite like many other Fascists did but does not succeed, is one of the main points of interest of Risi's 1959 film. But there are other examples such as Luigi Zampa's *Il Vigile* in which Sordi's character Otello Celletti explains to his son Remo (Franco Di Trocchio) the concept of the Homeland: "The Homeland is

⁶⁰ "Paradossalmente, è proprio il rifiutare a priori e fin dall'inizio la propria identità, il 'non facciamoci riconoscere', il 'non comportiamoci sempre da italiani', che si va a costituire come il tratto più tipico dell'italianità."

that thing which calls you up in the army, you serve it for eleven years like I did and then, once the wars are over it takes the uniform off you and sends you back home unemployed. And without a job, how are you supposed to eat?"⁶¹ The personification of the Homeland in Celletti's words is a reminder of Fascist rhetoric and his mentioning of eleven years spent in uniform, when World War II only lasted six, suggests that he adhered to the Fascist Party and actively engaged in it as a *Federale*. Though the plot will later reveal that the character's claim that his unemployment depends on the State rather than on himself is quite inaccurate, it is interesting for the purpose of this argument that the filmmakers have inserted this notion of the national identity having to be re-discussed and re-conceptualised because of the collapse of Fascism. Another element that renders *Il Vigile* worthy of attention is the fact that it is in many ways a mirror-image film in the comedy Italian style context of Zampa's previous post-war neorealism film *L'Onorevole Angelina*. Like *Angelina*, *Otello* becomes an unlikely popular hero for issuing the Major (Vittorio De Sica) with a speeding ticket and considers entering the political arena against a lobby of real estate profiteers. As was the case in the 1947 film, *Il Vigile* expresses distrust of the institutions as a fundamental character of the identity of the new Italian that, it is implied, are nothing but the same as the Fascist ones masquerading as a democracy. The recurring regional tag-line in the film, "beware of your next move",⁶² is an index of this concern, which ultimately results in *Otello's* abandonment of politics and his dropping of the lawsuit against the Major due to the threats made by the politician's lawyers.

In conclusion it can be said that Sordi's practice of '*dialectal duality*' in his negative characterisation of the 'average Italian' of the Economic Miracle period is a re-proposition, in a satiric context, of the narrative function regional varieties acquired during post-war neorealism.

⁶¹ "La Patria è quella cosa che ti chiama sotto le armi, tu la servi per undici anni come ho fatto io, poi quando le guerre sono finite, ti rileva la divisa e ti manda a casa disoccupato. E tu senza lavoro come *magni*?" Sordi uses the Roman expression "magni" instead of the Italian equivalent "mangi", giving an example of the substantial nature of Roman humour discussed by Fofi, of its direct and concrete attributes.

⁶² "Attento a come te movi!"

***Il Mattatore* and *I Mostri*: other examples of regional varieties used as a narrative element in comedy Italian style**

Soon after Sordi and Sonego unveiled the comedic possibilities inherent in the practice of '*dialectal duality*' and showed what an effective tool this was in articulating a discourse over the identity of the new Italian - especially at a time when this concept was being challenged by internal immigration - mass media and the pressures of a capitalist society, other comedy Italian style filmmakers adopted it and refined it. Dino Risi's *Il Mattatore* is an example of this, as in it this function of '*dialectal duality*' as an index of duplicity and opportunism is multiplied, as it were, and informs the very narrative structure of the film. The film presents us with the character of Gerardo Latini (Vittorio Gassman), a failed stage actor who can fake multiple regional accents such as the '*bolognese*', '*toscano*', '*romano*', "as good as if they were Italian".⁶³ He is facing unemployment and becomes a professional conman, using his impersonating abilities for the sake of larceny. This use of *dialectal duality* is not only a characterising solution but also gives a meta-cinematic dimension to the film as Gassman himself was a stage actor who had not succeeded in the cinema due to his impeccable and over-dramatic pronunciation throughout the 1950s and who became popular only when Mario Monicelli cast him in a comedic and regional role in *I Soliti Ignoti*. In fact, *Il Mattatore* is an instance in which *dialectal duality* shapes the narrative structure of the film. In it, the now retired Latini recounts his career to a Neapolitan conman (Alberto Bonucci), who has come to his house to try to sell a fake chandelier to Latini's wife Elena (Dorian Gray). In the flashback we learn that Gerardo retired at Elena's insistence. Once Gerardo's story is over, the fellow conman abandons the *napoletano*-accented variety and reveals himself to be an undercover policeman who, in formal Italian, arrests Gerardo because of his accidental confession. Once Elena believes Gerardo to be headed to jail, however, the alleged police officer reverses back to the neapolitan regional variety and is thus revealed to be an accomplice of Gerardo, who desperately wanted to leave his wife and get back into the business. To put it simply, in *Il Mattatore* *dialectal duality* not only defines the peculiar profession of the characters in the film, but also provides the double twist in the narrative and justifies

⁶³ "Bene come fossero l'italiano."

its flashback structure. Thus, rather than being a stereotyped attribute, the regional variety is shown to be an index of societal identity that can be easily concealed but also acquires the function of narrative tool: the *neapolitano*-accented at the start version justifies Gerardo's apparent inappropriate trust in the conman and its re-emergence at the end explains that Gerardo's freedom was never put in jeopardy by his 'confession'.

Dino Risi's episode film *I Mostri* (1963) can be considered a dictionary of the type of humour championed by the comedy Italian style genre, each of its episodes commenting on the habits of the Economic Miracle society. In this light it can also be considered as a faithful example of the linguistic practice pursued by the comedy Italian style filmmakers in the 1960s. Three of its episodes feature no dialogue at all, eight episodes feature dialogue in Italian with no notable use of regional varieties and the remaining nine use different regional varieties of Italian. These, however, are not necessarily used to give a backward connotation to a character or ridiculed for their distance from the national language. In the episode entitled *Come un Padre*, Lando Buzzanca plays a Sicilian jealous husband, who confesses to his best friend his suspicions about being cheated on by his wife. The association between Sicilian dialect and jealousy is typical and reminiscent of Nino Taranto's impersonation in *Tototruffa '62*. In this instance, however, Buzzanca does not exaggerate the linguistic diversity of the dialectal variety of his character and is perfectly understood by his counterpart, played by Ugo Tognazzi.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the Southern regional variety does not connote this character as an ignorant, since we learn from the conversation that he is fully integrated in civil society, he works in an office and that, in fact, he is repeatedly in contact with Amsterdam for work, which is an indication that he is a cultured man. In the comedic twist of the episode we find out that his wife is in fact having an affair, as she was in the apartment bedroom waiting for Tognazzi's character throughout the entire conversation. The supposed *backwardness* of the Sicilian character is negated, as the ending proves that he was not the typical over-jealous Southerner we expected him to be, but that he actually had good reason to be worried.

⁶⁴ Buzzanca instead abundantly exaggerated it in the *commedie-sexi* of the 1970s and 1980s.

In the episode entitled *Il Povero Soldato* Tognazzi plays a Lombard soldier who comes to Rome when he is informed that his sister has been murdered. At this point, a series of clues have clarified that his sister was making her living as a prostitute and that she had rich and famous clients. Tognazzi characterises the soldier with a heavy Lombard accent and we are led to believe that he is an ignorant, a simple man who does not know what his sister did for a living. He reads a series of numbers from his sister's diary, which he has removed from the scene of the crime, and seemingly does not understand what they indicate: "Twenty-five thousand... this must be the telephone number..."⁶⁵ However, in this instance the filmmakers are not repeating the folkloric operation seen in *Pane, Amore e Fantasia* and in most Italian comedic forms of the 1950s. In the episode's twist we find out that the soldier has perfectly realised his sister's profession and that his goal is that of obtaining a large sum of money in exchange for his sister's private diary, which allegedly contains the names of all her clients, many of whom are politicians. "Let's cut to the chase" - he says to a journalist - "are you going to give me three and a half million? Otherwise I'll take it to the *Giornale d'Italia!*"⁶⁶ It is not the filmmakers who are using a regional variety to give to this character a backward connotation, it is the character himself who has exaggerated his dialectal accent in order to appear *backward* to his interlocutors, in other words to feign cluelessness and concern for his family's reputation while proposing an illicit deal. Very much as was the case with Sordi's formal Italian used as a social mask of integration, in this episode *dialectal duality* indicates an increasing awareness of the 'otherness' implicit in the concept of "Italian" and of the expectations language and accents instil in the social audience, although here it is used in reverse as it were.

In the two episodes of *I Mostri* I discussed earlier and in others such as *La Giornata dell'Onorevole*, the audience is not encouraged to laugh at the expense of the regional varieties of Italian or at the ignorance they signify in a given character. Even though there are episodes within the film that still operate this way, such as *La Musa* and *Che Vitaccia!*, the subversion of clichéd expectations determined by

⁶⁵ "Ventizinchemila... questo deve da esser el numér de telefono..."

⁶⁶ "Inzoma, me li date 'sti tre miglioni e mézo" "altrimenti ze lo porto al Zornale d'Itaglia, ze lo porto!"

linguistic variety in a consistent number of episodes of Risi's film is an indicator of a more subtle narrative approach to the use of language in the comedy Italian style genre in comparison to previous comedic forms such as farce and pink neorealism and a resumed proposition of neorealism's suggestion of the notion of a 'fractured' national identity from a satirical perspective.

Going back to this notion, Brunetta has written that

starting with Rossellini's cinema, and throughout the whole of Italian cinema in its artistic *but mostly in its popular forms* [my emphasis], in its ability to follow closely the small transformations and changes both in material terms and in terms of collective imagination for the period of two decades, one can identify a progressive process of discovery of the 'other', a continuous and positive widening of the sense of belonging, the acceptance of diversity as a fundamental instigator of the progress and growth of the country (*Ricerca dell'Identità* 20).⁶⁷

One should take into account Brunetta's statement on the centrality of popular forms in this process, consider how linguistic variety in popular forms such as farce and pink neorealism, as I have previously shown, did not encourage "acceptance of diversity" but rather the ridiculing of it and therefore conclude that comedy Italian style fulfilled a primary role in the continuous "discovery of the other" that the Italian audience has been subjected to in those two decades as well as in the consolidation of the notion of the identity of the post-war Italian proposed by original neorealism.

It has been repeatedly stated that comedy Italian style, side by side with television programming, contributed to finally establishing a conversational and informal brand of Italian, a spoken rather than literary language that expanded to the point of being understood and often also adopted throughout the whole peninsula by

⁶⁷ "A partire dal cinema di Rossellini, e attraversando tutto il cinema italiano nelle sue forme alte e soprattutto popolari, nella sua capacità di stringere da presso le microtrasformazioni e le modifiche materiali e dell'immaginazione collettiva lungo un arco di due decenni, si può vedere un gigantesco processo di scoperta dell'altro, l'allargarsi progressivo e positivo della percezione di appartenenza, l'accettazione della varietà come molla dello sviluppo e della crescita del paese."

the juxtaposition of unitary Italian and the Roman regional variety in the majority of its films.⁶⁸ Tullio De Mauro has written that

while it contributed to limiting the use of actual 'dialetti', Italian cinema encouraged the development of a popular unitary variety of Italian and at the same time put such variety into practice: the 'Romanesco', what is left of the old 'dialetto' of Rome, tinted with a number of Southern expressions, has been and is used in the cinema to shape popular products or products with a popular aim (*Storia Linguistica* 124).⁶⁹

Going back to Sordi's practice of *dialectal duality* and the progressive adoption of this linguistic solution on the part of other performers such as Nino Manfredi, Vittorio Gassman, Marcello Mastroianni and Monica Vitti, and considering the massive popularity of the comedies Italian style they starred in, the centrality of the genre in this process is clear. Sergio Raffaelli goes beyond De Mauro's statement, singling out comedy Italian style among the popular cinema forms which had an effect on the use of Italian language by asserting that

the somewhat mimetic adoption of such an Italian marked by mostly phonetic, but partly also syntactical and lexical traits, which was then being established as a national code in private and sometimes public expression, represents *the most important linguistic innovation of the history of Italian*

⁶⁸ For example, Carpitella, De Mauro and Raffaelli subscribe to this view in their discussion in Napolitano's collection *Commedia all'Italiana: Angolazioni e Controcampi*. This form of Italian has been named "Italiano neo-standard", this expression indicating a language in which "constructions, forms that were not featured in the canon accepted by grammar manuals or that, if they were mentioned, they were addressed as forms of popular, vulgar or regional speech, and had to thus being avoided when speaking or writing" (in the original: "costrutti, forme e realizzazioni che non erano presentate nel canone ammesso dalle grammatiche e dai manuali, o che, quando vi erano men-zionate, lo venivano quali costrutti, forme e realizzazioni del linguaggio popolare o familiare o volgare, oppure regionali, e quindi da evitare nel ben parlare e scrivere") (Berruto 62).

⁶⁹ "Col contribuire a circoscrivere l'uso dei dialetti, il cinema italiano ha creato per dir così il posto allo sviluppo d'una varietà popolare unitaria di italiano; nello stesso tempo, ha cominciato a porre in essere tale varietà: il 'romanesco' del Novecento, quello che resta del vecchio dialetto di Roma, fortemente venato di meridiolanismi, è stato ed è sempre più largamente adoperato dal cinema per dare forma a contenuti popolari o popolareggianti."

cinema [my emphasis]. [...] Such a form of Italian, ever and less stiff and repetitive, was initially established in that bittersweet satirical mode of production known as comedy Italian style which expressed not only the reality it represented but also its language (*Cinema in Cerca della Lingua* 329).⁷⁰

Even though it limited the use of actual 'dialetti', as neorealism did with the exception of *La Terra Trema*, for the sake of audience understanding and popularity, comedy Italian style participated in the integration of their intermediate forms, the regional varieties, within a means of communication that operated on a national scale and therefore overcame the dichotomy between *purist myth* and *populist myth* that informed Italian cultural and socio-political history from the unification of the country up until the 1960s and mostly during Fascism.

In light of this consideration one can understand De Mauro's assessment of comedy Italian style being a factor in "a process of growth [...] of our national linguistic self-awareness, meaning the acquisition of the ability of speaking Italian but also the acquisition of the right to speak in reasonably varied ways and to preserve dialectal traditions" (in Carpitella, De Mauro and Raffaelli 169).⁷¹ This "linguistic self-awareness" went hand in hand with an awareness of the 'fractured' nature of Italian post-war national identity, as I shall now discuss in the analysis of comedy Italian style's mirroring of *Paisà's plurilinguism*, Rossellini's linguistic device for the establishment of such a notion in the post-war period.

Age and Scarpelli and the renewal of *plurilinguism*

⁷⁰ "L'impiego in certo grado mimetico di quell'italiano segnato da tratti soprattutto fonetici, ma anche morfosintattici e lessicali di matrice dialettale, che stava allora imponendosi come codice nazionale di comunicazione individuale e talora collettiva, con il sostegno della radio e soprattutto della televisione, cosistui l'innovazione più importante di tutta la storia linguistica del cinema italiano. [...] Tale forma d'italiano, sempre meno anchilosato e ripetitivo, cominciò a imporsi dapprima in quella produzione agrodolce di costume detta commedia all'italiana, che della realtà rappresentata assunse anche il linguaggio."

⁷¹ "Partecipazione positiva a un processo di crescita [...] della coscienza linguistica nazionale, nel senso dell'acquisizione dell'italiano ma anche dell'acquisizione del diritto a parlare in modo ragionevolmente differenziato e a salvare le tradizioni dialettali."

Mario Monicelli's *I Soliti Ignoti* is considered the first 'proper' comedy Italian style and one of the many reasons why I agree with this assertion is the fact that it represents a landmark in terms of the use of language in the context of Italian comedic film production.⁷² In this film a group of thieves from different regional backgrounds living in the "borgate", the outskirts of Rome, unite and scheme together, in an attempt to rob a pawnbroker's shop. The regional varieties featured in the film are Neapolitan, Bolognese, Sicilian and of course Roman. Sebastiano Mondadori notes that "the success [of these new characters] depends on the play on 'dialetti' combined in a polyphony which had never been seen before with the exception of *Paisà* and this analogy underlines the fact that the film descends from neorealism" (28).⁷³ First of all it should be noted how this presence of multiple regional varieties at the same time is an index of the filmmakers' intention of replicating in realist terms the historical phenomenon of internal immigration within the film's narrative. Another consideration that should be made is that, unlike what happened in *Pane, Amore e Fantasia* in which only the most stereotypical attributes of regional varieties were used to express stereotypical characters such as the romantic Neapolitan, the passionate rural girl, the rough Roman and the shy Venetian, the presence of multiple regional varieties in *I Soliti Ignoti* acquires an entire different level of authenticity. The screenwriters Age and Scarpelli, who without doubt had specialised in the field of linguistic innovation more than all the other comedy Italian style filmmakers, continued the practice of replicating professional and specialised forms of language which they had learned from their neorealist mentor Sergio Amidei. Director Mario Monicelli remembered how the dialogues in the film were the result of first hand research: "We went looking for these groups of small time thieves specialised in robberies, mostly compulsive liars who told us fairy tales of extraordinary expeditions. [...] We started making the

⁷² I use the expression 'proper' because the genre's historical canon is widely considered to begin in 1958 with the release of this film. A number of earlier films, such as the series of films starring Sordi and written by Sonego featuring the type of the 'average Italian' might be considered as "commedie all'italiana ante-litteram" and therefore the considerations made, for example, on the use of *dialectal duality* in the genre are also valuable in the case of these films, even though they were made before 1958.

⁷³ "Cambiano infine i personaggi, la cui riuscita deve molto al gioco dei dialetti in una polifonia inedita - fatta eccezione per *Paisà* di Rossellini, a sottolineare la discendenza dal neorealismo."

characters speak in a way that was more faithful to reality” (in Mondadori 28-29).⁷⁴ The use of technical terms typical of petty crime such as ‘sgobbo’, ‘madama’, ‘comare’, and ‘pecora’ that the characters of the thieves use to instruct and coordinate each other reinforce the idea of a community formed by a series of regional entities who migrated to Rome in the hope of being integrated within the Economic Miracle and are instead confined to the ‘borgate’, the outskirts of the city, a community that is in the process of its inevitable linguistic integration for the sake of survival.⁷⁵

In this sense the film is perfectly representative of the notion of ‘fractured’ national identity, as well as being a faithful dramatisation of the historical process of re-composition of such a fracture, the smoothing of the multi-faceted crystal to go back to my metaphor, and, as a popular artefact that gained immense success, a fundamental stage in the “process of growth of linguistic self-awareness”, in other words a significant factor in the resolution of the dichotomy between the *purist myth* and the *populist myth* of ‘dialetto’. This linguistic operation is repeated many times by Age and Scarpelli, whose recurring narrative theme of a group of losers uniting in a task that is beyond their capabilities is perfectly wedded to the practice of *plurilinguism* and the notion of ‘fractured’ national identity discussed above. Nanni Loy’s *Audace Colpo dei Soliti Ignoti*, the 1960 sequel to Monicelli’s film, also written by Age and Scarpelli, for example re-affirms the notion by contrasting the ineffectiveness of the mostly Southern characters from the first film with the calculating rationality of a group of Milanese gangsters who hire them to assault a van transporting lottery ticket revenues. The opinion the Milanese have of the Southerners and Romans in particular is informed by stereotypes of laziness and disorganisation, a cliché that evokes Gramscian notions on the propaganda disseminated in the North which influenced the ‘Southern Question’ and that the filmmakers to some extent subvert by having the Milanese thieves arrested while the ‘veterans’ from the first film do actually manage to get hold of the money.

⁷⁴ “Siamo andati a cercare queste bande di ladruncoli specializzati in *sgobbi*. Perlopiù gran ballisti che favoleggiavano di colpi straordinari. [...] Cominciammo a far parlare i personaggi con maggiore aderenza alla realtà.”

⁷⁵ “Sgobbo” is the equivalent of “job” used with criminal undertones as in “The Italian Job”. “Madama” signifies “police car”, “pecora”, literally sheep, is the scapegoat and “comare” is the much sought-after safe.

In light of this further discourse on plurilinguism it is appropriate to return to the considerations made in Chapter Four with regards to the function of language in Monicelli's *La Grande Guerra*, which was also written by Age and Scarpelli. As previously noted, in it the different regional varieties that mirror linguistic diversity within the Italian army during World War I articulate a discourse of the Gramscian type concerning the understanding of the Risorgimento and the notion of the role of culture and education in the establishment or maintenance of socio-economic and political hegemonies. In terms of narrative uses of language in comedy Italian style, *La Grande Guerra* certainly represents one of the most sophisticated examples of this practice. For example, the two protagonists are captured by the Austrians at the end of the film, and subsequently executed, because Jacovacci mistakes the German he hears being spoken next door for 'bergamasco', a northern Italian dialect, and thus does not refrain from talking loudly to Busacca and telling him that some of his peasants must have shown up. If the difficulties of communication between the soldiers described in the film are an index of the Gramscian cultural conception, it can also be said that Age and Scarpelli are here revisiting the first site of linguistic integration for many Italians belonging to different local areas, the first instance in which they were confronted with the 'other', the first glimpse of awareness of the fracture among them. The implicit parallelism between the situation in the historical period in which the narrative of the film is set and the time in which the film was produced, the eve of the 1960s, is an act of denunciation of the failure of the monolithic Fascist 'fiction', to the point that the fracture it proposed to re-compose in a coercive fashion in the 1920s is still, the audience is reminded, in some way present. This accusation, of course, replicates in satirical fashion, the identical understanding initially unveiled by post-war neorealism.

The impression that the comedy Italian style filmmakers, and Age and Scarpelli in particular, want to propose the notion of 'fractured' national identity as a positive element of self-awareness, like the neorealists did before them, through historical operations such as the one featured in *La Grande Guerra* is confirmed by two films directed by Monicelli set in the Middle Ages, *L'Armata Brancaleone* (1966) and *Brancaleone alle Crociate* (1970). Even though it would be hard to describe these two films as realist or particularly indicative of tensions within contemporary Italian

society, as they are period pieces which (especially the second) sometimes even allow fantasy elements of super-natural to emerge, they are films that are extremely sophisticated on the linguistic level.⁷⁶ Age, Scarpelli and Monicelli devised for them an invented medieval Italian lingo in which the “*volgare*” of Dante and other thirteenth century writers such as Cecco Angiolieri and Jacopone da Todi blended with Latin forms as well as some dialectal expressions which were still in use in the 1960s. This procedure not only proves the often underestimated cultural background of these filmmakers, since as Mondadori notes, they are capable of quoting “Pulci’s *Morgante*, the burlesque sonnets of Burchiello and Fiorenzuola, especially Teofilo Folengo’s *Baldus* and the *Opus Macaronicum* and sources derived from Muratori’s *Rerum Italicum Scriptores*” (118),⁷⁷ and the highly sophisticated level of their craft, but also goes hand in hand with the historical setting in which the division of the peninsula into multiple local entities has taken place, the ‘fracture’, as it were. One can easily draw a parallel between the aftermath of the collapse of the Roman Empire represented by the Middle Ages of these films and the aftermath of the collapse of the project of empire represented by Fascism which is post-war Italy. The articulated linguistic *mélange* devised by the filmmakers, however, is not indiscriminate and all-encompassing, as we can still distinguish the characters’ regional distinctions in their speech between the Ostrogoth-Lombard, the Byzantine-Ravennate and the Jewish merchant speaking in the idiom of the Roman *ghetto*. These distinctions reinforce the idea of fracture being an intrinsic attribute of the Italian notion of national identity: expressions such as “*trapassate lo cavalcone in fila longobarda*”,⁷⁸ “*non sarai mondo*

⁷⁶ The presence of fantasy elements in a restricted number of commedie all’italiana such as *Brancaleone alle Crociate* or Pietrangeli’s *Fantasma a Roma* (1961) does not negate the genre’s relationship with *neorealismo*, as this mode of production also featured films like De Sica’s *Miracolo a Milano* and Rossellini’s *La Macchina Ammazza-Cattivi*, which featured the blending of social reality and the fantastic.

⁷⁷ “[*Si citano*] il Pulci del *Morgante*, i sonetti burleschi del Burchiello, Fiorenzuola, soprattutto Teofilo Folengo con il *Baldus* e l’*Opus Macaronicum*, oltre alle fonti desunte dal *Rerum Italicum Scriptores* di Muratori.”

⁷⁸ Here the filmmakers play with the verb “*trapassare*” in its archaic meaning of “crossing”, “*attraversare*” even though its current use is more similar to “puncture” or “penetrate” and with the saying “*in fila indiana*”, “*in an indian file*” being a figure of speech signifying in a single file. The substitution of “*indian*”, a concept that obviously did not exist in the Middle Ages, with “*longobard*” provokes comedic relief.

se non monderai lo mondo”,⁷⁹ “tenevamo uno serpe in pectore”⁸⁰ are not simple instances of exploiting the formal mannerisms of the unitary literary language through a character typified as illiterate, as was the case of Totò's 'pinzillacchere' in the *farse*, but have the function of unveiling the intrinsic need of Italians to hide the 'other' within them behind an epic and rhetoric mask, the “let us not show who we truly are” sensibility that inevitably ends up distinguishing 'us'.

In this way, even though they put on screen an almost entirely invented language which is totally absent from current everyday use, *L'Armata Brancaleone* and *Brancaleone alle Crociate* can be considered as the ultimate examples of the functions that *plurilinguism* comes to acquire in its renewal on the part of Age and Scarpelli, that of progressive awareness of the 'fractured' nature intrinsic in the notion of 'Italian', of familiarising the audience with the 'other', thus encouraging a progressive reduction of distances between the many 'others' that compose the national whole and, most importantly, that of overcoming through laughter and comedic relief that sense of shame that one's hidden being 'other', one's divergence from the monolithic version of national identity imposed by Fascism, initially instilled. In other words, Age and Scarpelli's renewal of *plurilinguism* in a comedic tone had the effect of completing, through an intelligent and anything but degrading use of multiple regional varieties or even of archaic literary forms, that process of “linguistic self-awareness” initiated by Rossellini which was instrumental to a discourse concerning 'Italian' national identity.

In conclusion, expanding an argument made by Gian Piero Brunetta, I have identified a parallel between the use of regional varieties of Italian, and of an actual 'dialetto' in the case of Visconti's *La Terra Trema*, in post-war neorealism and the notion of 'fractured' national identity as a result of the collapse of the Fascist regime. In this view language, other than being informed by production necessities and realist ambitions, acquired the status of a narrative element. I have shown how, with the

⁷⁹ The pun plays on the repetition of 'mondo' three times, both as archaic verbal and adjectival form of “to cleanse” and the contemporary meaning “world” and thus means: “You will not be cleansed, unless you will cleanse the world!”

⁸⁰ “We held a snake in our bosom!” meaning “there was a traitor among us”. The Italian figure of speech “serpe in seno” is substituted with the Latin “serpe *in pectore*”.

practice of *dialectal duality* established with Alberto Sordi's type of the 'average Italian' and the re-propositioning of this practice in the majority of the films of the genre, language in comedy Italian style once again acquired a similar narrative function and contributed, albeit from a satirical perspective, to the same social discourse. Through these films and mostly thanks to the renewal of Rossellini's *plurilinguism* on the part of screenwriters Age and Scarpelli, comedy Italian style contributed at the same time to establishing the Roman regional variety as an informal means of communication on the national scale as well as to developing a "linguistic self-awareness" which was instrumental in the acceptance of the peculiar Italian notion of national identity. In opposition to the folkloric use that regional varieties were relegated to in the case of the intermediate comedic forms of the 1950s farce and pink neorealism, this similarity in the uses of and the functions they acquired in both neorealism and comedy Italian style proves the continuity between these two cinematic forms and the latter's conscious continuation of the most innovative instances of the former.

Conclusion

In this dissertation I have analysed the relationship existing between the cinematic mode of production prominent in Italy at the end of World War II known as neorealism and the comedic genre labelled comedy Italian style, which flourished between 1958 and the late 1970s. Even though the notion of such relationship between these two forms has been circulating, in academic research or in monographs dedicated to filmmakers, I considered the lack of a specific study dedicated to this relationship an unusual fact and in this dissertation I intended to fill this gap. The relationship between neorealism and comedy Italian style has often been considered that of a progressive dilution of the former engaged mode of production into an entertaining off-spin, intermediate forms such as pink neorealism and farce being middle steps in this process. My research has challenged this view, re-contextualising the relationship between neorealism and comedy Italian style as one of the evolution of the former into the latter, a Darwinian process by which the neorealist mode of production maintained some of its most innovative instances and acquired new attributes which secured its survival in a new, immensely popular form, thus resolving the lack of commercial appeal that initially threatened its survival, its economic feasibility as a viable production model. In the process, this study also redefined the pink neorealism and farce, forms that, despite being chronologically closer to post-war neorealism than comedy Italian style, were revealed as being more distant in structural terms from Rossellini and De Sica's neorealisms than the comedies Italian style.

I believe that, other than encouraging more study in the field of the historical canon of Italian post-war cinema and a more critical and less obsequious analysis of the different types of Italian cinematic comedy, the work I have produced offers an interesting and replicable model of analysis of the relations existing between cinematic forms that are widely recognised to be artistic products, high culture as it were, and cinematic forms that are considered mostly in terms of their commercial potential. These two broad areas of filmmaking are constantly studied as separate entities, remote from one another, when actually they often participate, as products of the same cultural and commercial industry, in symbiosis together, sharing talent,

productive resources and, most importantly, attempting to reach, with differing results, the same audience. I hope this research will encourage more work in this direction. For instance, a similar analysis could be made of the relationship between the British social realist movement associated with the production of directors acclaimed as artists such as Ken Loach, Mike Leigh and the commercially successful wave of British comedies produced in the late 1990s that revisit the same working class context such as Peter Cattaneo's *The Full Monty* (1997) and Stephen Daldry's *Billy Elliot* (2000).

I chose to articulate this dissertation into five main chapters that reflect the five areas of the relationship between neorealism and comedy Italian style which, at this stage, I consider most significant and more worthy of analysis. These chapters respond to different needs of the central argument of this research. Chapter One, in which I identified non-classical narrative strategies as one of the most innovative and defining aspects of neorealism and have proved their presence in comedy Italian style, proceeds following the principle of *inheritance*: if one aspect identifies *neorealism's* break from mainstream cinema and comedy Italian style is the only instance of Italian mainstream cinema reflecting this aspect, this similarity must be an index of the continuity between these two cinematic forms. In the light of the continuity thus highlighted and proved in Chapter One, Chapters Two and Three also emphasise similarities between the two forms, but arising from a different need, that of *problem-solving*. They examine two problems which, historically, have undermined the critical understanding of comedy Italian style's continuity with neorealism, two possible obstacles in the articulation of the main argument, namely the apparent discrepancy between neorealism's use of non-professional actors and comedy Italian style's star system and the supposed lack of engagement in the latter, and show the inaccuracy of these possible, and in fact existing, objections. Whereas the first three chapters analyse homogeneity as a principle of the continuity between these two cinematic forms, Chapter Four takes the next step, as it were, arguing that the passage from neorealism to comedy Italian style should not only be considered an evolution because of *modifications made in the context of natural selection*, it granting financial survival of the most innovative instances of the former, but should also be an evolution in light of the persistence of similar attributes combined with some modifications that were the result of an updated conception of culture and of the

role of cultural products such as films themselves, thus applying the evolutionary principle of *modifications due to differing environments*. The analysis of the replacement of a ‘Crocean interpretation’ of Italian history and society with one informed by the cultural weight of the dissemination of Gramsci’s writings in the 1960s, thus, should not be taken as an instance of discontinuity between the two forms, but rather as an investigation of how the same methodology on the part of both cinematic forms, that of engaging with issues of contemporary Italian social reality without descending into propaganda, was renewed and revitalised in the passage from neorealism to comedy Italian style by the coming into contact with new concepts that were beyond cinematic specificity. In other words, whereas the first three chapters are concerned with continuity, Chapter Four reflects a *development*, that does not signify discontinuity nor overall transformation or change of intent, but rather an adaptation in the evolutionary process to the updated cultural context. Chapter Five, in which I analyse the role of language and in particular of regional varieties of Italian in both cinematic forms, also reflects the notion of *inheritance* but to some extent marries it with instances raised in Chapter Four by approaching the notion of comedy Italian style’s active role in changing the habits and perception of Italians in the years of the Economic Miracle. In other words, whereas Chapter Three analyses continuity between neorealism and comedy Italian style in their *response* to Italian society, Chapter Five to some extent analyses also continuity in their contribution in *forming* Italian society, their *offering* to Italian society as it were. This alternation of the analytical principles of *inheritance* between the two forms, of a *modification* of the ethical approach of one form in a different cultural context in the case of the other and of *problem solving* with reference to supposed critical obstacles to the main argument, I believe, appropriately serve the notion of comedy Italian style as an evolution of neorealism.

I will now discuss possible avenues opened by this research, facets of its main argument I could not cover in this dissertation. In the same way in which I re-contextualised the comedy Italian style genre in the light of its relationship with neorealism and have discussed the comedic forms that preceded it, one could analyse through this new conception of comedy Italian style as an evolution of neorealism the Italian comedic forms that have succeeded it. I have articulated a discourse on the establishment of the historical canon of the comedy Italian style genre bound to its

relation to neorealism. In the same way the end of this canon could be rediscussed as the abandonment of realist strategies. In the existing literature on the genre, its demise at the end of the 1970s has been related to a generational turnover between the generation of Sordi, Gassman, Tognazzi, Monicelli, Risi, etc. and that of Benigni, Troisi and Verdone. In a more general discourse concerning the Italian cinema industry, comedy Italian style's crisis has also been contextualised in relation to the falling off of attendance at the cinema in the country in the 1970s and, therefore, the overwhelming competition offered by commercial television networks that changed the ways in which Italians used their spare time. These aspects certainly had an important weight in the demise of comedy Italian style. However, Italy continued to produce comedic films which are generally always more successful than their dramatic counterparts. The issue which should be investigated, therefore, is 'why are the comedic films produced after the 1970s in most cases simple "*commedie italiane*", instead of "*commedie all'italiana*", or comedies Italian style?' In the light of this thesis, one may answer that these more recent comedies cannot be considered comedies Italian style anymore because of the progressive detachment of both the ageing filmmakers of the 1960s and the new generations of comedians from post-war neorealism. By individuating which historical, economic and social factors from within the specific of the Italian cinema industry and outside of it have determined this detachment, one that encouraged the proliferation of sequels and a return to physical humour, is a task that would shed light on the functioning of the productive patterns within Italian comedic cinema which seems to be typified by a constant alternation of realist and non-realist waves: the primitive slapstick of the 1910s and 1920s, followed by the to some extent realist urban comedies of Camerini in the early 1930s. The latter were overtaken by the production of the 'white telephone' comedies of the Fascist regime that were then challenged by dialectal comedies and some more or less comedic films belonging to post-war neorealism such as Luigi Zampa's; in the 1950s the structural innovations of neorealism are dismissed by the farces and pink neorealist comedies that only focus on its iconographic aspects, while, conversely, those innovations are picked up by comedy Italian style in the 1960s and 1970s. The "*nuovi comici*", ultimately, depart from the realist instances of comedy Italian style.¹

¹ One can think of Benigni and Troisi's physical humour in films such as *Non ci Resta che Piangere* (1985), that appropriately features a time-travelling narrative, a staple of non-realist comedies.

One, however, does not have to expand the historical boundaries examined in this dissertation in order to pick up on its propositions. In the same way I have isolated five notions concerning neorealism and have questioned their continuity and resilience within the comedy Italian style genre, someone, and it might be myself in the near future, could repeat this operation by discussing other notions which have been raised on the post-war mode of production. Mark Shiel, for instance, has given a reading of neorealism as a mode of production that was mainly informed by a new conception of the Italian landscape, in particular the urban setting:

What began immediately after the war as a way of thinking about the war and its material, psychic and social consequences gradually evolved into a way of thinking about the material, psychic and social character of peacetime society, especially in relation to urban modernity which became the default mode of existence for more and more Italians as the 1950s progressed (15).

In Shiel's view one of the main innovations of neorealism is, therefore, its investigation of the post-war urban crisis, of the peculiar intermedial state of Italian cities between antiquity and modernity in this moment in history and the relationship between the protagonists of the films and this urban milieu. Since comedy Italian style was also heavily bound to urban setting, mostly Rome during the Economic Miracle, and in fact testified to the re-definition of these urban spaces, their progressive reconstruction and, in some cases, their transfiguration, a significant level of analysis of the notion of neorealism's evolution into comedy Italian style could be the study of both forms in relation to landscape.²

Similarly the popular *Fantozzi* series, starring Paolo Villaggio, takes comedy Italian style's criticism of consumer capitalism into the realm of the absurd, its protagonist surviving incredible accidents in cartoon fashion.

² Mino Argentieri, for instance, addresses the continuity in De Sica's investigation of the urban space between his neorealist and his comedy Italian style phases writing that

the city is a palette of sounds, voices, colours, a human and material horizon that, if not always at the centre of his films, emerges all of a sudden. [...] It is so in *Il Tetto*, in which De Sica regains the spatiality of *Ladri di Biciclette* and *Umberto D.* and it is so also in *Il Boom*, in which the changes introduced by the Economic Miracle are not only suggested in the changing habits and mentality of the middle class by its

Another interesting analytical operation could be that of comparing the film adaptations of literary works produced in the context of post-war neorealism, such as *The Postman Always Rings Twice* by James M. Cain that Visconti adapted into *Ossessione*, Visconti's peculiar re-writing of Verga's *I Malavoglia* in *La Terra Trema* or *Ladri di Biciclette* that, it is often forgotten, was originally a short novel by Luigi Bartolini, and those produced within the comedy Italian style genre, such as Carlo Lizzani's adaptation of Luciano Bianciardi's novel *La Vita Agra* and Elio Petri's adaptation of Luciano Mastronardi's *Il Maestro di Vigevano*, not to mention Vincenzo Cerami's *Un Borghese Piccolo Piccolo*, adapted by Monicelli in 1977, and the plethora of literary influences converging in the screenplay of *La Grande Guerra*. Comparing the approaches to adaptation of literary texts in the case of all of these works would, I believe, constitute an interesting discourse concerning instances of continuity between neorealism and comedy Italian style in the area of both forms' relationship with literature and, therefore, with the broader spectrum of Italian culture altogether. Even though I have focused here on the cinematic specificity of post-war neorealism, as mine is primarily the approach of a film scholar, the important role played by literary realist forms such as the *verismo* of Verga or the American realist novels by John Steinbeck as its inspirations have often been discussed. It should not be forgotten that in the post-war years neorealism also had a literary counterpart. Further examination of the relationship between comedy Italian style and Italian literature, especially the novels of the 1950s and 1960s that tried to offer an account of the phenomenon of the Economic Miracle, could offer interesting ideas concerning its relationship with neorealism itself.

everyday life, but also symbolised by the skeletons of the new buildings rising from the ground (63).

(In the original: "La città è una tavolozza di suoni, voci e colori, un'orizzonte umano e material che, se non sarà al centro dei suoi film, emergerà da scorsi improvvisi; [...] è così in *Il Tetto*, ove De Sica riguadagna l'ariosità di *Ladri di Biciclette* e *Umberto D.*, ma lo è anche in *Il Boom*, in cui le modificazioni introdotte dal miracolo economico non sono suggerite soltanto da un costume e da una mentalità che cambiano nella borghesia e nei suoi comportamenti quotidiani, ma sono anche simboleggiate dagli scheletri delle nuove abitazioni che si alzano da terra.)

Last but not least, a reading of the continuity between neorealism and comedy Italian style in terms of gender studies could complement some areas of this thesis, such as the discussion of the stardom of the comedy Italian style genre and the notion of an articulation of the concept of Italian national identity discussed in Chapter Five. If Maggie Gunsberg offered a very interesting account of the role of gender in the comedy Italian style in her *Italian Cinema: Gender and Genre* volume, one that finally went beyond the widespread preconception that comedy Italian style is simply informed by a general misogyny on the part of its filmmakers, it is an account that focuses primarily on the changing gender dynamics taking place within the Economic Miracle society and how the comedies reflected these new societal pressures. What I believe could represent an appropriate continuation of this study is expanding Gunsberg's considerations with greater emphasis on the possible continuity between gender dynamics in post-war neorealist films and in the comedies of the 1960s and 1970s. A number of varying considerations have been made on gender in neorealism, such as Laura E. Ruberto's notion that "Italian neorealism includes a little talked about tendency to rely on what can be called a male-male bond, usually with at least one young *boy* involved and always at the expense of positive representations of female characters" (*Neorealism and Contemporary European Immigration* 248-249) and that this trend informs an implicit suggestion in neorealist films of "masculinity generally becom[ing] that on which a country depends for rebuilding itself after the war. Likewise, women, girls, and femininity generally remain secondary actors in the building of that same society." On the other side, Lucilla Albano has written in reference to Marco Ferreri's comedy Italian style *L'Ape Regina: Una Storia Moderna* (1963) that "rather than the paradoxical satire [...] of middle class conformism, its objective is that of an apologue, an exemplary account, of the crisis of the Latin male" (171)³ and Gian Piero Brunetta has (somewhat shockingly, since Italian comedic production has been constantly dominated by male comedians) written that

since the 1950s onwards it is the woman who is the protagonist of comedy [*Italian style*], the emerging subject who embarks on a conquest of society, strongly supported by some myths promoted by the mass media and other

³ "[...] Nè il suo obiettivo principale ci pare essere la satira 'paradossale' [...] nei confronti del conformismo, sempre borghese, quanto un apologo, un racconto esemplare, sulla fine del maschio latino."

myths which she attempts to experience and reproduce on a smaller scale (*I Mostri e gli Altri Animali* 23-24).⁴

Are these considerations all-encompassing? Is there a shift in neorealism's evolution into comedy Italian style from a greater emphasis on males in the former and on females in the latter? If so, taking into account Deleuze's notions concerning the inability of *time-image* characters in post-war neorealism to effectively put in motion a transformation of the world they inhabit, is the journey from neorealism to the comedy Italian style genre not ultimately typified by the ineffectiveness of masculinity's attempts at rebuilding the country after the war? By their progressive negative characterisation in the Economic Miracle comedies Italian style? Is the Italian cinema of the reconstruction and of the 'boom' ultimately a critique, as it were, of Italian males' passive acceptance of the reinstatement of old forms of power with the advent of capitalism? Answering such questions would expand the notion of the relationship between these two cinematic forms in areas I cannot at present cover myself.

⁴ “[...] è soprattutto la donna la protagonista della commedia fin dagli anni Cinquanta, il soggetto emergente che parte alla conquista del sociale, forte dell'appoggio di alcuni miti diffuse dai mass-media e di alcuni miti che cerca di vivere e riprodurre in forme più ridotte.”

Appendices

Box Office Results of Neorealist Films (1945-1954)

Year of Release	Title	Director	Original Takings (in Liras)	Takings Calibrated for 2001 (in Liras)
1945	<i>Roma Città Aperta</i>	Rossellini	162,000,000	9,328,915,800
1945	<i>Giorni di Gloria</i>	Serandrei	28,820,000	1,659,625,638
1945	<i>Il Testimone</i>	Germi	19,060,000	1,097,587,254
1946	<i>Il Bandito</i>	Lattuada	184,000,000	8,978,059,200
1946	<i>Paisà</i>	Rossellini	100,300,000	4,894,018,140
1946	<i>Sciuscià</i>	De Sica	55,600,000	2,712,935,280
1946	<i>Le Miserie del Signor Travet</i>	Soldati	44,540,000	2,173,275,852
1946	<i>Roma Città Libera</i>	Pagliero	13,700,000	668,475,060
1947	<i>L'Onorevole Angelina</i>	Zampa	264,000,000	7,948,591,200
1947	<i>Vivere in Pace</i>	Zampa	129,600,000	3,902,035,680
1947	<i>Caccia Tragica</i>	De Santis	79,900,000	2,405,653,170
1947	<i>Il Delitto di Giovanni Episcopo</i>	Lattuada	73,500,000	2,212,960,050
1948	<i>Anni Difficili</i>	Zampa	294,600,000	8,377,304,520
1948	<i>Ladri di Biciclette</i>	De Sica	252,000,000	7,165,922,400
1948	<i>Fuga in Francia</i>	Soldati	84,000,000	2,388,640,800
1948	<i>Germania Anno Zero</i>	Rossellini	49,600,000	1,410,435,520

1948	<i>La Terra Trema: Episodio del Mare</i>	Visconti	35,800,000	1,018,015,960
1948	<i>L'Amore</i>	Rossellini	34,400,000	978,205,280
1949	<i>Il Cielo sulla Palude</i>	Genina	443,000,000	12,415,296,500
1949	<i>Riso Amaro</i>	De Santis	442,000,000	12,387,271,000
1949	<i>In Nome della Legge</i>	Germi	401,000,000	11,238,225,500
1949	<i>Il Mulino del Po</i>	Lattuada	280,200,000	7,852,745,100
1950	<i>Non C'È Pace tra gli Ulivi</i>	De Santis	396,000,000	11,249,132,400
1950	<i>Il Cammino della Speranza</i>	Germi	367,800,000	10,448,057,820
1950	<i>Stromboli, Terra di Dio</i>	Rossellini	312,700,000	8,882,837,630
1950	<i>Cronaca di un Amore</i>	Antonioni	175,800,000	4,993,933,020
1950	<i>Francesco, Giullare di Dio</i>	Rossellini	26,800,000	761,304,920
1951	<i>Achtung! Banditi!</i>	Lizzani	249,900,000	6,470,410,800
1951	<i>Miracolo a Milano</i>	De Sica	180,600,000	4,676,095,200
1951	<i>Bellissima</i>	Visconti	152,700,000	3,953,708,400
1951	<i>Luci del Varietà</i>	Fellini & Lattuada	118,400,000	3,065,612,800
1952	<i>Il Brigante di Tacca del Lupo</i>	Germi	378,500,000	9,400,728,800
1952	<i>Roma Ore 11</i>	De Santis	262,300,000	6,514,692,640
1952	<i>Europa '51</i>	Rossellini	223,300,000	5,546,057,440
1952	<i>Umberto D.</i>	De Sica	106,500,000	2,650,998,000

1952	<i>I Vinti</i>	Antonioni	104,200,000	2,587,994,560
1952	<i>Lo Sceicco Bianco</i>	Fellini	33,700,000	838,860,400
1952	<i>La Macchina Ammazzacattivi</i>	Rossellini	5,750,000	143,129,000
1953	<i>I Vitelloni</i>	Fellini	555,000,000	13,521,187,500
1953	<i>Anni Facili</i>	Zampa	401,000,000	9,769,362,500
1953	<i>Stazione Termini</i>	De Sica	343,000,000	8,356,337,500
1953	<i>Un Marito per Anna Zaccheo</i>	De Santis	341,000,000	8,307,612,500
1953	<i>La Signora Senza Camelie</i>	Antonioni	137,500,000	3,349,843,750
1953	<i>L'Amore in Città</i>	Antonioni, Fellini, Lattuada, Lizzani, Maselli, Risi, Zavattini	128,600,000	3,133,017,500
1953	<i>Viaggio in Italia</i>	Rossellini	50,000,000	1,218,125,000
1954	<i>Senso</i>	Visconti	571,000,000	13,546,746,600
1954	<i>La Donna del Fiume</i>	Soldati	547,000,000	12,977,356,200
1954	<i>La Strada</i>	Fellini	430,000,000	10,201,578,000
1954	<i>Giovanna d'Arco al Rogo</i>	Rossellini	18,400,000	436,532,640
1954	<i>La Paura</i>	Rossellini	18,300,000	434,160,180

Total of the takings of neorealist films (1945-1954) calibrated for 2001:
270,653,908,604 Liras

The data concerning the takings of neorealist films was gathered from Callisto Consulich's study 'La Battaglia delle Cifre', originally published in the number 98 issue of *Cinema Nuovo* released on January 15th 1957 and re-published in Aprà and Carabba's *Neorealismo d'Appendice* (84-89), which featured the results of Italian films released between September 1945 and August 1955. From this source, which featured the takings of all Italian films produced in those years, I have isolated 50 neorealist films, thus excluding from the list the pink neorealist comedies and the farces produced in the same period which featured elements of neorealist iconography but cannot be inscribed within the neorealist mode of production on a structural level.

I have used the multipliers provided by the Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) for historical researches in order to calibrate all of the figures to the same parameter. In this respect, having to compare figures from periods as diverse as the mid 1940s and the late 1960s, I have chosen to calibrate both the takings of neorealist films and of the comedies Italian style to 2001, the year in which Italian Liras ceased to exist because of the introduction of the Euro.

Box Office Results of comedies Italian style from 1958 to 1970

Year of Release	Title	Director	Original Takings (in Liras)	Takings Calibrated for 2001 (in Liras)
1958	<i>I Soliti Ignoti</i>	Monicelli	901,562,000	18,554,596,741
1959	<i>La Grande Guerra</i>	Monicelli	1,690,638,000	34,940,246,482
1959	<i>I Due Nemici</i>	Hamilton	1,045,444,000	21,606,086,603
1959	<i>I Magliari</i>	Rosi	552,467,000	11,417,780,242
1959	<i>L'Impiegato</i>	Puccini	507,374,000	10,485,847,720
1959	<i>Il Moralista</i>	Bianchi	485,158,000	10,026,711,870
1959	<i>La Notte Brava</i>	Bolognini	472,399,000	9,763,022,893

1959	<i>Arrangiatevi!</i>	Bolognini	423,663,000	8,755,800,854
1959	<i>Il Vedovo</i>	Risi	394,347,000	8,149,930,014
1960	<i>Tutti a Casa</i>	Comencini	1,153,929,000	23,231,244,806
1960	<i>Il Vigile</i>	Zampa	956,615,000	19,258,860,164
1960	<i>Adua e le Compagne</i>	Pietrangeli	763,313,000	15,367,246,309
1960	<i>Audace Colpo dei Soliti Ignoti</i>	Loy	742,609,000	14,950,427,170
1960	<i>Il Bell'Antonio</i>	Bolognini	610,639,000	12,293,567,539
1960	<i>Il Mattatore</i>	Risi	564,059,000	11,355,805,005
1961	<i>Crimen</i>	Camerini	982,698,000	19,222,064,229
1961	<i>Una Vita Difficile</i>	Risi	921,356,000	18,022,184,038
1961	<i>Il Federale</i>	Salce	812,076,000	15,884,612,598
1961	<i>Il Giudizio Universale</i>	De Sica	525,207,000	10,273,311,523
1961	<i>Il Mantenuto</i>	Tognazzi	361,122,000	7,063,726,881
1961	<i>A Cavallo della Tigre</i>	Comencini	245,390,000	4,799,951,095
1961	<i>Fantasmia a Roma</i>	Pietrangeli	209,190,000	4,091,860,995
1962	<i>Il Sorpasso</i>	Risi	1,264,619,000	23,536,203,594
1962	<i>Divorzio all'italiana</i>	Germi	1,223,356,000	22,768,245,522
1962	<i>Boccaccio '70</i>	De Sica, Fellini, Monicelli & Visconti	1,100,020,000	20,472,802,226
1962	<i>Mafioso</i>	Lattuada	734,835,000	13,676,234,635
1962	<i>Le Quattro Giornate di Napoli</i>	Loy	721,914,000	13,435,758,028

1962	<i>La Marcia su Roma</i>	Risi	683,137,000	12,714,067,648
1962	<i>La Voglia Matta</i>	Salce	561,101,000	10,442,819,041
1962	<i>Il Commissario</i>	Comencini	586,455,000	10,914,689,941
1962	<i>Il Diavolo</i>	Polidoro	509,580,000	9,483,946,254
1962	<i>Gli Anni Ruggenti</i>	Zampa	487,528,000	9,073,529,866
1963	<i>Ieri, Oggi e Domani</i>	De Sica	1,772,224,000	30,677,551,884
1963	<i>La Ragazza di Bube</i>	Comencini	876,289,000	15,168,737,847
1963	<i>L'Ape Regina: una Storia Moderna</i>	Ferreri	871,211,000	15,080,836,652
1963	<i>I Mostri</i>	Risi	745,818,000	12,910,258,743
1963	<i>Il Successo</i>	Risi	715,222,000	12,380,635,864
1963	<i>La Parmigiana</i>	Pietrangeli	563,818,000	9,759,802,343
1963	<i>Il Maestro di Vigevano</i>	Petri	554,315,000	9,595,303,513
1963	<i>Il Boom</i>	De Sica	543,366,000	9,405,774,133
1963	<i>I Compagni</i>	Monicelli	340,028,000	5,885,952,685
1963	<i>La Rimpatriata</i>	Damiani	92,516,000	1,601,470,463
1963	<i>I Basilischi</i>	Wertmüller	64,695,000	1,119,883,389
1964	<i>Matrimonio all'italiana</i>	De Sica	2,237,000,000	36,555,488,100
1964	<i>Il Magnifico Cornuto</i>	Pietrangeli	1,125,856,000	18,397,950,652
1964	<i>La Congiuntura</i>	Scola	969,481,000	15,842,579,865
1964	<i>Sedotta e Abbandonata</i>	Germi	881.395.000	14.403.140.113
1964	<i>Alta Infedeltà</i>	Monicelli	735,354,000	12,016,640,320
1964	<i>Se Permettete Parliamo di Donne</i>	Scola	727,354,000	11,885,909,920

1964	<i>La Mia Signora</i>	Bolognini, Brass & Comencini	680,313,000	11,117,198,826
1964	<i>Il Gaucho</i>	Risi	506,685,000	8,279,891,590
1964	<i>La Vita Agra</i>	Lizzani	322,000,000	5,261,898,600
1964	<i>Il Disco Volante</i>	Brass	272,134,000	4,447,023,334
1964	<i>La Donna Scimmia</i>	Ferreri	180,000,000	2,941,434,000
1964	<i>Controsesso</i>	Castellani, Ferreri and Rossi	153,123,000	2,502,228,879
1964	<i>La Visita</i>	Pietrangeli	100,280,000	1,638,705,564
1965	<i>Signore e Signori</i>	Germi	1,275,433,000	19,974,428,669
1965	<i>Casanova '70</i>	Monicelli	940,593,000	14,730,532,913
1965	<i>Una Moglie Americana</i>	Polidoro	746,146,000	11,685,317,891
1965	<i>I Complessi</i>	D'Amico, Risi & Rossi	669,315,000	10,482,075,283
1965	<i>Le Bambole</i>	Bolognini, Comencini, Risi & Rossi	660,127,000	10,338,182,934
1965	<i>Io, Io, Io... e gli Altri</i>	Blasetti	599,355,000	9,386,438,719
1965	<i>La Mandragola</i>	Lattuada	580,861,000	9,096,806,034
1965	<i>L'ombrellone</i>	Risi	501,119,000	7,847,974,547
1965	<i>La Bugiarda</i>	Comencini	461,737,000	7,231,216,983
1965	<i>Made in Italy</i>	Loy	448,398,000	7,022,316,238
1966	<i>Operazione San Gennaro</i>	Risi	1,536,021,000	23,583,452,025

1966	<i>L'armata Brancaleone</i>	Monicelli	1,361,420,000	20,902,698,112
1966	<i>Scusi, Lei è Favorevole o Contrario?</i>	Sordi	974,620,000	14,963,925,632
1966	<i>Adulterio all'italiana</i>	Festa Campanile	926,946,000	14,231,958,105
1966	<i>L'Arcidiavolo</i>	Scola	827,280,000	12,701,726,206
1966	<i>Fumo di Londra</i>	Sordi	689,218,000	10,581,977,484
1966	<i>L'Immorale</i>	Germi	583,154,000	8,953,513,254
1967	<i>Il Tigre</i>	Risi	1,270,989,000	19,131,561,922
1967	<i>Italian Secret Service</i>	Comencini	1,033,925,000	15,563,156,062
1967	<i>Il Padre di Famiglia</i>	Loy	824,312,000	12,407,956,380
1967	<i>Un Italiano in America</i>	Sordi	745,352,000	11,219,410,980
1967	<i>Questi Fantasmi</i>	Castellani	721,883,000	10,866,143,857
1967	<i>Le Streghe</i>	Bolognini, De Sica, Pasolini, Rossi & Visconti	369,000,000	5,554,372,500
1967	<i>Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria</i>	Salce	359,594,000	5,412,788,685
1967	<i>Il Fischio al Naso</i>	Tognazzi	345,324,000	5,197,989,510
1968	<i>Il Medico della Mutua</i>	Zampa	2,994,660,000	44,509,931,046
1968	<i>Serafino</i>	Germi	2,355,516,000	35,010,269,859
1968	<i>Straziami Ma di Baci Saziami</i>	Risi	1,927,022,000	28,641,520,688
1968	<i>La Ragazza con la</i>	Monicelli	1,835,079,000	27,274,962,684

	<i>Pistola</i>			
1968	<i>Riusciranno i Nostri Eroi a Trovare l'Amico Misteriosamente Scomparso in Africa?</i>	Scola	1,801,979,000	26,782,994,074
1968	<i>La Pecora Nera</i>	Salce	1,076,665,000	16,002,579,561
1968	<i>Il Profeta</i>	Risi	1,066,691,000	15,854,335,002
1969	<i>Nell'Anno del Signore</i>	Magni	2,962,813,000	42,833,980,103
1969	<i>Il Prof. Dott. Guido Tersilli, Primario della Clinica Villa Celeste Convenzionata con le Mutue</i>	Salce	2,218,789,000	32,077,476,330
1969	<i>Vedo Nudo</i>	Risi	2,155,862,000	31,167,728,106
1969	<i>Amore Mio Aiutami</i>	Sordi	1,827,875,000	26,425,954,450
1969	<i>Il Commissario Pepe</i>	Scola	1,338,653,000	19,353,174,151
1969	<i>La Bambolona</i>	Giraldi	818,112,000	11,827,608,806
1969	<i>Tò, è Morta la Nonna</i>	Monicelli	108,000,000	1,561,377,600
1970	<i>Venga a Prendere il Caffè da Noi</i>	Lattuada	2,232,916,000	30,719,788,453
1970	<i>Il Presidente del Borgorosso F.C.</i>	Sordi	1,807,350,000	24,864,979,095
1970	<i>Brancaleone alle Crociate</i>	Monicelli	1,770,357,000	24,356,040,498
1970	<i>Dramma della Gelosia (Tutti i Particolari in Cronaca)</i>	Scola	1,630,126,000	22,426,784,470
1970	<i>Contestazione Generale</i>	Zampa	1,625,540,000	22,363,691,658

1970	<i>Rosolino Paternò, Soldato</i>	Loy	1,463,400,000	20,133,018,180
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Total of the takings for the comedies Italian style produced between 1958 and 1967 calibrated for 2001:

1,023,977,400,730 Liras

Total of the takings for the comedies Italian style produced between 1958 and 1970:

1,528,165,595,544

The data concerning the takings of the comedy Italian style films has been gathered from the issues published between 1955 and 1972 of the industry periodical *Il Giornale dello Spettacolo/Borsa Film*. The information has also been compared with the data featured in Maria Grazia Franchi's study 'Un Ininterrotto Dialogo con il Pubblico', which features the takings gained by the films directed by Mario Monicelli, and with the data presented by Vittorio Spinazzola in *Cinema e Pubblico: Lo Spettacolo Filmico in Italia, 1945-1965*.

I have not included in the analysis the takings gained by films produced before 1958 which can be nonetheless considered comedies Italian style on the basis of the criteria based on Altman's model that I established in the Introduction, such as mid 1950s realistic comedies written by Rodolfo Sonego for Alberto Sordi's type of the 'average Italian' like Pietrangeli's *Lo Scapolo* (1955) or films that have been defined as 'comedies Italian style before their time' such as Fellini's *I Vitelloni* (1953)¹ or Steno and Monicelli's *Guardie e Ladri* (1951). Since the data in my possession concerning neorealist films only covered the 1945-1954 period, after the release of *Roma Città Aperta*, and thus excluded films that precluded aspects of neorealism which were produced before the end of World War II such as Visconti's *Ossessione*

¹ On the contrary, I have included *I Vitelloni* in the list of 50 neorealist films produced between 1945 and 1954 as it is a film directed in 1953 by a neorealist filmmaker, Fellini, before the definitive crisis of this mode of production the following year, with the release of Visconti's *Senso* and Fellini's own *La Strada*.

(1943) and Bonnard's dialectal comedy *Campo 'de Fiori* (1943), I deemed it appropriate for the comparison between the takings gained by the two cinematic forms to operate with the same criterion in the case of comedy Italian style and only consider the data from the release of *I Soliti Ignoti* onwards.

I shall however point out that in the 1951 to 1954 period the films that prelude comedy Italian style's re-proposition of neorealist structural traits in a comedic context, such as *I Vitelloni* and *Guardie e Ladri*, achieved much better results than the canonical neorealist films produced at that time: *Guardie e Ladri* (7th in the charts for the 1951-1952 season) achieved a 644.900.000 Liras result, which means that it gained more or less as much as De Santis' *Roma Ore 11* (32nd, gaining 262.300.000 Liras), Lizzani's *Achtung! Banditi* (34th, gaining 249.900.000 Liras), Visconti's *Bellissima* (68th, gaining 152.700.000 Liras despite the fact that it featured Anna Magnani in the cast), De Sica's *Umberto D.* (85th, gaining 106.500.000 Liras) and Rossellini's *La Macchina Ammazzacattivi* (118th, gaining 5.750.000, the very last in the chart of 118 Italian films distributed in that season) did all summed together. Similarly Fellini's *I Vitelloni* made 555.000.000 Liras, more than four times what *L'Amore in Città* (128.600.000), Zavattini's 'proper' neorealist project from the same season, earned. This once again confirms that in terms of economic feasibility it was the evolution of neorealism into comedy Italian style that guaranteed the survival of some of the structural and thematic characteristics of the post-war mode of production throughout the Economic Miracle period.

Extended Filmography

Relevant pre-neorealist dramas

I Bambini Ci Guardano (The Children Are Watching Us). Dir. Vittorio De Sica. Screenplay by Cesare Zavattini and Vittorio De Sica. By Cesare Giulio Viola. Perf. Emilio Cigoli, Luciano De Ambrosis and Isa Pola. Cristaldi Film, 1944. DVD.

La Nave Bianca (The White Ship). Dir. Roberto Rossellini and Francesco De Robertis. Cristaldi Film, 1942. DVD.

L'uomo dalla Croce. Dir. Roberto Rossellini. Screenplay by Roberto Rossellini, Alberto Consiglio, and Asvero Gravelli. Perf. Alberto Tavazzi, Roswita Schmidt. Ripley's Home Video, 1943. DVD.

Malombra. Dir. Mario Soldati. Screenplay by Mario Bonfantini, Ettore Maria Margadonna, Renato Castellani, and Mario Soldati. By Antonio Fogazzaro. Perf. Andrea Cecchi and Isa Miranda. Cristaldi Film, 1942. DVD.

Ossessione (Obsession). Dir. Luchino Visconti. By James M. Cain, Mario Alicata, Antonio Pietrangeli, Gianni Puccini, Santis Giuseppe De, Aldo Tonti, and Domenico Scala. Perf. Massimo Girotti, Clara Calamai, Landa Juan De, Elia Marcuzzo, and Chia Cristani. British Film Institute, 1943. DVD.

Un Pilota Ritorna. Dir. Roberto Rossellini. Screenplay by Vittorio Mussolini, Michelangelo Antonioni, Ugo Betti, and Roberto Rossellini. Perf. Massimo Girotti, Michela Belmonte. Ripley's Home Video, 1942. DVD.

Relevant pre-neorealist comedies

Avanti c'è Posto (Before the Postman). Dir. Mario Bonnard. Screenplay by Mario Bonnard, Aldo Fabrizi, Federico Fellini, Piero Tellini, and Cesare Zavattini. Perf. Aldo Fabrizi, Adriana Benetti and Andrea Cecchi. Terminal Video, 1942. DVD.

Campo de' Fiori. Dir. Mario Bonnard. Screenplay by Mario Bonnard, Aldo Fabrizi, Federico Fellini, and Piero Tellini. Perf. Aldo Fabrizi, Anna Magnani, Peppino De Filippo and Caterina Boratto. Terminal Video, 1943. DVD.

Darò un Milione. Dir. Mario Camerini. Screenplay by Cesare Zavattini, Mario Camerini, and Giac Mondaini. Perf. Vittorio De Sica and Assia Noris. Terminal Video, 1937. DVD.

- Gli Uomini che Mascalzoni! (What Scoundrels Men Are)*. Dir. Mario Camerini. Screenplay by Mario Camerini, Aldo De Benedetti, and Mario Soldati. Perf. Vittorio De Sica and Lia Franca. Terminal Video, 1932. DVD.
- Grandi Magazzini (Department Store)*. Dir. Mario Camerini. Screenplay by Mario Camerini, Renato Castellani, and Ivo Perilli. Perf. Vittorio De Sica, Assia Noris and Virgilio Riento. Terminal Video, 1939. DVD.
- Il Signor Max (Mister Max)*. Dir. Mario Camerini. Screenplay by Amleto Palermi, Mario Camerini, and Mario Soldati. Perf. Vittorio De Sica and Assia Noris. Terminal Video, 1939. DVD.
- L'ultima Carrozzella (The Last Wagon)*. Dir. Mario Mattoli. Screenplay by Aldo Fabrizi and Federico Fellini. Perf. Aldo Fabrizi, Anna Magnani and Anita Durante. Terminal Video, 1943. DVD.
- Maddalena... Zero in Condotta*. Dir. Vittorio De Sica. Screenplay by Ferruccio Biancini. Perf. Vittorio De Sica, Carla Del Poggio, Vera Bergman. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1940. DVD.
- Quattro Passi tra le Nuvole (Four Steps in the Clouds)*. Dir. Alessandro Blasetti. Screenplay by Cesare Zavattini, Piero Tellini, and Alessandro Blasetti. Perf. Gino Cervi, Giuditta Rissone and Adriana Benetti. Terminal Video, 1942. DVD.
- Teresa Venerdì*. Dir. Vittorio De Sica. Screenplay by Vittorio De Sica, Gherardo Gherardi, Margherita Maglione, and Franco Riganti. Perf. Vittorio De Sica and Adriana Benetti. Terminal Video, 1941. DVD.
- Un Americano in Vacanza*. Dir. Luigi Zampa. Screenplay by Gino Castrignano, Aldo De Benedetti, and Luigi Zampa. Perf. Valentina Cortese, Andrea Cecchi and Leo Dale. 1945. *Youtube.com*. Web. 24 May 2009.

Neorealism

- Achtung! Banditi! (Attention! Bandits!)*. Dir. Carlo Lizzani. Screenplay by Giuseppe Dagnino, Carlo Lizzani, and Rodolfo Sonego. Perf. Gina Lollobrigida, Andrea Cecchi and Lamberto Maggiorani. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1951. DVD.
- Anni Difficili*. Dir. Luigi Zampa. Screenplay by Vitaliano Brancati, Sergio Amidei, Franco Evangelisti, and Arthur Miller. By Vitaliano Brancati. Perf. Umberto Spadaro, Ave Ninchi and Delia Scala. Briguglio Films, 1948. Film.
- Anni Facili (Easy Years)*. Dir. Luigi Zampa. Screenplay by Vitaliano Brancati, Sergio Amidei, and Luigi Zampa. Perf. Nino Taranto, Alda Mangini. Ponti-De Laurentis, 1953. Television Broadcast.

- Bellissima*. Dir. Luchino Visconti. Screenplay by Suso Cecchi D'Amico, Cesare Zavattini, Luchino Visconti, and Francesco Rosi. Perf. Anna Magnani, Walter Chiari and Tina Apicella. Eureka, 1951. DVD.
- Caccia Tragica*. Dir. Giuseppe De Santis. Screenplay by Giuseppe De Santis, Carlo Lizzani, Michelangelo Antonioni, and Cesare Zavattini. Perf. Vivi Gioi, Andrea Cecchi and Carla Del Poggio. 1947. Videocassette.
- Cielo sulla Palude (Heaven over the Marshes)*. Dir. Augusto Genina. Screenplay by Suso Cecchi D'Amico, Augusto Genina, and Fausto Tozzi. Perf. Rubi D'Alma, Michele Malaspina and Domenico Viglione Borghese. 20th Century Fox Entertainment, 1949. DVD.
- Cronaca di un Amore (Chronicle of a Love)*. Dir. Michelangelo Antonioni. Screenplay by Michelangelo Antonioni and Piero Tellini. Perf. Massimo Girotti and Lucia Bosè. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1950. DVD.
- Europa '51*. Dir. Roberto Rossellini. Screenplay by Roberto Rossellini, Sandro De Feo, and Ivo Perilli. Perf. Ingrid Bergman, Alexander Knox and Ettore Giannini. Cristaldi Film, 1952. DVD.
- Francesco, Giullare di Dio (The Flowers of St. Francis)*. Dir. Roberto Rossellini. Screenplay by Roberto Rossellini and Federico Fellini. Perf. Aldo Fabrizi, Gianfranco Bellini and Peparuolo. Criterion, 1950. DVD.
- Fuga in Francia (Flight into France)*. Dir. Mario Soldati. Screenplay by Ennio Flaiano, Mario Soldati, and Mario Bonfantini. Perf. Folco Lulli, Enrico Olivieri and Rosi Mirafiore. RCS, 1948. DVD.
- Germania Anno Zero (Germany Year Zero)*. Dir. Roberto Rossellini. Screenplay by Roberto Rossellini, Sergio Amidei, and Max Kolpe. Perf. Edmund Moeschke, Ernst Pittschau and Ingetraud Hinze. Enelle Products, 1948. DVD.
- Giorni di Gloria (Days of Glory)*. Dir. Mario Serandrei, Giuseppe De Santis, and Luchino Visconti. Perf. Donato Carretta and Pietro Caruso. 1945.
- Giovanna d'Arco al Rogo*. Dir. Roberto Rossellini. Screenplay by Roberto Rossellini. By Paul Claudel. Perf. Ingrid Bergman and Tullio Carminati. Terminal Video, 1954. DVD.
- I Vinti*. Dir. Michelangelo Antonioni. Screenplay by Michelangelo Antonioni, Giorgio Bassani, and Suso Cecchi D'Amico. Perf. Franco Interlegghi, Anna Maria Ferrero and Eduardo Ciannelli. Minerva Video, 1952. DVD.
- I Vitelloni*. Dir. Federico Fellini. Screenplay by Federico Fellini, Ennio Flaiano, and Tullio Pinelli. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Franco Fabrizi, Leopoldo Trieste and Franco Interlenghi. Arrow Films, 1953. DVD.

- Il Bandito (The Bandit)*. Dir. Alberto Lattuada. Screenplay by Alberto Lattuada, Ettore Maria Margadonna, Tullio Pinelli, and Piero Tellini. Perf. Anna Magnani, Amedeo Nazzari and Carla Del Poggio. Cristaldi Film, 1946. DVD.
- Il Brigante di Tacca del Lupo (The Bandit of Tacca del Lupo)*. Dir. Piero Germi. Screenplay by Pietro Germi, Federico Fellini, and Tullio Pinelli. By Riccardo Bacchelli. Perf. Amedeo Nazzari, Cosetta Greco, Saro Urzì and Fausto Tozzi. Cristaldi Film, 1952. DVD.
- Il Cammino della Speranza (Path of Hope)*. Dir. Pietro Germi. Screenplay by Pietro Germi, Federico Fellini, and Tullio Pinelli. By Nino Di Maria. Perf. Raf Vallone, Elena Varzi and Saro Urzì. Cristaldi Film, 1950. DVD.
- Il Delitto di Giovanni Episcopo (Flesh Will Surrender)*. Dir. Alberto Lattuada. Screenplay by Suso Cecchi D'Amico, Federico Fellini, Alberto Lattuada, and Piero Tellini. Perf. Aldo Fabrizi, Yvonne Sanson, Ave Ninchi and Alberto Sordi. Cristaldi Film, 1947. DVD.
- Il Mulino del Po (The Mill on the Po)*. Dir. Alberto Lattuada. Screenplay by Federico Fellini, Tullio Pinelli, Mario Bonfantini, and Riccardo Bacchelli. By Riccardo Bacchelli. Perf. Carla Del Poggio, Jacques Sernas and Mario Besesti. Cristaldi Film, 1949. DVD.
- Il Testimone (The Testimony)*. Dir. Pietro Germi. Screenplay by Ottavio Alessi, Diego Fabbri, Pietro Germi, and Cesare Zavattini. Perf. Roldano Lupi, Marina Berti and Arnoldo Foà. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1945. DVD.
- Il Tetto*. Dir. Vittorio De Sica. Screenplay by Cesare Zavattini. Perf. Gabriella Pallotta and Giorgio Listuzzi. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1956. DVD.
- In Nome della Legge (In the Name of the Law)*. Dir. Pietro Germi. Screenplay by Pietro Germi, Federico Fellini, Mario Monicelli, and Tullio Pinelli. By Giuseppe Guido Lo Schiavo. Perf. Massimo Girotti, Charles Vanel and Jone Salinas. Cristaldi Film, 1949. DVD.
- La Donna del Fiume*. Dir. Mario Soldati. Screenplay by Giorgio Bassani, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and Ennio Flaiano. By Alberto Moravia. Perf. Sophia Loren and Gerard Oury. Ponti-De Laurentis, 1954.
- La Macchina Ammazza-Cattivi (The Machine to Kill Bad People)*. Dir. Roberto Rossellini. Perf. Gennaro Pisano, Marilyn Buford and William Tubs. Boying, 1952. DVD.
- La Paura (Fear)*. Dir. Roberto Rossellini. Screenplay by Sergio Amidei and Franz Von Treuberg. By Stefan Zweig. Perf. Ingrid Bergman and Mathias Waiman. Suevia, 1954. DVD.
- La Signora Senza Camelie*. Dir. Michelangelo Antonioni. Screenplay by Michelangelo Antonioni, Suso Cecchi D'Amico, and Francesco Maselli. Perf. Lucia Bosè, Gino Cervi and Andrea Cecchi. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1953. DVD.

- La Strada*. Dir. Federico Fellini. Screenplay by Federico Fellini, Tullio Pinelli, and Ennio Flaiano. Perf. Giulietta Masina, Anthony Quinn and Richard Basehart. Optimum, 1954. DVD.
- La Terra Trema: Episodio del Mare (The Earth Trembles)*. Dir. Luchino Visconti. Screenplay by Luchino Visconti and Antonio Pietrangeli. By Giovanni Verga. Perf. Antonio Arcidiacono and Giuseppe Arcidiacono. British Film Institute, 1948. DVD.
- Ladri di Biciclette (The Bicycle Thieves)*. Dir. Vittorio De Sica. Screenplay by Cesare Zavattini, Suso Cecchi D'Amico, and Vittorio De Sica. Perf. Lamberto Maggiorani and Enzo Staiola. Arrow Films, 1948. DVD.
- L'Amore (Amore)*. Dir. Roberto Rossellini. Screenplay by Federico Fellini, Tullio Pinelli, and Roberto Rossellini. By Jean Cocteau. Perf. Anna Magnani and Federico Fellini. Cinecittà Diritti, 1948. DVD.
- L'Amore in Città*. Dir. Cesare Zavattini, Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni, Alberto Lattuada, Dino Risi, Carlo Lizzani, and Francesco Maselli. Screenplay by Cesare Zavattini, Luigi Chiarini, and Tullio Pinelli. Perf. Antonio Cifariello, Ugo Tognazzi and Giovanna Ralli. Minerva Video, 1953. DVD.
- Le Miserie del Signor Travet (His Young Wife)*. Dir. Mario Soldati. Screenplay by Aldo De Benedetti and Tullio Pintus. By Vittorio Bersezio. Perf. Carlo Campanini, Vera Carmi and Alberto Sordi. Cristaldi Film, 1946.
- Lo Sceicco Bianco (The White Sheik)*. Dir. Federico Fellini. Screenplay by Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni, Tullio Pinelli, and Ennio Flaiano. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Leopoldo Trieste, Brunella Bovo and Giulietta Masina. Criterion, 1952. DVD.
- L'onorevole Angelina*. Dir. Luigi Zampa. Screenplay by Suso Cecchi D'Amico, Piero Tellini, and Luigi Zampa. Perf. Anna Magnani, Nando Bruno and Ave Ninchi. Cristaldi Film, 1947. DVD.
- Luci del Varietà (Variety Lights)*. Dir. Federico Fellini and Alberto Lattuada. Screenplay by Federico Fellini, Ennio Flaiano, Alberto Lattuada, and Tullio Pinelli. Perf. Peppino De Filippo, Carla Del Poggio and Giulietta Masina. Criterion, 1951. DVD.
- Miracolo a Milano (Miracle in Milan)*. Dir. Vittorio De Sica. Screenplay by Cesare Zavattini, Vittorio De Sica, and Suso Cecchi D'Amico. Perf. Francesco Golisano, Paolo Stoppa and Emma Gramatica. Arrow Films, 1951. DVD.
- Non c'è Pace tra gli Ulivi (Under the Olive Tree)*. Dir. Giuseppe De Santis. Screenplay by Giuseppe De Santis, Carlo Lizzani, and Gianni Puccini. Perf. Raf Vallone, Lucia Bosè and Folco Lulli. Cristaldi Film, 1950. DVD.
- Paisà (Paisan)*. Dir. Roberto Rossellini and Rod E. Geiger. Screenplay by Sergio Amidei, Federico Fellini, and Klaus Mann. Perf. Carmela Sazio, Robert Van Loon, Dots Johnson and Maria Michi. Criterion, 1946. DVD.

- Riso Amaro (Bitter Rice)*. Dir. Giuseppe De Santis. Screenplay by Giuseppe De Santis, Carlo Lizzani, and Gianni Puccini. Perf. Silvana Mangano, Doris Dowling and Vittorio Gassman. Cristaldi Film, 1949. DVD.
- Roma Città Aperta (Rome, Open City)*. Dir. Roberto Rossellini. Screenplay by Sergio Amidei, Federico Fellini, and Roberto Rossellini. Perf. Aldo Fabrizi, Anna Magnani, Marcello Pagliero and Harry Feist. Arrow Films, 1945. DVD.
- Roma Città Libera*. Dir. Marcello Pagliero. Screenplay by Ennio Flaiano, Suso Cecchi D'Amico, and Marcello Pagliero. Perf. Andrea Cecchi, Valentina Cortese, Vittorio De Sica and Marisa Merlini. Noshame, 1946.
- Roma Ore 11*. Dir. Giuseppe De Santis. Screenplay by Giuseppe De Santis, Cesare Zavattini, and Rodolfo Sonego. Perf. Massimo Girotti, Carla Del Poggio and Eva Vanicek. Titanus, 1952. Film.
- Sciuscià (Shoeshine)*. Dir. Vittorio De Sica. Screenplay by Cesare Zavattini, Sergio Amidei, and Adolfo Franci. Perf. Franco Interlenghi and Rinaldo Smordoni. Eureka, 1946. DVD.
- Senso*. Dir. Luchino Visconti. Screenplay by Luchino Visconti, Suso Cecchi D'Amico, and Tennessee Williams. By Camillo Boito. Perf. Farley Granger, Alida Valli and Heinz Moog. Cristaldi Film, 1954. DVD.
- Stazione Termini (Terminal Station)*. Dir. Vittorio De Sica. Screenplay by Truman Capote, Luigi Chiarini, and Cesare Zavattini. Perf. Jennifer Jones, Montgomery Clift and Gino Cervi. Criterion, 1953. DVD.
- Stromboli, Terra di Dio (Stromboli)*. Dir. Roberto Rossellini. Screenplay by Roberto Rossellini, Sergio Amidei, and Art Cohn. Perf. Ingrid Bergman and Mario Vitale. Boying, 1950. DVD.
- Umberto D.* Dir. Vittorio De Sica. Screenplay by Cesare Zavattini. Perf. Carlo Battisti, Maria Pia Casillo and Lina Gennari. Arrow Films, 1952. DVD.
- Viaggio in Italia (Journey to Italy)*. Dir. Roberto Rossellini. Screenplay by Roberto Rossellini and Vitaliano Brancati. Perf. Ingrid Bergman and George Sanders. British Film Institute, 1953. DVD.
- Vivere in Pace (To Live in Peace)*. Dir. Luigi Zampa. Screenplay by Suso Cecchi D'Amico, Piero Tellini, and Aldo Fabrizi. Perf. Aldo Fabrizi, Gar Moore, Nando Bruno and Ave Ninchi. Hobby & Work, 1946. DVD.

Pink Neorealism

- Belle ma Povere (Poor Girl, Pretty Girl)*. Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Dino Risi, Pasquale Festa Campanile, and Massimo Franciosa. Perf. Renato Salvatori, Maurizio Arena, Marisa Allasio and Memmo Carotenuto. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1957. DVD.

- Benvenuto, Reverendo!* Dir. Aldo Fabrizi. Screenplay by Aldo Fabrizi and Piero Tellini. Perf. Aldo Fabrizi, Massimo Girotti and Lianella Carell. Hobby & Work, 1950. DVD.
- Cronache di Poveri Amanti (Chronicle of Poor Lovers)*. Dir. Carlo Lizzani. Screenplay by Sergio Amidei, Giuseppe Dagnino, and Carlo Lizzani. By Vasco Pratolini. Perf. Anna Maria Ferrero, Cosetta Greco and Marcello Mastroianni. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1954. DVD.
- Domenica d'Agosto*. Dir. Luciano Emmer. Screenplay by Sergio Amidei, Franco Brusati, and Cesare Zavattini. Perf. Anna Baldini, Franco Interlenghi, Ave Ninchi and Marcello Mastroianni. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1950. DVD.
- Don Camillo (The Little World of Don Camillo)*. Dir. Julien Duvivier. Screenplay by Julien Duvivier. By Giovanni Guareschi. Perf. Fernandel and Gino Cervi. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1952. DVD.
- Don Camillo e i Giovani d'Oggi*. Dir. Mario Camerini. Screenplay by Adriano Baracco, Leonardo Benvenuti, and Piero De Bernardi. By Giovanni Guareschi. Perf. Lionel Stander and Gastone Moschin. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1972. DVD.
- Don Camillo e l'onorevole Peppone*. Dir. Carmine Gallone. Screenplay by Julien Duvivier. By Giovanni Guareschi. Perf. Fernandel and Gino Cervi. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1955. DVD.
- Don Camillo Monsignore ma Non Troppo*. Dir. Carmine Gallone. Screenplay by Carmine Gallone, Leonardo Benvenuti, and Piero De Bernardi. By Giovanni Guareschi. Perf. Fernandel and Gino Cervi. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1961. DVD.
- Due Soldi di Speranza (Two Pennyworth of Hope)*. Dir. Renato Castellani. Screenplay by Titina De Filippo, Ettore Maria Margadonna, and Renato Castellani. Perf. Maria Fiore, Vincenzo Musolino and Filomena Russo. Universalcine, 1952. Television Broadcast.
- È Primavera... (It's Forever Springtime)*. Dir. Renato Castellani. Screenplay by Suso Cecchi D'Amico, Renato Castellani, and Cesare Zavattini. Universalcine, 1950. Television Broadcast.
- Giovani Mariti*. Dir. Mauro Bolognini. Perf. Isabelle Corey, Antonio Cifariello and Franco Interlenghi. Cristaldi Film, 1958. DVD.
- Guendalina*. Dir. Alberto Lattuada. Screenplay by Leonardo Benvenuti, Piero De Bernardi, Jean Blondel, and Valerio Zurlini. Perf. Jacqueline Sassard, Raf Mattioli, Sylva Koscina and Raf Vallone. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1957. DVD.
- Il Bigamo*. Dir. Luciano Emmer. Screenplay by Sergio Amidei, Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli, and Francesco Rosi. Perf. Marcello Mastroianni, Franca Valeri, Giovanna Ralli, Vittorio De Sica, Ave Ninchi and Memmo Carotenuto. Royal Film, 1956. Television Broadcast.

- Il Compagno Don Camillo (Don Camillo in Moscow)*. Dir. Luigi Comencini. Screenplay by Leonardo Benvenuti and Piero De Bernardi. Perf. Fernandel and Gino Cervi. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1965. DVD.
- Il Medico e lo Stregone (Doctor and the Healer)*. Dir. Mario Monicelli. Screenplay by Ennio De Concini, Luigi Emmanuele, Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli, and Mario Monicelli. Perf. Vittorio De Sica, Marcello Mastroianni, Marisa Merlini and Alberto Sordi. Cineriz, 1957. Television Broadcast.
- Il Momento Più Bello (Wasted Lives)*. Dir. Luciano Emmer. Screenplay by Sergio Amidei, Luciano Emmer, and Ugo Pirro. Perf. Marcello Mastroianni, Giovanna Ralli and Marisa Merlini. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1957. DVD.
- Il Ritorno di Don Camillo (The Return of Don Camillo)*. Dir. Julien Duvivier. Screenplay by Julien Duvivier. By Giovanni Guareschi. Perf. Fernandel and Gino Cervi. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1953. DVD.
- Il Segno di Venere (The Sign of Venus)*. Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Franca Valeri, Edoardo Anton, Luigi Comencini, Ennio Flaiano, and Dino Risi. Perf. Franca Valeri, Sophia Loren, Peppino De Filippo, Alberto Sordi, Raf Vallone, Leopoldo Trieste, Vittorio De Sica and Tina Pica. 01 Distribution, 1955. DVD.
- La Bella di Roma (The Belle of Rome)*. Dir. Luigi Comencini. Screenplay by Ettore Maria Margadonna, Edoardo Anton, and Luigi Comencini. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Silvana Pampanini and Paolo Stoppa. Cristaldi Film, 1955. DVD.
- La Donna del Fiume*. Dir. Mario Soldati. Screenplay by Giorgio Bassani, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and Ennio Flaiano. By Alberto Moravia. Perf. Sophia Loren and Gerard Oury. Ponti-De Laurentis, 1954. Television Broadcast.
- La Fortuna di Essere Donna (What a Woman!)*. Dir. Alessandro Blasetti. Screenplay by Suso Cecchi D'Amico, Sandro Continenza, and Ennio Flaiano. Perf. Sophia Loren, Marcello Mastroianni and Charles Boyer. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1955. DVD.
- La Lupa (The Vixen)*. Dir. Alberto Lattuada. Screenplay by Ennio De Concini, Alberto Lattuada, and Antonio Pietrangeli. By Giovanni Verga. Perf. Kerima, Ettore Manni and May Britt. Ponti-De Laurentis, 1953. Television Broadcast.
- La Ragazza con la Valigia (Girl with a Suitcase)*. Dir. Valerio Zurlini and Valerio Zurlini. Screenplay by Leonardo Benvenuti, Piero De Bernardi, and Enrico Medioli. Perf. Claudia Cardinale, Jacques Perrin and Luciana Angiolillo. 01 Distribution, 1961. DVD.
- La Ragazza del Bersagliere*. Dir. Alessandro Blasetti. Screenplay by Leonardo Benvenuti, Pietro De Bernardi, and Alessandro Blasetti. By Edoardo Anton. Perf. Graziella Granata, Antonio Casagrande, Tony Renis, Rossano Brazzi and Leopoldo Trieste. Domovideo, 1966. Videocassette.

- La Romana (Woman of Rome)*. Dir. Luigi Zampa. Screenplay by Ennio Flaiano, Giorgio Bassani, and Alberto Moravia. Perf. Gina Lollobrigida, Franco Fabrizi and Daniel Gelin. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1954. DVD.
- La Spiaggia (The Beach)*. Dir. Alberto Lattuada. Screenplay by Luigi Malerba, Alberto Lattuada, Rodolfo Sonego, and Charles Spaak. Perf. Martine Carol, Raf Vallone and Mario Carotenuto. Renechateauvideo, 1954. DVD.
- Le Ragazze di Piazza di Spagna (Three Girls from Rome)*. Dir. Luciano Emmer. Screenplay by Sergio Amidei, Fausto Tozzi, and Karin Valde. Perf. Lucia Bosé, Cosetta Greco, Liliana Bonfatti, Renato Salvatori, Ave Ninchi and Marcello Mastroianni. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1952. DVD.
- Le Ragazze di San Frediano (The Girls of San Frediano)*. Dir. Valerio Zurlini. Screenplay by Leonardo Benvenuti and Piero De Bernardi. By Vasco Pratolini. Perf. Antonio Cifariello, Rossana Podestà and Giovanna Ralli. Cristaldi Film, 1954. DVD.
- Le Signorine dello 04*. Dir. Gianni Franciolini. Screenplay by Sergio Amidei, Agenore Incrocci (Age), and Furio Scarpelli. Perf. Giovanna Ralli, Franca Valeri, Marisa Merlini and Peppino De Filippo. Diana Cinematografica, 1955. Television Broadcast.
- L'oro di Napoli (The Gold of Naples)*. Dir. Vittorio De Sica. Screenplay by Cesare Zavattini, Vittorio De Sica, and Giuseppe Marotta. Perf. Silvana Mangano, Sophia Loren, Eduardo De Filippo, Paolo Stoppa and Totò. Filmauro, 1954. DVD.
- L'oro Di Roma*. Dir. Carlo Lizzani. Screenplay by Lucio Battistrada, Alberto Lecco, and Carlo Lizzani. Perf. Gerard Blain, Paola Borboni and Miranda Campa. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1961. DVD.
- Marisa la Civetta (Marisa)*. Dir. Mauro Bolognini. Screenplay by Mauro Bolognini, Tatina Demby, and Pier Paolo Pasolini. Perf. Marisa Allasio and Renato Salvatori. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1957. DVD.
- Mariti in Città (Husbands in the City)*. Dir. Luigi Comencini. Screenplay by Edoardo Anton, Suso Cecchi D'Amico, Luigi Comencini, Sandro Continenza, and Ruggero Maccari. Perf. Nino Taranto, Renato Salvatori and Memmo Carotenuto. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1957. DVD.
- Pane, Amore e Fantasia (Bread, Love and Dreams)*. Dir. Luigi Comencini. Screenplay by Ettore Maria Margadonna and Luigi Comencini. Perf. Vittorio De Sica, Gina Lollobrigida, Marisa Merlini, Mario Carotenuto and Tina Pica. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1953. DVD.
- Pane, Amore e Gelosia (Bread, Love and Jealousy)*. Dir. Luigi Comencini. Screenplay by Ettore Maria Margadonna, Luigi Comencini, and Eduardo De Filippo. Perf. Vittorio De Sica, Gina Lollobrigida, Marisa Merlini, Tina Pica and Saro Urzì. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1954. DVD.

- Pane, Amore e... (Scandal in Sorrento)*. Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Ettore Maria Margadonna, Dino Risi, and Marcello Girosi. Perf. Vittorio De Sica, Sophia Loren, Antonio Cifariello and Tina Pica. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1955. DVD.
- Poveri ma Belli (A Girl in Bikini)*. Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Dino Risi, Pasquale Festa Campanile, and Massimo Franciosa. Perf. Renato Salvatori, Maurizio Arena, Marisa Allasio and Memmo Carotenuto. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1957. DVD.
- Poveri Milionari*. Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Dino Risi, Pasquale Festa Campanile, and Massimo Franciosa. Perf. Renato Salvatori, Maurizio Arena and Lorella De Luca. 01 Distribution, 1959. DVD.
- Prima Comunione (Father's Dilemma)*. Dir. Alessandro Blasetti. Screenplay by Cesare Zavattini, Suso Cecchi D'Amico, and Alessandro Blasetti. Perf. Aldo Fabrizi, Gaby Morlay and Ludmilla Duradova. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1950. DVD.
- Racconti d'Estate (Girls for the Summer)*. Dir. Gianni Franciolini. Screenplay by Sergio Amidei, Ennio Flaiano, and Rodolfo Sonego. By Alberto Moravia. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Franco Fabrizi, Marcello Mastroianni, Sylva Koscina and Dorian Grey. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1958. DVD.
- Racconti Romani (Roman Tales)*. Dir. Gianni Franciolini. Screenplay by Sergio Amidei, Agenore Incrocci (Age), and Furio Scarpelli. By Alberto Moravia. Perf. Antonio Cifariello, Franco Fabrizi, Giovanna Ralli, Maurizio Arena, Vittorio De Sica and Totò. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1955. DVD.
- Sotto il Sole di Roma*. Dir. Renato Castellani. Screenplay by Sergio Amidei, Ettore Maria Margadonna, Emilio Cecchi, and Renato Castellani. Perf. Oscar Blando, Liliana Mancini, Francesco Golisano and Alberto Sordi. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1949. DVD.
- Souvenir d'Italie (It Happened in Rome)*. Dir. Antonio Pietrangeli. Screenplay by Dario Fo, Antonio Pietrangeli, Agenore Incrocci (Age), and Furio Scarpelli. Perf. June Laverick, Isabelle Corey, Ingeborg Schoner, Massimo Girotti, Vittorio De Sica and Alberto Sordi. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1957. DVD.
- Terza Liceo (High School)*. Dir. Luciano Emmer. Screenplay by Sergio Amidei, Carlo Bernari, and Vasco Pratolini. Perf. Ugo Amaldi, Claudio Barbesino and Gianni Bonini. Incom, 1954. Television Broadcast.
- Un Amore a Roma (Love in Rome)*. Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Ercole Patti and Ennio Flaiano. Perf. Mylene Demonget, Elsa Martinelli and Claudio Gora. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1960. DVD.
- Venezia la Luna e Tu (Venice, the Moon and You)*. Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Dino Risi, Pasquale Festa Campanile, and Massimo Franciosa. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Nino Manfredi, Marisa Allasio and Ingeborg Schoner. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1958. DVD.

Villa Borghese (It Happened in the Park). Dir. Gianni Franciolini and Vittorio De Sica. Screenplay by Sergio Amidei, Giorgio Bassani, Ennio Flaiano, Agenore Incrocci (Age), and Furio Scarpelli. Perf. Maurizio Arena, Margherita Autuori and Alberto Bonucci. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1953. DVD.

Comedy Italian Style

A Cavallo della Tigre (On the Tiger's Back). Dir. Luigi Comencini. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli, Mario Monicelli and Luigi Comencini. Perf. Nino Manfredi, Mario Adorf and Gian Maria Volontè. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1961. DVD.

Adua e le Compagne (Adua and Her Friends). Dir. Antonio Pietrangeli. Screenplay by Antonio Pietrangeli, Ruggero Maccari, Ettore Scola and Tullio Pinelli. Perf. Sandra Milo, Simone Signoret and Emanuelle Riva. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1960. DVD.

Adulterio all'italiana (Adultery, Italian Style). Dir. Pasquale Festa Campanile. Screenplay by Pasquale Festa Campanile, Luigi Malerba and Ottavio Alessi. Perf. Nino Manfredi, Catherine Spaak and Maria Grazia Buccella. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1966. DVD.

Alfredo, Alfredo. Dir. Pietro Germi. Screenplay by Tullio Pinelli, Leonardo Benvenuti, Piero De Bernardi and Pietro Germi. Perf. Dustin Hoffman, Stefania Sandrelli and Carla Gravina. Paramount, 1972. Videocassette.

Alta Infedeltà (High Infidelity). Dir. Mario Monicelli, Elio Petri, Franco Rossi and Luciano Salce. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari, Ettore Scola and Elio Petri. Perf. Nino Manfredi, Charles Aznavour, Monica Vitti and Ugo Tognazzi. Documento Film, 1974. Television Broadcast.

Amici Miei (My Friends). Dir. Mario Monicelli. Screenplay by Pietro Germi, Tullio Pinelli, Leonardo Benvenuti and Piero De Bernardi. Perf. Ugo Tognazzi, Gastone Moschin, Philip Noiret, Duilio Del Prete and Adolfo Celi. Filmauro, 1975. DVD.

Amici Miei Atto II (All My Friends Part 2). Dir. Mario Monicelli. Screenplay by Leonardo Benvenuti, Piero De Bernardi, Tullio Pinelli and Mario Monicelli. Perf. Ugo Tognazzi, Gastone Moschin, Philip Noiret, Adolfo Celi and Renzo Montagnani. Filmauro, 1982. DVD.

Amici Miei Atto III (All My Friends Part 3). Dir. Nanni Loy. Screenplay by Leonardo Benvenuti, Piero De Bernardi, Tullio Pinelli and Nanni Loy. Perf. Ugo Tognazzi, Gastone Moschin, Adolfo Celi, Renzo Montagnani and Bernard Blier. Filmauro, 1985. DVD.

- Amore Mio Aiutami (Help Me My Love)*. Dir. Alberto Sordi. Screenplay by Rodolfo Sonego, Tullio Pinelli and Alberto Sordi. Perf. Alberto Sordi and Monica Vitti. Documento Film, 1969. Television Broadcast.
- Anima Persa*. Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Dino Risi and Bernardino Zapponi. By Giovanni Arpino. Perf. Vittorio Gassman and Catherine Deneuve. 01 Distribution, 1977. DVD.
- Arrangiatevi! (You're On Your Own!)*. Dir. Mauro Bolognini. Screenplay by Mario De Majo, Leonardo Benvenuti and Piero De Bernardi. Perf. Peppino De Filippo, Totò and Laura Adani. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1959. DVD.
- Audace Colpo dei Soliti Ignoti*. Dir. Nanni Loy. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli and Nanni Loy. Perf. Vittorio Gassman, Nino Manfredi, Claudia Cardinale, Renato Salvatori and Tiberio Murgia. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1960. DVD.
- Bello, Onesto, Emigrato Australia Sposerebbe Compaesana Illibata (A Girl in Australia)*. Dir. Luigi Zampa. Screenplay by Rodolfo Sonego and Luigi Zampa. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Claudia Cardinale and Riccardo Garrone. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1971. DVD.
- Bianco Rosso e... (The Sin)*. Dir. Alberto Lattuada. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari, Tonino Guerra, Alberto Lattuada and Jaja Fiatri. Perf. Sophia Loren and Adriano Celentano. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 1972. DVD.
- Boccaccio '70*. Dir. Vittorio De Sica, Federico Fellini, Mario Monicelli and Luchino Visconti. Screenplay by Federico Fellini, Tullio Pinelli, Ennio Flaiano, Cesare Zavattini and Luchino Visconti. Perf. Peppino De Filippo, Anita Ekberg, Sophia Loren, Romolo Valli and Marisa Solinas. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1962. DVD.
- Brancaleone alle Crociate (Brancaleone at the Crusades)*. Dir. Mario Monicelli. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli and Mario Monicelli. Perf. Vittorio Gassman, Stefania Sandrelli, Paolo Villaggio and Adolfo Celi. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1970. DVD.
- Brutti, Sporchi e Cattivi (Ugly, Dirty and Bad)*. Dir. Ettore Scola. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari, Ettore Scola and Sergio Citti. Perf. Nino Manfredi, Ettore Garofolo and Maria Luisa Santella. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1976. DVD.
- C'eravamo Tanto Amati (We All Loved Each Other So Much)*. Dir. Ettore Scola. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli and Ettore Scola. Perf. Nino Manfredi, Vittorio Gassman, Stefano Satta Flores, Stefania Sandrelli, Aldo Fabrizi and Vittorio De Sica. Cristaldi Film, 1974. DVD.
- Café Express*. Dir. Nanni Loy. Screenplay by Nanni Loy, Nino Manfredi and Elvio Porta. Perf. Nino Manfredi, Vittorio Caprioli, Gigi Reder and Adolfo Celi. Cristaldi Film, 1980. DVD.

- Capriccio all'italiana*. Dir. Mauro Bolognini, Mario Monicelli, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Pino Zac and Stefano Vanzina (Steno). Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli, Cesare Zavattini, Stefano Vanzina (Steno) and Pier Paolo Pasolini. Perf. Totò, Ninetto Davoli, Franco Franchi, Ciccio Ingrassia, Walter Chiari and Silvana Mangano. Filmauro, 1968. DVD.
- Caro Michele*. Dir. Mario Monicelli. Screenplay by Suso Cecchi D'Amico and Tonino Guerra. By Natalia Ginzburg. Perf. Mariangela Melato and Delphine Seyrig. Mondadori Video, 1976. DVD.
- Caro Papà*. Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Marco Risi, Bernardino Zapponi and Dino Risi. Perf. Vittorio Gassman, André Lachapelle. 01 Distribution, 1979, DVD.
- Casanova '70*. Dir. Mario Monicelli. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli, Suso Cecchi D'Amico, Mario Monicelli and Tonino Guerra. Perf. Marcello Mastroianni, Virna Lisi and Enrico Maria Salerno. Mr. Bongo Films, 1965. DVD.
- Cattivi Pensieri*. Dir. Ugo Tognazzi. Screenplay by Antonio Leonviola, Ugo Tognazzi and Enzo Jannacci. Perf. Ugo Tognazzi and Edwige Fenech. Number One Video, 1976. DVD.
- Che Ora è? (What Time Is It?)*. Dir. Ettore Scola. Screenplay by Ettore Scola, Silvia Scola and Beatrice Ravaglioli. Perf. Marcello Mastroianni and Massimo Troisi. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1989. DVD.
- Compagni di Scuola*. Dir. Carlo Verdone. Screenplay by Carlo Verdone, Leonardo Benvenuti and Piero De Bernardi. Perf. Carlo Verdone, Christian De Sica, Nancy Brill, Eleonora Giorgi and Massimo Ghini. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1988. DVD.
- Contestazione Generale (Let's Have a Riot)*. Dir. Luigi Zampa. Screenplay by Rodolfo Sonego, Luigi Zampa, Leonardo Benvenuti, Piero De Bernardi and Alberto Silvestri. Perf. Vittorio Gassman, Nino Manfredi, Alberto Sordi and Enrico Maria Salerno. Ultra Film, 1970. Television Broadcast.
- Controsesso (Countersex)*. Dir. Renato Castellani, Marco Ferreri and Franco Rossi. Screenplay by Rafael Azcona, Marco Ferreri, Leonardo Benvenuti, Piero De Bernardi and Cesare Zavattini. Perf. Nino Manfredi, Ugo Tognazzi and Anna Mario Ferrero. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1964. DVD.
- Crimen (And Suddenly It's Murder!)*. Dir. Mario Camerini. Screenplay by Luciano Vincenzoni, Rodolfo Sonego and Oreste Biancioli. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Vittorio Gassman, Nino Manfredi, Franca Valeri, Dorian Gray and Silvana Mangano. Filmauro, 1961. DVD.
- Dagobert (Good King Dagobert)*. Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Dino Risi and Gérard Brach. Perf. Ugo Tognazzi and Isabella Ferrari. Univideo, 1984. DVD.

- Detenuto in Attesa di Giudizio*. Dir. Nanni Loy. Screenplay by Sergio Amidei and Emilio Sanna. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Elga Andersen and Andrea Aureli. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1971. DVD.
- Divorzio all'italiana (Divorce, Italian Style)*. Dir. Pietro Germi. Screenplay by Ennio De Concini, Pietro Germi and Alfredo Giannetti. Perf. Marcello Mastroianni, Daniela Rocca, Stefania Sandrelli, Leopoldo Trieste and Lando Buzzanca. Cristaldi Film, 1962. DVD.
- Dove Vai in Vacanza?(Where Are You Going on Holiday?)*. Dir. Mauro Bolognini, Luciano Salce and Alberto Sordi. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari, Furio Scarpelli, Rodolfo Sonogo, Sandro Continenza, Alberto Sordi and Jaja Sastri. Perf. Ugo Tognazzi, Alberto Sordi, Anna Longhi and Stefania Sandrelli. Medusa Home Video, 1978. DVD.
- Dramma della Gelosia (Tutti i Particolari in Cronaca)*. Dir. Ettore Scola. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli and Ettore Scola. Perf. Marcello Mastroianni, Monica Vitti and Giancarlo Giannini. 01 Distribution, 1970. DVD.
- Fantasma a Roma (Ghosts of Rome)*. Dir. Antonio Pietrangeli. Screenplay by Ennio Flaiano, Antonio Pietrangeli, Ruggero Maccari, Ettore Scola and Sergio Amidei. Perf. Eduardo De Filippo, Marcello Mastroianni, Belinda Lee and Sandra Milo. Cristaldi Film, 1961. DVD.
- Fantozzi (White Collar Blues)*. Dir. Luciano Salce. Screenplay by Paolo Villaggio, Leonardo Benvenuti, Piero De Bernardi and Luciano Salce. By Paolo Villaggio. Perf. Paolo Villaggio, Anna Mazzamauro, Gigi Reder and Liù Bosisio. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1975. DVD.
- Film d'amore e d'anarchia ovvero 'Stamattina in Via Fiori nella Nota Casa di Tolleranza' (Love and Anarchy)*. Dir. Lina Wertmüller. Screenplay by Lina Wertmüller. Perf. Giancarlo Giannini and Mariangela Melato. Minerva Video, 1973. DVD.
- Finché c'è Guerra c'è Speranza (While There's War There's Hope)*. Dir. Alberto Sordi. Screenplay by Alberto Sordi, Leonardo Benvenuti and Piero De Bernardi. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Silvia Monti and Alessandro Cutolo. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1974. DVD.
- Fumo di Londra (Smoke Over London)*. Dir. Alberto Sordi. Screenplay by Sergio Amidei and Alberto Sordi. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Fiona Lewis and Amy Dalby. Terminal Video, 1966. DVD.
- Gli Anni Ruggenti (Roaring Years)*. Dir. Luigi Zampa. Screenplay by Sergio Amidei, Ruggero Maccari, Ettore Scola and Luigi Zampa. Perf. Nino Manfredi, Gino Cervi and Gastone Moschin. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1962. DVD.
- Guardie e Ladri (Cops and Robbers)*. Dir. Stefano Vanzina (Steno) and Mario Monicelli. Screenplay by Stefano Vanzina (Steno), Piero Tellini, Ennio Flaiano, Ruggero Maccari and Vitaliano Brancati. Perf. Totò and Aldo Fabrizi. Filmauro, 1951. DVD.

- I Basilischi (The Lizards)*. Dir. Lina Wertmüller. Screenplay by Lina Wertmüller. Perf. Antonio Petruzzi and Stefano Satta Flores. Galatea Film, 1963. Television Broadcast.
- I Compagni (The Organizer)*. Dir. Mario Monicelli. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli and Mario Monicelli. Perf. Marcello Mastroianni, Renato Salvatori, Folco Lulli, Gabriella Giorgelli, Bernard Blier and Raffaella Carrà. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1963. DVD.
- I Complessi (Complexes)*. Dir. Dino Risi, Luigi Filippo D'Amico and Franco Rossi. Screenplay by Rodolfo Sonego, Alberto Sordi, Leonardo Benvenuti, Piero De Bernardi, Ettore Scola and Ruggero Maccari. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Nino Manfredi and Ugo Tognazzi. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1965. DVD.
- I Due Nemici (The Best of Enemies)*. Dir. Guy Hamilton. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli, Suso Cecchi D'Amico, Luciano Vincenzoni and Jack Pullman. Perf. Alberto Sordi and David Niven. Filmauro, 1961. DVD.
- I Magliari (The Magliari)*. Dir. Francesco Rosi. Screenplay by Suso Cecchi D'Amico, Francesco Rosi and Giuseppe Patroni Griffi. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Renato Salvatori, Aldo Giuffrè and Belinda Lee. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1959. DVD.
- I Mostri (Fifteen from Rome)*. Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli, Elio Petri, Ruggero Maccari, Ettore Scola and Dino Risi. Perf. Vittorio Gassman, Ugo Tognazzi and Lando Buzzanca. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1963. DVD.
- I Nuovi Mostri (Viva Italia!)*. Dir. Mario Monicelli, Dino Risi and Ettore Scola. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Ruggero Maccari, Ettore Scola, Giuseppe Moccia (Pipolo) and Bernardino Zapponi. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Vittorio Gassman, Ugo Tognazzi and Ornella Muti. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1977. DVD.
- I Soliti Ignoti (Big Deal on Madonna St.)*. Dir. Mario Monicelli. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli, Suso Cecchi D'Amico and Mario Monicelli. Perf. Vittorio Gassman, Marcello Mastroianni, Claudia Cardinale, Totò, Tiberio Murgia, Renato Salvatori and Memmo Carotenuto. Criterion, 1958. DVD.
- I Soliti Ignoti Vent'anni Dopo (Big Deal on Madonna Street 20 Years Later)*. Dir. Amanzio Todini. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Suso Cecchi D'Amico and Amanzio Todini. Perf. Marcello Mastroianni, Vittorio Gassman and Tiberio Murgia. Penta Video, 1985. Videocassette.
- Ieri, Oggi e Domani (Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow)*. Dir. Vittorio De Sica. Screenplay by Cesare Zavattini and Eduardo De Filippo. Perf. Marcello Mastroianni, Sophia Loren and Aldo Giuffrè. Eureka Entertainment, 1963. DVD.
- Il Bell'Antonio (Bell'Antonio)*. Dir. Mauro Bolognini. Screenplay by Mauro Bolognini and Pier Paolo Pasolini. By Vitaliano Brancati. Perf. Marcello Mastroianni and Claudia Cardinale. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1960. DVD.

- Il Carro Armato dell'8 Settembre*. Dir. Gianni Puccini. Screenplay by Rodolfo Sonego, Gianni Puccini and Pier Paolo Pasolini. Perf. Gabriele Ferzetti, Dorian Grey, Elsa Martinelli and Marisa Merlini. Napoleon Film, 1960. Television Broadcast.
- Il Commissario (The Police Commissioner)*. Dir. Luigi Comencini. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age) and Furio Scarpelli. Perf. Alberto Sordi and Alessandro Cutolo. Filmauro, 1962. DVD.
- Il Commissario Pepe (Police Chief Pepe)*. Dir. Ettore Scola. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari and Ettore Scola. By Ugo Facco de Lagarda. Perf. Ugo Tognazzi and Silvia Dionisio. PVB Editions, 1969. DVD.
- Il Comune Senso del Pudore*. Dir. Alberto Sordi. Screenplay by Rodolfo Sonego and Alberto Sordi. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Claudia Cardinale and Philip Noiret. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1976. DVD.
- Il Conte Max (Count Max)*. Dir. Giorgio Bianchi. Screenplay by Rodolfo Sonego, Ettore Scola, Ruggero Maccari, Alberto Sordi and Giorgio Bianchi. By Mario Camerini. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1957. DVD.
- Il Diavolo (To Bed or Not to Bed)*. Dir. Gian Luigi Polidoro. Screenplay by Rodolfo Sonego. Perf. Alberto Sordi. Dino De Laurentiis Cinematografica, 1962. DVD.
- Il Federale (The Fascist)*. Dir. Luciano Salce. Screenplay by Franco Castellano, Luciano Salce and Giuseppe Moccia (Pipolo). Perf. Ugo Tognazzi, Stefania Sandrelli and Georges Wilson. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1961. DVD.
- Il Fischio al Naso (The Seventh Floor)*. Dir. Ugo Tognazzi. Screenplay by Rafael Azcona, Renzo Tarabusi and Ugo Tognazzi. By Dino Buzzati. Perf. Ugo Tognazzi and Tina Louise. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1967. DVD.
- Il Gatto*. Dir. Luigi Comencini. Screenplay by Rodolfo Sonego, Augusto Carminio and Fulvio Marcolin. Perf. Ugo Tognazzi, Mariangela Melato and Mario Brega. Rafran Cinematografica, 1977. Television Broadcast.
- Il Gaucho (The Gaucho)*. Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari, Ettore Scola, Tullio Pinelli and Dino Risi. Perf. Vittorio Gassman, Nino Manfredi, Silvana Pampanini and Amedeo Nazzari. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1964. DVD.
- Il Giovedì (The Thursday)*. Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Franco Castellano, Giuseppe Moccia (Pipolo) and Dino Risi. Perf. Walter Chiari, Michele Mercier, Alice Kessler and Ellen Kessler. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1963. DVD.
- Il Giudizio Universale (The Last Judgment)*. Dir. Vittorio De Sica. Screenplay by Cesare Zavattini. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Vittorio Gassman, Nino Manfredi, Fernandel, Anouk Aimée and Silvana Mangano. Filmauro, 1961. DVD.

- Il Ladrone*. Dir. Pasquale Festa Campanile. Screenplay by Renato Ghiotti, Ottavio Jemma and Santino Sparta. Perf. Enrico Montesano and Edwige Fenech. 01 Distribution, 1980. DVD.
- Il Maestro di Vigevano (The Teacher from Vigevano)*. Dir. Elio Petri. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age) and Furio Scarpelli. By Lucio Mastronardi. Perf. Alberto Sordi and Claire Bloom. Filmauro, 1963. DVD.
- Il Magnifico Cornuto*. Dir. Antonio Pietrangeli. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari, Ettore Scola and Diego Fabbri. Perf. Ugo Tognazzi, Claudia Cardinale, Bernard Blier and Gian Maria Volontè. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1964. DVD.
- Il Mantenuto*. Dir. Ugo Tognazzi. Screenplay by Giulio Scarnicci and Renzo Tarabusi. Perf. Ugo Tognazzi and Ilaria Occhini. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1961. DVD.
- Il Marchese del Grillo*. Dir. Mario Monicelli. Screenplay by Bernardino Zapponi, Tullio Pinelli, Leonardo Benvenuti, Piero De Bernardi, Alberto Sordi and Mario Monicelli. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Leopoldo Trieste and Paolo Stoppa. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1981. DVD.
- Il Marito*. Dir. Nanni Loy. Screenplay by Rodolfo Sonego, Ruggero Maccari, Ettore Scola, Alberto Sordi and Nanni Loy. Perf. Alberto Sordi and Aurora Bautista. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1957. DVD.
- Il Mattatore (Love and Larceny)*. Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli, Ettore Scola and Sandro Continenza. Perf. Vittorio Gassman, Peppino De Filippo, Dorian Grey, Anna Mario Ferrero and Memmo Carotenuto. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1960. DVD.
- Il Medico della Mutua (Be Sick...It's Free)*. Dir. Luigi Zampa. Screenplay by Sergio Amidei, Luigi Zampa and Alberto Sordi. By Giuseppe D'Agata. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Sara Franchetti and Ida Galli. Minerva Video, 1968. DVD.
- Il Mondo Nuovo (That Night in Varennes)*. Dir. Ettore Scola. Screenplay by Sergio Amidei and Ettore Scola. Perf. Marcello Mastroianni, Jean-Louis Barrault and Harvey Keitel. 20th Century Fox, 1982. DVD.
- Il Moralista*. Dir. Giorgio Bianchi. Screenplay by Rodolfo Sonego, Ettore Maria Margadonna, Oreste Biancioli and Vincenzo Talarico. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Franca Valeri, Vittorio De Sica and Franco Fabrizi. Terminal Video, 1959. DVD.
- Il Padre di Famiglia*. Dir. Nanni Loy. Screenplay by Nanni Loy and Ruggero Maccari. Perf. Nino Manfredi, Ugo Tognazzi and Leslie Caron. 01 Distribution, 1967. DVD.
- Il Presidente del Borghorosso F.C.*. Dir. Luigi Filippo D'Amico. Screenplay by Sergio Amidei, Alberto Sordi and Adriano Zecca. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Rino Cavalcanti and Omar Sivori. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1970. DVD.

- Il Prof. Dott. Guido Tersilli, Primario della Clinica Villa Celeste, Convenzionata con le Mutue.* Dir. Luciano Salce. Screenplay by Sergio Amidei and Alberto Sordi. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Ida Galli and Claudio Gora. Minerva Video, 1969. DVD.
- Il Profeta (The Prophet).* Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari, Ettore Scola and Dino Risi. Perf. Vittorio Gassman, Ann Margaret and Oreste Lionello. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1968. DVD.
- Il Secondo Tragico Fantozzi.* Dir. Luciano Salce. Screenplay by Paolo Villaggio, Leonardo Benvenuti and Piero De Bernardi. Perf. Paolo Villaggio, Anna Mazzamauro, Gigi Reder and Liù Bosisio. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1976. DVD.
- Il Seduttore .* Dir. Franco Rossi. Screenplay by Diego Fabbri, Rodolfo Sonego and Leonardo Benvenuti . Perf. Alberto Sordi and Lea Padovani. Cristaldi Film, 1954. DVD.
- Il Sindacalista.* Dir. Luciano Salce. Screenplay by Franco Castellani and Giuseppe Moccia (Pipolo). Perf. Lando Buzzanca and Renzo Motagnani. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1972. DVD.
- Il Sorpasso (The Easy Life).* Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari, Ettore Scola and Dino Risi. Perf. Vittorio Gassman, Jean-Louis Trintignant, Catherine Spaak and Claudio Gora. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1952. DVD.
- Il Successo.* Dir. Dino Risi and Mauro Morassi. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari and Ettore Scola. Perf. Vittorio Gassman, Jean-Louis Trintignant, Ainouk Aimée and Ugo Attanasio. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1963. DVD.
- Il Tassinaro.* Dir. Alberto Sordi. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli and Alberto Sordi. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Federico Fellin and Giulio Andreotti. 01 Distribution, 1983. DVD.
- Il Tigre (The Tiger and the Pussycat).* Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli and Dino Risi. Perf. Vittorio Gassman and Ann Margaret. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1967. DVD.
- Il Vedovo (The Widower).* Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Rodolfo Sonego, Sandro Continenza, Dino Risi and Fabio Carpi. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Franca Valeri, Nando Bruno and Ruggero Marchi. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1959. DVD.
- Il Vigile.* Dir. Luigi Zampa. Screenplay by Rodolfo Sonego, Luigi Zampa and Ugo Guerra. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Vittorio De Sica, Marisa Merlini, Sylva Koscina and Nando Bruno. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1960. DVD.
- In Nome del Papa Re.* Dir. Luigi Magni. Screenplay by Luigi Magni. Perf. Nino Manfredi, Danilo Mattei and Carmen Scarpitta. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1977. DVD.
- In Nome del Popolo Italiano (In the Name of Italian People).* Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age) and Furio Scarpelli. Perf. Vittorio Gassman and Ugo Tognazzi. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1971. DVD.

- In Nome del Popolo Sovrano*. Dir. Luigi Magni. Screenplay by Luigi Magni and Arrigo Petacco. Perf. Nino Manfredi and Luca Barbareschi. RAI, 1990. Television Broadcast.
- In Viaggio con Papà*. Dir. Alberto Sordi. Screenplay by Rodolfo Sonego, Alberto Sordi and Carlo Verdone. Perf. Alberto Sordi and Carlo Verdone. Domovideo, 1982. Videocassette.
- Io e Caterina*. Dir. Alberto Sordi. Screenplay by Rodolfo Sonego and Alberto Sordi. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Edwige Fenech and Catherine Spaak. 01 Distribution, 1980. DVD.
- Io la Conoscevo Bene (I Knew Her Well)*. Dir. Antonio Pietrangeli. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari, Ettore Scola and Antonio Pietrangeli. Perf. Stefania Sandrelli, Nino Manfredi, Ugo Tognazzi, Franco Fabrizi and Enrico Maria Salerno. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1965. DVD.
- Io Sò che tu Sai che Io Sò*. Dir. Alberto Sordi. Screenplay by Rodolfo Sonego and Augusto Caminito. Perf. Alberto Sordi and Monica Vitti.
- Io, Io, Io... e gli Altri (Me, Me, Me... and the Others)*. Dir. Alessandro Blasetti. Screenplay by Alessandro Blasetti, Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli, Ennio Flaiano. Perf. Nino Manfredi, Vittorio De Sica, Gina Lollobrigida, Silvana Mangano, Caterina Boratto and Walter Chiari. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1965. DVD.
- Italian Secret Service*. Dir. Luigi Comencini. Screenplay by Leonardo Benvenuti, Piero De Bernardi, Luigi Comencini and Massimo Patrizi. Perf. Nino Manfredi and Clive Revill. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1967. DVD.
- L'Alibi (Alibi)*. Dir. Adolfo Celi, Vittorio Gassman and Luciano Lucignani. Screenplay by Adolfo Celi, Sandro Continenza, Vittorio Gassman and Luciano Lucignani. Perf. Adolfo Celi, Vittorio Gassman and Luciano Lucignani. Vides Cinematografica, 1969. Television Broadcast.
- L'ape Regina: una Storia Moderna (The Conjugal Bed)*. Dir. Marco Ferreri. Screenplay by Rafael Azcona, Marco Ferreri, Pasquale Festa Campanile and Massimo Franciosa. Perf. Ugo Tognazzi and Marina Vlady.
- L'Arcidiavolo (The Devil in Love)*. Dir. Ettore Scola. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari and Ettore Scola. Perf. Vittorio Gassman, Claudine Auger and Mickey Rooney. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1966. DVD.
- L'armata Brancaleone (For Love and Gold)*. Dir. Mario Monicelli. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli and Mario Monicelli. Perf. Vittorio Gassman, Catherine Spaak, Gian Maria Volontè, Barbara Steele and Enrico Maria Salerno. 01 Distribution, 1966. DVD.
- L'arte di Arrangiarsi (The Art of Getting Along)*. Dir. Luigi Zampa. Screenplay by Vitaliano Brancati and Luigi Zampa. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Marco Guglielmi and Franco Coop. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1954. DVD.

- L'immorale (The Climax)*. Dir. Pietro Germi. Screenplay by Pietro Germi, Tullio Pinelli, Alfredo Giannetti and Carlo Bernari. Perf. Ugo Tognazzi and Stefania Sandrelli. Dear Film, 1966. Television Broadcast.
- L'impiegato*. Dir. Gianni Puccini. Screenplay by Gianni Puccini, Elio Petri and Nino Manfredi. Perf. Nino Manfredi and Anna Maria Ferrero. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1959. DVD.
- L'ingorgo, una Storia Impossibile (TrafficJam)*. Dir. Luigi Comencini. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari, Luigi Comencini and Bernardino Zapponi. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Ugo Tognazzi, Marcello Mastroianni, Stefania Sandrelli, Gerard Depardieu and Ciccio Ingrassia. Koch Media, 1979. DVD.
- L'ombrellone*. Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Ennio De Concini and Dino Risi. Perf. Enrico Maria Salerno, Sandra Milo and Leopoldo Trieste. 01 Distribution, 1965. DVD.
- La Bambolona*. Dir. Franco Giraldi. Screenplay by Franco Giraldi and Ruggero Maccari. By Alba De Cespedes. Perf. Ugo Tognazzi and Isabella Rey. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1969. DVD.
- La Bugiarda*. Dir. Luigi Comencini. Screenplay by Luigi Comencini and Marcello Fondato. By Diego Fabbri. Perf. Catherine Spaak, Marc Michel and Enrico Maria Salerno. 01 Distribution, 1965. DVD.
- La Congiuntura (Hard Times for Princes)*. Dir. Ettore Scola. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari and Ettore Scola. Perf. Vittorio Gassman, Joan Collins and Jacques Bergerac. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1964. DVD.
- La Cuccagna*. Dir. Luciano Salce. Screenplay by Luciano Vincenzoni, Alberto Bevilacqua and Luciano Salce. Perf. Luigi Tenco and Donatella Turri. CIRAC, 1962. Television Broadcast.
- La Donna della Domenica (The Sunday Woman)*. Dir. Luigi Comencini. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age) and Furio Scarpelli. By Carlo Fruttero and Franco Lucentini. Perf. Marcello Mastroianni, Jacqueline Bisset and Jean-Louis Trintignant. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1975. DVD.
- La Donna Scimmia (The Ape Woman)*. Dir. Marco Ferreri. Screenplay by Rafael Azcona and Marco Ferreri. Perf. Ugo Tognazzi and Annie Girardot. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1964. DVD.
- La Famiglia (The Family)*. Dir. Ettore Scola. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari, Furio Scarpelli and Ettore Scola. Perf. Vittorio Gassma, Stefania Sadrelli and Fanny Ardant. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1986. DVD.
- La Grande Bouffe (The Big Feast)*. Dir. Marco Ferreri. Screenplay by Marco Ferreri and Rafael Azcona. Perf. Marcello Mastroianni, Michel Piccoli, Philip Noiret and Ugo Tognazzi. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1973. DVD.

- La Grande Guerra (The Great War)*. Dir. Mario Monicelli. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli, Mario Monicelli and Luciano Vincenzoni. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Vittorio Gassman, Silvana Mangano and Tiberio Murgia. Filmauro, 1959. DVD.
- La Mandragola*. Dir. Alberto Lattuada. Screenplay by Alberto Lattuada and Luigi Magni. By Niccolò Macchiavelli. Perf. Rosanna Schiaffino, Philippe Leroy, Totò and Nilla Pizzi. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1965. DVD.
- La Marcia su Roma (March on Rome)*. Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli, Ruggero Maccari, Ettore Scola and Sandro Continenza. Perf. Vittorio Gassman, Ugo Tognazzi, Roger Hanin and Mario Brega. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1962. DVD.
- La Mia Signora (My Wife)*. Dir. Luigi Comencini, Mauro Bolognini and Tinto Brass. Screenplay by Rodolfo Sonogo, Luigi Comencini, Alberto Bevilacqua and Marcello Fondato. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Silvana Mangano, Elena Fabrizi and Claudio Gora. Dino De Laurentiis Cinematografica, 1964. Television Broadcast.
- La Moglie del Prete (The Priest's Wife)*. Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari, Bernardino Zapponi and Dino Risi. Perf. Marcello Mastroianni and Sophia Loren. Warner Brothers, 1971. DVD.
- La Mortadella*. Dir. Mario Monicelli. Screenplay by Renato W. Spera, Leonardo Melfi and Suso Cecchi D'Amico. Perf. Sophia Loren, Gigi Proietti and Danny DeVito. Video Search of Miami, 1971. DVD.
- La Noia (The Empty Canvas)*. Dir. Damiano Damiani. Screenplay by Damiano Damiani and Tonino Guerra. By Alberto Moravia. Perf. Catherine Spaak, Bette Davis and Isa Miranda. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1963. DVD.
- La Notte Brava (The Big Night)*. Dir. Mauro Bolognini. Screenplay by Jacques-Laurent Bost and Pier Paolo Pasolini. Perf. Rosanna Schiaffino, Elsa Martinelli and Franco Interlenghi. AY, 1959. DVD.
- La Parmigiana (The Girl from Parma)*. Dir. Antonio Pietrangeli. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari, Ettore Scola, Antonio Pietrangeli and Bruno Piatti. By Bruno Piatti. Perf. Catherine Spaak, Nino Manfredi, Lando Buzzanca and Didi Perego. Dino De Laurentiis Cinematografica, 1963. Television Broadcast.
- La Pecora Nera*. Dir. Luciano Salce. Screenplay by Ennio De Concini and Luciano Salce. Perf. Vittorio Gassman and Lisa Gastoni. Fair-Film, 1968. Television Broadcast.
- La Più Bella Serata della Mia Vita*. Dir. Ettore Scola. Screenplay by Ettore Scola and Sergio Amidei. By Friedrich Dürrenmatt. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Marcel Simon and Charles Vanel. Filmauro, 1972. DVD.

- La Ragazza con La Pistola (The Girl With a Pistol)*. Dir. Mario Monicelli. Screenplay by Luigi Magni and Rodolfo Sonego. Perf. Monica Vitti, Stanley Baker, Carlo Giuffrè and Tiberio Murgia. Medusa Home Video, 1968. DVD.
- La Ragazza di Bube (Bebo's Girl)*. Dir. Luigi Comencini. Screenplay by Luigi Comencini and Marcello Fondato. By Carlo Cassola. Perf. Claudia Cardinale and George Charikis. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1963. DVD.
- La Rimpatriata*. Dir. Damiano Damiani. Screenplay by Vittorio Petrilli and Damiano Damiani. Perf. Walter Chiari and Gastone Moschin. Galatea Film, 1963. Television Broadcast.
- La Stanza del Vescovo (The Bishop's Bedroom)*. Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Leonardo Benvenuti, Piero De Bernardi and Dino Risi. By Piero Chiara. Perf. Ugo Tognazzi, Ornella Muti and Patrick Dewaere. Medus Home Entertainment, 1977. DVD.
- La Terrazza*. Dir. Ettore Scola. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli and Ettore Scola. Perf. Vittorio Gassman, Ugo Tognazzi, Marcello Mastroianni, Jean-Louis Trintignant, Stfania Sandrelli and Stefano Satta Flores. 01 Distribution, 1980.
- La Visita*. Dir. Antonio Pietrangeli. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari, Ettore Scola, Antonio Pietrangeli and Gino De Santis. Perf. Sandra Milo, François Perier and Gastone Moschin. Minerva Home Video, 1964. DVD.
- La Vita Agra*. Dir. Carlo Lizzani. Screenplay by Sergio Amidei and Luciano Vincenzoni. By Luciano Bianciardi. Perf. Ugo Tognazzi and Giovanna Ralli. Terminal Video, 1964. DVD.
- La Voglia Matta (Crazy Desire)*. Dir. Luciano Salce. Screenplay by Franco Castellano, Giuseppe Moccia (Pipolo) and Luciano Salce. By Enrico La Stella. Perf. Ugo Tognazzi and Catherine Spaak. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1962. DVD.
- Le Bambole (The Dolls)*. Dir. Luigi Comencini, Mario Bolognini, Dino Risi and Franco Rossi. Screenplay by Rodolfo Sonego. Perf. Nino Manfredi, Monica Vitti and Virna Lisi. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 1965. DVD.
- Le Coppie (Man and Wife)*. Dir. Vittorio De Sica, Mario Monicelli and Alberto Sordi. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari, Mario Monicelli, Rodolfo Sonego and Alberto Sordi. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Monica Vitti and Enzo Jannacci. CEIAD, 1971. DVD.
- Le Farò da Padre*. Dir. Alberto Lattuada. Screenplay by Bruno Di Geronimo, Alberto Lattuada, Ottavio Jemma. Perf. Gigi Proietti, Teresa Ann Savoy, Isa Miranda and Irene Papas. Koch Media, 1974. DVD.
- Le Fate (The Queens)*. Dir. Antonio Pietrangeli, Mario Monicelli, Mauro Bolognini and Luciano Salce. Screenplay by Luigi Magni, Rodolfo Sonego, Ruggero Maccari and Suso Cecchi d'Amico. Perf. Monica Vitti, Enrico Maria Salerno, Claudia Cardinale, Alberto Sordi and Raquel Welch. Documento Film, 1966. Television Broadcast.

- Le Ore dell'Amore (The Hours of Love)*. Dir. Luciano Salce. Screenplay by Franco Castellani, Giuseppe Moccia (Pipolo) and Luciano Salce. Perf. Ugo Tognazzi, Emmanuelle Riva and Barbara Steele. Eagle Pictures, 1963. DVD.
- Le Streghe (The Witches)*. Dir. Mauro Bolognini, Vittorio De Sica, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Franco Rossi and Luchino Visconti. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli, Luigi Magni, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Bernardino Zapponi. Perf. Silvana Mangano, Massimo Girotti, Alberto Sordi, Laura Betti, Clint Eastwood and Totò. Dino De Laurentiis Cinematografica, 1967. Television Broadcast.
- Le Svedesi*. Dir. Gian Luigi Polidoro. Screenplay by Rodolfo Sonego, Gian Luigi Polidoro and Furio Palmieri. Perf. Franco Fabrizi, Franco Interlenghi, Leopoldo Trieste and Mario Carotenuto. Ajace Produzioni Cinematografiche, 1960. Television Broadcast.
- Lo Scapolo (The Bachelor)*. Dir. Antonio Pietrangeli. Screenplay by Antonio Pietrangeli, Sandro Continenza, Ruggero Maccari and Ettore Scola. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Nino Manfredi and Sandra Milo. Minerva Video, 1955. DVD.
- Lo Scopone Scientifico*. Dir. Luigi Comencini. Screenplay by Rodolfo Sonego. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Silvana Mangano, Bette Davis, Joseph Cotten and Mario Carotenuto. Filmauro, 1972. DVD.
- Maccheroni (Macaroni)*. Dir. Ettore Scola. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari, Furio Scarpelli and Ettore Scola. Perf. Marcello Mastroianni and Jack Lemmon. Filmauro, 1985. DVD.
- Made in Italy*. Dir. Nanni Loy. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari, Ettore Scola and Nanni Loy. Perf. Nini Mandredi, Alberto Sordi, Anna Magnani, Aldo Fabrizi and Peppino De Filippo. Documento Film, 1965. Television Broadcast.
- Mafioso*. Dir. Alberto Lattuada. Screenplay by Rafael Azcona, Marco Ferreri, Agenore Incrocci (Age) and Furio Scarpelli. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Norma Bengell and Ugo Attanasio. Criterion, 1962. DVD.
- Marcia Nuziale (The Wedding March)*. Dir. Marco Ferreri. Screenplay by Rafael Azcona, Diego Fabbri and Marco Ferreri. Perf. Ugo Tognazzi and Shirley Anne Field. Eagle Pictures, 1966. DVD.
- Matrimonio all'italiana (Marriage, Italian Style)*. Dir. Vittorio De Sica. Screenplay by Renato Castellani, Leonardo Benvenuti and Piero De Bernardi. By Eduardo De Filippo. Perf. Marcello Mastroianni and Sophia Loren. Mr. Bongo Films, 1964. DVD.
- Menage all'italiana (Menage Italian Style)*. Dir. Franco Indovina. Screenplay by Rodolfo Sonego and Franco Indovina. Perf. Ugo Tognazzi, Anna Moffo and Monica Silves. Dino De Laurentiis Cinematografica, 1965. Television Broadcast.
- Mi Manda Picone*. Dir. Nanni Loy. Screenplay by Nanni Loy and Elvio Porta. Perf. Giancarlo Giannini, Lina Sastri and Aldo Giuffrè. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1983. DVD.

- Mimi Metallurgico Ferito nell'Onore (The Seduction of Mimi)*. Dir. Lina Wertmüller. Screenplay by Lina Wertmüller. Perf. Giancarlo Giannini and Mariangela Melato. Minerva Video, 1972. DVD.
- Mordi e Fuggi*. Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari, Dino Risi and Bernardino Zapponi. Perf. Marcello Mastroianni, Oliver Reed and Carole André. Champion, 1973. Television Broadcast.
- Nell'Anno del Signore (The Conspirators)*. Dir. Luigi Magni. Screenplay by Luigi Magni. Perf. Nino Manfredi, Enrico Maria Salerno, Claudia Cardinale, Ugo Tognazzi, Alberto Sordi, Robert Hossein and Renaud Verley. Minerva Video, 1969. DVD.
- Nestore l'ultima Corsa*. Dir. Alberto Sordi. Screenplay by Rodolfo Sonego and Alberto Sordi. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Matteo Ripaldi and Eros Pagni. Fabbri Editore, 1994. DVD.
- Noi Donne Siamo Fatte Così*. Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Dino Risi, Ettore Scola, Rodolfo Sonego and Luciano Vincenzoni. Perf. Monica Vitti, Carlo Giuffrè and Enrico Maria Salerno. Cecchi Gore Home Video, 1971. DVD.
- Notte d'Estate con Profilo Greco, Occhi a Mandorla e Odore di Basilico (Summer Night, with Greek Profile, Almond Eyes and Scent of Basil)*. Dir. Lina Wertmüller. Screenplay by Lina Wertmüller. Perf. Mariangela Melato and Michele Placido. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1986. DVD.
- Nudo di Donna*. Dir. Nino Manfredi. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli, Ruggero Maccari and Giuseppe Moccia. Perf. Nino Manfredi, Eleonora Giorgi and Jean-Pierre Cassel. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1981. DVD.
- Oggi, Domani e Dopodomani (The Man, the Woman and the Money)*. Dir. Marco Ferreri, Eduardo De Filippo and Luciano Salce. Screenplay by Rafael Azcona, Marco Ferreri, Eduardo De Filippo, Franco Castellano and Giuseppe Moccia (Pipolo). Perf. Marcello Mastroianni, Catherine Spaak, Virna Lisi, Ugo Tognazzi and Raimondo Vianello. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1965. DVD.
- Operazione San Gennaro (The Treasure of San Gennaro)*. Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Ennio De Concini, Dino Risi, Adriano Baracco and Nino Manfredi. Perf. Nino Manfredi, Senta Berger and Totò. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1966. DVD.
- Pane e Cioccolata (Bread and Chocolate)*. Dir. Franco Brusati. Screenplay by Franco Brusati, Jaja Fiastrì and Nino Manfredi. Perf. Nino Manfredi, Johnny Dorelli and Anna Karina. Hen's Tooth Video, 1973. Videocassette.
- Pasqualino Settebellezze (Seven Beauties)*. Dir. Lina Wertmüller. Screenplay by Lina Wertmüller. Perf. Giancarlo Giannini, Fernando Rey and Shirley Stoler. Warner Brothers, 1975. DVD.

- Per Grazia Ricevuta (Between Miracles)*. Dir. Nino Manfredi. Screenplay by Luigi Magni, Nino Manfredi, Leonardo Benvenuti and Piero De Bernardi. Perf. Nono Manfredi, Lionel Stander and Mariangela Melato. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1971. DVD.
- Permette? Rocco Papaleo*. Dir. Ettore Scola. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari, Ettore Scola and Peter Goldfarb. Perf. Marcello Mastroianni and Lauren Hutton. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1971. DVD.
- Polvere di Stelle*. Dir. Alberto Sordi. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari, Alberto Sordi and Bernardino Zapponi. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Monica Vitti and Vanda Osiris. Terminal Video, 1973. DVD.
- Primo Amore*. Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari and Dino Risi. Perf. Ugo Tognazzi and Ornella Muti. 01 Distribution, 1978. DVD.
- Profumo di Donna (Scent of a Woman)*. Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari and Dino Risi. By Giovanni Arpino. Perf. Vittorio Gassman, Alessandro Momo and Agostina Belli. 01 Distribution, 1974. DVD.
- Quelle Strane Occasioni*. Dir. Luigi Comencini, Nanni Loy and Luigi Magni. Screenplay by Rodolfo Sonego, Leonardo Benvenuti, Piero De Bernardi and Sergio Corbucci. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Stefania Sandrelli, Nino Manfredi and Paolo Villaggio. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1976. DVD.
- Questa Volta Parliamo di Uomini (Let's Talk About Men)*. Dir. Lina Wertmüller. Screenplay by Lina Wertmüller. Perf. Nino Manfredi and Milena Vukotic. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1965. DVD.
- Questi Fantasmi (Ghosts, Italian Style)*. Dir. Renato Castellani. Screenplay by Tonino Guerra, Leonardo Benvenuti and Piero De Bernardi. By Eduardo De Filippo. Perf. Vittorio Gassman, Sophia Loren and Aldo Giuffrè. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1967. DVD.
- Riusciranno i Nostri Eroi a Trovare l'Amico Misteriosamente Scomparso in Africa*. Dir. Ettore Scola. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli and Ettore Scola. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Bernard Blier and Alberto Sordi. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1968. DVD.
- Ro.Go.Pa.G.*. Dir. Roberto Rossellini, Jean-Luc Godard, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Ugo Gregoretti. Screenplay by Roberto Rossellini, Jean-Luc Godard, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Ugo Gregoretti. Perf. Rosanna Schiaffino, Orson Welles, Jean-Marc Bory and Ugo Tognazzi. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1963. DVD.
- Romanzo di un Giovane Povero*. Dir. Ettore Scola. Screenplay by Ettore Scola, Giacomo Scarpelli and Silvia Scola. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Rolando Ravello, Isabella Ferrari and Mario Carotenuto. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1996. DVD.

- Romanzo Popolare (Come Home and Meet My Wife)*. Dir. Mario Monicelli. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli and Mario Monicelli. Perf. Ugo Tognazzi, Michele Placido and Ornella Muti. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1974. DVD.
- Rosolino Paternò, Soldato*. Dir. Nanni Loy. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci, Furio Scarpelli and Nanni Loy. Perf. Nino Mandredi, Peter Falk and Milena Vukotic. Dino De Laurentiis Cinematografica, 1970. Television Broadcast.
- Scemo di Guerra (Madman at War)*. Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli, Claude Berri and Georges Dutter. By Mario Tobino. Perf. Beppe Grillo, Bernard Blier and Coluche. Fox Pathé Europa, 1985. DVD.
- Scherzo del Destino in Agguato Dietro l'Angolo come un Brigante di Strada (A Joke of Destiny)*. Dir. Lina Wertmüller. Screenplay by Lina Wertmüller and Agenore Incrocci (Age). Perf. Ugo Tognazzi, Piera Degli Esposti and Gastone Moschin. Raro Video, 1983. DVD.
- Scipione, Detto anche l'Africano (Scipio the African)*. Dir. Luigi Magni. Screenplay by Luigi Magni. Perf. Marcello Mastroianni, Vittorio Gassman and Silvana Mangano. 01 Distribution, 1971. DVD.
- Scusi, Lei, è Favorevole o Contrario?*. Dir. Alberto Sordi. Screenplay by Sergio Amidei, Alberto Sordi and Dario Argento. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Laura Antonelli and Bibi Andersson. Terminal Video, 1966. DVD.
- Se Permettete Parliamo di Donne (Let's Talk About Women)*. Dir. Ettore Scola. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari and Ettore Scola. Perf. Vittorio Gassman, Walter Chiari, Mario Brega and Maria Fiore. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1964. DVD.
- Sedotta e Abbandonata (Seduced and Abandoned)*. Dir. Pietro Germi. Screenplay by Luciano Vincenzoni, Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli and Pietro Germi. Perf. Stefania Sandrelli, Saro Urzì and Lando Buzzanca. Cristaldi Film, 1964. DVD.
- Senza famiglia Nullatenenti Cercano Affetto (Without Family)*. Dir. Vittorio Gassman. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli and Vittorio Gassman. Perf. Vittorio Gassman, Paolo Villaggio and Agostina Belli. Fair Film, 1972. Television Broadcast.
- Serafino*. Dir. Pietro Germi. Screenplay by Leonardo Benvenuti, Piero De Bernardi, Alfredo Giannetti, Tullio Pinelli and Pietro Germi. Perf. Adriano Celentano, Ottavia Piccolo and Saro Urzì. Mondadori Video, 1968. Videocassette.
- Signore e Signori (The Birds, the Bees and the Italians)*. Dir. Pietro Germi. Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli, Luciano Vincenzoni and Pietro Germi. Perf. Virna Lisi, Gastone Moschin and Franco Fabrizi. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1965. DVD.
- Signore e Signori... Buonanotte*. Dir. Luigi Comencini, Nanni Loy, Luigi Magni, Mario Monicelli and Ettore Scola. Screenplay by Luigi Comencini, Agenore Incrocci (Age),

- Furio Scarpelli, Piero De Bernardi, Leonardo Benvenuti, Ettore Scola and Ruggero Maccari. Perf. Marcello Mastroianni, Ugo Tognazzi, Nino Manfredi and Paolo Villaggio. 01 Distribution, 1976. DVD.
- Sistemo l'America e Torno*. Dir. Nanni Loy. Screenplay by Leonardo Benvenuti, Piero De Bernardi and Nanni Loy. Perf. Paolo Villaggio, Sterling St. Jacques and Alfredo Rizzo. Domovideo, 1974. Videocassette.
- Sotto...Sotto...Strapazzato da Anomala Passione (Softly, Softly)*. Dir. Lina Wertmüller. Screenplay by Lina Wertmüller and Enrico Oldoini. Perf. Enrico Montesano and Veronica Lario. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1984. Videocassette.
- Speriamo che Sia Femmina*. Dir. Mario Monicelli. Screenplay by Tullio Pinelli, Leonardo Benvenuti, Piero De Bernardi, Suso Cecchi D'Amico and Mario Monicelli. Perf. Liv Ullmann, Catherine Deneuve, Philip Noiret, Stefania Sandrelli. Giuliano Gemma and Bernard Blier. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 1986. DVD.
- State Buoni...Se Potete*. Dir. Luigi Magni. Screenplay by Luigi Magni and Bernardino Zapponi. Perf. Johnny Dorelli and Philippe Leroy. San Paolo, 1983. DVD.
- Straziami Ma di Baci Saziami (Torture Me But Kill Me with Kisses)*. Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli and Dino Risi. Perf. Nino Manfredi, Pamela Tiffin and Ugo Tognazzi. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1968. DVD.
- Telefoni Bianchi*. Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari, Dino Risi and Bernardino Zapponi. Perf. Vittorio Gassman and Ugo Tognazzi. 01 Distribution, 1976. DVD.
- Ti Ho Sposato per Allegria*. Dir. Luciano Salce. Screenplay by Sandro Continenza, Agenore Incrocci (Age) and Luciano Salce. By Natalia Ginzburg. Perf. Monica Vitti, Giorgio Albertazzi and Maria Grazia Buccella. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1967. DVD.
- Tò, è Morta la Nonna!*. Dir. Mario Monicelli. Screenplay by Luigi Malerba, Mario Monicelli, Luisa Motagnana and Stefano Strucchi. Perf. Sirena Adgemova and Carole André. Vides Cinematografica, 1969. Television Broadcast.
- Trastevere*. Dir. Fausto Tozzi. Screenplay by Fausto Tozzi. Perf. Nino Manfredi, Vittorio Caprioli and Vittorio De Sica. PEA, 1971. Television Broadcast.
- Travolti da un Insolito Destino nell'Azzurro Mare di Agosto (Swept Away)*. Dir. Lina Wertmüller. Screenplay by Lina Wertmüller. Perf. Giancarlo Giannini and Mariangela Melato. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1974. DVD.
- Trevico-Torino (Viaggio nel Fiat-Nam)*. Dir. Ettore Scola. Screenplay by Ettore Scola and Diego Novelli. Perf. Paolo Turco and Vittorio Franzinetti. Unitelefilm, 1973. Television Broadcast.
- Tutti a Casa (Everybody Home)*. Dir. Luigi Comencini. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Fulio Scarpelli, Luigi Comencini and Marcello Fondato. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Eduardo De Filippo, Serge Reggiani and Carla Gravina. Filmauro, 1960. DVD.

- Un Borghese Piccolo Piccolo (An Average Little Man)*. Dir. Mario Monicelli. Screenplay by Sergio Amidei and Mario Monicelli. By Vincenzo Cerami. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Shelley Winters and Vincenzo Crocitti. Filmauro, 1977. DVD.
- Un Eroe dei Nostri Tempi (A Hero of Our Times)*. Dir. Mario Monicelli. Screenplay by Mario Monicelli and Rodolfo Sonego. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Franca Valeri, Leopoldo Trieste, Tina Pica and Giovanna Ralli. 01 Distribution, 1955. DVD.
- Un Giorno da Leoni (A Day for Lionhearts)*. Dir. Nanni Loy. Screenplay by Alfredo Giannetti and Nanni Loy. Perf. Renato Salvatori, Carla Gravina and Saro Urzì. Lux Films, 1961. DVD.
- Un Italiano in America (An Italian in America)*. Dir. Alberto Sordi. Screenplay by Rodolfo Sonego and Alberto Sordi. Perf. Alberto Sordi and Vittorio De Sica. Euro International Film, 1967. Television Broadcast.
- Un Tassinaro a New York*. Dir. Alberto Sordi. Screenplay by Rodolfo Sonego and Alberto Sordi. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Dom DeLuise and Anna Longhi. 01 Distribution, 1987. DVD.
- Una Botta di Vita (Taste of Life)*. Dir. Enrico Oldoini. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Enrico Oldoini, Alberto Sordi and Liliane Betti. Perf. Alberto Sordi and Bernard Blier. 01 Distribution, 1988. DVD.
- Una Giornata Particolare (A Special Day)*. Dir. Ettore Scola. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari, Ettore Scola and Maurizio Costanzo. Perf. Marcello Mastroianni and Sophia Loren. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1977. DVD.
- Una Moglie Americana (Run For Your Wife)*. Dir. Gian Luigi Polidoro. Screenplay by Ennio Flaiano, Rafael Azcona and Rodolfo Sonego. Perf. Ugo Tognazzi, Marina Vlady and Rhonda Fleming. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1965. DVD.
- Una Vita Difficile (A Difficult Life)*. Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Rodolfo Sonego. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Lea Massari, Franco Fabrizi and Claudio Gora. Filmauro, 1961. DVD.
- Vedo Nudo*. Dir. Dino Risi. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari, Bernardino Zapponi, Fabio Carpi, Jaja Fiastrì and Dino Risi. Perf. Nino Manfredi and Sylva Koscina. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1969. DVD.
- Venga a Prendere il Caffè da Noi (Come Have Coffee with Us)*. Dir. Alberto Lattuada. Screenplay by Tullio Kezich and Alberto Lattuada. By Piero Chiara. Perf. Ugo Tognazzi and Milena Vukotic. Minerva Video, 1970. DVD.
- Vogliamo i Colonnelli*. Dir. Mario Monicelli. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli and Mario Monicelli. Perf. Ugo Tognazzi, Claude Dophin and Duilio Del Prete. Istituto Luce, 1973. DVD.

Other Italian comedic films cited

- Arrivano i Dollari*. Dir. Mario Costa. Screenplay by Giovanni Grimaldi, Ruggero Maccari, Giuseppe Magone, Fulvio Pazziloro and Alberto Sordi. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Nino Taranto, Isa Miranda and Turi Pandolfini. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1957. DVD.
- Borotalco*. Dir. Carlo Verdone. Screenplay by Carlo Verdone and Enrico Oldoini. Perf. Carlo Verdone, Eleonora Giorgi and Christian De Sica. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1982. DVD.
- Come Persi la Guerra (How I Lost the War)*. Dir. Carlo Borghesio. Screenplay by Carlo Borghesio and Benvenuto Gianini. Perf. Erminio Macario, Vera Carmi and Nando Bruno. Lux Film, 1948. Television Broadcast.
- Come Scopersi l'America*. Dir. Carlo Borghesio. Screenplay by Mario Monicelli, Mario Amendola and Leonardo Benvenuti. Perf. Erminio Macario, Carlo Ninchi and Delia Scala. Lux Film, 1949. Television Broadcast.
- Ecce Bombo*. Dir. Nanni Moretti. Screenplay by Nanni Moretti. Perf. Nanni Moretti, Luisa Rossi and Lina Sastri. Warner Brothers, 1978. DVD.
- Fermo con le Mani*. Dir. Gero Zambuto. Guglielmo Giannini and Gero Zambuto. Perf. Totò and Tina Pica. Terminal Video, 1937. DVD.
- Giovannona Coscialunga, Disonorata con Onore*. Dir. Sergio Martino. Screenplay by Francesco Milizia, Carlo Veo, Tito Carpi and Luciano Martino. Perf. Edwige Fenech and Pippo Franco. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 1973. DVD.
- Gli Onorevoli*. Dir. Sergio Corbucci. Screenplay by Vittorio Metz, Bruno Corbucci and Giovanni Grimaldi. Perf. Totò, Walter Chiari, Peppino De Filippo and Franca Valeri. Terminal Video, 1963. DVD.
- Guardia, Guardia Scelta, Brigadiere e Maresciallo*. Dir. Mauro Bolognini. Screenplay by Paolo Frascà, Ruggero Maccari and Ettore Scola. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Peppino De Filippo, Aldo Fabrizi and Nino Manfredi. Terminal Video, 1956. DVD.
- Il Mio Miglior Nemico*. Dir. Carlo Verdone. Screenplay by Carlo Verdone, Silvio Muccino and Pasquale Plastino. Perf. Carlo Verdone and Silvio Muccino. Filmauro, 2006. DVD.
- L'eroe della Strada*. Dir. Carlo Borghesio. Screenplay by Mario Monicelli and Leonardo Benvenuti. Perf. Erminio Macario, Carlo Ninchi and Delia Scala. Lux Film, 1948. Television Broadcast.
- La Banda degli Onesti*. Dir. Camillo Mastrocinque. Screenplay by Agenore Incrocci (Age) and Furio Scarpelli. Perf. Totò, Peppino De Filippo and Giacomo Furia. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1958. DVD.

- La Vita è Bella (Life is Beautiful)*. Dir. Roberto Benigni. Screenplay by Roberto Benigni and Vincenzo Cerami. Perf. Roberto Benigni and Nicoletta Braschi. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1997. DVD.
- Ladro Lui, Ladra Lei*. Dir. Luigi Zampa. Screenplay by Pasquale Festa Campanile, Massimo Franciosa, Alberto Sordi and Luigi Zampa. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Sylva Koscina and Mario Riva. Cristaldi Film, 1958. DVD.
- Mamma Mia che Impressione!*. Dir. Roberto Savarese. Screenplay by Cesare Zavattini and Alberto Sordi. Perf. Alberto Sordi and Giovanna Pala. Terminal Video, 1951. DVD.
- Miseria e Nobiltà (Poverty and Nobility)*. Dir. Mario Mattoli. Screenplay by Ruggero Maccari and Mario Mattoli. By Eduardo Scarpetta. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1954. DVD.
- Non ci Resta che Piangere*. Dir. Roberto Benigni and Massimo Troisi. Screenplay by Roberto Benigni, Massimo Troisi and Giuseppe Bertolucci. Cecchi Gore Home Video, 1985. DVD.
- Siamo Donne (We, the Women)*. Dir. Gianni Franciolini, Alfredo Guarini, Roberto Rossellini, Luchino Visconti and Luigi Zampa. Screenplay by Cesare Zavattini, Luigi Chiarini, Suso Cecchi D'Amico, Roberto Rossellini and Luigi Zampa. Perf. Ingrid Bergman, Anna Magnani, Isa Miranda and Alida Valli. Terminal Video, 1953. DVD.
- Totò Cerca Casa*. Dir. Stefano Vanzina (Steno) and Mario Monicelli. Screenplay by Vittorio Metz, Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli, Sandro Continenza and Stefano Vanzina (Steno). Perf. Totò, Folco Lulli and Alda Mangini. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1950. DVD.
- Totò e Carolina*. Dir. Mario Monicelli. Screenplay by Ennio Flaiano, Agenore Incrocci (Age), Furio Scarpelli, Rodolfo Sonogo and Mario Monicelli. Perf. Totò, Anna Maria Ferrero, Tina Pica and Arnoldo Foà. Filmauro, 1955. DVD.
- Totò e i Re di Roma*. Dir. Stefano Vanzina (Steno) and Mario Monicelli. Screenplay by Ennio De Concini, Mario Monicelli, Dino Risi and Stefano Vanzina (Steno). Perf. Totò, Aroldo Tieri and Alberto Sordi. Terminal Video, 1951. DVD.
- Totò, Peppino e la Malafemmina*. Dir. Camillo Mastrocinque. Screenplay by Edoardo Anton, Sandro Continenza and Nicola Manzari. Perf. Totò, Peppino De Filippo, Dorian Grey, Nino Manfredi and Teddy Reno. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1956. DVD.
- Tototruffa '62*. Dir. Camillo Mastrocinque. Screenplay by Franco Castellano and Giuseppe Moccia (Pipolo). Perf. Totò and Nino Taranto. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1963. DVD.
- Un Americano a Roma*. Dir. Stefano Vanzina (Steno). Screenplay by Sandro Continenza, Lucio Fulci, Ettore Scola, Stefano Vanzina (Steno) and Alberto Sordi. Perf. Alberto Sordi, Maria Pia Casillo and Carlo Delle Piane. Terminal Video, 1954. DVD.

Un Giorno in Pretura. Dir. Stefano Vanzina (Steno). Screenplay by Lucio Fulci, Sandro Continenza, Alberto Sordi and Stefano Vanzina (Steno). Perf. Peppino De Filippo, Silvana Pampanini, Alberto Sordi, Walter Chiari, Leopoldo Trieste and Sophia Loren. Terminal Video, 1953. DVD.

Un Sacco Bello (Fun is Beautiful). Dir. Carlo Verdone. Screenplay by Leonardo Benvenuti, Piero De Bernardi and Carlo Verdone. Perf. Carlo Verdone, Mario Brega and Renato Scarpa. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1980. DVD.

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8 e ½ (8 and ½). Dir. Federico Fellini. Screenplay by Federico Fellini, Ennio Flaiano and Tullio Pinelli. Perf. Marcello Mastroianni, Claudia Cardinale, Anouk Aimée and Sandra Milo. Criterion, 1963. DVD.

Accattone. Dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini. Screenplay by Pier Paolo Pasolini. Perf. Franco Citti and Franca Pasut. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1961. DVD.

Anna. Dir. Alberto Lattuada. Screenplay by Franco Brusati, Dino Risi, Rodolfo Sonogo and Ivo Perilli. Perf. Silvana Mangano, Raf Vallone and Vittorio Gassman. Cristaldi Film, 1951. DVD.

Edipo Re (Oedipus Rex). Dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini. Screenplay by Pier Paolo Pasolini. By Sophocles. Perf. Silvana Mangano, Franco Citti and Alida Valli. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1967. DVD.

I Figli di Nessuno (Nobody's Children). Dir. Raffaello Matarazzo. Screenplay by Aldo De Benedetti and Raffaello Matarazzo. By Ruggero Rindi. Perf. Amedeo Nazzari and Yvonne Sanson. Criterion, 1952. DVD.

Il Ferroviere (Man of Iron). Dir. Pietro Germi. Screenplay by Alfredo Giannetti, Pietro Germi, Ennio De Concini and Luciano Vincenzoni. Perf. Pietro Germi, Sylva Koscina and Saro Urzì. Cecchi Gori Home Video, 1956. DVD.

Il Gattopardo (The Leopard). Dir. Luchino Visconti. Screenplay by Luchino Visconti, Suso Cecchi D'Amico, Massimo Franciosa and Pasquale Festa Campanile. By Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa. Medusa Home Entertainment, 1963. DVD.

Il Gobbo. Dir. Carlo Lizzani. Screenplay by Tommaso Chiaretti, Carlo Lizzani, Ugo Pirro and Luciano Vincenzoni. Perf. Gerard Blain, Anna Maria Ferrero, Bernard Blier and Pier Paolo Pasolini. Dino De Laurentiis Cinematografica, 1960. Television Broadcast.

L'Età di Cosimo de' Medici (The Age of Cosimo de Medici). Dir. Roberto Rossellini. Screenplay by Roberto Rossellini. Perf. Marcello Di Falco and Virgilio Gazzolo. Criterion, 1973. DVD.

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- Le Notti Bianche (White Nights)*. Dir. Luchino Visconti. Screenplay by Suso Cecchi D'Amico and Luchino Visconti. By Fyodor Dostoevski. Perf. Marcello Mastroianni, Maria Schell. Criterion, 1957. DVD.
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