I. HISTORIC, ECONOMIC, AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

THE ‘MISSING’ ITALY AND THE DARK SIDE OF THE BOOM

Late Italian modernist cinema can be regarded as the failure of antagonism against standing values and institutions, a cynical and yet amusing journey into the inexorability of the status quo. In Lorenzo Cuccu’s words, this era of Italian cinema created ‘an updated version of the Subject of Modernity, characterized or obsessed by *amour-propre* and by a need of self-affirmation that makes him a little bit of a Prometheus and a little bit of a Narcissus.’¹ When the journey began, filmmakers, even in relatively prosperous and peaceful times, were concerned with the ephemeral nature of progress, the plethora of schizophrenic behaviors brought about by an industrial Italy, and the continuity with Fascism. It would be erroneous to establish a direct set of homologies between the shortcomings of economic and social progress and the growing disconnect between protagonists and their surroundings. However, an exploration into the political and economic causes that prepared the terrain for the rift between man and society, with references to the films that made such issues the explicit content of their discourse, will enlighten one facet of the sense of unease and impending defeat that characterizes Italy’s late modernist cinema. An analysis of this rift shows that there was eventual disillusionment on the part of the protagonists – revolutionaries, struggling idealists, the expectant soon-to-be workforce – who lost their initially hopeful perspectives and attitudes.

‘A confused, shortsighted country.’ Asked by foreign students to find the most comprehensive and yet specific denominator of Italy, this was the
definition that prominent writer and journalist Vittorio Zucconi provided during a speech given in 2008 at Middlebury College. Zucconi insisted on exposing blurred boundaries between the fundamental powers that are generally held as the supporting structure of an evolved democracy; revealed the inconsistencies in the mission that media is invested in; and denounced their feeble effort at counterbalancing opportunistic measures passed by the Italian political class. Most importantly, he underscored the general uncertainty of direction and lack of reform that, with few exceptions, seem to affect all post-Fascism parliamentary governments. The confusion and shortsightedness that Zucconi referred to have deep roots in the country that emerged after World War II and are derived from the peculiar ways in which Italy tried to consolidate its social peace internally. Factors of instability that would later pave the way for the financial crises of 1992 and 2011 resulted from unaddressed socio-economic contradictions. A suddenly promising economy was heavily infiltrated by practices of clientele-centered business practices and saddled with ominously vast pockets of profligate spending – not tangible, but for current expenses – crippling the national deficit. Subordination of political parties to power castes for electoral advantages became strategic; civil society rapidly distanced itself from the teachings of the Catholic Church but never fully acknowledged the Church’s parasitic nature. In the background, the growing dissatisfaction with the ungoverned and therefore uneven economic development and the long streak of the State’s entrepreneurial failures fueled a fatalistic resignation and the pernicious myth of an Italian people capable of great deeds only in desperate conditions. The absence of an established kernel of values to be shared in the nation-building process added to the short-term mentality that affected core reforms and financial planning. The cry for reassuring social foundations echoed amidst the economic catastrophe and the spiritual rubble left by World War II and was to remain unanswered. The reconstruction process struggled with outlining a stable course of action: the Resistance had been very erratically experienced as a rebirth process – with vast areas playing no direct role in the overthrowing of Fascism – and therefore could not work as a basis for the pragmatic purpose of shaping a shared identity. When translated into a nation-building articulation, the nobility of the anti-fascist discourse could not escape a structural weakness whereby the majority of the Resistance fighters were in the difficult position of balancing loyalty to the Soviet Union and demands of the population, eager to put the hardship of war behind itself as soon as possible.

The process of identity formation was hybridized. Placed at the mercy of its Atlantic allies during key moments of its political life; constantly blackmailed by the Vatican during parliamentary proceedings; dealing with the activism of the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) shrewdly adjusting to long-term strategies of cultural influence but reluctant to distance itself officially and substantially
from the Soviet Union: one may say the Italy was almost subjected to a sort of colonialism sui generis. Those exogenous and endogenous agents were trying to secure a share of Italy’s dislocated individualities, looking at them not as an opportunity to form a mature citizenship but to acquire new clientes through twisted forms of fidelization: the fragmented body of the population remained mired in destructive, ideology-driven, rearguard identitarian contestations. The strategy of the Communist Party to occupy institutions and centers where information was produced, such as unions, state bureaucracies, universities, local administrations and a significant share of the media, proved astute but inadequate. After the 1946 electoral failure of the Partito d’Azione, its intellectuals were annexed by the PCI and turned into trophies to be showcased when the most radical interpretations of Marxist doctrine would become outdated. The Partito d’Azione was a political formation whose ideologists were heirs of Carlo Rosselli, the author of Socialismo liberale (1930). Rosselli’s speculation – that individual freedoms and social justice be merged in an economically efficient environment – was conveniently bastardized into a liberalization of socialism and socialization of liberalism, which proved handy years later to justify the technocratic approach of Center-Left prime ministers like Carlo Azeglio Ciampi and Romano Prodi. What remained of the PCI’s Utopian thrust got lost in the bureaucratized powers it wooed as its supporting cast, quickly promoting among its followers an acquiescing mentality far removed from the galvanizing proclamations of its leaders; in the civil liberties department, the PCI’s libertarian perspective on paper became quasi nonexistent in practice as it chose to protect its flanks by adopting a traditionalist view on interpersonal relationships, emancipation and sexuality.

After recovering quickly to pre-war indexes of production and per capita levels of income, and also restoring communications, starting from 1951 until 1962 several key factors contributed to an impressive incremental growth of Italy’s gross domestic product by an annual average of about 6 per cent and a rise in industrial production by an annual average of about 8 per cent. Among such factors were financial stability enforced in the late 1940s by the strict monetary policies of Budget Minister Luigi Einaudi; a steady influx of American capital under the Marshall Plan provisions; newfound oil and gas deposits in Milan and Sicily, as well as an aggressive energy policy carried out by the National Agency for Hydrocarbons (Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi, or ENI). A prudent but advantageous protectionist policy on import and trading taxes that stabilized the domestic market for a number of critical years also helped, as well as a strategic adhesion to international trade agreements once a satisfactory level of protection was achieved internally. Finally, streams of cheap labor in the form of Southern immigrants eager to leave their derelict homes moved North to look for employment in the manufacturing districts of Lombardy, Piedmont and Veneto. In the wake of these favorable conditions,
the discord between a steadily improving economic situation and a rapidly deteriorating political system – with the latter too often intent on parasitizing the former – puzzled the scholars who interrogated Italian history. Numbers are very stubborn when evaluating the reasons for Italy’s legendary instability: from July 1953, the last cabinet presided over by Christian Democrat leader Alcide De Gasperi, to August 1969, when Mariano Rumor, known as gommina or ‘rubber eraser’ for his malleable temperament, swore on the Constitution on the occasion of his second mandate, Italy had witnessed eighteen different governments with an average lifespan of about ten months, with a total of ten different prime ministers. The situation of democrazia bloccata with an aggressively growing Communist Party guided in populist fashion by the wily Palmiro Togliatti as main representative of the Italian Left recompensed the Christian Democrats beyond their natural constituencies. Even though the PCI counted on an extremely organized and loyal base and despite how dreadful the Christian Democrats’ governance had previously been, they could have the final word in every debate and effectively blackmail voters by prefiguring apocalyptic scenarios in which the Cossacks freely moved about the Trevi Fountain in the case of a Communist victory. As a result, when not entirely constituted by representatives of the latter, the cabinets were always solidly hinged around the party of relative majority with only marginal contribution from other political forces. The status of ‘halted democracy’ was captured with impeccable cynicism by Luciano Salce’s Colpo di stato (1969), which imagined a Communist victory during the 1972 election: the PCI triumphs but, unwilling to take additional responsibilities and cautioned by Moscow about the geopolitical risks of such a move, refuses to seize power and happily retreats to the comfortable role of whistle-blower. Salce also lambasts the strategy of cultural hegemony by showing a studio manager of Italian television airing a folk singer and shamelessly inciting her to be ‘more anarchic, more left-wing, more anti-bourgeois.’ On election night, when the PCI’s victory seems inevitable, she seamlessly switches from sappy love tunes to songs describing the revolutionary occupation of churches as well as priests and nuns forced to get a job. However, her performance starts after she is taken to the studio by her brother driving a lambretta, one of the brands of consumerism and Italian export.

Under the watchful American eye and its diversified approach of mass attraction – from financial aid to military pressure to artifacts showcasing American lifestyles being dumped in the cultural and entertainment markets – Italy ‘had’ to choose the route of a capitalist country. Freedom of enterprise was deregulated and uncontrolled at the beginning to maximize its stimulation capacity and create a significant social bloc experiencing the comforts of affluence and ease, with mechanisms geared at subtracting human capital from the Communist ranks firmly in place. The revolutionary option never seemed overly realistic: and yet, given that Italy was the non-Warsaw pact
country with the largest Communist Party, even system reforms would be devised not only to avoid damaging key constituencies but also to weaken the PCI’s agenda. Except in a few cases, such as with the increase of the years of state-administered education and, partially, with the land reform, such measures would have minimal benefits and significant side effects. Italy established a model of economic development that has since been termed a ‘mixed economy,’ in which, together with the staples of free enterprise, the State maintains a significant power of intervention, with holdings and emergency plans to develop depressed areas without an endogenous push to industrialization. Italy pursued neither a pure liberist model of an unrestricted job market and marginalized unions nor a social democracy, like that of Sweden, where the marginal tax rate on personal income could go as high as 57 per cent. Fabrizio Barca called Italy’s model of economic development a ‘compromise without reform,’ neither state-directed nor ultra-liberist, driven by autonomous, hypertrophic public companies subbing for the central state in terms of planning and regulating, creating a macoeconomic template whereby growth is first generated by internal demand – until the late 1950s – and then supported by export to foreign markets. Economists like Luigi Einaudi were light years away from the fundamentalism of ‘Voodoo economics,’ and, in fact, they did not dismiss interventionist policies or the retention of key sectors in public hands if the earning power of the public companies was solid. Even setting aside the role that the Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale (IRI) played as the controller of private ventures, in Italy’s mixed economy the State retained a golden share in many neuralgic sections and actually was the main entrepreneur in the chemical and steel industries, just to name two of the most important interests. Public welfare was also institutionalized through the partecipazioni statali, or public financial shares and holdings, which was another form of state intervention and tutelage in private economy and another way of leaving unresolved ‘the problem of avoiding violent and recurrent economic crises and the problem of developing depressed areas.’ Mechanisms of such ‘contamination’ are multiform and confirm the stereotype of Italians as a people with an uncommon gift for fantasy, as in the creation of companies funded by banks that, in turn, would finance themselves with their stocks while at the same time appointing their executives to the companies’ boards. Also, the reverse process was not uncommon, with executives from the company sitting on the bank’s board and in this way gaining preferential access to credit. Needless to say, in a classic ending worthy of commedia dell’arte, very often such processes would take place after both the banks and the companies were financed or even bailed out by the State. Along the same lines, Barca and Sandro Trento termed the always growing allocations for public companies the ‘Trojan horse’ of party-dominated and clientelistic practices, according to which allowances are handled for practical necessities of factions, lobbies, party leaders and
their cohorts of small-time, local ‘satraps.’ The ‘Italian-style’ mixed market economy had some success only to rapidly set a course for abysmal failure at the rise of globalization, leading to a hasty de-nationalization in the late 1990s. The ramifications of such phenomena were manifold but all in the direction of an overarching deterioration of social life: the procedures to win governmental contracting – ‘the gravy of Italian economy’ – and tenders became more and more opaque, with political affiliation – often blurred by criminal sponsorship – considered a more reliable qualification than efficiency and competitiveness. The forced industrialization of the South without suitable development plans led to the creation of plants where the costs of manufacturing cars and other commodities could not be matched by any sale price. The task of managing the impetuous growth, channeling the inequalities between different geographic areas and ‘clearing up’ decaying institutions was by no means simple; however, the contradictions of the ‘missing’ country in fact eerily resemble the disjointed Italy we know today and its apparently irresolvable dilemmas. The economic imbalance and social hostility between North and South seems beyond the point of no return, certified by separatist movements openly rejecting the necessity of a unified Italy; the exhausting debate on the sustainability of agricultural-versus-industrial modes of development has slowed planning policies for the depopulated countryside and overcrowded cities. The disproportion in social security between hyper-guaranteed workers and other forms of ‘cannon fodder’ labor has created generations of youths with no attractive prospects; it looks prohibitive to make even a dent in the hypertrophic taxation to maintain bureaucratical apparatuses and political castes.

One aspect calls for immediate attention when browsing the literature on the phenomenon cursorily called the ‘Economic Miracle’ and in general on the circa twenty years of Italian history – mid-1940s to mid/late-1960s – elected as the target of the present volume. It is a bitter feeling of helplessness and disenchantment, even of shame and remorse for a missed opportunity, with parties competing at polished forms of fraudulent patronage instead of busying themselves with negotiations framed by an idea of curbed inequalities and public good. The painful paradox is that, even though Italy was capable of orchestrating an economic reconstruction and gained enough momentum to temporarily keep a check on its systemic problems, the political and entrepreneurial classes were responsible for not properly channeling the newly available financial resources and not implementing a foundational culture of civic honesty and efficiency, thereby initiating the country’s decline while at the peak of its maximum productivity. Such an approach left the clear impression that the forces guiding Italy were incapable of steering the momentous economic growth toward a productive, stabilizing direction, functioning more as greedy exploiters of the immediate fruits of modernization for personal and factional interests than as facilitators of a long-term,
virtuous model of development. If a researcher had to extrapolate a master narrative from the many historical analyses that have delved into the political hesitations and connivances of Italy’s first Republican governments, it would probably be the lack of reformist courage and the triumph of dubious profitability over a vision capable of permanently ‘westernizing’ the infrastructures and the archaic mentalities of a country that had to reinvent itself starting from a ‘year zero.’ The process of ‘cross-fertilization,’ as Richard Pells terms it, whereby each Western country with a neuralgic geo-political position determines its path to modernization and accomplishes its own occidentalization under the watchful eye of the United States, was counterbalanced in Italy by oppositional, contradictory thrusts deriving from the absence of a collectively participated pact legitimizing a brand of virtuous patriotism. This project does not advocate an ‘end of history,’ Italian-style, with the country passively adjusting to the role of America’s geo-strategic platform and fideistically adopting the logic of advanced capitalism: at the same time, failures in the institution of lean and effective political practices conducive to a national reconciliation after the end of Fascism are at the roots of Italy’s ongoing deterioration. The crucis that were embryonic at the time fully blossomed into the situation of contemporary Italy: a place where high technological innovation coexists with ‘third world’ developing countries’ practices; a site of contradictions that resists with admirable impermeability any attempt at serious reform; and a nation suffering from an inferiority complex and a form of xenophilia idolizing countries that were able to provide themselves with modern infrastructures.

Michel de Certeau said that Italian cineastes were in the enviable position of hegemonizing culture at the end of World War II, given the hope invested in the future, the tabula rasa of old discourses and the hatred against Fascism. But getting rid of the old regime proved to be impossible, and hope was soon replaced by disillusion when the architraves of the Fascist state were seamlessly retained. Starting in the 1940s and lasting through to the early 1970s, Italian filmmakers courageously tested the potential of cinema as a vehicle of cultural elaboration and ethical foundation, embarking on an identity-forming enterprise by tutoring the Italian people on crucial questions such as the ethical implications of personal aspirations, the role and responsibilities of the individual, and the lack of preparedness when confronting the sudden advent of a vehemently transforming country. Initially, the very nature of such modernization drew fatalistic, bitter reviews: the skepticism about the sustainability of the ‘miracle’ manifested itself, for instance, in the representation of entrepreneurs, mostly scripted as rogues boasting managerial skills of uncertain origin. The critique leveled at basic staples of a flexible capitalist economy, like regulated access to credit, creation of business, incentive to consumption and subsequent accumulation, was not of orthodox Marxist origin.
It rather indicated a general unsuitability of Italian businessmen as ethical models of productivity, with capital bearing the stigma of fraud, betrayal, and murder as though an industrial society were a sin of hubris against Italy’s peasant and artisanal vocation. The Catholic culture was also responsible for this state of things: the first papal encyclical where the role of the businessman enjoys a partial ‘rehabilitation’ is the Centesimus Annus, issued in 1991 by John Paul II. In fact, the figure of the entrepreneur often enjoyed dark or parodic traits in the Italian cinema of the 1950s and 1960s, coming across more as a witch doctor, an offshoot, a protean emanation originating from chaos – and a sexual predator for good measure – than a skilled organizer calibrating his operations to market rules. Renato Salvatori had already played the loutish Simone in Luchino Visconti’s Rocco e i suoi fratelli (1960), eventually turning into a rapist and murderer and thereby ‘mediating’ with blood the irreconcilability of his peasant culture with the indifferent modernity of Milan. In Giuliano Montaldo’s Una bella grinta (1964), Salvatori plays ruthless industrialist Ettore Zambrini, whose avidity and ambition culminate in the assassination of his wife’s lover, the crowning achievement of a long trail of manipulative and abusive behavior toward workers, lenders, and family. In the former film, Salvatori was a proletarian and here he is a representative of ‘mature’ capitalism, but the two tend to coincide: Zambrini allegorically christens with blood ‘the leap from small capitalism of artisanal family origin to big industrial, financial capitalism,’ celebrating the wife’s pregnancy with the inauguration of a new plant. Thus, Montaldo invests Salvatori/Zambrini with the role of modern shaman performing a ritual of archaic sacrifice to overcome a state of chaos not dissimilar to the mimetic disorder René Girard mentions in his study on sacrifice. In light of his success and of society’s incapacity to contain him, Zambrini’s disorganized plans and uncontrolled fury imply that the mechanisms of industrial programming are the propitiatory rites of our times. In Luciano Salce’s La cuccagna (1962), Umberto D’Orsi is a disastrous maneuverer whose grandiose and always failing business ideas, modeled around a misappropriated image of lurid capitalism ‘American style,’ find their only chance of success through under-the-table bribes passed to politicians in order to ‘speed up’ some licenses and contracts: the last we see of him is when a carabinieri van unceremoniously takes him to jail. D’Orsi is often caught by the camera in the act of raving about future profits. Like the secretary of the Partito Nazionale Fascista, Achille Starace, famous for his cult of an active lifestyle, D’Orsi is always running from place to place, trying to secure imaginary business opportunities. Even if the connection with the Fascist mandarin is not made explicit by Salce, the filmmaker mockingly juxtaposes the ‘evil’ nature of speculative capitalism with other low-key and ‘honest’ jobs, like that of typist, which the protagonist Rossella, played by Donatella Turri, finds early in the movie and then unwisely quits to follow the windbag played by D’Orsi. But
the Fascist subtext will be made explicit shortly thereafter: D’Orsi returns as an engineer/sexual predator in Pietrangeli’s *La parmigiana* (1963) and as the ‘Fascist capitalist’ in *Il successo* (1963) co-directed by Dino Risi and Alberto Morassi, where he is a vulgar and unpleasant businessman taunting and humiliating his old schoolmate Giulio Ceriani – played by Vittorio Gassman as another one-sided figure of greedy accumulator-wannabe needing money to finance his aspirations as developer – and forcing him to perform a skit based on Fascist gestuality before finally lending him part of the sum he asked for. In Elio Petri’s *Il maestro di Vigevano* (1963), based on the novel written by Lucio Mastronardi, education seems incompatible with manual labor as well as with entrepreneurship and profit. The new Italy is personified by the vulgar Bugatti, an industrialist who tries to buy good grades for his son, a pupil of the *maestro* Mombelli of the title, and ultimately destroys the Mombelli household by providing the schoolteacher’s wife with capital for her own start-up. The undoing of Mombelli is then accelerated by the relationship between his wife and Bugatti and sealed by a fatal car crash that kills the two lovers. Also, Damiano Damiani’s *Il sicario* (1960) injected heavy doses of *noir* iconography into his depiction of the business world.

Many authoritative historians across the entire ideological spectrum share a common view regarding Italy’s missed opportunities. Their diagnostic observations do not differ when assessing the disastrous policies that resulted in social turmoil, widespread inequalities, and lack of basic, general services. From a leftist, progressive position, Paul Ginsborg and Guido Crainz blame the overt and short-sighted resistance carried out by the far Right, the quasi totality of the Christian Democrats (Democrazia Cristiana or DC) and the union of industrialists or Confindustria, against the possible reformism that was a staple of the Center-Left governments – DC with the addition of Socialists – starting at the end of 1963. Those coalitions are considered by Ginsborg and Crainz a key moment of sorts for the creation of a potential, albeit inchoate and haphazard, ‘laboratory of successful reformism.’ But on the occasion of the very first vote of confidence, it became evident that the once ambitious agenda of the Center-Left had been consistently watered down. In the wake of the Center-Left’s failures, Crainz would go as far as coining the metaphor of ‘un paese mancato,’ a potentially stable and productive country that is *missing*, and a country that *missed* realistic goals in terms of democratization, civil and economic freedom, all the while agonizingly persevering in seemingly unchallengeable ideological stagnation and political instability. Ginsborg would give a very positive assessment of the dynamism shown by DC Prime Minister Amintore Fanfani with the creation of the agrarian reform boards and of Alcide De Gasperi’s institution of the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno, an instrument for fund allocation and infrastructural intervention, only to disconsolately note the ‘eternal return’ of one of Italy’s most pernicious malaises...
– the layers and layers of purely parasitic mediators bringing enterprises to a halt and wasting or embezzling resources in the process:

These were the local Christian Democrat bosses, the bureaucrats, building speculators, and lawyers who were in receipt of funds flowing from central government and who mediated between the state and the local communities. The old landed notables were replaced by this new élite, dependent for its power on local government, the special agencies of the State and the faction leaders who controlled the flows of the Cassa’s spending in the 1950s and the 1960s – Aldo Moro, Emilio Colombo, Silvio Gava.10

Indro Montanelli, maitre à penser of the conservative milieu, resignedly stated about the 1956 tax reform of Minister of Finance Ezio Vanoni, who had previously helped Enrico Mattei establish the gigantic holding company ENI: ‘Just like other reforms, this one missed many of its proposed goals.’11 Such an assessment that not only applies to single reforms but also to the overall direction of entire cabinets where the energy, creativity, and vision of specific measures were counterbalanced by lethargic delays in other key sectors and ultimately got lost in the great Italian tradition of wild taxation to sustain public spending, and subsequent downturn in growth. Spending measures were often aimed at destabilizing the minority’s constituencies and bypassing down years in electoral consensus, and the purely assistentialist policies that the Cassa embarked on after the first building, irrigation and construction interventions fulfilled that purpose. In addition, the lack of democratic control on closed, centralized state apparatuses and administrations, a phenomenon that reached its climax during Fascism, enjoyed a political continuity especially during the first postwar decade, culminating in a dramatic separation between the electing body of citizens and their representatives. Where infrastructures could sustain development, individual income would hike dramatically, whereas in the South the lack of opportunities coupled with the perception of the ever increasing delay in catching up with the modernized areas of Italy led to feelings of angry fatalism. Those feelings were only made worse by an unenviable feature of the economic transformation: unlike other European countries, for thousands of families and individuals the ‘Economic Miracle’ represented not only an improvement of current conditions but a far more radical turning point, in the sense that, whereas in Britain or France growth for many was synonymous with better salaries, better life conditions, and more savings, in Italy it was the event enabling families to afford running water, electricity, or a household appliance for the first time in their lives. The young and passionate forces of the Meridione, eager to reinsert themselves into history and contribute to the modernization of the country, acquired a
clear conscience about the South’s ‘renewed marginalization’\textsuperscript{12} with disastrous attempts at implementing public or heavily subsidized industries. The stance which considered the South a burden on Italy caused civil behavior to deteriorate, fanning the flames of resignation, and led to another wave of immigration to South America and Northern Europe. Part of the disastrous policy was the quixotic enterprise of the \textit{cattedrali nel deserto}, the chemical, steelworks, or manufacturing plants isolated from manufacturing circuits and thus neither creating satellite industries nor helping local economies. Historian Paolo Farneti labeled those calamitous policies a cataclysm, and his description of the Center-Left is that of a political laboratory for conservation, immobilism, and fraudulent pacts, emphasizing once more the litany of missed reforms:

A phenomenon of increasing contractualization among parties came about, government and minority included. The concrete manifestation was the ideological weakening of the three main forces of the political spectrum in Italy: political Catholicism, militant socialism and secularizing laicism: in a word, the fall of ‘great battles of ideals’ to the benefit of ‘daily management’. It is at this point that we can speak about a party system in Italy, where political identity is defined by the mostly contractual relationships between political forces rather than by the political forces – social base relationship. This is the frame where the Center-Left operation was carried out. Clientelism, growing relationships of interest instead of solidarity, corporativization of trades guaranteed electoral stability. But the decline of ideological thrust also culminated in a very specific result that lies in the lack of reforms.\textsuperscript{13}

The monopoly of power held by the Christian Democrats was ideologically founded on an incestuous relationship with the authoritarianism of the pre-war period, and the party did not dither about an instrumental use of the unliberal heritage for its survival:

In the field of political and civil rights, while the restored rule of law and the marked constitutional safeguarding of one’s liberties gave to the country the tools to preserve the conquered freedom, codes and rules of the past still in force legitimized governmental practices that were occasionally heavily illiberal.\textsuperscript{14}

Besides the persistent influence of the Church, another heatedly debated question in post-World War II Italian history is in fact how Fascist the country remained after the Liberation. Two aspects of continuity are particularly striking and concurrent with the social turmoil, and both were direct emanations of the Ministro degli Interni. The first was the continuous, unlawful use of the
casellario politico centrale, a database created by Prime Minister Francesco Crispi in 1894 that enjoyed unprecedented success under Fascism, with its illicit filing of political suspects, former Resistance fighters, ‘anarchists’ and ‘subversives,’ hippies, homosexuals, and, in general, of those citizens who would protest against majority parties and disobey the teachings of the Catholic Church or the deliberations of their employers. The second was the illegal, inquisitorial, and ultimately repressive use of the prefetti, state servants who would report to the central government about the social and political situation of their areas and who had the authority to cancel regular elections if the mayor was deemed too leftist or not ‘coachable’ enough. The prefetti would often include prurient, private details of their ‘suspects,’ obtained by their informants, among which police officers and priests of the local parishes were the most zealous. In Pietrangeli’s La visita (1963), the story of a man and a woman meeting through a ‘lonely hearts’ ad, the male protagonist receives first-hand information about the woman’s ‘morality’ from the maresciallo of the carabinieri stationed in her town. The casellario politico centrale would cease to exist in 1968, one year before adultery and concubinage would be expunged from the list of felonies. Workers, students, enlisted soldiers, and candidates to public posts who simply did not fit the description appreciated by a political power committed to marginalize those who could be loosely associated with the Left or the Resistance were discriminated against by a paternalist culture and overbearing ethical organisms acting outside of the Constitution. Crainz goes as far as painting a situation – from the 1950s throughout the late 1960s – in which citizens were not granted the ‘full enjoyment of their rights.’ The persistence of Fascism, prosecuting citizens during the regime and after its fall, is seen in Anni difficili (1948) and Anni facili (1953), also by Zampa. Both movies are based on novels and scripts by Sicilian writer Vitaliano Brancati, describing the imperturbable opportunism of the Fascist nomenklatura and the obtuse complicity, indifference, or frank cowardice of the majority of the population: in the words of the Fascist podestà who obliges his subordinate to join the Fascist party and then fires him for the same reason after the fall of Mussolini, ‘we, like servants, want evil for our master.’ One could almost pinpoint the homology between the economic deresponsabilization characterizing state organs and beneficiaries and the socio-ideological carelessness of the italiano medio (average Italian), trying to replicate on a smaller, individual scale the sterile and unproductive favoritism rampant at every level of the state administration. Along the lines of inconclusive reforms, one could also argue that the Concilio Vaticano II of 1962 turned out to be a tactical adjustment and not a substantial change in the practices and policies of the Church. It was the catalyst of the Lefebvre schism because, for the first time, the Church, abandoning the symbol of Christ the King and his social royalty, renounced its temporal supremacy over the State,
but the language of the Concilio did not distance itself from the most rigid declarations about the unity of the Church, its centralized power, its position and privileged role among other cults, ultimately proving to be a testimony to its irreformability. Likewise, no concessions were made for the advancement of individual rights: that which changed was allowing a different, more elastic interpretation of the doctrine for those ‘travel mates,’ like intellectuals and politicians forming temporary and strategic alliances with the Church, to push similar agendas.

Filmmakers treated the ‘miracle’ as the revolution Italy never had, fascinated by the rapidity with which the most problematic phenomena characterizing the economic overhaul seemed to take over and pervade all strata of the population. Federico Fellini’s *La dolce vita* (1960) articulated the advent of an age during which awareness of one’s own image encourages man to be even further removed from himself; *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* expanded on traumatic loss of the culture of origin in the ‘ascent’ from one class to another. Social status as a mental prison one obsessively reinforces with loops of crippling expectations is in Vittorio De Sica’s *Il boom* (1963), where the character played by Alberto Sordi sells one of his eyes to maintain the luxurious lifestyle he cannot relinquish; the homogenizing tendency of the newly acquired purchasing power was antagonized by Pier Paolo Pasolini with *Accattone* (1961) and *Mamma Roma* (1962). An embarrassed state of shame and regret for a ‘train’ that was not boarded and that will never again stop lingers in Dino Risi’s *Il gaucho* (1964), about a troupe of Italian actresses and script-writers coming to terms with their own failures during a trip to Argentina for a film festival. *Il gaucho* stars Vittorio Gassman as Marco Ravicchio, the PR of the film company. During the troupe’s drive through Buenos Aires, previously introduced by aerial shots highlighting its linear architecture and harmonious proportions, Marco rebukes an Italian immigrant who dares call him ‘paesano,’ implying that the cumbersome heritage of Italy’s peasant culture is a painful reminder of the emergency situation Marco and Italy are trying to put behind them. Then, Marco meets with his old university mate Stefano, played by Nino Manfredi, who welcomes his old friend in a crumbling apartment while desperately trying to deny his present condition of quasi-destitution by bragging about the nonexistent new home he is building ‘in Olivos’:

Stefano: I am very happy that I came here, I have no regrets . . . what could I have done better in Italy anyway? [After Marco teases him about feeling homesick] Why? Had I stayed in Italy, maybe. Were there any opportunities?
Marco: Well . . . it depends.
Stefano: Eh, there is affluence (*benessere*) in Italy; here all the newspapers say that. [Then the two pretend to reverse their roles, telling each other
that ‘smart guys like them would have made it’ had the one who emigrated stayed in Italy and had the other one done the opposite.

Marco: But what benessere are you talking about, Stefano? You must have read old newspapers: In Italy there is a malesse re that carries you away!

Stefano: Ah, because here it’s not the same? What do you think? At least in Italy it must be periodic!

Marco: Yes, a period of twelve months per year!

Stefano: Ah, OK, here it’s not of twelve, here we also get the Christmas bonus! [wordplay between the Italian word for ‘twelve,’ ‘dodici,’ and ‘tredicesima,’ the name of the extra paycheck workers receive at Christmas time]

As dejected and crestfallen as they are unskilled, Marco and Stefano wallow in self-pity: but *Il gaucho* also boasts in a complex role an old Amedeo Nazzari playing Engineer Marucchelli, a nostalgic Italian immigrant who made it for real in Argentina as a cattle owner and meat processor and is now a billionaire. The bitterly comic tensions between the three are a traumatic testimony to the revision of national and individual destinies when a country entertains grandiose economic dreams. *Il gaucho* exemplifies the pungent farsightedness of the genre reductively named commedia all’italiana, ‘Italian-style comedy,’ an investment that, not shying away from successes and contradictions, euphoria and angst, literally put the country on its shoulders: Risi leaves Italy in a supposedly prosperous time and boldly exposes the delusions and the imbalance of its people. The tone of *Il gaucho* is hardly evasive, often disquieting, sometimes even funereal: Risi does not make direct references to the contemporary political situation, but the troupe of actresses, together with their Communist scriptwriter, looks like a group of dead souls. Whereas cheaper comedies can propagate a self-indulgent image of Italian people, with hypothetically national traits held as immutable and the excuse to absolve the nation of its historical sins, *Il gaucho* is a reactive comedy that destabilizes the notion of Italian identity, and ridicules committed cinema for good measure, reducing it to a means to get by.

With a broader scope of inquiry encompassing the socio-economic destiny of Italy, Alberto Lattuada portrayed in *Mafioso* (1962) a ‘success story’ of social adaptation and cultural appropriation. It is a slice from the life of Antonio Badalamenti – played by a subdued Alberto Sordi, infusing his usually histrionic demeanor with cold, tragic overtones. The protagonist, a Sicilian man who, after emigrating to Northern Italy, integrated himself into a manufacturing plant as an efficient and responsible supervisor. But no matter how invested he has become in his new ‘narrative,’ familialism – structured through the system of power of organized crime – will always trump any other form
of morality; thus, Badalamenti has to obey his old insular godfather and, after being sent to the United States, kill an adversary of the criminal clan he has to perpetually represent. The mobster not only taps Sordi as hit-man in return for the favor he once made by sending him to the North, he also mentions a land dispute to be resolved in favor of Antonio’s family, accentuating, just like the claustrophobic mise en scène adopted throughout the Sicilian stay, the identification of the mafia with the real State, like an inescapable stranglehold. Another strong indictment of Italian culture is made in New York when Sordi is finally able to see the cityscape and among the first things he notices is a billboard with Sophia Loren. By having one of Antonio’s CEOs, an American-Sicilian mafioso, provide the name of the person to be eliminated, Lattuada goes as far as saying that the feudalism enforced by the Don on Sordi is of the same nature as the violence ingrained in the practices of advanced capitalism, certified and sanctified, as in Francesco Rosi’s Le mani sulla città (1963), by the Catholic Church. Similar courage is shown by the director in the brief encounter that Badalamenti has with a young and drunk black man, on the street, right before carrying out his mission: without appropriating the battle that black people were engaging in the United States against segregation, Lattuada is able to establish a parallelism between Badalamenti and the black man as both being pressured by old and new cultures. Mafioso, without an article, declares the eternal value of the qualification as a reminder of the resistance of tribal values in Italy, whose appeal will not be effaced by any economic – but superstructural – boom. Criticism of the use of stereotypes is unwarranted here because Mafioso does not use regional clichés to stabilize its cultural premises in a generically reassuring way; rather, it shows how Italy is desperately trying to run after said stereotypes.

Italian cinema often engaged with the penetration and expanded role of ideology but seldom portrayed the political class caught while scheming its machinations, also because until 1962 a form of preventive censorship was in force, intervening in the creation of the work from the scriptwriting phase. At the same time, features such as pomposity and natural inclination to corruption seem somehow embedded in the representational texture of politicians on the screen: just like entrepreneurs, they come across as a self-aggrandizing convergence of mediocrity and unscrupulousness. In movies like Scanzonatissimo (1963, decimating the first year of Center-Left) by Dino Verde, Totò a colori (1953) by Steno, or Gli onorevoli (1963) by Sergio Corbucci, representatives were innocuously ridiculed or singled out as odd, colorful characters. The presence of Totò and comic actor Mario Castellani in the latter two confirms the farcical tone without a clear reflection on the direct fallout that pernicious political practices had on the population. The vignettes are sporadically redeemed by the anarchist fury of Totò, who in Totò a colori unleashes his decrowning rituals on the Onorevole Trombeta, whose ‘honorability’ is
deconstructed by Totò to its very roots with one of his signature battle cries: ‘Onorevole? Ma mi faccia il piacere!’ (‘You, honorable? Please!) Then, as it became increasingly clear that the entire political system was an orchestrated fraud, cineastes lavishly made up for the lost time with plenty of interest. The satire becomes anthropologically corrosive, suggesting hypocrisy as a naturally ingrained trait in the class of Christian Democrat politicians in ‘La giornata dell’onorevole,’ an episode from I mostri by Dino Risi (1963). Its protagonist is an old general who is confident that a DC Rep. will help him thwart an impending episode of corruption of which he has just learned. The general waits for the Member of Parliament in the latter’s studio in order to reveal to him the details of the fraud. The Christian Democrat party representative delays the meeting with all sorts of improbable engagements. At the end, after the fraud is committed, the general has a heart attack because of the long wait, which he endured for an entire day with an unbending sense of duty, without even the comfort of a glass of water. The episode, singled out by Rémi Lanzoni as giving ‘a moral dimension to the film without ever imposing a moralistic deduction’\(^\text{19}\) is a superb example of cinema of disillusion and exclusion, aimed at exposing the country’s ethical shortcomings.

After a semblance of artistic freedom was restored, the effects of political corruption on vast communities were dealt with by Francesco Rosi’s aforementioned Le mani sulla città. After working for Visconti in La terra trema (1948), Rosi co-authored the script of Luigi Zampa’s Processo alla città (1952), revolving around the far-reaching tentacles of the Neapolitan criminal organization known as camorra and the code of silence presented as ‘balanced’ systems of integration. The events narrated in Processo alla città took place in 1905 but resonated with the contemporary moment in which criminal organizations’ infiltration of the State had transformed them into de facto twin institutions operating side by side and at all levels with local and central administrators. In 1958, Rosi returned to the camorra once again, directing his opus one La sfida, a spin-off of American gangster movies mixing the parasitical control of the fruit and vegetable market in Naples with a torrid love story involving the protagonist, a guappo (thug or mobster) who has sharpened his teeth in the cigarette-smuggling business. La sfida also contains heavy criticism of the Church, depicted ‘as a traditional, ritualistic church trapped on the one hand, and a mercantile institution on the other.’\(^\text{20}\) Le mani sulla città is a step forward in terms of negative representation of religious power: Rosi describes it as just another client of organized crime, to which it is profitably connected. The film is also an indictment of badly planned industrialization, used as a façade for supposedly improved life conditions, which loomed over citizens as a constant threat. The picture tells the story of real estate developer Nottola, who puts a quest to be appointed the city’s Construction and Planning Manager before everything else, his own family
Le mani sulla città was a successful hybrid, and agonizingly suspenseful, in an age of experimentation: stretching the ethical confines of the medium, Rosi created a perfect mechanism where critical realism, documentary style, and modernist aesthetics gelled into a powerful denunciation of a perverse status quo. Le mani sulla città represented one of the possible outcomes of the Neorealist revolution: visually, with the effort of interpretation required to decipher the relation of necessity between characters, things, and landscape cramming the frame; and ethically, with a broken system of values in place and the duplicitous nature of language and behavior. One can observe Rosi’s incrimination of the new political and economic order in the speech given in front of a scale model of the city, where the rhetoric about providing facilities to a farming district is just a masquerade hiding the real purpose of the enterprise; that is, to maximize profits after the land will be developed. The aerial shots of the city at the opening credits communicate a sense of omnipervasive danger, an infection that does not spare anyone, anticipating the interpretation of organized crime as a globalized phenomenon. A quantum leap in showing the camorra as an alternate state was Silvio Siano’s Lo sgarro (1962), where the criminals casually extort money and steal cattle completely undisturbed, and there is the oppressive atmosphere of conspiracy later to be found in political thrillers of the 1970s. After one of the godfather’s henchmen accidentally kills a little girl, an angry mob lynches all the members of the local camorra: they end up being clubbed to death, repeatedly shot with double-barreled shotguns, finished with face punches, tossed from the seat of a carriage and smashed under a bridge – without a single policeman in sight, but with the mob oozing a pleasure for violence that titillates the viewer and prefigures the exasperation of the poliziottesco genre and the resigned desperation of the 1970s.
As mentioned, the ‘boom’ is not an afterthought but gets lost among the unaddressed plagues. Crainz was not the only one surrendering the destiny of Italy to the irreversibility of its past: economist Mariano Marchetti called his overview of Italian economy regarding the years at issue *Il futuro dimenticato*; that is, the *forgotten* future, the triumph of short-termism, abuse and inefficiency.21 Marchetti investigates key concepts, which, at the base of Italy’s downward-spiraling economy, have also become metaphors for its twisted forms of relational solidarity. One is the *tenuta del sociale*, or the devastating costs deriving from public bail-outs, a procedure usually sold to voters as a moral blackmail because it avoids lay-offs; then there are the disastrous, pure relief policies of *assistenzialismo* in the South, where the central government ‘makes it rain’ on the different regions by creating temporary jobs of dubious usefulness or financing random projects of little use. The *difesa del posto di lavoro* becomes an ethical short circuit based on a paradoxical justification prioritizing the preservation of one’s job post, no matter what costs this entailed for the rest of the population. Stefano Pivato went even further, coining for his inquiry-book the image of a *stolen* – literally *snatched* – economic miracle, wrested out from the hands of the Italian people by the partitocratic system, and documenting how Italy remained behind in scientific and technological innovation.22 If Edward C. Banfield’s classic study on backward societies of the late 1950s and his subsequent pointed reference to amoral familialism

Figures 1 to 4 The *camorristi* Saro Urzi (top left, Fig. 1) and Charles Vanel (bottom right, Fig. 4, on the ground under the bridge) are taken down by the fury of the people’s justice, either collectively (top right, Fig. 2) or through the anonymous shot of a single well-intentioned citizen (bottom left, Fig. 3).
were a snapshot of the disinterest in transcending immediate, ‘corporate’ interests in Southern Italy, it is possible to argue that such mismanagement of social capital was decanted into the acquisitional patterns of the modernizing Italy emerging after the material debris of World War II was cleared away. As already observed by Crainz and Silvio Lanaro, the familialism studied by Banfield easily contaminated the vital tissue of the country at multiple levels, turning into a de facto corporativism thriving on the lack of cultural and political proposal. Every lobby, union, party and family capable of expressing contractual power in terms of favors and votes would emerge as a ‘micro-state’ with their own rule and their own entanglement of petty and contractualized interests and then shamelessly pass off its personal needs as national interest, to the point that observers considered respecting the family and respecting the law patently antinomical:

Also in Italy modern life is eroding the splendid solidity of the family. The change could clearly have serious consequences. If the family weakens, will anarchy reign supreme? Or will Italians finally develop a suitable respect for public authorities and institutions?23

Christopher Duggan has expanded on the concept of a missing Italian nation after the war, linking the problematic foundation of the country to the lack of unity that characterized Italy from its very inception. Speaking about the vilifying spectacle of the in-war sordidness and ethical indifference of the South, Duggan describes the throes of an uncertain future, based on shaky or nonexistent ideals, where colonization actually proves the most pragmatic answer:

What was more disconcerting in this moral decay, at least to those with patriotic leanings, was the sensation that more than eighty years of unity had barely touched the surface of society. There was little apparent remorse or shame at the disaster that had befallen the country . . . As the Calabrian writer Corrado Alvaro noted with a mixture of horror and amazement, public opinion seemed to think that ‘national dignity’ and ‘national honour’ involved no more than trying to curb the swarms of shoe-shiners and prostitutes that were thronging the streets. It was almost as if people were happy to be liberated not just from Fascism but from ‘Italy’ (‘I hope the Anglo-Americans will never go away . . . [T]hey have a vision of life that is different from the wretched one that we have known up to now,’ wrote a Neapolitan in a letter in January 1944).24

The after-war result is a disenchanted Italy, captured by the memorable definition of a ‘beautiful and useless country,’ as heard in Marco Tullio Giordana’s
La meglio gioventù (2003), wherein academics beg their best pupils to emigrate to France, Britain or the United States. The result is a ‘semi-permanent legitimization crisis ever since its inception’ of such country:

The basic ‘rules of the game’ have never been accepted by most Italians in terms of a ‘rational’ management of the state and the political system. They have, instead, been partly replaced by other ‘unwritten’ rules that have institutionalized patronage, clientelism, inefficiency and informal modes of behaviour and exchange.25

Italy’s Political System and the Rhetoric of the Isole Felici

Participation of the Socialists in the Center-Left coalitions demonstrated how ‘uncontaminated parties’ would quickly turn into de facto bureaucratic lobbies, their creative and democratizing energies all but sucked out. The perspective of bypassing popular consensus through favoritism, patronage, and inflated spending proved too tempting for the totality of forces joining a ruling coalition for the first time, and the Partito Socialista Italiano or PSI was no different. Judging by the Lega Nord or Northern League some 30 years later, it seems that nothing has changed in that trajectory. A hilarious snapshot of the failing horizon of the Center-Left project and of the political class’s shameless transformism appears in Marco Belloccchio’s La Cina è vicina (1967), where Glauco Mauri, playing a professor running for municipal office as a Socialist candidate, gives a legendary electoral speech in which he candidly admits his previous joining of all the four parties of the Center-Left – and also the PCI, even though it was ‘an experience disdainfully interrupted after the tragic facts of Hungary’ – not for personal advantage, but because ‘every party fully integrates and completes the other one, that which one party rejects, the other welcomes, because in every one there is a place for the Catholic and the layman, for the young and the old, for the rich and the poor.’ The professor has an unmarried sister, and his blue-collar aide chooses to climb the social ladder by getting her pregnant; meanwhile, the aide’s lover, a poor secretary, does the same by marrying the professor. The last scene is a memorable shot of the two women doing pre-birth exercises with a ball: beside them is the book Sarò madre. Depicting the impossibility of class struggle – as the popular saying goes, ‘In Italy, no revolutions are possible because we all know each other’ – La Cina è vicina parodies the narcissistic theatricality of Italian people in their pursuit of ‘values,’ implying that there is no real alternative to the atrophy of the collective ideals of the past. The characters’ ambitions are depicted as tragically laughable: the Center-Left seems firmly entrenched in a disheartening mediocrity, its spiritual domain is a review of petit bourgeois ideals – a socially rewarding marriage, aspiration to join the rich gentry – one could read
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in a feuilleton. The complete immobilization of the system is personified by a bedridden parson who, evoking the pedophilic nature of the priests’ attention toward children, exchanges languid kisses for candies with a group of little kids, ‘The chicks of Mary.’ Bellochio introduces the audience to the culture that generated the hypertrophic growth of nonproductive, artificially inflated ranks of affiliates to political parties, municipal governments, public companies, and, in general, parasitical organisms all designed as vehicles for political affiliation and patronage. The baneful ‘party-driven cloning of democracy’ is a ‘state of being’ whereby not only different parties but also different factions inside the same party had to be represented in the boards of trustees of public companies, hospitals, state-funded newspapers, administrative bodies supervising schools and universities, etc. where the reproduction of servile power relations created an atmosphere of courtisan conformism. The direct consequences on the range of economic action are summarized by Valerio Castronovo:

The expansion of artificial bureaucratic income and public spending influenced by clientelistic purposes had the result of subtracting a significant amount of resources from more productive expenditures, thus impeding the growth of capital stock, a better use of savings and the increase of investment assets.

As mentioned, the professor of La Cina è vicina had been a member of all the parties of the spectrum comprising the Center and the Left, and including the PCI. It might have seemed that Bellochio was getting ahead of himself by lambasting the Communists as just another gang of ineffective politicians, but the cineaste – even though his attack was from a position of the radical Left – was simply being honest. Crainz is quick to conjure up a ‘diversity’ of the Italian Communist Party from the systemic deficiencies of the Christian Democrats and the overambitious but hastily abandoned reformist vision of the Socialists, but such diversity in terms of honesty and transparency was extremely short-lived. It was also unclear what political offer the PCI could realistically put on the table. Historian Nicola Tranfaglia, whose analysis is characterized by criticism toward the Right and the Confindustria, most clearly synthesized the inescapable inadequacy of the Left even without implicating its formal adherence to the Warsaw pact:

Besides the sometimes fair criticism of the American myth, the two major parties of the Left could not juxtapose any solution of easy accomplishment against that project. From an economic standpoint, their ideas were more explicit on what they did not want than on the model they wanted to accomplish. Furthermore, liberism was also preferred among the few Italian economists who recognized themselves in the programs of the
Left. Ultimately, left-wing forces were not able to present to the Italian people a clear and realistic alternative for the immediate future and for a long time confined themselves to the role of critics of the Christian Democrats, incapable of building a viable alternative to that which was being carried out.28

The PCI was often the enthusiastic supporter if not the creator of bills where spending was disguised as social concern, and whose unsustainability eventually wore out the cultural difference of the party. While the PCI grew more and more similar to a substantially conservative force, its constituencies were dissatisfied with its revolutionary zeal or, rather, lack thereof. At the same time, its inconsistencies and prudent stands on economic themes contributed to creating citizens with a bizarre demand for more consumerism but also more social revolts. After China’s cultural revolution, the PCI saw fringes and factions burgeon from its left side, searching for a different, more ‘intriguing’ type of Communism and aggressively campaigning against the phony revolutionaries of PCI. Those tiny formations were looking not only at China but also at Albania or even North Korea for inspiration, in a grotesque quest for ‘the need for Communism,’ as ridiculed in the aforementioned generational fresco La meglio gioventù. The PCI, untested in the national government after the general elections of 1948, was extremely dynamic in local and regional governments in central Italy with plenty of success stories: for instance, it had the merit of applying on a large scale the Legge n. 167 sull’ediliza economica e popolare or the law enabling the building of ‘downmarket’ tenement blocks (promulgated in 1962 and subsequently amended in 1965 after a ruling of the Corte Costituzionale) to solve the most pressing housing problems in the areas where it was leading the local administrations. But their general way of dealing with power was as degenerate as that of their older brothers, the Christian Democrats: the pompous label of ‘anthropological diversity’ skillfully circulated by the party through its numerous publications and sympathizers among the intellectual class proved to be only a marketing device with no real reference to current affairs. One episode reported by Crainz perfectly sums up the degree of political decomposition and the self-conscious work of cultural camouflage the PCI applied itself to. By the mid-1950s, the mechanisms of corruption surrounding invitations to bid for public tenders were very well oiled and wildly practiced all over the country: they represented a comfortable way to control votes and preserve the myth of industrious government. The areas governed by the PCI – important urban areas like Bologna, Perugia, Ancona, Florence and other cities in Umbria, Marche, Toscana, and Emilia Romagna – were no different; the system was so efficient that it also allowed minority parties in local governments to collect backhanders proportionally according to their electoral weight (the case of the shared participation in the subway in Milan is probably
the most famous instance). There, the PCI established its own peculiar system of illicit funding by rewarding with tenders and contracts its wide network of cooperatives involved in key sectors such as retail, construction, insurance, and finance. The relationship between the party and the cooperatives became so incestuous that scholars saw in it a de facto superimposition of roles – the *sistema emiliano* – in which the perennial ‘awardees’ are so deeply connected with their political and administrative counterparts that, since other competitors will not receive any form of consideration, no illicit funds are necessary to win the tenders. When the *sistema emiliano* had already been in place for some twenty years and running at full throttle, Guido Crainz takes us to the meeting of party leaders held on March 1 and 2, 1974, where the incumbent law of public funding of political parties is being discussed. This list of unforgettable speeches is opened by Armando Cossutta:

> Over the last years many federations have created a system to collect funds that should worry us. There is a polluted element in the relationship with our public administrations where the party organization is involved, and then there are single party members who look after their private interests. A clear cut is necessary with any type of unlawful connection.

Not everybody shared Cossutta’s enthusiasm, probably because he was the party member responsible for managing the illicit funds coming from Moscow; therefore, the other participants must have perceived his moral commitment as not extremely authoritative. To no one’s surprise, the person in charge of Emilia suggested a more gradual approach: but it is with two other interventions that this already remarkable *Direzione nazionale* becomes truly legendary. The PCI created a system with which it could feast on public money while looking formally impeccable in the process. This is what Nilde Jotti, who would be elected to the Presidency of the Chamber of Representatives five years later – an office she would hold until 1992 – had to say about the unlawful connections and the pursuing of private interests by party members and public administrations governed by the PCI:

> If there are such bribes that are actually itemized in the estimates of private companies, [it is necessary] to demand that the bribes be spent in social ventures like schools and day-care.30

Later, Elio Quercioli gave an unparalleled lesson in *realpolitik*, flaunting the same know-how that comes in handy a few years later when, from 1980 to 1985, he served as vice-mayor of Milan during the infamous years of the PSI regime over the city, a regime that made Milan the capital of illicit business and eventually led to the epoch-making Tangentopoli inquiry:
There will always be deals from which bribes are turned, bribes will always exist and will go to others. We shall continue to have that tax paid, saying: do not give to parties but build centers for social and collective activities. The truth is that permits are not granted without a green light from the Communists... We shall not close our eyes.

Quercioli’s brutal frankness in acknowledging a situation of generalized corruption, the absurd downplaying of a felony as if it were the collection of just another generic ‘tax,’ the surreal and Jesuitical demand of using dirty money to build social infrastructure, and, above all, his tenacious determination to be part of the whole process no matter what unethical practices are involved paint a picture of accomplished political integration into the Christian Democrats’ system. The grotesque pretension of boasting a moral distinction because other parties would not dare to say that money should be used to build schools and recreational clubs is only an aggravating circumstance. Even if the PCI could not count on the illustrious sponsorship of the Motion Picture Association of America and their fast-track camaraderie with DC-guided cabinets to spread their own gospel, they more than kept pace with the other protagonists interested in a share of Italian identity. Whereas the United States was almost effortlessly able to flood the Italian market with cultural artifacts and dump its models into circulation in Italian culture, hard-working cadres from the PCI had ingeniously come up with a strategy that covered all the sensible spheres of action, from the engineering of an intellectual élite whose task was to reassure constituencies of the party’s authoritativeness and competence to the implementation of a profitable network of trade partnerships with the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries. The massive investment in the production and diffusion of ideas through newspapers, magazines, publishing houses and different forms of associations – political, cultural, recreational – was a successful countermove, contrasting Italy’s affiliation with the Western bloc. The final result was that, when it came to seizing quotas of the imaginative world of the population, Italians had the luxury to choose between two always alluring options:

In order to consolidate their followings, the two main blocs into which the country was divided... set about colonizing civil society, using as their model many of the techniques of the Fascist regime. The Communists built up a powerful network of institutions alongside those of the party and its affiliated trade union, the Italian General Confederation of Work (CGIL), and together these enabled millions of their supporters to move in what amounted to a parallel universe to that of their opponents. There were organizations for ex-partisans and women (the Union of Italian Women, with 3,500 local circles and over a
million members by 1954); the *Case del Popolo* (‘Houses of the People’); the focal points (together with the Church) of community life in many smaller towns; which arranged debates and meetings; screened films, laid on children’s activities and sporting events, and in some cases even ran their own pharmacies and medical services; and there were the popular *feste dell’Unità*, designed as fund-raising events for the party newspaper, with barbecues, singing, dancing and other entertainments for the whole family.\(^{33}\)

As regards dire financial matters, direct funding from Moscow was not the main external source of sustainment. A steady flow of cash was guaranteed by the undeclared earnings of import–export companies that were started when the top brass of Eastern bloc countries had to place orders in the Italian market. An exemplifying case is that of Maritalia, a maritime agency based in Ravenna, which, in concert with the Soviet merchant navy, perfected a scheme of fraudulent defiscalization by declaring false expenses and evading taxes on their profit. The estimated unpaid taxes amounted to roughly one billion dollars.\(^{34}\) The political evolution of the PCI paralleled that of the PSI: as soon as they entered *la stanza dei bottoni* where they could operate *le leve del potere*, their vision of democracy became a struggle for party preservation, carving up posts in public companies and administrations, where reforms were embraced only insofar as they did not threaten the penetration of the party into the social fabric. It is safe to assume that the capacity which the PCI demonstrated in local governments would have probably served areas of the South well. But even if one assumes that the PCI would not have allowed disgraceful robberies like ‘the Sack of Agrigento,’ culminating, on July 19, 1966, in the collapse of entire neighborhoods built on friable soil, then it is also fair to consider the party a de facto conservative force, confirmed by the fact that Communist representatives voted for 75 per cent of the bills passed by the Parliament during the years of the Center-Left coalitions; that is, from the end of 1963 (or even before, with the Fanfani Cabinet of 1962) until the political elections of 1976, with only a brief interval of Center-Right in 1973.

Had the PCI disengaged itself from the Soviet Union, instead of confirming its vote of confidence after the invasion of Hungary in 1956 and of Czechoslovakia in 1968 – not for the nonexistent threat but for the exhibited conformism – one might concur with the hopes nurtured by Crainz, Ginsborg and others. The PCI actively participated in the shaping of the *paese mancato* by helping forge the destabilizing habit of preserving jobs first and worrying about the long-term consequences later, claiming their annuity from the *politica delle mance* carried out by the *governo della non sfiducia* and the *governo di solidarietà nazionale*, where the monies labelled as ‘tips’ were allocated to silence local bosses, fund personal interests and barter for their votes. The
PCI never posed a direct threat in terms of acting as a field aide to facilitate Soviet military intervention or carry out a violent appropriation of the means of production and abolition of private property: the party was content with firmly placing itself as a Soviet outpost on Italian territory from a rhetorical standpoint, incorporating the internationalist rhetoric of the brotherhood of working classes in its identitarian engineering, insisting on the values of the Resistance as a national foundation, and opportunistically intercepting the emerging instances of liberation – feminist, anti-colonial, etc. – to appear always on top of the progressive agenda. The PCI distinguished itself with the reluctance of acknowledging the murders and other acts of violence perpetrated right after the end of the war by partisans and activists frustrated by the worst aspects of the Fascism–Republic continuity and the unwillingness to deal with the question of the *foibe* and the territory of Trieste out of loyalty toward the supranational confederation of Communist Parties and the ‘external appointment’ of Italy’s international affairs entrusted to the Soviet Union. All these aspects contributed to the failure of the PCI to legitimize itself as a political force capable of overcoming the similarly divisive ‘mission’ of the Christian Democrats, a force with which the PCI had too much in common to not work out the mutually advantageous compromise or *compromesso storico*. Those excruciating wars of ‘colonization from the inside’ annihilated any residue of virtuous patriotism and brought the question of Italian identity back to square one, eventually sparking a mentality of self-segregation into municipal cultures and communities. As Christopher Duggan writes about the missing nationhood, ‘the essence of Italian political life became, as it had been for so much of its history, more a struggle against an internal enemy than a pursuit of collective goals.’ The necessary homogenizing transition certainly could not be perfected by state institutions, always looked upon with suspicion and hostility to the point that Italian citizens have always endured a lack of faith in the State’s capabilities – perceived as irredeemably bureaucratized – and a cynical skepticism for its initiatives. Appropriating John Foot’s intuition on the ‘permanent legitimation crisis,’ ‘The Italian state has found legitimation extremely difficult to obtain since unification and has never been, in any real sense, hegemonic.’ The inadequacy of Rome led to a centrifugal tendency still propelling the country toward identification with local, microcosmic ‘bell tower’ cultures and increasing frustration with central government and authorities, demonstrated today by the autonomist Northern League in the North and single-issue parties in the South, created by local officials to promote public spending and enjoy electoral refunds. Through the 1950s and 1960s, cinema recorded the embryonic stages of the territorial explosion, interpreted later as the municipalistic atomization of cultures. National synthesis of regional languages, values, and behaviors was one of the battles Italian cinema invested itself in, but at the end of the heroic phase of Neorealism, once it became clear that the teaching and
educating capability of the medium could only give short-lived and opportunistic results, cinema abandoned its messianic role. Directors – with notable exceptions like Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio Cottafavi, Vittorio De Seta and Renato Castellani – largely cast aside the didactic aspect of filmmaking and celebrated the chaos in which Italy was floundering. Reading the phenomenon in retrospect, one could say that the colorful regionalism showcasing a prismatic array of local idioms and sensitivities was the omen of today’s difficult cohabitation of cultures and languages in the Italian territory, complicated by massive immigration, both internal and external. The obsessive circularity of the return to the dialect seems today the acknowledgement of a defeat – at the very basic level, of diffusion of literacy – in the task of cultural and linguistic enhancement and a retreat into the haven of micro-communities. Starting with Neorealism, the palette of dialects was hailed in the quest for national cohesiveness: today, thanks to the reactive nature of regionalism, it may not be an exaggeration to say that Italian cinema does not even try to speak to the entire population.

Resistance in the most conservative sectors of industry and in the forces most averse to social reconfiguration added up to the fragility of political action: in one instance, the excuse used by the cross-party formations contrasting the policies of the Center-Left was the nationalization of electric power, which at the time seemed the only suitable measure to meet the outstanding demand for electricity in reasonable time and at reasonable prices. If handled with the goal of complementing the prodigious growth, reforms such as the nationalization of electric power and the 1962 Legge n. 167 would have accompanied the economic and social transformation and facilitated the transition for both entrepreneurs, who were investing at a fast pace and needed labor, and workers uprooted from their areas of origin. The amendments that were proposed but not passed in order to combat land speculation and harmonize chaotic urban development confirm the incompleteness of the reformist action and the prohibitive political climate: the dishonorable battle against the subsequent systemic action on housing development presented by Rep. Florentino Sullo of the Christian Democrats, so necessary in a time of impetuous migration and disputable trades between local governments and developers uninterested in rational urban planning, became yet another scar on the national consciousness. After the law proposed by Sullo sank in the quagmire of conflicts of interest, citizens knew that the Parliament would not be able to stop the disfiguring of their landscapes and that, in turn, ignited part of the animosity Italian people routinely harbor toward their elected representatives. Such relational codes and models of social behavior began to emerge in the early 1950s and were immediately immortalized in film in Un eroe dei nostri tempi (1955) by Mario Monicelli and especially in the archetypical L’arte di arrangiarsi (The art of getting along, 1954) by Luigi Zampa, with the ‘camouflaging’
Alberto Sordi submissively adjusting to whichever force is in charge, ‘indirectly alluding to the capacity of politicians to adapt and reinvent for the different political époques of modern Italy’ but also confirming the antipolitical instinct of the Italian people, using politics essentially for their own – and their families’ – advantage.

The Movie Industry After the War: Censorship and the Statute of the Filmmaker

With regard to state repression during Fascism, the approach of the censors had been cautious: The regime and directors met somewhat halfway. The former had the goal of promoting a thriving Cinecittà – with relatively few means to exercise complete control over the film industry, unlike Germany – while the latter simply tried to make the best use of their relative freedom by retreating into literary adaptations, light comedies, historical re-enactments – with very few exceptions, and often for purely financial reasons, as Giovacchino Forzano or Carmine Gallone occasionally did – in what could be called a tacit complicity. After the war, the State’s repressive apparatus treated cinema as yet another ideological battlefield: political factions were looking for new forms of legitimization among the ranks of writers and filmmakers, especially from the Left, while conservative legislators were trying to balance through censorship and allocations a ‘domesticated’ film industry without compromising artistic freedom in its entirety.

Reorganizing the production and distribution of film was considered instrumental in improving the nation’s psychological welfare, and the strategies of ‘redirection’ were outlined by Giulio Andreotti’s revision and evolution of fascist ‘booster’ policies, especially of Luigi Freddi’s central direction and hierarchical integration of regulating bodies into state supervision. The philosophy underpinning the bill promulgated under the regime of Giulio Andreotti – actually consisting of two laws in July and December 1949 respectively, now simply called ‘the Andreotti law’ – is summarized by Christopher Wagstaff:

‘The strategy of Giulio Andreotti . . . as a cultural policy it paid lip service to quality in the letter of the law . . . but in its implementation deliberately failed to distinguish between mediocre ‘reliable’ films and challenging ‘high quality’ films.’

Andreotti’s vision, paired with Eitel Monaco’s leadership of the Associazione Nazionale Industrie Cinematografiche Audiovisive (later – e Multimediali; National Association of Film, Audiovisual and Multimedia Industries) or ANICA, created an avenue for producers and entrepreneurs that ultimately proved to be decisive in reaching the most critical goal at which this postwar,
leveled sector of the economy was aiming. The goal was not only resuming
the normal course of operation but creatively attracting sources and investors
that would in turn revitalize interest, modernize infrastructure and establish
a pattern of industrial development. One of the side effects was that some
of the protagonists of this renaissance were merely unscrupulous ‘soldiers of
fortune’ with no real managerial expertise and were simply trying to profit
rapaciously from state subsidies, whether in the form of rewards or ristorni,
the restitution of production costs. One of the funds from which money was
drawn consisted of the levies American companies had to pay in order to have
their films dubbed. Hundreds of film companies were started up just to enjoy
such financial advantages but folded without making a single movie. However,
in purely numerical terms the Andreotti law was successful in improving the
ratio of American and Italian movies shown in theaters that, until the late
1950s, was basically ten to one. As Barbara Corsi noted, state support was a
condicio sine qua non for the rebirth of Italian cinema, relentlessly pursued by
ANICA, which was seeking renewed prestige and status in spite of the signifi-
cant leverage granted to governmental organs over issues such as censorship
and ideological orientation of scripts. Noting the ‘acquiescence’ with which
ANICA responded to the ‘government blackmail,’ Corsi identifies a type of
‘popular and uncommitted production’ as an immediate result of Andreotti’s
power in promoting a cinematic aesthetics not at odds with the Christian
Democrats’ cultural models. Those models were, for the most part, gathered
from official pronouncements of the Vatican, like the apostolic exhortation Il
film ideale given by Pope Pius XII on July 1, 1955, to various representatives
of the film industry, or the publication by Msgr. Luigi Civardi – a prolific
writer of textbooks dealing with Catholic education and practical application
of Catholic principles – Il cinema di fronte alla morale, published in 1940 in
a series edited by the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico. Through the instru-
ment of segnalazioni cinematografiche, or explicit endorsements or decima-
tions of specific pictures, the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico would serve as
a powerful lobby, pronouncing judgments on works capable of reinforcing or
undermining the vision of society the Holy See had in mind for Italy, its most
beloved country. After appointing itself with the mandate of supervising cin-
ema’s moral message, the Vatican pinpointed the neuralgic areas of interven-
tion, heavily blasting – among other topics – any slight or direct reference to
belittled, diminished male authority; sexuality; female independence; broken-
up families, etc. As the only life coach certified on Italian soil, the state-funded
Catholic Church zealously got to work in fulfilling its role of a generously paid
consultant. Daniela Treveri Gennari describes the tortuous paths that had to
be followed to bypass censorship concerns, creating several layers of control
and resulting in cultural contamination not dissimilar to a sophisticated
practice of colonialism from within:
Producers approached the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico in order to gain an ecclesiastic consensus for their films, hoping therefore to pass automatically the State censorship, closely linked to the Vatican.42

A form of double suppression was in place, softer but ideologically consistent with other totalitarian systems, a preventative censorship prohibiting unacceptable works from being written or filmed in the first place. Producers pragmatically bowed to an insidious pressure subtler than Fascist censorship, captured by Gian Piero Brunetta:

Fascist censorship occupied well-defined spaces and implemented a ‘policy of boundaries’ that could be contravened only in exceptional cases by taking advantage of small crevices in the system. Christian Democrats’ censorship, thanks to its centralizing ability, triumphantly marks the most absolute policies of abuse, clientelism, blackmail, ‘divide et impera’ practices, and thanks to its locally decentralized forces can strike any cinematographic initiative at any moment.43

That elaborate strategy would touch, after the scriptwriting and marketing stages, distribution and occupation of available theaters. Parish cinemas would run only Church-approved works and subtract troublesome movies of Neorealist inspiration or those considered too lascivious or disrespectful toward Catholic teachings. Another measure was the reinforcement of widespread propaganda: prayers begging God and the Virgin to help spectators watch only Catholic-proof movies, that is, certified by the Vatican’s authorities, circulated in churches and parishes until the 1960s. ANICA’s pertinacious effort to secure a stable, privileged relationship with state agencies at least guaranteed a balance between the emergence of an authorial clout and development of an industrial infrastructure, whose propulsive force would last into the 1970s and end with the viral phase of the sub-genre and B-movies. Another essential aspect of the Andreotti law was the rigid structuring of the material shown in the theater, articulated in three phases: a movie, a documentary and a cinegiornale or newsreel. The bill had expected and unexpected consequences: if one of the goals was to undermine Neorealism, it may have had immediate effects but it did not prove far-sighted. Andreotti’s template allowed a great number of beginners to learn the trade the same way Rossellini did, shaping a generation of filmmakers through the rules of the documentary, and inevitably prolonging the Neorealist season in terms of truthfulness and experimentation.44

One may call the program carried out by the Vatican – control over consciences – a coherent application of a Gramscian strategy of intellectual influence on culture and behaviors. The program received direct support from the Italian state, with the Patti Lateranensi signed by Mussolini seamlessly
embedded in the Constitution, with full support from the PCI, which had all the right to believe that a democracy is only a well-organized oligarchy. Italy was suffering another colonial wave of sorts in the form of an occupation of Cinecittà by Hollywood majors for Italy–US co-productions, which, in turn, could pass off as Italian movies and limit the quota designated for the mandatory screening of Italian works. American cultural artifacts and behaviors were appropriated in a quest for national individualization, while at the same time there was an attempt to foster a productive, nonconfrontational fusion of regional cultures and locales for an accomplished Italian hybridization. After the end of the war, during its ‘soft’ colonization, the United States crafted a strategy of penetration disguised as liberation, trying not to hurt workers’ susceptibility and often relying on local cultural vehicles to adjust its propaganda to suitable channels and ensure maximum circulation. The guidelines drawn up by the Psychological Welfare Division were sophisticated in extolling the virtues of the American model of development and industrialization instead of simply denigrating the Soviet Union. These guidelines were also successful at organizing trips to factories on United States soil for Italian workers and aggressively employing accepted forms of cultural stratification – like storytellers – for their purposes. It was a pragmatically respectful approach in which military occupation would go hand in hand with Roosevelt’s ‘freedom from want’ and a well-crafted marketing strategy indicating America as ‘the last strand of hope.’ A dialectic was established between ways of life subject to Hollywoodization and feasible alternatives; between American cinema and an Italian way to mass-market and artistic productions capable of affirming a specific identity. Challenging the superiority and glamour overflowing from the American product was made even more problematic by the dubious workability of autarchical initiatives. Italian and European cinematographies in general were trapped in the apparently inescapable paradox of working toward a pronounced individualization against American movies while at the same time using funds coming from their commercialization. As Corsi writes, ‘The few shows of strength tried for very short periods of time in France and the UK demonstrate that the business may very well die in every European country without the American product.’ The conquest manu industriali of the Italian premises was made possible by a provision of the Andreotti law, which blocked the voucher given by the Italian State to American majors for each dubbed film but allowed American producers to reinvest domestically as fresh capital part of the revenue accrued in Italy, with co-productions occupying the studios for months and months and physically preventing other works from being filmed. The pragmatism of the PCI saw this as an opportunity to reinforce its political patronage with the walk-ons who were at that time thronging around Cinecittà in their thousands, knowing that filmmakers miffed over the lack of intellectual sponsorship for their projects would eventually
reconsider and return to the fold. An example is the treatment that Palmiro Togliatti reserved for Giuseppe De Santis, who, when complaining about the open obstructionism that his masterpiece *Roma ore 11* (1952) encountered when it was distributed, was told by the Communist leader that in the future he’d better come up with some nice ‘love story.’ In their anti-communist paranoia, the United States and the Vatican were also able to join forces in a holy alliance against every tendency that could loosely be perceived as subversive or disruptive or that fostered socialist germs. American majors’ executives would flock around representatives of the Centro Cattolico Cinematografico and influential members of the Catholic Association of Film Critics to secure benign reviews and capillary distribution in the parish cinemas system. Such blocs forged a bizarre cooperation determined to promote an art devoid of polemical and ‘nihilistic’ stances, where Catholic reviewers and intellectuals would strive to disinter values consistent with their cultural plan; for example, praising the male-dominated Westerns as great examples of family patriarchy and in general reinscribing American escapism into the comforting narratives of the Catholic tradition:

As genre films were a recognised form of popular and populist cinema, it is thus fair to suggest that, despite the at-the-time problematic undertone of some of the 1950s films (representation of race, or violence, for instance), they would still have been received as offering a reassuring, conventional mode of entertainment, with ‘soothing resolutions.’ This is not very far away from what Christian Democrats wanted to promote in their cultural ideology. They were keen on stopping national cinema from spreading doubts and liberating themes, and instead favoured proclaiming reassuring lifestyles and traditional values. This desire was in accord with the Vatican ideology.47

Even though the Vatican was greatly worried by the emphasis on materialism in American culture, the joint crusade aimed at providing an endless supply of American films with emphasis on stability and material affluence initiated the appropriation of such values by Italian audiences, eventually resulting in a thorough embrace of standardized American models of acquisition – in short, everything Pier Paolo Pasolini was opposed to. An argument could be made regarding the very few refusals that were issued from government offices to producers applying for state funding: on the one hand, the relative lack of controversial scripts confirms a cinema industry regulated by the Andreotti-Vatican joint venture in its mass production; on the other hand, it points to a conformist stage of intellectual life that would be broken only in the 1960s, when cultural and symbolic transformations were too overwhelming to be left out of motion pictures.
An excellent example of how filmmakers had to preventively treat their screenplays, stories and other materials can be seen in the volume De Sica & Zavattini: Parliamo tanto di noi, where there is a detailed chronicle of all the gratuitous and instrumental attacks that the two artists had to endure whenever one of their pictures came out. Besides well-known hostilities from Christian Democrat representatives, in that book the reader will find malevolent criticism by the Left and, in general, a perfect representation of the paranoid atmosphere in Italy, where everything had to be judged in political and ideological fashion because of the wholesale penetration of partitocracy in any critical aspect of the country. Such dynamics are also described by Pierre Sorlin, who nailed the relentless way political parties used motion pictures instrumentally for electoral reasons or to gain credit as the only forces that truly captured the character of the nation. Describing the illiberal strategy carried out by Andreotti and Communist critics, Sorlin writes:

Communist Puritanism matched that of the Catholics and Communists, like the Catholics, were longing for happy, positive endings not for ambiguous ones. Using different words, L’Unità could have said, like Andreotti, that there was a good and a bad realism.

Both parties tried to disavow filmmakers who were deemed to be too unorthodox. However, the true problem was not only the policies in place to adopt a fully industrial cinema, but the lack of alternate means of expression and production. And, most notably, the question is why cinema in Italy had to relentlessly occupy and surrogate the place of political agency. The last nail in the coffin of Neorealism is driven by Corsi:

It’s no accident that no new figure of cinema entrepreneur came out of the Neorealist experience. It is also no accident that besides generic auspices for change, the forces of the Left were not able to concretely elaborate and put into practice a truly alternative model of production.

The phenomenon of divismo, erratically continued under the Fascist regime thanks to the labored search for bland, noncastrating ‘divas,’ came to a definitive maturation with the emergence of several waves of great actors. Italy’s most recognized producers also emerged in the 1950s, internationally established figures who provided a higher standard for the technical imprint and also represented Italy abroad as a dual diplomatic service. The ethics of suspicion against industrialism and its discontents plagued the debate on cinema and its ultimate role in society, with education purposes and profit at opposite poles of the debate. The pauperist utopia imbued with Benedetto Croce’s idealism of art as a pure vehicle of aesthetic intuitions without the superstructure.
of financial planning undermined the discussion of what strategies to adopt for a successful national cinema. Corsi, while admitting the notion of quality cinema, does not hesitate to label the notion ‘paralyzing’ from the standpoint of economic strategies and industrial professionalization, and is joined in the discussion by Giulia Fanara. Paraphrasing an important essay by the Marxist sociologist Alberto Abruzzese, a definitive *summa* seen from the Left on the intellectual implications of Neorealism and its relations with the two main parties/ideological coalitions ruling Italian politics, Fanara highlights:

> [t]he juxtaposition between the ‘cultural anonymity’ of a militant in the Christian Democrats, who has on his shoulders a cultural but also functional and technical heritage, resources, awareness of media’s role, power of censorship and diffuseness of popular circuits, translating into the ability to organize a ‘cultural consumption’, and the incapacity of the Left to articulate the politics-culture relation around the values of industrialization and presence of the working class.52

The attraction to the Soviet cinema of socialist realism that glorified the conquests of the working class proved to be an unrealistic and impracticable model; whereas, the ideological opposition to Hollywood notwithstanding, American cinema created a subtle inferiority complex because of its efficient division of labor, its oiled mechanisms of production and realization, and its ever-improving technological standards. The goal of combining ‘high art’ and the inclusion of marginalized classes in cinematic discourse accompanied the debate on the ‘true’ mission of Italian cinema, that of resisting aesthetic standardization and passive obedience to market demands. Corsi also stresses another ominous trait belonging to Italian cinema; namely, its incapacity to cover the virtuous distance from improvisation and ‘capital coming from God knows where’ to procedural systematization and selection of its executive cadres. The diversification into sub-genres or *filoni* and the first high-budget productions gambling on Hollywoodization of plots and superb visual impact all point in the direction of ‘a mature market’ where end-users seem culturally prepared to add their new level of intellectual sophistication to the business equation, sometimes with curious twists. For example, consider the case of Visconti’s ‘art blockbuster’ *Il gattopardo* (1963), which almost made production company Titanus go bankrupt until its owner Goffredo Lombardo managed to recover his money with the parody of the original, called *I figli del leopardo* (1965) and starring Sicilian comic actors Franco Franchi and Ciccio Ingrassia. As Gianni Grimaldi fondly reminisces: ‘We picked a dude that with a stovepipe could look like Burt Lancaster and the same big woman playing the slut in Visconti’s movie. Franchi and Ingrassia were playing the sons of the *gattopardo* exacting revenge from the father. We used the outdoor locations
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that we did not use for the original movie. Lombardo resurrected the company from the disaster with a disaster’s parody.55

With the Legge n. 1213/1965, socialist Minister Achille Corona56 polished some controversial aspects of the legge Andreotti, regulating co-productions and establishing a 13 per cent state contribution calculated on box-office revenues. Corona also pushed for a distinct character of ‘Italianicity,’ implementing binding requirements about the nationality of directors, technicians, actors and scriptwriters. Given that Neorealism was propelled by a vacuum in the legislation and the explosion of Italian cinema was made possible by Andreotti, it seems paradoxical that one of the representatives of that riformismo possibile hoped for by Crainz and other scholars would stifle the unorganized creativity of Italian cinema by tightening up the system of state support and introducing the infamous article 28 on the ‘cinema of research’ and hard-to-distribute pictures. One may argue that there is similar ‘elitist’ legislation elsewhere in Europe that sculpts the role of the filmmaker as an autonomous creator, but cases in point, like that of France, are extremely pragmatic, for example, when dealing with marketing and distribution. Thus, without supplementary provisions, article 28 basically resulted in an application of Croce’s ideas on art as expression and intuition, with all the emphasis fideistically shifted toward the demiurgic auteur, as if technical and organizational aspects were afterthoughts crippling the work of art with their useless superstructural ballast. At the beginning of its application, promising filmmakers managed to find a niche for themselves in the ‘crevices’ of the legislation and have their projects approved. However, once the movie industry began to shrink and quality to deteriorate, article 28 became a byword for presumptuousness and unintentional comedy. The advent of television would then push the works made through article 28 – and the quasi totality of Italian cinematography, for that matter – toward a generalizing, low-budget model, where cinema copies television and producers hope that the audience, already accustomed to the soporific litany of television images, would enthusiastically accept spending two hours in a movie theater being comforted by the same type of language. The decadence of the entertainment circuit, in spite of accessible funding, reinforced the hostility toward a system of heavy intervention, possibly suggesting that tax sheltering may, in fact, attract more resources and ensure a less disharmonious development. Carlo Lizzani, a proven anti-fascist who has always been careful to give an honest picture of fascist cinema and culture,57 a system of which he had first-hand knowledge, criticized in a recent interview the heritage of the attitude of suspicion toward the industrial paradigm. After stressing the financial support Fascism granted to artists and culture,57 a system of which he had first-hand knowledge, criticized in a recent interview the heritage of the attitude of suspicion toward the industrial paradigm. After stressing the financial support Fascism granted to artists and culture in general, and after reminiscing about the failures of the Chinese Revolution, carried out by peasants – ‘the most conservative class in every society’ – Lizzani answers the interviewer on why Italian cinema is more than anything a cinema of autori:
Because it’s not an industry. If there were a strong industrial structure like in the U.S., then there would be the ‘director’ in charge in Hollywood instead of the ‘auteur’ that dominates in Europe. Luckily, with the new popularity of fiction [a fiction in Italy is a film made for television, usually in two or more episodes], we are witnessing the birth of such a technician with artistic features. La meglio gioventù by Marco Tullio Giordana is the most accomplished example.58

Even though the auteur–director argument is a dichotomy that dates back to the 1960s, Lizzani once again demonstrates his nose for structural developments in the industry, understanding that the old ritual of popular cinema with its genres and audiences has been replaced by TV serials or, as they are called in Italy, ‘fictions.’ Lizzani – who can be considered the critical consciousness of Italian cinema – was also quick to dismantle the equations Neorealism = amateurish production (whose consequence was the other equation, industry = lack of artistic quality) and to understand that heavy state subsidies would have been a false and temporary solution to systemic problems. Together with the luminous protagonists of those extraordinary years, he proved more enlightened than his political counterpart.

A comment on the exhaustion of Neorealism’s heroic phase is appropriate here. As hard as it is to give credit to the ‘murder’ theory – a murder with the fingerprints of American majors, Christian Democrats and the Vatican all over it – it is also safe to say that Neorealism’s demise has many accomplices. One of the merits of Neorealism was its mission to deliver the transformational energy of human suffering to everybody, showing characters, landscapes and lives that were not reassuring but destabilizing and, as many filmmakers attest was often their intention, vehicles of knowledge bound to educate people. The distressed plea to the Italian people for justice and freedom echoing from Ricci in Ladri di biciclette or from the partisans in the North-East episode of Paisà speaks of a clear ethical stance, pondered for years under Fascism, aimed at the discovery of the putatively authentic national spirit. In the Italian wasteland, those voices and ‘tears of things,’ as Mira Liehm and Gian Piero Brunetta called them in their histories of Italian cinema, seemed to offer a radical alternative, even capable of undermining the process of capitalist restoration. The mission was a suicidal one, especially when legislation all but ‘established a level of governmental control tantamount to censorship’59 resembling the same compromise sponsored by the Fascist regime, annihilating free speech and pushing directors to more acceptable genres. It is possible to see such tension in the words of militant literary critic Carlo Salinari, who blames state capitalism for the decadence of Neorealism and Italian art in general:
The crisis of neorealism was rooted in an objective general fact: in the
involution of the Italian society or, if we wish to use another expression,
in the restoration of capitalism in Italy. It affected the arts in different
ways. Film received a direct, massive, and brutal blow. The state used its
entire political power and took advantage of the dependence of film on
the industrial structure. All kind of administrative measures were used to
disrupt a further evolution of neorealism. The blow aimed at the cinema
had a far-reaching effect.60

It is unclear, though, what type of society would guarantee acceptable stan-
dards of life to complement ‘high art,’ which seems to go in the direction of a
constructivist rationalism stemming from Croce’s aesthetics and seamlessly
engrafting Marxist ideology onto idealistic culture, with that mention of
Neorealism’s ‘further evolution’ as a messianic projection of a Benjaminian
society in which politics and art march at the same pace. One also has to take
into account the initial attempts of the PCI to include works in its cultural pan-
theon when not explicitly joining forces in the crusade of preventative censor-
ship. Another fascinating take on Neorealism’s failure as a destabilizing agent
of change is Vincent Rocchio’s Cinema of Anxiety, a fundamental endeavor
that sought to lay bare the nonrevolutionary conventionalities of Neorealist
cinema. In Rocchio’s words:

The problem for contemporary American society, though, is that no
other kind of social model has found wide acceptance as a viable replace-
ment for reverence and obedience to authority. In this respect, there
are very strong parallels between contemporary American culture and
postwar Italian culture. The critical difference between the two is that
for postwar Italian culture there were other visible models competing
with patriarchal capitalism: the cooperation and unity of the Resistance
became the most hallowed example. Despite the dissolution of its govern-
ment and the resulting social upheaval, postwar Italy did not become a
revolutionary society. Patriarchal capitalism, while battered, nonetheless
maintained itself, with not a little help from American intervention in the
economic and political life of postwar Italy. Bold economic and political
acts do not occur in a vacuum, however; Gramsci’s concept of hegemony
demonstrates that they operate through and with ideological discourse.61

This passage, worthy of being quoted in its entirety, echoes John Hess’s
condemnation of the lack of political fervor in Neorealism62 and Frank P.
Tomasulo’s reading of Ladri di biciclette as ‘no less than a Hollywood film,
[a film that] sutures its viewers into an ideological mind-screen of received
wisdom.’63 Rocchio seems to imply that democracy does not do well enough
for a country trying to rebuild after a dictatorship. If one can agree with Rocchio about the seemingly inevitable turn that political events had to take in Italy under American pressure, choosing capitalist accumulation as opposed to sovkhoz, five-year plans, and other forms of revolutionary economy, many problems nevertheless arise when one seeks to understand the intimate nature of those ‘bold economic and political acts’ that to Rocchio’s dismay did not take place in Italy. Neorealism’s death was conveniently accelerated, but it was already under attack from too many fronts and it is unrealistic to think that the original neorealist template could work as the backbone of a movie industry. Finally, concerning the ‘cooperation and unity’ of the Resistance, aside from all geopolitical questions, it is not clear what Italy should or could have become because Rocchio does not mention in his book Pietro Calamandrei’s doctrine of ‘cooperazione e unità,’ unless he is simply trying to pinpoint the homologies between what in his opinion is a reactionary political turn – the electoral loss of the Popular Front in 1948 – and similarly reactionary art, Neorealism. With only a minor semantic slippage, one could rest assured that the collectivist slogan of ‘cooperation and unity’ may, as we in fact have seen, be chosen to illustrate postwar economy through the use of cooperatives, with the Christian Democracy resolute to not leave too much maneuverable space to its left and a substantial co-participation by the other mass parties, which had no options of radical discontinuity in mind. Cooperatives were only one of the means through which DC and PCI obtained major fiscal and financial assistance: they implemented sophisticated systems of ‘ballot-swapping’ and enlarged their sphere of influence occupying vast sectors of the Italian economy.

Notes

1. Lorenzo Cuccu, Il cinema di Paolo e Vittorio Taviani: Natura, cultura, storia nei film dei due registi toscani (Rome: Gremese, 2001), 15. The scholar points out that this declining ‘Subject’ is a representative of the bourgeois class more than an up-and-coming revolutionary hero.
3. Established in 1933 as a prop for failing Italian banks and originally conceived as ‘an instrument for the furtherance of the industrial policy of the Fascist state,’ the state-owned holding company grew over the years to encompass more than 1,000 businesses, employ more than 500,000 people, and produce everything from highways to telephone equipment to ice cream. Credited with spurring the phenomenal growth of the Italian economy that occurred in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the IRI worked well until it came to function mostly as a facilitator capable of attracting private capital.
8. ‘Cuccagna’ in Italian is a controversial word: It denotes a fabulous experience, and it often carries a sarcastic connotation. In Salce’s movie, it is an ironic commentary on the ‘wonderland’ of the economic boom.
15. On the substantial continuity of the prefetti with the Fascist regime and the failed reform of the administration, see also Fabrizio Barca, ‘Compromesso senza riforme nel capitalismo italiano,’ in Fabrizio Barca (ed.), *Storia del capitalismo italiano dal dopoguerra a oggi* (Rome: Donzelli, 1997), 24–5. Barca argues that two alternative models of reform for administrative justice were rapidly dismissed, the ‘American’ one emphasizing federal autonomy and the ‘council’ one in liberated areas based on people’s decisions ‘from below.’
17. ‘[T]his type of simplifications, these escapes into stereotypes . . . are part of a defensive process, typical for a historical moment in which the identitarian image seemed even more complex and elusive as opposed to the past.’ Mariapia Comand, *Commedia all’italiana* (Milan: Il Castoro, 2010), 41. See also Silvana Patriarca. *Italianità. La costruzione del carattere nazionale* (Bari: Laterza, 2010).
29. That is the definition used by a former manager of the Lega delle cooperative, Ivan Cicconi. See his *La storia del futuro di Tangentopoli* (Rome: Dei, 1988).
30. Both speeches by Cossutta and Iotti are quoted in Crainz, *Il paese mancato*, 497.
31. Ibid. 497.
32. This cartel was an outstanding achievement that had to be properly celebrated by further feasting on Italy’s public finances: From 1976 to 1979 the governo della non sfiducia and governo di solidarietà nazionale staged a trial period for a future merger, which happened in 2007 with the birth of the Partito Democratico – the sum of the post-Communist Democratici di Sinistra and the Christian Democrats who were not allied with Berlusconi.
34. On the financing mechanisms of the PCI, see Salvatore Sechi, *Compagno cittadino: Il PCI tra via parlamentare e lotta armata* (Cosenza: Rubbettino, 2006), 446 and 479.
38. In *Cinema e Fascismo* by Vito Zagarrio, the author conducts an interview with Alessandro Blasetti, stressing the ‘encouragement’ by the regime of filmmaking, the fact that Fascism did not use cinema as a political weapon, and that the ‘adherence to reality’ theorized since the 1930s, together with the tragic experience of the war, would later generate the cinema of Visconti and Rossellini. See Vito Zagarrio, *Cinema e Fascismo: Film, modelli, immaginari* (Venice: Marsilio, 2004).
44. See also the memories of Florestano Vancini, in Valeria Napolitano, *Florestano Vancini: Intervista a un maestro del cinema* (Naples: Ligouri, 2008), 8–9.
45. The complex process of Americanization that started with the prosperity vow made by the Marshall Plan is analyzed in the miscellaneous volume *Identità italiana e identità europea nel cinema italiano dal 1945 al miracolo economico*, ed. Gian Piero Brunetta (Turin: Edizioni della Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, 1996).
48. Another detailed account of this situation, not only relating to De Sica and Zavattini but also De Santis, Fellini, Visconti, and others, is in Mira Liehm, *Passion and Defiance: Film in Italy from 1942 to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 92–5 and 105–6. On page 94, Liehm observes that ‘Marxism had offered the only consistent antifascist ideology during the twenty years of fascism,’ and ‘it should not be forgotten that a centuries-old Catholic
tradition has accustomed the Italians to the translation of most problems, including those of art and culture, into ideological terms.’

51. Ibid. 55.
54. Ibid. 63.
57. Lizzani was one of the ‘witnesses’ against Mussolini during one of the ‘History Trials’ or *processi alla storia* that are regularly held every summer in San Mauro Pascoli. He was very determined, though, to confirm that Italy owes its national cinema to Fascism.
63. Frank P. Tomasulo, ‘*Bicycle Thieves*: A Re-Reading,’ in Howard Curle and Stephen Snyder (ed.) *Vittorio De Sica: Contemporary Perspectives* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 160. (The quote is from a comment made by the editors.)