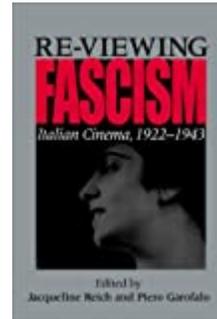




**Jacqueline Reich, Piero Garofalo, eds.** *Re-viewing Fascism: Italian Cinema, 1922-1943*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002. xiv + 368 pp. \$22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-253-21518-5; \$49.95 (library), ISBN 978-0-253-34045-0.



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*Re-viewing Fascism* is a collection of twelve essays which attempts to link the study of Italian cinema during the fascist *ventennio* to wider political, cultural, and other issues. This interdisciplinary approach draws primarily on studies of Italian film, literature concerned with fascist history, politics and culture, and films themselves. It is a welcome contribution to the study of fascism and its cultural enterprises. It is usefully concerned with breaking through the boundaries of film studies per se, showing how analyses based on cultural artefacts such as feature films can contribute to a greater understanding of the political and cultural context of fascism. The linkages made by the editors and the contributors do not stop there, however. As well as broadening the field of studies of Italian film, *Re-Viewing Fascism* attempts to link the years of fascist rule to the decades which preceded them, as well as those which followed.

The book is divided into three parts. The first is concerned with the placing of Italian cinema produced during fascism in a context which highlights continuity with the pre- and post-fascist period. In the first chapter, Jacqueline Reich examines the relationship between fascism and culture through a study of the development of the Italian film industry and the regime's reaction to and attempts to influence it, especially in the 1930s. She fo-

cuses in particular on the adaptation of Hollywood models to the Italian cinematic tradition during the years of the regime. As Reich argues, Italian cinema was influenced rather than controlled, enabling a variety of potential cultural interpretations. In this otherwise excellent chapter, the only area which does not seem to fuse well is the brief discussion of the Catholic Church and its stance on the cinema. Reich argues that the Church understood the propagandistic potential of film, and was both a conscious and an unconscious influence on Italian cinema. (In chapter 5, however, David Forgacs shows that Catholic and fascist film censors did not share the same agendas.) Whilst the unconscious effects of the Church on cinema are an interesting and underdeveloped field of study, the short section on the Church and cinema seems slightly out of place in a chapter which aims to examine the relationship between film, fascism, and culture.

Giorgio Bertellini examines the transition to sound in Italian cinema in the second chapter. The emphasis is on the continuity between cinematic production in the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s. Particularly interesting is the analysis of the wider European debate on sound cinema, which is utilized to illustrate the specific debate in Italy. Bertellini significantly focuses on the controversies con-

nected with the introduction of dialogue (as opposed to sound) in the cinema. Linkages are also made to post-war films and to the conceptualization of sound cinema since the 1910s by luminaries such as D'Annunzio, Canudo, Luciani, the Futurists, Bragaglia, Pirandello, and Paoletta. The early twentieth-century unease in regarding film as art is also highlighted through this study. It is interesting to note, in Bertellini's account, that film was initially denied those attributes—genius, creation, and the like—which were central to the problematic aesthetic conceptualization of the work of art in the modern era. The author proceeds to show how, in a conceptual reversal, the film was eventually granted its status as a work of art precisely because of the limitations of the image, which had previously been formalistically employed to exclude it from definition as a work of art. One of the highlights of Bertellini's chapter, for the author of this review, was his discussion of Neapolitan cinema. With its emphasis on the city and its ills, Partenopean cinema is used to expose certain key aspects of the debate around the urban sphere which would later be central to fascist rural and demographic policy.

The third chapter, by Ennio di Nolfo, examines the roots of neo-realism. Di Nolfo challenges the idea that neo-realism sprang from a vacuum after 1943. He emphasizes the fact that Italy's closure to international film markets, and its subsequent exposure to these same markets after the start of the period of Allied occupation, created the impression that neo-realism had emerged from nowhere. Di Nolfo states, however, that the tragedy of the 1930s was that Italian cinema remained unknown in the most important film market—the United States—but then argues that protectionism in the 1930s aided the rebirth of Italian cinema. An interesting, albeit hypothetical, question is whether this rebirth would have been able to occur under conditions of national market dominance by American production companies.

James Hay closes the first section of the book with his essay emphasizing the fluidity of Italian modernity. The focus of the chapter is on cinema and telephony, specifically on their role in the formation of the nation. He links his discussion to four current concepts of concern in contemporary Italy: federalism, Padania, immigrants (extra-comunitari), and the concept of an economic, deregulatory "Far West." These ideas are shown to exist not by themselves in a particular decade, but as a result of a continuous conceptual development. For example, Hay links the "white telephones" of so-called escapist films under fascism to the significance of today's *telefonini*, or mobile phones.

The second part of *Re-viewing Fascism* is concerned with cinema's mediation of sexuality and fascism. The three chapters in the section argue against the notion that cinematic production under fascism was mainly escapist, avoiding controversial themes such as sexuality. The subtle and, at times, subversive sexuality present in Italian films is studied by David Forgacs in the fifth chapter. William Van Watson follows with an essay on *Visconti's Ossessione* (1942). The film is seen as a projection of Visconti's homosexual self and his inner tensions onto a heterosexual template as the only way to express himself under fascism. This is an insightful analysis of the potential for the subversion of meanings inherent in film. Chapter 7, by Robin Pickering-Iazzi, analyzes the film *Sotto la Croce del Sud*, produced in 1938 by Guido Brignone. This chapter usefully examines the manner in which cinema can be utilized to construct meanings of empire and assign meanings to Africa. In particular, women's reactions to the on-screen construction of Africa by fascist cinematic imagery are studied. In this highly enjoyable essay, which concludes the second section of the book, Pickering-Iazzi links the analysis of Italian film to the study of fascist imperialism.

Italian cinema is considered within a broader cultural context in the third section, comprising five chapters. In chapter 8, Piero Garofalo insightfully analyses the influence of Soviet cinema on its Italian counterpart during the 1930s. Garofalo shows that Hollywood was not the only tradition influencing Italian films. Fascist understanding of the potential political role of cinema led to the absorption of various non-national models. Four particular films influenced by Soviet models are analyzed: *Sole* (1930) and *Terra Madre* (1931) by Blasetti, *Rotaie* (1930) by Camerini, and *Acciaio* (1933) by Ruttmann. Garofalo shows how these films, influenced by Soviet formalism and with their emphasis on ruralism, traditional values, and an ideal rural past, can be used to shed light on the modern unease felt by a modernizing, industrializing, and urbanizing Italy in the first forty years of the twentieth century. The use of Soviet models is traced through the political relationship between Italy and Soviet Russia. An interesting point made by Garofalo which supports the argument that Italian cinema was influenced by a variety of non-national models is that the president of the LUCE Institute, Alessandro Sarpi, visited the USSR in 1932 to learn about the Russian film industry. Garofalo shows how this visit influenced the centralization of the Italian film industry, as well as the foundation of the Scuola Nazionale di Cinematografia (which would in turn generate the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, or

CSC) in 1932, on the model of the Moscow State Film School.

The ninth chapter, by Marcia Landy, examines cinematic theatricality and performance in opposition to the blanket definition of films produced during the fascist period as escapist. Various films are studied and linked to wider issues. For example, Max Neufeld's *Una Moglie in Pericolo* (1939) is utilized to highlight how deception and fiction were depicted as useful for the attainment of social harmony. The tenth chapter, by Barbara Spackman, is a highly interesting analysis of Camerini's *Grandi Magazzini* (1939). Through a study of the film, Spackman links autarchy to the changing role of women, cast both in their traditional roles and as modern urban consumers. This excellent chapter fuses strands on fascist demographic policy, urbanization, and modernity, showing how Camerini's film attempted to reconcile the contradictions inherent in a modernizing Italy. The eleventh chapter, by Marla Stone, is an insightful and useful study of the Venice Biennale film festival. It focuses especially on 1942, the last year in which the festival was fascist. The shifting cultural emphasis of the Biennale and its films in the decade leading up to 1942 is masterfully examined to highlight how the festival reflected a devel-

oping fascist cultural policy. The twelfth and last chapter, by Stephen Gundle, analyzes the star system in Italy, highlighting the manner in which it selectively incorporated various characteristics of the U.S. star system, and the way in which it was utilized by the regime.

*Re-viewing Fascism* is a useful contribution to the study of Italian cinema and fascism. Its chapters deal with a variety of issues crossing interdisciplinary boundaries and contribute to a greater understanding of the fascist period as well as its role in the cultural and political development of Italy. Chapter structures are at times repetitive, so that the theory and setting of a political-cultural context for the chapter are followed by the analysis of various films. More thorough discussions of certain key topics of fascist history analyzed in the book (such as autarchy, Italian colonialism, as well as fascist urban, rural, and demographic policies) would have been welcome. However, these are minor points which are perhaps unavoidable in a book which aims to link films to wider aspects of Italy's development during and after fascism. Overall, the book is a welcome step forward in the integration of a plurality of approaches to the study of fascism.

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