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Making the Nation come real

*Neorealism/Nation
A Suitable Case for Treatment*

Essence, the building and the function. Performing the nation

The reflection upon national cinemas has given birth to different kind of descriptive and/or explanatory models, enabling the establishment of potential boundaries for a corpus of texts, practices and discourses. A possible and useful partition of the various models has been recently suggested by Thomas Elsaesser, establishing a deep methodological and historical fracture between two of them: an essentialist and a constructivist one¹.

The first approach pertains to a research era possibly superseded by the academic studies of the past twenty years, and yet, it is still widely spread in the common sense. In its worst and yet frequent results, it assumes a national cinema to be the “natural” outcome of a Nation-state, considering this latter as a definite and hopefully eternal given, capable of producing culture in a fluid and non-contradictory fashion. I do not need to stress the tautology underlying the more simplistic use of this approach, a tautology taken up in the possibly exemplary formula: Italian cinema is the cinema produced in Italy and recognised as such at home and abroad, hence revealing the essence of the nation. More acute uses of this perspective, as in the renowned case of Kracauer’s *From Caligari to Hitler*, in which he thinks of cinema as a possible symptom of the fantasies and removals of a given national society in a specific phase, i.e. Weimar Germany, shaped by its boundaries – Wilhelmine monarchy and national-socialist totalitarianism². In this case, the analysis tries to detect and produce a taxonomy of the textual devices, in order to find a coherence revelatory of the state of the (unconscious) nation.

Two possible problems arise: firstly, there is no necessary implication in the relationship established between a textual device, whether it be thematic or formal, and the collective psychology; secondly, the risk of tautology is always around the corner, since the scholar looks for what he knows to confirm the historical evolution of a chosen nation – i.e., symptoms of the impending German socio-political catastrophe. Or, in the opposite way, he finds social phenomena able to explain textual coherence.

¹ See ELSAESSER (2005a, 57-81).

² KRACAUER (1947).

The rise of cultural studies in the last decades of the 20th century, originated a far more complex approach to the reading of the relationships between the cinematic institution and the concept of nation. From this point of view, nation is the result of a set of discursive practices – linguistic, textual, social and so on – aimed at producing apparent coherence and cohesion, and naturalising the cultural, which would then be experienced as a non-constructed reality³. Furthermore: discourses create communities, sense of belonging and exclusions, underscoring shared experiences, referring to common backgrounds, pinpointing differences and similarities. Recently, as Philip Schlesinger has pointed out⁴, film and media studies has made an intensive use of paradigms elaborated in sociological and cultural studies, in the attempt to explain the active role of cinema as an institution and as a practice in the construction, functioning and revival of national identities.

From this perspective, a number of significant contributions were produced, leading to slightly different conclusions. Philip Rosen who, together with Thomas Elsaesser and Ed Buscombe, was among the first to reconsider the notion of national cinema, in a 1984 essay of historical methodology, addressed the cultural meaning underlying the establishment of an intertextual body of work named *national cinema*⁵. In the past decade, Susan Hayward has tried to circumscribe the French national cinema as well as the concept of national cinema itself. More specifically, Hayward suggested two possible research lines concerning the articulation of cinema and national: one devoted to the cinematic enunciation of the national – how does cinema speak of national through films, discourses around them and archival practices that preserve some texts instead of others, thereby establishing their meaning to a national community? The second line of enquiry pertains to the contribution given by cinema to the construction of a national identity through the forging and perpetuation of national myths and forms. In one case, one might speak of *how the national is enunciated*; in the other of *how to enunciate the national*⁶. Another remarkable contribution was given by Anthony Smith, who focused on the revival strategy of a national symbolic heritage through painting and cinema. From this perspective, cinema recalls and stresses the national myths mentioned by Susan Hayward, looking back at a past to create a community. It also uses recurring specific narratives, iconographical features, thematic devices, – for example, heroic self-sacrifice, meaningful landscapes, people as a dramatic term⁷. A more radical approach to the question of national cinema has been put forward by Andrew Higson. He fears the risks implicit

³ This cultural operation generates what is considered by.

⁴ SCHLESINGER (2000, 19-31).

⁵ ROSEN (1984, 69-84).

⁶ See HAYWARD (1993). I would like to thank Enrico Biasin for soliciting my attention on the passage. See also: HAYWARD.(2000, 88-102).

⁷ SMITH (2000, 45-89).

in the concept of national cinema: the drawing of boundaries not too useful in explaining the market, semiotic and, more generally, medial dynamics – rarely referred only to a restricted state community, and rather linked to wider economics, intertextual exchanges, shared experiences. In his words, «the concept of ‘transnational’ may be a subtler means of describing cultural and economic formations that are rarely contained by national boundaries»⁸. While the suggestions of Higson are doubtless rooted in a condition of the media processes, two objections might be raised: firstly, although since its start, the film industry has had a transnational and international perspective, at the same time, individual industries have always paid inward attention to their national boundaries in order to satisfy different agencies that is, both national *and* transnational media built imagined communities. Moreover, economic strategies and policies, as well as cultural frames, change and go through different conjunctural phases, which shape texts, linguistic options, production strategies and national (or international) communities. Therefore, instead of taking for granted the impossibility of a national cinema as indisputable, it might be more fruitful to examine the possible degrees of address and reference to a national community in different historical conditions.

The constructivist approach to the national cinema maintained as a reference the theoretically innovating research of Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*⁹. In this essay, Anderson postulates that written media and pedagogical institutions enabled the building of a national conscience, creating a sense of belonging in dispersed communities formerly deprived of or insensible to such a sense. This seminal study has been used extensively in order to explain national cinemas, film genres¹⁰ or stardom, despite the fact that, as mentioned, Anderson referred to different media and institutions, and scrutinised Asian Far East societies. As Thomas Elsaesser recently underscored, Anderson needed media studies less than media studies needed him; moreover, the examined topic and geocultural area would require a more cautious translation of the conclusions drawn in Anderson’s contribution. Yet, it might be said that not all historical phases or media scenes do work in the same way¹¹, and possibly some of them have profited from duplicating a pedagogical and institutionalized heritage culture, as was the case of Italian production in the 1930s or in the 1950s, restaging paradigmatic moments, figures, texts and landscapes assumed to be typical of the community. This can be seen in, for example, Italy’s state foundation in *1860* (A. Blasetti, 1933), musical composers in *Casta Diva* (C. Gallone, 1935 and 1954), operatic plays in *Aida* (C. Fracassi, 1953), idyllic Central Italy countryside in *Pane, amore e fantasia* (L. Comencini,

⁸ HIGSON (2000, 64).

⁹ ANDERSON (1991).

¹⁰ The most convincing case in this respect is ALTMAN (1999).

¹¹ This is what convincingly asserts HALL (1992, 274-325).

1953). All these narratives, characters, textual bodies are already defined and circulating in discourses aimed at constituting national communities.

More recent models of conceiving national cinema(s) took two different directions. One might be called a functionalist one, to be reflected in the postulate on which Pierre Sorlin based his contribution on Italian national cinema: «[...] A national cinema is not a set of films which help to distinguish a nation from other nations, it is the chain of relations and exchanges which develop in connection with films, in a territory delineated by its economic and juridical policy»¹². The other model, elaborated on by Thomas Elsaesser, is more interested in the imaginary formations that operate in defining national, international or transnational cinemas and the respective economic, symbolic and political strategies. With the concept of *impersoNation*¹³, Elsaesser questions both the essentialist as well as the constructivist paradigm, suggesting that a national cinema is neither the symptom of a national entity, nor (or not only) the result of a construction of an imagined national community; but rather, and more particularly in the post-1989 era, a performative attitude of a text/group of texts, assuming an identity in order to position itself/themselves in a cultural landscape, where a national brand has an economic value as well. If this hypothesis has a remarkable value in explaining the recent development of the European situation, it is useful in my opinion also to describe specific production strategies in the remote and more recent pasts, where nationality or internationality have been dressed in an elegant suit, as was international film style in the late 1920s and early 1930s, or “Italianness” in the French-Italian co-productions of the 1950s.

In the following section I will try to deal with the Italian post-war cinema as a peculiar case of national cinema, which I understand as more a field of struggle than just a cluster of films. It is a field in which the attribute national is not necessarily used as a differential term opposed to other nations or to the international cinema *par excellence*, for instance Hollywood¹⁴, but rather marks a *discontinuity in the history of an imagined national community*. Therefore, this use of the national offers a way to make a world through a *narrative* about the cultural origins of post-war cinema, concerning the possibility of establishing an *archive* of what had been produced before the above-mentioned discontinuity. A battlefield in which the attribute denoted not only different notions or cultural projects, but indeed, different groups of texts, consumption practices, common experiences. Thus, I explore a way to build different worlds out of *differing conceptions of media and their functions* within a community, and working out somehow antithetically the matter of the (national)

¹² SORLIN (1996, 10).

¹³ Quite more convincing to me than the more ideological one of *dissemiNation*, as proposed by BHABHA (1994).

¹⁴ This construction of the national as differential to Hollywood as been stressed by several scholars. See for instance: ELSAESSER (1994, 22-7). And more recently: O’ REGAN (2002, 139-64).

popular. In order to explain this phase and territory, I shall consider the order of discourses there active, meaning with this term «a network of social practices in its language aspect. The elements of orders of discourse are not things like nouns and sentences (elements of linguistic structures), but discourses, genres and style. These elements select certain possibilities defined by languages and exclude others – they control linguistic variability for particular areas of social life»¹⁵. Therefore, I would like to consider:

- the field of (neo)realism in its film actualisation and coeval critical/theoretical debate as a means to represent the nation, thus establishing a national cinema addressed to the national community, as well as to the international one, in order to play the national identity abroad;
- the textual representation of the Other in some films which exhibit the above mentioned tendency, as a way to define what belongs to the Nation and what does not;
- The project to rebuild a national industry, through the tools granted by the law, as harbouring conflicting ideas of nation.

Realizing the Nation

In this section, I would like to consider how the realistic project originated in order to make room for a new generation of intellectuals was developed through a series of discursive operations and addressed to a community as both a self-representation and, at the same time, an identity to be played abroad. That is, I would like to consider realism as the result of a negotiation, in order to depict a new national identity.

Realism is a slippery concept: it is sometimes pretended to be an objective way of representation, but indeed participates further more of an idiolectal nature, reducing itself to a perfective condition. Nelson Goodman among others underlined: «Realism, as reality, is multiple and evanescent». It is conditioned «by the system of representation current in a given culture or person, in a given time»¹⁶.

Moreover, realism somehow actualizes what is the common sense, giving a textual shape to what a conjuncture assumes to be the reality, through the code of verisimilitude. As Roland Barthes stated: «Verisimilitude is nothing else than what is believed: it is totally subjugated to what is a belief (of an audience)»¹⁷.

What might be valued to be, and as a matter of fact often is, a normative function of a mode of representation, at the same time, is revealed as a disputed term, precisely because of its uses as a model for reality. Among other examples, it was the case of post-war Italian culture and cinema in

¹⁵ FAIRCLOUGH (2003, 24).

¹⁶ GOODMAN (1983, 272).

¹⁷ BARTHES (1984, 179-87). See also GENETTE (1969).

which the question of realism became the space of a confrontation in three different respects. First, realism made cinema produce texts pertaining to the nation, through the representation of respectively territorial and popular culture forms; secondly, realism somehow legitimized cinema, assimilating it to an established art through categories such as Author, and ascribing it to a preceding aesthetical tradition; and finally, realism distinguished post-war cinema from what preceded it, instead considered non-art.

Within traditional historiography neorealism has been considered as a rather unitary style, a qualitative exception compared to previous production modes and a milestone in the national cultural history. Neorealism until the 1970s was the *nation's "good object"*¹⁸, what from an imaginary point of view redeemed Italy from its Fascist past. Francesco Casetti, basing his perspective on Stuart Hall's widely debated negotiation theory, remarked the heterogeneity of the stylistic devices displayed by the neorealist films¹⁹. The phenomenon was rather the result of a set of discursive operations, attempting to connect to the Nation, considered as the "popular", through various productive, enunciational and stylistic strategies. An attempt started already during World War II, establishing a tradition, excluding an alternative, and finally, addressing the nation.

Unfortunately, for the most part, this rebirth project failed to meet the popular demand, and was defeated by the enormous number of Hollywood movies circulating in Italy in the post-war era. It was also overwhelmed by the more traditional popular Italian productions, based on well established genres, biographies, comedy, farce, melodrama, and adventure²⁰. Some of the neorealist films challenged this preferred production on the same field, trying to negotiate their project and adsorbing the narratives and iconography typical of such popular national and Hollywood genres as the western, the melodrama or the musical, as was the case with the debated films of Giuseppe De Santis or Pietro Germi, to mention the most renowned. The popular success of these films permitted a further resonance of the films, through the popular press, which in those years was very quickly expanding. But it was rather a sporadic case.

The critical and cultural debate at the start of World War II had to face the emergence of a new generation of cultural employees and intellectuals, raised and trained by Fascist pedagogical institutions who were attempting to make room for themselves in the Italian arena. In order to find its place in the sun, the new generation advocated the mission of giving birth to a national cinema that had not yet seen the light under Fascism. Such a result was achievable through three different steps: marginalization of the current production, labelled as generally worthless; tracing the national

¹⁸ For a deep and fundamental revision of this model, see: CASETTI – FARASSINO – GRASSO – SANGUINETI (1999, 331-85).

¹⁹ CASETTI (2005). See also CASETTI – MALAVASI (2003, 176-86).

²⁰ For data and some hypothesis of the film market in the post-war era, see: QUAGLIETTI (1974); SPINAZZOLA (1974).

cultural lines of a genealogy to justify the young directors cultural program ; letting cinema ascend into the pantheon of institutionalised national arts. It is the project that has often been not critically assumed by film history, depicting a coherent instead of a problematic territory.

The tradition invented by the new generation, expressing itself mainly on the pages of such acknowledged journals as *Cinema* and the still existing *Bianco & Nero*, was a realistic one, to be found in some episodes of the national (and European) nineteenth-century literature – i.e. Giovanni Verga – ,in rather marginal silent or sound film productions – *Sperduti nel buio* (N. Martoglio, 1915), *Assunta Spina* (G. Serena, 1915), *1860* (A. Blasetti, 1933) – and in a certain representation of the landscape, to be considered not only a backdrop for narrative events, but a transitive term of a relationship between characters, actions and a nationally specified space. «Better to state immediately that precisely because of its narrative nature the cinema found in the realistic tradition its *most proper path*, since realism, considered as a force to create a fantasy, a story of actions and people, instead of a passive homage to an objective historical truth, is the *true and eternal test of any narrative tradition*»²¹.

As might be easily noted, adjectives such as «true» or ««eternal» transform a cultural and strategic option into a natural element. Realism here enables a new generation to enter a *national (invented) tradition*, create an apt *ethnoscape* – it will later on be the Southern sterile countryside, or the metaphysical Po Plains, rural areas to be transformed by social action – and propose a model of cultural participation to the nation²².

As pointed out, the realist ambition to totality, as well as the inclusion of cinema among institutionalised national culture are specific strategies to constitute European national cinemas²³. In this period, it was also an Italian ambition.

The advent of a realist aesthetics in post-war discourse and its promotion as the true national style has a corollary: the exclusion of those practices and textual models not consistent with the supported one. Therefore, a whole genre of production, (the films shot during the preceding decade known as “white telephones”), was to be withdrawn from the critical discourse, as well as from the historical one because it was considered synonymous with Fascist cinema. As a matter of fact, what was meant to be wiped from the canon was an alternative mode of representation, one based on a strict intermedial link with theatrical production, centred on well-trained actors and/or playwrights, and one in which the director’s function was diminished. However, the opposite of the model that aspired to rule the scene in the post-war era proclaimed itself as national, aesthetically-updated, and,

²¹ ALICATA – DE SANTIS (1941, 216).

²² On the relation between the attempt of refunding the national cinema, the reflection on landscape and the *Cinema* generation, see the seminal QUARESIMA (1984, 64-73). On the relation between the Po landscape and neorealism, see: QUARESIMA (1981, 287-94); PITASSIO (2007, 9-20).

²³ See ELSAESSER (2005b, 35-56).

most of all, based on a conception of the director as a demiurge. This model came directly from European art cinema.

The use of non professional actors, at the time one of the most celebrated devices of neorealist films as *Ladri di biciclette* (*Bicycle Thieves*, V. De Sica, 1948), *La terra trema* (*The Earth Quakes*, L. Visconti, 1948) or *Paisà* (R. Rossellini, 1946), just to mention the renowned ones, seems therefore to answer the need for a representation which adheres to the notion of the nation based on its iconic features – landscapes and faces – , as well as in accordance with the will of an Author to carry a reborn nation into modernity. The neorealist style intended to become authorial and popular at the same time, to position a demiurge at its origin, and to cancel his traces, so to transfer the moral attitude underlying each narrative act to the reality of historical events. In turn, this narrative would be told through a self-declaring reports style²⁴. That's why so frequently, at the beginning of the text is found what can be called a *preteritional segment*²⁵, naturalizing the artefact, stated to belong to a wider, common, spiritual experience of reality. The warning at the start of the film: «All you are going to watch is not a specific reality, nonetheless pertains to a universal truth that regards all of us».

The texts pretend to depict a common experience, basing their narratives in a precise territory and directly addressing the community through some enunciations strategies. A number of textual devices (the most evident of which is the voice over) possibly borrowed from informative texts – radio reports, U.S. newsreels – call for the attention of the audience and pretend to create a community at the level of the intertextual. The informative style of the communication is familiar as is the a historical content – war, misery, unemployment.

What is at stake here is the experience of an Italian community, defined by its sufferance and resurgence in a contemporary age and staged for domestic and foreign consumption. Therefore, a declared ethical function marks the strategies of many of these texts, and is supposed to identify them as positive national examples, as opposed to their regrettable precedents; more precisely, as the texts provided by a community to give itself a renewed ethical identity. Yet, what happens when some texts display similar communicative and aesthetic strategies – non professional actors, real settings, dialects, voice over – , but put aside any higher social goal? Probably, we face here an *impersonation*, to get back to Elsaesser's notion, for instance the exhibition of what is assumed to be a national identity. As for instance in the comedies directed by Renato Castellani between 1948 and 1952, or in the unclassifiable film *Prima comunione* (A. Blasetti, 1950), whose screenplay by Cesare Zavattini attempts to maintain some typical neorealist features – everyday setting, problems

²⁴ WHITE (1987).

²⁵ On such a strategy in literature, see BERTONI (2007, 134-46). I am widely indebted to this text in what regards the reflection upon realism.

and characters, diegesis/discourse coincidence. However, the film also seems the most distant from neorealism, despite the assumption that it was exemplary.

It should be remarked that the later *impersoNations* of neorealistic projects, as in the cases of the films of Castellani, Lattuada, De Santis, Comencini, Risi, were among popular successes at home and abroad. This was often not the case for the prototype²⁶.

Figuring the “Significant Other”

In this section it is my aim to deal with how the Italian post-war cinema at an imaginary level faced some major cultural changes, mainly because it was challenged by American culture.

Considering the Italian post-war cinema, it should be noted that its qualifying devices, as well as its unexpected and unequalled European development, were the result of a peculiar condition determined already in the pre-war era: the exclusion for the most part of Hollywood cinema from the national market subsequent to a monopoly established in 1938 and boycotted by American majors. Hollywood cinema had ruled the Italian exercise throughout the 1930s, providing the industrial as well as imaginary example into which to mould the national film industry and its popular audience.

The post-war era faced a return of the repressed in the form of a flood of Hollywood products on the domestic market. From 1947 until 1953, about three hundred films per year came onto the market. This estimate excludes the number the films released for the second time; a number between six and three times more than the domestic production, oscillating between forty-four and one hundred and twenty-six films²⁷.

But at the same time, one might consider an imaginary flood, providing Italian cinema with a cluster of formerly forbidden representational subject matter, and properly derived from American mass culture that was by the time available once again. These included sexuality, crime, violence and vice. Furthermore, Italian cinema embraced iconographical genre structures and narratives that were practically non-existent before, unless they were presented in the guise of parody. The doubtful American mass culture, reinforced through a series of concomitant apparatuses and practices – popular press, consumption habits – exploded in post-war Italy, being at first apparently widely accepted as an apt means of representing the nation itself in its as yet unrepresented aspects²⁸. Such semantic features might appear in a renowned masterpiece, such as *Il bandito* (A. Lattuada, 1946), and in less ambitious movies, that negotiate between neorealist settings and characters and those more obviously drawn from the preceding decade, such as for *La fumeria*

²⁶ Remarkable considerations on the debate on neorealism are in FORGACS (1989, 51-66).

²⁷ See QUAGLIETTI (1980).

²⁸ On American mass culture in post-war Italy, see: GUNDLE (1995). See also: FORGACS (1990, 97-114).

d'oppio (R. Matarazzo, 1947). This strategy forcefully denies the long lasting myth of a pure look to the reality in the neorealist movies, and rather perfectly fits into Nelson Goodman's statement: «Worldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already on hand; the making is a remaking»²⁹.

At the same time, what may seem to be a liberating and welcome culture was not so immediately accepted within what was considered as the national one. Although contrary opinions were not loudly expressed at first, either in the conservative or progressive press, elements associated with the American serial culture were often marked as doubtful in the films. To give one example, the dances recently imported might be easily read intertextually in opposition to the national folkloric ones. The American almost obscene dances are associated with the endangerment of the Italian female, through a sexual and criminal threat in *Un uomo ritorna* (M. Neufeld, 1946), while the second are the means by which the people's hero flees the policemen, with the help of the Lucia Bosè's body which is put in action (and on display) in *Non c'è pace tra gli ulivi* (G. De Santis, 1950).

In this respect, an even more revealing symptom of what is figured as national, and what is assumed as "significant Other", and yet, definitely dangerous for the nation, is the risk of *miscegenation*. Undoubtedly, the post-war era offered a number of new possible definitions of the feminine, compared to the Fascist era. Accounting for the symbolic side of the question, and therefore, excluding important social phenomenon such as the newly evolved access to political life, participation in the partisan movement or the newly forged professional roles for women, female body typologies were framed by post-war cinema. These were previously moulded by social rites directly imported by the United States, which were formally forbidden under the Fascist government: namely, the beauty contests. The bodies elected in the late 1940s proposed a new, successful kind of beauty, radically different from the more abstract former kind. For a long time these notions of beauty were regarded as the popular epitome of the nation: the daughters of the working classes, as was repeatedly stated of Lucia Bosè, Silvana Pampanini, Sofia Loren, Eleonora Rossi Drago, to mention a few. At the same time, such a definition of beauty and access to fame was without contention. The contention was a way to promote non-moral values and put at risk an acceptable moral. As stated in one of several articles devoted to the emergence of new stars, not theatrically trained: «Misses, generally speaking, are just beautiful bodies, when they are. They have no personality, not a real 'face', they do not know how to act [...]. The discoveries made by neorealist directors might be divided in two categories: those that do have a personality, and those

²⁹ GOODMAN (1992, 6).

that do not [...]. Both, as soon as they become 'stars', lose their head. Soon abandoned, they are lost as women and actresses»³⁰.

Moreover, the new narratives offered feminine characters morally more opaque, compared to the pre-war ones, divided into clear-cut angels- and demons. Although apparently femininity as pictured in movies showed off renewed morals and unusual autonomy, the narrative closure usually sanctioned the exuberance of these bodies, chosen and defined through rites often judged as incongruent with the national tradition and values, both from progressive and conservative perspectives. Indeed, the main risk for this femininity is the worst: miscegenation with the most unacceptable Other: the black man. So, the only possible outcome is rape, as in *Tombolo, paradiso nero* (G. Ferroni, 1947); or dead, as in *Senza pietà* (A. Lattuada, 1947).

Possibly, only religion offers the proper comfort and saviour, as in the binary narratives of the following decade. And the former soubrette of *Anna* (A. Lattuada, 1950) becomes a nun. (But from time to time remembers how nice it was to dance mambo among black dancers.)

If we assume the suggestions of Susan Hayward, according to whom the female body figures the body of the nation itself³¹, we reach a surprising conclusion: the Italian post-war culture feared the American serial culture and racial melting pot much more that it did German culture which was barely represented in a bunch of neorealist war movies, with a few, simplified traits.

It is rather, the new flood that must be expelled, in order for a new society to be formed. This is quite clearly depicted in *Il mulatto* (F. De Robertis, 1949), where in order to form a new family, the son conceived when the male hero's first wife was raped must be given back to America. A new era of political friendship and racial distance was on its way.

Modes of Existence

In this section, I would like very briefly to consider how the economic and juridical space of the post-war era included two very distant perspectives and possibly projects of what might be called a national cinema. The two hypotheses in the first years close one to another first closer, that suddenly in the complex balance of the political and social Italian situation became radical alternatives³².

The post-war Italian film market grew at an exponential rate: film consumption as well as movie theatres, both mainly in the urban areas, increased rapidly, much more than in the rest of Europe. In this landscape, a clash arose between different sectors of the film industry: on one side, filmmakers and producers interested in a state support to the production awarding possibly a

³⁰ GANDIN (1953,180).

³¹ HAYWARD (2000, 88-102).

³² On the topic, see GRIGNAFFINI (1989, 37-44).

qualitative offer, backed by the Left badly defeated in 1948 elections. On the other side, distributors and exhibitors, ready to profit from the cheap availability and enormous preference accorded to the Hollywood products, practically backed by the Right.

What is interesting in this scenario is on one side the use of the national attribute as a qualification device, employed mainly by filmmakers in order to achieve their goal, namely state assistance and insurance on their future career. This was not, however, necessarily acknowledged by market results³³. And on the other side, a similar declaration, in order to guarantee the economic function of a momentarily well established sector of the national film market.

The conflict on the verge of the new decade is one between two conditions of existence of a national cinema. On the one hand, a cinema proclaiming for itself a social function, characterised by a realist canon in its most advanced propositions experimental. This cinema would be backed by the production sector and ask for state assistance, protect its existence from the risks of the market and the difficulties of meeting a popular demand. On the other hand, a cinema characterised by the already given market conditions, embodying the emergence of a new serial culture (Hollywood), or rather evoking and prosecuting a popular one. This cinema would be both regional and institutional, widely accepted by audiences and backed by the conservative sectors of the national politics. On the one side, a model thought to be ruled by a strong state, whose morals had to be loudly declared and imposed on the nation in order to maintain its cohesion. This project led the Left to the cultural hegemony among filmmakers and intellectuals, while was rather not as successful in the wider social, political and economic arena. On the other side, an apparently much softer model, considered to be of national interest that might satisfy public demand and at the same time preserve economic interests – production, distribution and exhibition – which would be provided by their work with right politics. The law signed by the contemporary Head of the Prime Minister Cabinet Giulio Andreotti invented a bright solution, as was of the case most of the career of this long-lasting and most obscure Italian politician. A third path was chosen somewhere between an assisted model and a private one. The painter and writer Carlo Levi, describing the confuse days after the fall of the first post-war government, has one of his characters say: «Today is common to say that there are just two ways, only two principles upon which the State and the Society might be built: that of the Russians and that of the American. Well, there is another one, absolutely different and yet also important, the Italian one. The American way, they say, is the Freedom way. The Russian way the

³³ The protest of the filmmakers reached its top in a mass demonstration in Rome, in February 1949. See DE SANTIS (1949, 261); DE AGOSTINI – MIDA (1949a, 296-8); DE AGOSTINI – MIDA (1949b, 326ff.). See also AA.VV. (1949), which collects opinions of several renown filmmakers. For an official position of the Left on the Italian cinema, see the speech pronounced at the Senate on the 25th of March, 1949, by the cultural responsible for the Italian Communist Party, Emilio Sereni, *Per la difesa del cinema italiano*, now in SERENI (1974, 74-104).

Justice way. But the Italian way is another, the Charity way. [...]. Our State is based upon Charity, it is a Charity State»³⁴. Such a solution left Leftist cultural hegemony in tact, but gave the conservative Catholics the dominance of the market. Maybe, that was a truly, regrettable national solution.

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³⁴ LEVI (1989, 168).

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