

Introduction

This monograph volume of the NeMLA journal of Italian Studies proposes a series of reflections on Contemporary Italian Cinema. In the past couple of decades, Italian directors have been more than ever shooting in the present tense (to use Millicent Marcus' expression), making films that were recording the complexities of a changing socio-political and cultural context and were marked by an ever-growing activity of investigation, problematization, and negotiation of national identity. Such a process was facilitated by new intersections between different cultures and, in general, by the greater geographical and cultural porosity of the traditionally conceived national borders. Providing audiences with a unique perspective on many social, political, and economic changes, contemporary Italian cinema reflects how Italians began to face their own 'colonial unconscious' with respect to their external Other (represented by the so-called 'extracomunitari') and the internal one (the South). Moreover, some of the so-called 'new Italians' have recently acquired a filmic authorial voice that elaborates a refreshingly multilayered view on and of Italians, challenging their 'Italianness,' and offering glimpses of future possible acculturations by proposing complex but fruitful interactions.

In addition, in the past couple of decades Italian cinema has also been confronting its own past, struggling on one side to renew film genres and redefine their boundaries, while on the other focusing on the cumbersome inheritance of Italian Neorealism. Clearly, besides the calligraphic penchant of several films of the early 1990's, which were often labeled as neo-neorealist, one may notice a constant presence of the Neorealist ghost resurfacing in the works of many directors, a manifestation that a more in-depth investigation will unmask as a rather superficial 'mood,' a generic social 'impegno' that has nothing to do with a thoughtful renegotiation of the old masters' legacy.

In order to better locate, historically and contextually, the development of new authorial perspectives, this volume begins with an essay by Mary Watt on Michelangelo Antonioni. One of the first Italian auteurs trying to exceed the Neorealist boundaries and to reflect upon the nature of reality and the quest for truth, Antonioni creates, in

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Watt's words, "a meta-parody in which his use of hagiographical and popular traditions is itself a parody of the Neorealist tradition" (q.v. 1) Watt explores Antonioni's intention as articulated in one of his most intriguing *oeuvres*, *Blow Up*, where most clearly one detects the "filmmaker's break with Neorealism's belief that truth was knowable and reality capable of filmic representation, even if not always at the literal level of the narrative." (q.v. 1)

The following group of essays is devoted to the examination of some of the most noteworthy contemporary Italian *auteurs*. Fabio Benincasa explores the autobiographical echoes that distinguish the cinematography of Nanni Moretti, arguably the most influential and celebrated of contemporary Italian directors. Benincasa's analysis of Moretti's stylemes offers in-depth reflections upon Michele Apicella's character, but also upon the recurring presence of father figures, metacinematic aspects and the frequent psychoanalytical references. Andrea Righi investigates Francesca Comencini's cinema, showing its complexity both in terms of theoretical contents and modalities of expression, and highlighting the presence of symbolic and metonymic aspects. Moreover, Righi stresses how in Comencini's cinema issues of gender and politics are always strictly interconnected, and how the private sphere is often the site for larger political conflicts. Luca Barattoni underlines how the persistent resurfacing of realism in Italian Cinema affects independent directors such as Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi, urging them to find their own way to cinéma vérité, a new "moral realism" that elicits an ethical response on the viewer's part. The second group of essays proposes the analysis of three very different filmic experiences. Silvia Carlorosi emphasizes the elaboration of a discourse that conflates politics and society in Nanni Moretti's *Il caimano* (2006). In the film, Carlorosi identifies a narrative that entwines both levels, private and collective, in a dynamic exchange of crisis and resolution. Tania Convertini analyzes the experience of blindness exemplified in *Rosso come il cielo* (2006), by independent filmmaker Cristiano Bortone. A challenging and mildly provocative work that lays bare, after Convertini's analysis, the suggestive message the director has imbedded in its narrative: being blind does not represent an absence but rather a condition of potentiality, where existence can be lived in its fullness. Lastly, in her

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investigation of Carlo Mazzacurati's *La giusta distanza* (2007), Gloria Pastorino focuses on journalism and media as producers of voyeurism in a society more and more founded on surveillance and spectacle. At their intersection, these elements conflate, on the individual and collective level, with the Lacanian "lost object" of desire, occasioning unintended and often ruinous consequences.

With NeMLA Italian Studies, Volume XXXIV, *Special Issue on Contemporary Italian Cinema*, the editors intended to offer an open forum to Italianists and cinema scholars for new and stimulating paths of intellectual exploration while at the same time allowing the discourse of Italian contemporary cinema to thrive and deepen. We hope to have achieved both objectives.

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