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# The Post-War Construction of a Sense of Belonging in Italian Film Criticism (1943–53)

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## ABSTRACT

The immediate post-war years in Italy were characterized by a dual focus: on the one hand, the phase of reconstruction and economic revival, and on the other, a vibrant debate surrounding the 'defascization' of politics and culture, which ultimately led to a process of self-absolution. During this time, periodicals underwent significant turmoil, marked by a revival of pre-war models alongside the emergence of new publications. In the realm of film criticism, there was a resurgence of old specialized magazines, along with the creation of new ones, reflecting a growing recognition of the importance of film critics in the dissemination and interpretation of cinema. Intense discussions arose as film critics sought to distance themselves from the fascist era, positioning themselves around three pivotal themes: navigating Italy's complex socio-political landscape, addressing the evolution of Italian cinema during a transformative period marked by the birth of neorealism, and responding to the influx of foreign films — particularly Hollywood productions — that returned to theaters following the era of autarky. This article aims to analyze how a sense of belonging among film critics in post-war Italy was constructed by examining editorials from popular magazines such as *Oggi* (resuming publication in 1945) and *Tempo* (resuming in 1946), as well as specialized film magazines like *Star* (1944), *Film d'oggi* (1945), *Film*, and *Bianco e Nero* (both resuming in 1946), *Cinema* (resuming in 1948), *Filmcritica* (1950), and *Cinema Nuovo* (1952). Initially, the years following the war fostered a spirit of collaboration among film critics; however, by the late 1940s, the onset of the Cold War and differing ideological affiliations contributed to a cultural confrontation that gave rise to militant film criticism.

## KEYWORDS

film criticism, film magazines, Italian post-war era, defascistization, self-absolution from fascism

This paper considers the discourses on cinema present in film magazines in the Italian context over a period of time from the fall of the fascist regime (1943) to the early years of postwar reconstruction (early 1950s). The aim is to analyze how the profession of film critic is represented in the editorials of film magazines in order to understand how a sense of belonging is created in film critics, with regard to the particular historical period of transition. The debate in these film magazines revolves around three main themes: to position Italy's complex socio-political events; to address the node of Italian cinema in a period of innovation (the birth of neorealism and the postwar recovery context); and to take sides with respect to the return to theaters of a myriad of foreign films, particularly Hollywood, after the autarky. In the post-war period, film critics perceived a need to reflect on the function of criticism and their positioning in the context of post-fascist Italian culture. The aim of this article is therefore to reconstruct the perception film critics wanted to project of themselves and towards other critics through the analysis of some editorials in the magazines of the time. In the opening columns and editorial choices of these specialized and generalist magazines, one senses a tone of a rallying call for film critics, who were called upon to sustain a cultural discourse on the wreckage of the war and the previous two decades of fascism, despite the lack of discontinuity with the past regime.

### The Italian Context and the Self-Absolving Process

Under the pressure of an increasingly disastrous war, with Sicily now in the hands of the Allied Forces, Italy's fascist regime imploded on 25 July 1943. The Grand Council of Fascism, the highest organ of the National Fascist Party, decided to depose Benito Mussolini and put power back into the hands of the king in a complicated meeting that started on the evening of 24 July. On Sunday 25 July, after a meeting with King Vittorio Emanuele III, Mussolini was arrested. The task of government was entrusted to General Pietro Badoglio. On 3 September 1943, Italy signed an armistice with the Allied Forces, which was announced on 8 September.<sup>1</sup> While the Germans freed Mussolini from his captivity on the Gran Sasso and militarily occupied Rome and northern and central Italy, the King and Badoglio abandoned Rome and left the army in disarray. It was the beginning of a military clash that took on the aspects of a civil war: on one side there were the Germans and what remained of fascism, with Mussolini's founding of the *Repubblica Sociale Italiana* [RSI, Italian Social Republic] after being freed by the Germans; on the other side there were the Anglo-Americans, what remained of Badoglio's Royal Italian Army and the anti-fascist forces, organized in the *Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale* [CLN, National Liberation Committee], which gave life to the Resistance against Nazi-fascism and coordinated the activities of the partisan brigades. The war in Italy ended with the liberation of Milan and the entire northern territory on 25 April 1945.<sup>2</sup> The ensuing whirlwind political phase led to the institutional referendum of 2 June 1946 (monarchy or republic). This phase ended with the general

1 Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato. Vol. II. L'Italia in guerra 1940-1943. Tomo II: Crisi e agonia del regime* (Einaudi, 1996); Eugenio Di Rienzo, 'Il 25 luglio 1943 come problema storiografico', *Nuova Rivista Storica*, 52.3 (2018), pp. 1111-17; Marco Picone Chiodo, *In nome della resa. L'Italia nella seconda guerra mondiale (1940-1945)* (Mursia, 1990).

2 Elena Aga Rossi, *Una nazione allo sbando. 8 settembre 1943* (Il Mulino, 2003); Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato. Vol. III. La guerra civile 1943-1945* (Einaudi, 1997); Lutz Klinkhammer, *L'occupazione tedesca in Italia 1943-1945* (Bollati Boringhieri, 2007); Gianni Oliva, *I vinti e i liberati. 8 settembre 1943-25 aprile 1945. Storia di due anni* (Mondadori, 1994).

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elections of 18 April 1948. In between, the Constituent Assembly drafted the new republican constitution.<sup>3</sup>

In the period of transition from the fascist regime to the new republican form of government, the main problem, along with the military defeat of Nazi-fascism and the liberation of Italy, became that of the transition of powers and the ‘defascistization’ of the state, society, and culture after twenty years of dictatorship. The forces that grouped around the CLN initially promoted a purge at every level: when the war ended, however, this position was gradually abandoned, in favor of a policy of national reconciliation.<sup>4</sup> The result was that in Italy, unlike in other countries, there was no clear discontinuity between the pre- and post-war phases: there was a political change, but this was not matched by a change at the institutional levels. Intertwined with the problem of a lack of ‘defascistization’ was that of memory, that is, how Italy positioned itself with respect to fascism and how the war was recounted. CLN proposed a historical reading of what was happening that was instrumental to the goal of erasing the shame of fascism, but without dragging the entire country into a drift that would have isolated Italy geopolitically. The political, social, and moral choices of the political class that took the country from fascism to a republican state created a shared narrative that magnified the Resistance as an act of people’s redemption against the faults of Mussolini. Historian Filippo Focardi calls it a ‘hegemonic narrative’,<sup>5</sup> a reading in which

‘democratic and anti-fascist Italy’ did not have to pay for the sins of ‘Mussolini’s Italy’. To this end, it proved useful both to emphasize the country’s effort against the German ‘common enemy’ (which helped to portray the Resistance in epic terms as a great national liberation struggle) and to separate Italian conduct as sharply as possible from that of Germany[.]<sup>6</sup>

The distancing from Nazi Germany was based on some concrete data; however, ‘the representation of Italy as a capillary anti-fascist country and victim of the war was [...] inaccurate and misleading’.<sup>7</sup> In order to unite the population, Italian anti-fascism constructed ‘a narrative of the experience of war and fascism that would build the basis for the construction of a largely “self-absolving” collective memory, based on the constant [...] minimization of Italian faults’.<sup>8</sup> Despite the initial intentions of anti-fascists and the CLN, ‘no war crimes trial was ever held. This helped to preserve the self-absolving and self-celebrating image of the “good Italian”’.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the narrative that took over transferred the blame for the dictatorship, the war, and the atrocities committed by fascism and the Italian army, into an overpowering of one man (Mussolini) and one ally (Hitler and Nazi Germany) against an entire people, who were actually in their hearts against them. This narrative made it possible to maintain the balance between a country that emerged defeated from the war (Fascist Italy) and a country that, conversely, wanted to put itself forward as victorious (Resistance Italy), depicting the former as subdued by dictatorship and the latter as restoring the real will of the

3 Enzo Cheli, ed., *La fondazione della Repubblica: Dalla Costituzione provvisoria all’Assemblea Costituente* (Il Mulino, 1979), and Mario Fiorillo, *La nascita della Repubblica italiana e i problemi giuridici della continuità* (Giuffrè, 2000).

4 Filippo Focardi and Lutz Klinkhammer, ‘The question of Fascist Italy’s war crimes: the construction of a self-acquitting myth (1943–1948)’, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 9.3 (2004), pp. 330–48.

5 Filippo Focardi, *La guerra della memoria. La Resistenza nel dibattito politico italiano dal 1945 a oggi* (Laterza, 2005), p. vi.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

Italian people. This approach allowed Italy to differentiate itself from Germany and Japan on the international level and to present itself as united and triumphant on the domestic level. But it had a lasting consequence: Italy had, in fact, avoided coming to terms with its past (fascism); a process of historical revision had not been triggered, and indeed a path of self-absolution had been fostered for most of those who actively collaborated with the fascist regime and during the war — ‘the distancing from the previous season is transformed into its opposite, into a disarming recycling of men, of structures, of apparatuses. The reckoning with the past is avoided out of strategy, out of opportunism, out of convenience, out of fear.’<sup>10</sup> The civil war ended in violence and bloodshed, but this rupture was not followed by judicial procedures: ‘Avoiding reckoning with the past was a rational operation through which, in the aftermath of the Liberation, public memory was constructed, that is, the reworking of what had been according to the needs of the present.’<sup>11</sup> This decision, urged by the Anglo-Americans and the dominant economic forces, was taken over by the moderate political parties, which under the leadership of Alcide De Gasperi, leader of the Christian Democratic party, expressed the goal of ‘normalizing society after the convulsions of the conflict and civil war, ensuring stability in the transition from fascism to democracy’.<sup>12</sup> The approach found moderate opposition in the Italian Socialist Party and the Action Party, but not in the largest leftist organization, the Italian Communist Party. For its leader Palmiro Togliatti, ‘aware of the international framework emerging with the Cold War and the political crystallization into two opposing blocs, what matter[ed] the most [was] the legitimization’ of his party.<sup>13</sup>

Initial attempts to bring to trial those responsible for the wartime debacle and the fascist dictatorship stalled almost immediately. On 27 June 1946, Togliatti, then Minister of Justice in Alcide De Gasperi’s first government, signed an amnesty agreement. This agreement was intended to be an instrument of national reconciliation, halting trials and detentions of the fascist regime’s manpower, within its lower hierarchies, to focus on the real culprits. In fact, however, the amnesty had been interpreted so broadly that it turned into a generalized safe-conduct.<sup>14</sup> The ideological juxtaposition of the Cold War, which began making its pressure felt during the late 1940s and worsened with the Korean War (1950–53), facilitated

the reintegration of fascists at the most diverse levels of power, leading to a climate in which participation in the Resistance was often considered a negative factor [...]. And the judiciary, after a ‘generous’ application of Togliatti amnesty in favor of the fascists, launched — from the late 1940s into the next decade — an impressive trial against the Resistance, arresting hundreds of former partisans.<sup>15</sup>

The attitude of self-absolution affected every sphere of public life, including the cultural arena — not least, the press.<sup>16</sup> Between 1943 and 1946 there were attempts to bring to trial the journalists most openly aligned with the dictatorship, but the vast majority of

10 Gianni Oliva, *45 milioni di antifascisti. Il voltafaccia di una nazione che non ha fatto i conti con il Ventennio* (Mondadori, 2024), p. 4.

11 Ibid., p. 6.

12 Ibid., p. 8.

13 Ibid., p. 9.

14 Mimmo Franzinelli, *L’amnistia Togliatti: 1946. Colpo di spugna sui crimini fascisti* (Feltrinelli, 2016), pp. 159–60.

15 Mimmo Franzinelli, *Il fascismo è finito il 25 aprile 1945* (Laterza, 2022), pp. x–xi.

16 Luca La Rovere, *L’eredità del fascismo. Gli intellettuali, i giovani e la transizione al postfascismo 1943–1948* (Bollati Boringhieri, 2008); Mirella Serri, *I redenti. Gli intellettuali che vissero due volte, 1938–1948* (Corbaccio, 2005); Mattia Flamigni, *Professori e università di fronte all’epurazione. Dalle ordinanze alleate alla pacificazione (1943–1948)* (Il Mulino, 2019).

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defendants were able to return to writing in newspapers and periodicals as if nothing had happened. Special commissions were set up to evaluate suspect cases of connivance by journalists; these opened investigations into hundreds of registered journalists, but led to only a few dozen final convictions. Even those who were convicted continued to write in newspapers and periodicals in republican Italy: 'With the same ease with which it had switched from antifascism to fascism in the second half of the 1920s, [...] the Italian journalistic elite began to switch back from fascism to anti-fascism, self-absolving itself from the responsibilities of the past.'<sup>17</sup>

After the armistice of 8 September 1943, the RSI restored the *status quo ante*, reactivating the consensus machine despite the general situation of chaos. In southern Italy, the Anglo-American Psychological Warfare Branch (PWB) authorized the publication of some 'free' newspapers starting from August 1943, 'but the real turning point in the world of the press coincided with the liberation of Rome on 4 June 1944. Only then did the newspapers of the anti-fascist parties that had re-emerged from hiding come to the fore and new journals and magazines were born.'<sup>18</sup> Between the liberation of Rome and the autumn of 1945, the restored *Federazione Nazionale della Stampa Italiana* [National Federation of the Italian Press] tried to set up a system to 'purge journalists compromised with the past regime', but a series of setbacks, delays, and uncertainties brought very few results.<sup>19</sup> A few months after the end of the war, the Togliatti amnesty and the declaration of peace put an end to trials and disciplinary actions.

The situation was also apparent in periodicals that had less directly to do with politics. Film journalists had followed a path very similar to that taken by journalism within Italian society as a whole: many of the film critics who had worked during the fascist era continued to write in liberated Italy. An ideological shift in the aims attributed to film criticism was not always matched by a renewal of the names these changes invoked: 'That there is substantial continuity between prewar film theory and that of the 1950s is something that can be documented even at the immediate level. From the second half of the 1940s the intellectuals active in the theoretical field are almost always the same as in the previous period. And all are working on a revision of their work.'<sup>20</sup> Through a self-absolutory process, film critics active during fascism continued to write about cinema in newspapers and magazines even after the end of the conflict. However, they presented themselves with ideological nuances which later would have led to militant film criticism: 'The postwar period represents a time of cultural activism and battle of ideas between the different ideological orientations engaged in an attempt to hegemonize the world of culture.'<sup>21</sup> Cinema and film criticism played a prominent role after the fall of fascism: 'The postwar renewal of the film industry and publishing activity is accompanied by an increase in the importance of film criticism. The review column [...] becomes almost ubiquitous in every newspaper, magazine, and cultural journal.'<sup>22</sup> Probably influenced by the activities of the PWB, there was an explosion of cinema publications in these years: 'According to a certainly incomplete inventory, from 1944 to 1948, 102 film journals in a broad sense [...] begin publication.'<sup>23</sup>

17 Pierluigi Allotti, *Giornalisti di regime. La stampa italiana tra fascismo e antifascismo (1922-1948)* (Carocci, 2012), p. 156.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 153.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 166.

20 Claudio Bioni, *La critica cinematografica. Un'introduzione* (Archetipolibri, 2013), p. 45.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 43.

22 Alberto Pezzotta, *La critica cinematografica* (Carocci, 2018), p. 30.

23 Lorenzo Pellizzari, 'Il cinema pensato: tra liberazione e colonizzazione', in *Storia del cinema italiano, vol. VII, 1945-1948*, ed. by Callisto Cosulich (Marsilio, 2003), pp. 467-87 (p. 468).

## Film Criticism in a Nation in Reconstruction

In order to present the case of the emergence of awareness of film criticism, I will analyze editorials and columns from prominent film periodicals of this period. Some of these publications already existed during fascism and resumed activity after the end of the conflict; others were founded in the postwar period. Among the film magazines that resumed publication, I consider the monthly *Bianco e Nero* [*Black and White*], the fortnightly *Cinema*, and the weekly *Film*. Among the new magazines, I consider *Star*, *Film d'oggi* [*Film of Today*], *Filmcritica* [*Film Criticism*], and *Cinema Nuovo* [*New Cinema*]. For comparative reasons, I also include the illustrated news magazines *Tempo* [*Time*] and *Oggi* [*Today*]: weeklies that resumed their publication after an interruption of a few years.

One of the first cinema magazines to resurface after the liberation of Rome was a new publication titled *Star*, a heavily illustrated weekly magazine edited by Ercole Patti. Patti was a Sicilian novelist who started to write about films under the fascist regime, and continued to do so after it ended.<sup>24</sup> The anonymous editorial in the first issue of the magazine addresses many topics in just a few lines; these include the chaos of the time, the production of propaganda films in many countries, and the collapse of autarky and the end of Italian cinema protectionism, which prompted the necessary rebuilding of Italian cinema from scratch. It goes on to claim that:

a renewed Italy without its own cinematography is inconceivable. Nowadays, the cinema for a nation is not a luxury but an essential feature, no less than the press, the radio, the theatre. We believe in a sure Italian revival in the field of cinema as well, and we will follow its development with fervor. We are no less interested in all foreign productions, whose problems and activities we can now finally consider with an objective and free mind.<sup>25</sup>

The editorial does not use the words ‘fascism’ or ‘fascist’, but it continuously makes indirect references to both. Furthermore, it sketches out a discourse on the function of film criticism when it says that ‘we’ (implying film critics) will fervently follow the development of the new Italian cinema. In the third issue, Ercole Patti wrote an article on Italian cinema that showed the attention with which local cinema was followed when the explosion of neorealism was not yet evident. The article opens with a question, ‘Will Italian cinema be reborn? We are convinced it will’ [‘Rinascerà il cinema italiano? Noi siamo convinti di sì’].<sup>26</sup> Patti explains how, in order to look at the new course of Italian cinema, it is first necessary to understand what it was under fascism. Apparently, it was a ‘flourishing’ [‘floridissimo’] cinema — but such ‘prosperity’ [‘benessere’], he claims, was ‘fictitious’ [‘fittizio’].<sup>27</sup> For Patti, it no longer makes sense to think of a ‘vacuous, frothy film [...] set in an unspecified country’ [‘filmetto vacuo e spumeggiante [...] che non si sa in quale paese sia ambientato’]; instead, films need to have personality, which means

24 Sarah Zappulla Muscarà and Enzo Zappulla, ‘Il cinema, “la più meravigliosa delle arti”?’ in Ercole Patti, *Tutte le opere*, ed. by Sarah Zappulla Muscarà and Enzo Zappulla (La nave di Teseo, 2019), pp. 55–102.

25 ‘Non è concepibile un’Italia rinnovata, senza una sua cinematografia. Il cinema, oggi, per una nazione, non è un lusso, ma un connotato essenziale, non meno della stampa, della radio, del teatro. Noi crediamo in una sicura ripresa italiana anche nel campo cinematografico, e ne seguiremo con fervore gli sviluppi. Non meno ci interessano tutte le produzioni straniere, i cui problemi e le cui attività oggi possiamo finalmente considerare con un animo obiettivo e libero.’ ‘Questo giornale’, *Star* (12 August 1944), p. 2.

26 Ercole Patti, ‘Un nostro cinema’, *Star* (26 August 1944), p. 3.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

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they should have their own recognizability linked to the local context.<sup>28</sup> Only in this way is it possible to have a new Italian cinema, untethered from the failed attempts of the past regime: ‘This is the time to let an Italian cinema be born that does not yet exist except in sporadic sequences or in strictly personal cases’ [‘Questo è il momento per lasciar nascere un cinema italiano che ancora non esiste se non in sporadiche sequenze o in casi strettamente personali’].<sup>29</sup>

At the end of the war, as *Star* continued its run, two other weeklies, *Film* and *Film d’oggi*, were distributed: they had a similar format, despite having very different backgrounds. *Film* was founded in 1938 by translator and journalist Paola Ojetti, journalist Giuseppe Vittorio Samperi, and journalist Mino Doletti. Doletti became the magazine’s editor, while Ojetti had a subordinate role as editorial secretary, although she exerted great influence on the direction of the magazine.<sup>30</sup> *Film* positioned itself closely to the fascist regime; so much so that both Doletti and Ojetti adhered wholeheartedly to the RSI, and in 1944, moved its editorial office from Rome to Venice, to which Mussolini shifted cinematic activities at the outbreak of the civil war.<sup>31</sup> While *Star* was published in liberated Rome, *Film* continued to be published in Venice on behalf of the RSI (the last issue of the first series is dated 16 April 1945, just ten days before the liberation of Italy). After the end of the war and an interruption of a few months, however, *Film* resumed publication in Milan. The first issue of the new series came out in March 1946 with a different editorial board.<sup>32</sup> Now, the magazine’s editor was Franco Barbieri, who signed a balanced editorial in an attempt both to mark the distance of the new magazine from the first series and to preserve audiences, along with the good that had been done by the magazine in the past:

Though arriving late in a field in which publishing enterprises of all kinds are arising, we want to work for Italian cinema [...]. We are interested in other cinematographies; but, before the others, we will be interested in our own. [...] We do not believe that everything that has been done in the past few years is to be thrown overboard, to be demolished, to be re-done. (And for that matter, those who are shouting that everything is to be re-done, to be demolished, to be thrown overboard, are precisely the same ones who until yesterday did the same things that they are now, loudly, calling for to be demolished, to be re-done, to be thrown overboard. The same ones. The very same [...]).<sup>33</sup>

Barbieri acknowledges the great number of new film magazines published in Italy; he states that the primary interest of his magazine will be Italian cinema, but above all he rails against those who indiscriminately want to amend the past — which is peculiar, considering the past of the magazine and the fact that later on Barbieri discloses that

28 Ibid., p. 3.

29 Ibid., p. 3.

30 Michael Guarnieri and Stella Scabelli, ‘Paola Ojetti and Maria Basaglia: Two Women Workers in Fascist Italy’s Cultural Sector’, *Comunicazioni sociali*, 1 (2023), pp. 13–27 (p. 18).

31 Ibid., p. 20.

32 However, Doletti and Ojetti were back to the magazine in a year. When Doletti left *Film*, in 1950, he started writing for *Film d’Oggi*.

33 ‘Arrivando buoni ultimi in un campo nel quale si stanno avvicinando imprese editoriali di ogni genere, vogliamo lavorare [...] per il cinematografo italiano. Ci interessano gli altri cinematografi; ma, prima degli altri, ci interesserà il nostro. [...] Noi non crediamo che tutto — del già fatto, negli scorsi anni sia da buttare a mare, da demolire, da rifare. (E, del resto, quelli che urlano che tutto è da rifare, da demolire, da buttare a mare, sono precisamente gli stessi che fino a ieri hanno fatto le medesime cose che adesso, a gran voce, chiedono di demolire, di rifare, di buttare a mare. Gli stessi. Gli stessissimi. [...]).’ Franco Barbieri, ‘La prima pietra’, *Film* (9 March 1946), pp. 1–2 (p. 1).

he has been in and out of prison during the regime. His perspective becomes clearer shortly thereafter:

If we are to judge, we must say that everyone — some more, some less — has done wrong, everyone has done a little bit of harm [...] to Italian entertainment. To republish certain articles from *Film* or other magazines would be comical, if not tragic. And we will not republish them. But we have, on the other hand, reread them, and a deep despondency has invaded us when comparing what the same authors are writing today with what they were writing yesterday. [E]veryone has something to make up for. So let it be clear that the sterile polemic must end [...].<sup>34</sup>

Barbieri notes how many film critics working in liberated Italy continue to write things in continuity with what they wrote under the influence of Mussolini's regime. His request is to get rid of the hypocrisy and resume serving Italian cinema: film critics should engage 'in a fierce struggle — artistically, industrially and commercially — against malpractice, incompetence and excessive ambition' ['una lotta accanita — sul piano artistico, industriale e commerciale — contro il malcostume, le incompetenze, gli arrivismi'].<sup>35</sup> Once again, the column is an opportunity to give a vision of what the magazine would like film criticism to be. The article's prose, with its frequent repetitions, draws attention to a sense of unity that film criticism must regain if it is to have an impact on Italian cinema.

*Film d'oggi* was a new publication that took up the graphic layout of *Film*, but with a slant that was decidedly opposite to that of Ojetti and Doletti.<sup>36</sup> In each of the early editorials there is a strong focus on the practical side of the film industry. In the first issue, for example, the opening column is devoted to the production of celluloid: 'The Ferrania plants are saved. This is a great story of the resistance, which concerns us closely as men of cinema and fills us with pride as Italians. For long months the partisans managed to secure the factory, to make it a besieged fortress' ['Gli stabilimenti di Ferrania sono salvi. È questa una grande storia della resistenza, che ci riguarda da vicino come uomini di cinema e ci riempie di fierezza come italiani. Per lunghi mesi, i partigiani sono riusciti a isolare la fabbrica, a farne una fortezza assediata'].<sup>37</sup> Ferrania was an industry that produced motion-picture film, a medium that had become precious to a cinema that wanted to restart and become great:

Allow us to emphasize here our joy: that of beginning the life of our magazine in conjunction with such extraordinary news, considering how our program has as its primary hinge that of flanking and supporting the new and dignified cinema that must arise from the redemption and resurgence [*risorgimento*] of Italy [...]. It is such a comfort to those who love cinema and know its great functions in civil progress.<sup>38</sup>

34 'Se vogliamo giudicare, dobbiamo dire che tutti — chi più, chi meno — hanno sbagliato, tutti hanno fatto un piccolo poco di male [...] allo spettacolo italiano. Ripubblicare, oggi, certi articoli di *Film* o d'altri giornali, sarebbe comico, per non dire tragico. E noi non li ripubblicheremo. Ma li abbiamo, in compenso, riletti, e ci ha invaso un profondo sconforto confrontando quello che gli stessi autori vanno scrivendo oggi con quello che scrivevano ieri. [T]utti hanno da farsi perdonare qualcosa. Sia chiaro, dunque, che la polemica deve finire [...]' Ibid., p. 2.

35 Ibid., p. 2.

36 It has been described as 'combative and Marxist'; Pellizzari, 'Il cinema pensato', p. 471.

37 'La pellicola c'è', *Film d'oggi* (9 June 1945), p. 2.

38 'Ci sia permesso, in questa sede, di sottolineare la nostra particolare gioia: quella di iniziare la vita del nostro giornale, il cardine primo del cui programma è nell'affiancare e sostenere il cinema nuovo e decoroso che dovrà nascere dal riscatto e dal risorgimento d'Italia [...], di tanto conforto per chi ama il cinema e ne conosce le grandi funzioni che ad esso spettano nel progresso civile.' Ibid., p. 2.

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The anonymous author links the news about Ferrania with the rebirth of Italian cinema through the action of the partisans who defended the factory. The word *risorgimento* is used, a historical period leading to the unification of Italy in the second half of 1800s, as if the events are on the same plane (the struggle for the unification of Italy in the distant past, the struggle for the liberation of Italy from Nazi-fascism in the very recent past, and the struggle for the rebirth of Italian cinema in the present).

Although with different tones and rhetorical strategies, the editorials of the film magazines that resumed publication around the end of the war revolve around very similar topics: the relationship with the past regime, interest in Italian cinema, and reflections on the role of film criticism. To see how these themes were dealt with in non-specialist magazines, I turn to the well-known illustrated news magazines *Oggi* and *Tempo*, which resumed publication at roughly the same time. The weekly illustrated news magazine *Oggi*, published by Rizzoli, had been discontinued by the fascist regime at the beginning of 1942. It resurfaced immediately after the liberation of Italy in 1945.<sup>39</sup> The column on cinema in the first issue of the new series is entirely dedicated to how Italian audiences were late in watching Hollywood cinema. The columnist uses irony to address the collapsed regime: ‘We left American cinema in 1938. Then autarky turned off the tap and forced us to content ourselves with the ersatz of Cinecittà. I know more than one person who became anti-fascist on that occasion’ [‘Noi, il cinema americano lo lasciammo nel ‘38. Poi l’autarchia chiuse il rubinetto e ci obbligò a contentarci degli ersatz di Cinecittà. Conosco più di una persona che diventò antifascista in quella occasione’].<sup>40</sup>

*Tempo* was first published by Mondadori between 1939 and 1943. It was close to the fascist regime, so much so that it was used as a propaganda tool in other European countries with up to eight different editions in foreign languages.<sup>41</sup> It resumed publication with a different publisher, Aldo Palazzi, after the war in 1946. The editor-in-chief for the new series was Arturo Tofanelli. In the first issue of the new series, in the cinema section, there is a column and a two-page article on the Hollywood actress Bette Davis. The column, titled ‘Now or never’ [‘Adesso o mai più’], compares Italian and American cinema. The columnist states that it is true what the film critics say: that the best American films have yet to arrive in Italy, although masterpieces are few and directed by the same old filmmakers we already know. And the column continues:

Italian cinema will not find an opportunity like this again. It was challenged in the fascist period, inflated by autarky, with no possibility of valid comparison; one day or another — it was said — ‘the good times’ would come to an end. Of course, ‘the good times’ are over; the Americans, for better or worse, are serious; if we want to put ourselves in competition with them, we have to be just as serious.<sup>42</sup>

After the end of the war, the columnist has no fear in using words like ‘fascist’ and ‘autarky’ — but he speaks more as an informed insider than as a film critic, opening the column with the claim that the ‘film critics’ are right, as though he was something

39 Linda Poncetta, ‘L’invenzione del rotocalco popolare: “Oggi” e “il direttore con le bretelle viola”’, in *Come un don Chisciotte. Edilio Rusconi tra letteratura, editoria e rotocalchi*, ed. by Velenia La Mendola (EduCatt, 2016), pp. 45–87.

40 Crescimbene, ‘Amara America’, *Oggi* (21 July 1945), p. 9.

41 Stefano Locati, ‘Il rapporto immagine-testo nella sezione Cinema delle edizioni estere di “Tempo”: tra Hollywood, Europa e autarchia’, in *Immagine e testo nei periodici illustrati italiani degli anni trenta e quaranta*, ed. by Dario Boemia, Elena Gipponi, and Stefano Locati (Mimesis, 2024), pp. 177–213.

42 ‘Il cinema italiano non ritroverà una occasione come questa. Visse sfiduciato in periodo fascista, gonfiato dall’autarchia, senza possibilità di valido paragone; un giorno o l’altro — si diceva — sarebbe “finita la pacchia”. Certo, la “pacchia” è finita; gli americani, bene o male, fanno sul serio; se vogliamo metterci in lizza dobbiamo fare altrettanto sul serio.’ Luigi Comencini, ‘Adesso o mai più’, *Tempo* (17 January 1946), p. 12.

else. Luigi Comencini, the columnist, and Dino Risi, who usually signed the two-page articles, were in fact about to become film directors, two of the rising stars of the Italian comedy genre. In the second issue, Comencini returns to the same topic in the column 'Misguided policy' ['Politica sbagliata']: he states that, since American distributors are in no hurry to bring Hollywood films to Italian screens, 'the renowned "invasion" that many were expecting has not arrived yet' ['la famosa "invasione" che molti temevano non è ancora arrivata'].<sup>43</sup> Comencini argues that the distributors are more interested in Switzerland, where many recent Hollywood films are actually being screened, than in Italy, since the Swiss currency is stronger. Then he asks himself what the criteria for the selection of the few Hollywood films sent to Italy could be: 'From statements caught here and there, from examining what has reached us so far, perhaps we are right to say that films suitable for Italian audiences must be optimistic and democratic' ['Da dichiarazioni colte qua e là, dall'esame di ciò che ci è giunto finora, forse siamo nel giusto nell'affermare che i film adatti agli spettatori italiani devono essere ottimisti e democratici'].<sup>44</sup> He argues that the two terms, 'optimistic' and 'democratic', are equivalent to one another in Hollywood mentality. This would explain why films such as *The Grapes of Wrath* (John Ford, 1940), which is 'democratic, yes, but rather pessimistic' ['democratico, sì, ma decisamente pessimista'], and *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941), which is 'neither optimistic nor democratic' ['né ottimista né democratico'], have not been distributed in Italy yet.<sup>45</sup> He concludes the column by arguing that these may not be the right criteria, and lamenting the paternalistic attitude of American distributors. These two examples show that, while the main concerns over cinema are the same as those expressed in other cinema magazines — the newfound freedom from fascism and autarky; the support towards Italian cinema, which has to become 'serious' if it wants to thrive; the close examination of how Hollywood cinema is affecting the Italian audience — the attitude is quite different. *Oggi* uses irony, while Comencini tends to distance himself from film critics.

*Bianco e Nero* was one of the most prestigious film magazines during the fascist era. Its return after the war was rather difficult. The magazine, founded in 1937 by Luigi Chiarini, who edited it until 1943, was published by *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia* (CSC), founded in 1935.<sup>46</sup> While other cinema institutions were transferred to Venice during the RSI and the civil war, CSC remained in Rome and was sacked by the Germans before the liberation of the city. It took time to reorganize the cinema school (which reopened in 1946) and to work on the magazine: the first number in the new series was published at the end of 1947, under the direction of Umberto Barbaro.<sup>47</sup> The entire 1947 editorial, anonymous and concisely titled 'Recovery' ['Ripresa'], is dedicated to emphasizing how the critical work of the magazine was useful in the past not only to debate cinematic problems, but also to direct producers and audiences towards a cinematography of greater artistic, social, and moral commitment. The editorial goes on to state that the magazine will continue 'along the path already taken, cleared today of the extra-artistic obstacles that burdened this magazine then as well as the entire Italian press' ['la via già battuta, sgombra oggi dagli ostacoli di carattere extra-artistico

43 Luigi Comencini, 'Politica sbagliata', *Tempo* (24 January 1946), p. 12.

44 Ibid., p. 12.

45 Ibid., p. 12.

46 The first issues saw Vezio Orazi as editor, but his role was soon taken over by Luigi Chiarini, who had always been the real editor: Claudio Bisoni, 'Il cinema italiano nelle riviste e nei settimanali popolari', in *Storia del cinema italiano. Volume VI - 1940/1944*, ed. by Ernesto G. Laura in collaboration with Alfredo Baldi (Marsilio, 2010), pp. 509–21 (pp. 515–16).

47 Massimo Garritano, 'Il numero di "Bianco e Nero" diretto da Barbaro', in *Storia del cinema italiano, vol. VII, 1945-1948*, edited by Callisto Cosulich (Marsilio, 2003), pp. 472–73.

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che gravarono allora su questa rivista come su tutta la stampa italiana’].<sup>48</sup> Fascism and censorship are only indirectly referenced, but what is more interesting here is how the magazine positions itself as the home for true debates in the theoretical and aesthetic fields, and also as a beacon for directing the future of Italian cinema. The editorial defines a perimeter within which film critics should work: *Bianco e Nero* will not give up ‘the specific function that [it] has always exercised — as much and as best as was possible given the circumstances of the time — of orientation and guidance not only in the aesthetic field, but also in all forms of film practice’ [‘la specifica funzione che [...] ha sempre esercitato — quanto più e quanto meglio è stato possibile date le circostanze di allora — di orientamento e di guida non solo nel campo estetico, ma anche in tutte le forme della pratica cinematografica’].<sup>49</sup> At the time, CSC was still under extraordinary management, but at the beginning of 1948, Luigi Chiarini came back. Barbaro was relieved from his duties, and Chiarini worked on a new series of *Bianco e Nero*. In March 1948 there was a new first issue of the magazine, with an explicit editorial.<sup>50</sup> First, Chiarini argues in favour of the new Italian cinema:

A group of films, remarkable and courageous in many respects, has drawn the interest of foreign audiences to our cinema, which [...] presents itself with a form that is perhaps still unrefined, but original, because it is an expression of a richer and more genuine humanity. In the works of what has been called by foreign critics the ‘Italian neorealistic school’, in fact, one can sense, beyond the historical contingency from which they have taken their cue and above the schematic political ideologies of their respective directors, a new way of looking at life and, therefore, an original and local conception of the cinematic spectacle.<sup>51</sup>

Then Chiarini makes a list of the structural problems of Italian cinema that in his opinion need to be addressed and resolved, because ‘a great country like ours without its own cinema would be a spiritually mutilated country. There is, therefore, a need to defend Italian cinema’ [‘un grande paese come il nostro senza un suo cinema sarebbe un paese mutilato spiritualmente. Necessità, dunque, di difendere la cinematografia italiana’].<sup>52</sup> He concludes with a sort of call-to-arms for film critics to put up a united front, despite their respective (political) differences: *Bianco e Nero*

is open to all those who deal seriously and honestly with the problems of cinema; which is not to say that *Bianco e Nero* intends to renounce that function of orientation to which it has always acquitted itself — far from it: but simply that we consider our ideas so just and strong that they can withstand any contradiction, precisely because they are formed in the dialectic of discussion.<sup>53</sup>

48 ‘Ripresa’, *Bianco e Nero*, 1.1 (October 1947), pp. 5–6 (p. 5).

49 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

50 Garritano, ‘Il numero di “Bianco e Nero”’, pp. 472–73.

51 ‘Un gruppo di film, notevoli e coraggiosi sotto molti riguardi, ha attirato l’interesse dei pubblici stranieri sul nostro cinema, che [...] si presenta con una forma forse ancora grezza, ma originale perché espressione di una più ricca e genuina umanità. Nelle opere di quella che è stata definita dai critici esteri la “scuola neo-realistica italiana”, infatti, si sente, al di là della contingenza storica da cui han preso le mosse e al di sopra delle schematiche ideologie politiche dei rispettivi registi, un nuovo modo di guardare alla vita e, quindi, una concezione originale e tutta nostra dello spettacolo cinematografico.’ Luigi Chiarini, ‘Avviso’, *Bianco e Nero*, 9.1 (March 1948), pp. 3–6 (p. 3).

52 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

53 ‘La rivista sarà aperta a tutti quanti si occupano con serietà ed onestà dei problemi del cinema; il che non vuol dire che *Bianco e Nero* intenda rinunciare a quella funzione di orientamento cui ha sempre assolto, tutt’altro; ma semplicemente che noi riteniamo le nostre idee così giuste e forti da poter resistere a qualunque contraddittorio, proprio perché formatesi nella dialettica della discussione.’ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

1948 was also the year in which the fortnightly film magazine *Cinema* resumed its publication. It was first published between 1936 and 1943, founded by Luciano De Feo, who at the beginning figured also as the editor. This role was then taken up by Vittorio Mussolini, one of the sons of Benito, from 1938 to 1943. Vittorio was a film enthusiast with ambitions to become a producer; in love with Hollywood cinema, he ran the magazine from a distance, leaving it in the hands of his colleagues on the editorial team, whom he nevertheless somehow managed to protect from reprimands and censorship.<sup>54</sup> It was during these years that *Cinema* became the place in which to debate realism in cinema, and from these discussions blossomed neorealism. The editorial in the first issue of the new series resonates to the *Bianco e Nero* editorial quoted above but uses even stronger wording. It declares that

from 1943 to the present day, the best exponents of our film journalism have not had a suitable forum in which to express their ideas and discuss them, because the Italian press that deals with films was largely of a popular nature (*Bianco e Nero*, a very worthy publication, comes out monthly and is more a collection of essays than a magazine); to these writers we offer our pages; *Cinema* is reborn for them and will be thrilled to have them as collaborators. The journal will welcome journalists of different tendencies and we are sure that from the opposing theories and the serene discussion of the problems, useful conclusions will be reached.<sup>55</sup>

The editorial then goes on to consider Italian cinema, 'which was considered silly before the war, astounding in the immediate post-war period, and now must either establish itself definitely in general consideration, or return to the insubstantiality of ten years ago' ['che venne considerato sciocco prima della guerra, sbalorditivo nell'immediato dopoguerra, e ora deve affermarsi definitivamente nella considerazione generale, oppure tornare all'insistenza di dieci anni fa'].<sup>56</sup> Once again, Italian cinema seems to be the main concern of film criticism: 'We will fight for all Italian films that deserve it, and we hope to contribute to the fortunes of works and men who really have something to say, and know how to say it well' ['Ci batteremo per tutti i film italiani che lo meritano e ci auguriamo di poter contribuire alla fortuna di opere e uomini che abbiano veramente qualcosa da dire, e sappiano dirlo bene'].<sup>57</sup> The editorial clearly presents *Cinema* as the new home for film critics, against the popular press. The magazine aims to be the center stage for any meaningful debate over cinema in Italy.

### Towards a Militant Film Criticism

The rhetorical strategies present in *Bianco e Nero* and *Cinema* were similar: the magazines highlighted their traditions and links to their renowned first series, while calling to all 'serious' film critics to discuss cinema (and specifically Italian cinema) in their pages. *Bianco e Nero* mentioned in passing the limitations and impositions of the past regime;

54 Giovanni Sedita, 'Vittorio Mussolini, Hollywood and Neorealism', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 15.3 (2010), pp. 431–57.

55 'Dal 1943 ad oggi, i migliori esponenti del nostro giornalismo cinematografico non hanno avuto una sede adatta su cui esporre le loro idee e discuterle, perché la stampa italiana che si occupa di film è per gran parte di carattere popolare (*Bianco e Nero*, pubblicazione assai degna, esce mensilmente ed è più una raccolta di saggi che una rivista); a questi scrittori offriamo le nostre pagine; *Cinema* rinasce per loro, e sarà lieto di averli a collaboratori. La rivista ospiterà gli appartenenti alle diverse tendenze, e siamo sicuri che dalle opposte teorie e dalla serena discussione dei problemi, si giungerà a utili conclusioni.' 'Cinema', *Cinema* (25 October 1948), p. 5.

56 Ibid., p. 5.

57 Ibid., p. 5.

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*Cinema* opted to gloss over it, and indeed emphasized the function it played in the European context.<sup>58</sup> The unified and unifying tone they adopted, which expressed a willingness to maintain a dialogue with every discordant voice, recalls the climate of the Constituent Assembly and the unified front of the CLN. But in those very years the political dialectic in Italian society was changing and positions were hardening. Two examples of the resulting militant sentiment can be found in two new magazines that appeared in the early 1950s: *Filmcritica* and *Cinema Nuovo*.

*Filmcritica* was a monthly film magazine published by *Federazione Italiana dei Circoli del Cinema* [Italian Federation of Film Clubs]. It started its publication at the end of 1950 and in the editorial for the first issue, its editor Edoardo Bruno argues that it is necessary to begin a revision of film criticism, to get out of simplistic patterns that have led film critics away from society (a clear reference to the past regime). He then continues:

This journal of ours is born today to bring a serious contribution to this need for revision, to break the bonds of an unnecessarily formalistic attitude. [...] And one will also have to see to what extent society influences cinema, influences, in a word, art. Culture, reality, poetry cannot exclude or ignore each other. They are too intimately connected with each other for art to be able only to regard itself as a process of abstraction and not as something living, concrete, real, as an evolving history of humanity. A cinema [...] that is not the expression of a certain period of society risks remaining only a game for its own sake. That is why *Filmcritica* is not an anthology magazine, it is not, that is, a useless collection of good writings: rather *Filmcritica* wants to have from the very beginning a concrete and real character as concrete and real is the art of our time.<sup>59</sup>

Bruno believes that a revision of film criticism is necessary: it no longer seems to be enough to discuss cinema from different positions, merely judging films or their context, like magazines such as *Bianco e Nero* and *Cinema* nobly invited critics to do. Film critics must immerse themselves in society, experience the link between art and society, that is, be engaged with reality from their own perspective: this is an early call for a declared militancy, which will become even more explicit in *Cinema Nuovo*.

*Cinema Nuovo* was first published in 1952. The new magazine was founded by the film critic Guido Aristarco, who had left *Cinema* in open opposition to the critical direction taken by that magazine. It was a tangible signal of how quickly the space for a debate with discordant tendencies was closing in the new political climate. The first editorial of the magazine, titled 'Continuing the discussion' ['Continuare il discorso'], is the most effective in addressing each of the topics seen thus far. It links the birth of

58 The reference to the European context is not an exaggeration, see for example Lukas Schaefer, 'European Critical Film Culture. Italian and Western German Film Magazines in an International Context', in *Cinema as a Political Media. Germany and Italy Compared, 1945–1950s*, ed. by Lutz Klinkhammer and Clemens Zimmermann (Heidelberg University Publishing, 2021), pp. 115–29. Nonetheless, the omission of the detail of the dictatorship and what it entailed is quite glaring.

59 'Oggi per portare un contributo serio a questa esigenza di revisione, per spezzare i legami di un atteggiamento inutilmente formalistico, vede luce questa nostra rivista. [...] E si dovrà anche vedere fino a che punto la società influisca sul cinema, influisca, in una parola, sull'arte. Cultura, realtà, poesia, non possono escludersi o ignorarsi a vicenda. Sono troppo intimamente connesse tra loro perché l'arte possa solo considerarsi come un processo di astrazione e non come qualcosa di vivo, di concreto, di reale, come storia dell'umanità in evoluzione. Un cinema [...] che non sia l'espressione di un determinato periodo della società rischia di restare solo un gioco fine a se stesso. Per questo *Filmcritica* non è una rivista antologica, non è, cioè, inutile collezione di buoni scritti: piuttosto *Filmcritica* vuole avere sin dall'inizio un carattere concreto e reale come concreta e reale è l'arte del nostro tempo.' Edoardo Bruno, 'Premessa', *Filmcritica* (December 1950), p. 3.

Italian neorealism to the semi-clandestine critical debate over realism that took place among film critics and filmmakers in film magazines before the war, under the fascist regime. It then denounces the current involution of Italian cinema and argues that to contrast said involution it is necessary to start a new critical debate, which *Cinema Nuovo* would host:

It is no coincidence that what is usually called the new “school” of our cinema was born in the immediate post-war period. This birth is in fact linked to factors of a different nature, to an experience of freedom, to a terrain prepared almost clandestinely before and during the recent conflict by a critical and cultural movement [...]. Today, other factors, of an opposite nature, threaten to hold back the liveliest forces in our cinema, which are often forced to retreat into “fringe” experiences. This worrying involution [...] derives on the one hand from the pressure of external forces [...] and, on the other hand, from too many film professionals who are consciously or unconsciously beginning to limit themselves. [...] Our magazine was born from this situation, and from the need to continue the discussion begun immediately after the war. The magazine is titled *Cinema Nuovo* because it will support new films [...].<sup>60</sup>

The editorial identifies new dangers for the development of Italian cinema and proposes to counter these negative effects through the power of critical debate. However, the text is also adept at linking events, proposing a chronology that sees the critical debate (when the regime was still in place) as an integral part of the creative process that led to neorealism. The reference to clandestinity is also significant, for the past, as if opposed to the present, ‘fringe experiences’. The purpose of the film critic is not only to examine finished products and judge them, or to act as a generic guide to filmmakers and give them an artistic or moral direction; but it is also to be at the core of the creative act as an integral part of the process. And it does not end there: the actions of the film critic also have a meaning and impact on society at large:

*Cinema Nuovo* therefore proposes: on the one hand to identify and denounce the causes that have determined today’s situation; on the other hand to continue our discussion, i.e. to support the most vital currents and men with concrete proposals on the level of criticism in its various aspects, methodological, of revision, and of the struggle for a new culture; that is to say, as Gramsci would say, ‘for a new moral life’ [...]. In this, we do not consider ourselves outside the fray, but inside the fray: that is, we will not be ‘objective’ in the classical and comfortable sense of the term, but always connected to our own and our time’s passions. [...] This is

60 ‘Non a caso, nell’immediato dopoguerra, è nata quella che si suol definire la nuova “scuola” del nostro cinema. Tale nascita è infatti legata a fattori di diversa natura, a un’esperienza di libertà, a un terreno preparato quasi clandestinamente prima e durante il recente conflitto da tutto un movimento critico e culturale [...]. Oggi altri fattori, di opposta natura, minacciano di frenare le forze più vive del nostro cinema, le quali spesso sono costrette a ripiegare su esperienze di “fronda”. Tale preoccupante processo involutivo [...] deriva da una parte dalla pressione di forze esterne [...] e, dall’altra, da troppi uomini di cinema i quali cominciano, coscientemente o inconsciamente ad autolimitarsi. [...] Da questa situazione, e dall’esigenza di continuare il discorso cominciato subito dopo la guerra, nasce la nostra rivista. Essa si intitola *Cinema Nuovo* perché sosterrà appunto i film nuovi [...].’ ‘Continuare il discorso’, *Cinema Nuovo* (15 December 1952), p. 7.

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why we, through joint research work, aim to clarify and deepen for ourselves, and for others, the fundamental problems of contemporary reality.<sup>61</sup>

*Cinema Nuovo* calls film critics to a new awareness of the need to commit to work in the cultural context of the country: cinema is part of society, and to affect cinema is to affect society.

The change in approach to film criticism discourses between magazines such as *Bianco e Nero* and *Cinema*, on the one hand, and magazines such as *Filmcritica* and *Cinema Nuovo*, on the other hand, was subtle, but perceptible. Within a few years, film criticism had been moving toward a sharpening of militancy — political and cinematic. The climate of unity of the immediate postwar period had dissipated and the polarization brought about by the Cold War was increasingly evident. Moreover, after the 1948 general election and the victory of the Christian Democrats, who would govern the country with coalition governments for several decades, a highly divisive and contentious film law was passed:

Film censorship in Italy was as rigorous throughout the 1950s as it had been under Mussolini's regime. The postwar period represented, however, a decisive moment: Italy experienced one of the highest box-office intakes in Europe and a new film law, introduced by Giulio Andreotti in 1949, transformed censorship practice into a preventative form of control under the ideological and legislative pressure of the Catholic establishment.<sup>62</sup>

The frictions around and against the film law, with its promises of future censorship, along with the exacerbation of ideological juxtaposition that characterized the Cold War in the Italian context fostered the transition towards militant film criticism. It meant a clearer division between political ideas in film criticism (e.g. Marxist, catholic, formalist areas), and also an increasing distance between cultural film magazines, popular film magazines, generic news magazines, and newspapers.

### Conclusions

Illustrated periodicals were one of the main media through which current issues were discussed in Italy at the time.<sup>63</sup> These were the years in which Italian cinema blossomed, with a sharp increase in both film production and film consumption. Cinema, and

61 '*Cinema Nuovo* pertanto si propone: da un lato di individuare e denunciare le cause che hanno determinato l'odierna situazione; dall'altro di continuare il nostro discorso, cioè di sostenere le correnti e gli uomini più vitali con proposte concrete e sul piano della critica nei suoi vari aspetti sia metodologici e di revisione sia di lotta per una nuova cultura; cioè, come direbbe Gramsci, "per una nuova vita morale" [...]. In questo noi non ci consideriamo fuori della mischia, ma dentro la mischia; non saremo cioè "obiettivi" nel senso classico e comodo del termine, ma sempre legati alle passioni nostre e del nostro tempo. [...] Ecco perché noi, con un lavoro comune di ricerca, ci proponiamo di chiarire e approfondire a noi stessi, e agli altri, i problemi fondamentali della realtà contemporanea.' *Ibid.*, p. 7.

62 Daniela Treveri Gennari, 'Blessed Cinema: State and Catholic Censorship in Postwar Italy', in *Silencing Cinema. Film Censorship around the World*, ed. by Daniel Biltereyst and Roel Vande Winkel (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 255–71 (p. 255).

63 After the war and until the early 1950s, while 'the choice driving the publishers' of daily newspapers 'is immobility', there was 'the growing dynamism of weekly rotogravure magazines. Even for those devoted to current events, politics and culture it is possible to speak [...] of a real phenomenon'. See Paolo Murialdi, *Storia del giornalismo italiano* (Il Mulino, 2000), pp. 211–12. Until the advent of television in 1954, radio and illustrated periodicals were the mass media of choice to a wide audience in Italy: 'It was in these years that the rotogravure [the illustrated periodicals] [...] would achieve mass success by doubling its circulation at the expense of the political and satirical periodicals that had prevailed until then'. See Andrea Sangiovanni, *Specchi infiniti. Storia del media in Italia dal dopoguerra ad oggi* (Donzelli, 2021), p. 31.

therefore cinema magazines, had a central role in the media system.<sup>64</sup> The process of segmentation of film criticism that took place in the late 1940s and early 1950s had its roots in the immediate post-fascist era. The heated debates of film critics within the pages of the numerous magazines that were born and reborn after the end of the dictatorship stimulated an awareness of the role of the film critic as an intellectual operating within a society and a history, unlike during fascism. Film magazines were the privileged medium in which to discuss and debate not only films, but also film criticism, its purposes and rules: they were instrumental in building a new awareness after the age of autarky and self-censorship under fascism. As noted, there are three themes that persistently intertwine in the editorials of the magazines taken into consideration: the relationship with the fascist period (how to distance oneself from it, but also what sense of continuity can be granted); the position to be taken with regard to Italian cinema (how to position oneself in the delicate moment of the international affirmation of neorealism and the intrusions of external elements such as censorship); what reading to give of the return of Hollywood cinema to Italy (especially with regard to what it involved in safeguarding the uniqueness of Italian cinema). Film periodicals were filled with calls for renewal that helped to create a sense of belonging in film criticism, a process that over the years helped to sediment the idea of militant film criticism, as opposed to ‘generalist’ film criticism, which merely looked at cinema as a pastime from a spectacular/escapist perspective. Articles dedicated to film criticism represented a sort of ‘call to arms’ for film critics, who were called to identify themselves and find a common ground with others, therefore aiming to change the perception of films and cinema for general audiences. Popular and specialized magazines had very different tones and target audiences. And yet, at least in the immediate post-war period, the underlying intentions — such as safeguarding the rebirth of Italian cinema — were similar, although expressed in different terms. The continuation of the debate, in the climate of the Cold War following the 1948 general election and the tightening of the censorship discourse that began in 1949, led to the emergence of a militant film criticism that identified itself with certain film magazines (such as *Filmcritica* and *Cinema Nuovo*), even though film critics wrote for other magazines or newspapers — an awareness-raising process that points to the need for further investigation in the future. It was at this point that the rift between popular and specialized magazines grew deeper and deeper.

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64 Gian Piero Brunetta, *Il cinema neorealista italiano. Storia economica, politica e culturale* (Laterza, 2009).