

Everyman's Broadcasting: Programming the Democratic Transition in 1950s Italy

by

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Abstract

Italian neorealism created a globally recognizable and reproducible style of cinema, one which became leveraged in efforts to create humanist and democratic societies around the world. Yet if Italian neorealism is a transnational force, approaches to Italian television—which began in neorealism’s waning years—remain rigidly national. “Everyman’s Broadcasting: Programming the Democratic Transition in 1950s Italy” addresses this oversight to consider how early Italian television developed a series of practices aimed at creating a more participatory and egalitarian society. In particular, it addresses how programming made everyday individuals its protagonists, capturing them through impromptu encounters and encouraging them to express themselves colloquially and informally. This dissertation traces the confluence of factors that helped to establish these practices and explores why television became regarded as the ideal location through which to produce this new vision of society.

“Everyman’s Broadcasting” draws on three cases studies to exemplify how the unmediated, unedited, and improvised participation of average citizens structured new modes of interaction and produced new notions of individual subjectivity. The quiz show *Lascia o raddoppia (Double or Nothing)*, the documentary *Chi legge (Who Reads)*, and the variety program *Un, due, tre (One, Two, Three)* are examples of how regardless of genre, television used the individual’s own story, told live, in efforts to represent a new idea of Italian modernity—one which was to be humanist, participatory, and egalitarian. In analyzing the representations of everyday individuals on Italian television screens at a moment of cultural and political transition, “Everyman’s Broadcasting” reconsiders and revises the role of the television in the process of postwar Italian modernization and democratization, and the European response to the middlebrow entertainment of “mass” culture industries.

INTRODUCTION

Everyman Culture in Postwar Italy

Between 1956 and 1958, Cesare Zavattini, the premier theorist of neorealism and screenwriter of such canonical neorealist films as *Ladri di biciclette* (1948), *Sciuscià* (1946), and *Umberto D.* (1952), embarked on a series of “man on the street” style interviews across the Italian peninsula. Published in the popular Communist magazine *Vie Nuove* (*New Roads*), each interview became a full-page, weekly column with a new but ordinary individual.¹ The resulting series of interviews poignantly encapsulated the state of Italian life in the mid to late 1950s. Topics of discussion ranged from personally oriented questions about leisure time, feelings of fulfillment at work, moments of personal pride and embarrassment, impressions about politicians, bosses, and celebrities, to more politically and philosophically orientated questions

¹ *Vie Nuove* targeted a female audience and resembled American popular magazines such as *Time* in terms of its address to popular audiences, the mix of reportage and general interest stories, as well as the emphasis on visual graphics. Through this dissertation, I will be referring to the concept of the “everyman” to encapsulate the representation of the ordinary person, often described in the era as the man on the street, the common man, or the any man. I recognize that 1) this term replicates the linguistic bias that exists especially in Italian and in English in which words such as “mankind” retain a male norm and 2) that the Italian television producers I will be discussing, all of which are men, were attempting to represent reality that—despite their attempts to the contrary—managed to exclude the perspectives of females and other disadvantaged groups. Of the many potential examples I could have used to open this dissertation, I chose Zavattini’s work for a women’s magazine to emphasize that while women were largely excluded from the production of television and its critical discourses, they were not viewed as outside the reach of everyman programming. In a historical moment infused with Marxist theory and which predates the rise of feminism however, difference was more often than not reduced to the inequities of labor, not gender per se. So while I am sensitive to the importance of gender, I also do not want to distract from Zavattini’s goal to see every person as part of a universal reality, all worthy of human empathy. His project was about shifting notions of individualism, irregardless of gender, even though it was expressed in a more paternalistically on behalf of women, rural peoples, and workers. Zavattini defends the “everyman” as a feminist project in the preface to *Italian Women Confess*, a book of collected stories focusing on women’s problems. Recognizing the critiques of the book’s editor Gabrielle Parca, Zavattini responds by underscoring the importance of projects that allow us to see society “as they see it.” See Cesare Zavattini, “Prefazione,” in *Le italiane si confessano* ed. Gabrielle Parca (Florence: Parenti, 1959), xxi.

about racial equality, divorce, justice, and the belief in God.² Zavattini's *Vie nuove* column is one of many examples in which he displayed a distinct interest in unearthing the story of the everyday individual, with magazine columns, films, and television programming all repeatedly centered on what can be described as confessional motifs and first-person narration.³

Although the "Questions to Humanity" project for *Vie Nuove* is not commonly known or discussed, Zavattini's explanatory foreword to the column holds the key to understanding why, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Italian representational forms returned again and again to the "man on the street" interviews and autobiographic narration.⁴ Theoretically situating his project alongside the underlying threads that connect Catholic theology, the 1945 UNESCO Constitution, and Marxist critiques of industrialization, Zavattini argued that in order for a society to be democratic and humanist, everyday individuals and quotidian life stories must be at the center of culture.

You read everywhere articles that find labored reasons for the many crimes against the dignity of man. Reasons that collapse the moment that one sees and profoundly understands that the masses are made up of individuals. It is easier to say they will massacre the masses than we will massacre ourselves. Here [in this column] we will follow one-by-one the names of all of the individuals that

² Renzo Martinelli collected the "Questions to Man" series in *Domande agli uomini di Cesare Zavattini* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2007). For Zavattini's first introductory piece, see *Vie Nuove* 11.45, November 10, 1956, 18-19. In two letters (dated March 5, 1958 and February 16, 1959) to Guido Aristarco, editor of the neorealist cinema journal *Cinema Nuovo*, Zavattini also outlines a series of other projects that he envisions for television, almost all of which use interviews and autobiography as the central guiding principle of the programs. *Cesare Zavattini cinema: Diario cinematografico. Neorealismo, ecc.*, eds. Valentina Fortichiari and Mino Argentieri (Milan: Bompiani, 2002), 390-393 and 420-435.

³ For examples, see the magazine column "*Che film fareste se dipendesse da voi?*" or "What film would you make if it were up to you?" *Cinema Nuovo* 75 (January 25, 1956): 39-42, the film *Amore in città* or *Love in the City* (1953), and the television program *Chi legge? Viaggio lungo il Tirreno* or *Who reads? Trip along the shores of the Tyrrhenian Sea* (1960-1961).

⁴ Guido Conti argues that "[It was Zavattini's] idea to interview famous and successful people, intellectuals and artists. The true novelty of Zavattini is the interest for the man on the street and [this interest] matured year after year with the idea of interviewing the common man. To interview a man on the street, in the diverse conditions in which he lived, was an essential part of Zavattini's work." "Cesare Zavattini direttore editoriale: Le novità nei rotocalchi di Rizzoli e Mondadori" in *Forme e modelli del rotocalco italiano tra fascismo e guerra*, eds. Raffaele De Berti and Irene Piazzoni (Milan: Cisalpino, 2009), 441.

compose the masses...and this will be a good for everyone, and this is truly progressive.⁵

In conceptualizing autobiographic and confessional media as means to protect societies against the potential for autocratic rule and inhumane acts against people, Zavattini's choice to reinvest in the interview process takes on new meaning. It speaks to the resonance that first-person narration had within Italy's national postwar cultural project, that is, it speaks to his profound hope that Italians might acquire a perspective on the meaning of modernity that differed from that of the war generation.⁶ For Zavattini, there was nothing more democratic or humanist than allowing everyday individuals to speak direct about their own lives. Speaking of television's potentials, he wrote that "every connection means direct participation...And this is democracy."⁷

Zavattini's experimentations with different forms of autobiography are just one example in a broader mode of media production in 1950s Italy, interconnected to cinematic, journalistic, and literary cultures, in which television provided the ideal context for representing a new Italian subject. In this dissertation, I will be exploring how across a variety of different genres, Italian television used the individual's own story, told live, in efforts to represent a new idea of Italian modernity—one which was to be humanist, participatory, and egalitarian. Although autobiographic and confessional motifs appeared across different mediums, they were most jarring to Zavattini and his counterparts when they were televised. In a 1958 conversation with André Bazin, directors Roberto Rossellini and Jean Renoir speak about the potential of *live television interviews* as *the* primary reason for their transition to the new medium. To Rossellini

⁵ Cesare Zavattini, "Prefazione a una rubrica Domande agli uomini," *Vie Nuove* 11.45, 10 November 1956, 19. The Italian reads, "Si leggono da ogni parte molti articoli che trovano affannosamente le ragioni di tanti delitti contro la dignità dell'uomo. Ragioni che crollano appena si veda, si capisca profondamente che le masse sono composte da individui ed è più facile dire: mitragliamo le masse, che: mitragliamo...e qui dovrebbe seguire uno a uno i nomi di tutti gli individui che compongono le masse."

⁶ Ibid. In Italian, he writes "Ciò che spaventa è che le nuove generazioni hanno l'aria di crescere non diverse da noi, ma come noi."

⁷ Arturo Gismondi, "Le proposte di Zavattini per una TV aperta alla realtà e alla democrazia, *l'Unità*, May 4, 1961, 3. The original Italian reads, "Ogni collegamento significa partecipazione diretta...E questa è la democrazia."

and Renoir, these interviews capture the ordinary individual's persona and therefore also re-orientate modern societies toward a greater sense of humanism and understanding.

I ought to say that the television shows I've found most exciting have been certain interviews of American TV... In two minutes, we could read the faces of these people, we know who they were. I found this tremendously exciting...and somehow an indecent spectacle to watch. Yet this indecency came nearer to the knowledge of man than many films.⁸

Capturing the power of these first-person interviews for postwar audiences, Renoir and Rossellini's words emphasize the extent to which the television interview form offered a radically different mode of engagement with its audience—a mode they saw as uniquely American in nature. The live television interview opened up avenues into understanding ordinary individuals that other media—based in spectacle, fantasy, or the propagandistic drive toward modernization—ignored.⁹ Each of them saw the television interview process as a way of allowing the individual *everyman* to narrate his or her own life story, insisting on the first-person quotidian narrative as the cornerstone of an anti-fascist and democratic society. Their

⁸ This extended interview conducted by André Bazin with Jean Renoir and Roberto Rossellini after their work on the TV documentary series *India, Matri Buhmi* will be cited a number of times throughout this dissertation. Adriano Aprà's edited volume *Roberto Rossellini My Method: Writings and Interviews* (New York: Marsilio, 1995), 78-89, translates this interview from the original French article "Cinéma e Télévision. Un entretien d'André Bazin avec Jean Renoir et Roberto Rossellini," *France Observateur*, July 4, 1958, 16-18 as "Cinema and Television, Jean Renoir and Roberto Rossellini interviewed by André Bazin." However, this interview was also published in *Cinema Nuovo* shortly after the French version. "Il nostro incontro con la TV," *Cinema Nuovo* 136, August 1, 1958, 237-244. While the published interview is largely the same in the French translation and the Italian, there are a few key passages that can be found only in the Italian version. I will rely on Aprà's translation from the French since most Anglophone readers will find his text the most useful reference point. The passages found only in the Italian will be my translations. However, for the Italianists, I have transcribed the original Italian and cited the page numbers both from Aprà's edition and the 1958 published version in Italian. For this specific exchange, see page 240 in Aprà and 93-94 in *Cinema Nuovo*. The original in Italian reads, "Devo dire che gli spettacoli televisivi che più mi hanno appassionato sono certe interviste alla tv americana... In due minuti sapevamo chi erano e ho trovato la cosa assolutamente appassionante; uno spettacolo simile era forse indecente, perchè era quasi un' indiscrezione, ma questa indecenza era più vicina alla conoscenza dell'uomo di molti film." Rossellini's original words read, "televisione... ha osato andare alla ricerca dell'uomo."

⁹ I am referencing the inundation of American studio-era films after WWII and the *Settimana Incom* newsreels that dominated the postwar visual landscape in Italy. For background on postwar influence of these films and newsreels, see Gian Piero Brunetta, "The Long March of American Cinema in Italy: From Fascism to the Cold War," in *Hollywood in Europe: Experiences of a Cultural Hegemony*, eds. David E. Ellwood and Rob Kroes (Amsterdam: Amerika Instituut, 1994), 139-154 and Franco Monteleone, "Dalla pellicola alla telecamera: L'informazione per immagini tra stereotipo sociale e controllo politico," in *La settimana incom. Cinegiornali e informazione negli anni '50*, ed. Augusto Sainati (Turin: Lindau, 2001), 121-129.

theorization of the connection between television autobiography, live interview, and democratization was the central and recurring theme of their television work—as such, it stands at the heart of this dissertation.

By defining the emergence of “Everyman’s Broadcasting,” this dissertation focuses on the identification and elaboration of a specific style of television programming, its origins and its culturally situated meaning. The decision to create media that encouraged a sense of engagement with the everyday individual is incredibly significant given the national context of 1950s Italy and its transition from fascism to democracy. If fascist cinema stressed the use of spectacle and artifice that was often unsympathetic to the realities of everyday existence, the decision to use autobiographic motifs was a profoundly political act—one that seemed to perfectly coincide with the anti-fascism of Zavattini’s and Rossellini’s neorealism.¹⁰ The continuity they perceived between their own cinematic neorealism and the formal innovations introduced by American television programming was based on an insistence that, in a truly democratic society, the individual must matter. In articulating, and then materially producing that assertion, they force a necessary alteration of our understanding of the genealogies of European television. Through the formal elements across programming—such as the desire to accent liveness and simultaneity, and their tendency toward direct address—I explore the Italian production of modernity at a crucial moment of transition.

Typically, histories of television in continental Europe read the medium’s impact through geopolitics of the Cold War and America’s campaign to modernize postwar Europe, both industrially and politically. Although these studies are invaluable in that they are able to document, contextualize, and cogently explain American fantasies and projections of power in

¹⁰ Marcia Landy describes the characteristics of fascist-era filmmaking in “Theatricality and Impersonation: The Politics of Style in the Cinema of the Italian Fascist Era,” in *Re-viewing Fascism: Italian Cinema, 1922-1943* eds. Jacqueline Reich and Piero Garofalo (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2002), 250.

Europe at midcentury, they nonetheless miss an opportunity to analyze the translation of American modernity into the visual, political, and philosophical languages of European postwar culture, where the development of realism left an indelible mark not just on the Italian media landscape, but global cinema as well.¹¹ Italian media theorist Milly Buonanno points to this failure in describing the continued, unwritten influence of “transmission models” of communication, which not only conceive of the exchange between Italy and the United States as unidirectional, but also view American power as a homogeneous and contiguous blanket of influence across all arenas.¹²

In contrast to these models, this dissertation foregrounds the Italian interpretation of television’s early regimes and sees early programming modes as a uniquely Italian response to what Karl Schoonover describes as the “newly revamped geopolitical exchanges of the post-World War II North Atlantic.”¹³ With the end of World War II, both the United States and Western European countries moved toward a modernity in which democratic egalitarianism and humanism were prized values—and for their part, media producers sought to create stylistic and aesthetic means through which to encourage cultural and civic participation and egalitarianism in their fellow citizens primarily (though not exclusively) through cinematic neorealism. This dissertation expands our understanding to early television producers and how they worked to create these historically novel structures of interaction—what Paddy Scannell describes as the “sociable self-in-everyday-life [that] only becomes visible and recognized as such in the post-

¹¹ Saverio Giovacchini and Robert Sklar, “The Geography and History of Global Neorealism,” in *Global Neorealism: The Transnational History of a Film Style*, eds. Saverio Giovacchini and Robert Sklar (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2012).

¹² Milly Buonanno, *Age of Television: Experiences and Theories* (Bristol: Intellect, 2008): 90.

¹³ Karl Schoonover, *Brutal Vision: The Neorealist Body in Postwar Italian Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), xiv.

war decade.”¹⁴ My analysis of early Italian television styles (and the way in which television producers explicitly borrowed or extended the language of neorealism) helps television scholars to escape the “tyranny of the national” and recognize television form’s inherent transnationalism and cross-mediality, even when it was put in the service of creating national culture.¹⁵ As Scannell notes, “the communicatively available self in everyday life has gone global”—and quite rapidly so.¹⁶ Given the unique historical circumstances of postwar Italy, we can clearly locate and identify the emergence of this self, the representational norms developed around its expression, and its connection to more egalitarian and inclusive approach to national culture.



Alcuni caratteristici atteggiamenti di Emilio Zagò

¹⁴ Paddy Scannell, *Television and the Meaning of Live: An Inquiry into the Human Situation* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2014), 35.

¹⁵ Donna Gabaccia uses the idea of the “tyranny of the national” in speaking about the dominance of national historiography in understanding American-Italian relations, in “Is Everywhere Nowhere? Nomads, Nations, and the Immigrant Paradigm of United States History,” *Journal of American History* 86.3 (December 1999): 1115-1134. Many scholars have noted this same problem in reference to the study of broadcasting; the best explanation can be found in Michele Hilmes, when she implies explore the possibility of using television’s national character as an “analytical game” through which to reach “non-national within the national.” *Network Nations: A Transnational History of British and American Broadcasting* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 11.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

Figure 1: “The Communicatively Available Self”: Column from Zavattini’s “Questions to Humanity” series (left) and the expressions of a *Lascia o raddoppia* contestant captured in *Due anni di Lascia o raddoppia: 1956-1957* (right).

Curiously, the use of the interview and autobiography in postwar Italian media was not limited to politically Leftist or critically well-respected filmmakers like Cesare Zavattini or Roberto Rossellini. At the very moment that Zavattini was traveling around the country interviewing people from different walks of life to produce his column for *Vie nuove*, the quiz show, which would become emblematic of Americanization and the explosion of consumerism, offered its own version of the “man on the street” interview.¹⁷ Based on the American quiz show *The \$64,000 Question*, *Lascia o raddoppia*’s (*Double or Nothing*, 1955-1959) premise was similar to its American counterpart, but with one distinct difference: it expanded the interview format.¹⁸ It was through these encounters with contestants that *Lascia o raddoppia* evoked an otherwise unexperienced sense of discovery and fascination around ordinary people and rendered the everyday individual as worthy of the national public’s attention. Despite *Lascia o raddoppia*’s more popular origins, contemporary commentators nonetheless recognized continuities between the program and cinematic neorealism, even suggesting that the program continued Italian neorealism’s project because of the aesthetic codes used in representing ordinary individuals. The television critic at the Catholic cinema and television journal *Cronache del cinema e televisione*, Claudio Tricoli, argued that:

Where neorealist cinema failed, *Lascia o raddoppia* can succeed in that it is able to unite Italians in terms of culture and compassion. It is able to finally give maturity to a population that is at times unable to understand the problems of the community at the level of the entire nation and which is prone to individual egotism because it has failed to participate in this historic movement. In other

¹⁷ As an interesting historical side note, the female host of *Lascia o raddoppia*, Edy Campagnoli, first came to prominence as a Miss *Vie Nuove* finalist. Stephen Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow: The Italian Communists and the Challenge of Mass Culture, 1943-1991* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 94. Gundle’s *Bellissima: Feminine Beauty and the Idea of Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 125-141, explores the competition and commonalities between the cultures of the Left and Right in Italy through beauty pageants.

¹⁸ Aldo Grasso, *Storia della televisione italiana: I 50 anni della televisione* (Milan: Garzanti, 1992), xiii-xiv and 44.

words, it seems to me that *Lascia o raddoppia* has been successful, and I can maintain that in as much as it represents with truth at least a part of Italy and the Italians. Each face that appears on the television screen during the weekly transmission is not only a way for people to identify with each other, but also to effectively know other people.¹⁹

Triscoli underscores the program's potential to evoke empathy and a commonality of experience through its representation of the realities of ordinary people.

Although writing for a Catholic publication, Triscoli's perspective reflects that of his fellow television critic, Paolo Gobetti. As critic at the neorealist movement's unofficial journal, *Cinema Nuovo*, Gobetti argued that:

While cinema with its increasingly large screen size and its enormous financial resources is coming to inexorably distance itself from man, television, confined by its technical limitations, rediscovers and concentrates its attention on him. It is a phenomenon that is fully revealing itself with the explosive success of *Lascia o raddoppia*.²⁰

Triscoli and Gobetti, although coming from different political and institutional positions and emerging with different stakes in neorealism's project, both point to potential overlaps between cinematic neorealism and a popular quiz show, particularly in the approach to the ordinary individual who was enabled for the first time to tell their life story to a national audience. Furthermore, both see television's emphasis on the everyday individual as an important means of creating a sense of mutual identification

¹⁹ Claudio Triscoli "Televisione, usi, e costumi," *Cronache del cinema e televisione* 16-17, Sept - Oct 1956, 41-42. The original Italian reads: "E aggiungo che là dove il neorealismo cinematografico non è riuscito, può riuscire 'Lascia o raddoppia?', riuscire cioè a unire gli italiani sul piano della cultura e della simpatia, riuscire, infine, a dare una maggiore età a un popolo incapace, a volte, di comprendere i problemi della comunità su piano dell'intera nazione e involontariamente incline all'egoismo individuale per la mancata partecipazione al moto storico. Insomma per dirla con altre parole, mi sembra che 'Lascia o raddoppia?' abbia avuto successo e possa mantenerlo in quanto in esso si rappresenta con verità almeno una parte dell'Italia e degli italiani e che ogni volto apparso sul teleschermo durante le trasmissioni della rubrica non sia un motivo per gli altri di riconoscersi in esso, o per lo meno non solo questo, ma di conoscere effettivamente altre persone."

²⁰ Paolo Gobetti, "L'uomo mutilato," *Cinema Nuovo* 79, 25 March 1956, 190. The original Italian reads, "Proprio mentre il cinema, con i suoi schermi sempre più grandi e le sue smisurate possibilità finanziarie, si viene allontanando inesorabilmente dall'uomo, la televisione, costretta dalle sue stesse fondamentali esigenze tecniche lo riscopre e su di esso concentra la sua attenzione. Si tratta di un fenomeno che, rivelatosi pienamente con il successo esplosivo di *Lascia o raddoppia*."

between Italy's citizens, and therefore also creating the grounds for a more humanist and democratic society.

In addition to the chatter within critical and intellectual circles about the potential continuities between a popular television quiz show and neorealism, *Lascia o raddoppia*'s host, Mike Bongiorno, also underscores the underlying interest of the program in making the individual story part of a national cultural experience.

I certainly could not brag about having a certain scientific education or to have behind me training in rigorous academic methods, but even then I felt that my work had led me to a very thorough knowledge of the...types of people who lived in Italy. Today, as I re-evaluate these things calmly, I say that...to ask questions and interact with people in front of cameras requires a lot of effort and specific and well-articulated knowledge of the psychology of the people...My "intelligence" consisted in being able to bring out the best...from any type of person...to absorb from each persona certain human characteristics and to know and to learn with joy things about the people I met, to understanding them through experience. I was able to refine this technique for almost sixty years, and I can state with certainty that there are truly very few people like me who possess a more profound understanding of the culture and conscious of our country and the people who inhabit it.²¹

Bongiorno's self-congratulatory language about his own abilities is different in tone and intent than the reflections of Zavattini and Rossellini; however, he nonetheless frames his media practice in similar terms. His television interviews were an act of revealing ordinary individuals

²¹ Mike Bongiorno, *La versione di Mike* (Milan: Mondadori, 2007), 156. The Italian reads, "Non potevo certo sbandierare di aver avuto una certa formazione scientifica né di avere alle spalle un rigoroso metodo accademico, ma già allora sentivo che il mio lavoro mi aveva portato a una conoscenza molto approfondita della psicologia della gente e delle tipologie di persone che abitavano l'Italia. Oggi rivaluto queste cose con serenità, e dico che Eco non poteva certo capire che quella che sembrava una cosa alla portata di tutti, il rivolgere delle domande, e l'interagire con delle persone davanti alle telecamere, necessitava invece di un grande sforzo e di una conoscenza specifica, mista a una sensibilità molto articolata della psicologia delle persone. Io dovevo, e ho sempre dovuto, sviluppare la capacità di trasformarmi davanti alla gente con cui interagivo, e la mia 'intelligenza' consisteva nel saper tirare fuori il meglio... Questa costante sollecitazione della mia sensibilità mi ha permesso di assorbire da ognuno certe caratteristiche umane e di conoscere e imparare con gioia le cose dalla gente che ho incontrato, comprendendole con l'esperienza. Ho potuto affinare questa tecnica per quasi sessantanni, e posso dichiarare con certezza che ci sono davvero poche persone che come me possiedono una cultura e una conoscenza così approfondita del nostro Paese e della gente che lo abita."

and their lives to a mass Italian audience.²² Just as Zavattini highlighted his own humanist desire to recognize the dignity of the average man within the mass, so too did Bongiorno see his work on *Lascia o raddoppia* to be about revealing the individual. Both believed in the idea that television could help bring the value, diversity, and contributions of ordinary citizens to the television viewing audience.²³

Despite Bongiorno's and Zavattini's different places in the cultural hierarchies of postwar Italy, their works, taken together, speak to the dominance of the interview as a cultural form, one where displaying the individual persona was understood as profoundly political. Rather than the politics of mass culture embodied by both fascism and the industrialization and modernization brought to Italy by postwar American intervention, their focus on individual narration suggested a new and different avenue forward through which to establish a national, Italian culture. Given their mutual reliance on a distinct structure and mode through which to interact with average citizens, the work of Zavattini and Bongiorno act as parallel—even kindred—projects. Yet while producers and critics alike understood their projects as sharing underlying commonalities in terms of their formal and textural qualities, these two and their works have never been considered relationally, let alone as part of a regime of programming.²⁴ Instead, traditional accounts position these two media producers as polar opposites. For example, in the frequently

²² In addition to Bongiorno's words in his autobiography, the RAI's own edited volume about the program suggests a similar perspective. Mario Apollonio, "Personaggi, personaggi nuovi. Bisognano, signore, personaggi?" in *Due anni di Lascia o raddoppia: 1956-1957* (Turin: ERI Edizioni, 1958), 233-237.

²³ Zavattini and Bongiorno were also penning weekly columns in women's magazines at the same time. Stephen Gundle describes *Vie Nuove*, where Zavattini's interviews were published, in these terms: "Founded in 1946 as a 'weekly of orientation and political struggle', the magazine gradually evolved into an illustrated publication similar in many respects to the established Sunday supplement of the *Corriere della sera*, *La Domenica del corriere*, and then to new illustrated weeklies like *Epoca* and *L'Europeo*." Gundle, *Bellissima*, 132. Penelope Morris briefly discusses Bongiorno's weekly column in *Grazia* in "A Window on the Private Sphere: Advice Columns, Marriage, and the Evolving Family in 1950s Italy," *the italianist* 27 (2007), 307.

²⁴ Aldo Grasso argues that neorealism "enters television clandestinely as a stylistic reference... [of] moderate social engagement... Above all, television exhibited an involuntary neorealism, especially when it came live from the countryside." See "Extra ecclesiam: il neo-realism nella radio e nella televisione," in *Neorealismo: Cinema italiano 1945-1949*, ed. Alberto Farassino (Turin: EDT, 1989), 128.

cited volume *American way of Television: Origins of TV in Italy*, Gianfranco Bettetini argues that “the formal and productive models of quiz shows, even if they were widely revisited in terms of their nationalistic aspirations, were the furthest from the style and character of neorealism.”²⁵ Even today Italian television histories largely negate the affinities between postwar cinema and television or characterize television programming as merely a vulgarization of the practices of “art” cinema.²⁶

The mention of the perennially lambasted *Lascia o raddoppia* in relation to the work of Cesare Zavattini, hero of Italy’s grand contribution to film culture, would be considered a form of heresy for most scholars of Italian culture and history or, at best, in the words of Aldo Grasso, one of Italy’s preeminent scholars of television, “a clumsy gesture.”²⁷ While Zavattini would continue as a father figure to Italian Leftist cinema, honored as a prolific and articulate theorist of the movement’s aims and objectives, Bongiorno would go on to a career immersed in the low-brow and crassly commercial forms of popular culture. Known for his frequent malapropisms as host of the Italian versions of *Jeopardy* and *Wheel of Fortune* and for opportunistically abandoning the RAI in favor of Silvio Berlusconi’s Mediaset in 1979, the revelation toward the end of Bongiorno’s life that “Quiz King” of Italian television was a *partigiano*, fighting in defense of an occupied Italy during the Second World War and eventually taken prisoner, found many Italians hard-pressed to make sense of the more noble and morally engaged side of an

²⁵ Preface to *American way of television: Le origini della Tv in Italia*, ed. Gianfranco Bettetini (Florence: Sansoni, 1980), 9.

²⁶ For example, neither major television history of Italy mentions any interconnection with Italian neorealism. In addition to Grasso’s *Storia della televisione italiana*, see Franco Monteleone, *Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia. Un secolo di costume, società e politica* (Milan: Tascabili Marsilio, 2001). One key exception is Anna Chiara Maccari, *Zavattini ha le antenne: Pensieri sulla televisione* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2010). As a curious side note, not only were these two mediums theorized relationally, but the RAI’s catalog of audiovisual materials show a number of films made by those associated with neorealist that were aired on television in the 1950s.

²⁷ Grasso, “Extra ecclesiam,” 127.

otherwise buffoonish Bongiorno.²⁸ However, while the biographies of these men give us very different impressions of their work, and while they occupy very different spaces within Italian media histories, their television projects of the late 1950s and early 1960s, and the language used to describe their efforts, suggest their common vocabulary despite their seemingly varied origins and later trajectories.

Due to the idiosyncrasies in the development of the field of Italian television studies, it has been previously impossible to consider these programs as part of a unified style of programming. In bridging the divide between high- and low-brow culture and aesthetics—that is, between the serious interventions of neorealism and the popular quiz and variety shows nostalgically remembered by average television viewers—we can identify a coherent, previously unrecognized style of television programming which sought to “program democracy” through the way in which it structured its engagement with average citizens through interviews and autobiographic disclosure. Across genre and regardless of its place within the programming schedule, Italian television of the late 1950s and early 1960s relied on the interview format as the master technique to unify its purpose. Television, therefore, in many respects, literally was “Everyman’s Broadcasting” in that it almost compulsively returned back to the individual and his or her own live, self-narration of personal experience.

The projects of Cesare Zavattini and the Italian adaptation of *The \$64,000 Question* are two examples of how both “serious” television documentaries and their popular counterparts, such as the television quiz shows and variety programs, chose to use autobiography and live interview as a central and dominant motif in the programming routines of 1950s Italian television. I see the use of autobiographic disclosure and live interview as the defining feature of

²⁸ The entry about Bongiorno in the Encyclopedia of the Resistance sparked debate about the extent of his involvement with anti-fascist forces, with some contributing his imprisonment as due to his American citizenship. Dino Messina, “Bongiorno raddoppia sulla ruota della Resistenza,” *Il Corriere della Sera* (18 January 1996), 27.

early Italian television culture, and I will locate the transnational origins of this motif and its role in the redefinition of Italian modernity. Yet the idea that popular television's own routines of interview, autobiography, and audience engagement are coherent and consistent with neorealism poses a number of serious questions about our current genealogies of media and our conceptualization of American power and influence within those genealogies. Thus this work has as much to bring to the field of global television studies as it offers to postwar Italian historiography.

In defining the specific impetus behind the idea of the field of global television studies, Shanti Kumar argues that the field is based on the ability of its scholars to “look at the orchestrated power of images and the myths in the world as challenges of our own intellectual discipline as well as those of our institutional disciplinarity.”²⁹ In speaking of both the need for “intellectual discipline” and the tensions surrounding “institutional disciplinarity,” Kumar encapsulates the challenging dualism that global television scholars must always negotiate. On the one hand, global television scholars must speak directly to the subfields that oftentimes have the most critical stake in our own work, producing intellectually disciplined, serious research that lives up to the demanding standards of each field. On the other hand, global television scholars must look at the ways in which their subfields contain their own biases that often leave the expression of power through media not adequately theorized, contextualized, or defined. As a result, global television scholars are always transitioning between the act of demonstrating the relevancy of our specific case while also challenging the orthodoxies within our subfields.

By intervening into the history of early Italian television through the perspective of global media studies—a perspective that recognizes the implementation of power and its

²⁹ Shanti Kumar, “Is There Anything Called Global Television Studies?” in *Planet TV: A Global Television Reader*, eds. Lisa Parks and Shanti Kumar (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 137.

limitations—we can begin to rewrite the problematic conceptualization of television’s emergence and the origins of its programming routines. By in large, “institutional disciplinarity” has demanded that Italian television and its programming routines be read as the product of America’s imperialist influence over Europe in the years following World War II—a point which I will expand upon in the following chapter. Confronting the uniformity with which “transmission models” serve as the basis for explaining television as a form of American geostrategic consolidation, I reconsider the thorny issue of American projections of power in postwar Europe, by writing from the perspective of individuals that Jérôme Bourdon describes as the “European gatekeepers of Americanization.”³⁰ In focusing on their reception and interpretation of early television forms, a very different narrative about television’s role in postwar cultural change emerges. While this shift in focus does not deny the underlying role of American influence (as well as British and French influence) that is so prominently highlighted in the histories of postwar reconstruction, it does mean recognizing that the idea of America was “needed, admired, used and imported” by Italian programmers, and it was not forced upon them.³¹ Italian programmers found something in their idea of America useful, and to the extent American cultural models were found as valuable, they were able to influence early Italian television styles.

This dissertation is guided by Marwan Kraidy’s framework of “critical transnationalism,” an approach that stands in contrast to models of imperialism or cultural hybridity. Critical transculturalism views international communication not simply as a question of imperialistic dominance or an affirmation of its inherent pluralism and hybridity, but as arising from contexts

³⁰ Jérôme Bourdon, “Imperialism, Self-Inflicted? On the Americanization of Television in Europe,” in *We Europeans?: Media, Representations, Identities*, ed. William Uricchio (Bristol: Intellect, 2009), 106.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

“already permeated with power.”³² It enables my reconsideration of the emergence of early Italian television regimes because it allows us to identify American influence and power without equating that presence with any prescribed outcome. Even though *Everyman’s Broadcasting* comes at a moment when the United States constitutes an omnipresent point of reference, Kraidy’s emphasis on social practices discourages any preconceived conclusions about what this presence means for television programming regimes made at a time of transformative social and cultural change.³³ The value of Kraidy’s model of critical transculturalism is that it effectively distinguishes between the structural and symbolic influence exerted by the United States and the independent agency of Italian producers. The translocal and intercontextual social practices of key Italian producers and the discourses that surround these practices are analyzed at length in this dissertation.

In making my object of study not the *product* but the *process* of mediating of cultural change, the framework of critical transculturalism provides two critical advantages. First, Kraidy’s critical transculturalism encourages multivariate analysis. In this dissertation, “everyman” programs do not just hinge on the Italian receptivity toward foreign cultural products and ideas, but are also made through a complicated nexus of exchanges across mediums, genres, class lines, and political cultures. Second, Kraidy does not view the formal and narrative choices of a media producers as neutral. Instead, they arise out of a “materially and discursively defined context.” In the case of postwar Italy, their representational choices were loaded with meanings that were oftentimes defined as much by neorealism and its aftermath as on American cultural referents and political economic influence. In this way,

³² Marwan Kraidy, *Hybridity or the Cultural Logic of Globalization* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 156.

³³ *Ibid.*

critical transculturalism emphasizes the process of creating media in which a series of influences both inform its production and dictate its interpretation and re-elaboration.

Like Marwan Kraidy, William Mazzarella also emphasizes the role of social practice in theorizing that culture is “ideology and social process, as something continuously made and remade”—*transitioning* if you will—“through constantly shifting relations, practices and technologies of mediation.”³⁴ To the extent that cultural transformation depends on the practices of *mediation*, so too must any analysis that begins from the perspective of these mediators take into account the field of meaning and power in which they operated. The parameters of Italian cultural change—including the legacies of fascism, the Second World War, and the consolidation of media practice around neorealism in the 1940s—constitute critical backdrops through which television must to be interpreted. In emphasizing the social practices and agency of media producers as well as the forces that shape those practices, this dissertation does not just assert the impact of American models in the production of television postwar, but qualifies them. Specifically, through the careful examination of Italian media practices and their interpretative frameworks, it becomes clear that early programming regimes were most interested in the ideas of *ordinariness* and the *everyman*, which were coded as American, humanist, and democratic.

Reframing the theoretical basis that has underwritten the historiography of the Italian postwar period through the lens of critical transculturalism has important implications for the conceptualization of global TV flows and for the periodization of global television. Italian media producers engaged in a larger project to “program democracy” that relied on formal and theoretical practices that they perceived as *both* neorealist and influenced by the global discourse of human rights. In recognizing this fact, I underscore the extent to which to the humanist and democratic potentialities of popular culture were being actively theorized and implemented on

³⁴ William Mazzarella, “Culture, Globalization, Mediation,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* (June 2004): 355.

both sides of the Atlantic in the postwar years. The television medium's immediacy and everydayness offered radically new possibilities, particularly when read in tandem with the mutual investment in liberal democratic and humanist ideals of the self in the 1950s.

However, histories of television usually place the emergence of anything that could remotely be called "global television" firmly within the 1960s. For example, James Schwoch's *Global TV* makes a firm distinction between the years immediately following World War II, in which global communications was placed within a paradigm of East-West security, and the rise of television as a vehicle through which to promote global citizenship in the 1960s. Drawing on the archives of American military, academic and corporate actors, Schwoch determines that Cold War geopolitics helped shaped 1950s television so that "if one were to analyze what went on in this period of study strictly and exclusively from the point of view of the intended actions of the principal *dramatis personae*, one would place concerns over East-West or superpower security as the central motivating factor."³⁵ Long before American programmers worked to invoke the "global now" through satellites and live TV specials in the 1960s, Italians already understood their television projects as part of the transition toward liberal, American-style democracy.³⁶ Heralded as the "peoples in revolt" and the "likable, compassionate, quotidian," American culture was part of a political language that expressed itself through television's immediacy and its interest in the individual story as early as the mid 1950s.

The fact that Italian television producers saw their work as drawing on specific American political-aesthetic values, before there were formal institutional and technological structure to foster exchange between the United States and Western Europe, suggests that more than creating the shift toward global communication, American policy elites perhaps *responded* to the

³⁵ James Schwoch, *Global TV: New Media and the Cold War, 1946-1969* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 5.

³⁶ Lisa Parks, *Cultures in Orbit: Satellites and the Televisual* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 21-46.

preexisting ubiquity of American political values. Just as neorealism had narrated humanist, democratic values, so too did “everyman” programming—by engaging in the discursive ethical-aesthetic language of neorealism—stand as an example of a reconfigured global order. This liberal democratic approach to the individual united programming across national borders and genres existed before American elites dreamed up the geopolitical utility of satellites and syndicated programming. As a series of recent studies culminating in the publication of Robert Sklar and Saverio Giovacchini’s edited volume *Global Neorealism* attest, rather than an explicitly Italian national cinema, neorealism was a national variation on “a widely international conversation about realism and political cinema that had been at the center of the 1930s.”³⁷ Just as the *Global Neorealism* anthology questions the idea of neorealism as an exclusively Italian phenomenon, the stylistic and narrative continuities that Italians recognized between their own cinematic forms and American television suggests that early television’s programming regimes also have something very important to say about the global turn to a specific configuration of individuality and modernity.

In using neorealism as a touchstone through which to document the shifting postwar geopolitical order, the everyman project for Italian television outlined here acts as a complement to Karl Schoonover’s 2012 *Brutal Vision*. Schoonover argues that Italian neorealism was central to the global turn toward liberal democratic humanism.³⁸ Certain forms of television programming were appealing because they spoke the common language of democratic, global rights that both neorealism and American programming sought to evoke. Therefore, the implications of *Everyman’s Broadcasting* are not just limited to the subfields of Italian or global television studies, but also called for a reinterpretation of early American (and other Western)

³⁷ Giovacchini and Sklar, 9.

³⁸ Karl Schoonover, *Brutal Vision: The Neorealist Body in Postwar Italian Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

television programming regimes. Foundational texts on American postwar television, such as Lynn Spigel's *Make Room for TV*, Denise Mann's "The Spectacularization of Everyday Life," and Susan Murray's *Hitch Your Antennas to the Stars* document the extent to which early television programming was reliant on stylistic markings of liveness and instantaneity, and used these stylistic markers in coordination with the use of everyday themes and seemingly ordinary stars.³⁹ These scholars present a compelling case that economic and industrial factors, such as cost of television production, the role of sponsorship, and television's origins in vaudeville theater and radio routines, directly contributed to early television styles. However, Italian interpretations of American television form at midcentury emphasize that the emergence of early television styles cannot be solely attributed to industrial factors, profit motives, or television's technological qualities. We must also take into consideration the loaded political and ethical meanings that were already associated with specific stylistic choices as they sought to create new communicative structures.⁴⁰

As the neorealist theorization of television makes abundantly clear, television's emphasis on the live interview and autobiography felt politically radical because it brought to the fore the ordinary individual's problems as central to national dialogue. Representations of the live and ordinary may have been an economically beneficial model, but those incentives would have been meaningless if these representations had not also felt politically appealing and modern. The Italian response to American television foregrounds these qualities as essential to their own creation and re-mediation of television programming. Their words provide a means through

³⁹ Susan Murray, *Hitch Your Antennas to the Stars: Early Television and Broadcast Stardom* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Denise Mann, "The Spectacularization of Everyday Life: Recycling Hollywood Stars and Fan in Early Television Variety Shows," in *Private Screenings: Television and the Female Consumer*, eds. Lynn Spigel and Denise Mann (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 41-69; Lynn Spigel, *TV by Design: Modern Art and the Rise of Network Television* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

⁴⁰ Scannell, 99-104. Paddy Scannell's emphasis on the management and production of new communicative routines for television is an important shift away from seeing early television liveness as simply a technological phenomenon or the product of economic forces.

which to reread early television style so that it is not just a product of industrial pressures or an heir to vaudeville or radio as American scholars tend to presume. Instead, early television's use of the live interview and its emphasis on the everyday takes on new importance, as a means through which to foster a new social and political order at a moment of intense change and transition.

Beyond matters of form, however, the everyman style of broadcasting also hinges on what William Uricchio refers as the “textural” elements of media that “elude the grasp of many media historians.”⁴¹ By textural elements, I mean to highlight the extent to which the formal emphasis on liveness and direct address were often found in combination with specific program structures, such as the interview or the invitation for autobiography, which colored these programs as being primary about the recognition and individualization of ordinary citizens from distant geographic locales, professions, and ages. Although the formal analysis of television style is certainly not new—works ranging from John Caldwell's 1995 stylistic analysis of the emergence of “televsuality” to Lynn Spigel's 2009 identification of early television's “vaudeo-modernism” have made important contributions to the field and the analysis of television style merit greater attention.⁴² In taking a critical look at the field of cultural studies, Julia D'Acci quite accurately observes that “the formal and stylistic dimensions (the material dimensions) of television programs as cultural artifacts” remain “a woefully underexamined domain in the cultural studies work.”⁴³

However, the impetus behind studying television style is not that it is under-examined, but rather that other avenues for studying early television in a transatlantic context, such as

⁴¹ William Uricchio, “Rethinking the American Century,” in *Media, Popular Culture, and the American Century*, eds. Kingsley Bolton and Jan Olsson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 368.

⁴² John Caldwell, *Televsuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995): 5; Spigel, *TV*, 44.

⁴³ Julie D'Acci, “Cultural Studies, Television Studies, and the Crisis in the Humanities,” in *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, eds. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 436.

genre, format, and political economics, have lopsidedly approached the medium of television as an agent of commercialization and industrial capitalism. As Jérôme Bourdon argues, specific genres and formats have too easily and too often been used to as means of establishing pure and simple examples of Americanization.⁴⁴ In the Italian case, style is a particularly effective lens through which to read origins of early programming practices and their political meaning, given that neorealism had created a distinct discourse that linked realist aesthetics to socially democratic film practices. It is in the aesthetic interconnections between neorealist films and early television programming that we can begin to make sense of how television “programmed” a specific set of democratic and modern values in postwar Italy.⁴⁵ The presence of an everyman style of programming provides new insights into the political and cultural reasons behind specific aesthetic preferences in early television. I am able to make this intervention by putting Italian television styles in conversation with broader aesthetic and political discourses of the period, particularly the protracted engagement with Italian neorealism. In identifying the continuities between film and television, I will be leveraging style as part of the broader move that Italian film scholar Emiliano Morreale calls upon the field to make. Media historians need “to re-read Italian cinema of the 1950s as a complex moment, in terms of genre and its relationship with other *popular* media (from graphic novels to the newly-arrived television)” [emphasis added].⁴⁶ In tracing the continuities in style across neorealist “art” cinema and “popular” television programming, this dissertation provides a lens through which to reconsider

⁴⁴ Jérôme Bourdon, “Old and New Ghosts: Public Service Television and the Popular A-History,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 7.3 (2004): 283-304.

⁴⁵ Aldo Grasso is the only figure to consider this relationship, but Grasso presents television as either a neutered or accidental form of neorealism, a “stylistic referent...of moderate social engagement” or an “involuntary neorealism.” Grasso, “Extra ecclesiam,” 128.

⁴⁶ Emiliano Morreale, “Perché Soldati?” in *Mario Soldati e il cinema*, ed. Emiliano Morreale (Rome: Donzelli Editore, 2009), 5.

the role of television programming in the management and mediation of Italian postwar modernization while also forcing a reevaluation of global television's emergence.

This research is particularly crucial in light of the state of the subfield of Italian television studies, which has largely marginalized the study of television through formal and textural approaches. Italian television studies, frequently placed under the heading of mass communications, has more often than not been studied in a vacuum, away from film, rather than side-by-side as most Anglo media studies departments now tend to approach these sibling mediums. In the case of Italian media history of the 1950s, the institutional structure of the Italian university system has carried over in the methodological approach used in distinctly analyzing television versus film. Whereas film is analyzed as an aesthetic and political object, the continued dominance of Marxist-political economic and ideological approaches that came into vogue as the field was founded in Italy continued to be popular modes of analyzing television.⁴⁷ In another key distinction, the field of Italian television studies largely defines itself in opposition to the theoretical and methodological interventions of British cultural studies, whose influence has only begun to be felt over the past decade.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the overwhelming academic interest in Silvio Berlusconi and his rise to power amidst the deregulatory changes of the late 1970s has left early Italian television, with a few notable exceptions, comparatively unexamined.⁴⁹ The singular focus on media concentration and

⁴⁷ John Foot, "Inside the Magic Rectangle: Recent Research on the History of Television," *Contemporary European History* 11.3 (July 2002): 467-475; Roberto Grandi, "The Limitations of the Sociological Approach: Alternatives from Italian Communication Research," *Journal of Communication* (Summer 1983), 53-8.

⁴⁸ Augusto Bianco penned an early and typical theoretical rejection of the approaches of BCCC when he wrote that he is not interesting in producing contrary readings of televisual texts, but instead wants to understand public service broadcasting as an "apparatus of ideology" where they "teach and learn the techniques of manipulation." *La videocrazia cristiana: Rai-TV, cosa, chi, come* (Florence: Guaraldi, 1974), 8-9.

⁴⁹ Notable exceptions are Luca Barra, Cecilia Penati, and Massimo Scaglioni, "Images of the Public: The Construction of the Italian TV Audience, 1953 – 1955," *Comunicazioni sociali* 3 (2010): 4 – 17; Gianni Isola, *Cari amici vicini e lontani: Storia dell'ascolto radiofonico nel primo decennio repubblicano, 1944 – 1954* (Florence: Scandicci, 1995); Francesa Anania, "Fabbrica dei sogni o specchio della realtà: Le indagini della Rai e le grandi inchieste degli Istituti di ricerca negli anni cinquanta e sessanta," *Ventesimo secolo* 4.10 (1994): 146 – 169.

management politics distracts the field from the more ground-level questions about the translation of television production, translation either from other mediums or from other cultural sources.

The preference for industrial and political economic approaches to television has left the analysis of programming itself in a nebulous state. When programming is explicitly discussed, it is usually packaged into encyclopedic reference books, such as Aldo Grasso's *History of Italian Television*. Similarly, there has been an increasing trend toward organizing and gathering responses to television programming in the press. While these studies can serve as enormously useful compendiums, especially for American-based scholars without regular access to many of these publications, their organizing logics point to a more broad issue: the lack of theoretical and conceptual force behind current scholarship in this subfield. Too many collections focus on gathering responses, rather than critically analyzing them through broader theoretical paradigms.⁵⁰ And, unfortunately, collections that selectively gather responses around specific themes often persevere on and overemphasize negative responses to the new medium.⁵¹ The fact remains that when programming itself is taken seriously, it is usually framed in a manner that inhibits critical or theoretical thinking about representation, and about the role of representation in the establishment of hegemonic norms. In addition, there remains a "great men" approach to telling industrial histories, with a specific critic or figure as the driving motivation behind research.⁵² In a recent article in *New Left Review*, Michael Cramer highlights this issue in calling for more a theoretically grounded examination of television works by

⁵⁰ Aldo Grasso, *L'Italia alla Tv: la critica televisiva nelle pagine del Corriere della sera* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2010); *Mamma Rai: storia e storie del servizio pubblico radiotelevisivo*, eds. Claudio Ferretti, Umberto Broccoli, and Barbara Scaramucci (Milan: Mondadori, 1997).

⁵¹ Francesco Pinto, ed. *Intellettuali e TV negli anni '50* (Rome: Savelli, 1977).

⁵² Valerio Corvisieri, *Vita di un manager al servizio del bene comune: Marcello Rodino' di Miglione, 1906-1994* (Naples: Grimaldi & C. Editore, 2006); *Paolo Gobetti*, eds. Umberto Mosca, Paola Olivetti, and Gianni Rondolino, (Turin: Lindau, 1999); Nanni Delbecchi, *La coscienza di Mike* (Milan: Ugo Mursia Editore, 2009).

scholars willing to finally abandon auteurist approaches to these programs.⁵³ Therefore, while Italian-language secondary sources are frequently referenced throughout this dissertation, a careful reading of my secondary source literature reveals the influential role of British scholars of Italian history, including David Forgacs, John Foot, and Stephen Gundle. All of these historians of Italian culture approach television and film through the lens of cultural studies—a perspective that is wanting in Italian language literatures.

Historical Sources for Early Italian Television

This dissertation intentionally seizes on the gaps left from the institutional and theoretical differences between Anglo and Italian academies by analyzing the discourses surrounding television style; however, this research contends with the same issue that has dogged Italian-language scholarship: the lack of traditional archival sources. In the European sphere, the existence of singular, state-run bureaucratic institutions over television production usually eases the media historian's task by providing a single site in which to conduct research. But unfortunately, Italy's public service broadcaster, the RAI, did not maintain paper archives in its early years, making the process of reconstructing its television history an onerous, piece-meal process. In order to construct this history, I had to travel across the country to find individual archives where usually only a small portion of their archive pertained to television or the RAI. So while some media producers, such as Cesare Zavattini and Mario Soldati, have established archives, others such as Mike Bongiorno do not have formal archives. In addition to the archives of producers themselves, I also found other key archives that provided important contextual information. These include the archives of the President of the RAI, Giuseppe Spataro, the cultural critic Guido Aristarco, the literary agent Erich Linder, and governmental figures such as

⁵³ Michael Cramer, "Rossellini's History Lessons," *New Left Review* 78 (November 2012): 117.

American ambassador to Italy Clare Boothe Luce and Louis Cowan, who was involved in policy and in programming for CBS.

To further complicate matters, the archival record of visual media is inconsistent. Many programs were never recorded and kept, especially popular programs, which were generally seen as less culturally valuable. When programs were saved, oftentimes only brief fragments exist. The documentary program *Chi legge* was fully preserved by the RAI, but my analyses of *Lascia o raddoppia* and *Un, due, tre* rely on fragmentary visual excerpts and accounts in newspapers and magazines of the era, as well as recollections of the programs in interviews. There are a number of programs available for viewing at the RAI's headquarters, but the digital database has incomplete and inaccurate metadata, complicating the process of locating visual sources. Furthermore, the process of gaining access to these programs offsite is cumbersome. It entails a highly bureaucratic and costly process to have hard copy DVDs made; therefore, the vast majority of the images are taken from either the RAI's online site or YouTube videos in which fans graciously recorded reruns of these clips. Or instead, they are described based off of my own notes and recollections.

Given this circumstances, it is unsurprising that one need not look very far to find Italian scholars lamenting the issue of sources—both visual records and paper documentation—which continues to be a serious hindrance on the field. The words of the respected historian of Italian radio, Gianni Isola, along with those of the prominent film critic, Tatti Sanguineti, are among the more cogent and colorful expressions of the problem facing Italian media histories:

Among the limiting factors on this second phase of my research is the omnipresent issue of sources: the persistently evasive RAI—which admittedly has seen a good three boards of directors in the past two years and therefore, even if it wanted to, could not even start to consider the problem of the undeniable and unpostponable construction of a national historical archive of the RAI—and for the national archives, the daily and periodic press is irreplaceable in reconstructing

the history of phenomenon, but most accredited historiography continues to considers these sources secondary.⁵⁴

In approaching the RAI archive spanning the years between 1954 and 1961 the first reaction is astonishment. What do you mean all of it is here? What the television network conserved of its beginnings is a poor and pathetic percentage of what it produced and transmitted in those years.⁵⁵

Registering frustration at the intransigence of Italian bureaucratic organizations, the field's "secondary" status in the Italian academy, the dearth of primary audiovisual at the RAI's archives and their claims that there exists no paper documentation, Isola and Sanguineti present two compelling testimonies of the hamstrung Italian media historian.

Given the lack of manuscript and visual archives, publications of the era provide critical primary source documentation. In this dissertation, I draw on newspapers and magazines from across the ideological spectrum, including both popular sources and those targeted at intellectuals. These include film and communication journals, such as *Cinema Nuovo*, *Il Contemporaneo*, *Cronache del cinema and della televisione*, *Bianco e nero*, *Radiocorriere*, and *Vita e pensiero*, newspapers including *Corriere della sera*, *La Stampa*, and *l'Unità*, magazines including *L'Espresso*, *L'Europeo*, and *Vie Nuove*, and literary and sociological journals such as *Tempo presente*, *Encounter*, and *Nord e sud*. In addition to these sources, interviews with and the writings of key intellectual figures provide important culture context. These include the perspectives of Luigi Barzini, Luciano Bianciardi, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Mario Soldati, Dario Fo and Carlo Lizzani.

Despite the difficulties of conducting research on early Italian television, individual archives when used alongside a combination of visual analysis and discourse analysis offer a

⁵⁴ Gianni Isola, *Cari amici vicini e lontani: Storia dell'ascolto radiofonico nel primo decennio repubblicano, 1944 – 1954* (Florence: Scandicci, 1995), xiii.

⁵⁵ Tatti Sanguineti, "Televisione e cinema negli anni cinquanta," *American way of television: le origini della Tv in Italia*, ed. Gianfranco Bettetini (Florence: Sansoni Editore, 1980), 87.

distinct advantage. Analyzing early television style— its theorization and the discourses surrounding it—all us to more fully qualify claims that television acted as the force of nationalization and capitalist modernization. Therefore, rather than continuing to see television as the product of “an *inexorable* process of capitalist modernisation...[or] as the Left has seen it for so long, as simply inauthentic culture, culture sullied by being dragged through the marketplace,” this dissertation shares the approach of works across television studies which examine the role of television in the development of national identity.⁵⁶ Even if these studies may vary in terms of how they approach television, with some seeing it as an industry and others as a technology or as a visual language, works such as Shanti Kumar’s *Gandhi Meets Primetime*, Victoria Johnson’s *Heartland TV*, and Lila Abu-Lughod’s *Dramas of Nationhood* are important examples of research which goes beyond giving evidence for visual media’s role in the processes of nationalization and modernization, to also ask exactly what kind of nation and what kind of modernism television proposed.⁵⁷ This dissertation teases out exactly what sorts of visions of the citizen and what ideas of the modern that Italian television programming sought to propose to its viewers. Moreover, it elucidates precisely why it is that first-person interview and autobiography became the preferred means through which to construct this individual citizen.

Dissertation Structure and Chapter Outlines

When television programming gave everyday individuals the chance to speak directly to audiences about their lives, it structured moments that appeared to some of neorealism’s most

⁵⁶ David Forgacs, “The Making and Unmaking of Neorealism in Postwar Italy,” in *Culture of Reconstruction: European Literature, Thought and Film 1945–1950*, ed. Nicholas Hewitt (New York: St. Martins, 1989), 60.

⁵⁷ Shanti Kumar, *Gandhi Meets Primetime: Globalization and Nationalism in Indian Television* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2005); Victoria Johnson, *Heartland TV: Prime Time Television and the Struggle for U.S. Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2008); Lila Abu-Lugold, *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). Yeidy Rivero’s work has also frequently returned to these themes. See her “Broadcasting Modernity: Cuban Television, 1950–1953,” *Cinema Journal* 46.3 (Spring 2007): 3–25.

prominent figures as accomplishing something fundamentally *neorealist*. And neorealist filmmakers like Zavattini and Rossellini were not alone. Critics from across the political spectrum recognized popular television programming as placing an emphasis on the ordinary individual and as creating avenues for their participation, thereby realizing some of neorealism's own goals. Their responses suggest that the use of autobiography and live interview was a defining feature of early television culture because it was rooted in Italy's own visual experimentations with realism, not simply because it was the product of American influence. However, the perceived compatibility between American popular programming motifs and cinematic neorealism stands as a challenge to traditional conceptualizations of the postwar Italian media landscape and its place within the cultural changes of the 1950s and 60s.

The first section of this dissertation locates autobiography and live interview motifs on early Italian television as the product of a specific socio-historical configuration, identifying in particular three primary elements that contributed to their use and interpretation: 1) the identification of casual and informal modes of interaction between ordinary, working class individuals as an American, anti-fascist, *and* anti-authoritarian mode of representation; 2) the aesthetic preference, emerging out of neorealism, for representations that use "direct capture." By direct capture, I am specifically referring to media production that explicitly sought to reject the development of cinematic editing and production techniques to capture—unmediated, uninterrupted, and without any preconceived idea as to the proper cinematic subject—the diversity of the Italian national public; and 3) the emerging postwar preference for participatory forms of culture that invited the involvement of Italy's popular classes and the adaptation of Italy's broadcasting structures to be aligned with European values of public service. The sustained and frequent use of autobiography and live interview on television offered a distinct

mode of production. A number of historical forces coalesced to establish this mode, including the postwar, transatlantic realignment toward American informality and ordinariness, the aesthetic innovations theorized by cinematic neorealism, and the desire for inclusive, popular, and participatory cultural forms. All of these transformations will be developed in the first section of this dissertation.

In the second section of this dissertation, I will take on examples of programming engaged in the cultural and political transformation of Italy, including the aforementioned *Lascia o raddoppia*, the documentary series *Chi legge*, and the variety show *Un, due, tre*. In each case, we will see two common themes. First, in their project to create a post-fascist Italian society, Italian media producers employed the qualities that would be the cornerstone of this new form of modernity: the representation of working-class and disenfranchised people and doing so in a mode that was “realistic,” i.e. that involved direct, unmediated, and continuous capture. In particular, these qualities coalesced around the live television interview because it satisfied all of these conditions. These programs engaged with ordinary people on live television in ways that emphasized the informality, spontaneity, and authenticity of the exchange occurring on screen. Italian media producers and critics saw that television form—in its informal routines of dialogue and its direct capture—created a sense of participatory engagement that fundamentally destabilized their very sense of audiovisual media’s address.

Second, we will see in each case that these motifs created an uncomfortable relationship to neorealism—a point that Carlo Lizzani summarized in a 1958 interview with Paolo Gobetti at the journal *Cinema Nuovo*. While other prominent directors, such as Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni, Carlo Lizzani, and Luigi Zampa easily specified the differences they saw between

film and television, Visconti deferred. “The most important medium is humanity.”⁵⁸ In emphasizing that the exploration of humanity was the ultimate motivating force regardless of the medium of choice, Visconti identifies the engagement with his fellow citizens as the overarching, overriding feature of Italian culture into the 1960s. If, as Zavattini noted, the concept of the “people” obscured the “real sense of the gigantic human importance of this word,” visual media was to produce representations that defied any abstraction by creating solidarity between individuals.⁵⁹ At midcentury, television’s codes of autobiography and live interview felt compelling to Italians because they encouraged the participation of everyday individual in the cultural and political institutions of the nation. They were not representational forms of the immediate postwar or the Cold War; instead, as I will develop in the next chapter, their arrival comes at a moment of transition in which participatory representational forms were about a simultaneous embrace of Western European egalitarian ideals and rejection of the fascist past.

⁵⁸ Luchino Visconti, “Registi davanti alla TV,” *Cinema Nuovo* 134 (July 1 1958): 64. The Italian reads, “Il mezzo più importante è l’uomo.”

⁵⁹ Cesare Zavattini, “Domande agli uomini,” *Vie Nuove* 11.45, November 10, 1956, 19. The Italian reads, “Diciamo ‘i popoli’ senza più avere il senso reale della gigantesca imponenza umana di questa parola.”

Part I: The Socio-Historical Context of Everyman Programming

CHAPTER 1

From Reconstruction to Transition: TV in the Historiography of the Postwar

In the turn toward the live interview and first-person narration, Italian media producers suggested not only that the individual and his or her experience mattered, but that the experience of postwar democratization and modernization could be best narrated through individual, ordinary people. Figures from Zavattini and Rossellini to Bongiorno used the daily and personal experiences of the individual within the mass to engage audiences in efforts to narrate postwar culture “from below.” The central preoccupation of television and its programming was about the primacy of the experiences of ordinary Italians. Yet if Italian producers are primarily invested in narrating the experience and the identity of the Italian nation through *everyday* men, the grand narratives of postwar reconstruction and the cultural Cold War take a very different approach; they tell the history of the postwar period through the eyes of *great* men with the archives of the architects of Italy’s postwar recovery as the primary source of information. In efforts to direct the focus of postwar studies away from the well-trod subject of the American manner and expression of power over European cultural producers, I seek to critically examine the vision and the practices that Italian producers operationalized for transforming and “programming” culture. To make my intervention clear, I have subdivided this historical background in two parts: “Reconstructing Italy” and “Transitioning Italy.” These two sections are meant to call attention to the extreme gap between the historicization of television as part of

postwar *reconstruction* and what emerges when we redirect our attention toward the act of creating media in the midst of cultural *transition*. In making the distinction between the idea of “reconstructing” and “transition,” I will recontextualize the act of making media in which the Italian relationship to the fascist past was an equally determining force as the presence of an imperial America.

The history of Italian reconstruction is the traditional history of the postwar period, which is written from the privileged position of those who held the agency to “reconstruct” culture and politics through the expression of power and influence. It is a history more interested in American projections of power on the part of politicians, military advisers, policy makers, and social theorists than the processes of negotiations, translations, and reinterpretations of that power. The history of Italian reconstruction culminates with widespread adoption of television as the object believed to unitarily solidify American consumer capitalism as the foundation of Italian economic and cultural life. In contrast, the history of a “transitioning” Italy is about the national project of what it meant *for Italians* to create a democratic society. The history of a “transitioning” Italy is not about the definitive language or the untested ideas of United States Information Agency (USIA) reports about how to dominate and control through soft power. Instead, it is about the Italian response to an environment that was often dictated by these impulses. In foregrounding the role of postwar Italian programmers, the history of the Italian transition examines the rise of humanist and democratic values as a guiding principle in the production of media and their translation into representational form. These values found fruition in the representation of the ordinary and the everyday on television.

My objective in drawing a distinction between these two types of history is to call attention to the fact that Italian television has been exclusively thought of as an expression of

Christian Democratic, American, capitalist, and/or bourgeois power, i.e., as a product of *reconstruction*. However, the words and language of Italian media producers suggest instead that television offered them a unique possibility to help manage the challenges of democratization and establish a modern society founded on humanist ideals. The history of a transitioning Italy I bring forth is not meant to replace the histories of postwar reconstruction, but to act as a complement, focusing on how the mediators of Italian reconstruction used their agency in working to create a new form of culture amidst the geopolitical pressures of reconstruction. As we will see, American models certainly did influence programming and come to stand as examples for media produced during the democratic transition, but not in the ways in which we would necessarily expect.

America was a key referent and source of influence for postwar Italians, but as long as we fail to contextualize the how television's formal tendencies were envisioned through historically specific and distinct political and cultural meanings, we will remain ignorant as to why Italian producers came to favor a specific television language. Furthermore, we will be destined to place Italian neorealism in opposition to the foreign influences of Hollywood cinema or popular television genres when in reality their visual and political languages often intersected and overlapped to create a fully synthesized cultural mode, not a hybridized or indigenized one.⁶⁰ Mario Soldati (whose series *Who Reads?* will be discussed in Chapter Six) described these poignantly felt contradictions by quoting from Italian writer Carlo Levi, "the future has an old heart."⁶¹ I take up this fundamental paradox in order to unpack how the act of arriving into

⁶⁰ Chiara Ferrari writes about early Italian television as a product of indigenization in "'National Mike': Global Host and Global Formats in Early Italian Television," in *Global Television Formats: Understanding Television Across Borders* eds., Tasha Oren and Sharon Shahaf (New York: Routledge, 2012), 128-147.

⁶¹ Mario Soldati references Carlo Levi's 1956 *Il Futuro ha un Cuore Antico* in the first episode of *Chi legge?* Palermo 6 luglio 1959: Schema generale della trasmissione sulla Sicilia, Archivio Mario Soldati, Chi legge B32 UA274 sf.1, Archivi della Parola, dell'Immagine e della Comunicazione Editoriale at Università degli Studi di Milano, Milan, Italy.

modernity may have been predicated oftentimes through the novel example set by the United States, but it was expressed through an “old heart.” The lens of Italian experience always colored the production of visual culture and the preexisting aesthetic paradigms through which it came to take form. But before fully addressing the legacy of the “old heart” in television productions of the 1950s and 60s, I will first contextualize the problematic historiography of Italian television, which places television within the arc of the American modernization project for Italy while underemphasizing the Italian interpretation of modernity.

Reconstructing Italy

In 1946, Italian commentator Ignazio Silone dreamt of the day that Italy would not just be an anti-fascist society—one that opposed the ideals and structures of society under Mussolini’s rule—but a *post*-fascist society, one which had fully exited out of the cultural language introduced during the fascist experience.⁶² As World War II ended, the problem of how to make Italians transition from a fascist to a post-fascist society occupied the attention of both Italians and Allied forces. For an American policy elite gearing up for the Cold War struggle against Communism, the shorthand answer to this question was the promotion of an American model of democracy. Yet for Italy—which, since its unification in 1861, was either ruled by an monarchical government or the autocratic government of Benito Mussolini—Republican democracy was an untested and theoretical experiment rather than a natural system of governance to be embraced. In the 1946 referendum, called to decide whether Italy was to revert to monarchical control or become a republic, the populace was rather divided, with around 46% of

⁶² Ignazio Silone, “Autocritica,” *Avanti!*, July 14, 1946, unpaginated.

voters preferring monarchy to democratic governance.⁶³ Mining the gap between the American geopolitical priorities for Italy and the ambivalence of the Italian populace itself, scholars of the postwar period have produced a broad, far-reaching, and detailed history of American interventionism in Italy.

Accounts of the postwar Italian reconstruction emphasize the consolidation and solidification of the American political, economic, and cultural interests in Italy. Italy's 1948 election—one which saw both anti-communist letter writing campaigns conducted by Italian Americans and the secret funneling of American money to sway the election—helped to establish the dominance of Christian Democrat party, which would remain a hegemonic political force through the 1990s and beyond.⁶⁴ However, the nominal successes in establishing a functioning parliamentary system were offset by the fact that the young democracy was worryingly unstable, both because of internal and external pressures. A 1954 report to Clare Booth Luce, then ambassador to Italy, documents American anxiety over Italy's transition to democracy. They believed that the idea of being “democratic” was being given lip service by Italian officials, but that this was more a front than a signal of true political change: “They are all ex-fascists (everybody over the age of 10 in Italy who functioned at all in the political, economic or social life of Italy, was either involved with Fascism or was an exile or a Communist. They

⁶³ Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943 – 1988* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 98.

⁶⁴ For background on the Italian American letter writing campaign to oppose Communist rule, see Wendy L. Wall, “America's ‘Best Propagandists’: Italian Americans and the 1948 ‘Letters to Italy’ campaign,” in *Cold War Constructions: The Political Culture of United States Imperialism, 1945-1966* ed., Christian G. Appy (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 89-109. Kaeten Mistry develops the strategy of the American government in trying to encourage and sway the democratic process in the 1948 election. See “The Case for Political Warfare: Strategy, Organization and U.S. Involvement in the 1948 Italian Election,” *Cold War History* 6.3 (August 2006): 301-329. Clare Booth Luce, the American ambassador to Italy between 1953 and 1956, openly discussed funneling secret campaign money to sway the Italian elections in favor of the Christian Democrat Party. Clare Booth Luce. Interview by John Luter. Transcript. January 11, 1968. Columbia University Oral History Collection, Columbia University, New York, NY, 42.

are “Democrats” now more often for expediency than out of conviction).”⁶⁵ Internally, the Italian political elite’s philosophical commitment to the democratic process was questionable, necessitating involvement in the peninsula for American political elites.

Externally, the politics of containment meant that Italy was to become an important front in the fight against communism. Positioned between Eastern and Western Europe, the potential for relapse in the transition to a fully functioning democracy was embodied not just by latent fascism but more poignantly by communism. The sheer size of Italy’s communist voting bloc—consistently weighing in at around 30% of the voting public throughout the 1950s and 60s—gave force to the idea that Italy was not naturally a part of the Western liberal democratic mindset, but rather had to be converted to it.⁶⁶ The diplomatic cables during the tenure of Clare Boothe Luce demonstrate the extent to which the United States government prioritized and worked to consolidate American power and influence on the peninsula, a position first articulated in the formation of the NATO alliance between the United States and her Western European allies. Arguing that the alliance was “not a natural concept, but rather a structured, political one,” historian Ronald Steele suggests that these political agreements were important in the quest to make Italy “Atlantic,” both politically and culturally.⁶⁷ Rather than a uniform and united notion of Western Europe, the idea of an ideologically and culturally consistent group of European nations took shape through security demands that precipitated the formation of the NATO alliance; NATO never simply reflected pre-existing affinities. Emphasizing the lack of either geographic or ideologically continuity between Italy and the core NATO members, historian

⁶⁵ “An Inquest on Communism, 1954,” Briefing Reports, Box 632, Folder 6 Clare Boothe Luce Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (Washington, D.C.).

⁶⁶ For a shorthand table of Italian voting percentages from 1948 to 1992, see Maurizio Ferrera and Elisabetta Gualmini, eds. *Rescued by Europe: Social and Labour Market Reforms in Italy from Maastricht to Berlusconi* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004), 19.

⁶⁷ Ronald Steele, “How Europe Became Atlantic: Walter Lippmann and the New Geography of the Atlantic Community,” in *Defining the Atlantic Community: Culture, Intellectuals, and Policies in the Mid-Twentieth Century*, ed. Marco Mariano (London: Routledge, 2010), 13.

Mario Del Pero highlights the fact that American foreign policy makers considered Italy politically questionable and sought to “[rescue] Italy from the ambiguous state of ‘frontier country’ that, during the cold war, represented the worst environmental condition for the survival of a stable democracy.”⁶⁸ The NATO alliance and its promise of protection was used as a political tool to encourage Italy to become “Western,” forming a stopgap against any potential progress that could be made by Communism. It is commonly presumed that these arrangements created an Atlantic identity; yet I see them more as structural forces that frame the mutual, transatlantic turn toward a specific set of cultural routines, of which one of these routines was Everyman’s Broadcasting.

As the geopolitical battle between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. escalated, the Italian political class became increasingly polarized. The dominant political parties—the Christian Democrats and the Communists—moved from being anti-fascist allies during World War II, fighting together as *partigiani* against Italian fascist and German occupying forces, to find themselves in an increasingly hostile battle for political control. As the United States increasingly sought to bolster the position of the Christian Democrat party, the divisions between these formerly allied groups increased, especially in light of the rhetorical struggle of the Cold War. The Italian Communist Party was marginalized from access to governing power and thus amped up its anti-American rhetoric so that presumably after the war’s end, the spirit of collaboration between Catholic and Communist forces, not only militarily or politically, but also culturally, erodes throughout the 1950s and evaporates by the mid-1960s.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Mario Del Pero, “When the High Seas Finally Reached Italian Shores: Italy’s Inclusion in the Atlantic *Communitas*,” in *Defining the Atlantic Community: Culture, Intellectuals, and Policies in the Mid-Twentieth Century*, ed. Marco Mariano (London: Routledge, 2010), 170.

⁶⁹ See Ginsborg’s section on “Ditching the Left,” 110-120.

However—and this is key to understanding Everyman’s Broadcasting as a form of visual experimentation that while not politically homogeneous was nonetheless attractive across political lines—new scholarship is beginning to question these old dichotomies. Historian Luigi Bruti Liberati makes clear that the role of political orientation in the acceptance or rejection of American cultural ideals have been overstated:

In a country politically divided into two opposite camps, one might presume that the left was solidly anti-American, whilst the centre-right was ardently pro-American. This picture is of course oversimplified. The fact of the matter is that the criterion of political affiliation is not applicable when confronting the issue of...modernization.⁷⁰

Just as the Italian Right expressed concern about American cultural and political values, so too did those on the Left oftentimes hold a double view of the United States as both a geopolitical enemy and a cultural model to emulate. The legacy of cultural cross-contamination between “white” and “red” anti-fascists during the war extends throughout the 1950s, even if histories of Italian reconstruction often see the domestic politics of Italy in stark geopolitical terms.

Alongside Luigi Bruti Liberati’s questioning of these supposedly hardened political positions, recent film histories have also questioned traditional political genealogies that supposedly dictated cultural production. For instance, while most scholars still agree that cinematic neorealism arose out of an Italian response to fascism and the country’s embrace of democracy, recent work questions the strict connection between the film movement and the postwar Italian Left.⁷¹ Although neorealism came to be staunchly defended by the Italian Communist Party, the “postwar gloss” of neorealism as an exclusively Leftist cinema

⁷⁰ Luigi Bruti Liberati, “Witch-hunts and *Corriere della sera*: A Conservative Perception of American Political Values in Cold War Italy, the 1950s,” *Cold War History* 11.1 (February 2011): 69-70.

⁷¹ Luca Caminati, “The Role of Documentary Film in the Formation of the Neorealist Cinema,” in *Global Neorealism: The Transnational History of a Film Style*, eds. Saverio Giovacchini and Robert Sklar (Jackson, MI: University of Mississippi Press, 2012), 55. The original article was published in Italian as “Alberto Cavalcanti e il ‘documentario narrativo’: il ruolo della tradizione documentaristica nella formazione del cinema neorealista,” *Bianco e nero* 71.567 (May-August 2010): 57-71; Daniela Treveri-Gennari’s *Post-War Italian Cinema: American Interventions, Vatican Interests* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

“obscured...the multivalency of realist discourse—its use by the Right as well as the Left” and the Center.⁷² Neorealism’s “multivalent” political origins did not represent a fleeting moment of collaboration at the beginning of neorealism’s project; rather, neorealism’s humanistic vision of self in a democratic state has a much longer and broader historical trajectory, one that drew upon Catholic culture as much as it did from Gramscian and Marxist theorization of culture.⁷³

Neorealism’s multivalency suggests a certain degree of common cause that predated the strong economic, political, and cultural pressures that the United States exerted over the peninsula.

Despite the potential receptivity to its cultural values, America’s fears about Italy as a potential weak link in its geostrategic plan rationalized its continued presence and investment in the peninsula. As one 1954 U.S. State Department briefing about the threat of communism stated,

The stakes are enormously high. Because of Italy’s geographic and strategic position, her succumbing to the Reds through political agitation, intimidation and strikes would represent the Soviet Union’s most important victory since war’s end...It would mean nullifying all the Atlantic Allies’ defense plans with their control over the Mediterranean.⁷⁴

More than diplomatic agreements or intervention into elections, it was the European Recovery Program (ERP), or Marshall Plan, that most prominently established America’s presence. While the explicit purpose of the Marshall Plan was to offer American aid and economic investment in Europe after the destruction of World War II crippled the economies of many European states, the ERP functioned both as an economic and an ideological force exacting enormous influence over Italian cultural norms.

⁷² Ruth Ben-Ghiat, “Fascism, Writing, and Memory: The Realist Aesthetic in Italy, 1930 – 1950,” *Journal of Modern History* 67.3 (September 1995): 642.

⁷³ Daniela Treveri Gennari, “Did Neorealism start in church? Catholicism, cinema, and the case of Mario Soldati’s *Chi e’ Dio?*” *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 8.2 (June 2010): 199.

⁷⁴ “An Inquest on Communism, 1954.”

Rather than enacting hard, political power, the Marshall Plan allowed the United States to exert cultural influence over Italy. David Ellwood describes the ERP as being designed to “get close as possible to the people it was benefitting—at all levels of society, and particularly in relations between the citizen and the state—in order to channel attitudes, mentalities and expectations in the direction Americans understood, the direction of mass production and mass consumption modernisation.”⁷⁵ In arguing for these twin intentions of the Marshall Plan, Ellwood’s work has sparked a large and expansive subfield detailing the way in which the “American way of life” became accepted and implemented in Italian society. While this literature is too broad to engage with in detail, I do want to outline the way in which these studies have examined the economic impact of ERP funds, alongside the explicit ideological campaigns that accompanied it.

There is no shortage of work detailing the many arenas through which the ERP, once described as “the greatest international propaganda operation ever seen in peacetime,” disseminated American influence throughout the Italian peninsula.⁷⁶ Historians of the postwar period have documented the creation of white propaganda campaigns by American governmental entities including the Economic Cooperation Administration, the Voice of America, the United States Information Agencies, and even NATO.⁷⁷ However, it is increasingly clear these campaigns to “sell” the political and cultural values of the United States involved the

⁷⁵ David W. Ellwood, “Italian Modernism and the Propaganda of the Marshall Plan,” in *The Art of Persuasion: Political Communication in Italy from 1945 to the 1990s*, eds. Luciano Cheles and Lucio Sponza (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 28.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁷⁷ More prominent and recent work on these propaganda campaigns include Bernadette Whelan, “Marshall Plan Publicity and Propaganda in Italy and Ireland, 1947–1951,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television* 23.4 (2003): 311–328; Linda Risso, “Propaganda on Wheels: The NATO Traveling Exhibitions in the 1950s and 1960s,” *Cold War History* 11.1 (February 2011): 9 – 25; Simona Tobia, *Advertising America: The United States Information Service in Italy (1945–1956)* (Milan: LED, 2008), which covers American propaganda efforts from the Psychological Warfare Branch during the war through to programming on the RAI in the early 1960s. White propaganda differentiates itself from black propaganda in that the viewer both knows the source of the information and recognizes it as propaganda.

participation and active cooperation of Italians. Italian documentary filmmakers relied on both their Fascist era precedents and their interactions with Americans to produce a series of newsreels and television documentaries aimed at re-conceiving of Italian identity postwar. That Italians were often left in authorial control complicates the notion that these ideological campaigns were primarily American in nature.⁷⁸

In addition to the propaganda campaigns orchestrated by elements of the United States government and NATO, there was also the influential role of Hollywood cinema, which, though less ideological explicit, was more widespread. During the final years of the fascist *ventennio*, Hollywood imports were banned altogether, the result being that, after the war, Italian theaters were inundated by years of backlogged films from Hollywood's studio era. Gian Piero Brunetta describes how movie theaters provided a new repertoire of ideas. These films were "a large-scale focal point of convergence, meeting and mixing...[the new myths from America] were re-worked on the basis of meters and rhythms never heard before, never seen in any other form of popular spectacle...from 1945 on Hollywood's new march on Rome was immediately felt as an overwhelming material presence."⁷⁹ The dominance of American films in Italian theaters was an exciting and spectacular visual presence for Italian cinemagoers, and with this new presence came new ideas of social mobility and democratic access. The glamour of Hollywood stars not only offered a model of "socio-cultural possibility" offering a "simple and socially innocuous vocabulary which channel the dilemmas of modern man," but, according to Victoria De Grazia, Hollywood cinema also exhibited "a widening, democratic influence, a sense of the need to

⁷⁸ Regina Longo, "Marshall Plan Films in Italy, 1948-1955: Cinema as Soft Power" (PhD diss., University of California at Santa Barbara, 2012) and Maria Adelaide Frabotta, "Government Propaganda: Official Newsreels and Documentaries in the 1950s," in *The Art of Persuasion: Political Communication in Italy from 1945 to the 1900s*, ed. Luciano Cheles and Lucio Sponza (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 49-61.

⁷⁹ Gian Piero Brunetta, "The Long March of American Cinema in Italy: From Fascism to the Cold War," in *Hollywood in Europe: Experiences of a Cultural Hegemony*, eds. David E. Ellwood and Rob Kroes (Amsterdam: Amerika Instituut, 1994), 143.

involve the masses in visions of excitement and plenty.”⁸⁰ Hollywood films then offered a complement to the white propaganda from the United States and the *Settimana Incom* newsreels that proceeded screenings. The overall consequence of this combined influx was that the United States came to represent an increasingly tight set of values and codes—some of which have not yet been accurately identified. These will be explored in detail in the following chapters.

Hollywood’s optimistic representations of social mobility and new democratic access to wealth would have seemed farfetched and unbelievable if it were not for the economic consequences of the Marshall Plan felt across the Italian peninsula. If, in the 1940s, Italians were exposed to narratives about acquisition and social mobility, the 1950s were a time in which these visual images could potentially be actualized. By the 1950s American leaders increasingly wanted to channel the discussion away from Marshall Plan “aid” and toward “economic investment.”⁸¹ In 1954, the same year that television officially began in Italy, the American ambassador to Italy, Clare Boothe Luce, went on an aggressive campaign to reset the American relationship with Italians who had, in her opinion, become too reliant on American charity and thus had not been compelled to give American businesses adequately beneficial investment terms. In her April 21st address to the Milan chapter of the American Chamber of Commerce, Boothe Luce encouraged Italian businessmen to take advantage of American corporations looking to expand abroad.

In the continually expanding American economy, individuals and corporations every year set aside billions of dollars for investment enlargements of the capital structure...As you are well aware the American investor and the American technician will, if they are wanted, be found ready to help in this work of

⁸⁰ Victoria De Grazia, “La sfida dello ‘star system’ L’americanismo nella formazione della cultura di massa in Europa, 1920-1965,” *Quaderni storici* 58.1 (April 1985): 95 and 98. Translated as Victoria De Grazia, “Mass Culture and Sovereignty: The American Challenge to European Cinemas, 1920 – 1960,” *Journal of Modern History* 61 (March 1989): 53-87; Stephen Gundle, “Hollywood Glamour in Postwar Italy,” in *Histories of Leisure* ed. Rudy Koshar (Oxford: Berg 2002), 345.

⁸¹ “Aid to Italy,” Briefing Reports, Box 632, Folder 4, Clare Boothe Luce Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (Washington, D.C.).

expanding Italy's economy. In this month of April alone, there are or will be in Italy no fewer than 146 American industrialists, who are traveling about the country, visiting the Milan Fair and the automobile show here, surveying the economic activity of the country, looking for investment opportunity.⁸²

Her speech, which scolds Italian businessmen for their failures to fully take advantage of American capital investment, was part of a large diplomatic and political background that informed Italy's eventual economic boom of the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Victoria de Grazia's *Irresistible Empire* makes precisely this argument in documenting the influence of consumerism in transforming postwar Italian culture. Her landmark text highlights the extent to which American power crossed from traditional domains of diplomacy into the realms of culture and consumerism, operating as an "'empire by invitation,' an 'empire of consensus,' or an 'empire of fun.'"⁸³ Rather than exacting control through hard political power, this shift was not only novel but brought about new modes of consumer expression and consumer lifestyles.⁸⁴ Although underwritten by the Marshall Plan and its postwar recovery funds, the influence of American business elites, advertising professionals, and academics helped pave the way for the construction of a consumer society in Italy which evoked American Fordism as both a distribution model and a consumption regime. The idea of Fordism became a source of debate amongst postwar Europeans—a point that Mary Nolan makes in discussing the ambivalent and incomplete legacy of American economic models in Europe.⁸⁵

The investment of American corporations to increase production, the re-tooling of European distribution methods, the opening of consumer credit, and the visual impact of

⁸² Clare Boothe Luce's April 21, 1954 address to the Milan chapter of the American Chamber of Commerce, Press: USIS Daily Wire, 1953-4, Box 638, Folder 14 Clare Boothe Luce Papers, Library of Congress (Washington, D.C.).

⁸³ Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2005), 6.

⁸⁴ In addition to De Grazia's chapter on the subject, Kristin Ross's works on the role of American Fordism in the modernization of France is a useful parallel. *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).

⁸⁵ Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

narratives of social mobility, all worked to create a more individualized forms of consumerism that according to Emanuela Scarpellini stood in stark contrast to fascism's collective goods and services: "popular trips to the beaches by train, free theater or cinema shows, entertainment initiatives in favour of workers and peasants."⁸⁶ The influence of American diplomatic efforts and the work of American business combined to help transform the country in a matter of a few years, both in terms of pure GDP and daily working and consumer habits. As Italian cultural critic Luciano Bianciardi wryly noted, "for everything that there is an average of, it grew."⁸⁷ For, by the early 1960s, Italy in many ways was a "consumer's republic," with cultural belonging being expressed through the participation in and consumption of products such as Hollywood films, kitchen appliances, and automobiles.⁸⁸

As represented in accepted histories of the Italian reconstruction, years of foreign economic investment, as well as diplomatic and cultural influence on the part of the United States, reach a crescendo in one final event which closes the postwar period: the "economic miracle" of the late 1950s and early 1960s. And within these histories, there is no greater symbol of this transformation than television. Alongside rapid modernization, industrialization, and internal migration (both from South to North and from countrysides into the cities) came both new economic models and a new form of culture, i.e., mass culture. It is in the symbolic

⁸⁶ Emanuela Scarpellini, "The Invention of Modern Consumers and Consumer Credit in 1950-1960's Italy," *Entreprises et Histoire* 59 (June 2010): 95. While Scarpellini explores the rise of consumer credit, Adam Arvidsson discusses how the idea of mobility was expressed within Italian advertising campaigns of the period. "From Counterculture to Consumer Culture: Vespa and the Italian Youth Market, 1958-78," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 1 (2001): 47-71. Scarpellini also provides a more detailed account than De Grazia about shifts to the Italian distribution models. *Comprare all'americana. Le origini della grande distribuzione in Italia, 1945-1971* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001).

⁸⁷ Luciano Bianciardi, *La vita agra* (Milan: Bompiani 2001 [1962]), 177. The original Italian reads "Tutto quello che c'è di media è aumentato." Bianciardi's *The Bitter Life* documents and critiques the transition to 1960s boom culture.

⁸⁸ I am borrowing Lizabeth Cohen's term to highlight the extent to which new forms of consumerism in Italy coincided with the rise of liberal democracy. *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage, 2003). Guido Craniz documents the shifts in Italian consumerism in *Storia del miracolo italiano: cultura, identità, trasformazioni fra anni cinquanta e sessanta* (Rome: Donzelli, 1996), 138-48.

association of television with the economic boom and mass culture that the methodological and interpretative lenses of the histories of Italian reconstruction become crucial for my analysis. The singularity with which scholars read the postwar modernization project profoundly colors the historical interpretation of television in Italy. In these histories, television becomes the culmination of American diplomatic and propagandistic expressions of power. Television is the means through which the Christian Democrats, as the political party that the U.S. worked to bolster until the collapse of the First Italian Republic, solidified their political power. Television also becomes the final lynchpin in the postwar industrialization and modernization campaigns focusing on the creation of a Fordist consumer economy. Entangling the history of Italian television with the postwar reconstruction is problematic because the effects of television are always political and economic, while its cultural work is largely disregarded. Moreover, by encasing the narrative of television's emergence exclusively within the history of the reconstruction, these histories fail to explore the issue of Italian *agency*.

If the Italian economic miracle was a byproduct of a decade of American intervention and politico-economic power, television was the force of cultural homogenization used to complete American hegemony. According to historian John Foot, “mass culture signifies all that was brought by the boom—and above all by television and from the USA; the ‘enemy’ for so many intellectuals on the Italian Left during and after the ‘miracle.’”⁸⁹ Foot’s incisive essays on Italian working-class cultures of the postwar period underscore the extent to which television is read as the instigator of mass culture (and by extension the culmination of the American influence).

Foot explains that

State television...is normally assigned a central role by historians and cultural commentators as the ‘death’ of traditional cultures—peasant and worker alike.

⁸⁹ John Foot, “Mass Cultures, Popular Cultures and the Working Class in Milan, 1950-70,” *Social History* 24.2 (May 1999): 136.

Television, it is argued, helped to spread, rapidly and within the home, consumerist values—mass cultures—which replaced and overpowered all others... This ‘analysis’ has now become an accepted truth in Italy. The role of television has been magnified into an all-powerful precursor of bourgeois (modern) mass consumer culture.⁹⁰

Arriving at the end of the postwar reconstruction, television is positioned as the triumph of mass culture and consumerist values over local culture, and television also comes to symbolize the ideological power of the United States and its Christian Democrat allies over all of Italy.

Most histories of the Italian television, working from the framework provided by the historiography of postwar reconstruction, do little to differentiate their interpretation of television from the influential position articulated by Pier Paolo Pasolini in his stinging and often-cited 1963 article entitled “Italy? A Shack in which the Owners Can Buy a Television.” Equating the logics of industrial capitalism with television, Pasolini wrote that “from our perspective the industrialized are humanly unknowable. One produces and one consumes, there it is. And the world will be exactly like television is today.”⁹¹ As a sort of sage of the Italian Left, Pasolini’s comments were infectious among Italian scholars. And many histories of Italian television, especially those from a political economy perspective, still replicate, to varying extents, Pasolini’s own conflation of the economic changes of industrialization with their cultural effect. Italian television criticism also continues to strongly reassert Pasolini’s idea that television programming is fundamentally homogenizing and dehumanizing, not to mention massifying, nationalizing, and Americanizing. Instead, the live interviews and autobiographical narration of *Everyman’s Broadcasting* suggest something altogether different. This form of programming

⁹⁰ Ibid., 145.

⁹¹ Pier Paolo Pasolini, “L’Italia? Un tugurio i cui proprietari sono riusciti a comprarsi la televisione,” in *Interviste corsare sulla politica e sulla vita, 1955 – 1975*, ed. Michele Gulinucci (Rome: Liberal Atlantide, 1995 [1963]), 59. The Italian reads “Gli industrializzati dalla nostra prospettive ci riescono umanamente in conoscibili. Si produrrà e si consumerà, ecco. E il mondo sarà esattamente come oggi la Televisione—questa degenerazione dei sensi umani.”

focused its attention on the ordinary and the everyday experiences of a mass Italian audience, but it specifically intended to pluralize, differentiate, and individualize.

In conflating the mechanicity of industrial capitalism and mass production with the experience of television, Pasolini became the touchstone for numerous histories of Italian television from which my own analysis of early television form seeks to move away. These interpretations of Italian television history have been enormously consistent over time. Take, for example, the way in which Francesco Pinto discusses the role of television in his 1977

Intellectuals and TV in the 1950s.

At the beginning of the 1950s, [television] immediately created an organic relationship between the new offering of cultural products and the organization of workers in the home appliance industries, where the new mass production determines the necessity of synchronizing the market through new techniques that re-articulate the internal structure of the factory and the relationship between the work force and the product.⁹²

Like Pasolini, Pinto points to a nebulous relationship between television, mass culture, and the nature of work experience under industrial capitalism.

Pinto's perspective fits within the dominant ideological and theoretical trends of the 1960s and 70s but, curiously, this same tendency to conflate television with the industrialization of labor still dominates Italian television histories today. Franco Monteleone's *History of the RAI from the Allies to the DC, 1944-1954* has this to say about television's origins:

With the beginning of the television, the RAI becomes not only a colossal factory of consumer goods, but also a strong financier able to have, with the job orders, contracts, and the development investments, etc., a considerable influence over full sectors of economic interests.⁹³

⁹² Francesco Pinto, preface to *Intellettuali e TV negli anni '50*, ed. Francesco Pinto (Rome: Savelli, 1977), 19.

⁹³ Franco Monteleone, *Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia. Un secolo di costume, società e politica* (Milan: Tascabili Marsilio, 2001), 275. Alongside Aldo Grasso's *Storia della televisione italiana: I 50 anni della televisione* (Milan: Garzanti, 1992), Monteleone's text is the definitive Italian television history akin to Eric Barnouw's 1975 *Tube of Plenty*.

Collapsing the boom in consumer goods with the influence of the RAI as an industrial capitalist force, Monteleone's 2001 publication makes this same connection between television and the rise of mass industrial culture, completing the trajectory in which television continues to be read as the creator of (or at least a strong contributing force to) mass culture.

In addition to the idea of television as an industry, the literature about Italian television creates a very strong association between certain specific programs and the rise of consumer capitalism. Media historian and theorist Jérôme Bourdon critiques the way in which European scholars of television tend to read specific genres and other “ghosts of the popular” as agents of consumerism against which traditional public service programming are heralded as the defenders of national culture. These genres in turn become the means through which to explain American influence, where the United States is exclusively read as the source of commercialism, consumerism, and lowbrow entertainment—a pattern that dominates interpretations of early Italian television.⁹⁴ For example, Stephen Gundle's 1986 “The Americanization of Everyday Life” attempts to link the rise of quiz show genre to the explosive growth of consumer culture in Italy, arguing that “television inevitably reflected and more importantly promoted the advent of consumer society” because it was able to offer viewers “the habits of consumption, the values and styles to which the style of Italian life seemed to have to be measured.”⁹⁵ Similarly, Adam Arvidsson's 2003 *Marketing Modernity* outlines television's central position as part of the “‘standard package’ of mass consumption,” describing how programming, specifically advertising and quiz shows, provided a model of consumerism and modernity.

There were programmes like *il Carosello*, a sequence of three-minute dramatizations of consumer goods...*Campanile sera*, where families from small

⁹⁴ Jérôme Bourdon, “Old and New Ghosts: Public Service Television and the Popular A-History,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 7.3 (2004): 283-304.

⁹⁵ Stephen Gundle, “L’Americanizzazione del quotidiano: televisione e consumismo nell’Italia degli anni cinquanta,” *Quaderni storici* 21.62 (August 1986): 563.

towns competed for domestic appliances and fully equipped ‘American kitchens’; *Lascia o raddoppia*, where, guided by the suave Italo-American hybrid Mike Bongiorno, the most abundant riches became available to the quaintest and seemingly most useless of talents, and consumer goods represented the wonders of an affluent and civilized modern life in principle accessible to anyone.⁹⁶

Overwhelmingly, historians captured television programming of the 1950s in a narrative that sees the images and stories it told as proof of modernity’s arrival and irresistible impact—the exact type of historical account that feeds into modernity’s own narrative about itself and its singular path toward progress.⁹⁷

In his analysis of contemporary Italian television studies, John Foot cogently captures how television’s far-reaching effects are oftentimes inadequately supported. According to Foot, “the fact that it was capitalism itself which was the main leveler of cultures, not one aspect of the capitalist cultural market—television—has escaped the attention of most.”⁹⁸ In reading television as the epitome of American-led capitalist modernization, historians have effectively quashed any alternative, more nuanced readings of Italian programming. For they have neglected to recognize that, while the parameters of transnational exchange were unequal, the exchange itself required European mediators who “found no better symbolic resource [for their sense of identity] than America.”⁹⁹ The challenge is to recuperate the way in which formal experimentation and exchange emerged out of the particularities of the Italian cultural context.

Although in many respects television’s everyman was synonymous with being a modern man, its

⁹⁶ Adam Arvidsson, *Marketing Modernity: Italian Advertising from Fascism to Postmodernity* (Routledge: London, 2003), 83.

⁹⁷ In speaking of Egyptian television’s relationship to modernity, Lila Abu-Lughod reminds scholars to be “wary of telling unilinear stories of personhood or the coming to modernity” in *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 113-114. Timothy Mitchell strikes a similar chord when he argues that representation is not only “the source of modernity’s enormous capacity for replication and expansion” but also the “source of the liability that opens [modernity] up to rearticulation and displacement,” in the introduction to *Questions of Modernity* ed. Timothy Mitchell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), xiii-xiv.

⁹⁸ John Foot, “Inside the Magic Rectangle: Recent Research on the History of Television,” *Contemporary European History* 11.3 (July 2002): 470.

⁹⁹ Jérôme Bourdon, “Imperialism, Self-Inflicted? On the Americanizations of Television in Europe,” in *We Europeans?: Media Representations, Identities*, ed. William Uricchio (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2003), 94.

articulation depended upon Italian formulations of ethics and aesthetics, most prominently the lasting legacy of Italian neorealism.

Transitioning Italy

Previous studies of postwar reconstruction offer us a picture of postwar Italy in which Americanization and modernization too often become synonymous forces that were enabled by the visual images of American propaganda campaigns, Hollywood cinema, and television. The studies of the Italian reconstruction take varying stances on the role of American power. Some, such as Simona Tobia's 2008 study of American propaganda efforts from the OWI to the USIA, work explicitly from the singular idea of Americanization. Others work from a compromised idea of Americanization where, as Victoria de Grazia suggests, the United States functions as empire by consensus. Increasingly, studies of the Italian reconstruction take the step to emphasize that Italians were, as David Ellwood notes, "free to resist the projection of American power in all its forms," that is, free to contest American interventions.¹⁰⁰ Despite these nuances in approach to the issue of agency and power, methodologically these studies tend to be preoccupied more with American forces—American figures and their actions in the political, diplomatic, economic, cultural, and ideological arena—rather than Italian responses. Taken as a whole, these studies give the impression that the reconstruction of Italy was more the work of Americans officials than Italian themselves; the historiographic accounts of postwar Italy are by in large framed through the archives of those who fantasized about expressions of American

¹⁰⁰ David W. Ellwood, "The Propaganda of the Marshall Plan in Italy in a Cold War Context," in *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe, 1945-1960*, eds. Giles Scott-Smith and Hans Krabbendam (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003), 235.

power in an era marked by the enthusiastic drive to produce an “American century.”¹⁰¹ Even when the histories of Italian reconstruction clearly point to the limitations of American influence, they still tend to write an overdetermined narrative about American values acting as the guiding conceptual force in every arena of Italian life.¹⁰²

Therefore, the challenge to historians is to recognize the varied and uneven expression of American influence across culture, politics, and economics, and to understand that this process depended on the responses and receptions of that influence. Mary Nolan’s *The Transatlantic Century*, a newly produced survey text of Euro-American relations in the twentieth century, explicitly attempts to differentiate between economic, political and cultural influences within Europe and the various actors within those camps. According to Nolan,

American economic might did not automatically translate into political power or cultural influence, and hard military and diplomatic power and soft economic and cultural power did not always move in tandem. Transatlantic perceptions of shared interests, incompatibilities, and animosities were seldom clear-cut or stable.¹⁰³

In documenting the lopsidedness of American-influenced modernization, Nolan’s revision of U.S.-European relations makes abundantly clear that, even at the peak of American power, the presence of America cannot be equated with impact. As John Tomlinson astutely notes, qualifying that impact “may be impossible to grasp in the interrogation of texts and audiences: it may involve a more complex analysis of cultural ‘mediation’ than what the research programmes

¹⁰¹ Henry Luce most vocally proposed this idea of internationalism based on American ideals in “The American Century,” *Life*, February 17, 1941, 61-65.

¹⁰² For example of this tendency, see Paolo Scrivano, “Signs of Americanization in Italian Domestic Life,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 40.2 (April 2005): 317-340. Scrivano quickly switches his language from writing about “Americanization” to recognizing the resistance to change on the part of Italians. De Grazia’s chapter on the supermarket also acknowledges the resistance to American models, despite being placed within an overall framework of selling American culture to Italians.

¹⁰³ Mary Nolan, *The Transatlantic Century: Europe and America, 1890-2010* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 2.

of media specialists have so far offered.”¹⁰⁴ It may entail, in other words, a reading of how Italian media producers interpreted and practiced the paradigms of their craft.

Nowhere is this type of research more imperative than with Italian television, since it has been most strongly (mis)understood as the force of Americanization and modernization. Yet the centrality of the translative process also emerges as we consider the specificities of how television was tied to, and yet independent from, avenues of American influence. The first Italian television studio was funded by the European Recovery Program. But as the RAI worked to improve and expand its radio and television network and services, it was only able to rely on the subscription fees as the base of its income.¹⁰⁵ As a result, the entity quickly became strapped for cash—particularly in the years around 1953 until 1958.¹⁰⁶ As a result, the budget-conscious public service entity came to rely on USIA documentary and news services and VOA language courses to fill hours of open airtime. However, while USIA programming can be read as a conduit for American political ideologies, these areas of influence by no means tell the full story. My research indicates that, beyond producing some documentary programs and organizing meetings with American television producers, U.S. governmental forces were not involved with the day-to-day programming of foreign broadcasts—a claim supported by Italian research as well.¹⁰⁷ While the imperial nature of American power is clear to see in detailing the inventions

¹⁰⁴ John Tomlinson, “Media Imperialism,” in *Planet TV: A Global Television Reader*, eds. Lisa Parks and Shanti Kumar (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 126.

¹⁰⁵ John Secondari (Assistant Chief Information Division of the Economic Cooperation Administration) letter to Giuseppe Spataro (Presidente RAI), July 15, 1949, Fasciolo 111, Documento 365, Ministero delle poste I, Fondo Giuseppe Spataro, Istituto Luigi Sturzo (Rome, Italy).

¹⁰⁶ Speech to the XVIII Mostra della radio e della televisione, Fasciolo 116, Documento 117, (23 September 1953) Ministero delle poste I Fondo Giuseppe Spataro, Istituto Luigi Sturzo (Rome, Italy); See series of 1953 letters about RAI budgets, including 13B/18, NBC, 1953; 13C/30, RAI, 1953 Fondo Erich Linder, Fondazione Mondadori (Milan, Italy).

¹⁰⁷ “It may be said that, on the whole, RAI-TV makes wide use of American material, but this is bought from commercial sources... Some years ago, USIS helped RAI-TV much more than it does now.” “A Study Exploring USIS Activities in Italy: A Report to the United States Information Agency,” Records of the U.S. Information Agency, 1900 – 2003, Record Group 306, Box 20 (S-11-63), National Archives and Records Administration (Washington, D.C.). For documentation about the training of Italian professionals, see Fasciolo 121; documento

of the State Department and the impact Marshall Plan in Europe, it is fundamentally misguided to use instances of direct American influence on early Italian television to characterize all Italian programming. Traditional historiographic approaches simply do not offer an adequate framework through which to understand the expression of American power in instances where the U.S. government took a more “hands off” approach, as was the case with television.

Although documentary, news, and education programs may have been directly distributed onto Italian television screens from the United States, Italians lacked concrete examples of American popular, dramatic, and comedic television programming. Gianfranco Bettetini’s 1980 *American Way of Television* argues precisely this:

Americanism held a great deal of appeal in the declarations and perhaps in the intentions of television producers...but it did not translate formally in any concrete way because no one in reality had exact knowledge of that area of communication...the transmissions of the RAI remade very little from [American] models...[they applied] American programming in a more imaginary than substantive way.¹⁰⁸

Bettetini’s claim is further supported by the 1964 documentary, *Ten Years Earlier*, produced to celebrate the ten-year anniversary of the RAI’s first official broadcast. In this documentary, programmers and producers of television’s experimental and early years describe the uncertainty with which Italian television production employees approached their work. An actress on many of the early costume dramas forced the issue when she reminded viewers that “no one had seen television except Pugliese,” referring to the Artistic Director of the RAI who had spend three months learning television production in New York. Television came to them as second-knowledge from a colleague or from compendiums of translated American anthology drama

332 Ministero delle poste I, Fondo Giuseppe Spataro, Istituto Luigi Sturzo (Rome, Italy) and Multinational TV Seminars, Box 17; Box 50 Louis Cowan Collection, Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Collection (New York, NY).

¹⁰⁸ Gianfranco Bettetini, introduction to *American way of television: Le origini della Tv in Italia*, ed. Gianfranco Bettetini (Florence: Sansoni, 1980), 7-8.

screenplays, not as a tangible example to follow.¹⁰⁹ Both Bettetini and the RAI's documentary highlight the extent to which television existed as an imaginary object—influenced by their own perception and interpretations of American ideals—more than a concrete example with a specific formal language that they sought to replicate.

While models of American news and documentary programming were a reference for Italian media producers, these examples were almost completely absent in other genres. As a result, transatlantic perceptions of television were filled with ambiguity and instability, sometimes being more informed by imagination than reality, while at other times American and foreign models were completely ignored. Reflecting on the first decade of television production in Italy, television producer Mario Carpitella recalls that while Italy received “technical information” from the U.S., it certainly didn't import “structural or organizational models.”¹¹⁰ American television was “too advanced for the economic and production possibilities of our country.”¹¹¹ While television arose out of a culture where the presence of America was often a potent and determining factor, it was not uniform or omnipresent across all arenas of social life. Given that early television programming was founded on mediation between familiar referents, second-hand translations of foreign models, and their own ideas of the local conditions on which television should be based, television programming cannot simply be framed as project of the Italian reconstruction where America imposed direct influence. Privileged theories and histories of Italian reconstruction point to the undeniable presence of American culture, which no doubt impacted the thinking and the projects on Italian media producers. But in efforts to demarcate

¹⁰⁹ Giorgio Merli (director), *TV 10 anni prima*, Radiotelevisione italiana, C4358, 1964. This documentary can only be accessed in person at the RAI archives. Paolo Gobetti, the television critic at *Cinema Nuovo*, edited two editions of American anthology dramas, which were among the first published books that documented American television for Italian audiences: *Qui: Studio One* (Milan: Edizioni di Cinema Nuovo, 1959) edited with Guido Aristarco, and *Teatro Tv americano* (Turin: Einaudi, 1966).

¹¹⁰ Mario Carpitella, “La Provincia e l'Impero,” in *Televisione: la provvisoria identità italiana*, ed. Aldo Grasso (Milan: Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, 1985), 131.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

the postwar period as a new and different historical era, histories often downplay the experience most forcefully weighing on the minds of Italian media producers: the experience of war and its destruction, as well as the cultural and moral overhang from the fascist experience.

A careful examination of the writings of the period, especially those written by Italians themselves, reveals that the irresistible transformation dreamed about in State Department diplomatic cables and USIA country plans was experienced as tumult and uncertainty, a feeling of protracted transition in which television's role was ambiguously regarded. In his poetic description of the difficult postwar transition process, the prominent Italian journalist Luigi Barzini foregrounds postwar culture's struggle to come to terms with its own past. "The destruction of an order is easy work, like blasting a building with dynamite. But construction is a difficult job. Nations must create their own new structures out of their own suffering, experience, past and their ideas."¹¹² Barzini extends the idea that fascism's legacy prevents an easy path to reconstruction in his own interpretation of the newly arrived medium of television. Rather than being read as a leap toward democracy and modernization, Barzini, in recalling the televised exchange between himself and Mike Bongiorno on the first official day of broadcasts, expresses the feeling of ambiguity in a nation entrenched in a democratic transition:

'Do you believe that television will be a good influence on the cultural life of Italy?' The question was thrown out, as it is were nothing. Just as a drowning man sees his whole life pass before his eyes, I saw flashing in front of me a scene from the centuries-old Italian culture, which was laboriously conquered by a few, and that becomes with the passing of the generations an unconscious way of thinking and living for everyone. Could television improve our social life? I responded as best I could, saying that television was a powerful medium, that its influence could be enormous in one sense or the other, that it depended on them, the producers of television and what they will transmit that will be beneficial or detrimental and that I had faith in them and there was no reason to worry.¹¹³

¹¹² Luigi Barzini, *Americans are Alone in the World* (New York: Random House, 1953), 115.

¹¹³ Luigi Barzini, "Occhio di Vetro," *La Stampa*, January 5, 1954, 3.

The deep trouble and concern with which Barzini visualizes television as a medium that would provide a new “unconscious way of thinking and living for everyone” speaks to the potentiality for the use—and specifically the misuse—of mediums of mass dissemination in creating new forms of national culture.

In recognizing that the postwar experience was about producing “new structures out of their own suffering,” Barzini’s 1953 comments about the emotional and psychological process of rebuilding underscore what studies have recently begun to emphasize—namely that the histories of economic and political change have overlooked how the postwar cultural transformation was marked by personal struggle and the long process to re-work a number of cultural norms. Paolo Gobetti strikes a similar chord in a 1958 article in the Leftist cinema journal *Cinema Nuovo*. In outlining his ideal for what television should seek to accomplish, he sees the shift from fascism to democracy as about rejecting ideologies and embracing of the everyday:

In this historical period that is above all about preparation, or we could also say about *waiting*, in which the heroisms are ‘miniscule’, the grand ideas seem to have lost a good part of their romantic appeal, and when their translation in practice, their daily and material realization leaves lots of confusion, regrets, and above all a lot of rhetoric. It is a rhetoric destined to hide the humility, the simplicity, the smallness that in practice assumes an extraordinary undertaking destined to transform into modern man.¹¹⁴

In calling attention to the skepticism that most postwar intellectuals expressed toward accepting a single system or idea wholesale, Gobetti underscores the extent to which the idea of the ordinary and everyday look precedent and was looked to as the source of cultural renewal in 1950s Italy. For Gobetti and many others of his generation, visual media was at its most revolutionary when it focused on the “the humility, the simplicity, the smallness” and any visual means through which to accomplish those ends was regarded positively.

¹¹⁴ Paolo Gobetti wrote a postscript to André Bazin’s interview with Jean Renoir and Roberto Rossellini. “Commento alle dichiarazioni,” *Cinema Nuovo* 136 (August 1, 1958): 243.

Although Barzini and Gobetti occupy different positions in the political spectrum of Italy—the liberal party (PLI) and the communist party (PCI)—their language expresses the common feeling: more than a decade after the end of World War II, the experience of living in Italy was not a time of renewal and simple optimism brought about by the increased economic gains of industrialization and modernization; reconstruction produced a sense of being in waiting, in between two systems, of being *in transition*. If fascist era media was concerned with “the reflexive use of gesture, costume, and mise-en-scène, stressing artifice of setting and highlighting impersonation, disguises, doubling, carnival, and spectacle,” television provided a sense of authenticity and reality that stood in stark contrast to previous forms of media.¹¹⁵ And, crucially, both Barzini and Gobetti eschewed the idea that television would engage in prewar fascist personality cults or spectacle, preferring television rely on the language and codes of *realism*. Thanks to the lasting impact of neorealism, which coded the representation of reality as being fundamentally humanist and democratic, it seemed apparent to Italians of their generation that a post-fascist and democratic society would concern itself above all with the everyman and the everyday.

Although accounts typically imply that neorealism was fully exhausted by 1953 (interestingly, the year before television officially arrives in Italy), the framing of new media production through the tenets of neorealism suggests that the movement provided a conceptual framework that extended far beyond its limited canon of films. David Forgacs makes this point when he suggests that we define neorealism not as an easily recognizable and definable “a set of works,” but as “a critical concept, a way of defining and grouping particular cultural

¹¹⁵ Marcia Landy, “Theatricality and Impersonation: The Politics of Style in the Cinema of the Italian Fascist Era,” in *Re-viewing Fascism: Italian Cinema, 1922-1943*, eds. Jacqueline Reich and Piero Garofalo (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2002), 250.

products.”¹¹⁶ In conceptualizing television not as part of the tainted trajectory of the radio—which was used by both the fascist state and Allies to disseminate propaganda—but instead as a descendant of cinematic (neo)realism, postwar Italians made a distinct connection between the perceived qualities of the television medium and their own idea of what democratic media looked like.

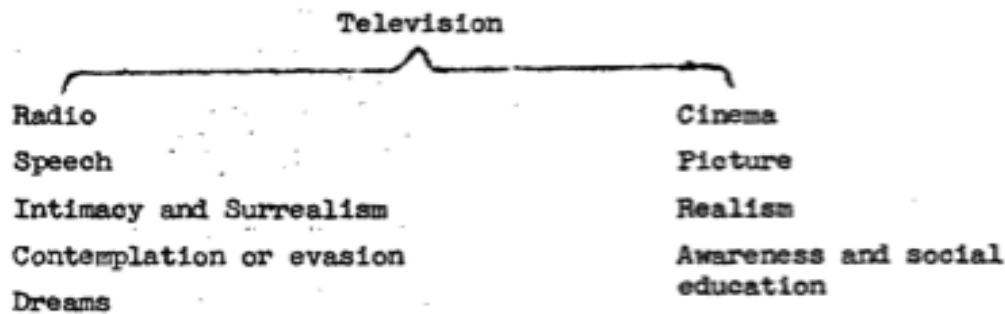


Figure 2: Evelina Tarroni's Graph on the Origins of Television, UNESCO International Meeting of Film and Television, October 1962

Evelina Tarroni, a functionary at the Ministry of Education specializing in the use of television as a medium of education, argued for this precise connection between television, realism, and democracy in her 1962 paper for UNESCO on the aesthetics of television. Making parallels to cinematic aesthetics, she saw television, despite its technical and industrial similarities to radio, as “an instrument available to modern man for knowing and representing *the reality of human life*, [which] can above all be used as a means of civic and social education” [my emphasis].¹¹⁷ Her chart on the genealogy of television clearly points to the extent to which Italians saw realist aesthetics as *the* expressive mode of projects aimed to create social good. As a medium designed

¹¹⁶ David Forgacs, “The Making and Unmaking of Neorealism in Postwar Italy,” in *Culture of Reconstruction: European Literature, Thought and Film 1945–1950*, ed. Nicholas Hewitt (New York: St. Martins, 1989), 51.

¹¹⁷ Evelina Tarroni, “The Aesthetics of Television” (paper presented at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization International Meeting on Film and Television Teaching Oslo, Norway, October 1962), accessed on [July 20, 1013], <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001549/154968eb.pdf>

for the representation of “the reality of human life,” television inherited realism’s aesthetics and, in doing so concomitantly inherited neorealism’s responsibility to reeducate Italian society.

To the extent that television inherited postwar cinema’s (i.e., neorealism’s) use of visual media to explore daily reality in the wake of the destruction of the Second World War, it was also extending the movement’s democratic, humanist ethos. In emphasizing the un-heroic individual and the realities of daily life, Barzini, Gobetti, and Tarroni underscore how media production in this period primarily entailed negotiation and mediation that worked in-between the larger-scale political and economic transformations (e.g. the transformation from fascism to democracy and the overarching geopolitical battle). In the process, these authors position television as central to the postwar *transition* that Ruth Ben-Ghiat identifies as a prolonged sense of uncertainty. This uncertainty, also articulated by Italian intellectuals like Luigi Barzini and Paolo Gobetti, continued to be felt alongside—and because of—modernization and democratization in the 1950s and 60s. As Ruth Ben-Ghiat writes, there was a

sense of living through an interregnum, which is essential to an understanding of the way the fall of fascism and the war were experienced by Italians... The rubric of ‘reconstruction’, which structures many studies of postwar politics and economics, tends to gloss over the diffused perception of living through a protracted transition period in which the past was a compelling and often disturbing presence and what was to be constructed (or reconstructed) was up for debate.¹¹⁸

Ruth Ben-Ghiat recognizes that cultural forms were deeply negotiated between varying influences and legacies. More importantly, Ben-Ghiat carves out a new and important role for historians of visual culture in understanding the process of cultural change. By calling attention to the fact that modernization has been recognized as economic and political phenomena, when in reality modernization was primarily experienced as a *cultural* phenomenon, Ben-Ghiat argues

¹¹⁸ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, “Unmaking the Fascist Man: Masculinity, Film and the Transition from Dictatorship,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 10:3 (2005): 337-8.

for the centrality of both visual media and daily practice in the transition from fascism to democracy.¹¹⁹

According to Ben-Ghiat, the media of the postwar transition were concerned primarily with a new form of individuality. What begins with neorealism's new, un-heroic conceptualization of masculinity culminates in what Jacqueline Reich describes as a full-blown cultural trope in postwar Italian cinema. The *inetto*—the man who is “passive rather than active, cowardly rather than brave, and physically or emotionally impotent rather than powerful”—became the norm of late 1950s and early 1960s cinematic stardom and provided an important means of identification for the many who were “inept in adapting to the transformations of Italian culture and society.”¹²⁰ While cinema screens contained images of fumbling and failing men that deconstructed fascist era definitions of masculinity, television's Everyman Broadcasting offered a parallel image of the flawed and humble everyday individual.¹²¹ In the words of one commentator of the era, with television “we allow ourselves to be taken with the ‘personality’ of the individual on the screen...[who is] an everyday individual like the postman or the milkman.”¹²² We could say then that television offered a new sense of identification by connecting the viewer, not with a star, but with his or her everyday counterpart.

Italian media producers found themselves at a critical juncture—a moment of profound historical transition—where the very idea of society and how it should be organized was in flux. They therefore needed new visual paradigms through which to re-imagine Italian national

¹¹⁹ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 6.

¹²⁰ Jacqueline Reich, “Stars, Gender and Nation: Marcello Mastroianni and Italian Masculinity,” in *Screening Genders* eds. Krin Gaabard and William Luhr (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 52 and 59.

¹²¹ In an era before the feminist and civil rights movements would articulate the connection between gender, race, and inequality, the idea of the “everyman” encapsulated people, who regardless of gender, ethnicity, age, or profession, were products of class-based disadvantages.

¹²² Paolo Gobetti, “L'amico di famiglia,” *Cinema Nuovo* (April 15, 1958): 255. The Italian reads, “siamo affascinati soprattutto dal divo, o dalla diva, e alla televisione ci lasciamo conquistare dalla ‘personalità’ dello individuo sul teleschermo” and “deve presentarsi quasi come un amico di famiglia, come un personaggio quotidiano quanto il postino o il garzone del lattaiio.”

identity. By focusing on the new paradigm of individuality that took shape in postwar Italy, Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Jacqueline Reich make inroads into the area Stephen Gundle identifies as needing the most scholarly attention. Gundle laments the predominance of studies dealing with the “impact of American example and American techniques...in diplomacy, politics, and economics,” that stand in contrast to the “little...[that] has been said about the way in which mentalities were altered, new desires diffused and material dreams generated and managed.”¹²³ In taking up these questions, the words of cultural critic Luciano Bianciardi stand as an important jumping off point for understanding the priorities of the postwar generation of media producers. As he explained in his memoir, “after all, we, the young, were the burnt generation: determined to break with tradition and redo everything from the start.”¹²⁴ Television’s emphasis on the individual was to become a central component to that new “start”—to that re-imagined sense of Italian national identity after the fascism.

¹²³ Gundle, “Hollywood,” 337.

¹²⁴ Luciano Bianciardi, *Il lavoro culturale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1957), 12. The original Italian reads, “Infine, c’eravamo noi, i giovani, la generazione bruciata: decisi a rompere con le tradizioni ed a rifar tutto daccapo.”

CHAPTER 2

Translating American Modernity

In the last chapter, I ended with television critic Luciano Bianciardi's description of his peers as "the burnt generation: determined to break with tradition and redo everything from the start."¹²⁵ In these words, Bianciardi captured how Italian intellectuals of the postwar era searched for new cultural paradigms as they sought to overturn entrenched structures and construct a post-fascist society. In highlighting his generation's desire to rebel and engage in the processes of revision, Bianciardi imparts the sense of renewal and change often associated with the Italian postwar experience. But as an active participant within Italian intellectual circles of the period, Bianciardi also manifests a seemingly paradoxical set of interests. Like many of his peers, he was actively translating American literature, including works from Henry Miller, John Steinbeck, Saul Bellow, and William Faulkner. However, he was also invested in developing ways to create a new, socialist political consciousness—one that, not incidentally, reflected the influence of the recently published works of Antonio Gramsci. Rather than underscoring an inherent tension or contradiction here, I will establish these two activities—translating American culture and working to product solidarity across classes—as mutually informing and implicit references used in the production of new modes of postwar culture and early television programming.

In order to document the cultural practices and goals that informed the production of 1950s Italian programming, I will be examining the discourses of the Italians who were actively

¹²⁵ Luciano Bianciardi, *Il lavoro culturale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1957), 12. The original Italian reads, "Infine, c'eravamo noi, i giovani, la generazione bruciata: decisi a rompere con le tradizioni ed a rifar tutto daccapo."

engaged in creating a post-fascist society; these include Luciano Bianciardi, Carlo Lizzani, Umberto Eco, Cesare Zavattini, Paolo Gobetti, and Mario Soldati. These individuals are crucial to our understanding of how early television's representational forms helped to structure a new form of modern subjectivity because each of them actively wrote about film and television and also documented their perceptions of American models of modernity in the late 1950s and early 1960s.¹²⁶ And as workers in the culture industries, all of them took on the cultural responsibilities that Bianciardi outlined in his 1962 semi-autobiographical account, *La vita agra* (*The Bitter Life*). Bianciardi writes: "I asked myself if there was a way to know [these rural people]... to speak to them by overcoming the difficulty of dialects, to ally myself with them because, without this allegiance, I understood it, my mission would never be brought to fruition."¹²⁷ Each of them, in other words, sought to provoke a sense of commonality between Italy's diverse publics through new representational styles; they sought to make their fellow citizens relatable to one another and to overcome the barriers of communication.

In foregrounding their aims, I am following Marwan Kraidy's framework of *critical transculturalism*. Marwan Kraidy emphasizes that we should not conceive of culture as something "out there," but rather as something instilled in within our "identities, practices, and effects."¹²⁸ In other words, we must think of the Italian cultural environment as already "in there"—in the thoughts, in the intuitive processes, in the sense of affiliation—shaping the ideas and the productions of postwar Italians. Kraidy's formulation stresses how the contours of

¹²⁶ Emilio Gentile, "Impending Modernity: Fascism and the Ambivalent Image of the United States," *Journal of Contemporary History* 28.1 (January 1993): 7-8. Gentile argues we can understand the Italian approach to modernity through their response to America.

¹²⁷ Luciano Bianciardi, *La vita agra* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2013 [1962]), 59-60. The Italian reads, "Io mi chiedevo se ci fosse il modo di conoscerli... di parlarci, superando la difficoltà dei dialetti, di allearsi con loro, perché senza questa alleanza, lo capivo, la missione mia non sarebbe mai andata in porto."

¹²⁸ Jennifer Daryl Slack quoted in Marwan Kraidy, *Hybridity or the Cultural Logic of Globalization* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 156. Slack wrote, "Context is not something *out there*, within which practices occur or which influences the development of practices. Rather, identities, practices, and effects generally, constitute the very context with which they are practices, identities or effects."

modernity depend on internal, personal modes of being and the practices they shape. In this chapter, I will identify the underlying associations and affinities that informed programming regimes in postwar Italy and their frequent return to the representation of ordinary people. In particular, I will look to the embrace of American culture as an alternative form of modernity with specific communicative and stylistic implications encouraging the participation of ordinary Italians through interviews and direct address. As a symbolic reservoir of anti-fascism, American models not only offered the appearance of modernity, they also suggested new identities and modes of interaction that could create the “national-popular” Italian culture that Bianciardi and many of his peers hoped to establish.¹²⁹

The Transnationality of Italian Postwar National Identity

For Luciano Bianciardi and his peers, their dedication toward creating a “national-popular” culture was never at odds with their translations of American literature and culture. In fact, the two practices informed each other, since their vision for a new Italian modernity was an inherently transnational creation:

When I say ‘us,’ I mean to say we young people from Kansas City, the city open to the wind and to strangers...who were, politically speaking, without a party since the Party of Action, of which we were all naturally a part, broke up. Of that Party we preserved the polemical spirit, the love for long, heated discussions, for abstract and not easily solvable problems. That was a time when there were communists, and they were many.¹³⁰

Rather than steadfast doctrines or ideologies, Bianciardi paints a picture of a generation very

¹²⁹ By “national-popular culture,” I am specifically referring to the Gramscian idea by which a revolutionary culture can be created through the organic unity between intellectuals and the popular masses. I will be developing this point in further detail in Chapter 4.

¹³⁰ Bianciardi, *Il lavoro*, 26. The original Italian reads, “noi, voglio dire noialtri giovani di Kansas City, della città aperta ai venti ed ai forestieri, e del letto a duecento piazza, eravamo, politicamente parlando, senza partito, da quando si era disciolto il partito d’azione al quale, naturalmente, tutti eravamo stati iscritti. Di quel partito serbavamo lo spirito polemico, l’amore per le lunghe discussioni accalorate, per i problemi astratti ed insolubili. Infine c’erano i comunisti, ed erano molti.”

much aware of the new and varying cultural impulses and ideas that emerged out of the liberation and immediate postwar experience. Bianciardi describes how his own identity emerged out of very seemingly irreconcilable terms; in his mind he was both a communist *partigiano* and a native of Kansas City. That these seemingly disparate identities do not register in Bianciardi's mind as a conceptual impossibility—in fact, quite the opposite, they seem to go hand-in-hand—tells us something key about the way Italians, throughout this transitory phase, took up cultural forms at a time when the idea of “America” carried a signification that was quite different from that of our dominant, present day associations. The fact that being a communist *partigiano* and a native of Kansas City were not inherently in conflict, but instead came to be *synthesized* into a coherent identity, begs the question: what were the conditions of possibility for Bianciardi's seemingly schizophrenic sense of identification?

More than any other feature, Bianciardi's description of his generation establishes the existence of an identity that extended beyond any singular, national culture. The identification as a Kansas City *partigiano* could only emerge if postwar Italians thought of themselves, their world, and their daily lives as inherently transnational. But Bianciardi's processes of affiliation are about something more than geopolitical alignment. His sense of identification also about a shifting Italian approach to modernity, since, first and foremost, the postwar (and also prewar) desire to look to foreign influences was itself part of a complex relationship to fascism. For anti-fascist Italians of varying political stripes, looking to foreign influences was a way to directly repudiate past fascist policies that banned the use of foreign words, foreign films, and foreign literature—an identification that applied equally to Soviet, American, and all other forms of culture.¹³¹ In other words, the embrace of any sort of transnational culture in postwar Italy was a

¹³¹ I do not see the Italian sense of transnational identity as new or an exclusively postwar phenomenon, only that it could be more openly expressed and experimented with the fall of the fascist regime. Ruth Ben-Ghiat describes how

means of placing oneself temporally in the present and rejecting a fascist past—even if it still held some degree of sway and influence.¹³²

To be antifascist was to embrace transnationalism. Carlo Lizzani, who would write and direct a 1964 film based on Bianciardi's *La vita agra* (*The Bitter Life*), described a postwar moment in which the sense of identity was taken from both major geopolitical players. The fascist regime had “attached a communist sticker to any potential opposition,” so that anti-fascism became synonymous with a communist political orientation.¹³³ Equally, however, an established fluency in American literary and cinematic culture served to identify someone as belonging to an anti-fascist persuasion and thus as open to different forms of modernity. If communism shared a vexed relationship to fascism itself because of the shared hostility toward aristocratic and managerial classes, political apathy, and capitalism, Italians created a particular mythology around America that they drew upon in their own works. American literature and cinema was “decisive,” according to Lizzani, because it represented for Italians a cultural model that was “far from the ideology that was dominant for us.”¹³⁴ Whereas Marxist thought had fully penetrated Italian intellectual circles—with some even working to make Marxist language functional within a fascist political framework—American culture, because of its literal and figurative difference, became a particularly ripe ground on to which to project and imagine a new society.¹³⁵ In this sense, Luciano Bianciardi's clear investment in American culture as a model

Italians took up foreign influences despite fascist rules banning foreign words. See *Fascist Modernities: Italy 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 138.

¹³² More recently, scholars have been identifying the continuities of practice before and after fascism. Lizzani speaks openly about the topic in his memoir about the appeal of fascism for those of his generation, writing that it promoted an “emotional” response against the aristocratic and managerial classes, political apathy, and capitalism. Carlo Lizzani, *Il mio lungo viaggio nel secolo breve* (Turin: Einaudi, 2007), 50.

¹³³ Ibid. The original Italian reads, “ma poi stata l'attribuzione dell'etichetta ‘comunista’ a tutti i potenziali oppositori del regime.”

¹³⁴ Ibid. The original Italian as cited reads, “È stata determinante anche la scoperta di certi scrittori americani, lontani dall'ideologia da noi dominate.”

¹³⁵ Lizzani specifically mentions Ugo Spirito and the politics of the “third way” that tried to reconcile communism and fascism.

for Italy was not unique, but was part of an embrace of American culture by anti-fascist Italians that began prewar and exploded postwar. Bianciardi was among the many committed Leftists who were translating American culture into a new Italian modernity. But their embrace was crucially shared by moderate and conservative anti-fascists as well. Italian journalist Luigi Barzini, for example, similarly described how “the young people of my time knew that the world began with them and that everything had to be invented all over again. They made a bonfire of everything, traditions, rules, laws. They [like their American counterparts] wrote prose without punctuation and capitals, poetry without sense.”¹³⁶

Numerous studies cite the critical work of Italian literary critics, such as Cesare Pavese and Elio Vittorini, in providing translations of American literature and proliferating what amounted to an Italian myth of America that “shaped a generation of intellectuals and had functioned as a sort of cultural opposition to the ideological dictates of the [fascist] regime.”¹³⁷ As a critical reference point in the development of an anti-fascist paradigm, American culture continued to function as a reservoir of cultural and political ideals, even as geopolitical tensions complicated the relationship between Italian intellectuals and the United States. As inheritors of the tradition begun by critics like Pavese and Vittorini, who embraced American literature and culture, postwar Italian media producers and television critics (such as Luciano Bianciardi, Carlo Lizzani, Umberto Eco, Paolo Gobetti, and Mario Soldati) rank among the “co-crafters” of the very idea of America; they were as responsible for the mythologies of America as were the propaganda campaigns of the Marshall Plan.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Luigi Barzini, *Americans are All Alone in the World* (New York: Random House, 1953), 49.

¹³⁷ Anna Maria Torriglia, *Broken Time, Fragmented Space: A Cultural Map for Postwar Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 79-80.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 82. Also see Valerio Ferme, “The Americanization of Italian Culture under Fascism,” *Quaderni del Novecento* 2 (2002): 58.

Media producers' mythologization of America began long before the United States government invested in overt campaigns to convince Italians of the value of American consumer capitalism and democracy, and Italians continued to refine this mythology long after the U.S. government gave up on white propaganda campaigns to convince Italians of the value of American society.¹³⁹ In his 1962 book on the Italian miracle, the esteemed Italian journalist and Resistance member, Giorgio Bocca, described the critical role of Italian translators of American culture: "Italy will not be an independent civilization, it will be, we say it too, a re-elaboration of ideas, techniques, and social relations that arrive in large measure, from the United States."¹⁴⁰

As co-creators of the myth of America—a country in which individuals were viewed as open, good-natured, and defined by empathetic relationships with their peers—Italian intellectuals were articulating the cultural and representational shifts they felt were needed in order to form a new political system that was humanist, participatory, and egalitarian. In other words, the Italian curiosity with American culture "has more to do with Italian political history...than with the United States."¹⁴¹ It is in the Italian reception to American culture that we can establish the Italian re-articulation of modernity after fascism. As a useful vocabulary of expression at the moment in which new political aspirations were being formed, American culture was, in the words of film historian Peter Bondanella, "a countercultural phenomenon" that allowed Italians to imagine a different political-cultural configuration.¹⁴²

Although we could easily draw parallels to the idea of America as a "virgin land," as a

¹³⁹ James Schwoch, "Crypto Convergence, Media, and the Cold War: The Early Globalization of Television Networks in the 1950s," Schwoch, James. (Paper presented at the Media In Transitions Conference, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA, May 2002).

¹⁴⁰ Giorgio Bocca, *Miracolo all'italiana* (Milan: Edizioni Avanti!, 1962), 5. The Italian reads, "Non sarà una civiltà autonoma, sarà diciamo pure, una rielaborazione di idee, tecniche, rapporti sociali che ci arrivano, in grandissima parte dagli Stati Uniti."

¹⁴¹ Francesco Pontuale, *In Their Own Terms: American Literary Historiography in the United States and Italy* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 119.

¹⁴² Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present* (London: Continuum, 2001), 26.

repository for the aspirations of immigrants, or as the location of Hollywood spectacle, the work of Michael Denning, in his *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*, directs us to be specific as to what precisely we are calling up when we reference America. As Denning notes, Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* was not always a universally cited epigraph when discussing the uniqueness of American politics.¹⁴³ Rather, there was a resurgence of Tocqueville in the postwar period, a phenomenon that corresponded to the surge in efforts to promote the “American way”—i.e., liberal democracy—globally in the 1950s. What is more, Denning points out that it is at this precise moment in history that writers begin to “confuse what is democratic with what is only American.”¹⁴⁴ Denning, through Tocqueville's own words, forces us to parse out whether, when speaking of the image of America in postwar Europe, the Italian translators of American culture are speaking of the precise peculiarities of an American system of democracy, or seeking to reference some more vague and ill-defined notion of egalitarianism and human rights more broadly. In other words, when postwar Italians evoked the image and idea of America, they were almost universally invoking America as a means of describing a specific configuration of what they envisioned their own post-fascist modernity to look like.

Among the many prominent commentators and translators of American culture, Mario Soldati established his role early on. Beginning with his 1935 memoir, *America, primo amore*, which went through a number of subsequent editions (two in the 1950s alone), Soldati's writings about American society continued to be read and re-read throughout the decades.¹⁴⁵ His extended commentary on American culture—including his frequent revisions of those perspectives—creates the unique opportunity to trace an ovulating Italian approach to, and

¹⁴³ Michael Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (New York: Verso, 2004), 192-93.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 197 and 207.

¹⁴⁵ Mario Soldati, *America, primo amore* (Palermo: Sellerio Editore, 2003 [1935]) recounts the time Soldati spent in the United States as he tried to flee from fascism and gain citizenship.

reception of, American values.¹⁴⁶ In his memoir of his war experience, Soldati offers a telling description of the specific appeal of American culture as Italy emerged from the Second World War. In his first-hand account of a celebration between incoming liberating American forces and Italian locals during the fall of 1943, Soldati describes the singing of an American G.I. in the following manner:

My friends and I listened to him moved, enchanted... we found here again an American of which we dreamed, an American that we love. It was that *likable, compassionate, quotidian* America from the films that trace the lives of the poor. This is the intelligent and educated America of its best novelists [my emphasis].¹⁴⁷

Coming from a man known for his prewar anti-Americanism, Soldati's postwar identification with America in this passage is a significant departure. Rather than describing these soldiers in the act of conflict, he describes them in the act of celebration and camaraderie. Even in the midst of war, Soldati does not describe American soldiers as heroic or superhuman. He characterizes them in terms of their approachability, personability, and accessibility. By describing the American soldiers first and foremost by their engaging personalities, he defines them as extraordinary not by virtue of their class status or their ability on the battlefield, but by their mode of interacting with those around them.

The idea of the soldier as empathetic and unremarkable was a strict divergence from the heroic and virile soldier offered by fascist-era propaganda.¹⁴⁸ But as much as this ideal of the American character resonated with Soldati, he described the Italian relationship to America as

¹⁴⁶ The archive of Mario Soldati has an extensive collection of reviews of and interviews about *America, primo amore* in which Soldati changes and refines his impression of the United States over the course of his lifetime. Recensioni B33 UA28S, Archivio Mario Soldati, Archivi della Parola, dell'Immagine e della Comunicazione Editoriale at Università degli Studi di Milano, Milan, Italy.

¹⁴⁷ Mario Soldati, *Fuga in Italia* (Palermo: Sellerio Editore, 2004 [1947]), 90. The original Italian reads: "Io e i miei amici lo ascoltiamo commossi, rapiti...ritroviamo qui un'America che abbiamo sognato, un'America che amiamo. Quella era l'America simpatica, umana e quotidiana, dei film che descrivono la vita umili. Questa è l'America intelligente e colta, l'America dei suoi migliori romanzieri."

¹⁴⁸ Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi discusses the propagandistic image of Italy and the Italian soldier during the war in Ethiopia in the "War and Melodrama" chapter of *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

being defined by a set of tensions rather than by a holistic and uniform mutual engagement. In his 1959 re-release of *America, My First Love*, he wrote that “America...is not only imperialist, but also democratic, it is not only political, but also moral; it is not only puritanical, but also forgiving; not only deceitful, but also sincere.”¹⁴⁹ Soldati’s language takes account of the contradictions contained within the Italian idea of America. As much as there is a clear sense of America as an occupying or imperial force, Soldati undeniably finds a viable and liberating model. But in wavering between the qualities that define a national government interested in solidifying power and those that speak to a set of *personal* values, Soldati does something more. He engages in a process of transference in which American political values stand in for character values. As much as Soldati offers a more sympathetic and humanized depiction of America and American social and political values, he is also participating in an Italian mythology of America that connected its concept of the individual personality to its political paradigms. Being open, ordinary, and empathetic was increasingly viewed as an appealing model of personal identity, one indicative, more broadly, of a democratic and humanist political configuration.

Bianciardi and Soldati, writing in 1957 and 1959 respectively, exemplify a continuing elaboration on the idea—or ideal—of America, even as geopolitical shifts made an open embrace of American society more and more problematic. They, like many of their generation, saw the authenticity and compassion of everyday individuals as the foundation of a more humanist and democratic nation, one that they also tied to anti-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian values. Take, for instance, this passage in which Soldati elaborates on his description of incoming American G.I.’s:

[The Americans were] good, kind, human. Lively characters from a Will Rogers movie. It is enough to look at the face [of the G.I.], his honest and friendly smile,

¹⁴⁹ Soldati, *America*, 22. The original Italian reads, “non soltanto imperialista, ma anche democratica, non soltanto politica, ma anche morale; non soltanto puritana, ma anche cristiana; non soltanto bugiarda, ma anche sincera.”

to understand the greatness of America, the moral and religious strength of America. If Americans are like them, our hopes will not be disappointed.¹⁵⁰

In this passage, Soldati is not attempting to convey the idea that Italians should not fear American influence over the Italian peninsula because American citizens are good people. Soldati, who spent years in the United States and considered living there permanently, would not have been prone to such generalities about Americans. Instead, he was posing a rhetorical challenge to his fellow Italians about their own future: will they embrace the culture of Will Rogers, one which he saw as the crux of America's moral and religious strength in the postwar?

In making reference to Will Rogers, Soldati is calling upon the Italian idea of American culture, one that saw that culture as having had created a system that was more open and accessible to its most disadvantaged members. Historically significant because they were among the first to give “voice to the *rebellious* views of racial minorities, women, and youth,” the films of Will Rogers created modes for expressing dissent.¹⁵¹ In reflecting on the era's filmmaking, Rogers' colloquial manner of speaking, his improvisation on screen, and his diatribes against the rich and the powerful, reverberates in Soldati's own interpretation. According to Soldati, American prewar cinema was valuable, even “prophetic,” because it embodied the “modern sensibility of rebellion” against class systems of monopolistic capitalism and fascist populism.¹⁵² It is difficult to overestimate the impression these sorts of films made on Italians identifying as anti-fascist *partigani*. Carlo Lizzani outlined the experience of being anti-fascist in Mussolini's

¹⁵⁰ Soldati, *Fuga*, 88-89. The Italian reads, “Sono buoni, gentili, umani. Personaggi vivi di un film di Will Rogers. Basta guardare il viso di Roberts, il suo sorriso candido e cordiale, per capire la grandezza dell'America, la forza morale e religiosa dell'America. Se gli americani sono così, le nostre speranze non andranno deluse.”

¹⁵¹ My emphasis. Lary May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 31.

¹⁵² Text of lecture given by Mario Soldati, Keaton B46 UA412, Archivio Mario Soldati, Archivi della Parola, dell'Immagine e della Comunicazione Editoriale at Università degli Studi di Milano, Milan, Italy. The original Italian reads, “può essere considerato profetico di una necessità modernissima in America come altrove: la contestazione, la ribellione al monopolio capitalistico.”

Italy in terms of a retreat from the public arena and silence—a stark contrast to the rebellious voicing of dissent that Soldati and his peers saw in American films.¹⁵³

In defining the act of rebellion as modern, Soldati implies that conformity with state power is inherently not modern. The failure to defer to state narratives therefore becomes the critical way to separate American prewar modernity from Italian fascism—and it explains why Italian Resistance fighters, the *partigiani*, would continue to look to American culture even when geopolitical tensions made these associations more problematic. Throughout the years, even as Soldati's opinion and sentiments toward the United States shifted, he always returned to this idea of America as a land of protest against authority and abuse of power as its enduring contribution. In a speech given at a 1978 conference on Italian-American relations, Soldati describes that despite his recent “disenchantment” with United States, he still heralded it as the model for the free world “because the strongest protestors we have against American civilization are in America, amongst the Americans.”¹⁵⁴ The sense of resistance he found in American culture was so strong that it withstood years of examples that suggested otherwise.

The culture of protest in Will Rogers's films not only evoked an anti-fascist rebelliousness in the minds of many *partigiani*, the films pointed the way to a mode of citizenship that challenged the very hierarchical structures that stood to curtail broad access to national, cultural life. In his novel *Il lavoro culturale* (*Cultural Work*), Luciano Bianciardi extends his metaphor of Kansas City to specifically conceive of the openness of American culture as the mode through which to narrate Italian modernity.

¹⁵³ Lizzani, 50.

¹⁵⁴ Text of speech given by Mario Soldati, Convegno USA-Italia B38 UA332, Archivio Mario Soldati, Archivi della Parola, dell'Immagine e della Comunicazione Editoriale at Università degli Studi di Milano, Milan, Italy. The original Italian reads, “perché i più forti contestatori della civiltà americana, li abbiamo appunto in america, tra gli americani.”

It is also right to defend the logics of the countryside: the city open to the wind and to strangers, Kansas City. [...] Each culture demonstrates its worth and its modernity only by confronting, with all of its historical and social reality, that which stands before it, only if it is able to liberate everyone, to liberate the farmers, to understand them, to make them like us.¹⁵⁵

For Bianciardi, Kansas City stands in for two things: it is symbolic of Italy's rural cultures, and it is an approach to culture that expands the range of narratives that enter into national consciousness. This approach seeks to make the quotidian logics of the countryside knowable to the intellectual classes, as much it works to integrate disadvantaged classes into national culture.

Bianciardi's Kansas City culture was a rejection of bourgeois culture and traditional taste hierarchies—and, alongside them, interpersonal communicative conventions that demanded a hierarchical structuring of relationships. Bianciardi writes of a culture “emancipated” from “dependence on status symbols and prestige of the wealthy and their tastemakers,” thanks to new routines of interacting.¹⁵⁶ In his first encounter with the influential filmmaker Alessandro Blasetti in 1943, Lizzani recalls how the mere choice to converse in a causal way felt radically different and invigorating.

People's Square. Il Bolognese restaurant. And right away an authoritative command, ‘Let's use the familiar form of speaking’...I was 20 years old, Blasetti 40. ‘Let's use the familiar form of speaking’: it was something of '68! [In those days] the generations were separated by unfathomable distances. That *informality* gave me courage.¹⁵⁷

For Lizzani, the act of individuals speaking to each other as equals, without the rules of formality, was culturally revolutionary. This act also enabled him to participate in a cinematic

¹⁵⁵ Bianciardi, *Il lavoro*, 40. The Italian reads, “guisto anche sostenere le ragioni della provincia: la città aperta ai venti e ai forestieri, Kansas City[...] Ogni cultura dimostra la sua forza e la sua modernità solo confrontandosi con tutta la realtà storica e sociale che si sta dinanzi, solo se riesce a liberare tutti, a liberare i contadini, a capirli, a farceli simili a noi.”

¹⁵⁶ May, 33.

¹⁵⁷ Lizzani, 45-46. Lizzani is referring to the difference in Italian between the formal way of speaking, which uses the pronoun Lei, and the informal way of speaking to friends and family, which uses the pronoun tu. The Italian reads, “Piazza del Popolo. Ristorante Il Bolognese. E subito un comando autorevole, ‘Diamoci del tu.’...Avevo vent'anni, Blasetti quaranta. ‘Diamoci del tu’: cose da '68! Le generazione erano separate, allora, da distanze abissali. Quel *tu* diede il coraggio.”

culture that he had previously only seen and watched. The informal exchange sparked his transformation from being an observer to a participant in the production of culture. In this way, Lizzani describes how the seemingly innocuous act of speaking casually or informally functioned as a sort of invitation to Italians who were otherwise not used to such egalitarian modes of communication.

By comparing the casual nature of his 1943 encounter with Alessandro Blasetti as “something of ’68,” Lizzani not only expresses how new and different this mode of interaction was, but he also theorizes that the structures of informal conversation were inherently political, expressing the egalitarian ethos of the 1960s student revolutions. Or, as centrist journalist Luigi Barzini phrased it, there was an idea from America that “talk was what young people needed, the round table, the cigarettes, the artificial informality...trying to grow ideas by surrounding them with the setting for polite conversation.”¹⁵⁸ Many Italians of that generation associated casual, informal modes of address and presentation with the American culture they recognized from cinema and literature. The American codes of informality—which Blasetti incorporated into his daily interactions—broke with the linguistic and formal structures of Italian culture, which relied, both socially and linguistically, on forms of hierarchical address. Quick, bare-boned, and full of slang and colloquialisms, American culture provided a model through which the problems of Italy’s popular masses could come to national awareness. As Italian historian Ambra Meda argues, American cinematic and literary examples were exception because they were “rooted in everyday parlance.”¹⁵⁹ It would be these forms of parlance that would make their debut on programs such as *Lascia o raddoppia*, *Chi legge*, and *Un, due, tre*.

¹⁵⁸ Barzini, 188.

¹⁵⁹ Ambra Meda, *Al di là: Scrittori italiani in viaggio negli Stati Uniti* (Florence: Vallecchi, 2011), 19.

Italian translators of American culture connected the representational choices to the broader differences in the American and fascist notions of modernity. Their glorification of certain strands of American culture partakes in what Emilio Gentile describes as the “run from history,” in which postwar Italians disengaged from Italy’s “myth of the Man of the State” by embracing representations of ordinary, flawed people.¹⁶⁰ More than merely a symbol of what a post-fascist individual would be like, American representations also suggested new relations of exchange and dialogue between people and institutions of power—a concept that Bianciardi points to in his notion of Kansas City, in which he argues that “culture does not make sense if it does not help us understand others, to give aid to others, to evade evil.”¹⁶¹ Postwar Italians found American cinema and literature instrumental to their idea of media in an egalitarian, participatory, and anti-authoritarian society. In this respect, the representational paradigms of interwar American films that Soldati and Bianciardi reference were not just innovative in that they gave voice to everyday people for the first time, they were part of what Lary May describes as the broader emergence of American *political humanism* domestically and, as I have shown, also abroad.¹⁶²

Overall, the interpretation and embrace of American culture by postwar Italians demonstrates that Italian cultural forms were not intended to be pitted against American media (as neorealism is so often seen as a critical and alternative *counterweight* to Hollywood’s influence). Rather, Italian media producers looked to American culture’s emphasis on empathetic, everyday individuals as they sought to instill a new set of ideals in Italian society after the war. More than American cinema or literature, in the postwar period, aspects of

¹⁶⁰ Emilio Gentile, *La Grande Italia: The Myth of the Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 261

¹⁶¹ Bianciardi, *Il lavoro*, 40. The Italian reads, “la cultura non ha senso se non ci aiuta a capire gli altri, a soccorrere gli altri, ad evitare il male”

¹⁶² May, 31.

American *television* appeared to challenge communicative norms. In his second volume dedicated to American anthology dramas and their screenwriters, Paolo Gobetti described television as

the most new and vital phenomenon of contemporary American culture. Neither cinema, nor theater, nor literature have produced anything more revelatory and revolutionary in these years...one fundamental feature immediately becomes obvious: the keen interest that the producer has for the average American man (or woman).”¹⁶³

Gobetti predicates his excitement for American television programming—over any other cultural product produced in the United States—on one key, “new and vital” feature: its exploration of the individual person and his or her daily concerns. American television’s perceived interest in the life stories of ordinary individuals seemed continuous with earlier examples of American popular culture, be it Will Rogers, Buster Keaton, or D.W. Griffith’s *Intolerance*.¹⁶⁴

The emphasis on the realities of the everyday person quickly created the perception that television was the form of American culture most similar to Italian neorealism. Guido Aristarco, the editor of the Marxist film journal *Cinema Nuovo*, defended the comparisons being made between neorealism and American television dramas: “It is legitimate to compare the situation between the television drama in America and a film of the Italian postwar.” To Aristarco, the productions of Chayefsky, Sterling, and other American television screenwriters were comparable to Cesare Zavattini’s work.¹⁶⁵ Roberto Rossellini’s biographer, Tag Gallagher,

¹⁶³ Paolo Gobetti, *Teatro televisivo americano* (Turin: Einaudi, 1966), xvii-xviii. The original Italian reads: “Il fenomeno più nuovo e vitale della cultura americana contemporanea: nè il cinema, nè il teatro, nè la letteratura seppero infatti in quegli anni produrre nulla di altrettanto rivelatore e rivoluzionario...balza subito agli occhi una caratteristica fondamentale: l’interesse preciso con cui l’autore si occupa dell’uomo (o della donna) medio statunitense.”

¹⁶⁴ Keaton B46 UA412, Archivio Mario Soldati, Archivi della Parola, dell’Immagine e della Comunicazione Editoriale at Università degli Studi di Milano, Milan, Italy; Cesare Zavattini. Interview with Giacomo Gambetti. 15 December 1982. *Zavattini mago e tecnico* (Rome: Gremese, 2009): 75.

¹⁶⁵ Guido Aristarco, *Qui studio one* (Milan: Edizioni di Cinema Nuovo, 1959), 7. The Italian reads, “Legittimo è ad esempio un raffronto tra la situazione del teledramma in America a il film del dopoguerra in Italia (per non parlare della nostra tv... Leggendo le confessioni di Arthur o di Chayfsky, di Elliot o di Lee, di Miller o di Mosel, di Shaw,

identifies American television as an implicit but critical reference point in Rossellini's television documentaries:

'Educational' subjects like Rossellini's were unthinkable for movie theaters in 1960...But television was something else. In America, *You Are There*, *The Hallmark Hall of Fame*, and Dupont's *Cavalcade of America* had been treating audiences since the early fifties with weekly historical re-enactments that were creative, instructive, and entertaining... Ironically the revolution that Roberto accurately saw himself leading in Europe had long been normal life for American television.¹⁶⁶

In both cases the presence of everymen—which were first identified in American prewar cinema and then became a code through which to conceive of democratic modes of being—were critical to the reception of television as well.

The Italian perceptions of American culture that have I captured here reaffirm Umberto Eco's memory of what it was like to politically identify as a Leftist during the early years of the Cold War. According to Umberto Eco, those on the Italian Left often had to negotiate between the US as a geostrategic actor and America as a cultural symbol. Eco describes how in 1950s Italy,

America was already a way of living, and I am not talking about blue jeans or chewing gum, or in other words the America that dominated Europe as a model of consumer culture. I am talking about the myth [of America] that matured in the 1940s that in some way was still working beneath the surface...America was an enemy as a government or a model of capitalistic society, but there was an attitude of rediscovery and of recuperation in regards to America as a people, as a *melting pot* of peoples in revolt.¹⁶⁷

In calling attention to the appeal of American anti-fascist radicalism, New Deal liberalism, and America's domestic commitment to multiethnic pluralism, Eco's analysis of the political dialogue of the postwar Italian Left establishes an emerging consensus around the value of

e in parte anche di Sterling, sembra di assistere a una rappresentazione del monologo di Zavattini *Come nasce un soggetto cinematografico*."

¹⁶⁶ Tag Gallagher, *The Adventures of Roberto Rossellini: His Life and Films* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1998), 527.

¹⁶⁷ Umberto Eco, "Il cuore rosso del sogno americano," in *La riscoperta dell'America* ed. Umberto Eco, Giampaolo Ceserani, and Beniamino Placido (Rome: Laterza, 1984), 14-16.

American approaches to the individual at the precise moment that television begins in Italy. Despite arguments that the Cold War struggle irrevocably quashed the fascination with America, Gian Piero Brunetta sees a persistent and sustained embrace of American cultural forms beyond the immediate postwar period—a position that rings true given the Italian embrace of American modes of address and interaction that I will examine in the case studies in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.¹⁶⁸

If the Italian response to modernization is most clear when it is confronted with forms of American culture, then identifying specifically what was conceived as being American—that is, the valence Americanism was given by Italians—can help us to identify the representational modes through which Italians developed “modern” notions of individualism and citizenship. In the responses and writings of Italian intellectuals collected here in this chapter, we can identify a distinct and undeniable triangulation across the Italian political spectrum: the representational presence of the ordinary, working-class individual, along with the stylistic codes of casualness and informality, combine to articulate a steadfast refusal of fascist-era hierarchical and autocratic control. Italians read informal conversation between ordinary individuals as distinctly modern and American; across genre, we can detect moments in which television programming evoked new forms of participatory citizenship—i.e., when programming engaged the individual and his or her immediate experience through conversational exchanges. This “socialibility”—what Paddy Scannell described as “the *ability* to be at ease in the society of unknown others and to interact with them without (too much) anxiety in the many and varied situations of everyday life”—was an important component to why television became implicated as an important site for

¹⁶⁸ Alessandro Brogi argues that the Cold War did irreparable damage to the Italian myth of America. See *Confronting America: The Cold War between the United States and the Communists in France and Italy* (Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 42. Gian Piero Brunetta argues that the “hidden love of America” persisted in “The Long March of American Cinema in Italy: From Fascism to the Cold War,” in *Hollywood in Europe: Experiences of a Cultural Hegemony*, eds. David E. Ellwood and Rob Kroes (Amsterdam: Amerika Instituut, 1994), 150-151.

establishing a new Italian modernity.¹⁶⁹ As I will be exploring in the follow two chapters, this entailed something more than just the idea of the ordinary and accessible individual.

Television's technological qualities of direct capture and its ability address to a national and popular public distinguished it as the preeminent site for creating this new Italian citizen.

¹⁶⁹ Paddy Scannell, *Television and the Meaning of Live: An Inquiry into the Human Situation* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2014), 37.

CHAPTER 3

TV and the Legacy of Neorealism

We needed to know and to see how these terrible events [of WWII] could have occurred. The cinema was the most direct and immediate way of making this sort of study. It was preferable to other art forms which did not possess a language...against the lies of those old, generalized ideas.¹⁷⁰

Cesare Zavattini, 1953

Italian intellectuals looked to American culture, before and after the war, because they saw in it a “powerful response to the elitist, rigid academic nature of Europe’s bourgeois culture and to the futile pomp of fascist authoritarianism.”¹⁷¹ American literary and cinematic culture provided an important example of what an anti-fascist and anti-elitist culture looked like. Therefore, American cultural producers are credited with providing new forms of modernity and, concomitantly, informing neorealism’s stylistic and conceptual impulses. In the words of film historian Gian Piero Brunetta, American culture formed an afterimage—burned “on the retinas of many of the cameramen and directors of that epoch.”¹⁷² While scholarly histories of the Italian culture characterize both television and cinema as having a stake in postwar modernization, the two mediums have often been regarded as working at cross-purposes.

¹⁷⁰ Cesare Zavattini, “Alcune idee sul cinema,” in *Cesare Zavattini cinema: Diario cinematografico. Neorealismo, ecc.*, eds. Valentina Fortichiari and Mino Argentieri (Milan: Bompiani, 2002 [1952]): 718-736. Translated by David Overbey as “A Thesis on Neo-Realism,” in *Springtime in Italy: A Reader on Neorealism* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1978), 69.

¹⁷¹ Alessandro Brogi, *Confronting America: The Cold War between the United States and the Communists in France and Italy* (Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 42.

¹⁷² Gian Piero Brunetta, “The Long March of American Cinema in Italy: From Fascism to the Cold War,” in *Hollywood in Europe: Experiences of a Cultural Hegemony*, eds. David E. Ellwood and Rob Kroes (Amsterdam: Amerika Instituut, 1994), 147. Marcia Landy, *Stardom, Italian Style: Screen Performance and Personality in Italian Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 87-88.

Cinematic neorealism has come to embody all the hopes of postwar modernization, including the reinvestment in humanism and the turn toward democracy. Television instead has come to symbolize the fears of modernization, such as cultural massification and the nullification of individual human experience.¹⁷³ As a result, histories of Italian television largely ignore and scoff at the idea that aesthetic and/or thematic affinities exist between popular Italian television programming and neorealism.

Traditional histories of Italian visual culture are more likely to cite the competitive relationship between cinema and television rather than their interconnections. In describing television as engaging in “an Oedipal relationship with cinema,” Gianfranco Bettetini recognizes that the grammars of neorealist cinema were consciously brought to bear on the way in which television was conceived and programmed.¹⁷⁴ Yet in describing the relationship as Oedipal, he denies the possibility that television offered anything to those working within neorealism’s ethical-aesthetic language. Aldo Grasso strikes a similar tone, later writing that neorealism “pertains above all to cinema [...]. To look for neorealism outside of cinema is a clumsy gesture and a bit bleak. One either gets disproportionately excited about it or indignant.”¹⁷⁵ Despite being one of just a few scholars to consider the question of the relationship between neorealism and early television, Grasso’s attitude toward the subject is primarily dismissive, considering any influence from neorealism as “involuntary.”¹⁷⁶

Going against narratives that seek to polarize and compartmentalize the postwar Italian media landscape, this chapter analyzes the theorization of television in the context of paradigms

¹⁷³ Mario Morcellini notes that television did aid in creating a more pluralistic society, but then says it quickly became an object of political control. See “Prefazione,” in *Il Cavallo Morente: Storia della RAI*, ed. Franco Chiarenza (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2005), 14-15.

¹⁷⁴ Gianfranco Bettetini, Introduction to *American way of television: Le origini della Tv in Italia*, ed. Gianfranco Bettetini (Florence: Sansoni, 1980), 9.

¹⁷⁵ Aldo Grasso, “Extra ecclesiam: il neo-realism nella radio e nella televisione,” *Neorealismo: Cinema italiano 1945-1949*, ed. Alberto Farassino (Turin: EDT, 1989), 127.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 129.

established by neorealism. Most studies, speaking in terms of the *production* of neorealist films, locate the official end to neorealism in 1953. However, as Francesco Casetti notes, the production of these films was accompanied by three periods of *theorization* that did not strictly conform to the chronologies set forth by the canon of neorealist films. In Casetti's chronology, 1955 is a watershed year in the theorization of neorealism, a point where it "showed signs of both saturation and renewal."¹⁷⁷ Television, which began its first official broadcast in 1954, emerged out of a context in which Italian visual theory, including that being applied to the new television medium, was "saturated" by the theorization of realism. In thinking about neorealism in terms of how it "saturated" Italian thinking, I move away from accounts that characterize the representational crossover between neorealism and television as involuntary, accidental, or an example of television as an ersatz, politically neutered form of filmmaking.

This chapter establishes how the theorization of realist cinema framed the response to television. However, realism cannot be equally applied to both film and television. Nor is it meaningful to attempt to establish the existence of (neo)realist television, as doing so would only further problematize an already unwieldy term. The terms *realism* and *neorealism*—owing to their long and varied uses and multiplicity of definitions, do not provide useful categories through which to think through television's role in the postwar transition. However, the issue of neorealism, and the neorealist approach to the social function and aesthetics of media, is inevitable given the specificities of the Italian historical experience. In analyzing the visual culture of fascist modernity, Ruth Ben-Ghiat argues that the perceived break between the prewar and postwar aesthetic is an *ex post facto* construction. The basis of neorealism, for example, was established well before the war's end. It was at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, a once fascist-controlled training ground where many of neorealism's most famous directors began

¹⁷⁷ Francesco Casetti, *Theories of Cinema, 1945-1995* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1999), 24.

their careers, that documentary and realist forms of expression were first identified as being particularly adept at persuading and impacting audiences. And it was under fascism that the choice to “return to man”—that is, to represent individual, subjective reality—became both “a moral as well as aesthetic imperative...for the development of a new civilization.”¹⁷⁸ Realism, which was first set to bolster a fascist order of modernity, became repurposed in the postwar to serve a specifically humanistic and democratic ethos.

If Ben-Ghiat limits her analysis to the examination of *cinematic* texts between the prewar and the immediate postwar, I will consider the way in which the very theorization of cinematic realism informed modes of *televisual* representation extending into the 1950s. The experimentation with humanist forms of media and their aesthetics coalesced around the film movement. So even as the crisis of neorealism took hold in 1953, these themes continued to dominate critical discourses, as Casetti so importantly brings to our attention. In fact, in writing to André Bazin in 1953, Cesare Zavattini felt assured of neorealism’s influence on the conceptualization and uses of visual media:

My most profound satisfaction is in this: that also the enemies of neorealism must pay homage to neorealism and that today neorealism, which by too many people was considered dead, comes to be considered alive and the only banner around to which Italian cinema can usefully unite itself.¹⁷⁹

Zavattini points to how the theorization of neorealism created models for producing media that were so strong that everyone, regardless of their response to the film movement, had to contend with neorealism’s framework—even in the mid 1950s. Inasmuch as scholars theorize television

¹⁷⁸ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, “The Fascist War Trilogy,” in *Roberto Rossellini: Magician of the Real*, eds. David Forgacs, Sarah Lutton, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: BFI, 2000), 20-36.

¹⁷⁹ Cesare Zavattini, Letter to André Bazin, dated December 28, 1953. B653/27, Archivio Cesare Zavattini, Biblioteca Panizzi, Reggio Emilia, Italy. The original Italian reads, “La mia profonda soddisfazione sta in questo: che anche i nemici del neorealismo hanno dovuto rendere omaggio al neorealismo, o oggi il neorealismo, che da troppa gente era considerato morto, viene considerato vivo e la sola bandiera intorno alla quale quelli del cinema italiano possono proficuamente riunirsi.” Zavattini’s original words describes these values of neorealism as: “valori di libertà e di partecipazione sempre più stretta, sempre più cosciente alla vita sociale.”

in relationship to the paradigms set forth by neorealism, we can also begin to elaborate how and why certain televisual forms came to be considered particularly humanist or democratic. The question then becomes how, and in what specific ways the “realism” of cinematic neorealism was perceived to be compatible with the “realism” of television. In comparing the two mediums, the critical discourses of the era point to the concept of “direct capture” as the point of continuity between televisual aesthetics and style and cinema’s realist poetic. Yet these discourses also suggest that, inasmuch as neorealism’s poetic framed the use and interpretation of television, television’s “direct capture” contributed to the theorization of neorealism.¹⁸⁰

Theorizing Television in the Postwar Italian Context

There are so many definitions of neorealism that the term—except when used to refer to a certain canon of films and the general characteristics of filmmaking of the era—has become almost meaningless. Rather than speak broadly of neorealism, I want to focus on why the cinematographic medium was selected by neorealists as their ideal vehicle of expression, and how television either interrupted or supported the principles at the heart of their cinematic practice. Indeed, Cesare Zavattini always differentiated between the camera as a tool that captures photographic indexicality and the development of film practices that act on, modify, and change that indexical image. Zavattini was not drawn to cinema broadly speaking, but was invested in the idea of cinema as it was used in its earliest stages of development. He described early cinematic practice as part of a period when “everything was equal, everything was worthy

¹⁸⁰ I am indebted to William Uricchio’s work here suggesting that the idea of television’s “liveness” predated the rise of cinema. See “Storage, Simultaneity, and the Media Technology of Modernity,” in *Allegories of Communication: Intermedial Concerns from Cinema to the Digital*, eds. John Fullerton and Jan Olsson (Rome: John Libbey, 2004), 123-138.

of being suspended on film. It was the most pure and promising moment of cinema.”¹⁸¹ When cinema was used as a documentary medium (before it invented fictitious story lines), filmmakers capitalized on its privileged relationship to indexical reality. Zavattini even argued that cinema went in the wrong direction when it chose the path of Méliès instead of Lumière—i.e. when it began to be used to create fantasy instead of documenting the ubiquity and banality of everyday reality.¹⁸²

Zavattini identified cinema as a means of gaining direct knowledge about the world and, most importantly, the people in that world. Reflecting the visual sensibility that has come to be described as his “poetics of shadowing,” Zavattini privileged a cinematic practice that allows the viewer to experience continuous and non-spectacular reality. “We observe our man: he walks, smiles, speaks, you are able to see him from all angles, to get close to him, to go away from him, to study every act, and to restudy him.”¹⁸³ In this description of how the unimpeded camera can shadow the individual, Zavattini emphasizes that he desired cinema to document the uninterrupted progression of real time events. With his description of a quasi-voyeuristic gaze, Zavattini establishes cinema’s value in terms of its authentic connection to reality without any narrative constructs to create a barrier between the spectator and that reality. Zavattini underscores this point when he describes the motivation for his filmmaking in these terms: “to interest ourselves in others not according to the synthesis of the narrative of the past” but by

¹⁸¹ Cesare Zavattini, “Il cinema e l’uomo moderno,” in *Cesare Zavattini cinema: Diario cinematografico. Neorealismo, ecc.*, eds. Valentina Fortichiari and Mino Argentieri (Milan: Bompiani, 2002 [1949]), 681. The Italian reads, “tutto gli era uguale allora, tutto degno di essere fermato sulla lastra. Fu il momento più incontaminato e promettente del cinema.”

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 679.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 681. The Italian reads, “Osserviamo il nostro uomo: cammina, sorride, parla, lo potete vedere da tutte le parti, avvicinarvi a lui, allontanarvi, studiare ogni suo atto, e ristudiarlo come se foste alla moviola.” Also see Luca Barattoni, *Italian Post-Neorealist Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 95, for a discussion of Zavattini’s poetic of pedinamento.

“bringing the existence and the dignity of men *in their real time* to our awareness.”¹⁸⁴ In contrasting the narrative constructs concretized by classical Hollywood cinema to his ideal of cinematic form—one in which there is a total absence of artificial cinematic techniques—Zavattini associates “realism” with a new structure of intimacy. Zavattini’s idea of shadowing never implied a power over the subject on the part of the spectator; instead, cinema “establishes an amazing parity” between subject and viewer when it eschews narrative cinematic editing and storytelling techniques.¹⁸⁵ In the postwar Italian framework, unedited, unmediated cinematic images established a different sort of relationship between subject and viewer that the historical development of cinematic form had left behind—Zavattini and neorealist counterparts wanted to find a way to recuperate that initial sensation created by cinema.

Striking a similar chord, Luchino Visconti described his own rationale for filmmaking by drawing a contrast between theatrical artifice—in which everything is performance—and cinema’s ability to capture the authentic. Rather than having to “endure actors,” he saw filmmaking as a means to capture “the most humble gesture of a man, his face, his hesitations and his impulses.”¹⁸⁶ Visconti equated the cinematic form with the ability to reveal the authentic nature of the subject. And in describing cinema as “reality as it unfolds before our eyes,” Visconti also emphasizes, like Zavattini, that cinema documents the temporal unfolding of reality—without editing or other artifices—as a means of getting at the truth of individual experience.¹⁸⁷ Whether they called their cinematic ideal and practice “the poetics of shadowing” or “anthropomorphic cinema,” both Zavattini and Visconti identified why film in particular

¹⁸⁴ Zavattini, “Il cinema,” 680. My emphasis. The Italian reads, “c’è la spinta ad interessarsi degli altri non più secondo la sintesi della narrativa del passato, ma con l’analisi che porta al riconoscimento della esistenza e della pena degli uomini nella loro reale durata.”

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, The Italian reads, “troppa dignità e si stabilivano equazioni sorprendenti.”

¹⁸⁶ Luchino Visconti, “Anthropomorphic Cinema,” in *Springtime in Italy: A Reader on Neorealism*, ed. and trans. David Overbey (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1978[1943]), 84.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

appealed to them: it offered them a potentially uninterrupted, unaltered means of capturing individual reality. Christopher Wagstaff, in summarizing the neorealist theorization of reality, put their perspective in these terms:

Reduction brings you closer to the real. The smaller the facts, the more everyday they are, the humbler the protagonists, the fewer the events and the more they are preserved in their fullest duration, the simpler the apparatus used for recording them, the quicker they are reproduced...the closer you are to reality.¹⁸⁸

Notice that in his description (which I find to be a quite accurate representation of the theorization of neorealism), “realism” manifests as a function of both the subject matter or content (e.g. the smaller, everyday facts and humble protagonists) and the selection of the medium (i.e. with the medium that is simplest, quickest, and preserves things in their fullest duration as being the most preferred).

Christopher Wagstaff’s list of what the neorealists were seeking to accomplish through their realist aesthetic best coincides not with cinema, but *television*. Television, as it was understood in that historical moment, was the medium best suited to their demands. As Italian intellectuals attempted to theorize exactly what television was as a medium, they returned to qualities captured within Wagstaff’s description: television was a documentary medium, characterized by uninterrupted, unedited capture, experienced daily, in which the subject is the ordinary person. In other words, given the neorealists’ aims, television was the perfect medium in which to capture “reality.” In his article “Thinking about Television with Cinema,” French television scholar Gilles Delavaud argues that postwar intellectuals isolated one distinct way in which television—at least when it was thought of primarily as a medium of live transmission—was different from cinema. “Unlike film, in which the spatio-temporal continuity has to be built, television production does not, strictly speaking, build this continuity but transmits it...the

¹⁸⁸ Christopher Wagstaff, *Italian Neorealist Cinema: An Aesthetic Approach* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 80.

pioneers of television acutely felt this continuity requirement both as a technical constraint and as an aesthetic requirement.”¹⁸⁹ If cinema had to construct its narrative, television was different in that it could simply capture reality. Yet while Delavaud accurately points to the qualities of television that distinguished the medium from cinema in the minds of postwar intellectuals, he underplays the extent to which these qualities actually inspired filmmakers, particularly those coming out of the neorealist tradition.

Although Italian intellectuals described television’s unique quality (and its remarkable similarity to the neorealist idea of “realism”) using a variety of different terms, they all underscore the notion of its “direct capture.” In 1964, Umberto Eco succinctly recounted this moment in the mid to late 1950s: “In the attempt to identify a ‘specific’ televisual quality in relationship to the by now canonical problem of film’s specificity, one of the first issues around which the discussion was orientated was that of the *direct capture*.”¹⁹⁰ In identifying television’s direct capture as the point of theoretical interest, Eco’s account is consistent with Delavaud’s analysis of how televisual transmission was theorized in that era. If cinema “habituated the spectator to a concatenate [or successive, chain] narrative...like the nineteenth century novel,” early television production broke from this model. In place of a model in which every scene contributed to the overall meaning of the work, television’s direct capture broke the narrative connection between the “essential and nonessential.”¹⁹¹ According to Eco, Italian intellectuals recognized that television, as a live medium, did not need to construct a narrative, but rather had to record what was in front of it thereby rendering reality in ways that destabilized traditional

¹⁸⁹ Gilles Delavaud, “Penser la television avec la cinema,” *Cinemas: revue d’études cinématographiques* 17.2-3 (2007): 75.

¹⁹⁰ Umberto Eco, *Apocalittici e integrati: Comunicazioni di massa e teorie della cultura di massa* (Milan: Bompiani, 2008 [1964]), 318. The Italian reads, “Uno dei primi temi su cui si orientò la discussione, nel tentativo di discriminare uno ‘specifico’ televisivo di fronte all’ormai canonico problema della specifico filmico, fu quello della *ripresa diretta*.”

¹⁹¹ Ibid. The Italian reads, “abituato lo spettatore a una sorta di racconto concatenato”; “come il romanzo ottocentesco”; “il cui dossaggio tra essenziale e inessenziale sia profondamente diverso.”

spectatorial (and productive) practices. Eco's 1964 recap of the state of Italian theory even replicates the language Zavattini used in his 1959 understanding of televisual immediacy: "Television's voracious temporality does not leave those nineteenth-century spaces where fame and any sort of myth lingered undisturbed at length in the air."¹⁹² Both Eco and Zavattini see television, through its codes of immediacy and simultaneity, as producing new storytelling modes.¹⁹³ Or, as Eco said, television creates a new "narrative fabric."¹⁹⁴

Before I elaborate further on implications of the spectatorial and narratives changes that television introduced, I want to reinforce that (1) television was seen as unique because of its properties of direct capture, and (2) its direct capture was read in parallel to the codes of realist filmmaking. Nowhere are these connections more apparent than in the writings of Federico Doglio and Angelo D'Alessandro, both of which were institutionally associated with the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia. Much of the theorization of neorealism began prewar at the Centro, where many of neorealism's most famous directors received their training. In the postwar period, the Centro, despite having been taken over by Catholic circles, nonetheless continued to influence Marxist criticism, particularly through the work of figures such as Umberto Barbaro.¹⁹⁵ Furthermore, the 1960s and 1970s saw a revolving door between the Centro and the RAI, with Rossellini standing at the institutions' intersection. Rossellini, one of

¹⁹² Cesare Zavattini, "Prefazione," in *Le italiane si confessano* ed. Gabrielle Parca (Florence: Parenti, 1959): ix. The Italian reads, "il tempo vorace della TV non lascia più quegli spazi ottocenteschi dove la fama e qualsiasi sorta di mito restavano nell'aria a lungo indisturbate."

¹⁹³ Carlo Lizzani also connected television's direct capture to a new narrative mode, saying that television has a "fourth dimension that cinema and theater do not have: length. Television can be like the old epic storyteller."¹⁹³ Carlo Lizzani interviewed by Paolo Gobetti, "Registi davanti alla TV," *Cinema Nuovo* 134 (July 1, 1958): 61. The Italian reads, "quarta dimensione che cinema e teatro non hanno: cioè la *durata*. La televisione può essere come l'antico cantastorie."

¹⁹⁴ Eco, *Apocalittici*, 319. In Italian, "tessuto narrativo."

¹⁹⁵ Tiziana Ferrero-Regis, *Recent Italian Cinema: Spaces, Contexts, Experiences* (Leicester, UK: Troubador, 2009), 99; Daniela Treveri Gennari, "Forbidden Pleasures: Voyeurism, Showgirls and Catholicism in Postwar Cinema in Italy," in *Italy on Screen: National Identity and Italian Imaginary*, eds. Lucy Bolton and Christina Siggers Manson (Bern: Lang, 2010), 101.

neorealism's most important figures, headed the Centro in 1968, which marked the middle of his arc of television productions of the RAI.¹⁹⁶

Federico Doglio and Angelo D'Alessandro both emphasized television's immediacy as its defining characteristic. Doglio, who wrote extensively about television including for the Centro Sperimentale's *Bianco e nero*, believed that a distinction had to be made between moments when television merely functioned as a means of rebroadcasting, such as when it broadcasted old films, and when it acted as a unique and independent medium, such as when programming was designed to be "captured" for television.¹⁹⁷ For Doglio, as for the majority of his peers, television markedly distinguished itself when it took advantage of its specificity as a medium: its immediacy and its connection to *attualità*, or its basis in documentary reality.¹⁹⁸ Angelo D'Alessandro at the Centro Sperimentale dubbed television "the art of mimicking movement," thus challenging his contemporaries to see television as having the unique ability to follow, uninterrupted, the movements of the individual.¹⁹⁹ The likely inadvertent but apropos language by which D'Alessandro described television's simultaneous and continuous flow as "mimicking movement" recalls Zavattini's (filmic) poetic of shadowing, in which the spectator is invited to follow along, shadowing reality undisturbed.

D'Alessandro positions television's direct capture as being highly adaptable to the scenarios that Zavattini envisioned for neorealist filmmaking. According to D'Alessandro, television's aesthetic limitations—its restrictions in terms of settings, the limited number of characters that can be on screen, the need for close ups, the lack of image clarity, and the size of its screen—were in reality benefits of the medium. In his assertion that these qualities insured

¹⁹⁶ Peter Bondanella, *The Films of Roberto Rossellini* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 29.

¹⁹⁷ Federico Doglio, *Televisione e spettacolo* (Rome: Universale Stadium, 1961), 83. Doglio uses the exact same Italian term as Eco: "riprese dirette."

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ Angelo D'Alessandro, "TV: Arte del movimento mimico," in *Lo spettacolo televisivo*, ed. Angelo D'Alessandro (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1957), 307. The Italian reads, "TV come *arte del movimento mimico*."

that “the primary object and essential component in every correct television image is man. Not man in the abstract, but man in concrete, living reality,” D’Alessandro connects television’s direct capture to the representational modes of realism.²⁰⁰ Later in that same essay, D’Alessandro makes this precise argument in establishing television as an extension of neorealism:

The ideas of L’Herbier have already for some time been theorized and validated by the experience of Flaherty, Grierson and a few directors of cinematic neorealism. L’Herbier, but also Grierson, Pugliese, and the others occupied with television attribute a great importance to the element of the ‘real’ in determining the autonomous expressive form of television...One of the fundamental aspects of television is the *acquisition of reality*.²⁰¹

D’Alessandro’s 1957 interpretation of television traces the exact same lineage that Luca Caminati rescues a half a century later in his study linking the development of neorealism to the prewar influence of Alberto Cavalcanti and the concept of “narrative documentary.” Critically missing in Caminati’s account, though, is the fact that D’Alessandro extended the same formal comparison to another, very important node in the lineage: television.²⁰²

There is more at stake here than just a point of continuity between the neorealist idea of “realism” and television’s direct capture. There is also the question of the extent to which the introduction of television impacted the continued theorization of neorealism in the mid-1950s. In 1964, Umberto Eco even encouraged his readers to think about television’s arrival as impacting cinematic ideas of realism. “In the diffusion of direct capture one can identify the debt of new cinema toward television...it would be not accidental that only after a few years of

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 313-314. The Italian reads, “l’oggetto primo ed essenziale componente ogni corretta immagine televisiva è l’uomo. Non l’uomo in assoluto, ma in concreto, l’uomo, realtà vivente ed operante nell’esistenza.”

²⁰¹ Ibid., 317. The original Italian reads, “le sue idee sono state già da tempo teorizzate e convalidate dall’esperienza di un Flaherty, di un Grierson e di alcuni registi del neorealismo nel cinema. Con L’Herbier anche il Grierson, il Pugliese ed altri studiosi della TV attribuiscono grande importanza all’elemento ‘vero’ nella determinazione della forma espressiva autonoma della TV... Uno degli aspetti fondamentali della TV è l’*acquisizione del vero*.”

²⁰² Luca Caminati, *Roberto Rossellini documentarista: una cultura della realtà* (Rome: Centro sperimentale di cinematografia, 2012), 19-24.

the routines of the television narrative cinema also took those moves.”²⁰³ In citing the works of Antonioni and *cinéma vérité* as examples of this phenomenon, Eco sees the development of cinematic form as being influenced by television. These experimental cinematic forms were among the works most engaged with the theorization of cinema (Antonioni in particular comes to mind here), indicating that television posed new theoretical problems and possibilities for cinema.

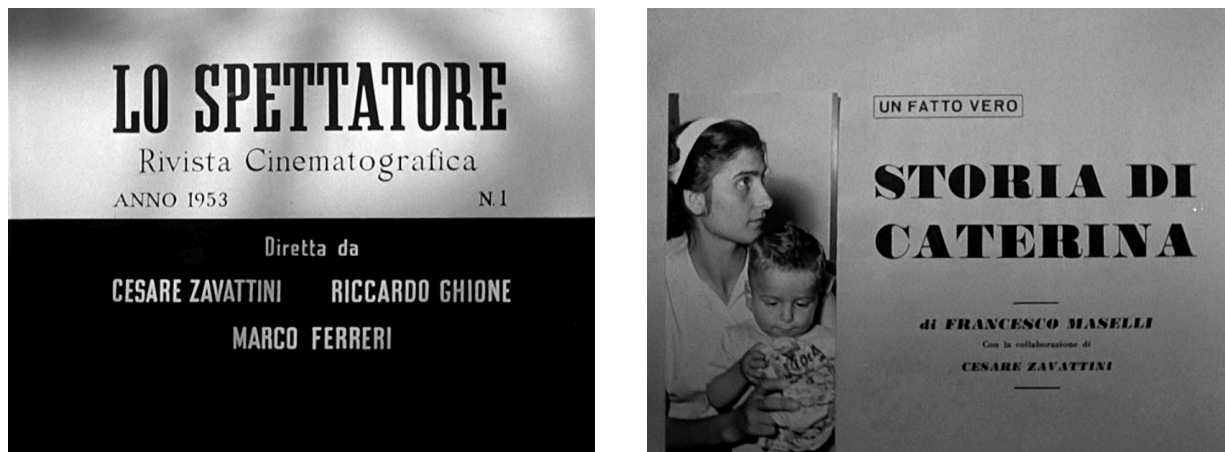


Figure 3: Title cards designed to look like newsmagazines from *Amore in città*

Indeed, while the original writings in which Zavattini outlines the neorealist approach to filmmaking date back to the 1940s, the pursuit of direct capture as an aesthetic and narrative mode emerges as an overarching preoccupation in Zavattini’s work of the 1950s.²⁰⁴ In a letter to Roberto Rossellini about his 1953 *Amore in città* (*Love in the City*) project, Zavattini outlined his objective to create a cinematic experience that was even “more direct, more immediate” than his previous experimentations.²⁰⁵ *Amore in città* is composed of six individual episodes, each by a different director, with each episode made to appear as if it were an article within a

²⁰³ Eco, 319. In Italian, “Nell’insegnamento della ripresa diretta si potrebbe individuare il debito del nuovo cinema verso la TV...non sarebbe accidentale che solo dopo alcuni anni di abitudine al racconto televisivo anche il cinema abbia preso la mosse.”

²⁰⁴ Casetti, 30.

²⁰⁵ Cesare Zavattini to Roberto Rossellini, R357/3, Archivio Cesare Zavattini, Biblioteca Panizzi, Reggio Emilia, Italy. The Italian reads, “vuole essere sempre più diretto, immediato.”

newsmagazine. The film's title cards copied the formats of newspaper pages to make the episodes appear as if ripped from the headlines. In his own episode, Zavattini invited a woman who had become the subject of newspaper headline to recreate the succession of those events from her own life story. In eliminating the role of the actor and capturing the voice and perspective of the woman, Zavattini sought to eliminate the element of fiction and performativity, viewing his project as an attempt to "give another try at neorealism's vitality."²⁰⁶ His experimentation with new representational strategies (further elaborated in a letter to Rossellini describing his intentions for the project), documents the extent to which his creative process was preoccupied with the search for representational immediacy. As Zavattini continued to write about and theorize his own practices, he increasingly sought ways to heighten or further exploit the sense of direct capture within his work, advocating that visual media "get close to its true expressive use, which is contemporaneity, immediacy."²⁰⁷

As Zavattini continuously sought to break down the barriers between fiction and reality, the values he identified as unique to television allowed the medium to represent, ultimately, "a technical improvement" over cinematic form.²⁰⁸ And, not coincidentally, his writings and experimentations coincide with Casetti's historicization of neorealism, by which the theorization of realism hits a point of saturation and renewal around 1955. Along with Zavattini, Rossellini, too, identified televisual practice in terms of a *renewal* of his cinematic goals. In a 1958 interview with André Bazin, published in the French *France Observateur* as well as the Italian

²⁰⁶ Ibid. The Italian reads, "diamo un'altra prova della vitalità del neorealismo."

²⁰⁷ Zavattini, "Il cinema," 686. The original Italian reads, "Cinema deve avvicinarsi alla sua vera ragione espressiva, che è la contemporaneità, l'immediatezza."

²⁰⁸ Cesare Zavattini, "Roma, 16 febbraio 1959," in *Cesare Zavattini cinema: Diario cinematografico. Neorealismo, ecc.*, eds. Valentina Fortichiari and Mino Argentieri (Milan: Bompiani, 2002 [1959]), 421. The Italian reads, "c'è stato un miglioramento tecnico e vedremo in tal senso cose straordinarie, mentre moralmente si ripeteranno sempre, anzi ingranditi, gli stessi guai del cinema."

Cinema Nuovo, Roberto Rossellini and Jean Renoir gave the following reasons for their turn to television production.

Television...can bring to producers the spirit of cinema at its beginnings. I would like to make this film—and this is where television gives me something valuable—in the spirit of *live* television. I'd like to make the film as though it were a live broadcast, shooting each scene only once, with the actors imagining that the act is directly receiving their words and gestures. Both the actors and the technicians should know that there will be no retakes and that, whether they succeed or not, they can't begin again... by adapting these techniques, one should be able to arrive at a new cinematographic style which could be extremely interesting.²⁰⁹

For Renoir, live television's unintermittable capture and transmission of reality conjured up early cinema documentary use while also suggesting a means to revise both his and Rossellini's cinematic practice. Rossellini elaborated upon Renoir's comments by questioning the utility of montage and editing in filmmaking. Calling for a return to cinema's origins, Rossellini referred back to the moment in which, in his nostalgic and imaginary view, motion pictures captured the world without narrative conventions (i.e. the period of Lumière).²¹⁰ In speaking of a period of cinematic production before editing, Rossellini and Renoir identified television's direct capture as being where television's most radical potential rested for those working from neorealism's paradigms.²¹¹

We could say then that television's direct capture intensified the relationship to immediate reality that the neorealists first lauded in early cinematic productions. In so doing, television

²⁰⁹ "Il nostro incontro con la TV," *Cinema Nuovo* 136 (August 1, 1958): 238-9. Translated as "Cinema and Television, Jean Renoir and Roberto Rossellini interviewed by André Bazin" by Adriano Aprà, *Roberto Rossellini My Method: Writings and Interviews*, ed. Adriano Aprà (New York, Marsilio, 1995): 90-91. The original Italian reads, "Se oggi ci rivolgiamo, Roberto ed io, alla tv, è perché la tv...potrà dare agli autori lo spirito del cinema alle sue origine. Vorrei girare questo film—ed è qui che la tv mi offre qualcosa di apprezzabile—nello spirito della 'televisione diretta'. Non si tratterà evidentemente di una trasmissione diretta, dato che sarà preparata sulla pellicole, ma vorrei girarla come una trasmissione diretta. Vorrei girare una volta sola ogni scena e chi gli attori immaginassero ogni volta, mentre recitano che il pubblico segue diretta i loro dialoghi e i loro gesti. Gli attori, così come i tecnici, sapranno che si gira una volta sola e che, riuscita o no la ripresa, non si ripeterà mai più...queste tecniche, possiamo arrivare a una nuova tecnica cinematografico che può essere estremamente interessante."

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 92-93.

²¹¹ Cesare Zavattini, "Roma," 421.

produced moments of empathetic connection and participatory dialogue that were even more forceful than what cinema was able to inspire. For example, in describing the notion of shadowing, Zavattini described cinema as creating a unique spectatorial experience in which the act of spectating was synthesized with the represented moment on screen. “The concreteness of [the man in front of us and] his minute will therefore indicate to us how our minute of absence is just as concrete.”²¹² The simultaneous passage of time for the spectator and the subject on screen created relationship in which the viewer was forced to recognize his or her commonality with that subject. Cinema, when used as a documentary medium, enabled image-makers to deepen the social consciousness of their viewers.²¹³ Or, as Carlo Lizzani phrased this same idea, “I was rather helped by cinema in being able to know my country and its history better... for those who do not have direct contact...[cinema] *enters* between people, *inside* people, they confuse themselves with them until they become, dare I say it, *invisible*.”²¹⁴

Under this framework, television’s “direct capture” fostered a seamless connection between subject and viewer, a connection so strong that it is as if they are wedded together in the same experience. As French sociologist and filmmaker Edgar Morin argued, with the arrival of mass cultural forms such as cinema and television, “the living human presence of gestures, of expressions, of the voice, collective participation was reintroduced into the culture.” Television in particular allowed for an “immediate or concrete connection” between the viewing audience and the subject on screen, creating what Morin described as a “*tele-partecipazione mentale*

²¹² Ibid. The Italian reads, “l’uomo è lì davanti a noi e noi lo possiamo guardare al rallentatore (con un mezzo proprio del cinema), per accertare la concretezza del suo minuto che ci indicherà perciò come altrettanto concreto il nostro minuto di assenza.”

²¹³ Cesare Zavattini, “Tesi sul neorealismo,” in *Cinema. Diario cinematografico. Neorealismo ecc.*, in eds. Valentina Fortichiari e Mino Argentieri (Milan: Bompiani, 2002 [1953]), 743.

²¹⁴ Carlo Lizzani, *Il mio lungo viaggio nel secolo breve* (Turin: Einaudi, 2004), 4. The Italian reads, “*Mi sono piuttosto servito del cinema per conoscere meglio il mio paese e la sua Storia...per chi non ha un contatto diretto...[cinema] si entra fra le persone, dentro le persone, ci si confonde con loro fino a diventare, oserei dire, invisibili.*”

(mental tele-participation).”²¹⁵ The implications of this new participatory form of mental tele-participation were unambiguous for Morin; the medium would create a “new structure in human relations.”²¹⁶ Morin’s description of television’s participatory potential is significant, especially considering his own choice of stylistic modes of filmmaking. His 1960 documentary, *Chronique d’un été* (*Chronicle of a Summer*), produced with Jean Roach, made the participation and opinions of ordinary people the driving force and the narrative thrust. Thus the production functioned not unlike the range of audience participation television programming, television news programming, and, as we will see, the documentary series *Chi legge* that Zavattini made in 1960, which will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Television’s direct capture created a heightened participatory experience for Zavattini. In a 1961 interview with the Communist daily *l’Unità*, Zavattini spoke about the way in which television enabled viewers to connect to their elected representatives under new circumstances. He described his “curiosity of seeing the face of Togliatti, Nenni, Moro [Italian political figures from the Communist, Socialist, and Christian Democrat parties], to hear them in first person defend their ideas.” Zavattini added that in television’s direct capture he “finds a sense of discovery, of adventure that every night calls all of us in front of the TV.”²¹⁷ Returning again to the idea that visual media could create a feeling on commonality and identification between the viewer and the subject on the screen, Zavattini identified in television programming a way in which to recreate his own poetic of realism. In the aforementioned 1958 interview with Bazin, Jean Renoir had spoken about television providing a new form of contact. It only took “two

²¹⁵ Edgar Morin, “L’industria della cultura,” *Tempo Presente* 6.8 (August 1961), 562. In Italian, “la presenza vivente umana, l’espressione vivente dei gesti, delle mimiche, delle voci, la partecipazione collettiva sono reintrodotta nella cultura”; “il legame immediate e concreto”; “*tele-partecipazione mentale*.”

²¹⁶ Ibid. The Italian reads, “nuova strutture dei rapporti umani.”

²¹⁷ Arturo Gismondi, “Le proposte di Zavattini per una TV aperta alla realtà e alla democrazia,” *l’Unità*, May 4, 1961, 3. The original Italian reads: “La curiosità di vedere in faccia Togliatti, Nenni, Moro, di vedere come se la sarebbero cavata, di sentirli, in prima persona difendere le loro idee. Ma anche mi si consenta il senso di scoperta, di avventura che ogni sera richiamava tutti davanti alla TV.”

minutes [to] read the faces of these people, [to know] who they were.”²¹⁸ Rossellini built on Renoir’s argument, underscoring the point that television revived the “cinematic possibility to penetrate to the heart of the personality,” a representational function that had been threatened with the end of neorealism in the late 1940s.²¹⁹ Renoir’s and Rossellini’s words highlight the extent to which television was perceived as being able to readily create a sense of identification between the individual on screen and the viewing audience.

When Renoir and Zavattini described their experience of engagement and excitement in watching television programming, both returned to moments in which television employed the interview. In each case, the live interview produced a moment of direct contact and knowledge that most specifically addressed their own poetic and its goals. Catholic film and television critic Renato May even considered the live television interview its own special televisual language: “A single television language does not exist, but there exists as many languages as there are possible types of transmissions. So there will be a language of the interview, like that of the sports event, the language of the story or of the transmission from the studio, like that didactic one from lessons or cultural programs or the inadequate social inquiry.”²²⁰ Not only was the television interview a definable “language” of television, but, in evoking the televised sporting event, May associates the interview with qualities of live, continuous, and unmediated capture. Furthermore, just as Zavattini and Rossellini viewed moments of direct participation—of politicians and ordinary people alike—as solidifying the link between cinema’s capacity for realism and

²¹⁸ “Il nostro incontro,” 240 and 93 in the English translation. The Italian reads, “in due minuti sapevamo chi erano e ho trovato la cosa assolutamente appassionante”

²¹⁹ Ibid., 241. The translation from the French version of the interview between, Renoir and Rossellini does not contain this quote, but it can be found in the Italian interview. It reads, “Volevo insistere su questa possibilità del cinema di penetrare fino al fondo dei personaggi. Oggi alla tv, si ritrovano queste esperienze.”

²²⁰ Renato May, “Che cosa non è la televisione,” *Cronache del cinema e della televisione* 16-17 (September-October 1956): 30. The Italian reads, “un linguaggio televisivo non esiste, ma esistono—se esistono—tanti linguaggi quanti sono i generi possibili della trasmissione. Ci sarà così il linguaggio dell’intervista come quello della trasmissione di un avvenimento sportivo, il linguaggio del racconto o della trasmissione da studio, come quello didattico della lezione e del programma culturale o quello scarno dell’inchiesta sociale.

television, so too did Sergio Pugliese, the RAI's Artistic Director, characterize television, because of its "direct transmission and the contemporaneity of its events," as the "first medium of communication to allow the direct participation of the spectator."²²¹ Based on this participation of ordinary people in the production of programming, Pugliese understood television to be a "technical evolution of civilization."²²² In other words, he articulated that television's direct capture helped to refine the Italian relationship to modernity, which had been taking place through the debate over realism.

For Paolo Gobetti, television's direct capture was so transformative as to fundamentally alter the dynamics of national culture. According to Gobetti, "in the first period of capitalist development the people of the underprivileged classes, who had remained for centuries on the margins of civil life, finally became aware of their value," and when this happened it was cinema "that best responded to the needs of these evolving masses."²²³ Gobetti's cogent analysis foreshadows Miriam Hansen's argument that cinema functioned as a form of "vernacular modernism" that was able to help popular audiences mediate the experience of modernity.²²⁴ Yet Gobetti also articulates how television continued cinema's legacy. By the 1950s, Hollywood "cinematic spectacle" was no longer perceived as producing a "critical attitude" in audiences; instead, television was able medium deemed capable of stimulate a critical attitude, but only

²²¹ Sergio Pugliese, in *Drammaturgia nuova: Raccolta di drammi e commedie scritte per la televisione*, ed. Sergio Pugliese (Turin: ERI Edizioni RAI, 1965), xx. The Italian reads, "ripresa diretta e contemporanea d'un avvenimento" and "La televisione è il primo mezzo di comunicazione che consenta questa partecipazione diretta dello spettatore"

²²² Ibid., xvii. The Italian reads, "evoluzione tecnica della civiltà."

²²³ Paolo Gobetti, *Teatro televisivo americano* (Turin: Einaudi, 1966), xviii-xix. The Italian reads, "Nel primo periodo di sviluppo del capitalismo gli uomini delle classi diseredate, rimasti per millenni ai margini della vita civile, prendono finalmente coscienza della propria qualità... il cinema è lo strumento che meglio risponde a questi bisogni delle masse in evoluzione."

²²⁴ Miriam Hansen, "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism," *Modernism/modernity* 6.2 (April 1999): 59-77.

“when it is faithful to the particularity of medium” or its “‘contemporary’ element.”²²⁵ In highlighting television’s contemporaneity or its direct capture as fundamentally different than that provided by cinema, Gobetti also suggests that television could be the Italian idea of modernity, because it was best suited to the new demands of a democratic Italy.

The people of the subaltern classes became (or at least were inspired to become) creative and informed elements of a new society...[there was] the rediscovery of human nature, just as there was in aftermath of the Middle Ages. And television appears to be the form of expression best adapted for the present moment...having the ability to identify in the conscience of the individual the necessary elements for a society in equilibrium.²²⁶

In lauding the example set by American anthology dramas as a renaissance of humanism after the fascist dark ages, Gobetti argues for adopting American televisual modernity because it best invited the participation of the popular masses and their consciousness.

For media producers and critics in Italy, like many of their peers across the globe, television’s technological qualities defined the medium as distinctly different from cinema. Television was assumed to be a medium of liveness and contemporaneity, whereas cinema was a medium of storage with an evolved set of editing norms and rules (e.g., classical Hollywood narrative in the West and Soviet montage in the East). The role of neorealism in patterning and inflecting the interpretation of television both nationalizes and transnationalizes Italy’s early programming regimes. On the one hand, television fed into the specific aesthetic goals established by neorealist cinema—to produce a direct capture of events, which was unmediated and unaltered, thereby creating a participatory connection between subject and viewer. On the

²²⁵ Gobetti, xiii. The Italian reads, “lo spettacolo cinematografico per sua natura non favorisce un atteggiamento critico, mentre quello televisivo può addirittura stimolarlo, quando sia fedele a una della particolarità del mezzo che è presenza di almeno un elemento ‘contemporaneo’

²²⁶ Ibid., xviii-xix. “Gli uomini delle class subaltern sono diventati (o per lo meno aspirano a diventare) elementi creatori e consci di una nuova società...e come fu all’indomani del Medioevo, alla riscoperta di tante nature umane. E la televisione appare la forma di espressione più adeguata ai tempi presenti abbinando alle qualità di moltiplicazione quantitative quelle d’indagine ‘umanistica,’ la capacità di scorgere nella coscienza dell’individuo gli elementi vitali per l’equilibrio della società.”

other hand, the search for realist modes of representation connected Italy's television experimentations to a broad-based project, with French and American critical perspectives and visual experimentations providing particularly important points of reference. In the following chapter, I will turn from aesthetics to explore how television's public service broadcasting ethos informed television's potential to create a national-popular culture.

CHAPTER 4

TV as an Institution of National Popular Dialogue

The Andreotti law, which gave the Italian government control over funding and thus led to the dominance of American co-productions, made socially driven, neorealist films harder and harder to make.²²⁷ As commercially driven, Italian-American co-productions most easily found financing from Hollywood studios, those associated with neorealism began to search for alternative outlets. Luchino Visconti, for example, expressed his frustration at the changing dynamics of film production, lamenting, in a personal letter to Zavattini, that “the Americans are not interested in fascism.”²²⁸ The new system of funding for films was not supportive of films in which Italian media producers sought to deal specifically with Italy’s relationship to its own past. Anti-fascist intellectual Nicola Chiaromonte also keenly recognized the deadening impact of commercialization on neorealist productions:

As long as the Italian movies were a kind of free-lancing affair, individual talent and the gift for improvisation could exercise themselves quite freely... The Italian movies have now become a big business. This is, in itself, a threat to the very impulse out of which ‘neo-realism’ was born. It brings it is wake standardization, commercialism, and also conformism.²²⁹

²²⁷ Luca Barattoni, *Italian Post-Neorealist Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 40-42 provides a good analysis of the impact of the *legge Andreotti* and the crisis of neorealism. For additional discussions, see Daniela Treveri Gennari, “Forbidden Pleasures: Voyeurism, Showgirls and Catholicism in Postwar Cinema in Italy,” in *Italy on Screen: National Identity and Italian Imaginary*, eds. Lucy Bolton and Christina Siggers Manson (Bern: Lang, 2010), 101-114 and Victoria De Grazia, “La sfida dello ‘star system’ L’americanismo nella formazione della cultura di massa in Europe, 1920-1965,” *Quaderni storici* 58.1 (April 1985): 95-133. Translated as Victoria De Grazia, “Mass Culture and Sovereignty: The American Challenge to European Cinemas, 1920 – 1960,” *Journal of Modern History* 61 (March 1989): 83.

²²⁸ Luchino Visconti, undated letter to Cesare Zavattini, V263-18, Archivio Cesare Zavattini, Biblioteca Panizzi, Reggio Emilia, Italy. The Italian reads, “gli americani non s’interessano di fascismo”

²²⁹ Nicola Chiaromonte, “Stage and Screen in Italy,” *Encounter* 4.3 (March 1955): 13. The original was published in English, although likely translated from the Italian.

In this atmosphere, where the commercial viability of films determined the likelihood that any one film would be made, television offered an appealing and practical alternative. Instead of a film industry increasingly dominated by private investors operating in a free capitalist economy, public television offered freedom from the new commercial imperatives of filmmaking.

Given this climate, prominent neorealists defended television broadcasting on the basis that it could provide a more free and fair avenue through which to disseminate their work. Cesare Zavattini predicated the merits of television on the basis of what it represented from a production standpoint. Television opened up new possibilities at the moment film production was being increasingly closed off because “you don’t need millions to express yourself anymore.”²³⁰ Unrestrained by the demands of profit-oriented studios, television offered valuable flexibility in terms of the types of projects that could be produced, increasing the availability of programming genres and possibilities—a point to which Zavattini and Rossellini returned many times.²³¹ Furthermore, if cinema had become dominated by certain conventions, such as the length of the film or its content, television was open to varying artistic possibilities, including documentary and non-narrative forms of expression.²³² The embrace of television by Leftist filmmakers such as Rossellini and Zavattini, because of the formal and financial liberties it provided, is undeniable. However, the vision of television as an outlet for creative expression conflicts with

²³⁰ Cesare Zavattini, “Roma, 16 febbraio 1959” in *Cesare Zavattini cinema: Diario cinematografico. Neorealismo, ecc.*, eds. Valentina Fortichiari and Mino Argentieri (Milan: Bompiani, 2002), 427. The original Italian reads, “Non ha più bisogno di milioni per esprimersi.”

²³¹ Sergio Trasatti, *Rossellini e la televisione* (Rome: La Rassegna, 1978), 139.

²³² Both expressed hostility toward the conventional two-hour film length. For Zavattini’s commentary, see Zavattini, 425. Rossellini’s lament can be found in Trasatti, 139.

most of the historiography addressing Italian television, which emphasizes the censorship policies of RAI that excluded Leftist perspectives.²³³

The historical accounts reflect the Left's growing frustration with lack of openness of the monopoly service. As the Left became increasingly disenchanted with public broadcasting, the RAI was accused of indoctrinating Italy's citizens into a center-right, Christian Democrat worldview. Books by Leftists, such as Arturo Gismondi's 1958 *Radiotelevisione in Italia* (*Broadcasting in Italy*) and Cesare Mannucci's 1962 *Spettatore senza libertà* (*Spectator without Liberty*), unequivocally positioned the RAI as an institution dominated by conservative forces intent on hierarchical control, one that was quick to censor imagery not compatible with its worldview.²³⁴ Leftist critiques were popularized and hit the mainstream as well. Satirist Achile Campanile penned a number of articles directly confronting the role of Catholic morality in limiting and censoring television programming. Campanile took on both individual figures at the RAI and specific cases of censorship, but he also conflated the monopoly status of the RAI as antithetical to the very idea of democracy, comparing it to a Soviet cultural model.²³⁵ By the 1960s, Leftists and cinematic labor organizations were not only critiquing programming, they were challenging the monopoly status of the RAI in an effort to gain a foothold within television production. This history confirms the image of RAI as a restrictive entity. At the same time, however, the legal challenges brought forth by cinematic labor organizations serve to demonstrate that the Left was not historically uninterested in the potentials of television, as is so often assumed. In fact, Leftist factions were keen on instituting commercial television in Italy,

²³³ See Franco Monteleone, *Storia della RAI dagli alleati alla DC, 1944-1954* (Bari: Laterza, 1980) and Flaminia Morandi, *La via dell'inferno: Il progetto cattolico nella storia della televisione italiana* (Bologna: Odoya, 2009), particularly their discussions on the role of Filiberto Guala.

²³⁴ Cesare Mannucci, *Lo spettatore senza libertà* (Bari: Laterza, 1962) and Arturo Gismondi, *La Radiotelevisione in Italia* (Rome: Editore Riuniti, 1958).

²³⁵ Achile Campanile, "Se c'è il monopolio ci sia la vigilanza," *L'Europeo*, July 24, 1960, 54 and Achile Campanile, "Lettera aperta al trappista del video: L'ingegner Guala si ritira in convento dopo la sua esperienza televisiva," *L'Europeo*, December 11, 1960, 40-41.

as they presumed the element of competition would allow for more voices to appear on air. Cinema associations and labor groups saw television as an opportunity, as did industry and advertising agencies.²³⁶

At least in television broadcasting's early stages, there was an air of cooperation from across the political spectrum that preceded the political infighting that solidified in the 1960s and beyond. For example, the letters between Zavattini and Sergio Pugliese, the RAI's Artistic Director, indicate that Pugliese welcomed the contributions of the Leftist Zavattini, seeing his ideas as compatible with his own regarding how to program the service. Writing in response to Zavattini's proposal for a program to follow his 1960 documentary series, Pugliese indicated that, despite logistical and financial challenges, the program appeared "so new, useful, and specific to television and its cultural obligations toward the country that it is worth spending some more time on it."²³⁷ The praise for Zavattini's work and ideas on the part of Pugliese suggests that common interests did exist between the two, a fact that reinforces recent scholarship pointing to how the creation of Italian postwar culture had consistently relied on affinities existing between Catholicism and Marxism.²³⁸ The image of the RAI is therefore contradictory—the broadcaster functioned as an opportunity for open expression after production and financing norms of cinema became unappealing, but it was also seen as a closed and dogmatic institution that sought to suppress free expression.

²³⁶ Although I have not found any scholarship that addresses this history, primary sources documenting interest in creating new television channels can be found in the following: Fondo Giuseppe Spataro, fascicolo 112, documento 452, Istituto Luigi Sturzo, Rome, Italy.

Parties directly petitioning the RAI included: film company Adriatica Film SPA, labor organizations Associazione nazionale industrie cinematografiche e affini (ANICA) and Associazione Generale Italiana dello Spettacolo (AGIS), as well as an unspecified advertising agency and Biellese industry group. There was also a broad and ongoing discussion going on in both technical publications such as Alessandro Banfi's frequent editorials in *L'Antenna* and the reporting on Giovanni Archibugi in the Leftist film publication *Il Contemporaneo*.

²³⁷ Sergio Pugliese, letter to Cesare Zavattini, May 26, 1961, P691/6, Archivio Cesare Zavattini, Biblioteca Panizzi, Reggio Emilia, Italy. The Italian reads, "ma essi sembra, e sembra a tanti amici, così nuova utile e specifica per la tv sul piano degli impegni culturali verso il Paese che vale la pena di perdervi ancora del tempo."

²³⁸ Daniela Treveri Gennari, *Post-War Italian Cinema: American Intervention, Vatican Interests* (London: Routledge, 2008).

In efforts to break from these dueling interpretations of the RAI, I will use the very document that supposedly cemented the RAI's hard-line position—its “Self-Censorship Code”—to argue that its institution helped to frame the issue of a participatory and egalitarian culture as a specific objective of the broadcasting service. Filiberto Guala—who headed the construction of public housing for the Italian INA-casa before assuming the presidency of the RAI (to then later become a monk)—instituted the Self-Censorship Code in 1956, two years after television broadcasts had begun, but before the vast majority of Italians had regular contact with the medium. The Self-Censorship Code is similar in many respects to the Hays Code in the United States, as it set out specific guidelines for the themes and subject matter that would be morally permissible on air. Up until this point (and as we will see in further detail in Chapter 7), the scholarly understanding of censorship has taken on a rather reductive historical perspective on the Code, framing it as having enacted a function of control over the populace, either morally or politically. But in much the same way that Lee Grieveson sees the policing of cinema in terms of “the gradual evolution and codification...of [its] social function,” the RAI's Self-Censorship Code can be understood as an important document through which television itself, as a site of participatory culture, was imagined.²³⁹ Here I will specifically explore the Code as an attempt to adapt the fascist-era Ente Italiano per le Audizioni Radiofoniche (EIAR), which had maintained striking structural continuity into the postwar period, to the demands of the postwar context.²⁴⁰ However, before delving into the specifics of the RAI as an institution guided by the Self-Censorship Code to create programming that was open and accessible to all Italians, I want to contextualize RAI's approach to its audiences in terms of Italian postwar cultural policies.

²³⁹ Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early Twentieth Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 6.

²⁴⁰ There were also a series of successive name changes that reflect its changing relationship to Italy's political regimes. After being named the EIAR under fascism, its name was changed to Radio Audizioni Italia in 1944 (not coincidentally shortly after the Allied liberation). Finally, it became Radiotelevisione Italiana or RAI in 1954 to reflect TV being placed under agency's control.

Popular and Participatory Culture in Postwar Italy

As both anti-fascist Catholic and Marxist Italian intellectuals sought to create a post-fascist Italy, the question of culture and the need to create a cultural policy was a recurring issue. Cultural historian Stephen Gundle describes how “the great hopes and aspirations of the Liberation were strongly felt on the cultural plane. Among intellectuals...the prospect of a complete regeneration in national life was highly attractive.”²⁴¹ Common among these intellectuals was a desire to create a culture that refused hierarchical norms and produced egalitarian representations that were accessible across social classes—a practical task that had intellectually plagued and divided Italian elites for decades. According to political scientist Maurice Finocchiaro, modern, twentieth-century Italian political theory is overwhelmingly preoccupied with defining the individual’s relationship to society. Finocchiaro recounts how Italian political scientists were divided, not in terms of political identity (being on the Left or Right), but by contrasting principles concerning the orchestration of power (egalitarianism versus elitism). Drawing on the writings of Gaetano Mosca and Antonio Gramsci—who emerge from different ends of the Italian political spectrum—Finocchiaro positions these two authors as working on the same theoretical issue: how to define the role of the elites in relationship to the masses.²⁴² Finocchiaro makes clear that, despite polarized political views, Italian ideas of political modernity have centered on the question of the relationship between the elite and the masses. These concerns were heightened postwar as when intellectuals across the political divide increasingly sought to produce cultural products that could address all audiences.

²⁴¹ Stephen Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow: The Italian Communists and the Challenge of Mass Culture, 1943-1991* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 24.

²⁴² Maurice A. Finocchiaro, *Beyond Right and Left: Democratic Elitism in Mosca and Gramsci* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

Not coincidentally, the postwar publication of Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* created a compelling case for the process by which to achieve egalitarian goals, since Gramsci himself called for the creation of such a culture. For postwar intellectuals, Gramsci's notion of national-popular became a "cultural concept" that encompassed a desire to "form *expansive, universalizing* alliances with other classes and class-fractions" through culture.²⁴³ Gramsci's writing inspired the pervasive idea amongst postwar elites: that in order to create solidarity with the popular masses, culture must be created on popular terms. Because the masses are "excluded from high culture and 'official' conceptions of the world," cultural forms cannot be in the form of books, but they must "be addressed through a medium adapted to their different cultural positions."²⁴⁴ The high culture of the intellectual classes must be integrated into the popular culture of the masses.

The reevaluation of modern Italian politics along the division between egalitarianism and elitism resonates with scholarship that sees the acceptance of American political modernity not as a question of Left or Right politics, but as an expression or manifestation that tracks other affiliations.²⁴⁵ For example, famous Italian journalist and *partigiano* Giorgio Bocca recalls that the differentiation between American democracy and Soviet communism was difficult for the postwar generation to fully conceptualize and understand. They had not experienced "prefascist democracy" or "the communism of Stalin"; instead, the distinction that mattered most was whether someone subscribed to an egalitarian ethos or if they shared in the politics of *qualunquismo*.²⁴⁶ *Qualunquismo* solidified around the "Fronte dell'Uomo Qualunque" or the

²⁴³ David Forgacs, "National-Popular: Genealogy of a Concept," in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (London: Routledge, 1993), 213.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 218.

²⁴⁵ Luigi Bruti Liberati, "Witch-hunts and *Corriere della sera*: A Conservative Perception of American Political Values in Cold War Italy, the 1950s," *Cold War History* 11.1 (February 2011): 69-70.

²⁴⁶ Giorgio Bocca, *Partigiani della montagna: Vita delle divisioni Giustizia e Libertà del Cuneese* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2005), 7 and 170.

“Common Man’s Party” and encouraged an approach in which individuals were to be self-interested and withdrawn from civic duties and political life.²⁴⁷ Although superficially it may appear the movement supported individual agency to operate outside of the confines of governmental control, the opposite is true. The *qualunquismo* of the postwar conceived of the individual in terms of what Umberto Eco has described as “an immediate plebiscitary relationship between a charismatic leader and the masses” that defines populist political movements.²⁴⁸ Its rhetoric maintained a hierarchical idea of power, denying the agency and individuality of the ordinary person and encouraging the populace to leave state management to the country’s leaders. If Gramsci’s notion of national-popular culture encourages the participation and agency of individuals, *qualunquismo* was fundamentally populist movement, believing that government should be left in the hands of leadership without the engagement of the individual. For postwar intellectuals including Bocca, participation was one of the defining features through which the assessed political movements and their ultimate intentions.

The confrontation between egalitarianism and *qualunquismo* highlights the very contentious battle occurring over the screened representation of the ordinary person. Luca Caminati, for example, describes how fascist propaganda films of the late 1930s translated the American idea of the “common man” into documentaries such as those produced by the Fascist Confederation of Agricultural Workers.²⁴⁹ The common man of fascist era films foregrounded the concerns of everyday individuals, but it did so in order to encourage their subservience to state needs (or in the case of postwar *qualunquismo*, rhetoric directed to the sentiments of the

²⁴⁷ Emilio Gentile, *La Grande Italia: The Myth of the Nation in the Twentieth Century*, trans. Suzanne Dingee and Jennifer Pudney (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 260.

²⁴⁸ Umberto Eco, *Turning Back the Clock: Hot Wars and Media Populism*, trans. Alastair McEwen (Orlando: Harcourt, 2007), 146.

²⁴⁹ Luca Caminati, “Alberto Cavalcanti e il ‘documentario narrativo’: il ruolo della tradizione documentaristica nella formazione del cinema neorealista,” *Bianco e nero* 71.567 (May-August 2010): 57-71. Translated as “The Role of Documentary Film in the Formation of Neorealist Cinema,” in *Global Neorealism: The Transnational History of a Film Style*, eds. Saverio Giovacchini and Robert Sklar (Jackson, MI: University of Mississippi Press, 2013): 62.

average person argued that government had no place in attempting to maintain equality and democratic rights designed to benefit the ordinary people). These models stood in contrast to the idea of the Everyman, which Italian intellectuals gleaned from American cinematic and literary sources. The Everyman figure signified the values of a society that was anti-hierarchical and egalitarian, while also being rebellious—i.e. engaged in its political discourses and institutions.

In fact, there was often a very thin line between whether or not the representation of the individual bolstered a populist or popular idea of individual value and agency. For instance, in March of 1956, just a few months after the quiz program *Lascia o raddoppia* began, Paolo Gobetti described the empathetic connection that the program fostered: “The audience is excited about the presence of man, his character. [...] It is a phenomenon that fully revealed itself with the explosive success of *Lascia o raddoppia*.”²⁵⁰ However, by 1959, Gobetti had changed his position on the program. In an article entitled “The Black Shirt of the Dearly Departed,” Gobetti argued that, although the program did originally contribute to the knowledge and awareness of other people, it had lost that ability and had become precariously populist in nature. The program offered “a new form of language,” whose “fundamental characteristic of discovery, novelty, and its sharp introduction into a most vast world” became over time “similar to *qualunquismo* of the immediate postwar.”²⁵¹ Gobetti’s shifting perspective on *Lascia o raddoppia* underscores the priority placed on creating new and participatory forms of culture also found within Gramsci. *Lascia o raddoppia* was popular at first, when it had encouraged

²⁵⁰ Paolo Gobetti, “L’uomo mutilato,” *Cinema Nuovo* 79 (March 25, 1956): 190. The Italian reads, “Ci si è resi conto d’un fenomeno che appare invece ogni giorno più chiaro: la televisione rivaluta l’uomo come elemento fondamentale di spettacolo. Più che alla vicenda, alla trama, al racconto, dinanzi allo schermo del televisore il pubblico si appassiona alla presenza dell’uomo, del personaggio, dell’individuo qualsiasi che racchiude in sé straordinarie ragioni d’interesse per il suo simile... Si tratta di un fenomeno che, rivelatosi pienamente con il successo esplosivo di *Lascia o raddoppia*.”

²⁵¹ Paolo Gobetti, “La camicia nera del caro estinto,” *Cinema Nuovo* 140 (July-August 1959): 339. The Italian reads, “una nuova forma di linguaggio”; “la sua caratteristica fondamentale, di scoperta, di novità, di brusca introduzione a un mondo più vasto”; “simile al ‘qualunquismo’ dei primi anni di questo dopoguerra.”

new forms of awareness and engagement; however, when it became more formulaic and proscribed, it ceased to bolster and further the creation of national-popular culture. In other words, there was no singular form or content that absolutely signified national-popular culture, but this culture needed constant re-elaboration through which to induce the participation of the masses.

As medium of direct capture, television was able to structure aesthetic regimes that encouraged popular participation. Yet television's ability to foster an emerging sense of the popular went beyond its programming. Writing for the Marxist film journal *Cinema Nuovo*, Luigi Chiarini emphasized television as an institution that could mitigate the inequities in Italian society that inhibited the formation of national-popular culture. Chiarini, who founded the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia and became an important postwar international film critic framing neorealism as an international movement, stated television's importance in these terms: "Both [cinema and television] have a greater importance for us, in respect to other countries, if you consider the situation of the education and the poor circulation of books. The democratization of cinema and television is of equal weight to the freedom of the press."²⁵² In these words, Chiarini articulates the themes that were critical to the vision of television as an institution: television was to be a point of solidarity that could tie the illiterate masses to national culture. Television created a stopgap, allowing for the construction of an organic culture until the point in time in which Italy's education system and literacy rates could be improved.

Prominent conservative Italian journalist Idro Montanelli also viewed television in terms of its ability to create a singular, national-popular culture. Quoted by his fellow conservative

²⁵² Luigi Chiarini, "Cinema e tv nella società italiana," *Cinema Nuovo* 146 (July-August 1960): 317. The Italian reads, Entrambi [cinema e televisione] hanno un'importanza maggiore da noi, rispetto ad altri paesi, se si considerano la situazione della scuola e la scarissima diffusione del libro. La democratizzazione del cinema e della tv è una esigenza il cui peso è pari a quello della libertà di stampa."

journalist, Luigi Barzini, Montanelli said the following about television on the first day of the RAI's broadcasts:

There is only one television...if you operate two clearly separated programming regimes it would only aggravate the division [between classes] and [television] would fail in its purpose, which is to be the voice of everyone, the most unattainable ideal is to make frivolous things of such great merit that even serious men find in them fun and serious things, but so human that even the most humble will be interested in them.²⁵³

Montanelli's words are curious in that they establish, even among more conservative elements of Italian culture, a desire for a single universal culture that can unify intellectuals and the masses through common cultural forms. The writings of Chiarini, Montanelli, and Barzini establish that, even across political lines, postwar anti-fascist intellectuals were unified in their approach to culture, despite their varying political beliefs. In the following section, I will explore how the RAI began to encourage these types of ideas about television. With the publication of its Self-Censorship Code in the mid-1950s, the RAI began to frame itself as an institution receptive to the needs of the whole Italian public.

The RAI as an Institution of National Popular Culture

Structurally and organizationally, the RAI unquestionably continued the *status quo* from the fascist to the post-fascist era. The explicit motto "to educate, to inform, to entertain," common amongst European broadcasting services, was never integrated into the charter of the RAI at its founding. Instead, the RAI's institutional structure and legal rationale was merely an agreement extending the concessionary status that the fascist government had given to its predecessor

²⁵³ Indro Montanelli quoted in Luigi Barzini, "Occhio di Vetro," *La Stampa*, January 5, 1954, 3. The Italian reads, "“la televisione è una sola...se mantenessero separati nettamente due programmi, aggraverebbe la divisione e fallirebbe il suo scopo, che è quello di essere la voce di tutti, l'ideale quasi irraggiungibile è quello di far cose frivole così degnamente che anche uomini gravi vi trovino svago e cose serie così umanamente che anche gli umili vi si interessino.”"

agency, the EIAR.²⁵⁴ It wasn't until the 1956 institution of its infamous "norme di autodisciplina," or Self-Censorship Code, that the RAI established for itself a specific and coherent set of norms which was to guide programming. Through the Code, the upper echelons of the RAI's management sought to structure the relationships and cultural codes of their producers, some of whom became prominent intellectuals and performers within Leftist circles, including Umberto Eco, Dario Fo, Gianfranco Bettetini, and Furio Colombo.

The Self-Censorship Code began by establishing the contradiction that frames the organization's very existence: while RAI was an "organization with a functionally private structure" the Code nonetheless established that RAI "has indisputable public characteristics" and therefore must attend to the "education and moral and cultural elevation of the citizen."²⁵⁵ In foregrounding the education of all of Italy's citizens, the Code simultaneously positions itself within postwar Italy's new democratic norms while also making a nod to the global, postwar investment in the language of human rights. The Code begins by stressing that "television programs will be based on respect of the human person. [...] Man is the subject of law, and therefore the respect for and protection of the human person in his dignity, his physical and moral integrity, are the fundamental rule."²⁵⁶ The RAI's management, in emphasizing respect for humanity dignity, rooted the Self-Censorship Code in a language of the individual's legal and moral rights, proliferated most notably by emerging global organizations such as UNESCO. The

²⁵⁴ Italy was an exception to the rule in Europe in that the RAI's existence was legally written as an extension of the contract that the previous broadcasting service the EIAR had with the fascist state. Documents 246 – 298 document the concessionary arrangements in Ministero delle poste I, Fasciolo 119, 246-298, November 1952 – 1953, Fondo Giuseppe Spataro, Istituto Luigi Sturzo, Rome, Italy. The 1952 concessionary agreement is also reprinted in the first appendix to Arturo Gismondi, *La radiotelevisione in Italia* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1958): 139-156.

²⁵⁵ The "self-discipline code" was reprinted in the second appendix to Gismondi, 157-177. The Italian reads, "un organismo a struttura funzionalmente privatistica," and "presenta caratteristiche indiscutibilmente pubbliche" "educazione ed all'elevazione morale e culturale dei cittadini."

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 167. The Italian reads, "I programmi televisivi saranno ispirati al rispetto della persona umana...l'uomo è soggetto del diritto e pertanto il rispetto e la tutela della persona umana nella sua dignità, nella sua integrità fisica e morale, costituiscono norma fondamentale."

Code, by emphasizing both human dignity and legal rights, positioned the RAI to be (at least according to its mission) as open to the goals of the neorealist project as it was to the conservative sects within the RAI that would have embraced the emphasis on human dignity. Indeed, UNESCO goals struck a chord with both groups. Film critic Luigi Chiarini attempted to frame neorealism as a “humanistic aesthetic” compatible with the goals of UNESCO, and critics in Catholic circles were eager to position themselves alongside the pedagogical objectives and projects set forth by the organization, even hosting a UNESCO conference on audiovisual media in 1952.²⁵⁷

In emphasizing the education of the citizen, the Code attempted to speak to UNESCO’s emphasis on dialogue and education as a tool through which to create liberal democracy, and also sought to align itself with the public service logics of other European broadcasters, such as the BBC and the RTF in France. But the Self-Censorship Code also replicated the very language of the new Italian Constitution.²⁵⁸ The Constitution, written in 1947 and establishing the Italian Republic, stipulated that “all citizens have equal *social dignity* and are equal in front of the law, without distinction toward sex, race, language, religion, political opinion, or personal and social conditions.”²⁵⁹ The Constitution invokes standard democratic ideals with respect to the concept

²⁵⁷ Regina Longo, “Marshall Plan Films in Italy, 1948-1955: Cinema as Soft Power” (PhD diss., University of California at Santa Barbara, 2012), 5. Also see Cesare Zavattini, “Domande agli uomini,” *Vie Nuove* 11.45. November 10, 1956, 18-19. Ernesto Valentini, “Il Congresso dell’U.N.E.S.C.O. sui mezzi audiovisivi all’Università del Sacro Cuore,” *Vita e pensiero* 35 (July 1952): 366-374. Vittorino Veronese held positions at both the Azione Cattolica, a Catholic organization dedicated to politically and culturally bolstering the power of the Catholic Church and the Executive Committee of UNESCO. His archives relating to both organizations can be found at the Istituto Luigi Sturzo, Rome, Italy.

²⁵⁸ Zoë Druick, “International Cultural Relations as a Factor in Postwar Canadian Cultural Policy: The Relevance of UNESCO for the Massey Commission,” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 31.1 (2006): 179. Also see Timothy Smith, *Opposition Beyond the Water’s Edge: Liberal Internationalists, Pacifists and Containment, 1945-1953* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999).

²⁵⁹The text of the Italian Constitution can be accessed at <http://www.governo.it/Governo/Costituzione/principi.html>. See in particular Article Three of the Italian Constitution, which reads, “Tutti i cittadini hanno pari dignità sociale e sono eguali davanti alla legge, senza distinzione di sesso, di razza, di lingua, di religione, di opinioni politiche, di condizioni personali e sociali. È compito della Repubblica rimuovere gli ostacoli di ordine economico e sociale, che,

of social dignity, implying a new more humanist emphasis in the political language of the postwar. Furthermore, the constitution goes further in efforts to specify the responsibilities of the government in securing that social dignity: “It is the duty of the Republic to remove obstacles...that impede the full development of the human person and the *effective participation* of all workers in the political, economic, and social organization of the country.”²⁶⁰ The Constitution connected the responsibility to encourage and promote the *participation* of citizens in national life to the promotion of citizens’ social dignity and worth.

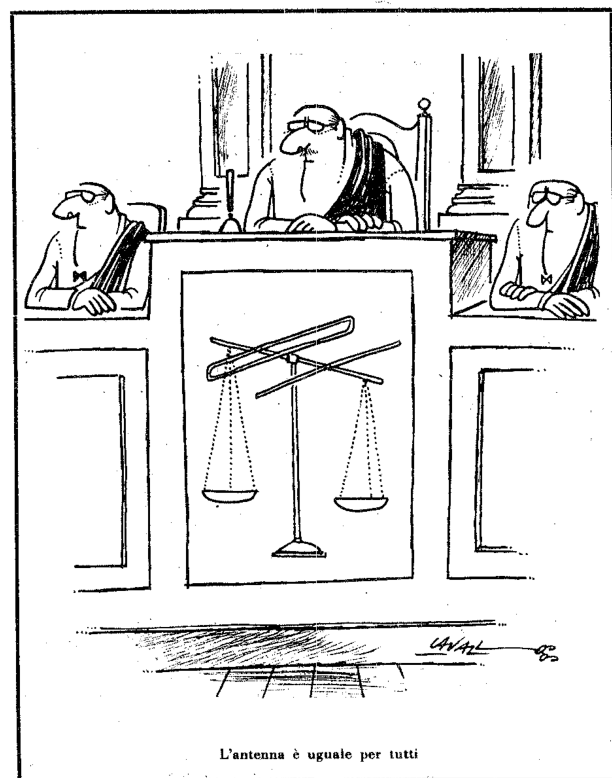


Figure 4: "La antenna è uguale per tutti" from Achille Campanile, "Ho l'imputato mio che Fo l'attore," *L'Europeo* (March 10, 1963): 69.

The RAI, in emphasizing the diversity of the populations it must serve and its dedication to their education, replicated the Constitution’s own egalitarian vision of Italy, which was

limitando di fatto la libertà e l'eguaglianza dei cittadini, impediscono il pieno sviluppo della persona umana e l'effettiva partecipazione di tutti i lavoratori all'organizzazione politica, economica e sociale del Paese.”

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

predicated on establishing institutions designed to foster the engagement and participation of all citizens in national, cultural life. Although more conservative figures within the broadcasting service penned the Self-Censorship Code that conflated the RAI's institutional responsibility with the ideals of the national constitution, the Italian center-Left and Left adopted this understanding as well. The humorist Achille Campanile, for example, betrays the extent to which the Self-Censorship Code helped to institutionalize ideals that were missing in the original concessionary agreement. Campanile's cartoon in Figure 4, which appeared in *L'Europeo* and accompanied a longer column, addressed the censorship of Leftist playwright Dario Fo's comedic sketches on the variety program *Canzonissima*. With the caption underneath the three judges reading, "La antenna è uguale per tutti" or "the antenna is equal for everyone," Campanile means to highlight the RAI's self-proclaimed responsibility to represent all citizens and encourage their participation while also questioning the RAI's own policy toward one of its producers, Dario Fo. Campanile's cartoon interprets the restrictions placed on Fo's free speech as an instance of the RAI, acting as judge and jury, failing to uphold Italy's new democratic values. Through the Self-Censorship Code, the RAI sought to set the groundwork for permissible content and simultaneously established itself as a national organization responsive to the Italian public—although these ideals clearly came into strict conflict with one another on many occasions. Inasmuch as the Self-Censorship Code left the RAI open to these critiques, it also formed a crucial point through which we can establish the institution as being aligned with postwar democratization.

Furthermore, by stressing individuals' social dignity, RAI's own internal self-discipline rules provided a rationale for its production practices while also creating an ethic that neorealist filmmakers could partially embrace. Roberto Rossellini viewed television as a "potential

technology of enlightenment” precisely because, as a *de facto* public service broadcaster, it was an institution dedicated to the education of audiences.²⁶¹ If, as Rossellini contended, “educational systems...were developed when human societies were organized and stratified,” so that individuals were unable to critically assess the world around them, then television, by offering a different form of education, would theoretically, for Rossellini, produce a more engaged and humanistic approach to society.²⁶² “We need to think of a whole new system for knowing,” Rossellini emphasized. Television could help create that new system; its institutional mission, dedicated to the education of the individual, offered a potential remedy to this problem.²⁶³

Rossellini’s interpretation of television’s potential aligns with the RAI’s own language in its Self-Censorship Code. The Code states that since television “is not able to choose its public, in principle it should address the nuclear family and consequently every category of people of different ages and sexes, social condition, moral education, and various cultures.”²⁶⁴ While the the national-public-as-nuclear family trope has a longstanding tradition that can be traced as far back as the Renaissance, in the context of the postwar period, and specifically within the era’s debates over the culture industries’ roles in the processes of modernization, the nuclear family metaphor connotes an idea of television as addressing, not a mass audience, but a pluralistic one.²⁶⁵ At the height of the “mass culture” debates, when intellectuals on both sides of the

²⁶¹ Michael Cramer, “Rossellini’s History Lessons,” *New Left Review* 78 (November 2012): 127.

²⁶² Roberto Rossellini, *Utopia Autopsia 10¹⁰* (Rome: Editore Armando, 1974), 185. The Italian reads, “I sistemi educativi...sono sviluppati quando le società umane si sono organizzate e stratificate” and “acritica.”

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 190. In Italian, “ci si impone concepire un sistema del tutto nuovo per *conoscere*.”

²⁶⁴ The full 1956 code was republished in the second appendix of Gismondi, 157-177. See page 163 for this citation, which reads in the original Italian: “non è consentito alla televisione scegliere il suo pubblico poichè, in via di principio, essa si rivolge ai nuclei familiari e conseguentemente ad ogni categoria di persone di differente età e sesso, di condizione sociale, preparazione morale e culturale disparate.”

²⁶⁵ Leon Battista Alberti’s notion of the *paterfamilias* or the head of the house conflated the role of the male head of the house with the overseeing of territorial estates. See *The Family in Renaissance Florence, Book Three* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1994).

Atlantic increasingly fretted over the new television medium's potential for mass manipulation, Rossellini and also Zavattini saw television's address to public broadcasting's popular audiences as encouraging, because it meant overcoming class divisions and creating an egalitarian notion of culture—one that public service broadcasting at least rhetorically refers to, even if, in practice, its notion of culture falls short.²⁶⁶ Rossellini divorced himself from the views of the Frankfurt School to instead see cultural products targeted at the ordinary individual as positive. In contrast to academic forms of knowledge that “paralyze the mind in pedantic mnemonic challenges,” Rossellini saw television as exploiting the increase in leisure time in a way that provided practical knowledge.²⁶⁷ In Rossellini's stance, we can detect the resonance of Gramsci, who emphasized the need for culture to address groups in ways that recognize their social and cultural positions.²⁶⁸

Like Rossellini, who continued to support and operate for public service broadcasting through the 1970s, Zavattini displayed admirable coherence and consistency toward the same goal. For example, in 1982, when the American flood of programming on Italian television screens had hit its high point following the cross-continent deregulation of Italian and European media markets, Zavattini continued to distance himself from “apocalyptic” critiques of television's middlebrow culture.²⁶⁹ Speaking of television as an inclusive and popular form of culture, Zavattini stated the following in a 1982 interview: “I cannot tell you now that I shun

²⁶⁶ Laurie Ouellette, *Viewers Like You? How Public TV Failed the People* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Elizabeth Jacka, “‘Democracy as Defeat’: The Impotence of Arguments for Public Service Broadcasting,” *Television and New Media* 4 (2003): 177-191.

²⁶⁷ Rossellini, 194-5. The original Italian reads, “Non si dovrebbe paralizzare la mente in sforzi mnemonici pedanti... bisogna propor[re le dati] ma lasciare poi ad uno cervello la possibilità di assorbire ciò che gli può essere utile ai ragionamenti.”

²⁶⁸ Forgacs, 218.

²⁶⁹ Umberto Eco used the term “apocalyptic” to describe intellectuals that saw the rise of mass culture as an inherently negative phenomenon. See the introductory chapter to *Apocalittici e integrati: Comunicazioni di massa e teorie della cultura di massa* (Milan: Bompiani, 2008 [1964]). For the English translation, see Umberto Eco, *Apocalypse Postponed*, ed. Robert Lumley (London: BFI, 1994), 17-35.

cinema, that I disdain it, because cinema still has a hypothetical basis that intersects the urgent needs of human knowledge, but these will be redeployed in television.”²⁷⁰ While in the 1980s many Italian intellectuals were panicked about deregulation and the nefarious potential for Italian cultural Americanization (through, for example, popular programs like *Dallas*), Zavattini’s faith in the medium of television continued to privilege its broad pedagogical mission. Thirty years after he first wrote to the editor of the neorealist film journal *Cinema Nuovo* to express his excitement over television, the medium still offered, for Zavattini, an idea of culture targeted at the experience and level of the broad populace.

Those associated with neorealism and those institutionally located with RAI shared a common language, one that intersected with Leftist humanism, Catholic morality, and values increasingly set forth by global, non-profit organizations, all of which prioritized the human individual, his or her reality, and his or her education. Pointing to the continuities between himself and Catholic film and TV critic Renato May, Paolo Gobetti noted their shared perspective that television addresses both the individual and the collective. “It seems to us that television resolves in a particularly effective way the duty [to intellectually and culturally develop the individual] inasmuch as it dialectically employs—and May also indicates this—the ability to make a collective discourse, but directing it to the individual.”²⁷¹ The RAI’s Self-Censorship Code, which articulated a public-service-type ideal focusing on the development of

²⁷⁰ Cesare Zavattini. Interview with Giacomo Gambetti. December 15, 1982. *Zavattini mago e tecnico* (Rome: Gremese 2009), 166. The original Italian reads, “Non posso dirti *il cinema* adesso che l’ho accantonato, che lo disprezzo, perché il cinema ha ancora delle ipotesi di lavoro che si inseriscono in queste urgenze di conoscenza, ci trasferirà in televisione.”

²⁷¹ Paolo Gobetti, “Civiltà della immagini,” *Cinema Nuovo* 120-121 (December 15, 1957): 348-349. The Italian reads, “La televisione ci pare che possono assolvere in modo particolarmente efficace a questo compito [narrare in modo semplice e immediato e esprimere meglio le esigenza umana a uno sviluppo intellettuale e culturale ‘individuale’] in quanto riassume, dialetticamente—and lo indica anche il May—capacità di fare un discorso collettivo rivolgendosi però al singolo.”

the individual person, altered, according to Gobetti and May, the way in which the individual was framed in relation to the collective whole of society.

In identifying a tension produced between the individual and the collective, Gobetti and May view television as intervening into one of the central points of conflict within Italian political modernity and its postwar revision: television was to resolve the issue of the individual's participation in national culture. Sociologist Francesco Alberoni, who held a position at the Catholic University in Milan and wrote for the conservative newspaper *Corriere della sera*, argued precisely this in describing television's impact on traditional Italian society:

Television provokes a real and true restructuring of the networks of traditional interactions... In regards to the cultural transformation of the country, a good deal of the most important programs are based on the fact that they seem to be 'people like us.' *Lascia o raddoppia*, *Campanile sera*, etc. testify to the possibility, or better yet the reality, of the participation of everyone, single men, families, villages, other types of communities, within a complex social field, which is unified but also everyday.²⁷²

For Alberoni, the way in which postwar culture invited the *participation* and active engagement of ordinary people was its defining and most transformative quality. In encouraging people to recognize their underlying commonalities, Alberoni points to the way in which television's Everyman programming regimes created the possibility of a national-popular culture based for the first time on unity between Italy's multiple publics.

In an environment in which Italian-American cinematic co-production placed an emphasis on a film's commercial viability, television held the potential of creating a national-popular arena in which media was not only targeted at Italy's popular masses, but that these masses would have the opportunity to engage in the dialogues that formed the basis of

²⁷² Francesco Alberoni, *Pubblicità televisione e società nell'Italia del miracolo economico*, ed. Gianpiero Gamaleri (Rome: Armando Editore, 2011 [1968]), 58-59. The Italian reads, "Televisione provoca una vera e proprio ristrutturazione delle reti di interazione tradizionali... E buona parte dei programmi di maggior importanza dal punto di vista della trasformazione culturale del Paese sono basati sul fatto che vi compare 'gente come noi.' *Lascia o raddoppia?*, *Campanile sera*, ecc. testimoniano la possibilità, anzi la realtà di una partecipazione di tutti, uomini singoli, famiglie, villaggi, comunità di altro genere, ad un campo sociale complesso, integrato, ma commune."

television's national address. The RAI's Self-Censorship Code may have prescribed a strict Catholic moral code of television production, but it also served as a point through which to translate the codes of Italy's new democratic and pluralistic values and more explicitly impose those values onto service. In this way, the Self-Censorship Code also points to Italy's modernity as both specific to the Italian nation while also operating in tune with Western, transatlantic projects. The Code's emphasis on education and moral and cultural elevation aligned it with the norms of European public service broadcasting, but its particular emphasis on social dignity, participation, and pluralistic address recalls both the Italian emphasis on Catholic morality and the recently-circulated Gramscian notion of national-popular dialogue. In the three successive case studies in the following three chapters, I will continue to document the production of an aesthetic of participation and engagement. Experimentations with live, improvised address bring to the fore the way in which the Italian iteration of postwar modernity capitalized on new communicative and aesthetic structures. Yet these motifs of programming, as much as they were informed by transatlantic models, also elaborated on the Italian cinematic theories to redress fascist era modes of representation and construct a popular and participatory culture.

Part II: Everyman Programming on Early Italian Television

CHAPTER 5

The Ordinary Self in the Quiz Show *Lascia o raddoppia*

We confess that we remain rather confused in front of the first broadcasts of *Lascia o raddoppia*. There was something so thrilling, but above all there was great moral and cultural value that we were not able to explain.

Paolo Gobetti, 1956²⁷³

Walking through the midst of the foggy villages with people crowded into cafes... because *Lascia o raddoppia* had begun, it doesn't take much to understand that putting a bunch of new, free things in front of the eyes of millions, contemporaneously in the North and the South, you can either start a revolution or stop it.

Cesare Zavattini, 1959²⁷⁴

In the fall of 1955, just a year after television broadcasting first began in Italy, the RAI experimented with new quiz show, *Lascia o raddoppia* (*Double or Nothing*, 1955-1959). Based off the American high-stakes quiz show, *The \$64,000 Question*, the Italian version began just five months after its American counterpart and quickly created a sensation. For many Italians, *Lascia o raddoppia* marked their first television experience, whether in the comfort of their own home or, more likely, in that of their better-off neighbors or at the local bar. But for the more educated and affluent, who had contact with television since its first “unofficial” broadcasts

²⁷³ Paolo Gobetti, “Tutti ne parlano,” *Cinema Nuovo* 74 (January 10, 1956). The original Italian reads, “Confessiamo che di fronte alla prime trasmissioni di *Lascia o raddoppia* rimanemmo alquanto perplessi. Che cosa c’era di tanto entusiasmante e soprattutto di tanto morale e culturale non riuscivamo a spiegarcelo.”

²⁷⁴ Cesare Zavattini, “Roma, 16 febbraio 1959” in *Cesare Zavattini cinema: Diario cinematografico. Neorealismo, ecc.*, eds. Valentina Fortichiari and Mino Argentieri (Milan: Bompiani, 2002), 421. The original Italian reads, “Passando in mezzo a dei paesini nebbiosi con la gente affollata dentro ai caffè... perché cominciava allora *Lascia o raddoppia*? non ci voleva tanto per capire che mettendo contemporaneamente nel nord e nel sud, a portata di milioni di occhi, tante cose nuove gratuitamente, si sarebbe potuto fare la rivoluzione o impedirla.”

began in 1952, *Lascia o raddoppia* represented a new approach in television programming that diverged significantly from the costume theater productions, dramas, and educational programs that dominated early, experimental programming schedules. In the epigraphs above, the experiences of Paolo Gobetti and Cesare Zavattini convey how radical and new the program felt in the Italian context of the second half of the 1950s; the program appeared able to “start a revolution or stop it,” and it provided a “great moral and cultural value we were not able to explain.” While neither of the two responses fully or precisely articulated what it was about the quiz show that captured their attention, or what its ultimate cultural impact would be, the new mode of programming did *something* that they could not ignore.

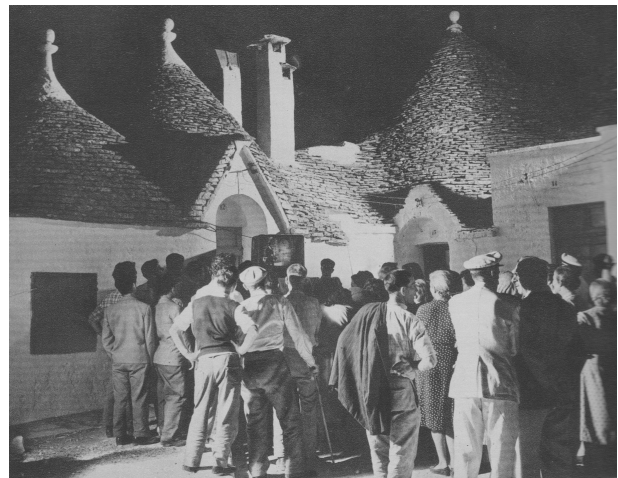


Figure 5: Across class and region, a “mass” nation audience watches *Lascia o raddoppia* from *Due anni di Lascia o raddoppia: 1956-1957* (Turin: Edizioni Radio Italiana, 1958), unpaginated.

The words of Paolo Gobetti and Cesare Zavattini are merely two examples of a plethora of stunned reactions to the program that have over time contributed to the contemporary assessment that *Lascia o raddoppia* be “assigned a central role in the cultural transformation of Italy.”²⁷⁵ Like American family sitcoms, which have become a shorthand way through which

²⁷⁵ John Foot, “Mass Cultures, Popular Cultures and the Working Class in Milan, 1950-70,” *Social History* 24.4 (May 1999): 149.

American popular memory often idyllically imagines the 1950s, *Lascia o raddoppia* is for contemporary observers emblematic of the postwar era.²⁷⁶ Anecdotal tales of theaters being shut down, parliamentarians ending debates early to return in home for the beginning of the program, farmers walking miles to reach a TV set, and bars and cafes overflowing with spectators, are all part of the way in which *Lascia o raddoppia*—and specifically its *mass* appeal—tells the story of Italy suddenly embracing a Fordist consumer democracy. Indeed, there is a particular burden in approaching a program such as *Lascia o raddoppia*, easily the most frequently mentioned program of the 1950s, in relationship to what John Foot describes as “folklore” of the current histories.²⁷⁷ The secondary critical literature is almost dogmatic in its approach to the program, often misrepresenting or misunderstanding the sort of transformation that *Lascia o raddoppia* helped to create. In re-examining the primary literature, I seek to detangle *Lascia o raddoppia* from “folklore” in order to think more precisely about the representative norms of the program. Throughout my analysis, I will be calling attention to how the program’s autobiographic narratives produced an unsettling readjustment in which the hierarchical norms that normally determined who dictated national culture were overturned. The stories of ordinary Italians decentered national culture to give a form of democratic access to Italians across the peninsula.

In efforts to pull *Lascia o raddoppia* from the nostalgic accounts of postwar history, in this chapter I will do three things. I will begin by correlating the critical reception of the program to the historical context from which it emerged. In re-reading both well-worn critiques and forgotten reviews of *Lascia o raddoppia* (and its host, Mike Bongiorno), I will unpack the notion of *mass* audience that is deemed to be so critical to *Lascia o raddoppia*’s legacy. By doing so, I

²⁷⁶ Stephanie Coontz, in Chapter 2 of *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), uses the example of how *Leave it to Beaver* stands in for an image of postwar America that hides the underlying realities in which female participation in the labor force was always a vital part of family income and a significant portion of families did not fit the nuclear family ideal.

²⁷⁷ John Foot, *Milan Since the Miracle: City, Culture and Identity* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 97.

shall reveal the program's *everyday* dimension as its novel and destabilizing element, marking it as a prominent example of the new Everyman Programming on 1950s Italian television screens. Secondly, I will explore how *Lascia o raddoppia*'s format morphed from a fairly strict replication of the American format into one that increasingly expanded the interview section with individual contestants in order to both showcase the individual and create an empathetic relationship between viewer and subject. By highlighting the extent to which the Italian version relied on the interview structure, I position *Lascia o raddoppia* as a key early example of how Italian television began to adopt new interactive modes that were symptomatic of broader shifts toward an increasingly participatory culture. In concluding, I consider the transnationality of the program to identify how *Lascia o raddoppia*'s engagement with the audience mimicked the aesthetic norms of realist cinema. In the process, I re-route traditional thinking about early Italian television's popular programming to think about the terms under which it was in dialogue with an emerging humanistic aesthetic.

Pasolini's Legacy for Italian TV Studies, or How Italian TV Became a Mass Medium

Placed as the pivot point between Italian traditional culture and the beginning of postwar mass culture, *Lascia o raddoppia* has taken on life beyond any reasonable measure. Its legacy as the supposed catalyst of Italian modern culture has roots in two very influential critical essays, written by two of Italy's most prominent twentieth-century intellectuals: Pier Paolo Pasolini's 1963 "Italy? A Shack Where the Owners Can Buy a Television" and Umberto Eco's 1963 "Phenomenology of Mike Bongiorno."²⁷⁸ I will first rely on Pasolini's contribution as a starting point through which to think through the specious and more famous histories of *Lascia o*

²⁷⁸ Pier Paolo Pasolini, "L'Italia? Un tugurio i cui proprietari sono riusciti a comprarsi la televisione," *Interviste corsare sulla politica e sulla vita, 1955 – 1975*, ed. Michele Gulinucci (Rome: Liberal Atlantide, 1995 [1963]), 57-61; Umberto Eco, "Fenomenologia di Mike Bongiorno," *Diario minimo* (Milan: Mondadori, 1963), 70-78.

raddoppia. Eco's essay will be a means of entry into the less-known and forgotten discourses about the program. If Pasolini's views on television encapsulate an approach to the medium that informs highly problematic historiographic approaches, Eco's work informs more fruitful ways to think about the television's Everyman in postwar Italy. In other words, in this chapter I seek to historicize the program within a set of critical discourses that make apparent the shifts in representational structures introduced by *Lascia o raddoppia*.

In Italy, broadcasting has had a particularly fraught history. Censorship under the fascist regime, the *lottizzazione*, or the division of the public service network by political party in the 1960s and 70s, and the concentration of the Italian media system into the hands of Silvio Berlusconi in the 1980s and 90s, all support the notion of Italian broadcasting's exceptionalism amongst Western European broadcasting systems due to its inherently anti-democratic nature. Whether Italy was ruled by a dictatorship or as a republic, in each case whoever exercised political power also had control of the media. Even in the case of the *lottizzazione*, when each major political party was given control over a single television channel, the impact was to limit and define who could use the airways and in what way. Pier Paolo Pasolini was scathing in his critique of television and became a prominent voice amongst those that would take up his work to emphasize the use of medium for political control.²⁷⁹ Pasolini's comments—that “from our perspective the industrialized are humanly unknowable. One produces and one consumes, there it is. And the world will be exactly like television is today”—were infectious among Italian scholars, so much so that television has struggled to overcome the perception in Italy that it has aided in the ideological control of the Italian public.²⁸⁰ Yet for Pasolini this was more than just a

²⁷⁹ As I mentioned in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, political economic approaches to television dominate Italian scholarship. Although Pasolini's work never directly made an argument about media ownership, his commentary helped to inspire many who have taken this line of approach.

²⁸⁰ Pasolini, “L'Italia,” 59.

question of the ownership of the media and the transmission of certain ideas through the airwaves. Pasolini rooted the problem of television's anti-humanism in the singularity of television's address. Pasolini was unequivocal about the way in which the television medium structured a hierarchical relationship to the home audience. Television was "truly a mass medium. The moment in which you listen to someone on video, there is an inferior-superior relationship, which is a frighteningly anti-democratic relationship."²⁸¹ For Pasolini, it was not programming's content, but the television medium's inherent mode of address, its speaking to a supposedly passive/inferior viewer, that defined his critical animus toward the medium.

Pasolini's response is emblematic of the broader shift within Italy's intellectual classes in the 1960s, most of which began to express disdain for television. In this sense, his comments are another footnote within a broader historiographic literature that emerged out of this pessimistic approach and tends dystopically to represent television as one monolithic force of homogenization and massification. In the 1960s, a series of studies spoke about the impact of television in terms of a process of national reconstruction. Francesco Alberoni's 1960 *Contribution to the Social Integration of the Immigrant*, Tullio De Mauro's 1963 *Linguistic History of United Italy* and Lidia De Rita's 1964 *Farmers and Television*, all helped provide the rationale for the role played by television broadly, and *Lascia o raddoppia* in particular, in the process of the nationalization and massification of the Italian public.²⁸² While sociologist

²⁸¹ Pier Paolo Pasolini interviewed by Enzo Biagi on *Terza B: facciamo l'appello*, accessed on January 25, 2014, <http://www.rai.tv/dl/RaiTV/programmi/media/ContentItem-c393b7c3-57d0-4a66-82b2-0dd3c2b93a84.html>. In Italian, he said, "[La televisione] è proprio un medium di massa in sé. Il momento in cui qualcuno si ascolta nel video ha verso di ognuno rapporto d'inferiore/superior che è un rapporto spaventosamente anti-democratico."

²⁸² Francesco Alberoni, *Contributo allo studio dell'integrazione sociale dell'immigrato* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1960); Tullio De Mauro, *Storia linguista dell'Italia unita* (Bari: Laterza, 1963), Lidia De Rita, *I contadini e le televisione: Studio sull'influenza degli spettacoli televisivi in un gruppo di contadini lucani* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1964); It is worth noting that, while DeRita draws on the "uses and gratifications" model for her study, she was trained in part by Jacob Moreno, who pioneered a form of sociometry and the use of psychodrama. His work on measuring social interactions and reenacting real life events, although too tangential to develop here, would be a jumping off point for contextualizing *Lascia o raddoppia* within broader socio-psychological theories being developed in Italy.

Francesco Alberoni argued that popular programming created a form of “pre-socialization” of rural Italians, preparing and encouraging them to move into the modernized capitals of industry like Milan and Turin, De Mauro and De Rita both suggested ways in which programming like *Lascia o raddoppia* created cultural homogeneity through linguistic and social-psychological means.

These studies were among the first to document television as having a direct impact on the behavior and psychology of Italians. Yet they are part of a longstanding, overdetermined narrative about *Lascia o raddoppia*'s historical impact. In the primary text on the history of Italian television, *History of Radio and Television in Italy*, Grasso equates the introduction of *Lascia o raddoppia* (and the influence of its host, Mike Bongiorno) alongside other seismic shifts in the history of the Italian nation, such as the publication of its first vernacular texts and its modern political unification. “If Dante had given Italy a unitary language after Latin, if the *spedizione dei Mille* had achieved political unity” then television was able to recreate the nation after fascism, unifying Italy “not with the language of Dante, but with that of Mike.”²⁸³ But his characterization of Bongiorno is anything but exceptional. In the words of Chiara Ferrari, “endless pages have been written in Italy both about *Lascia o Raddoppia* and about ‘Il Mike Nazionale’ (‘National Mike’) to celebrate and analyze the role of early Italian television as the most unique—and perhaps significant—factor responsible for the formation of Italian national identity in the aftermath of World War II.”²⁸⁴ If these histories highlight the singularity of identity imposed by *Lascia o raddoppia*, I will be recuperating the participatory routines of the

²⁸³ Aldo Grasso, *Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia: I 50 anni della televisione* (Milan: Garzanti, 1992), xv.

²⁸⁴ Chiara Ferrari, “‘National Mike’: Global Host and Global Formats in Early Italian Television,” in *Global Television Formats: Understanding Television Across Borders* eds., Tasha Oren and Sharon Shahaf (New York: Routledge, 2012), 130.

program in emphasizing its vernacular quality (i.e. that it was about dialogue amongst peoples rather than a language imposed from above).

The desire to link television programming to the project of national identity formation is not surprising, as both technology and regulation help create broadcasting's particularly strong connection to the national, particularly in Europe where monopolistic public broadcasting systems quickly became the norm.²⁸⁵ Yet beyond the methodological gap between the claims that the program contributed to the emergence of a modern national culture and the evidence presented to support it, there is another issue at stake. The nation that these histories envision through the "National Mike" is not Italy at all, but the United States. Based off an American format and hosted by an Italian American who made frequent grammatical mistakes, the urge to see the program as evidence of Americanization has been difficult to resist. Following the paradigms of cultural Cold War historiography, Simona Tobia maps Bongiorno's institutional position as a means of asserting his personal agenda. Assessing Bongiorno and his program as "an effective instrument of American cultural diplomacy"²⁸⁶ out of his Italian American origins and brief work as a Voice of America host appears reductive. Separated by more than twenty-five years, Tobia's research, like Stephen Gundle's 1986 "The Americanization of Everyday Life," continues to document American influence over the Italian peninsula with such force that

²⁸⁵ Michele Hilmes, "Who We Are, Who We Are Not: Battle of the Global Paradigms," in *Planet TV: A Global Television Reader*, eds. Lisa Parks and Shanti Kumar (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 53-73.

²⁸⁶ Simona Tobia, "Mike, The Voice of America," in *ItaliAmerica: il mondo dei media*, eds. Jeffrey T. Schnapp and Emanuela Scarpellini (Milan: Il saggiatore, 2012), 35 and 37. Also see Tobia's *Advertising America: The United States Information Service in Italy, 1945-1956* (Milan: Il Filarete, 2008). Similarly, Barbara Scaramucci and Claudio Ferretti argue that Bongiorno "had a perfect personal story for an Italy that was still licking its wounds after the war. He came from America, like everything. Like dreams, packages, and the Marshall Plan." *Tutta la vita è un quiz: Da Lascia o raddoppia? ad oggi* (Rome: RAI-ERI, 2005), 25.

made Italian consumers while also overcoming the incompatible Italian norms of both Catholicism and communism.²⁸⁷

Both Tobia and Gundle leave the ideological force of the United States as either an imaginary of want or as a diplomatic force to fill in for the unresolved question of how a program so outside the main ideological currents of mainstream Italian thought could gain such footing. Equally troubling is Enrico Menduni's 2007 "American Influence on the Birth of TV in Italy," which attempts to redress the relative failure of scholarship to address television programming (since historically the Italian field has preferred political economy approaches), by describing *Lascia o raddoppia* as the "killer application" of Italian TV. However, his analysis merely ends up echoing Pasolini's 1963 statement that "one produces, one consumes, and the world is exactly like television." According to Menduni, the quiz format linked Italian programming to American models, so that "television provides a social model of consumerism; literally, it teaches you to consume."²⁸⁸

Whether *Lascia o raddoppia* is interpreted as an agent of "nationalization," creating culturally and linguistically what previously only existed politically, or as a force of "Americanization," bringing the norms of industrial mass capitalism to Italy, the underlying argument behind fifty years of research is that *Lascia o raddoppia* was a force of *homogenization* and *massification*. Yet, as John Foot noted, "what proof is there of such a process resulting directly from *Lascia*, as opposed to a general climate of consumerism or mass transformation? Is it not simply too easy to 'blame' one (important) programme for a whole

²⁸⁷ Stephen Gundle, "L'Americanizzazione del quotidiano: televisione e consumismo nell'Italia degli anni cinquanta," *Quaderni storici* 21.62 (August 1986): 561-594.

²⁸⁸ Enrico Menduni, "I caratteri nazionali e l'influenza americana nella nascita della televisione in Italia," *Memoria e ricerca* 26 (September/October 2007), 103-4.

series of ‘ills’?”²⁸⁹ By prodding at the troubling regularity of these narratives, Foot calls attention to their methodological failures. But his interrogation also highlights a more severe issue: the profound methodological/epistemological confusion at the heart of these histories, specifically in regards to the program’s transnational origins. Working within a paradigm of “transmission” models of communication, the arrival of an American format at the precise moment of Italy’s economic transformation into a consumer society appeared less than coincidental. It was quite easy to make the blanket connection between the program with “mass” appeal and the arrival of a supposedly universalizing American modernity. Yet this leap is harder to accept when we take into consideration the necessary role Italians played in the program’s production and popularity. Communist and Catholic Italians alike, who were both producers and audience members, found themselves represented within the program and their responses, receptions, and interpretations of the program—the traces of the Italian transition—tell us a different story about the electrifying impact of the programming in 1950s Italy.

Not Such a Common Man: Reconsidering Eco’s Everyman

Currently, Italian television histories consider the idea of American influence only inasmuch as that influence is about the new imaginary of social want and desire provided by the propagandistic ideal of the American standard of living. Yet Umberto Eco’s 1963 article entitled the “Phenomenology of Mike Bongiorno”—*the* perfunctory reference for anyone discussing *Lascia o raddoppia* and its mass appeal—provides a way to recognize the program’s representational strategies as its enduring contribution. As the common reference point for anyone describing mass culture’s arrival within the context of postwar Italian boom culture, most point to Eco’s assertion that novelty is its glorification of the average.

²⁸⁹ Foot, “Mass Cultures,” 150.

Television does not propose *superman* as an ideal with which to identify: it proposes *everyman*. Television's ideal is the absolutely average person [with a refrigerator and a twenty-one inch TV set]...The most striking illustration of superman being reduced to everyman is, in Italy, the figure of Mike Bongiorno.²⁹⁰

Given Eco's description of how the program creates an identificatory process with the average Italian and his world of newfound consumer items, it is no surprise that television histories read the program as a foundational node in the creation of a postwar Italian consumer culture.

The idea of the superman being reduced or degraded into the form of the everyman underwrote the connection many made between the "Phenomenology of Mike Bongiorno" and the writings of Dwight MacDonalD. MacDonalD's works were widely circulated in Italy at the time through publications such as *Tempo Presente* (founded by Italian anti-fascists Ignazio Silone and Nicola Chiaromonte) and *Encounter* (later discovered to be funded in part by the CIA with ties to the Congress of the Cultural Freedom), as well as thanks to the work of Umberto Eco himself who as an editor at the publishing house Bompiani was responsible for their publication.²⁹¹ The idea that mass culture was cannibalizing high culture and that an emerging mass man was giving up his individualism and human creativity to function according to the logics a rigid, industrialized society percolated on both sides of the Atlantic and Eco knew it quite well. His 1964 *Apocalittici e integrati* or *Apocalyptic and Integrated Intellectuals* was littered with references to the New York intellectuals and other prominent American sociologists. Concepts arising from America, such as MacDonalD's "masscult," enabled and

²⁹⁰ I am adopting William Weaver's translations of Eco's essay ("Phenomenology of Mike Bongiorno,") from *Misreadings* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1993), 157-8. The original reads: "La situazione nuova in cui si pone al riguardo la TV è questa: la TV non offre come ideale in cui immedesimarsi, il *superman* ma l'*everyman*. La TV presenta come ideale l'uomo assolutamente medio."

²⁹¹ For background on the work of the Congress of Cultural Freedom and Dwight MacDonalD's relationship to it, see Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 2000). Eco discusses MacDonalD at length in *Apocalittici e integrati: Comunicazioni di massa e teorie della cultura di massa* (Milan: Bompiani, 2008 [1964]), 29-35.

fostered the idea that *Lascia o raddoppia* and Mike Bongiorno were culpable for the rise of a new, indistinguishable mass man.

Although MacDonald's discussion of what he saw as the concerning rise of mass culture or "masscult" and the erosion of "high culture" appeared to resemble Eco's own observation that *Lascia o raddoppia* presented a "quantitative" instead of a "critical" idea of culture and that the language of the program was "basic Italian," Eco was not interested in dismissing the program wholesale because of its masscult address.²⁹² Rather, he described MacDonald and others of his persuasion as Leftists who had in essence given up on the progressive cause and who had failed to approach popular culture without any serious analytical force. Considering MacDonald representative of "apocalyptic aristocrats" he was in his words "a critic that is constantly remaking a humanist model that, even if he doesn't know it, is classist."²⁹³ Quite sensitive to the way in which mass forms of culture were packaged and produced for the "mass" audience, and the way sensibilities of those in charge can alter those message, Eco faulted MacDonald and his counterparts for their lack of intellectual rigor.²⁹⁴ They

refused from the outset to examine the instrument and to test its possibilities. The only inspection he made was from the other side of the barricade, using himself as he guinea-pig: "Apples make me come out in a rash, so they are bad. I am not interested in what an apple is and what substances it contains. If other people eat apples and are none the worse for it, it means that they are degenerates."²⁹⁵

²⁹² Dwight Macdonald, "Masscult & midcult," in *The New York Intellectuals: A Reader*, ed. Neil Jumonville (Routledge: New York, 2007 [1963]), 205-223. Eco, "Phenomenology," 160-161.

²⁹³ Eco, *Apocalittici*, 47 and 34. The Italian reads, "apocalittico-aristocratici" and "il critico costantemente si rifaccia a un modello umano che, anche se non lo sa, è classista."

²⁹⁴ Eco critic "apocalyptic" intellectuals in the preface to *Apocalittici e integrati*, which can be found translated into English in Umberto Eco, *Apocalypse Postponed*, ed. Robert Lumley (London: BFI, 1994).

²⁹⁵ Eco, *Apocalittici*, 21. The Italian reads, "In realtà egli si è rifiutato in partenza di esaminare lo strumento e di saggiarne le possibilità; l'unica verifica che ha fatto è stato dall'altro lato della barricata, e scegliendo se stesso come cavia: 'Le mele mi provocano eruzioni cutanee, dunque sono cattive. Cosa sia una mela, e quali sostanze contenga, non mi interessa. Se altri magiano mele e stanno bene, vuol dire che sono dei degenerati.'" The English translation is from Eco, *Apocalypse*, 35.

Taking a firm stance against the classic critiques of mass culture, Eco employed his infamous sarcastic humor to underscore the failures of many critiques of popular culture, including many of the reactions to *Lascia o raddoppia*.

Eco's similarly biting tone throughout the "Phenomenology of Mike Bongiorno" is undeniable, yet when we re-contextualize Eco within a different set of cultural discourses, the essay reveals another, long ignored, dimension. Eco wanted to reframe the "problem of the new man in non-aristocratic terms" to take note of how mass culture presented information to peoples once denied access to cultural knowledge.²⁹⁶ "Mass culture" according to Eco was not the product of a "capitalistic regime. It is born in a society in which the whole mass of citizens is able to participate with equal rights in public life."²⁹⁷ When we read the "Phenomenology of Mike Bongiorno" alongside the interventions of the European avant guard of which Eco was part—which sought to recognize popular culture as a valid arena of study—Eco's essay becomes less about a diatribe on mass culture and more about the paradigmatic shift instituted by *Lascia o raddoppia*, relative to normative programming routines.²⁹⁸ The essay was an attempt to identify those qualities that made the program so "thrilling" and "stupefying" to Eco's peers; Eco sought to describe, from the perspective of that historical moment, the characteristics of *Lascia o raddoppia* that made it feel phenomenologically different than its predecessors. In both his 1962 *Opera aperta* or *Open Work* and his 1964 *Apocalyptic and Integrated Intellectuals* Eco establishes his position that

it is not true that the mass mediums are stylistically and culturally conservative. In as much as they constitute a combination of new languages, they introduced new ways of speaking, new styles, new perceptive modes...for good or bad they

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 35. The Italian reads, "il problema dell'uomo nuovo in termini non aristocratici."

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 41. The Italian reads, "la cultura di massa non è tipica di un regime capitalistico. Nasce in una società in cui tutta la massa di cittadini si trova a partecipare a pari diretti alla vita pubblica."

²⁹⁸ Peter Bondanella, *Umberto Eco and the Open Text: Semiotics, Fiction, Popular Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 22; John Picchione *The New Avant-garde in Italy: Theoretical Debate and Poetic Practices* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 32-80.

are about a stylistic renewal that often has constant repercussions on the level of arts considered superior, pushing their development.²⁹⁹

In what he called its “informative power” Eco broke from traditional theories of aesthetics (such as Benedetto Croce’s) which viewed the meaning as inherent to any work of art to consider the to think about the extent to which art breaks from norms to and created new linguistic systems, which television’s “direct address” undoubtedly produced.³⁰⁰ Eco even penned an entire chapter dedicated to television aesthetics in which thought about the communicative structures of television’s direct address in terms of their open qualities that encourage interpretation and awareness.³⁰¹

In rudimentary terms, we can say that what Eco finds compelling in *Lascia o raddoppia* is Bongiorno’s presentational style, which broke the norms of the Italian linguistic and representational system. Honing in on the stage persona of Mike Bongiorno, Eco continually underscores the modes of address and patterns of Bongiorno’s behavior. When we attend to these moments of description, it becomes clear that Eco sees the presentational style as being about a broader shift in the way in which people relate to one another. In the following passage, Eco described Bongiorno in terms of how he is able to convey an absolutely authentic identity, and therefore create a feeling of absolute equality between himself and the viewing audience.

Eco writes that Mike Bongiorno

owes his success to the fact that from every act, from every word of the persona that he presents to the telecamera emanates an absolute mediocrity along with (the only virtue he possesses to a high degree) an immediate and spontaneous allure, which is explicable by the fact that he betrays no sign of theatrical artifice or

²⁹⁹ Eco, *Apocalittici*, 45. The Italian reads, “Infine, non è vero che I mezzi di massa siano stilisticamente e culturalmente conservatori. In quanto costituiscono un insieme di nuovi linguaggi, hanno introdotto nuovi modi di parlare, nuovi stilemi, nuovi schermi percettivi... bene o male si tratta di un rinnovamento stilistico che spesso ha costanti ripercussioni sul piano delle arti cosiddette superiori, promuovendone lo sviluppo.”

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 318-319. The Italian reads, “ripresa diretta.”

³⁰¹ See Umberto Eco’s chapter on “Il caso e l’intreccio: L’esperienza televisiva e l’estetica,” *Opera Aperta* (Milan: Bompiani, 2008 [1962]). This chapter can be found translated into English by Anna Cancogni as “Chance and Plot: Television and Aesthetics in *Open Work* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 105-123.

pretense. He seems to be selling himself as precisely what he is, and he cannot create in a spectator, even the most ignorant, any sense of inferiority.³⁰²

Eco is calling attention to how Bongiorno *normalized* mediocrity or ordinariness, one that had the impact of creating a radical sense of equality and identification between subject and audience. By failing to evoke any sense of inferiority in the spectator, Eco identifies *Lascia o raddoppia* as constituting a profound shift from models of Hollywood stardom, fascist notions of heroism, and literate and “high” cultural forms. Regardless of whether or not we view this shift in a positive or negative light, the underlying argumentation refers us back to thinking about *Lascia* as structuring participation and engagement in a new and different way.

If we accept that the “Phenomenology of Mike Bongiorno” was primarily an effort to identify and describe the modes of address of *Lascia o raddoppia* then we ought to locate Eco’s writing within the contributions actively commenting on television’s mode of address, its representational strategies, and its realist poetics—not place it within the “mass culture” debates. Written as Eco was working on *Open Work*, the “Phenomenology of Mike Bongiorno” even employs—albeit in a way that would be not immediately apparent to someone unfamiliar with his other theoretical works—the language of the *Open Work* to his analysis of *Lascia o raddoppia*. Just as open works that challenge the representational systems “invite us to conceive, feel, and thus see the world as possibility,” so Bongiorno’s mode of interacting with contestants on stage created a shift in how “the spectator sees his own limitations.”³⁰³ Most importantly, this

³⁰² Eco, “Fenomenologia,” 72. The original Italian reads, “Idolatrato da milioni di persone, quest’uomo deve il suo successo al fatto che in ogni atto e in ogni parola del personaggio cui dà vita davanti alle telecamere traspare una mediocrità assoluta unita (questa è l’unica virtù che egli possiede in grado eccedente) ad un fascino immediato e spontaneo spiegabile col fatto che in lui non si avverte nessuna costruzione o finzione scenica: sembra quasi che egli si venda per quello che è e quello che è sia tale da non porre in stato di inferiorità nessuno spettatore, neppure il più sprovvaduto.”

³⁰³ Eco, *Opera*, 186. The Italian reads, “ci inducono a concepire, sentire e quindi vedere il mondo second le categoria della possibilità”; Eco, “Fenomenologia,” 72. The Italian reads, “il ritratto dei propri limiti.”

process was never just individual; for Eco it had had national implications. *Lascia o raddoppia* ensured that these personal limitations were “glorified and supported by national authority.”³⁰⁴

Curiously, the act of placing the flawed individual at the forefront and creating empathy with them is the only point on which Eco and Bongiorno, who have exchanged critiques of one another over the years, seem to agree.³⁰⁵ When asked in a 1965 interview about how someone who was not “to any special degree athletic or educated”—an oblique reference to Eco’s piece to which Bongiorno knowingly nodded and responded—Bongiorno explained the public’s “fondness” for him with these words: “perhaps [the audience] began to like me because they saw themselves in me, with the defects I have, which are the defects of the man of the street.”³⁰⁶ He described the gap between how he felt about himself and how spectators responded to him as a star, in essence attempting to negate the importance of public person in favor of the common traits that linked him to the viewers. Given that both Bongiorno and Eco saw the performance style of *Lascia o raddoppia* as about building a sense of commonality, to write off the “Phenomenology of Mike Bongiorno” as solely a critique of mass domination and homogenization misses the mark.

Umberto Eco was one of the first intellectuals to demand that popular culture be taken seriously and inasmuch as he theorizes that the reception and interpretation of media messages are largely determined by the perspective of their recipients and not located exclusively within

³⁰⁴ Ibid.. “glorificato e insignito ufficialmente di autorità nazionale.” 72.

³⁰⁵ Bongiorno dedicates a full chapter in his autobiography to addressing Eco’s article. Bongiorno reads the article as is more commonly and superficially understood—a pessimistic account of mass culture and its introduction in Italy. Ironically, Bongiorno critiques Eco for the exact points he was trying to convey in the piece, further indicating a sort of resonance between them, even if Bongiorno took the article very personally. See Mike Bongiorno, “La mia fenomenologia,” in *La versione di Mike* (Milan: Mondadori, 2007), 155-161.

³⁰⁶ Mike Bongiorno, interviewed by Sergio Zavoli, accessed March 25, 2014, <http://www.rai.tv/dl/RaiTV/programmi/media/ContentItem-4a44c39e-01d6-400a-a69f-4fd2d8a61acd.html>. In response to being described as “non in una misura speciale, atletico, colto.” Bongiorno replied, Italians, he said “cominciavano a volermi bene perché vedevano in me se stessi, con i difetti che io? avevo che sono i difetti dell’uomo della strada.”

the text, it seems unlikely that he meant to ascribe a singular meaning to *Lascia o raddoppia*. Given both Eco's predilection for recognizing the potential value of popular media and their "open" status, current characterizations of his "Phenomenology of Mike Bongiorno" disassociate this single piece of criticism from Eco's broader role in confronting traditionalist approaches to popular forms of culture. For his part, Eco in the English-language translation of the "Phenomenology of Mike Bongiorno," bolsters the association between the essay and his other preference for "open" works that leave interpretation to the viewers. Eco introduces the piece by saying that "Mike Bongiorno, while unknown to non-Italians, belongs to a familiar, international category; *and, personally, I continue to consider him a genius* [my emphasis]."³⁰⁷ Whether the characterization of Bongiorno as a genius is more an act of critical revisionism for an essay Eco considered too harsh in hind-sight or whether it was a suggestion to readers that his own essay has been "misread," Eco nonetheless implies that Bongiorno's self-presentational style was innovative in the context of 1950s Italy. It would seem impossible for someone speaking "basic Italian" and who holds a "quantitative" understanding of culture to be described as a "genius," unless of course they very leveraging of those qualities made him a genius. Therefore, when interpreting Eco's claim that Bongiorno presents viewers with an "ideal that nobody has to strive for, because everyone is already at its level,"³⁰⁸ we must entertain the possibility that, rather than just a critique of the massification at the hands of television programming, Bongiorno was an exemplar of participatory and "open" media communication that embraced non-heroic and

³⁰⁷ Peter Bondanella makes a similar argument about this phrase in the English language edition in *Umberto*, 3.

³⁰⁸ Eco, "Fenomenologia," 77-78. The original Italian reads, "egli rappresenta un ideale che nessuno deve sforzarsi di raggiungere perché chiunque si trova già al suo livello."

flawed identities as part of a new definition of culture and which sought to wrest control from the “men of culture.”³⁰⁹

Other writings by Eco’s peers only bolster this argument. Writer and journalist Luciano Bianciardi’s 1959 essay “Mike: Eulogy of Mediocrity,” which predates Eco’s “Phenomenology of Mike Bongiorno,” also viewed Bongiorno’s ordinariness and informality as part of Bongiorno’s genius. Written in response to the final episode of *Lascia o raddoppia*, Bianciardi sees the relationship Bongiorno cultivates with the audience as one between equals.

That evening [Bongiorno] spoke at some length about himself and claimed to have known, before success, hard and difficult days. There is no reason not to believe him. In this Mike Bongiorno is not differentiable from the hundreds of contestants that file through the stage at the theater at the Fiera: they have also known, before success, hard and difficult days, and they have also known, like all of the good Italians of the 1950s, that you must wait for your fifteen minutes of celebrity and fortune. In this way, Mike Bongiorno is worth the same amount as Bolognani, Degoli, the Appiotti twins [the program’s most famous contestants], as much as all the others...our television hosts had success, and they have success, in as much as they are able to personify and express certain defects and imperfections in the national character. Mike Bongiorno epitomized this more than anyone, and that is why we consider him the most mediocre, and therefore the best.³¹⁰

Like Eco, Bianciardi’s emphasis on Bongiorno as the “epitome of the mediocre” has justified interpretations of *Lascia o raddoppia* as an agent of massification. Yet the concluding section of his essay suggests something quite different about *Lascia o raddoppia*. In comparing Bongiorno’s hardships and difficulties to those of his contestants, Bianciardi evokes a common

³⁰⁹ See Robert Lumley, “Introduction,” in Eco, *Apocalypse*, 5-7 for a discussion of Gruppo 63 and the quest to change the production employees involved in the culture industries.

³¹⁰ Luciano Bianciardi, “Mike: elogio della mediocrità,” in *Chiese escatollo e nessuno raddoppiò: diario in pubblico 1952-1971*, ed. Luciano Bianciardi (Milan: Baldini & Castoldi, 1995), 37-39. Reprinted from the original *L’Avanti!* (July 28, 1959). The Italian reads, “Quella sera [Bongiorno] parlò abbastanza a lungo di sé e affermò di aver conosciuto, prima del successo, giorni duri e difficili. Non c’è motivo per non credergli. Mike Bongiorno in questo non si distingueva per nulla dalle centinaia di concorrenti che gli sono sfilati accanto, sulla pedana del teatro della Fiera: anche loro hanno conosciuto, prima del successo, giorni duri e difficili, anche loro hanno saputo, da buoni italiani degli anni cinquanta, aspettare il quarto d’ora di celebrità e di fortuna. Mike Bongiorno in questo modo valeva esattamente quanto la Bolognani, o il Degoli, o le gemelle Appiotti, quanto tutti gli altri...i nostri presentatori della televisione avevano successo, e lo hanno, in quanto riassumono ed esprimono certi difetti, certe tare nazionali. Mike Bongiorno ne riassumeva più di tutti, ed ecco perché lo possiamo stimare il più mediocre, quindi il più bravo.” 37-8.

history and sense of humanity. Bianciardi implies not so much a homogeneous culture, but an egalitarian one in which Bongiorno is indistinguishable in any real way from any other person, except for his involvement in this new style of programming and performance. For Bianciardi, Bongiorno does not belong to a mass society incapable of humanity, as the critiques of Dwight MacDonald or Pier Paolo Pasolini both imply, but rather he is above the fray or “the best” simply because he is the one who dares to emphasize the commonalities in human experience—including the “difficult days” of war and the “defects and imperfections” of character to which everyone suffered. Bianciardi’s decision to focus on a non-heroic, ordinary sense of individualism in *Lascia o raddoppia* speaks to the way in which the program was redefining these norms, regardless of whether or not this shift was being embraced or rejected.³¹¹ Bianciardi’s analysis is significant in the way in which it positions *Lascia o raddoppia* in reference to Italy’s past—and not America’s present or future—particularly in contrast to past notions of heroism and toward the notion of humanism.

Indro Montanelli, one of the most famous Italian journalists of the twentieth century who founded the conservative newspaper *Il Giornale* and often contributed with editorial pieces for *Il Corriere della sera*, also defines Bongiorno sense of personality in terms of his ordinariness and through a shared past. Montanelli, who first met Bongiorno during World War II in a Milanese prison for *partigiani* run by Germans, emphasized that while Bongiorno was devoid of any sense of heroism or courage, he displayed humanity toward his peers.

I remember him with a certain tenderness, Mike went out of his way... for the benefit of his cellmates.... I would like to testify that in prison, he stood as a gentleman and a well-manner boy. I did not see heroism because he wouldn’t have to carry out any.... The fact that he managed [to survive] represents a partial miracle. I am not saying that these circumstances make him worthy of a

³¹¹ It is important to note that Bianciardi also saw danger in this shift, as he obliquely notes within the article the depoliticization of his friends in the face of this new model.

medal...but the poor devil conducted himself, he who is not, better than a lot of Italians.³¹²

Against this portrait of Bongiorno as an average, but decent human being, Montanelli describes the obsessive, exaggerated “star” culture swirling around the ordinary Bongiorno. Although Montanelli considers Bongiorno’s success well-deserved because of his original talent as television host, he finds the Italian populace intent on glorifying public figures a disturbing relic of totalitarianism. While Bongiorno represents a new, very human public persona—an “interlocutor,” in Montanelli’s words—the Italian public still preferred to engage in the fascist-era personality cults to a more humanist and participatory culture.³¹³

In their criticism of Bongiorno and *Lascia o raddoppia*, both Bianciardi and Montanelli locate Bongiorno in reference to the experiences of WWII. The desire on the part of Bianciardi and Montanelli to frame *Lascia o raddoppia* in terms of the war experience suggests that the program fitted firmly within what Ruth Ben-Ghiat describes as “texts from a cultural interregnum,” or texts that were about mediating the democratic *transition* in Italy.³¹⁴ Arguing that “the need for new ethical and civil codes” became a central preoccupation of culture after fascism, Ben-Ghiat argues that shifting notions of masculinity was a fundamental component to the cultural work for texts of transition.³¹⁵ It could certainly be argued that Bongiorno, with his un-heroic humanism shown to fellow prisoners and his empathy toward contestants as a TV host, provided a strong example of this new idea of masculinity for a generation interested in

³¹² Indro Montanelli, “Tutti ora dimenticano di aver spasimato per Mike,” *Corriere della sera*, July 26, 1959, 3. The original Italian reads: “Mi ricordo con una certa tenerezza, il gran daffare che Mike si dava... a beneficio dei suoi compagni... Desidero però testimoniare che in galera ci stette da galantuomo e da ragazzo educato. Di eroismi non ne vedo perchè avrebbe dovuto compierne... il fatto che se la sia cavata rappresenta un mezzo miracolo. Non dico che queste vicissitudini lo rendano meritevole di medaglia... però il povero diavolo si è condotto, lui che non lo è, meglio di parecchi italiani.”

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, “Unmaking the Fascist Man: Masculinity, Film and the Transition from Dictatorship,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 10:3 (2005): 337.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 338.

“breaking from tradition and redoing everything from the start.”³¹⁶ Bongiorno was even credited with creating a new model for television, one that differentiated itself from cinematic forms of stardom.³¹⁷

In emphasizing Bongiorno’s experiences during the Second World War, Montanelli suggests a new persona and a new way of interacting with one’s peers emerges out of the ethics of anti-fascism and humanism. This new persona and this new notion of citizenship that Montanelli locates within Bongiorno’s openness and generosity toward his *partigiani* cellmates harkens back to that idea of America before the war. Montanelli sees in the Italian American Bongiorno the “Kansas City” America of the populist and warm-hearted Will Rogers, not the postwar resurgence of America as a consumer paradise. For example, prominent Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci described Bongiorno in a manner that recalls Mario Soldati’s own description of American G.I.’s as “intelligent” and “compassionate.” According to Fallaci, Bongiorno “solicits the best instincts of man, such as the respect for courage and for education, and he is able to provoke the human participation of spectators.”³¹⁸ For Fallaci, as for Bianciardi and Montanelli, Bongiorno’s personality and his style of engagement were elements interconnected to the program’s mission and effectiveness. Each of them spoke of Bongiorno relationally, in terms of how he was like his contestants and his audience. While Bongiorno’s persona was certainly a flashpoint in the debates about the program, more often than not Bongiorno was mentioned only inasmuch as he framed and interacted with what really caught

³¹⁶ Luciano Bianciardi, *Il lavoro culturale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1957), 12. The original Italian reads, “Infine, c’eravamo noi, i giovani, la generazione bruciata: decisi a rompere con le tradizioni ed a rifar tutto daccapo.”

³¹⁷ Michele Galeani, “Chiediamo che il Prof. Degoli sia nuovamente interrogato,” *L’Europeo*, December 25, 1955, 35. Galeani wrote that while “Bongiorno is questionable as a film actor, he is certainly a model for television hosts.” The Italian reads, “Bongiorno come attore del cinema è discutibile ma come presentatore televisivo è certamente un modello.”

³¹⁸ Oriana Fallaci, “Al Professore Degoli è stato fatto lo sgambetto?” *L’Europeo*, December 25, 1955, 30-34. The original Italian reads, “solleccata i migliori istinti dell’uomo, come il rispetto per il coraggio e per l’istruzione, ed è capace di provocare la partecipazione umana degli spettatori.”

the Italian public's attention and imagination: *the contestants*. In the next section, I will explore how the series managed its interactive and participatory elements through the informal conversations with ordinary people.

Everymen in *Lascia o raddoppia*

Histories of Italian television usually credit Mike Bongiorno alongside RAI's Artistic Director, Sergio Pugliese, as the creators of *Lascia o raddoppia*. In an oft-mentioned meeting in New York, the duo saw the *The \$64,000 Question* program and decided to create an Italian version of it—apparently only after legal hurdles had been cleared insuring CBS and the original creator, Cowan Productions, could not sue the RAI over the rights.³¹⁹ What Italian legal expert Carlo Zini Lamberti described as the “undeniability” of the program's American origins is evident in the obvious similarities between the two programs. The premise of the game, the interview and question segments, and the use of the soundproof cabin were all borrowed elements—so much so that the issue of rights did eventually become a problem.³²⁰ It is also clear that the conventions of framing draw distinct inspiration from the American format. In both the Italian and American formats, the host and the contestant are framed together while conversing together, and in moments of suspense, there are more close ups of the contestant. While the Italian counterpart was certainly stripped down from the original American format—the IBM computing machine, for instance, was replaced by hand-written questions—the main difference rested elsewhere. As Aldo Grasso perceptively recognizes, “compared to the American model, the Italian version was characterized not so much by the eccentricity of the questions as its research into characters, the

³¹⁹ Carlo Zini Lamberti, “*Lascia o raddoppia*: Considerations on the various aspects of the Italian television feature,” *EBU Bulletin* 8.45 (September-October 1957): 549.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

expansion of the dramatic structure, the tales of personal histories.”³²¹ Grasso describes the Italian version’s engagement with its contestants by using Mike Bongiorno’s own term: it was the ““spectacular side dish”” that was the main course in the Italian version.³²²



Figure 6: The December 25, 1955 edition of *L'Europeo* featuring close-ups of Lando Degoli, pages 30-31.

What is never mentioned in descriptions of *Lascia o raddoppia* is how the series changed over the course of its run from 1956 until 1959 in one particularly significant way. In the early months of the program, the series strictly adhered to the American model in terms of its interactions with the contestants themselves. As contestants returned each week to face a new round of questions, and as they became eligible for larger and larger cash prizes, Bongiorno would engage with them in long discussions. For instance, the first appearance may only entail a couple of brief questions establishing the basic facts about a person. By the time the contestant

³²¹ Grasso, *Storia*, xiii-xiv.
³²² Ibid.

reached the end stages, the total time dedicated to conversation expanded, even though initially the exchanges still yielded to the rhythms of pauses of the quiz segment in a way that closely followed the pacing of the American format. This was the case, for example, with *Lascia o raddoppia*'s first contestant to try for the final question, Lando Degoli. Appearing on the program between the November 26, 1955 and January 7, 1956, in his final appearance on the program, he only spoke about himself to Bongiorno for about four minutes. Despite being one of the most beloved and most discussed contestants on the program, the relative time engaging with him on air was in fact, quite brief and comparable in length to the American equivalent.

However, over time Bongiorno's interactions with the contestants developed as the main and overarching work of the program. By 1958, the interview segment exploded to routinely be about ten to fifteen minutes in length—a segment so long that it would have taken up half of the air time of the American version. In a curious reiteration of the program's participatory structures, viewers began sending in letters, photos and documents through which they themselves partook in further expanding and elaborating the story of the individual contestants. It was widely published that when Marisa Zocchi ended the show early because she could not risk losing the earnings with which she intended to pay her mother's medical bills, viewers began sending in money.³²³ There were also less notable occasions, such as when a contestant spoke of his father, who was one of first train engineers in Italy, and a fan sent in a photograph that was displayed on the next week's show. These moments of exchange between the contests and the audience, as well as the increasingly long and dominant interactive moments between Bongiorno and the quiz show contestants, defined the program in the minds of many commentators.

By the time the show was coming to the end, the success of every episode appeared to hinge primarily on the contestants themselves, as they dominated both the progress and the

³²³ Scaramucci and Ferretti, 55.

reporting on the show. Weekly accounts in newspapers highlight the extent to which audience identification with the contestants established the basis of the program's appeal. The television audience was, in the words of a *Corriere della Sera* review, "siding with," "whistling" and "applauding" for, and becoming "passionate" about specific contestants, making the program's essence a more "personal matter."³²⁴ The program was described as "painting portraits" and engaging in "psychology."³²⁵ In other words, the sense and the depth of contact with ordinary Italians made a lasting impression on the critics. It was its defining feature, "not the more obvious area of the game," so much so that when critics spoke of the meaning and value of the program they always came back to the program's contact with other human beings.³²⁶ Carlo Gregoretti, critic at the newsmagazine *L'Espresso* or *The Express* described the program as "exploiting to the maximum degree the spectacular elements that flow out of every single individual when they are on stage in front of spotlights and the cameras."³²⁷ The public access to what Gregoretti described as the "elements of individual psychology" made a strong impression on the critics.

Rather than the common presumption that the possibility of winning a new FIAT Cinquecento (or the equivalent in prize money) distinguished the program from its counterparts, the empathetic connection created between viewer and contestant dominated the critical response. Writing for a Catholic film and television periodical, Claudio Tricoli emphasized the extent to which *Lascia o raddoppia* resonated with critics and audiences alike because the

³²⁴ "Finale agitatissimo per la sfida al campione," *Corriere della sera*, March 13, 1959, 6. The original Italian reads: "parteggiare," "fischiare," "applaudire," "appassionarsi" and "gioco come fatto personale."

³²⁵ "Polemica senza veleno per due graziose concorrenti," *Corriere della sera*, March 6, 1959, 6.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Carlo Gregoretti, "Un campanile sbagliato," *L'Espresso*, November 15, 1959, 3. The Italian reads, "sfruttava al limite del lecito gli elementi spettacolari affioranti in ogni singolo individuo quando viene chiamato su un palcoscenico, davanti ai riflettori e alle telecamere" and "element psicologico individuale."

interview segment sparked the compassion of the viewer who not only had to recognize the contestant in their full humanity, but acknowledge their interconnection to that person.

It seems to me that *Lascia o raddoppia* has been successful and will keep being so, as long as it represents truthfully at least part of Italy and the Italians, and as long as each face which appears on the television screen during the broadcast is not only a way for others to recognize themselves within it, but is also a way to actually know other people who have by chance assumed the role of a character. I do not know if I hit the problem, but it seems to me that this is how it is. I would add that my experiences in the bars and cafes where I had the opportunity to find myself some Thursday evenings, suggest to me that the most interesting moments of the transmission are those in which the character appears as he or she is questioned by the presenter about his or her life, destiny, and so on.³²⁸

Triscoli's anecdotal observations about the interviews producing the most interest amongst viewers not only suggests that the opportunity to know other citizens as individuals was fundamental to *Lascia o raddoppia*'s appeal, but that these interviews also seemed to spark a sense of identification and personal engagement. In a volume published by the RAI about the program, one commentator describes this new and intense engagement and empathy produced by *Lascia o raddoppia*. He described how "more than a game, it is for us a personal adventure because given the way in which we are made, we cannot help but put ourselves each week in the shoes of the person who is taking the test."³²⁹ The program provoked a deep sense of empathy that was its defining feature.

With the ordinary contestant, in his or her authentic persona, emerging as the centerpiece of show, the idea of the Italian nation that evolved from *Lascia o raddoppia* was anything but the

³²⁸ Claudio Triscoli "Televisione, usi, e costumi," *Cronache del cinema e televisione* 16-17 (September-October 1956): 41-42. The original Italian reads, "Mi sembra che 'Lascia o raddoppia?' abbia avuto successo e possa mantenerlo in quanto in esso si rappresenta con verità almeno una parte dell'Italia e degli italiani e che ogni volto apparso sul teleschermo durante le trasmissioni della rubrica non sia un motivo per gli altri di riconoscersi in esso, o per lo meno non solo questo, ma di conoscere effettivamente altre persone, assunte occasionalmente al ruolo di personaggio. Non so se ho centrato il problema, ma a me pare che sia così, io aggiungo, per quanto mi suggerisce l'esperienza compiuta nelle sale bar o dei caffè di mezza Italia dove ho avuto occasione di trovarmi il giovedì sera, che i momenti più interessante della trasmissione sono quelli in cui il *personaggio* si presenta, viene interrogato dal presentatore sulla sua vita, sui suoi destini, ecc."

³²⁹ Silvio Negro, "Appartiene ai semplici" in *Due anni di Lascia o raddoppia: 1956-1957* (Turin: Edizioni Radio Italiana, 1958), 250. The original Italian reads: "Più di un gioco è per noi un'avventura personale, perchè dato il modo in cui noi siamo fatti, non possiamo non metterci ogni settimana nei panni di chi sta passando l'esame."

image of a homogenized mass public. Time and time again what struck critics was the diversity of national characters that the program revealed. In framing the success of *Lascia o raddoppia* for the European Broadcasters Union, Turin-based lawyer Carlo Zini-Lamberti described how, more than any singular contestant, the psychological connection with a diverse array of contestants was an indelible feature of the program.

The reason for such success much be looked for not only in the interest which people in general, and the Italians in particular, take in competitions of various kinds, especially if prizes are attached, but also in the psychological element running through the show, even though this may not be immediately apparent to the bulk of the listeners. The people appearing on the television screen are from very different walks of life, and—what is more important—of very varied character, temperament, education and disposition, in other words, a series of real persons, whose thoughts and attitudes are for the most part spontaneous.³³⁰

The presence of so many different types of personalities and citizens was sensed by a number of critics, so much so that famous Italian humorist, television critic, and public intellectual, Achille Campanile described the program as “a kaleidoscope of human types.”³³¹ This cross-section of the Italian public was most likely intentional on the part of producers, since they selected contestants out of the thousands of postcards they received from across the peninsula.³³²

Critically, the way in which the program recognized and demonstrated Italy’s diversity corresponded within neorealism’s own vision for Italian society going forward, particularly with Zavattini’s idea of a “devouring” television that gave an alternative vision to the narratives offered by the bourgeois and intellectual classes of Italy.³³³ But more than that, Paolo Gobetti, at the Marxist film journal *Cinema Nuovo*, theorized that the transformative potential of *Lascia o*

³³⁰ Zini Lambertini, 547.

³³¹ Achille Campanile, “Averemo il tango dell’imposta complementare,” *L’Europeo*, February 1, 1959, 53. The Italian reads, “caleidoscopo di tipi umani.”

³³² A diagram of the selection process can be found in Barbara, Ferretti, Umberto Broccoli, and Barbara Scaramucci, *Mamma RAI: Storia e storie del servizio pubblico radiotelevisivo* (Milan: Mondadori, 1997), 179.

³³³ Cesare Zavattini, “Roma, 16 febbraio 1959” in *Cesare Zavattini cinema: Diario cinematografico. Neorealismo, ecc.*, eds. Valentina Fortichiari and Mino Argentieri (Milan: Bompiani, 2002 [1959]), 431. Zavattini wrote in Italian that “la tv divorava.”

raddoppia rested on the extent to which the program emphasized the individual and treated his or her life with a sense of dignity. He described how through *Lascia o raddoppia*, Italians

became aware of a phenomenon that seems clearer every day: television appreciates man as a fundamental element of the show. More than the event, the plot, the story, in front of the TV screen, the audience is excited about the presence of man, his character, of any individual who embodies extraordinary interest for his fellow man... It is a phenomenon that fully revealed itself with the explosive success of *Lascia o raddoppia*.³³⁴

Emphasizing both the access to the individual and his or her life story, Gobetti envisioned *Lascia o raddoppia* as a founding experimentation, the materialization of a media form in which ordinary individuals stand at the center of society's preoccupations. In all of these accounts, the suspense of the *quiz* portion and the cash prizes were superfluous elements; the connection to and engagement with the program's contestants remained the central concern. *Lascia o raddoppia*'s participatory modes "forced viewers to abandon the limitations of a strictly personal perspective and embrace the reality of 'others'"—a quality that Millicent Marcus has described as the cornerstone of Italian neorealist production.³³⁵

As I brought to the fore in the introduction to this dissertation, both Catholic and Marxist critics perceived *Lascia o raddoppia* as entertaining a relationship to cinematic neorealism in two critical respects: in terms of the way in which it fostered a sense of identification with the subject and in terms of how positions the spectator toward ordinary, everyday events.³³⁶ In the descriptions of *Lascia o raddoppia*'s destabilizing influence, accounts miss how the program's

³³⁴ Paolo Gobetti, "L'uomo mutilato," *Cinema Nuovo* 79 (March 25, 1956): 190. The Italian reads, "Ci si è resi conto d'un fenomeno che appare invece ogni giorno più chiaro: la televisione rivaluta l'uomo come elemento fondamentale di spettacolo. Più che alla vicenda, alla trama, al racconto, dinanzi allo schermo del televisore il pubblico si appassiona alla presenza dell'uomo, del personaggio, dell'individuo qualsiasi che racchiude in sé straordinarie ragioni d'interesse per il suo simile... Si tratta di un fenomeno che, rivelatosi pienamente con il successo esplosivo di *Lascia o raddoppia*."

³³⁵ Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 23.

³³⁶ The examples I used in the introduction were from Claudio Triscoli "Televisione, usi, e costumi," *Cronache del cinema e televisione* 16-17 (September-October 1956): 41-42 and Paolo Gobetti, "L'uomo mutilato," *Cinema Nuovo* 79 (March 25, 1956): 190.

modes of address were perceived to have created an implicit sense of egalitarianism. Midway through *Lascia o raddoppia*'s run, Rossellini saw television as a form of intimate discussion between individuals, a two way conversation based on humanist mutual identification. If "cinema's audience has psychology of the mass," television enabled him to focus attention on everyday people. "The television is quite different, it offers immense liberty."³³⁷ Encompassing both a total inversion of Pasolini's descriptions and a switch from our normal expectations—with cinema described as a "mass" medium and television heralded in terms of its address to the individual—Rossellini's comments are part of a largely forgotten response of those who saw in television utopian possibilities for constructing a modern society. In the 1958, neorealist director Luchino Visconti described himself as "a television fanatic" because the medium gave the viewing audience the opportunity "to enter into contact with a number of unknown people, ordinary people, but humanly very interesting."³³⁸ Television for both Rossellini and Visconti was able to structure authentic exchange between individuals. In the following chapter, I will further expand on this point through the words of neorealism's most famous theorist, Cesare Zavattini, and his own television documentary series.

Is It Just About Lipstick?

In her reflection on *Lascia o raddoppia*, Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci made the argument that while the American program was "designed to sell lipstick," referring to Revlon's sponsorship of

³³⁷ Roberto Rossellini interviewed in "Il nostro incontro con la TV," *Cinema Nuovo* 136, August 1, 1958, 240. English translation from "Cinema and Television, Jean Renoir and Roberto Rossellini interviewed by André Bazin," in *Roberto Rossellini My Method: Writings and Interviews*, ed. Adriano Aprà (New York: Marsilio, 1995), 94. The Italian reads, "Erano ben pochi però a essere alla ricerca dell'uomo. La gran massa della gente faceva tutto quanto era necessario perchè l'uomo venisse dimenticato...La tv tutt'a un tratto, offre una libertà immensa. Bisogna approfittare di questa libertà. Il pubblico della tv è profondamente diverso da quello del cinema. Il pubblico del cinema ha la psicologia della massa. Alla tv si rivolge a dieci milioni di spettatori che sono dieci milioni di individui, uno dopo l'altro. Il discorso diventa quindi infinitamente più intimo, infinitamente più persuasivo."

³³⁸ Luchino Visconti interviewed by Paolo Gobetti, "Registi davanti alla TV," *Cinema Nuovo* 134 (July 1, 1958): 64. The Italian reads, "Sono un maniaco della tv...ci ha dato...la possibilità di entrare in contatto con un certo numero di persona sconosciute, persone qualsiasi ma umanamente interessantissime."

The \$64,000 Question, the Italian version became “the best television program” because it created a narrative around the individual.³³⁹ Despite the oversimplification in Fallaci’s narrative (and its inaccuracy) her analysis nonetheless points to the idea that the program’s format is merely a container; it only holds meaning when it is placed within the specificities and the exigencies of a specific historical moment and context. *Americans* just wanted to sell lipstick. *Italians* made it into something else, something “great.” As I have documented throughout this chapter, the program’s novel quality was the way in which its live exchanges fostered a new form of connection between host, contestant and audience in a way that sparked a sense of empathy, participation, and common cause. Whereas Fallaci sees the Italian and American versions in terms of their difference, I want to conclude by pointing to how the live, stripped down aesthetics of the format were intended to create an empathetic connection.

Louis Cowan, the creator of the American version, was known at the time for his realist aesthetic, an aesthetic which in the words of *New York Times* television critic Jack Gould instilled a “profound lesson for the television busybodies who are addicted to the curse of overproduction.”³⁴⁰ Cowan himself had an explanation for why he sought to eliminate and reduce any signs that would make his program formats seem produced or artificial. Describing his own practices and perspective in terms of the argument set forth by Joyce Cary’s 1958 *Art and Reality*, which was one of the few pieces of English language criticism at the time that seriously considers the aesthetic philosophy of Benedetto Croce, Cowan asserted the following: “the aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance; for this, and not the external mannerism and detail, *is* true reality...the folk arts and the lively

³³⁹ Fallaci. The Italian reads, “L’ha organizzata per lanciare un nuovo tipo di matita per le labbra” and “il migliore spettacolo televisivo.”

³⁴⁰ Jack Gould, “Conversation in Program of Same Name on Channel 4, Holds One’s Interest,” *New York Times*, April 12, 1954, 36.

arts...are always groping toward a comment on the ‘inward significance.’” In this way, Cowan underscores that extent to which he, in a Crocian manner, saw culture as a means of expressing the larger meaning. But like the Italian neorealists, Croce is merely a framework as he also interprets the representation of “true reality” as predicated on the means of creating unmediated access to individual reality. Cowan had always seen the high-stakes prize element of the quiz show as merely a hook to draw viewers into what he felt was truly important: the representation of ordinary Americans. Speaking to American media historian Eric Barnouw about the program, he described the intentions of the program in these terms. There was

a whole multiplicity of reasons why the idea came into being. Part of it was, I guess, the fact that while one did have a program that I thought had the potential of having a large audience, a considerable suspense if done live, it was also a program that as far as I was concerned made clear the fact that the people who were the little known people knew a lot more than most people gave them credit for knowing, that this was part of the insight into this, that it was important because of the contribution that so many people who are the so-called little people make to the whole business of living, and that if people could be found who had capacities in different fields, that they could then show them, that this was important.³⁴¹

If the intention of the program was to show ordinary people in a way that recognized their fundamental value to postwar American society, the creation of suspense through the existence of a cash prize and the liveness were the best expressive and dramatic means to achieve that goal. Cowan’s clear objective was not to structure the relationship around a sense of pity for or glorification of the contestants, but rather to create a sense of egalitarianism and a feeling of commonality between audience and contestant through structures that revealed their individual reality and identity.

³⁴¹ Louis G. Cowan. Interview by Eric Barnouw. Transcript. 1967. Columbia University Oral History Collection, Columbia University, New York, NY, 183.

Italian critics and media producers also pointed to the way in which the program fostered a sense of connection between audiences and contestants. Paolo Gobetti explained the aesthetics of the program in reaching a moment of truth:

As for the neorealism of *Lascia o raddoppia*... The quality of any television broadcasting, in particular any live broadcasting, is a definite reflection of reality... In *Lascia o raddoppia*, this reality is particularly raw... when the camera examines the face of the contestant who was asked a question, there comes a moment of truth... we consider it unjust to undervalue certain positive elements [of the program] that could also be of precious help to contemporary cinema.³⁴²

Despite recognizing the flaws and limitations of the format that he and others saw, Gobetti was adamant that *Lascia o raddoppia*'s "neorealistic" ability to identify the authentic "truth" of the individual. While I shall develop further the idea that the program offered a potential avenue through which to re-elaborate neorealism in the subsequent chapter, for the moment I wish to stress that the program's casual and informal conversational style resonated with, or responded to, a set of aesthetic, thematic preferences already established in Italy. Unsurprisingly, Cesare Zavattini made the interview motifs and communicative structures of *Lascia o raddoppia* the foundation of his own documentary series. Gobetti's analysis is also consistent with the way in which Sergio Pugliese accounted for the popularity of *Lascia o raddoppia* in the following speech before a conference of television producers. According to Pugliese, quiz programs come "very close to reality" and display with "courageous rawness" the world of each contestant.³⁴³ In

³⁴² Paolo Gobetti, "Millioni e divismo," *Cinema Nuovo* 87 (July 25, 1956): 62. The Italian reads, "Per quanto riguarda il neorealismo di *Lascia o raddoppia*... Qualità di qualsiasi trasmissione televisiva, in particolare in ripresa diretta, è un indubbio rispecchiamento della realtà... In *Lascia o raddoppia*, questa realtà è particolarmente viva... quando la telecamera scruta il volto del concorrente a cui è stata posta la domanda, viene il momento della verità... riteniamo che non sia giusto sottovalutare certi elementi positivi che potrebbero essere anche di aiuto prezioso per il nostro cinema d'oggi."

³⁴³ Pugliese quoted from his 1958 speech in Rome at the Convegno interno di studi sulle trasmissioni radiofoniche e televisive in Cesare Mannucci, *Lo spettatore senza libertà* (Bari: Laterza, 1962), 178. The original Italian reads: "Le ragioni per [cui] le trasmissioni di *quiz* hanno sollevato dei veri entusiasmi collettivi impressionanti in tutto il mondo, forse trarremo delle conclusioni che saranno abbastanza vicine alla verità. C'è il giochetto, c'è il premio, c'è il senso sportivo della gara, ma tutto questo non basta a giustificare il quasi morboso interesse... per queste trasmissioni... I giochi a *quiz* hanno semplicemente scoperto e rivelato il dramma intimo, le verità celate di piccoli uomini di strada a milioni di altri uomini della strada. Ogni personaggio popolare dei giochi di *quiz* ha portato sullo

emphasizing the program's reality and rawness, Pugliese makes a statement about *Lascia o raddoppia*'s purpose and function that appears in conversation with neorealism's own emphasis on the cinematic uncovering of everyday realities. Pugliese's esteem for *Lascia o raddoppia*'s mimics Zavattini's own praise for immediate visual images as the means through which we can "truly dig down deep into a man."³⁴⁴

Whereas, as Umberto Eco himself noted, most American intellectuals were engaged in a campaign against the elements of massification in midcentury culture, Cowan was quite the exception.³⁴⁵ By linking the "rawness" or the immediacy of format to its ability to create a new, participatory form of contact with the individual, Cowan's views seem much more aligned with the Italian drive to "produce cultural forms better adapted to the conditions of modernity."³⁴⁶ In a 1959 speech, Cowan summarized his own objectives as a programmer in terms:

What I am pleading for is a latitudinarian view of the arts and a rejection of snobbery, of the limited view. I am even doing something more than that; I am suggesting that so long as you and I choose to spend out lives in attempting to enrich the lives of the many, we have an obligation to conceive of art as a human impulse that takes scores of forms....that is why we prize the arts, because they help us to perceive.³⁴⁷

For Cowan, a man who scribbled the motto of European Public Broadcasting—"to educate, to inform, and to entertain"—in his production notes as programming director of CBS, television programming was about "helping us perceive," an idea that comes eerily close to Rossellini's own perspective about television opening pathways to knowledge about man and Eco's own

schermo un suo piccolo mondo, l'ha rivelato con assoluta sincerità, talvolta con coraggiosa crudezza...sono tutti personaggi che hanno scoperto improvvisamente sullo schermo una loro verità, una loro compiuta concretezza."

³⁴⁴ Cesare Zavattini, "Del film inchiesta, autobiografico e altro," in *Cesare Zavattini cinema: Diario cinematografico. Neorealismo, ecc.*, eds. Valentina Fortichiari and Mino Argentieri (Milan: Bompiani, 2002 [1963]): 920. The original Italian reads: "Con l'autobiografia puoi, veramente, scavare dentro un uomo. Un regista non ha, in essa, il compito di imporre il proprio mondo al personaggio, sibbene di sollecitare il massimo grado di realtà, di autonomia, di libertà nello spazio e nel tempo e di piegare i mezzi tecnici ai desideri del protagonista dell'autobiografia."

³⁴⁵ Eco, *Apocalittici*, 32.

³⁴⁶ Lumley, 3.

³⁴⁷ Louis G. Cowan, *Television and the Arts: A Talk at the American Association of School Administrators Annual Meeting in Atlantic City, N.J., February 17, 1959* (New York: CBS Television Network, 1959), 10.

definition of an open work.³⁴⁸ We will see in the following chapter that the format's use of unmediated dialogue inspired Zavattini in his own turn toward television production. In this sense, we can see that the *\$64,000 Question/Lascia o raddoppia* format became about a mutual turn, taken in both the United States and Italy, that was about an increased curiosity toward representing the everyday citizen and making his or her reality truly relevant to their counterparts around the country.

³⁴⁸ James Schwoch has already suggested that Cowan's legacy needs to be revised. However, while he finds the gap between quiz shows and Cowan's later roles "disorientating," he appears to ignore the fact that the aims and goals of *The \$64,000 Question* created a sense of coherence in Cowan's biography between his roles as programmer and then as a governmental official and policy proponent. For Schwoch's discussion of Cowan, see *Global TV: New Media and the Cold War, 1946-1969* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), chapters 3 and 4.

CHAPTER 6

The Unknown Self in the Documentary Series *Chi legge*

Neorealism's representational focus on everyday reality unnerved many of the period, not the least Giulio Andreotti, one of the most important Italian statesmen of the twentieth century, who before becoming prime minister on multiple occasions held a governmental post in the late 1940s overseeing cultural policy. In Andreotti's oft-cited critique of neorealism, he demanded that Italy's "dirty laundry...be washed at home" and lambasted Italian neorealists for their depictions of Italy's poor and downtrodden populations.³⁴⁹ Andreotti even went so far in his conviction that he spearheaded governmental interventions to limit the production and distribution of neorealist films.³⁵⁰ Andreotti's words and actions strike at the underlying concern over Italy's reputation internationally. But by arguing that De Sica and Zavattini's *Umberto D.* presented, at least according to Andreotti, an "incorrect" image of Italian society, he was also engaging in a contentious debate about *whose* realities should define Italian national culture.³⁵¹ Andreotti's open letter to De Sica and Zavattini captures the extent to which neorealism, as a movement dedicated to telling ulterior narratives, sought to expose and confront one of the defining predicaments of postwar society: behind the veneer of modernity's supposedly universal impact (be it a fascist modernity or a consumer capitalist modernity) there existed a whole host of peoples who were excluded from the public sphere of the press and from the cults of

³⁴⁹ Giulio Andreotti, "Piaghe sociali e necessità di redimersi," *Libertas* 7, February 28, 1952.

³⁵⁰ One of the better analyses of the impact of the Andreotti law can be found in Daniela Treveri Genari, *Post-War Italian Cinema: American Intervention, Vatican Interests* (London: Routledge, 2011), 51-58.

³⁵¹ Andreotti.

personality and celebrity found in both fascist and Hollywood cinemas. In recognizing the incompleteness of the intellectual and managerial classes' accounts of reality, neorealist sought to produce a culture that would be responsive to those forgotten individuals.

Andreotti is attributed to helping quash neorealism, since his 1949 law effectively gave the government control over the financing and censorship of films. The neorealism of the immediate postwar was replaced by the “rosy” and more populist variant; however, the desire to produce films responsive to suppressed and marginalized lives of ordinary Italians continued. Writing in 1953 about his idea for a film entitled *Italia mia* or *My Italy*, Zavattini expressed his continued commitment to stories of ordinary people:

I want to say that today this is a urgent need for neorealism, which is a way of looking at life that is good, sincere and that demonstrates an affection toward the things that exist in one's country, with one's own people...we must confront [this need] outside of books, to write instead these books with cinema.³⁵²

In suggesting that the stories of Italy's popular masses must be written not in books but through cinema, Zavattini reiterated his preference for cinema as a medium that could document reality. But he also was emphasizing that in a country with one of the highest illiteracy rates in the West, the book was an inefficient and unpractical means through which to engage Italians. As film critic Luigi Chiarini noted, “both [cinema and television] have a greater importance for us, in respect to other countries, if you consider the situation of the education and the poor circulation of books. The democratization of cinema and television is of equal weight to the freedom of the press.”³⁵³ In this chapter, I will explore Zavattini's experimentation with televisual form as an attempt to foster the “democratization” of Italian culture.

³⁵² Cesare Zavattini, “Come spero di fare Italia mia,” *Rassegna del film: mensile di cultura cinematografica* 2.13 (April 1953): 21. The Italian reads, “Vorrei dire che oggi vi è una urgenza del neorealismo, un modo di guardare la vita che è sano, sincero e che dimostra un affetto verso le cose che esistono del proprio paese, del proprio popolo...bisogna affrontare al di fuori dei libri, per scrivere anzi questi libri proprio con il cinema.”

³⁵³ Entrambi [cinema e televisione] hanno un'importanza maggiore da noi, rispetto ad altri paesi, se si considerano la situazione della scuola e la scarissima diffusione del libro. La democratizzazione del cinema e della tv è una

In his television documentary series *Chi legge? Viaggio lungo il Tirreno* or *Who Reads? A Voyage Along the Tyrrhenian Sea* (1960-1961), Zavattini explicitly put the culture of books into contact and dialogue with the popular culture of cinema and television. Comprised of eight weekly episodes that aired between November 19, 1960 and January 21, 1961, the *Chi legge* series traced famous novelist Mario Soldati's journey from the South to the North of Italy along the west coast abutting the Tyrrhenian Sea. Over the course of the series, Soldati acts as both teacher, telling the audience about Italy's literary history according to region, and as interlocutor, interviewing a cross-section of Italy's literate and illiterate populations. In capturing both experiences, the series both incorporated ordinary Italians into national dialogue and it also experiment with the new representational paradigms of interview and direct address to insure a more popular culture would come to fruition. While *Lascia o raddoppia* is central to historical accounts because of its perceived cultural impact, Cesare Zavattini's television documentary series *Chi legge* has received essentially no critical attention. Yet it is the very conscious use of representational style within the *Chi legge* series that enables us to analyze how early television styles offer a critical, but overlooked avenue through which to understand postwar democratization.

Thematically *Chi legge* was a continuation of Zavattini's narrative interest in ordinary Italian lives, but stylistically, the series diverged from the routines of cinematic neorealism to intentionally draw on the motifs of American, audience participation programs. In the place of cinematography's rules of editing and neorealism's realistic, yet fictional storylines, television programming featured live, unedited exchanges between the host and ordinary Italians, creating what Zavattini called television's "improvised humanity." By "improvised humanity," Zavattini

esigenza il cui peso è pari a quello della libertà di stampa." Luigi Chiarini, "Cinema e tv nella società italiana," *Cinema Nuovo* 145 (Jul-Aug 1960): 317.

was specifically referring to informal and casual conversations that he saw on popular television programming in which ordinary Italians were invited to speak directly to the television viewing audience about themselves. However, television's improvisational routines offered Zavattini a means by which to heighten the audience's connection to the subject to inspire empathy and identification because they employed television's direct capture.

With *Chi legge*, Zavattini abandoned traditional documentary motifs, such as voice-over narration and staged encounters to explicitly pattern the program off of popular programming and its participatory modes. Zavattini saw the unprecedented presence of everyday people on television and their direct capture on live TV as a new and potentially revolutionary representational and narrative paradigm. In other words, *Chi legge* exemplifies Umberto Eco's idea of the open text by challenging the very norms of documentary production through the use of popular television's representational languages. In exploring how the series pushed the boundaries of documentary production, I will first detail exactly what Zavattini meant by the term "improvised humanity," which he used in his 1959 letter to Soldati describing the objectives of the *Chi legge* series. I will then examine how he deployed the improvised humanity motif within the series to create a popular version of Italian national culture. In concluding, I will explore how program's repeated return to the everyday individual buttressed alternative narratives about the nation and Italian national culture at a time when the Italian Left had the opportunity to read the writings of Antonio Gramsci for the first time.³⁵⁴ *Chi legge* is therefore an example of how the new television styles of direct capture could open the door for multiple interpretations of national culture to emerge—both those offered by on screen subjects and those activated within the program's viewers.

³⁵⁴ Stephen Gundle documents the dissemination of Gramsci's writings postwar thanks to the head of the Italian Communist Party Palmiro Togliatti. See *Between Hollywood and Moscow: The Italian Communists and the Challenge of Mass Culture, 1943-1991* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 42-54.

The presence of ordinary people directly addressing the home audience on live television, innovated in the United States and found across Italian primetime programming schedules, offered a way through which to restructure the engagement between subject and viewer. These routines, however, also reflect the shifts already underway in Italy thanks to influence of neorealism. Against the segmentation of postwar culture by medium or genre, Zavattini's embrace of popular television's improvised humanity demonstrates that the representation of the everyday individual became a potent rubric in categorizing cultural products in postwar Italy, regardless of its location within taste hierarchies—a point that Karen Pinkus underscores in arguing that neorealism's experimentation with postwar forms of reportage helped render everyday individuals as worthy of the public's attention for the first time.³⁵⁵ In blurring the modes of investigative documentary and reportage with the autobiographic flourishes of a travelogue, *Chi legge* is a part of this same paradigmatic shift in 1950s Italian culture. Inasmuch as the direct, unplanned, and unmediated contact with everyday Italians was never limited to *Chi legge* but was dispersed across popular programming, we should not think about the series as a singular instance of programming based on autobiographic motifs but as part of early Italian television's routines and thus, more broadly, as constituent of Italian culture of the time.

Rather than dismissing popular, primetime programs such as *Lascia o raddoppia* (*Double or Nothing*, 1956-1959) or *Il Musicchiere* (*The Music Box*, 1957-1960) as examples of mass culture and as a degradation of high culture, Zavattini's unabashed experimentation with popular programming motifs invoked the less recognized benefits of the *expansion* of midcentury mass culture. Although “the opposition between high art and mass culture—between modernism and kitsch—structured much of the discourse around cultural production in this period,” Zavattini's

³⁵⁵ Karen Pinkus, *The Montesi Scandal: The Death of Wilma Montesi and the Birth of the Papparazzi in Fellini's Rome* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 10-12.

Chi legge is an example of how many cultural producers sought a third way that rejected these dichotomies and embraced the popular.³⁵⁶ The fact that Zavattini and Soldati did not write off popular television programming as instances of mass culture that simply evoked immediate and massive pleasure challenges us to rethink the European response to the culture industries.³⁵⁷ Instead, these producers incorporated the presence of Italy's popular classes at every step along their journey in the *Chi legge* series, understanding the elements of television programming typically described as mass culture as participatory outlets.

In building on the engagement of Italy's popular classes, the documentary series staged a paradigm shift between the routines of Italian culture and the Gramscian idea of national-popular culture, in which there can be an "organic unity...between intellectual strata and popular masses, between rulers and ruled...Every relationship of 'hegemony' is necessarily an educational relationship."³⁵⁸ Their series did not romanticize the state of Italy's illiterate or quasi-literate publics, but instead gave everyday individuals the opportunity to have their stories narrated as part of national culture. As one commentator of the time wrote, "This *Voyage along the Tyrrhenian Sea* can perhaps be considered the first socialist television documentary in the history of Italian TV...[because it] explains a framework that on the surface may simple appear as picturesque...taking account of the sense of the gathered individuals, of the single atoms within the crowd."³⁵⁹ The documentary's codes of improvised humanity were not only an attempt to depict the true reality of Italy's mass publics, but in the act of revealing those unknown and

³⁵⁶ Michael Cramer, "Rossellini's History Lessons," *New Left Review*, 78 (2012): 118.

³⁵⁷ Jérôme Bourdon, "Old and New Ghosts: Public Service Television and the Popular A-History," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 7:3 (2004): 283.

³⁵⁸ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, eds. and trans. by Quinin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 350.

³⁵⁹ "Il viaggio di Soldati e Zavattini," Archivio Mario Soldati, Critiche televisive, B40 UA357, Archivio della Parola, dell'Immagine e della Comunicazione Editoriale, Università degli Studi di Milano, Milan, Italy. The Italian reads, "Questo *Viaggio lungo il Tirreno* è forse da considerarsi il primo documentario televisivo socialista nella storia della TV italiana... da ordine e spiegazione a un quadro che in superficie potrebbe semplicemente apparire pittoresco...stupenda rassegna di visti e gesti...questa volontà di analizzare un pulviscolo umano."

ignored parts of the country, the series also gave the Italian viewing audience the opportunity to recognize themselves in their fellow citizens. It was designed to give ordinary Italians the privilege of being able to narrate culture, not be narrated by it.

Defining Popular Television's Improvised Humanity



Figure 7: "Improvised Humanity": A few of the many interviews Mario Soldati conducted for *Chi legge*.

When proposing the series to the RAI and publicizing it in newspapers, Zavattini and Soldati described the documentary as an investigation into the reading habits of Italians. But this description is misleading. In reality, the program is based on a travelogue premise, where at each stop along the way Soldati both provides background about Italy's literary greats while also routinely stopping to conduct a series of happenstance and impromptu interviews. The geographical progress of the journey provides a frame for the frequent man-on-the-street style

interviews—or moments of improvised humanity—such as ones depicted in Figure 7.³⁶⁰ In selecting individuals that he came across in his travels regardless of their class background or other distinguishing features, Soldati understood these causal interviews as an act of “reflecting the percentage from each condition...that together constitutes our population,” indicating the variety of different experiences that were to constitute the base of the investigative series.³⁶¹

In proposing the series to his primary collaborator, Mario Soldati, Zavattini had a particularly curious way of describing what it was that he thought their documentary should be doing. Although Soldati and Zavattini had collaborated before, on a series of films in the late 1930s, the letter doesn't mention their previous collaborations or Soldati's 1957 television documentary, in which he went along the Po River valley to sample regional cuisine. Zavattini's winding, twelve-page proposal, which was filled with different ideas and possibilities for the program, did not mention neorealism or any other form of filmmaking. Instead, when Zavattini thought about the documentary series, he referred back, time and time again, to the RAI's popular entertainment programs. Zavattini insisted, “we will certainly use not didactic models from dry documentaries,” instead he wanted the series to “give prizes to the television spectators like what via Arsenale, 21 [the RAI's physical address] usually puts on the air.” He dreamed of it “gather[ing] people in the town square, just as they get together for *Telematch* (1957-1958).” But most of all he wanted the series to “create interest in personalities like *Lascia o raddoppia* or *The \$64,000 Question* (1956-1959) or *Il Musichiere* or *Name That Tune* (1956-1959).”³⁶² These

³⁶⁰ The images are taken from across the eight part series. Permission to publish these images was granted by the RAI.

³⁶¹ Mario Soldati, *Canzonette e viaggio televisivo* (Milan: Mondadori, 1962), 150. The Italian reads, “He creduto bene di non distinguere: e quasi di rispecchiare la percentuale che ogni condizione e ogni ceto, con la sua cultura e col suppo reddito, costituisce nell'insieme della nostra popolazione.”

³⁶² Cesare Zavattini to Mario Soldati, Archivio Cesare Zavattini, Mario Soldati S622/21, Biblioteca Panizzi, Reggio-Emilia, Italy. The original Italian reads, “così come saranno dati premi agli spettatori della televisione che manderanno al solito Via Arsenale 21 la loro soluzione”; “si raccoglieranno in piazza, come si raccoglievano per *Telematch* per l'oggetto misterioso”; “come si occupano dei personaggi di *Lascia o raddoppia* e del *Musichiere*.”

frequent references to popular programs were not happenstance, but a reflection of how television, when it invited the participation of everyday individuals and allowed them to directly address the television audience, felt radical. *Lascia o raddoppia* was unsettling and transformative in terms of its interactive modes. Zavattini found no better source of inspiration than the very languages provided by popular entertainment programming and viewed such programming as the basis of the new culture that he was beginning to imagine through the program.

The *Chi legge* series was ostensibly supposed to be an investigation into the reading habits of Italians; however, it explicitly took on the issue of *who* gets to narrate Italian national identity when it abandoned the confines of traditional documentary and sought out moments of dialogue with ordinary people in the midst of their daily routines. In concluding his letter to Soldati, Zavattini describes that “as it happens with other television series,” *Chi legge* should find “personalities...that touch the fantasies and the hearts of the public” and which “leave to a substantial degree the sincerity, the character, the *improvised humanity* of the people.”³⁶³ In suggesting that their documentary series capitalized on popular programming’s *improvised humanity*, Zavattini was calling attention to how television’s immediacy created a human connection between subject and audience. The representational routines that rendered ordinary Italians human were, for Zavattini, intimately tied a different kind of national culture. In a spring 1961 interview with the communist daily *l’Unità*, appeared just a few months after *Chi legge* had aired, Zavattini reaffirmed the role of participatory media in the process of creating a more egalitarian and democratic culture.

TV should connect with as many happenings as possible because each connection

³⁶³ Ibid., The original Italian reads, “ci sarà un 'personaggio' che toccherà la fantasia e il cuore del pubblico,” and “da lasciare tuttavia alla sincerità, al carattere, alla umanità improvvisa infine della persone incontrate, un notevole margine.”

means direct participation...And this is democracy...having television divulge and verbalize the experiences of everyone, the culture can acquire for its own self a new character and overcome the historical barrier academic culture and popular culture.³⁶⁴

In choosing to have *Chi legge* “divulge and verbalize the experiences of everyone,” Zavattini understood television as being able to rupture structures of taste and class and contribute to the formation of a national culture.

Not coincidentally, the sense of time and temporality stood at the heart of how Zavattini thought about the contrast between the old, divided cultural paradigms and new currents of popular culture. For example, Zavattini described the shortcomings of intellectual culture, arguing that “culture, in order to be culture, must lose its sense of mystery. The men of culture...are the dead because when we think of them with respect, we think of them as if they are in their graves.”³⁶⁵ If the the culture of intellectuals was esoteric and disconnected from contemporary popular culture, Zavattini identified the specific characteristics of early television—namely improvisation and immediacy—as vital components of his alternative ideal. The notion of improvised humanity recaptures the profound identification with the subject that Zavattini sought with his previous, cinematic experimentations. He had long understood his own neorealist practice as essentially an effort to produce an immediate and contemporaneous experience because that is what would create the most profound connection between subject and viewer.

³⁶⁴ Arturo Gismondi, “Le proposte di Zavattini per una TV aperta alla realtà e alla democrazia,” *l’Unità*, May 4, 1961, 3. The Italian reads, “La TV dovrebbe collegarsi con quanti più avvenimenti e possibile poiché ogni collegamento significa partecipazione diretta, fisica dirsi dell’uomo quanto avviene nel mondo. E questa è la democrazia...La cultura deve trovare in modo di esprimersi una capacità divulgative attraverso la TV. E non soltanto per ragioni diciamo così utilitarie, ma perché dovendosi divulgare ed esprimere per tutti, la cultura può acquistare essa stessa caratteri nuovi e superare la storica barriera italiana fra culture specialistica, accademica e cultura popolare.”

³⁶⁵ Cesare Zavattini, “Cultura popolare,” in *Cesare Zavattini cinema: Diario cinematografico. Neorealismo, ecc.*, eds. Valentina Fortichiari and Mino Argentieri (Milan: Bompiani, 2002 [1956]), 813. The Italian reads, “Gli uomini di cultura... sono i morti, se noi pensiamo a loro con rispetto, vi pensiamo come sulle loro tombe.”

When I say “enough with subjects” it is because with the invention of a story it seems to me that you betray the immediacy and the freshness of the camera...between the moment of your thought and the moment in which the camera records this thought too much time actually relapses. That is why I think that diary is the most authentic and complete expression.³⁶⁶

Working with this ideal in mind, television’s direct capture could effectively synthesize the experiences of the viewer and the subject. There could be no artificiality or performance—both hallmarks of fascist era filmmaking.

In his own idiosyncratic reading of neorealism, Zavattini saw the movement as primarily about creating structures of direct communication between individuals. This idea of direct communication not only had a distinct *temporal* dimension, but it also distinguished itself from other forms of cinema in that it “allowed you to feel a person in his or her essence.”³⁶⁷ Direct address and contemporaneity sparked the viewer’s empathy and created a human connection, and therefore were inherent to any form of democratic media. Given this prevailing norm instituted by neorealism, popular television’s codes of everydayness and *improvisation* provided the potential to rearticulate neorealism’s own language and goals. Zavattini implied this when describing their efforts in the documentary series as a “*new, massive, methodical, persistent and spectacular assault on Italian inertia.*”³⁶⁸ In pitting television’s improvisation and immediacy against the inertia of Italian society, Zavattini saw these representational norms as capable of transforming national culture. As important as it was to privilege the personal experiences of everyday Italians, utilizing popular programming’s engagement sense of immediate and direct

³⁶⁶ Cesare Zavattini, “Basta con i soggetti,” in *Cesare Zavattini cinema: Diario cinematografico. Neorealismo, ecc.*, eds. Valentina Fortichiari and Mino Argentieri (Milan: Bompiani, 2002 [1950]), 689-90. The Italian reads, “Quando dico “basta con i soggetti” è perché con l’inventare una storia mi pare di tradire questa immediatezza e freschezza della macchina da presa...tra il momento del pensiero e il momento in cui la macchina realizza questo pensiero ci corre troppo tempo attualmente. Ecco perché penso al diario come all’espressione più completa e autentica.”

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 692.

³⁶⁸ Cesare Zavattini to Mario Soldati, Archivio Cesare Zavattini, Mario Soldati S622/21, Biblioteca Panizzi, Reggio-Emilia, Italy. The original Italian reads “è giunto il momento di tentare con la TV un assalto *nuovo, massiccio, metodico, insistente e spettacolare contro l’inerzia all’italiano.*”

contact combatted a stagnant Italian nation.

Even the very idea of taking a trip across Italy was conceptualized by the duo as a means of gaining direct knowledge without the filters or mediation of others. In Soldati's own words, "Why travel, what is it to travel? To travel is to know a place, its people, the country."³⁶⁹ If travelling was a way of gaining directly knowledge and experience of a place and its people, it was also a departure from Soldati's usual method. In memoirs such as *America, primo amore* (*America, My First Love*, 1935), Soldati uses his own personal voice in ethnographically recounting his own observations of, and experiences with, American culture. That Soldati would instead use conversation and interview as the basis of the series suggests the influence of documentary filmmakers like Jean Rouch. Rouch's concept of "participatory ethnography" used the "notion of conversation" as a means of signaling "informality, spontaneity and open-ended interaction," that he believed could mitigate cinema's use as a tool of colonization.³⁷⁰ Luca Caminati has not only identified Rouch as a key influence on Rossellini's own 1957 *India Matri Bhumi* television documentary produced for the RAI, but Rouch's own formal experimentations suggests a degree to cross-cultivation between emerging documentary motifs and television's interactive modes.³⁷¹

The potential link with forms of "participatory ethnography" is also significant when we consider that the documentary's journey follows the path of Italy's unifying armies. In this way, the trip was the perfect pretext under which to exploit popular programming's modes for interacting with everyday people while also suggesting a new basis under which to have national unity. In overlaying the voices of ordinary people and their everyday experiences over the

³⁶⁹ Mario Soldati, "Script of Il Viaggio nella valle del Po," Archivio Mario Soldati, Chi legge B32 UA274 sf.3. Archivio della Parola, dell'Immagine e della Comunicazione Editoriale, Università degli Studi di Milano, Milan, Italy. The Italian reads, "Perchè viaggiare, che cos'è viaggiare? Viaggiare è conoscere luoghi, gente, paesi."

³⁷⁰ Anna Grimshaw, *The Ethnographer's Eye: Ways of Seeing in Anthropology* (Cambridge, University Press, 2001), 138.

³⁷¹ Luca Caminati. Interview by author, Seattle, WA, March 21, 2014.

historical pathway of armies that took territory by force, the series implicitly suggest that the voice of everyday Italians constituted a truly unified Italy. Furthermore, in emphasizing the first-hand account that travelling provides, both in terms of experiencing the visual space and its inhabitants, the documentary reiterates the importance of representational strategies that themselves emphasize television's direct capture.

Improvised Humanity in *Chi legge*

As much as the travelogue motif in *Chi legge* allowed for a linear narrative in which direct contact could be made with Italy's popular classes, it was underwritten by the instability between the journey's two distinct types of sequences—one which employed traditional documentary forms in which Soldati didactically narrated to the viewing audience and one that drew on popular programming's interview motifs—which stood in for these two competing versions of Italian culture. The first type corresponds to the scenes in which Soldati directly addresses the camera to describe each region's primary literary figures, their living quarters and places of work, while also contextualizing their contributions to Italian culture. In these scenes, each stop in his trip is another piece in Italy's cultural unification, read through the contributions of the "great men" of Italy's literary history. By contrast, the second type of scene engages Italy's anonymous members of Italy's working and lower middle class, solicited in happenstance encounters, to narrate their own literary preferences, habits, and daily life. In these travelogues, Soldati interrupts regular individuals during their daily tasks, whether bailing sea salt, sewing and washing clothing, catching fish, or going home on break from patrol duties. Most importantly, a series of representational choices highlight the authenticity and spontaneity of their personal, autobiographic disclosures.

In maintaining both modes of address, and the specific representational styles that

accompany them, *Chi legge* tangibly distinguishes between two notions of culture. On the one hand, the documentary holds up the image of the privileged intellectual represented by Soldati and the “great men” of Italy’s literary inheritance. Their intellectual contributions to Italian society are described at length. On the other hand, the representational immediacy of ordinary people erodes traditional notions of culture and exposes its limitations. Viewer are invited to see that the world of Italy’s literary greats was encompassed by people whose daily works and lives were excluded from literary culture and discussion. In including these people and their relationship to literature, *Chi legge* was as much about the existence of other versions and definitions of Italian national culture—ones not offered by Italy’s literary elite or found in history books—as it was about the possibility of overwriting them with a truly popular and autobiographical account of Italian culture.



Figure 8: Mario Soldati on a ferry traveling across the Strait of Messina, *Chi legge*; aired November 26, 1960

The series itself uses a variety of representational strategies to distinguish between the moments when Soldati speaks to the viewing audience and when he interviews people he meets along his trip. When Soldati directly addresses the viewing audience, the camera is usually balanced, steady, and tracks Soldati as the host, framing him within the picturesque natural landscapes of Italy, as in Figure 8 (a still from an episode titled “Un altro ferry boat/Another Ferry Boat”). The lingering presence of Soldati within the frame and the florid language with which Soldati discusses these writers creates a slow and controlled pacing. This technique is repeated in the sequences in which Soldati discusses the contexts from which these literary greats emerge. However, when Italy’s popular classes act as confessants in front of the camera—admitting with embarrassment their illiteracy, their general disinterest in literature, or their diet of “popular” forms of reading such as mystery novels and news magazines—the pace speeds up and the stability of the camera vanishes. Perhaps most notably, the filming crew becomes a part of the scene itself, so much so that television historian Aldo Grasso describes the frequent shots of camera and sound operators as being “shown off, almost glorified.”³⁷² The compositional structure of Figure 8, in which the framing balances Soldati’s figure between the ship’s ballast and the scenic Calabrian coast of in the background, is in direct contrast with the lack of harmony in Figure 9 (a still from an episode titled “Gli scogli delle sirene/ The Sirens’ Cliffs”). At the moments when Soldati engages the everyday Italians he meets over the course of his journey, as in this example where he awkwardly and bravely hops out in front of oncoming traffic, the presence of the production crew attests to the production’s improvisational and thus authentic quality.

³⁷² Aldo Grasso, “Chi legge? Viaggio lungo il Tirreno,” in *Il libro e la televisione: storia di un rapporto difficile*, ed. Aldo Grasso (Turin: RAI ERI, 1993), 149.



Figure 9: The boom operator remains in the shot as Soldati interviews passing motorists, *Chi legge*; aired December 3, 1960.

Describing the sequence depicted in Figure 9, the television critic at weekly magazine *L'Espresso* emphasized the authenticity and liveliness that these techniques elicit. *Chi legge* “worked without a script. In the middle of a road between Crotona and Catanzaro, [Soldati] began to stop people passing by at random. Caught up in the vortex of his emotive nature, the respondents immediately released any inhibition about being in front of the cameras and responded freely.”³⁷³ The improvisational quality of the series, manifested in the act of catching unsuspecting individuals off-guard, was read as the essence of capturing a truly real moment. The Communist daily *l'Unità* found these same documentary approaches striking and praised the series for “appearing, as much as possible, told as if it were ‘live’.”³⁷⁴ Despite being a prerecorded documentary series, Zavattini intended for these sequences to offer the feeling of

³⁷³ Carlo Gregoretti, “Soldati rinuncia ai personaggi,” *L'Espresso*, December 11, 1960. The original Italian reads, “S’è messo in mezzo a una strada, fra Crotona e Catanzaro, e ha cominciato a fermare la gente che passava, così a caso. Presi nel vortice del suo caldo gesticolare, gli interrogati si liberavano subito dall’inibizione delle telecamere, e rispondevano con scioltezza.”

³⁷⁴ Arturo Gismondi, “Finalmente l’inchiesta di Soldati e Zavattini,” *l'Unità*, November 12, 1960, 6. The Italian reads, “l’inchiesta televisiva appaia, quanto più è possibile, raccontata ‘dal vivo.’”

being fully “televsual,” allowing the viewing audience to experience the event as it happened without the disruption of editing.



Figure 10: The Hazards of Live Production: A "head shot" in *Lascia o raddoppia*; and part of the stage interrupts the performance of rollerskaters on *Campanile sera*

What is perhaps most significant is how these scenes recreated the look and feel of popular programming. The presence of the cameramen and boom operators, the long pauses, and the difficult camera angles, were defining characteristics of live television productions of the era examples, which often struggled to produce a perfectly seamless visual presentation. As you can see in the two images in Figure 10, which were taken from popular quiz shows *Lascia o raddoppia* and *Campanile sera*, live television often included shots in which the audience was visible in the shot of the stage or elements of the stage interrupted the seamlessness of the performance. In speaking of the challenge of live television from a production standpoint, Umberto Eco called these interruptions “unforeseen events” and “unpredictable, random inserts that the independent and uncontrollable unfolding of real fact suggests.”³⁷⁵ Whereas Hollywood sought to mask all the signs of filmmaking to make the story world of the film appear seamless,

³⁷⁵ Umberto Eco, *Apocalittici e integrati: Comunicazioni di massa e teorie della cultura di massa* (Milan: Bompiani, 2008 [1964]), 319. The Italian reads, “eventi imprevisi...inserti imponderabili e aleatori che lo svolgimento autonomo e incontrollabile del fatto reale gli propone”

part of live television's feeling on reality emerged out of production routines in which only part of the "narrative fabric" of the events can be controlled.³⁷⁶ *Chi legge*, which was filmed, had the option to mimic Hollywood style or the documentary filmmaking during Fascism. Instead, Soldati and Zavattini chose in a very obvious and revealing way to make spectators aware of their own very presence (and that of the camera and sound men) within the scene, just as in live television.

Their conscious choice recalls the words that anti-fascist intellectual Nicola Chiaromonte used to describe neorealism. In distinguishing neorealism from other national film poetics, he emphasized that neorealists made "deliberate effort to give the illusion of real life, even at the cost of appearing clumsy or naïve...to be shocking and clumsy, rather than false and slick, has been the aesthetic rule of neo-realism."³⁷⁷ The clumsiness of this scene suggests a way in which television offered a new paradigm to replace the editing techniques developing over time with the unedited aesthetic of live television, which was filled with the "imperfections" of live recording. Curiously, in 1964 Umberto Eco saw the new narrative modes of television as now influencing new cinematic modes such as *cinéma vérité* and the films of Antonioni. Whereas before films displayed a certain degree of causality, which each event and scene informing a significant part of the overall narrative and meaning, Eco saw live television as operating by a different logic. It was as not real in the sense that it recorded directly reality without invention, but it did use "the complex causality of daily events" to destabilize the distinction between significant and insignificant events and push back against a grand organizational and artistic vision.³⁷⁸ In other words, even at the level of representation, the documentary challenged traditional ideas of narrative authority.

³⁷⁶ Ibid. In Italian, "tessuto narrativo."

³⁷⁷ Nicola Chiaromonte, "Stage and Screen in Italy," *Encounter* 4.3 (March 1955): 13.

³⁷⁸ Eco, 319. In Italian, "la complessa casualità degli eventi quotidiani."

Zavattini's selection of live, popular television's improvised humanity highlights the highly codified and widely established hierarchies of cultural forms against which *Chi legge* worked. In his letter to Mario Soldati and their collaborator, the screenwriter Carlo Musso, Zavattini assured them that "there is not a danger of excessive didacticism because of how it is directed;" the presence of the cameramen and boom operators were a means of using the uncontrolled elements in live television productions to their advantage.³⁷⁹ Zavattini's letter to Soldati and Musso, written after seeing the first cut of the series, pinpointed and suggested scrapping sections of their documentary that were distracted from the fast, energetic rhythm he wanted to underwrite the series and distracted from the fast, energetic rhythm he wanted to underwrite the series. They were of the "old style, where one feels the fiction that for me is unbearable."³⁸⁰ "High culture," in other words, had an implicit feeling of lifelessness and irrelevancy that stood in stark contract to the immediacy and vibrancy of contemporary, popular culture. His letter articulates the choice to interweave these representational modes as intentional. Zavattini sought to create a sense of immediacy, engagement, and authenticity around popular opinion and experience and at the same time he used more stagnant, stultified, and artificial visual language to confine the world of high culture.

Speaking to the television public in the first episode of the series, Soldati suggested that he wanted everyday people to supersede his own claims over national culture. He confessed, "I interviewed a bunch of people, but I never found myself, one by one, in front of so many workers. I am embarrassed and happy at the same time. Perhaps all of you need to be dictating to

³⁷⁹ Cesare Zavattini to Carlo Musso, B32 UA274 sf.2, Archivio della Parola, dell'Immagine e della Comunicazione Editoriale, Università degli Studi di Milano, Milan, Italy. The Italian reads, "Non c'è pericolo di un eccessivo didatticismo perché è proprio la cosa come viene condotta che lo ho già abbondantemente evitato."

³⁸⁰ Ibid. The Italian reads, "è vecchio stile, si sente la finzione per me insopportabilmente... È ovvio che Soldati potrebbe scegliere e mirare a un ritmo intenso, al meglio, insomma."

me because I live – it is my job – within a written page.”³⁸¹ By deferring his own status to that of his audience and their experiences, Soldati’s encounters with everyday Italians enabled them to write national Italian culture—to perhaps even emerge as the organic intellectuals of the working class. In this way, *Chi legge* provides for a Gramscian interpretation of national-popular culture, which Leftist, realist postwar filmmakers seized upon as critical for the remaking of postwar Italian culture. Although the Gramscian concept of the national popular does not proscribe any single “cultural content” it does mean transforming a culture “stratified into high and low and dominated by specialist intellectuals without organic links with the broad popular masses” and replacing it with one which a culture in which popular “strata must be addressed through a medium adapted to their different cultural positions.”³⁸² The creation of the national-popular was the basis for a revolutionary culture, but to postwar intellectuals who were actively reading Gramsci, it meant that they must not segregate themselves from everyday culture but

inhabit the perspectives of the new culture, which is a culture that seeks to be without adjectives, which seeks to be so popular that the adjective popular becomes superfluous. Culture cannot but mean grow together, meaning that the way to become a people is not in singular expressions, like sudden comets, but like a chorus.³⁸³

Emphasizing that culture should become “so popular that the adjective popular becomes superfluous” and that it should not be “singular...but like a chorus,” Zavattini argued for the notion of culture that would address the popular masses through an everyday language that they

³⁸¹ Mario Soldati, “Palermo 6 luglio 1959: Schema generale della trasmissione sulla Sicilia, Archivio Mario Soldati, Chi legge B32 UA274 sf.1, Archivio della Parola, dell’Immagine e della Comunicazione Editoriale, Università degli Studi di Milano, Milan, Italy. The Italian reads, “Ho interrogato tanta gente; ma non mi sono mai trovato di fronte, in una volta sola, a così numerosi operai. Sono imbarazzato e contento nello stesso tempo. Forse siete voi che dovete comandare a me, perchè io vivo—è il mio mestiere—in mezzo alla carta stampata.”

³⁸² David Forgacs, “National-Popular: Genealogy of a Concept,” in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (London: Routledge, 1993), 217-218. Amongst the many articles written about Gramsci’s notion of “national-popular” culture (and there are many), I find Forgacs’ to be the most clear, cogent, and precise.

³⁸³ Zavattini, “Cultura,” 812-813. The Italian reads, “secondo le prospettive della nuova cultura, la quale cerca di essere senza aggettivi, cerca di essere in modo che lo stesso aggettivo popolare diventi pleonastico” and “singolari, o come improvvisate comete, ma come coro.”

were familiar with and inviting them to participate within it. Even at the level of narrative, *Chi legge* reinforced the idea that intellectuals were never extraneous from the world of the popular classes. The documentary went to great lengths to capture the scenes and voices from each literary great's everyday life, even including interviews with those who provided services to them. Through these scenes, *Chi legge* presented high culture as never being removed from the lives of the popular classes. It is one voice in a "chorus" that resembled the "organic unity" between social strata that Gramsci deemed necessary for the construction of national-popular culture.

In this sense the critical reception of the program was telling; for one critic, the documentary was the "first socialist television documentary."³⁸⁴ But it was also a perfectly coherent part of popular programming and its routines. *Chi legge*, in its efforts to depict both the universal consequences through the individual constructed an idea of national-popular culture, one that, though contextualized through Soldati's narration, was nonetheless about the viewer contemplating his fellow citizens.³⁸⁵ Critics were hesitant to connect the television series to the highly codified documentary culture. Unlike "young documentary directors" who "reduce reality into a short sequence of events," Soldati's television documentaries evaded "formalism." In place of documentary's narrative, *Chi legge* used a style that was "free of artifice, appropriately spontaneous, humble" that made it innovative or different than traditional documentary form.³⁸⁶ In describing Soldati's approach in terms of immediacy and everydayness, the critic at Marxist film journal *Il Contemporaneo* understands the documentary's

³⁸⁴ "Il viaggio di Soldati e Zavattini," Archivio Mario Soldati, Critiche televisive, B40 UA357, Archivio della Parola, dell'Immagine e della Comunicazione Editoriale, Università degli Studi di Milano, Milan, Italy. The Italian reads, "il primo documentario televisivo socialista nella storia della TV italiana."

³⁸⁵ Ibid. The Italian reads, "una dimensione universal" and "i volti...della dignità umana."

³⁸⁶ Saverio Tutino, "Mario Soldati," *Il Contemporaneo*, December 14, 1957, 7. The Italian reads, "La sua tecnica è semplice; il suo modo di accostarsi alla realtà è rispettoso e privo di artifici convenientemente spontaneo, umile quanto occorre per non cadere nella presunzione caratteristica dei giovani registi di documentari e quindi nei mille trabocchetti che il formalismo tende a chi si accinge a ridurre la realtà in una breve dimensione di sequenze."

representational strategies as belonging to popular programming. Paolo Gobetti made these connections explicit when arguing that *Soldati* bridged the divides of Italian culture by proving that a man of “taste” can fit within the routines of television. Comparing him to such successful, television personalities as Mike Bongiorno of *Lascia o raddoppia* and Mario Riva of *Il Musichiere*, Gobetti argues that “some natural qualities are indispensable for television.” Soldati’s performance “would seem to indicate that it is above all the man of taste who possesses the famous television personality.”³⁸⁷ Furthermore, the Communist daily *l’Unità*’s description of Soldati as “effusive and friendly...able to immediately create a connection of interest and empathy between him and his interviewees” even replicated the language Zavattini used in distinguishing their series from traditional documentaries: “we will be friendly, happy, brotherly, not heavily didactic.”³⁸⁸ In other words, Soldati’s style of engagement with everyday individuals was perfectly consistent with both the routines of popular television programming and with socialist media, even being called by *l’Unità* “as worthy in our opinion to be seen as a masterpiece of neorealism.”³⁸⁹ *Chi legge*’s routines of improvised humanity in essence bridged the innovative strategies of film with those of live television.

In addition to embedding Italy’s popular classes within the representational strategies of the documentary series, Zavattini and Soldati also intended to develop more large-scale projects to further engage the viewing public. Although Zavattini never realized the plan, he wanted the program to include a “regional competition, and then a national one, in other words a sort of ranking, which has already been done for trivial reasons” but focusing on the region with “the

³⁸⁷ Paolo Gobetti, “L’amico di famiglia,” *Cinema Nuovo* 129 (April 5, 1958): 255. The Italian reads: “Alcune qualità naturali sono indispensabili per la tv” and “Il caso di Soldati...parrebbe indicare che è soprattutto l’uomo di gusto a possedere la famosa personalità televisiva.”

³⁸⁸ Arturo Gismondi, “L’inchiesta di Mario Soldati,” *l’Unità*, December 11, 1960, 6. The Italian reads, “espansivo e cordiale...riesce a stabilire immediatamente un legame di interesse e di simpatia fra lui e i suoi intervistati.” Zavattini to Soldati. The original Italian reads, “Saremo cordiale, allegri, fraterni, non pesantemente didattici.”

³⁸⁹ Gismondi, “L’inchiesta,” 6. The Italian reads, “degni a nostro parere di figurare come capolavoro del neorealismo”.

most interesting and effective [cultural and educational] initiatives.”³⁹⁰ In a letter to the RAI’s Artistic Director, Sergio Pugliese, he compared this idea to the regional competition and the lottery that *Campanile sera* and variety program *Canzonissima* respectively had prominently featured.³⁹¹ Furthermore, the proposals that both Zavattini and Soldati prepared for the RAI in this period indicate that the participation of everyday Italians was part of a more extended and broader approach to television. Soldati, for example, proposed that he direct a program in which people who have suffered an injustice at the hands of government would be able to reveal those failings through interviews that he would conduct across the country; he also wanted to allow a local head of police, as “a man like everyone else,” to tell the stories each week of his district so that the public would “know something of the country way of life that is still ignored.”³⁹² These projects, though never carried out, call on the same routines of autobiography and improvisation and demonstrate the same urgency around having the national audience both hear and sympathize with the experiences of the ordinary person.

Meanwhile, Zavattini proposed that *Chi legge* be followed by a similar documentary on the subject of art. Zavattini’s hope was that this new program could demystify high culture by being both “a real popularization of painting” and by taking art out the hands of the “collectors, privileged” and allowing it into the homes of everyday Italians.³⁹³ While Zavattini’s proposal was ultimately denied because of logistical and cost issues, the publication of *Canzonette e viaggio televisivo* (*Songs and a Television Voyage*, 1962) by Mario Soldati provided just this sort

³⁹⁰ Cesare Zavattini to Sergio Pugliese, Archivio Cesare Zavattini, Sergio Pugliese P691/5, Biblioteca Panizzi, Reggio-Emilia, Italy. The Italian reads, “La possibilità di una gara regionale, e poi nazionale, cioè una specie di graduatoria, come del resto è stato fatto per futili motivi.”

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Mario Soldati, “Progetti vari,” Archivio Mario Soldati, Progetti vari TV B40 UA 358sf.1, Archivio della Parola, dell’Immagine e della Comunicazione Editoriale, Università degli Studi di Milano, Milan, Italy. The Italian reads, “un personaggio usuale...le sensibilità di ogni essere umano” and “gli farebbe conoscere qual costume di vita paesana che dai più è ignorata.”

³⁹³ Zavattini to Pugliese. The Italian reads, “una reale popolarizzazione della pittura” and “non solo nelle gelose case dei collezionisti, dei privilegiati.”

of connection between literate and television culture. Soldati made his literary career out of autobiographical forms, such as *America, my first love*, and his *Songs and a television voyage* extends his interest in memoirs and travelogues and reformulates his writing for a broader audience. The book traces his voyage for *Chi legge* from the South of Italy to the North, dedicating a song to each scene of the documentary series. In selecting song as the form through which to retranslate his experiences, Soldati's book sought to reach out to a more popular audience. To make the book accessible to a wider reading public, these songs were also accompanied by childlike, figurative drawings by Mino Maccari, as featured in Figure 11.



Figure 11: Mino Maccari's drawing of Mario Soldati from *Canzonette e viaggio televisivo* (Milan: Mondadori, 1962)

Maccari made a name for himself with a series of postwar caricatures of Mussolini, which directly rejected the triumphalism and monumentality of fascist era images of the Duce. By selecting Maccari, Soldati not only provided a graphic language through which to understand the trajectory of the voyage, but he also selected an artist who he knew would depict his voyage

graphically in non-heroic representational form.

Zavattini and Soldati's unabashed embrace of popular, everyday audiences may have been shared with variety show and quiz programs, but their choice to put the voices of these audiences in conversation with the didacticism of traditional documentary argued for the democratization of culture in a powerful way. As Zavattini wrote, reflecting on the merits of the television medium:

the TV devours and that is good because in that fact consists its most secret and potent novelty. [In devouring people, television] derives a certain aesthetic that seems to me natural, this or that "personality" that is hidden in Italy, they will *all* go to illustrate that Italy is not an academic or patriotic concept, but something much better.³⁹⁴

By representing the realities of Italy as told by its everyday citizens, *Chi legge* replaced academic and patriotic ideas of Italy that emerged out of Italy's intellectual classes and replaced them with a *popular* idea of Italy through the contact with Italy's otherwise unknown individuals. *Chi legge*—in its engagement with improvised humanity—was about the existence of other versions and definitions of Italian national culture not offered by Italy's literary elite or found in history books. And it even provided a means through which to overwrite them with a truly popular and autobiographical account of Italian culture. In regarding everyday individuals as being worthy of public attention and central to the very definitions of Italian culture, *Chi legge* used popular television's unabashed engagement with everyday people as an alternative route through which to continue neorealism's own emphasis on the representation of everyday reality.

³⁹⁴ Cesare Zavattini, "Roma, 16 febbraio 1959" in *Cesare Zavattini cinema: Diario cinematografico. Neorealismo, ecc.*, eds. Valentina Fortichiari and Mino Argentieri (Milan: Bompiani, 2002), 431. The original Italian reads, "Bisogna sfuttare tanta gente, la tv divora, e ciò bene, in ciò consiste la sua più segreta e potente novità, e che ne derive lo sviluppo di una certa estetica mi pare naturale, questo o quell 'personaggio' ci nascondeva l'Italia, *tutto* andrà a illustrare l'Italia che non è un concetto scolastico, partriottico, ma qualche cosa di meglio."

CHAPTER 7

The Satirized Self on the Variety Show *Un, due, tre*



Figure 12: Italian President Gronchi (bottom center) falls next to Charles de Gaulle as broadcast on live television

On June 23, 1959, the President of the Italy, Giovanni Gronchi, hosted French President Charles de Gaulle at La Scala opera house in Milan. As the two leaders went to sit next to each other for the night's performance, Gronchi's chair was missing, causing him to fall. The incident, captured on live television, showed Gronchi struggling to maintain composure as his handlers attempted to prop him back up. Although no newspapers immediately reported the embarrassing incident, the comedic duo Raimondo Vianello and Ugo Tognazzi immediately made a parody in subsequent edition of their variety program, *Un, due, tre*. In a sketch frequently referenced in the histories of Italian television, the pair re-enacted the incident, albeit in an oblique manner. According to Vianello, the occasion led the duo to, at the last minute, adapt their regular segment, called "The Corner Post Office," which routinely featured the pair

reading letters they had received (sometimes real letters, sometimes made up). In performing the sketch, as they prepared to sit down for the post office segment, Tognazzi fell to the floor, at which point Vianello asked, “Who do you think you are?” The obvious (although never said) response was supposed to be, “The President of the Republic?”³⁹⁵

Typically, this sketch—which directly led to the cancellation of the program and to years of difficult exchanges between the comedic duo and the RAI—is positioned as the example *par excellence* of the political control and censorship of the RAI at the hands of Christian Democrat politicians.³⁹⁶ That Vianello and Tognazzi were censured for satirizing Gronchi for an embarrassing yet inconsequential *faux pas* appeared indicative of a broader climate in which open critique of important policy and political decisions was not possible. Historical accounts see the censorship of this parody as symbolic of a system that was so restrictive that jokes at the expense of politicians, even the most seemingly benign, were not tolerated. Yet the Vianello and Tognazzi sketch was not as innocuous a joke as contemporary histories often frame it to be.³⁹⁷ Overlooked is the extent to which the slip in Gronchi’s ceremonial performance momentarily suspended his image as a dignified political leader, creating the opportunity for parity with the viewing audience, but also sublimating his persona to public scrutiny in a way in which Italy’s political classes were not used to experiencing. The gag capitalized on this moment to encourage the audience to think of the Italian president not as a perfect and noble leader, but as a clumsy,

³⁹⁵ Raimondo Vianello quoted in *Un, due, tre*, ed. Roberto Buffagni (Milan: Mondadori, 2001), 134-135.

³⁹⁶ Flaminia Morandi, *La via dell’inferno: Il progetto cattolico nella storia della televisione italiana* (Bologna: Odoja, 2009), 102; Daniela Brancati, *Occhi di maschio: le donne e la televisione in Italia: Una storia dal 1954 a oggi* (Rome: Donzelli Editore, 2011), 14; Giuseppe Gnagnarella, *Storia politica della RAI, 1945-2010* (L’Aquila, Italy: Textus, 2010), 72. In addition to the aforementioned secondary source histories, these primary sources articles document the issues of censorship between Vianello, Tognazzi, and the RAI. Achile Campanile, “Finti o very la censura non li accetta,” *L’Europeo*, August 2, 1959, 719-720. Arturo Gismondi, “Si prospetta una squallida stagione televisiva,” *l’Unità*, April 1, 1961, 6. Campanile and Gismondi were amongst the most constant and outspoken critics of RAI censorship.

³⁹⁷ Ettore Bernabei, the head of the RAI from 1961 – 1974, argued that part of the problem was that before Vianello and Tognazzi political satire on television did not exist. Bernabei was quoted in Buffagni, 133. The Italian reads, “Bisogna un po’ considerare come stavano le cose allora per valutare bene i fatti. Intanto: la satira politica in televisione non esisteva, non era mai esistita.”

fully human figure. In the context of a society transitioning from fascism—one which Mussolini as *il Duce* crafted a public image as an infallible commander—Tognazzi and Vianello verbalized the changing cultural and social hierarchies in which political leaders were no longer held in unimpeachably high esteem.

For many Italians of the postwar generation, the tendency to equate their leaders with ordinary people was viewed as a particularity of American society and politics—a new form of modernity being introduced thanks to the American example. Making this precise case, the usually pro-American journalist, Luigi Barzini, took this the rare occasion to critique American culture:

Americans like to think that Great Men are like everybody else and prove it by saying that ‘they put their pants on one leg at a time.’ This necessity to appear to be ‘one of us’ at all costs makes astronauts talk like schoolchildren on a picnic, prevents eminent scientists, scholars, thinkers, heroes, or statesmen of today (not of the past) from delivering immortal lines.³⁹⁸

For the conservative Barzini, the American system demanded its leaders speak to their citizens in a language that was understandable and which fostered a sense of equality—which he believed contributed to a problematic erosion of authority and gravity. While Barzini expressed anxiety over this shift in address, his contemporaries on popular variety programs sought to encourage this new relationship between the elite and the popular masses.

Throughout the course of this chapter, I will be arguing that *Un, due, tre*, along with other television variety programs of the late 1950s and early 1960s, took an anti-hierarchical posture—a paparazzo’s view of the world—in which they interjected themselves into the immediate cultural moment with an eye for deconstructing previously normative narratives and images. Such programs sought to both problematize the distinction between “real” and performative identity while also seeking to erode the representational structures that fostered imbalances of

³⁹⁸ Luigi Barzini, *Americans are Alone in the World* (New York: Random House, 1953), xxv.

social power. This chapter examines early television variety programming as part of broader paradigm of 1950s and 60s paparazzo culture, which emphasized the use of improvisation and immediacy as a means of revealing unknown aspects of the individual person. Thus I will also be exploring the interconnections between paparazzo culture and the stylistic routines of *Un, due, tre*.

From my analysis of these routines, there will emerge two ways in which, I argue, *Un, due, tre* intervened into the Italian idea of modernity. In the mid-twentieth century, Italians understood themselves as a society that excelled in the production of performance and spectacle. This tradition was so culturally embedded that Luigi Barzini described spectacle and illusion as “the fundamental trait of the national character”—a theme he would later emphasize for an American audience in his 1967 documentary *The Italians* produced for CBS.³⁹⁹ Speaking of Mussolini as the consummate and perennial showman, Barzini describes a postwar awakening to the gap between spectacle and reality. Whereas before “people did not know he was not really solving any problems,” they came to view the act of performance with skepticism. “We laugh now when we see [Mussolini] in old newsreels... His technique was flamboyant, juvenile, ridiculous.”⁴⁰⁰ Early television variety shows—which were, above all, interested in reframing exemplary and spectacular personalities from film, politics, and television to make them appear ordinary and flawed—renegotiated the parameters of fascist modernity.

Un, due, tre and other variety programs of the era not only played with the ceremonial image of stately political leadership, such as in the Gronchi sketch, but they also engaged in the

³⁹⁹ Luigi Barzini, *The Italians: A Full Length Portrait Featuring Their Manners and Morals* (New York: Touchstone, 1996 [1964]), 90.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 147.

routines of auto-parody.⁴⁰¹ Saverio Tutino, writing in the Leftist film journal *Il Contemporaneo*, noted the significance of the fact that Mike Bongiorno was among the most frequently parodied figure on these programs. Because Bongiorno was the “official host and sort of official of the RAI,” the deconstruction of his high-profile public persona worked to offset, or at least put into view, the question of his own stardom.⁴⁰² Even the titles of these television variety shows of the era call attention to their preoccupation with notions of celebrity, fame, and performance.

Among the most watched and reviewed programs to explicitly take on these themes was *Dietro la faccia* (*Behind the Façade*, 1954), *Fortunatissimo* (*Very Fortunate*, 1954-55), *La via del successo* (*The Road to Success*, 1958), *Il Mattatore* (*The Theatrical Star*, 1959), and *Le divine* (*The Godly Ones*, 1959). Vittorio Gassman’s 1963 *Il gioco dei eroi* (*The Hero’s Game*) took its title from Bertold Brecht’s famous line, “unhappy is the land that needs a hero.”⁴⁰³ The title repudiated of the fascist past while also gesturing towards a renewed, post-fascist political and social agenda. Critical reviews interpreted the program’s director and primary actor, Vittorio Gassman (who starred most famously in Vittorio De Sica’s 1949 *Riso amaro* (*Bitter Rice*), as well as *commedia all’italiana* style films such as *I soliti ignoti* (*Big Deal on Madonna Street*), in 1958, and *Il Sorpasso* (*The Easy Life*), in 1962), as successfully targeting Italy’s cults of stardom and heroism. The communist daily *l’Unità* praised the series for critiquing both fascism and American postwar culture. There was a “rejection the hero by juxtaposing it with the ‘affluent society,’” but Gassman also did not praise industrial capitalism in which “man is reduced to a

⁴⁰¹ For discussions on variety programming and self-parody, see Saverio Tutino, “Walter Chiari,” *Il Contemporaneo*, January 18, 1958, 7; Achille Campanile, “Festa in famiglia mentre infierisce l’anonimo,” *L’Europeo*, February 15, 1959, 696.

⁴⁰² Tutino, 7.

⁴⁰³ This quote comes from Brecht’s play *Life of Galileo*. See *Seven Plays by Bertold Brecht*, ed. Eric Bentley (New York: Grove Press, 1961 [1938]), 392.

robot.”⁴⁰⁴ *The Hero’s Game*, like many variety programs of the era, tangibly articulated the inbetweenness of Italian culture in the late 1950s and early 1960s. These variety programs, especially with their use of parody and satire, sought to mediate Italian cultural identity at the crucial moment between two forms of modernism: fascism and mass consumer democracy.

As much as *Un, due, tre* brought to the attention of its audience the performative image of stars and politicians, it also established an ambiguous position toward the changes brought by modernity—participating in the shifts in popular culture while simultaneously critiquing that process of cultural and social transformation. Carlo Lizzani, who directed Ugo Tognazzi of *Un, due, tre* in the adaptation of Luciano Bianciardi’s *La vita agra* (*The Bitter Life*, 1962), described the function of comedy for his generation as the “attempt of the ordinary, insignificant individual to obtain a small bit of identity in the greyness of everyday life.”⁴⁰⁵ In his formulation, satire and parody gave validity to individual identity by distinguishing the single subjective experience out of the larger processes of industrialization and modernization. In this sense, these variety programs are a testament to the way in which satire and political humor in media address one’s “cultural citizenship.” Lisbet van Zoonen argues that cultural citizenship is “behind intense conformations about national and minority languages or religions; about the validity and legitimacy of particular kinds of knowledge...about lifestyles, identities, norms, values, decency, and good and bad taste.”⁴⁰⁶ Questions of language, regional identity, and humanist ethics were dominant themes within *Un, due, tre*, and the parody of both ordinary individuals and constructed celebrity personas established the terms upon which these differences could be rendered as part of a common cultural belonging.

⁴⁰⁴ G.C., “Controcanele: Un ottimo ‘gioco,’” *I’Unità*, 8 Apr. 1963. The Italian reads, “al rifiuto dell’eroe in contrapposizione a quello ‘civiltà del benessere’ and ‘ridurre l’uomo a un robot.’”

⁴⁰⁵ Carlo Lizzani, *Il mio lungo viaggio nel secolo breve* (Turin: Einaudi, 2007), 186. The Italian reads, “Il tentativo di un piccolo individuo insignificante di conquistarsi un minimo d’identità nel grigiore della vita quotidiana.”

⁴⁰⁶ Lisbet van Zoonen, *Entertaining the Citizen: When Politics and Popular Culture Converge* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 8.

However, as much as these parodies most immediately addressed the plethora of Italian working-class and regional identities as a push against capitalist modernization, they harbor a pervasive skepticism toward the impact of commercialization and industrialization. Italian television historians Aldo Grasso, Franco Monteleone, and Giovanni Buttafava have all highlighted these qualities in comparing *Un, due, tre* to the American variety program *Your Show of Shows*.⁴⁰⁷ Despite the fact that, within the discourse of the era, not a single review or mention of the program calls up any connection to an American predecessor, the comparison is apt;⁴⁰⁸ the Italian variety programs, like their American counterparts, brought to mainstream culture “the perspective of a number of liberal sociologists and critics who throughout the fifties fretted over the growth of large scale bureaucratic organizations and the development of mass commercial culture.”⁴⁰⁹ Furthermore, as Stephen Kercher points out, American variety programs critiqued this culture by evoking an “aesthetic of spontaneity” and by filtering their perspective through the “antiheroic modern male.”⁴¹⁰ Grasso identifies this same communicative structure in Italian variety programs, marking *Un, due, tre* as an important example of the transatlantic

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 94.

⁴⁰⁸ Franco Monteleone, *Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia. Un secolo di costume, società e politica* (Milan: Tascabili Marsilio, 2001), 325; Aldo Grasso, *Storia della televisione italiana: I 50 anni della televisione* (Milan: Garzanti, 1992), 24; Giovanni Buttafava, “Un sogno Americano: Quiz e riviste TV negli anni cinquanta,” in *American way of television: Le origini della Tv in Italia*, ed. Gianfranco Bettetini (Florence: Sansoni, 1980), 62.

⁴⁰⁹ Stephen Kercher, *Revel without a Cause: Liberal Satire in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 120. While I did not find a single primary source that compared Italian variety programs to American examples, press on both the Left and the Right compared Tognazzi’s brand of humor to the work of Charlie Chaplin. These comparisons to Chaplin reinforce my argument in Chapter 2. Italians interpreted prewar cinematic examples and their codes of everydayness and informality, as a uniquely American trait. Italian comics and their critics saw Italian variety as “American” only inasmuch as they were interested in using the ordinary individual as their protagonist as a means of critiquing industrial capitalism. For comparisons between Tognazzi and Chaplin, see for example, R.Z. “La ribalta della luce con Ugo Tognazzi,” *Radiocorriere* 31.6 (February 7, 1954): 6 and Piero Dallamano, “Il clown umiliato,” *Il Contemporaneo*, September 29, 1956, 10.

⁴¹⁰ Kercher, 121. Gilbert Seldes, *The Public Arts* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994 [1956]), 148. In many respects, we can see a parallel between how American television critic Gilbert Seldes saw Sid Caesar on *Your Show of Shows* and the themes of Italian variety programming of the era: “Caesar’s typical man” is “the unrealized individual, the male who cannot cope with females, modern gadgets, own his own floating and undefined desires.”

development of “comic realism.”⁴¹¹ *Un, due, tre* was even named for the three-camera setup of television, an explicit reference to its own live production and the unpredictability or improvisational of the performances before the television cameras. In the following section, I will detail how, despite the transatlantic connection, the improvisational routines of *Un, due, tre* capitalized on an image culture unique to Italy. Specifically, we will see how the program’s routines of improvisational humor established themselves in relationship to the practices of paparazzo photography.

Paparazzo Humor

The writers and actors of *Un, due, tre* sought to establish the figure of the antiheroic individual as a recourse against the forces of industrial modernization, but they did so in a way that consciously played upon and embraced the modernity of the new and fast-paced circulation of images in weekly magazines. Indeed, most of the prominent comedians of the 1950s and 60s got their start working in fascist-era humorist magazines that were a critical part of the developing culture, where the immediacy of imagery in the press was transforming routines of everyday life.⁴¹² Their work on publications such as *Marc’Aurelio* and *Settebello* not only instilled in these comics an interest in representing the current and immediate cultural moment, but also prepared the ground on which many of them first tested their critical stances toward Italian narratives of progress.⁴¹³ Karen Pinkus alludes to these discourses of 1950s Italian culture in her

⁴¹¹ Grasso, 24; Kercher, 78.

⁴¹² Raffele De Berti argues that newsmagazines were important in helping to shift the rhythms of everyday life and the nature of social relations beginning interwar and coming to fruition postwar. See “Il nuovo periodico: Rotocalchi tra fotogiornalismo, cronaca e costume,” in *Forme e modelli del rotocalco italiano tra fascismo e guerra*, eds. Raffaele De Berti and Irene Piazzoni (Milan: Cisalpino, 2009), 13.

⁴¹³ Guido Conti, for example, stresses the interconnections between Zavattini’s work on humoristic magazines and his neorealist poetic, particularly in his interest for the everyday individual. See “Cesare Zavattini direttore editoriale: Le novità nei rotocalchi di Rizzoli e Mondadori,” in *Forme e modelli del rotocalco italiano tra fascismo e guerra*, eds. Raffaele De Berti and Irene Piazzoni (Milan: Cisalpino, 2009), 441.

examination of the “paparazzo shot” and the simultaneously emergent culture of newsmagazines—of which satirical magazines were an important area of production. According to Pinkus, Italian media producers were immersed in a cross-pollination between the following: new forms of journalistic reportage, including image-heavy news and popular magazines, the theoretical priorities of neorealism that emphasized everyday life, and the celebrity culture spurred by Italian-American co-productions.⁴¹⁴ Pinkus pinpoints the paparazzo shot, which emerged precisely at this historical moment, as the site where these tensions over modernization manifested. Italian humorists were always very much a part of these overlapping realms of cultural production. Most prominently, Federico Fellini both wrote for *Marc 'Aurelio* and chronicled 1950s paparazzo culture in *La Dolce Vita* (1960).

The satirical regimes that began within prewar magazine culture and found an outlet on television underscore the extent to which television’s liveness fostered new participatory regimes that were experimented with elsewhere but had not previously been fully realized. As opposed to the staged studio shot, the paparazzo shot captured the everyday, private moment when there was no stage or act of performance to obscure the identity of the subject. In a culture dominated by paparazzo photography, the consumption of these images meant access to a startlingly new “insider’s” view of reality. The paparazzo’s photograph gave viewers the impression of seeing a reality behind the surface. But there is something more to the paparazzo shot that Pinkus does not fully explore—the paparazzo was an ordinary person stealthily operating among/inside an exclusive world of celebrity and the political elite; the paparazzo held the unique position of being surrounded by the world of celebrity without being fully included (or welcome).⁴¹⁵ The

⁴¹⁴ Karen Pinkus, *The Montesi Scandal: The Death of Wilma Montesi and the Birth of the Paparazzi in Fellini’s Rome* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 1.

⁴¹⁵ Pinkus notes that many paparazzi began taking photos of tourists on the street and transitioned into roles taking photographs of celebrities. Pinkus, 38.

paparazzo's shot then—whether offering a laudatory or critical perspective of its subject—is ultimately about a desire to infiltrate the remote but newly visible world of the elite, creating the sensation of direct and immediate access.

The live television broadcast of Gronchi opened up what Pinkus describes as the “interstitial moment” of the paparazzo shot—the instance, captured in Gronchi's fall, between the ongoing performance of his stately persona and its rupture. *Un, due, tre* played on the logics of paparazzo photography by building an improvised sketch off this moment. They leveraged the language of paparazzo shot—i.e. television's immediacy—to convey the private or undisclosed side of the Italian president and to make apparent the fact that Italy's political leaders were prone to the mistakes and embarrassments experienced by everyday Italians. Although Pinkus argues that television never engaged in the modes of representation instituted by paparazzo culture because television's “presenters and commentators appeared artificially stiff,” I view the improvisational comedy of Tognazzi and Vianello as a vivid (though not singular) exception to Pinkus's point.⁴¹⁶ Television news may have been stilted, but *Un, due, tre* immersed itself in the references of the immediate moment, mimicking the routines of newsmagazines and their paparazzo journalism. To return to the example of the Gronchi sketch, television's continuous and unmediated transmission of de Gaulle's visit to Italy allowed audiences to see unfolding reality in real time—an opportunity that newspaper stories or newsreels were unable to capture. As Leftist television critic Piero Dallamano noted, live television “honestly” captured a whole host of events previously denied to the vast majority of the population, such as the proceedings of parliament or cultural and political events.⁴¹⁷ Television, in other words, played a crucial role in mobilizing the logics of the culture of

⁴¹⁶ Pinkus., 36.

⁴¹⁷ Piero Dallamano, “Il televisore,” *Il Contemporaneo*, September 10, 1955, 8.

immediacy that Pinkus describes because programming motifs leveraged television's liveness to create a sense of parity between subject and viewer.

Vianello and Tognazzi's decision to use television's immediacy to their advantage underscores that improvisational humor engaged and relied upon this circulation of images described by Pinkus. Capitalizing on live television's uninterrupted stream, the sketch functions as a testament to how *immediacy and improvisation* (whether on the part of the paparazzo's camera or the comedian's live routine) allowed media producers to unmask documentary and cinematic conventions. As Pinkus argues, the paparazzo shot is emblematic of a desire to break down the barriers between elite culture and daily life. The revolutionary impact of that deconstruction process meant that "stars and ordinary people... increasingly [came] to resemble one another."⁴¹⁸ Visually, 1950s Italian variety programs attacked the very stylistic conventions of documentary, so that their comedy was actually as much about normative codes of representational realism as it was about societal or political critique. According to Raimondo Vianello, relevancy to the contemporary moment was a motivating force behind the sketch. Vianello recalls how his wife, actress Sandra Mondaini, pitched the idea to the other members, saying, "come on, let's do it right away while it is still good and fresh."⁴¹⁹ In other words, they prioritized the feeling of immediacy surrounding Gronchi's fall in making the production decision to add the sketch, unplanned and unannounced. In doing so, Vianello indicates that they saw their work as engaging in quite conscious ways with emerging news protocols and routines that were superseding traditional documentary's claim to the real.

Improvisational aesthetics in *Un, due, tre*

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁴¹⁹ Vianello quoted in Buffagni, 133. In original Italian, "Dài, facciamola subito che questa è buona fresca."

As I already mentioned using the example of parody of Gronchi, *Un, due, tre*, variety programs of the era sought to inject themselves into the contemporary moment by satirizing subjects and ideas that felt and appeared immediate to Italian audiences. But the Gronchi sketch was one of many instances in which the variety program critiqued the RAI—specifically, the institution’s reliance on a stultified documentary form. In fact, variety programs quite consciously worked to make their modes of address and performance feel immediate and real and to distance them from documentary. This motivation was so strong that one of the RAI’s very first television variety programs explicitly took on the documentary form in its opening sequences. The variety show *Passeggiata in città* (*A Walk in the City*, 1954), which featured such famous comedic names as Nino Manfredi and Franca Rame (the wife of Dario Fo), began with a set of unmistakable stylistic hallmarks of fascist-era documentary that would have been quite familiar and recognizable to Italian audiences of the period: a male’s voice narrates over images of the city as shot from above. Within seconds of establishing this documentary frame for the viewers, a female inquisitor unexpectedly interrupts the familiar trope. Her voice, marked by a fluid and conversational style, immediately distinguishes itself from the monotone of conventional documentary narration, setting up, even at this fundamental auditory level, a clear distinction from documentary. The dialogue then proceeds to define the variety show (or *la rivista*, the same term used in Italy for newsmagazine) as something altogether different from documentary.

Variety is truly this: the day in the life, the city, the people who populate it, because it is from this that we find the inspiration for the various things that comprise it. You see, songs, sketch routines, jokes, they are nothing other than moments of life and its personalities. They are those that we see every day on the street. You need only look at them in a different way. In other words, in the way of the variety show.⁴²⁰

⁴²⁰ From *Passeggiata in città*, originally aired September 2, 1954. In Italian, “La rivista è proprio questo: la vita di un giorno, la città, la gente che la popola perché è proprio da questo che troviamo gli spunti per le varie cose che la compogono. Vedi canzoni, sketch, barzellette non sono altro che momenti della vità e i loro personaggi. Sono

If documentary codified the shots from above the city and the monotone voice of the narrator, *Passeggiata in città* stylistically differentiated itself from documentary by identifying the hidden and obscured humorous “reality” lying within the viewer’s everyday interactions. At a key moment in the development of the television variety program, Manfredi, Rame, and the other writers of the show took an important stance regarding the intention and message of variety programming: Their programming would reveal the world from the perspective of the everyday person. Their work was about the “liveliness” of daily life—as opposed to the stiff language and motifs of documentary.

I bring up *Passeggiata in città*’s efforts to contrast documentary and variety in order to lay the groundwork for discussion of *Un, due, tre*’s own conscious play with the style of documentary form. Although no strata of culture was off limits to Vianello and Tognazzi’s comedy—everything from American rock n’ roll music and neorealist films to all genres of RAI programming were parodied—the duo took particular aim at television documentaries (including Mario Soldati’s 1957 documentary on Italian regional cuisine). Most famously, the pair parodied the RAI’s 1959 multipart documentary series on *La donna che lavora* (*The Woman Who Works*), which travelled across Italy’s regions and classes to document women’s contributions to the economic and industrial progress of Italy. This series, dominated by the deep voice of an omniscient male narrator/interviewer, featured a series of interviews with women in the course of their work. The documentary framed the women with striking regularity in static shots, still shots, emphasizing their faces (see Figure 13).⁴²¹

quelli che vediamo ogni giorno per strada. Basta solo guardarli in una maniera diverso. Insomma alla maniera della rivista.”

⁴²¹ *La donna che lavora*; episode titles “Braccianti del sud / Laborers from the South,” (April 15, 1959) and “Libere professionali / Free Professionals” (May 6, 1959), respectively.



Figure 13: *La donna che lavora*: From the April 15, 1959 episode (left) and the May 6, 1959 episode (right)

Rather than asking the women open-ended questions or creating interactive exchanges with the narrator/interview, the documentary used these interviews to establish the “facts” already described by the narrator. So while the documentary engages with issues of everyday life, even capturing women within their daily routines, it does so in a way that reveals the contrived ambitions of an objective study rather than pursuing a personal and subjective individual connection. The documentary addresses the women as anthropological subjects, not fellow citizens.

Although the choice to use the interview motif certainly distinguished this documentary from its fascist-era predecessors, it nonetheless repeats many of the routines of these traditional documentaries—as did a great many of the television documentaries of the era.⁴²² It used an authoritative, narrating male voice, it relied on interpretive and descriptive language to frame the way in which the viewers understand the images they see, and it established a positive overall narrative meant to convey and reinforce a notion of national progress. The parody of this

⁴²² Histories note both the continuities and the innovations in television documentary form. Franco Monteleone views documentary and educational programming in terms of continuity. There was a “precise hierarchy of values separating and drastically censoring formulas, styles, and languages,” 305. Marco Bertozzi argues that the use 16mm offered stylistic freedom and allowed documentaries to take on a more natural rhythm. He also notes the interview as a unique innovation of TV documentary. See *Storia del documentario italiano: Immagini e culture dell’altro cinema* (Venice: Marsilio, 2008), 183.

production on *Un, due, tre* made those routines of documentary its object to derision. In contrast to the RAI's documentary, in which anthropological subjects are pliant and respectful toward the camera, in the parody sketch, titled *La donna che lavora* (*The Woman Who Works*), Ugo Tognazzi plays a female worker at a ceramics factory that is obstinate toward the examining narrator. Asked her name and age, she indignantly replies, "Why is that of interest to you?" At other points, Tognazzi's character replies in incoherent and nonsensical ways, making the documentary's absurdity apparent through her own confused and garbled repetition of the narrator's own questions. Through these exchanges, the viewer is invited to reflect on documentary's construction of reality and objective truth as a just that—an inauthentic construct.

Yet the play with language within this scene also points to how the presence of the dialects and accents of documentary's subjects were a startling sonic contrast to the formal voice of television (heard from the documentary narrator, television hosts, and politicians). The struggle to understand and be understood responded to the realities of daily experience for most Italians, especially for the many who inevitably felt stigmatized because of their manner of speaking. As Angelo Restivo argues, the use of language was extremely charged in this era, capable of defining one's very relationship to modernity itself. Restivo references Pier Paolo Pasolini's term of "neo-italiano," in which he describes "the emergence of a national language, one that threatened to displace once and for all the regional dialects that had, throughout Italian history, defined the parameters of reality for 'national subjects' who had remained essentially regional."⁴²³ According to Restivo, the emergence of Italian as a national language was about the creation of a "new *subject*...constructed out of the rapid modernization of...the economic

⁴²³ Angelo Restivo, *The Cinema of Economic Miracles: Visuality and Modernization in the Italian Art Film* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 45. Pasolini's original argument about "neo-italiano" can be found in "L'italiano è ancora in fasce," *L'Espresso*, February 7, 1965.

boom.”⁴²⁴ In playing with dialectal variation, Vianello and Tognazzi resist the hegemonic linguistic norms of “neo-italiano” making sure that there is a place for dialect (i.e. alternative modernities). It is important to note that Tognazzi did not limit this practice just to moments in which he played characters of different social classes. He frequently made fun of the dialect from his native Cremona, a small city outside of Milan, in essence marking himself as someone uncomfortable with new subjectivities.

The prominence of verbal and dialectic play is unsurprising given the historical role of dialect and language within Italian culture. The postwar publication of Antonio Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* helped to enable postwar intellectuals to recognize and attend to language as a site of struggle. Gramsci wrote at length about the issue of language in Italy, using the existence of regional Italian dialects as an example of how Italy never formed a national culture in which Italians could be united across region or class.⁴²⁵ Gramsci understood language as symptomatic of shifts in hegemonic power:

When the question of language surfaces, in one way or another, it means a series of other programs are coming to the fore: the formation and enlargement of the governing class, the need to establish more intimate and secure relationships between the governing groups and the national-popular mass, in other words, to reorganize cultural hegemony.⁴²⁶

In the context of 1950s Italy, the tumult of rapid industrialization and nationalization brought to the fore the issue of dialect. The migration of workers from the South to Northern industrial areas and from the country to the city made language a particularly contested area of identity, particularly for ordinary Italians. For intellectuals, the importance given to language by Gramsci’s writings and Mussolini’s own policies made language a site of tension. Therefore, the

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ David Forgacs, “National-Popular: Genealogy of a Concept,” in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (London: Routledge, 1993), 218.

⁴²⁶ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* eds. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 183-184.

narrative voice and diction of the television (as well as film) took on a critical importance—one that, I would add, extends into the present.⁴²⁷ Chiara Ferrari’s analysis of use of dialect in dubbing *The Simpsons* points to the extent to which dialects and their use in television programming continues as a site through which to map and maintain national and regional identity.⁴²⁸

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the use of language was deeply intertwined within Italian discourses of modernization and nationalization. Luciano Bianciardi mobilized Gramsci’s commentary on language as the basis for his broader critique of the RAI and its programming regimes. Bianciardi saw the RAI as creating a standardized and hegemonic form of language that was distinctly different from colloquial language practice. In contrast to “the Italian languages of class, sect, group, clan” the language of the RAI “limits expression, it communicates. It doesn’t sing, it says, it informs.”⁴²⁹ This standard, documentary style voice of the RAI was “the gray, anonymous, poor Italian...of the person who reads the daily news, [the Italian of] the stark faces and the official voices.”⁴³⁰ By associating the language of the RAI with the official perspective of the news and governmental officials, Bianciardi positions the use of vernacular dialect and linguistic variation as anti-authoritarian and as representing popular and authentic cultures. Describing television as only “bureaucratic by definition,” he encourages the variety and diversity of voices on television because they mobilized truer expressions of the

⁴²⁷ Ruth Ben-Ghiat speaks about fascist era policies toward language and dialect in *Fascist Modernities: Italy 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 138.

⁴²⁸ Chiara Ferrari, *Since When is Fran Drescher Jewish? Dubbing Stereotypes in The Nanny, The Simpsons, and The Sopranos* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2011).

⁴²⁹ Luciano Bianciardi, “Accertamenti sulla neonata,” in *Telebianciardi: Il convitato di vetro*, ed. Luciano Bianciardi (Milan: ExCognita Editore, 2007), 41. The article was originally published in *Le Ore*, February 4, 1965. The Italian reads, “Rispetto alle sorelle che l’hanno preceduta—le lingue italiane di classe, di ceto, di gruppo, di clan—questa anziché limitarsi ad esprimere, comunica. Non canta, ma dice, informa.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, “l’italiano scolorito, anonimo, povero...di chi legge le cronache quotidiani...le facce atone e le voci ufficiale”

Italian nation and its citizens.⁴³¹ This quest was taken up by popular Italian films of the era (and, I would add, television variety programs), which sought to counter the “homogenizing sterilization conducted by the ‘educating’ and ‘pedagogic’ television of the 1950s.”⁴³² Like its predecessor forms, such as the humor magazine, *Un, due, tre* was decidedly “anti-conformist.”⁴³³ Its critiques gave voice to a skeptical view and a critical interpretation of Italian society, even if their parodies didn’t always challenge these changes outright. In other words, *Un, due, tre* questioned the “reality” or truth behind media representations by using verbal play to establish its own relationship to toward popular or authentic culture.



Figure 14: Ugo Tognazzi as a female worker in the sketch “La donna che lavora” (*Un, due, tre*, June 14, 1959)

Beyond these stylistic references to the documentary mode of narration and address, the parody also questions the standard documentary’s underlying narrative of progress. Vianello and

⁴³¹ Ibid., 42. The Italian reads, “Televisione è un ente solo per definizione burocratica, di fatto è uno strumento.”

⁴³² Paolo D’Agostini, *Il cinema di Age e Scarpelli* (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1991), 10.

⁴³³ Steno, the editor of *Marc’Aurelio*, frequently calls the magazine and its writers “anti-conformist.” By using “anti-conformist” here, I am both signaling a connection to these origins, and calling attention to Steno’s own understanding of the politics of the magazine as being anti-fascist, not Leftist or radical. Angelo Oliveri, *L’imperatore in platea: I grandi del cinema italiano dal Marc’Aurelio allo schermo* (Bari: Dedalo, 1986), 7.

Tognazzi's parody of the program captures the female worker, played by Tognazzi, in the midst of her work. However, rather than performing her role in the mass production process of plates coming off of the assembly line's conveyor belt, she unexpectedly starts breaking the plates. The familiar parodies of the assembly line, made famous by Charlie Chaplin and Lucille Ball, are here transformed into a darker and most absurdist form of humor, which imagined a cathartic release to the daily monotony of work. Breaking plate after plate, Tognazzi envisions the industrialization of Italy as a corrosive and destructive force. The famous popular playwright, Dario Fo, in speaking to his own television parodies of the same period, described improvisational and absurdist humor as an attempt to subvert the very logics that underwrote daily existence. It was about making apparent "the grotesque logic of the Italian economic miracle, that we're all going ahead, that everything is happiness and positive, and naturally I turned the situation upside down to satirize it."⁴³⁴ By refusing to complacently engage in the narratives of the era's documentaries that sought to frame factory work as productive to the nation, Tognazzi's factory worker character exposed the false promises of modernization. As much as the satire highlighted the demands placed upon industrialized labor, by taking the documentary's logics to an extreme, it also underscored documentary's culpability in establishing and extending modernity's false narratives.

Tognazzi's parody of the documentary's investigative form and treatment of its subjects is in many respects a forbearer, albeit in much more popular form, to Umberto Eco's parody of these kinds of narratives a few years later. In his 1962 article, "Industry and Sexual Repression in Milan," Eco writes as if he is conducting an anthropological study of a distant island—only

⁴³⁴ Dario Fo interviewed by Gianni Minà and aired on Rai due's 1997 *Storie* series. The Interview can now be accessed at <http://www.rai.tv/dl/RaiTV/programmi/media/ContentItem-15067915-9348-47f6-b573-81225032ef3a.html> (accessed [April 2, 2014]). In Italian, Fo said that "era la satira, il grotesque del logico del miracolo economico italiano, che andiamo in Avanti, la felicità, e di tutto positive, e naturalmente si capolgevo la situazione per farla satira."

his study is of 1960s Milan. Facetiously “documenting” the illogical rituals of Italy’s industrial capital, Eco writes:

The native does not like his work and will do everything possible to postpone the moment when he has to start. Curiously, the village chiefs seem to assist him in this, eliminating, for example, the customary methods of transportation, digging up the tracks of the primitive tramways, confusing traffic with broad yellow stripes...It is hard to explain psychologically the attitude of the village chiefs, but this ritual destruction of transportation is no doubt linked with rebirth rights.⁴³⁵

Eco’s parody presciently and incisively critiques the superiority with which Western anthropologists approached their “primitive” subjects. Describing modernity’s progress as a continual act of destruction, Eco highlights the how the experience of modernity is often riddled with inconsistencies and unpredictability, even if it is a supposedly logical transformation. In much the same way, the parodies of Tognazzi and Vianello gave expression to the flaws in documentary’s naturalizing presentation of modernity and its benefits. In both cases, the parodies copy the stylistic routines of documentation only to push those codes to their point of irrationality. Eco even compared his use of parody to the act of “overinterpretation.” According to Eco, “parody...must never be afraid of going too far,” of pushing its critique to the point of full deconstruction.⁴³⁶ I bring up this comparison to Eco not to position Tognazzi and Vianello as *avant guard* artists or equate their work with these more radical experimentations but, rather, to call attention to how their position toward authority and play with form was not wholly divorced from artistic movements of the 1960s. Like Eco’s “Industry and Sexual Repression in Milan,” the comedic duo’s decision to take on documentary form—which was itself most

⁴³⁵ Umberto Eco, *Misreadings* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1993), 75-76. Originally published in Umberto Eco, *Diario minimo* (Milan: Mondadori, 1963), 29. The Italian reads, “L’indigeno tuttavia non ama il suo lavoro e fa il possibile per evitare il momento in cui lo inizierà: quello che è curioso è che i capi del villaggio paiono assecondarlo, eliminando ad esempio le vie di trasporto, divellendo le rotaie dei primitivi tramways, confondendo la circolazione con larghe strisce gialle dipinte lungo le mulattiere (con chiaro significato di tabù), e infine scavando profonde buche nei punti più inopinati, dove molti indigeni precipitano e vengono probabilmente sacrificati alle divinità locali. È difficile spiegare psicologicamente l’attitudine dei capi del villaggio, ma questa distruzione rituale delle comunicazioni è legata senza dubbio a riti di risurrezione.”

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

implicated in Italy's modernization narratives dating back to the fascist era—sought to change the very terms of the national conversation about modernity by creating forms that could challenge modernity's visual and auditory narratives.

Television historians are now only just beginning to recuperate the translations of art cinema and *avant guard* experimental forms onto television, but the Marxist film and television critic, Paolo Gobetti, developed the possibilities offered by television as early as 1966.⁴³⁷

Exploring the circumstances under which television could create a self-reflexive Brechtian epic structure—in which the audience is not only aware of the performative act they are watching, but is also able to glean a sense of the permeability of the world that the performance represents—Gobetti pointed to the role of the television host. For Gobetti, in order to produce the “active” engagement of the spectator, there had to be “direct, first-person contact with at least one of the characters.”⁴³⁸ Ideally, this character would occupy the role of a “presenter-author,” hosting the program as well as acting within it—precisely role that Vianello and Tognazzi played in *Un, due, tre*. According to Gobetti, when these circumstances were met (such as when Tognazzi transitioned from being a host to playing a female factory worker), television is able to have an even greater “power of suggestion” over its audiences. Gobetti writes:

The human presence of the presenter in television is not reducible to the anonymous voice of the commentator of a film documentary...but assumes the concreteness of a personality in the same reality as what is being transmitted. The presenter, the commentator, the television author...they are the vicarious element that allows [the spectator] to participate in far away events, but also in a way that reduces these events to human proportions and dimensions.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁷ Lynn Spigel's chapter on television advertising and the influence of European art cinema comes to mind as a prescient analysis of this kind of crossover with popular form. See *TV by Design: Modern Art and the Rise of Network Television* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 213-250.

⁴³⁸ Paolo Gobetti, *Teatro televisivo Americano* (Turin: Einaudi, 1966), xiii. The Italian reads, “contatto diretto e in prima persona dello spettatore con almeno uno dei personaggi” and “presentatore-autore.”

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, xiv. The Italian reads, “forza di suggestione” “la presenza umana del presentatore in televisione non si riduce quindi alla voce anonima del commentatore d'un cinedocumentario...ma assume la concretezza d'un personaggio nelle realtà stessa che viene trasmessa. Il presentatore, il commentatore, l'autore televisivo...[è] il

In contrasting the presence of the television host (and by extension the engagement of the audience) to the absence of the narratorial voice of documentary, Gobetti sees television as having new and distinct stylistic implications that change the very structure of visual form and open it to new functions. This role of the host as envisioned by Gobetti also recalls the function of the paparazzo. Paparazzo photography captures the star at an inopportune moment so that the viewer of the photograph assumes the perspective of being there in the moment. In either case, the viewer is aware of the producer's presence in making that cultural product.

Gobetti saw the presence of the presenter-actor (as opposed to the voice-over narration of traditional documentary form) as *the* point of contrast against which new television forms established themselves. In doing so, Gobetti called attention to the profound importance of television's mode of presentational address, particularly in terms of how it impacted the audience's perception of the events on screen. In the case of variety programs, the connection between the presenter-author and the audience had to be particularly strong. As Henry Jenkins has argued, the "vaudeville aesthetic," in which there were many performers and no overarching narrative, demanded that the performances made a quick and enduring impact on the audience.⁴⁴⁰ As Barra, Penati, and Scaglioni have shown, *Un, due, tre* emerged out of circumstances similar to vaudeville. Drawing on the formal conventions established by the fascist-era *avanspettacolo*, a form of musical-comedic variety (sometimes performed before a film screening), the program manifested a distinct desire to foster a new and different form of participatory engagement between performer and audience.⁴⁴¹ As part of their spontaneous style, performers on *Un, due,*

vicario che permette di partecipare ad avvenimenti lontani, ma è anche un modo per ridurre questi avvenimenti a proporzioni e dimensioni umane."

⁴⁴⁰ Henry Jenkins, *What Made Pistachio Nuts?: Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 68.

⁴⁴¹ Luca Barra, Cecilia Penati, and Massimo Scaglioni. "Images of the Public: The Construction of the Italian TV Audience, 1953 – 1955," *Comunicazioni sociali* 3 (2010): 10.

tre self-consciously referenced their own acts of improvised performance by making quips in the midst of their routines about their own limitations as performers. The show also played jokes on the studio audience, often turning the camera around to capture their response.⁴⁴² Thus the audience was invited to participate in the unfolding of the performance in ways that were unseen in other genres of television programming.

Beyond these more overtly performative interventions, processes of parody also occurred at a subtler formal level, with the quality of the sound and the degree of audience audibility within the program itself. In the RAI's *Il lavoro della donna* documentary series, the narrator's voice was added after the production was filmed, creating a crisp, clean, and controlled sonic landscape. By contrast, the parody of this documentary series on *Un, due, tre* self-reflexively displays all of its qualities of liveness. The recoding of Tognazzi's voice captures the ambient space that the microphones pick up from the theater, which had not been soundproofed and was not specifically designed for television production. Most importantly, the television viewer hears the interjections of the audience. The audible echo of the audience responses—their laughs, their clapping—established this direct and immediate connection, a quick feedback-loop between Vianello and Tognazzi and their audience that is so crucial to the improvisational aesthetics of variety and vaudeville.

In fact, Italians reacted quite hostilely at the first television comedy that broke with the routines of live variety programming and dispensed with this live feedback-loop between audience and performer. When the American sitcom *I Love Lucy* aired in Italy in 1960, it was almost universally rejected, with critics pointing to both the artificiality of its humor and the annoying sound of the laughter in the background as its main flaws. Exasperated, Carlo Gregoretti, writing for the weekly magazine *L'Espresso* asked, "Why don't we bend over in

⁴⁴² Ibid.

waves of laughter...over Lucille Ball's moves? And why does the American public explode continuously in deafening laughs? ...Why is it that the RAI decided that they should regularly broadcast these sitcoms without at least suppressing the applause and the laughter that...just annoys those that are not able to share in it?"⁴⁴³ In registering his frustration at the laughter he hears but cannot participate in, Gregoretti underscores the significance of live audience reaction as a function of authenticity and immediacy. Arguing that *I Love Lucy* lost all of its "freshness," Gregoretti underscores the importance of the programming's auditory quality and mode of address to the creation of its regimes of immediacy and spontaneity.⁴⁴⁴

The importance of improvisation toward the formation of audience connection should not be underestimated—nor should its theoretical implications be ignored. Under Zavattini's system of expression, the goal of the media producer was to produce a sense of identification in the viewer with the subject so that the viewer would be able to experience and understand reality in an unprecedented way.⁴⁴⁵ In what Zavattini called *convivenza*, which can be translated as a momentary "cohabitation" between subject and viewer, he stressed the fundamental importance of the engagement of the audience with the representation on screen. In fact, in strategizing toward more publically responsive programming regimes, Zavattini became one of the primary proponents of television clubs designed to encourage involvement in the critique and analysis of programming.⁴⁴⁶ *Un, due, tre* informally engaged in many of these sorts of practices. Its

⁴⁴³ Carlo Gregoretti, "Il risate del sabato sera," *L'Espresso*, March 6, 1960, 23. The Italian reads, "Perché non ci pieghiamo in due sulla poltrona e non lanciamo trilli di gioia alle mossette di Lucille Ball? E perché il pubblico della platea Americana esplode in continuo fragorosissime risate? ...Come mai la televisione italiana abbia ritenuto opportuno mandare in onda regolarmente questi telefilm senza provvedere, per lo meno, a sopprimere quegli applausi e quelle risate che, esplodendo in continuazione, finiscono per infastidire chi non riesce a dividerli."

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid. In Italian, "freschezza."

⁴⁴⁵ Cesare Zavattini, "Tesi sul neorealismo," in *Cesare Zavattini cinema: Diario cinematografico. Neorealismo, ecc.*, eds. Valentina Fortichiari and Mino Argentieri (Milan: Bompiani, 2002 [1953]), 743-45. Zavattini writes in Italian that "gli artisti devono guardare la realtà attraverso la *convivenza*...per staurare rapport approfonditi con gli altri uomini e la realtà...per uscire dalle astrazioni...[e] cogliere il punto comune dei nostri personaggi."

⁴⁴⁶ Ivano Cipriani, "I tele-club," *Il Contemporaneo*, September 22, 1956, 7.

parodies invited audiences, much in the style of the television clubs, to be critically conscious of their immediate media environments, and to create programming more responsive to their input.

Satires and parodies are generally known for their “ability to unmask and deconstruct, pointing us toward the flaws and posturings of official policy.”⁴⁴⁷ In their parodies of President Gronchi and of the RAI documentary, *The Woman That Works*, Vianello and Toganazzi’s *Un, due, tre* goes beyond the fulfillment of these expectations. *Un, due, tre* directly engaged with the shifting representational paradigms of late 1950s Italy in which codes of immediacy and informality were prized.⁴⁴⁸ Paparazzo photography is one of the most prominent manifestations of this culture, as it was engaged in increasingly immediate and fast-circulating images that destabilized the relationship between subject and viewers, between elites and popular masses. *Un, due, tre* drew on the subject matter of its immediate moment and utilized casual and vernacular language to confront the conventions of documentary and to engender feelings of engagement and participation in its audience. Television critic Saverio Tutino brings this point home—inadvertently, perhaps—when describing variety programming of the era as “spontaneous to the point of amateurism, but extremely communicative.”⁴⁴⁹ For Tutino, the highly impactful and unabashed spontaneity manifest in variety programming was unexpected, if not unprecedented. *Un, due, tre*—alongside *Lascia o raddoppia* and *Chi legge*—constituted parts of a whole regime of programming, one that used the improvised encounters between television hosts and subjects as a way of expressing a new egalitarian ethos. What Tutino called “amateurism,” expressed in terms of improvisation, spontaneity, and ordinariness, became a

⁴⁴⁷ Amber Day, *Satire and Dissent: Interventions in Contemporary Political Debate* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011), 12. Although Day addresses contemporary American television satire and parody, her analysis of the strategies of satire and parody is a helpful text to thinking about how satire and parody plays off of its contemporary media environment and its rhetorical and aesthetic codes.

⁴⁴⁸ Gregoretti, 23.

⁴⁴⁹ Tutino, 7.

cultural signifier of the very anti-authoritarian and humanist values associated the new postwar modernity. And television became a prominent site of its expression and elaboration.

CONCLUSION

Toward a History of Transnational TV Style

In this dissertation, I have conceived of the postwar period as an era of prolonged transition in which Italians actively worked to create a post-fascist society and to construct a new form of modernity that was neither fascist nor one that purely followed the model of American consumer capitalist modernity. On the most immediate level, this project is an intervention into the narratives of Italian television historiography; my research calls into question the way in which scholarly histories have conceived Italian television's early programming regimes. But this study is also about the theoretical paradigms and methodological approaches through which we understand postwar transatlantic Western European/American modernity—and Italy's place within it. In focusing on the sociohistoric conditions of postwar Italy as a frame for the patterns of reception and the production practices of the early television "Everyman" aesthetic, my research is part of another kind of transition that is currently underway—the readjustment and re-theorization of media in a global paradigm.⁴⁵⁰ The project to de-center the study of television and to move beyond what Tasha Oren and Sharon Shahaf describe as the "persistent 'general' that is American and British television" presents a number of challenges and questions—ones that I have engaged with over the course of this dissertation, both explicitly and implicitly.⁴⁵¹ In

⁴⁵⁰ My dissertation draws upon Julie D'Acci's circuit model of culture. See "Cultural Studies, Television Studies, and the Crisis in the Humanities," in *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, eds. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 418-446.

⁴⁵¹ Tasha Oren and Sharon Shahaf, "Introduction: Television Formats—A Global Framework for TV Studies," in *Global Television Formats: Understanding Television Across Borders*, eds. Tasha Oren and Sharon Shahaf (New York: Routledge, 2012), 1.

concluding, I specifically want to address the implications of this dissertation in two areas: (1) our understanding of global cultural flows and their history, especially Italy's place within Europe (2) the role of television in postwar democratization.

What is European? What is Italian?

If postwar Italian filmmaking styles exemplify cinema's global reach—neorealism, for example, emerged as part of an international discussion and exchange at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia and travelled extensively after its height, particularly outside the West—the study of television still struggles to break the confines of the national context. Because the medium of television has always been regulated by complex legal, linguistic, and technological *national* frameworks, global television scholars have struggled to theorize *transnational* television and to produce effective methodologies suitable for the complexity of its examination. As European television scholar Jérôme Bourdon points out, the field has yet to fully identify the object of study: “the problem for both the historian and the theorist is to identify exactly what was borrowed.”⁴⁵² In foregrounding the development of a specific regime of representation and the discourses that developed alongside of it, this dissertation seeks to approach this issue of Italian television's transnationality in ways that both coincide and digress from the mainstream of European television historiography.

In recent years, prominent European television scholars have begun a project that seeks to build an argument for a European television space. Important anthologies—such as Jonathan Bignell's and Andres Ficker's *A European Television History* and William Uricchio's *We Europeans? Media, Representations, Identities*—set out to explore the possibility of a

⁴⁵² Jérôme Bourdon, “From Discrete Adaptations to Hard Copies: The Rise of Formats in European Television,” in *Global Television Formats: Understanding Television Across Borders*, eds. Tasha Oren and Sharon Shahaf (New York: Routledge, 2012), 113.

“European” television.⁴⁵³ Bignell and Fickers base their framework on the “debate both implicit and explicit about how television has taken part in the construction and deconstruction of Europe.”⁴⁵⁴ Working from a similar vantage point, Uricchio’s collection, funded by the European Science Foundation, sets out “to interrogate the issues that divide and that bind” European identity.⁴⁵⁵ The choice to compare circumstances across European boundaries to find points of commonality is quite new and exceptional. Traditionally, as Graeme Turner underscores, it has been difficult to think of the idea of a pan-European television space. The public broadcasting tradition, which has historically been especially strong across Europe, creates the appearance of broadcasting as a medium most tied to the nation.⁴⁵⁶ However, in the wake of the formation of the European Union and the advent of Sky TV as a regional satellite provider, the potential for the pan-European space now appears tangible, as does the underwriting motivation for work emphasizing the historic existence of a European identity.⁴⁵⁷

Italianists often cite the words of Massimo D’Azeglio, a central figure in the unification of Italy: “We have made Italy. Now we must make Italians.” It appears a similar quest is currently occurring after the formation of the EU. Now that the European Union is a solid entity, there is the need to point to an interconnected common cultural history that links European nations, despite histories of war and political division, and in the face of the continent’s cultural and linguistic diversity. Given these circumstances, academics in Europe are incentivized to find traces of a common European heritage that has always existed but of which we were not fully

⁴⁵³ Jonathan Bignell and Andres Ficker, eds. *A European Television History* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008) and William Uricchio, ed. *We Europeans? Media, Representations, Identity* (Bristol: Intellect, 2009).

⁴⁵⁴ Bignell and Fickers, 2.

⁴⁵⁵ Uricchio, 22.

⁴⁵⁶ Graeme Turner, “Television and the nation: does this matter any more?” in *Television Studies after TV: Understanding Television in a Post-Broadcast Era*, eds. Graeme Turner and Jinna Tay (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2009), 54-64.

⁴⁵⁷ Jean Chalaby, *Transnational Television in Europe: Reconfiguring Global Communications Networks* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009).

aware. Since the establishment of institutions such as the European Broadcasters Union (EBU) in the immediate postwar, broadcasting has consistently been inflected with a certain degree of utopian possibility around the idea of a pan-European space.⁴⁵⁸ And while the idea of a united European culture stands as an important corollary against the recent rise of right-wing, nationalistic movements across Europe, these studies recuperate broadcasting in ways that mitigate or downplay the very tensions that continue to inform European nationalism. As a former Axis power, geographically located on the divide between Eastern and Western European, and often categorized among the “weak” Southern European economies, Italy’s position within Europe presents a number of challenges to any reading of a holistic European past or present.

So far the solutions offered by the field of European television studies do not allow us to effectively analyze the development of programming regimes in 1950s Italy. The television format, defined as a “technology of economic and cultural exchange that facilitates television’s possibilities,” is currently the preferred analytic framework through which to understand the circulation of television globally in the contemporary moment.⁴⁵⁹ The format has garnered attention as scholars attempt to account for the flow of television across national boundaries—flows that persist despite the institutional, technological, and bureaucratic boundaries of nation-states. Yet the 1950s was an era of informal exchange, in which borrowing occurred outside of signed agreements. The era’s processes of transatlantic and inter-European exchange and translation preceded the development of more bounded and proscribed packages. To focus on these stable packages denies the fluidity and experimentation that characterized early production.

⁴⁵⁸ Jérôme Bourdon, “Unhappy Engineers of the European Soul: The EBU and the Woes of Pan-European Television,” *International Communication Gazette* 69.3 (2007): 263-280.

⁴⁵⁹ Tasha Oren and Sharon Shahaf, “Television Formats—A Global Framework for TV Studies,” in *Global Television Formats: Understanding Television Across Borders*, eds. Tasha Oren and Sharon Shahaf (New York: Routledge, 2012), 1-20.

The emphasis on the format or the genre has other, more specious implications as well. In seeking to establish a broader European visual vocabulary, a number of histories in the field(s) of European television studies have placed their attention on fiction programming, quiz shows, and westerns.⁴⁶⁰ Such studies carry some questionable implications, however, in that the popular genres—long the standard bearers of Americanization—are now simply ascribed a new function, that of providing a common European heritage. A genre framework that was once, for European intellectuals, emblematic of the architecture of American cultural domination, has now been rendered in positive terms, as a point through which a cultural European *comunitas* can be identified. As Robert Kroes would say, “American imaginaries” now constitute a common vision that has homologized Europe.⁴⁶¹ Even if the theoretical frame has shifted (with significantly more attention being paid to the contexts of reception and interpretation in which Europeans have agency and control within the process), the result is still problematic.⁴⁶² These studies continue to maintain an uncomfortable binary between the “pleasurable” forms of consumer capitalism, which appear to have more mobility across borders, while documentary forms remain within the domain of the nation-state.

There is also a way in which the methodological emphasis on format and genre, as the central product of exchange, too often hide the real power inequities in Europe, both now and in the past. The creation of formats—most of which hail from Amsterdam and London, thanks to the successes of Endemol and FremantleMedia—offer a strong case for a European media sphere

⁴⁶⁰ See, for instance, Chalaby and Milly Buonanno, *Imaginary Dreamscapes: Television Fiction in Europe* (Luton, UK: University of Luton Press, 2005).

⁴⁶¹ Robert Kroes, “Imaginary Americas in Europe’s Public Space,” in *We Europeans? Media, Representations, Identity*, ed. William Uricchio (Bristol: Intellect, 2009).

⁴⁶² As Jérôme Bourdon writes, they are the European mediators of the American soul. See “Imperialism, Self-Inflicted? On the Americanization of Television in Europe,” *We Europeans?: Media, Representations, Identity*, ed. William Uricchio (Bristol: Intellect, 2009), 93-108.

where the flows are transnational and carry distinct power implications.⁴⁶³ American media scholar Michael Curtin has proposed the framework of “media capitals” in an effort to articulate how flows of people, ideas, and capital coalesce in certain geographical locales and create media products that have expansive reaches outside the center through an expansive periphery.⁴⁶⁴ Since his initial proposal for this model in 2003, a number of studies have documented regional centers in Asia and Southeast Asia, Africa, and Latin America—but, to my knowledge, no one has proposed a European media capital.⁴⁶⁵ This oversight is perhaps indicative of a desire to pretend that modernization across Europe since World War II is mutually constitutive, homogeneous, and level. Michele Hilmes’s *Networked Nations*, for example, uses a comparative approach in proposing that a “transnational cultural economy” existed between the US and the UK, such that each country used the other as both a model and a boogeyman against which they defined their own values through their national broadcasting systems.⁴⁶⁶ The comparative approach works well in Hilmes’s work, but only because the US and the UK have relatively equal footing—sharing a language, a history, and a state of economic and political dominance in the world.

The case of inter-European relationships and cultural exchange is quite different.⁴⁶⁷ As the European fiscal crisis brought clearly into view, there are “debtor” nations and “producer” nations within the European sphere—and these positions have strong historical bases emerging

⁴⁶³ Ted Magder, “Television 2.0: Business of American Television in Transition,” in *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, eds. Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette (New York: NYU Press, 2008), 149-152.

⁴⁶⁴ Michael Curtin, “Media Capital: Towards the study of spatial flows,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 6.2 (2003): 202-228.

⁴⁶⁵ See examples including, Yeidy Rivero, “Havana as a 1940s-1950s Latin American Media Capital,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 26.3 (August 2009): 275-293; Aswin Punathambekar, “From Indiafm.com to Radio Ceylon: New Media and the Making of the Bombay Film Industry,” *Media Culture Society* 32.5 (2010): 841-857; Jade Miller, “Global Nollywood: The Nigerian Movie Industry and Alternative Global Networks in Production and Distribution,” *Global Media and Communication* 8.2 (2012): 117-133.

⁴⁶⁶ Michele Hilmes, *Network Nations: A Transnational History of British and American Broadcasting* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

⁴⁶⁷ Focusing on Eastern Europe, Anikó Imre has also noted that the narratives about European media ignore alternative modernities within Europe. See “Adventures in Early Socialist Television Edutainment,” *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 40.3 (2012): 119-130.

out of the Cold War era that current comparative paradigms do not fully capture in their analysis of the European broadcasting sphere. Italian understandings of American cultural forms can be a means through which to map the Italian approach to modernization. “The controversy about different images of America can be regarded as a variation of the controversy... over the question of modernity, because in their portrayal of Americanism [Italian intellectuals] actually define their attitude towards the modern world.”⁴⁶⁸ Yet early Italian television’s programming regimes belie the fact that Italian modernity was equally contingent on exchanges with France and Britain, as well as its own internal debates over aesthetics and their social mission that had begun under fascism and continued in the theorization of neorealist filmmaking. Therefore, while the informal communicative regimes of American Everyman culture formed a significant and influential cultural model, the impact of French filmmaker Marcel L’Herbier’s writings on television, as well as the work of documentary filmmakers like John Grierson and Jean Rouch, indicate that European notions of realism emerged out of cross-European exchange, elaboration, and development. French and British discourses served as a constant point of contact that informed the Italian perspective and linked European experimentations across both film and television. The influence of the French tele-club model, the role of cross sponsorships with the RTF, as well as the influential concept of public service broadcasting from the UK are all points through which France and the UK provided a pattern for European broadcasting through cross-national dialogue and productive exchanges.

I bring up these issues to point to the larger question within the field, but also to confront one of the primary questions that my own research raises—to what extent is Italian modernity European? And what does the analysis of aesthetics and style provide to our understanding of

⁴⁶⁸ Emilio Gentile, “Impending Modernity: Fascism and the Ambivalent Image of the United States,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 28.1 (January 1993): 7-8.

Western European and Italian modernity that other approaches do not? As scholarship on television currently stands, there are two primary ways through which to think about Italy and its relationship to a broader European modernity. On the one hand, censorship under the fascist regime, the division of the public service network by political party in the 1960s and 70s, and the concentration of the Italian media system into the hands of Silvio Berlusconi in the 1980s and 90s, all support the notion of Italian broadcasting's exceptionalism within Western Europe and thus have helped to frame Italy as having an aberrant modernity—of a country unable to tamp down the tendencies of authoritarianism and create a stable democracy. These narratives, whether intentionally or not, position Italy outside the bounds of comparative European frameworks, and are primarily interested in addressing Italian media in terms of the national political economy of the media.⁴⁶⁹ On the other hand, the comparative paradigm that implicitly guides many of the most recent European historical case studies glosses over the historic specificities within the Southern or Eastern European experiences of modernity.⁴⁷⁰

This is where the analysis of early television's aesthetic and communicative structures constitutes an important alternative to these methods, which often center on the format and the genre. It is through the development of routines of informality and improvisation that Italian television producers articulated their own relationship to fascism and unequivocally embraced Western European modernity postwar. This turn did not occur through a singular type or instance of programming, but across a number of different sites that sought to create an egalitarian

⁴⁶⁹ For English-language examples of work that emphasize Italy's uniqueness in comparison to other media systems, see Paolo Barile and Giuseppe Rao, "Trends in the Italian Mass Media and Mass Media Law," *European Journal of Communication* 7 (1992): 261-281, and Gianpietro Mazzoleni, "Towards a 'Videocracy'? Italian Political Communication at a Turing Point," *European Journal of Communication* 10.3 (1995): 291-319.

⁴⁷⁰ Milly Buonanno, *Italian TV Drama and Beyond: Stories from the Soil, Stories from the Sea* (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2012) is a key example of a European television history working explicitly from a comparative framework. In their introductory essay, Timothy Havens, Anikó Imre, and Katalin Lustyik critique current European histories for their failure to adequately deal with regional power differentials within the European sphere. See *Popular Television in Eastern Europe During and Since Socialism* (London: Routledge, 2013), 1-13.

relationship between host, subject, and viewer through participatory modes of address. Research into formats and genres can provide a means of comparison in which these “containers” become loaded with values and meanings unforeseen in their original context.⁴⁷¹ Take, for instance, how the seemingly innocuous format of *Pop Idol* has become a mechanism through which both viewers and participants have reconsidered and enacted their sense of citizenship in recent years.⁴⁷² However, as the case of postwar Italian television demonstrates, the emphasis on format or genre cannot tell us about the way in which communicative and aesthetic structures become adopted more broadly as forms of cultural practice. Only when we expand out beyond a single genre, does it become clear that multiple sites (such as communicative structures from the US or aesthetic theory developed in Italy and France) informed the clear and distinct Italian reliance on autobiography and direct address on television. My attention to the processes of transition and translation in postwar Italy are important means through which to reconceive of how, and in precisely what way, early television programming was *transnational* even as it was institutionally and technologically bound to the nation.

For example, this dissertation has explored what would superficially be described as an indigenized American quiz format, an Italian documentary, and an Italian variety program—all of which relied on the same stylistic routines in how they represented and presented ordinary individuals to their peers in the viewing audience. But only one of these programs was, predictably, never tied to the influence of American modernity—the documentary. However, as Marco Bertozzi notes in his history of Italian documentary, television documentaries of the period were significantly more experimental in nature, openly playing with interview motifs and

⁴⁷¹ Oren and Shahaf define the format as Oren and Shahaf as a “globally distributed container for locally produced content,” 3.

⁴⁷² Part III of Oren and Shahaf’s edited volume contains case studies on the Idol franchise. Also see Marwan Kraidy, *Reality Television and Arab Politics: Contention in Public Life* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010) and the documentary *Afghan Star*, directed by Havana Marking (2009; London: Roast Beef Productions), DVD.

interactive modes that had not yet been incorporated into documentary film form.⁴⁷³ My research on *Chi legge* (one of the experimental documentaries cited by Bertozzi) indicates that the communicative regimes of American entertainment programming were at least partially responsible for these innovations, as Zavattini and Soldati intentionally incorporated these routines in an attempt to bolster a new sense of citizenship postwar. I bring up this example to suggest how casual categorizations often overlook the dispersed but important role of representational modes in articulating notions of modernity across programming. So while formats and genres may make our analysis easier by providing an obvious example of media's transnationality, this level of analysis can also lead us to overlook the more dispersed responses to global culture and the practices they inform.

In other words, examining aesthetics and stylistic motifs across genre enables media historians to identify broader how modes of programming stand at the intersection of economic, political, and cultural influences. As Jason Mittell argues, television aesthetics are “at the nexus of a number of historical forces that work to transform the norms established with any creative practices.”⁴⁷⁴ My intention here is not to proscribe a single approach—aesthetics for all!—onto the field. Rather, I want to highlight how the study of television styles allows us to account for television within its historical context—with implications beyond its “textual borders.”⁴⁷⁵ For instance, Mittell’s concept of “narrative complexity” describes a mode of contemporary programming that reaches across genre and encompasses how both popular programming and commercial flops shaped the medium and its practices.⁴⁷⁶ In so doing, Mittell points us to a larger shift that occurred because of a specific configuration of audience expectations,

⁴⁷³ Marco Bertozzi, *Storia del documentario italiano: Immagini e culture dell'altro cinema* (Venice: Marsilio, 2008), 182-4.

⁴⁷⁴ Jason Mittell, “Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television,” *Velvet Light Trap* 58 (Fall 2006): 29.

⁴⁷⁵ Mittell, 30.

⁴⁷⁶ Jason Mittell, “The Aesthetics of Failure,” *Velvet Light Trap* 64 (Fall 2009): 76.

commercial demands, and new technological capabilities.⁴⁷⁷ In much the same way, *Everyman* programming was shaped by the technological possibilities of television in an environment where cultural-political shifts in notions of egalitarianism, along with aesthetic theories of participation emerging out of neorealism, created an interest in using direct address and live interview. In identifying the dominance of these motifs of across programming, we can trace the broader configuration of forces that informed the transformation of Italian citizenship and identity from the fascist to the postwar period.

Programming Democracy

Throughout the course of this dissertation, I have demonstrated how television's stylistic modes produced new structures of participation and communication between Italians. *Lascia o raddoppia*, *Chi legge*, and *Un, due, tre* were all informed by discourses that understood improvisation, immediacy, informality, and direct, autobiographical disclosure as inherently humanist and democratic. These practices of autobiographic expression and participatory dialogue were not limited to onscreen appearances, but encompassed a broader set of acts that expanded beyond the experiences of viewing. To make this shift clear, I want to think about what one compelling April 1956 political ad, now held in a collection of political advertisements documented by the USIA (Figure 15), conveys about the relationship between television's *Everyman* motifs and the routines of postwar citizenship. The ad reads: "Quit the FIOM [the Federazione Impiegati Operai Metallurgici, a labor union aligned with Leftist elements in the Italian labor movement] and double your wages by voting for the democratic [and more

⁴⁷⁷ Mittell, "Narrative," 30.

politically moderate] unions.”⁴⁷⁸ The political ad is a play on the title of *Lascia o raddoppia*—which literally translates to *Quit or Double*—to suggest that workers “lascia” or “quit” their current union and “raddoppia” or “double” their wage by embracing the campaign underway by more moderate labor unions to create an anti-Communist labor movement.⁴⁷⁹

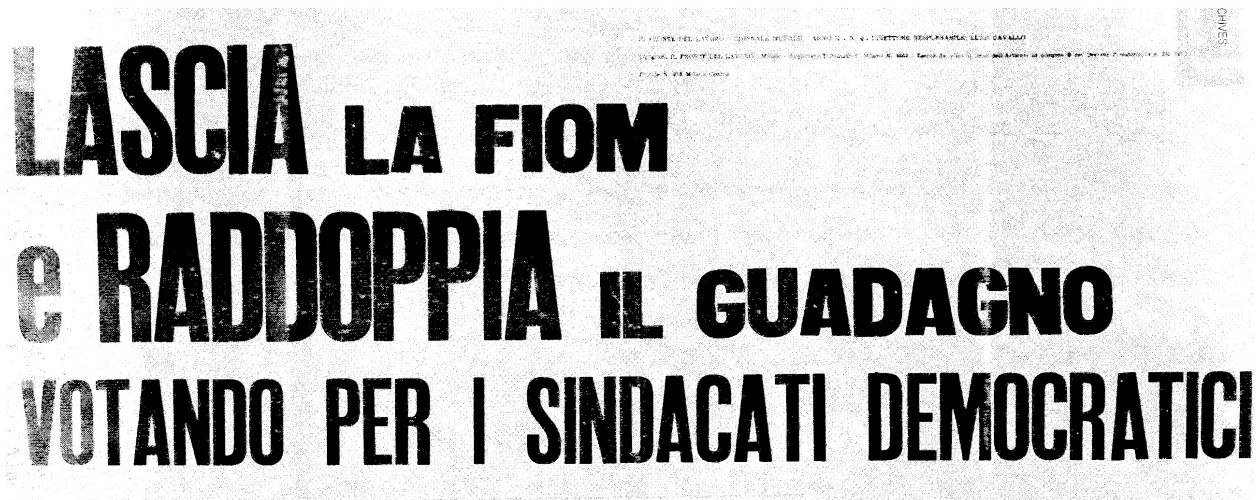


Figure 15: "Leave the FIOM and Double Your Wages"

From a traditional vantage point, one in which processes of Americanization helped to solidify Italy’s Atlantic identity within the geopolitics on the Cold War, this ad can be read as a perfect example of how television promoted a consumer capitalist model. Ostensibly lured by the promise of wealth and affluence offered through American formats like *\$64,000 Question*, Italians were encouraged to reject the Soviet model and become fully instep with the West. While the ad most readily addresses the potential for economic prosperity (in which members of Italy’s working classes became successful, prize-winning contestants), it also has implications beyond those immediate economic concerns. On *Lascia o raddoppia*, individuals were free to

⁴⁷⁸ RG 306, General Information Records of the USIA Historical Collection, Propaganda Country Files, 1953-1991, Italy, Box 13. National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.

⁴⁷⁹ American Ambassador to Italy Clare Boothe Luce describes American pressure to rid Italy of Communist-leaning or Communist-led labor organizations. See Clare Boothe Luce, interviewed by John Luter, January 1968, transcript Columbia University Special Collections, New York, NY, 42 and “Operation Free Enterprise, 1956,” Investigations, Box 635, Folder 3, Clare Boothe Luce Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (Washington, D.C.).

participate and be at the center of the national public's attention; they were solicited to be an agent, not a receiver of culture. The ad, which encourages the average worker to participate in the future and management of the labor union through the voting process, is a testament to the ways in which the program's routines spawned a whole host of new ways of thinking and being. The Italians who created this ad made the plea for democratic representation by relying on the example that most readily and poignantly came to mind—the narrative and communicative structures of *Lascia o raddoppia*. In other words, the new participatory contexts offered by television helped ordinary Italians envision the act of voting and engagement in civic life as potentially valuable and worthwhile.

For Italians of the period, the program structured interactions between subject, host, and viewers through an egalitarian ethos—one that corresponded to the democratization of organizational and political structures that was occurring alongside these new visual strategies. Paolo Gobetti attributed to television—which he called the “form of expression best suited to the present time”—exactly this kind of capability. Television bridged the divide between the individual experience and a broader humanist pose in which “men of the subaltern classes have become (or at least aspire to become) creative and conscious elements of a new society.”⁴⁸⁰ Luciano Bianciardi also connected television's cultural and aesthetic regimes to a new form of modernity, one in which ordinary and informal talk connected people and their aspirations. In a column for the Socialist newspaper *L'Avanti!* (*Forward!*), Bianciardi described his curiosity at seeing a gathering of “dissidents, refugees, heretics from two or three parties...[and] anarchists,” applaud with equal enthusiasm for both a Spanish Civil War veteran and a contestant from

⁴⁸⁰ Paolo Gobetti, *Teatro televisivo americano* (Turin: Einaudi, 1966), xviii-xix. The Italian reads, “Gli uomini delle class subaltern sono diventati (o per lo meno aspirano a diventare) elementi creatori e consci di una nuova società...E la televisione appare la forma di espressione più adeguata ai tempi presenti abbinando alle qualità di moltiplicazione quantitative quelle d'indagine ‘umanistica,’ la capacità di scorgere nella coscienza dell'individuo gli elementi vitali per l'equilibrio della società.”

Lascia o raddoppia. In explaining the contestant's warm reception, Bianciardi described how he embodied "popularity (and the word is not to be offensive, as it is shown in its original meaning) of tastes, of aspirations, of hopes."⁴⁸¹ It was the man's ordinary, humble everydayness that these dissidents cheered for—it was television's inclusive address that they were responding to so enthusiastically. Both Bianciardi's description and the advertisement itself are cultural artifacts that force us to consider what kind of citizen Everyman programs addressed, what kind of citizen Everyman programs fostered, and what kind of culture viewers saw themselves as participating in when they identified with the Everyman on screen.

To that end, I am reminded of an essay by Umberto Eco in which he seeks to refocus the attention of scholars away from the "effects" research tradition and toward the question of how audiences interpret and use mass communications. In this essay, Eco gives us a historical account of the first generation brought up with television:

Our typical Italian probably began to speak just before the time his parents bought a television set, which found its way into the home in about 1953...The boy starts to go to school and base his notions of culture on *Lascia o raddoppia* or, more worryingly, on the cultural programmes of the epoch. Once able to read and write he enters the era of *Carosello*, his initiation rituals go by the name of the Festival of San Remo and *Canzonissima*...At eleven he learns geography from *Campanile sera*...If apocalyptic theorists of mass communications...had been right, this boy would in 1968 have automatically applied for a post in a savings bank, having graduated on completion of a dissertation entitled 'Benedetto Croce and the Spiritual Value of Art', getting his hair cut every week and hanging the olive branch blessed by the priest of Palm Sunday over the picture of the Sacred Heart from the *Famiglia Cristiana* calendar. We know what actually happened. The television generation has been the generation of May '68, revolutionary organizations, anti-conformism, 'parricide', crisis of the family, rejection of the 'Latin lover syndrome' and acceptance of homosexual minorities, women's rights and class culture.⁴⁸²

⁴⁸¹ Luciano Bianciardi, "Mike: elogio della mediocrità," *Chiese escatollo e nessuno raddoppiò: Diario in pubblico, 1952-1971* (Milan: Baldini&Castoldi, 1995 [1959]), 38. The Italian reads, "sua trivialità (e la parola non vuol essere offensiva, riportata com'è al suo significato originario) dei gusti, delle aspirazioni, delle speranze." Here I translated trivialità to capture the popularization of culture, but the word most directly translates into vulgarity, banality, or ordinariness.

⁴⁸² Umberto Eco, "Does the Audience have Bad Effects on Television?" in *Apocalypse Postponed*, ed. Robert Lumley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 87-88. The original Italian version can be found in "Il

Eco, in humorously and distinctly drawing the comparison to what is “supposed” to happen to the “television generation” (i.e., getting a job at a bank and being a respectful Catholic) and what really happened (i.e., participating in protests, challenging authority, and disrupting familial norms), opens up early popular programming to questions of interpretation, reception, and the role of ideology by quite succinctly deconstructing any historical reading of television as an agent of homogenization and massification. But, in the context of this dissertation, Eco’s observation also suggests that there are ways in which styles or motifs of television programming were part of a culture in which anti-authoritarianism and egalitarianism were shared values and their expression came to take on specific stylistic forms of expression.

When media producers were making *Lascia o raddoppia*, *Chi legge*, and *Un, due, tre*, they sought to create scenarios of improvisation and of live, informal communication in order to create a participatory link with their audience. To return to the place from which I began—Zavattini’s “Questions to Humanity” series—his emphasis on unmediated access to the individual and their autobiography was about a fundamental shift in how media addressed its audience, who were now ordinary and equal peers. It was through his defense of television as a medium of democratization and egalitarianism that he articulated his prescient understanding of

pubblico fa male alla televisione?” in *Dalla periferia dell'impero: Cronache da un nuovo medioevo* (Milan: Bompiani, 1997 [1977]): 261-263 and reads: “Dunque il nostro italiano tipo incomincia a parlare quando presumibilmente I propri genitori non hanno ancora acquistato la televisione e se la trova in casa verso il 1953. Tra I tre o I quattro anni viene accompagnato giorno e sera dall'immagine di Marisa Borroni...il ragazzo incomincia ad andare a scuola e forma la sua nozione di cultura su *Lascia o raddoppia* o, ciò maggiormente preoccupa, sulla trasmissioni culturali dell'epoca. Non appena si alfabetizza entra nell'era di *Carosello*, i suoi riti di iniziazione si chiamano Festival di San Remo e *Canzonissima*, non ode neppure nominare Marx sotto la forma di Groucho e Harpo...A undici anni impara la geografia su *Campanile sera*...Se i teorici apocalittici delle comunicazioni di massa, muniti di un pretenzioso marxismo della prassi e infastiditi dalle masse, avessero avuto ragione, questo ragazzo nel 1968 avrebbe dovuto cercare un dignitoso posto alla Casa di Risparmio dopo essersi laureato con una tesi su “Benedetto Croce e i valori spirituali dell'arte,” tagliandosi i capelli una volta la settimana e appendendo alla Domenica delle Palme il ramo d'ulivo benedetto sul calendario della Famiglia Cristiana recante l'immagine del Sacro Cuore. Invece sappiamo quanto è successo. La generazione televisiva è stata la generazione del maggio sessantotto, dei gruppuscoli, del rifiuto dell'integrazione, dell'uccisione dei padri, della crisi della famiglia, del sospetto vero il *latin lover* e l'accettazione delle minoranze omosessuali, dei diritti della donna, della cultura di classe opposta alla cultura delle enciclopedia illuministiche.”

how television's routines of liveness and everydayness were eroding the divide between the abstract postwar principles of democracy and their actualization into practice. The ordinary men and women on *Lascia o raddoppia*, *Chi legge*, and *Un, due, tre* were given license to speak freely as themselves to their peers—practices which carried over to a variety of circumstances in daily life. In a world recovering from startling indifference toward human dignity and life, television's modes of address were of the utmost importance. And the frequent return to circumstances of live, unedited, informal conversations—circumstances that were explicitly structured to reveal, with autobiographical detail, the experience of ordinary Italians—unequivocally positioned television as the crucial site for Italians in their postwar democratic transition.

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