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Journal

California Italian Studies, 4(2)

Author

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Publication Date

2013

DOI

10.5070/C342018021

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The New Stakes for National Cinemas, a Word on the Case of Italy, and an Interview with Ivan Cotroneo

Anthony Cristiano

The new stakes for national cinemas combine issues of cultural identity and nationhood with questions pertaining to new media trends and the evolving nature of the global political economy. On the one hand, the geopolitical center of the world's economy has been extending its influence beyond the Western world, while on the other hand Western cinema has been attempting to hold onto its "command post" by strategizing its influence through digital technology. Like other renowned European and non-European national cinemas, throughout the decades Italian cinema has played a varying role in the economy of the country, enjoying glorious peaks during the 1910s and 1920s, the 1960s and the early 1970s, and again in the years leading to, and at the beginning of, the 2010s. For the first time in about half a century Italy once again released over two hundred films in 2011, with box-office returns of over 40% of the national market share.¹ Internationally, during the first decade of the 2000s, many new films and new directors appeared on the world stage. During the extraordinary year of 2011, films such as the French *Sarah's Key* (Gilles Paquet-Brenner, 2010), the Iranian *A Separation* (Asghar Farhadi, 2011), and the Mexican-Spanish production *Beautiful* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2010), were extremely successful in theaters. In Italy, the box-office success of *Che bella giornata* (*What a Beautiful Day*, Gennaro Nunziante, 2011) and *Benvenuti al sud* (*Welcome to the South*, Luca Miniero, 2010), which alone have earned close to eighty million Euros,² have re-posed questions about what constitutes a "popular Italian cinema." During the same year Italy released a record number of forty *opere prime* and *seconde*, among them *Io sono Li* (*Shun Li and the Poet*, Andrea Segre, 2011), *Corpo celeste* (*Celestial Body*, Alice Rohrwacher, 2011), *Into Paradiso* (*Inside Paradise*, Paola Randi, 2011), *Scialla!* (*Easy!* Francesco Bruni, 2011), and *La kryptonite nella borsa* (*Kryptonite!*) directed by Ivan Cotroneo, the scriptwriter and first-time director interviewed below.

The earnings of the most successful films listed above pale by comparison to those of the most successful American films during the same year (i.e. the British-American *Harry Potter*, the US *Transformers*, and the *Pirates of the Caribbean* sagas); their cultural success on the international stage, however, has brought some sense of pride to their country of production. This limited success amounts to a symbolic victory for their National Cinemas against a "Goliath" (America's Hollywood) that cannot be overcome easily by cultural means alone. In the film industry, the century-old dominant position of America is being perpetuated in the transition to digital media. With the Digital Cinema Initiatives (DCI), in 2002 Hollywood's major studios once again joined forces to establish a standard system for a Digital Cinema. By doing so they paved the road for homologizing the set of compatible specifications for manufacturers of software and hardware products, as well as producers, distributors, exhibitors, and vendors of moving images

¹ "Dati Cinema 2011, 2012," ANICA, accessed August 15, 2013, <http://www.anica.it/online/index.php/studianica/dati-sul-cinema-italiano/535-dati-cinema-2012.html>.

² "Citazioni ANICA Luglio-Dicembre 2011," ANICA, accessed August 15, 2013, <http://www.anica.it/online/index.php/component/content/article/71-citazioni-anica/315-citazioni-anica-luglio-dicembre-2011.html>.

and thus taken a leadership role in the digital era and the digital cinema market. American cinema's hegemonic position around the globe has been reaffirmed.

In 2008 Italy began to present its first digital screenings. *007 Quantum of Solace* (Marc Forster, 2008) in DCI 2K—the two thousand pixels resolution standard by the Digital Cinema Initiatives—opened at the Arcadia di Melzo theater, in the province of Milan, that same year. Gabriele Berto, from the Impianti Televisivi Cinema di Lissone firm, announced that the Arcadia di Melzo cinemas had full DCI operation, including the encryption security measure to prevent the copying of the film and the Key Delivery Message (KDM) to unlock the Digital Cinema Package (DCP) for the screening, on October 13, 2012.³ The general idea that plays well with most Internet users—especially with young people—that if something is online it is free, is of much concern to Hollywood studios and to their extended film markets. If the problem of *pirateria* (media piracy) hurts the American giant, how much will it harm struggling national cinemas around the world? In Italy, Riccardo Tozzi, the President of the Associazione Nazionale Industrie Cinematografiche Audiovisive Multimediali (ANICA), at the 2012 annual meeting in Viale Regina Margherita, in Rome, expressed his concerns on the subject saying that “la nuova generazione pensa che internet sia il luogo naturale per vedere i film gratis.”⁴ (*The new generation believes that the Internet is the natural locus for watching free films*). In such a context the new media piracy may not be only an indicator of how ‘cheap’ entertainment has become, but also a further index of the waning pride in one’s national arts and their worth, a trend which the digital revolution easily becomes a cunning excuse for. ANICA also reported that Italians prefer to watch American films over their own,⁵ and in an article on “Lo stato di salute del cinema italiano,” the author reports that at a time of digital transition in Italy’s national culture “manca una sorta di orgoglio per il ‘made in Italy’ dell’immaginario.”⁶ (*there seems not be a sense of pride for the ‘made in Italy’ imagination*). Italians, like other Europeans and non-Europeans, are deserting their cinemas when it comes to watching their own products.

America’s decades-long forceful influence is felt the world over to the point that any peculiar trait of a nation’s identity, which includes its language, its culture, and its values, must come to terms with this “big brother” if they hope to survive and profit from the changes undergoing media technology and practices. As in other nations included in the Oscars’ single category of Best Foreign Film, Italy’s fortunes, or lack of the same, with America’s Academy Awards, as in the newsworthy cases involving *Private* (*Private*, Saverio Costanzo, 2004) and then again *Terraferma* (*Mainland*, Emanuele Crialese, 2011), are regarded as a sort of barometer for the success of its national cinema. In such an imbalanced and evolving media context the bar is very high for any individual nation aiming to make the grade or even assert its presence within the system. Given the (unsurprising) disparity of resources and leadership regarding new digital trends, what do national cinemas need to do in order to succeed to any degree on the domestic and/or world stage? The current situation raises, once again, fundamental issues regarding the nature,

³ “Cinema digitale: La prima proiezione DCI in Italia,” *Millecanali: Le schede dell’Annuario di Millecanali*, accessed August 7, 2013, http://www.millecanali.it/cinema-digitale-la-prima-proiezione-dci-in-italia/0,1254,57_ART_120167,00.html.

⁴ Elena D’Alessandri, “Lo stato di salute del cinema italiano,” *Millecanali: Le schede dell’Annuario di Millecanali* April 24, 2012, http://www.millecanali.it/lo-stato-di-salute-del-cinema-italiano/0,1254,57_ART_9823,00.html.

⁵ “Tutti i numeri del Cinema Italiano Anno 2012,” ANICA, accessed August 3, 2013, <http://www.anica.it/online/index.php/component/content/article/25-news-anica/489-tutti-i-numeri-del-cinema-italiano-anno-2012.html>.

⁶ D’Alessandri, “Lo stato di salute del cinema italiano.”

function, politics and objectives of individual national film industries. These include matters of education and values, identity and purpose, aesthetic culture and national government policies. If we are to accept Gian Piero Brunetta's auspicious word on the subject, the first to be "educated," or re-educated, are the filmmakers themselves:

Bisognerà ripensare tutto, dal mercato all'affabulazione, dalla capacità di produrre miti, ai rapporti tra localismi, particolarismi regionali, federalismi e problemi sovranazionali comuni [...] delle nozioni di appartenenza e soprattutto delle identità e delle differenze. [...] L'augurio forte che ancora si può fare [...] è che, prima di tutto, i giovani autori del cinema italiano sappiano guadagnarsi questa nuova cittadinanza cinematografica [europea], riprendendo ad andare al cinema, immergendosi nella sua grande storia, presente e passata.⁷

Although Brunetta's words may be tinged with an idealistic fervour, an excess of faith in the role and potential of the cinema, his whole-hearted defense—coming from someone reared in the magic of classic cinema—speaks to modern culture's *rapport* with the emergence and development of moving-images. Modern societies have increasingly relied on the evolving shapes and forms of these media for providing it with a view and sense of place in the world.

Brunetta goes so far as to wish filmmakers would make exclusive use of "pixels" to tell their stories, the pixels of that which he calls the "nuova civiltà digitale." (*The new digital civilization*). He does not subscribe to the notion that moving images can be enjoyed solely for purposes of entertainment, without acknowledging that viewers take in the symbolic or representational charge images carry. It is his faith in cinema's ability to renew its own aesthetics, his faith in cinema's cultural and political power to educate, that directs his advice to young filmmakers to return to going to the movies, to immerse themselves in cinema's present and past, in its mythic history. Brunetta turns the issue into a civic matter, a question of national and European identity, a sort of rite of passage, of acquiring "filmic citizenship," which must be earned by educating oneself about one's own and other European national cinema histories. Brunetta points to artistic, economic, and political concerns that deserve attention, and while he shows an abundance of confidence in what he names the "nuovi aedi" and "icononauti" storytellers of the future, he indirectly exposes Italy's poor pragmatics in matters of film culture.

The virtually unique, one true film school, in Italy, is the decades-old "Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia" in Cinecittà, in the Italian capital, Rome—although a number of new centers and schools have emerged in the cities of Milan, Florence, Rome, and Naples, among others, aided by the turn to digital equipment and modes. It is the oldest Western European film school we know of, founded in 1935 during Benito Mussolini's rule, and still funded by the Italian government.

⁷ Gian Piero Brunetta, *Il cinema italiano contemporaneo: da "La dolce vita" a "Centochiodi"* (Rome-Bari: Editori Laterza, 2007), 670-86. (Everything ought to be re-figured out, from marketing to storytelling, from the ability to produce myths to the relationship between localisms, regional peculiarities, federalisms and shared supranational problems [...] the notions of belonging and, above all, the notions pertaining to identity and differences. [...] The strongest auspice that one may give [...] is that first of all the young auteurs of Italian cinema know how to earn this new [European] cinema-citizenship, starting to watch movies again, and immerse themselves into its present and past great history).

Unlike North America, where film schools abound in private and public sectors, Italy shows shortsightedness when it comes to film and related arts education, to preserving and promoting the values of its century-old traditions. It has very little to offer to its aspiring filmmakers, the isolated case of the now National Film School of the “Centro Sperimentale” making it very hard and competitive to get training and pursue a career by conventional routes. In this regard, the private initiatives of filmmakers like Ermanno Olmi’s “Ipotesi Cinema” and the ongoing “Scuola di Bassano,” or the training, production, and exhibition center which Sacher Film, headed by Nanni Moretti in Rome, lended itself to in the 1980s and, again, in recent years, are among the few examples of meaningful alternatives. Based on the current context, Italians seem unconcerned with preserving and passing on their cultural heritage in matters of cinema. They appear skeptical, to put it mildly, about the worth of their national story; and they see neither need for, nor faith in, cinema’s promotion of that story. If such is the case, how can there be political will from legislators and administrators to pursue fruitful policies in this regard?

Over the years, Italy’s shaky governments have put at risk the few laws and measures aimed at promoting its cinema. The principal laws and regulations, including the “Decreto Legislativo del 22 gennaio 2004 n. 28,” the “Tax Credit” and the “Tax Shelter,” and various ministerial and regional directives and regulations,⁸ require political stability and action (as well as vigilance) on the part of all parties involved in order to have any durable effect. The *incentivi fiscali* offered by the “Tax Credit” and the “Tax Shelter” provisions are made to provide a source of indirect subsidy for Italian film makers but do not amount to a green light for starting new productions. National cinemas are subject to the vagaries of their home industries and economies and, increasingly, to the globalizing effects of the world’s united communication systems and the global financial markets. In Italy, the restructuring of public and private production and distribution companies is shaped by constant changes on the political scene and shifting economic allegiances in the financial markets of Europe and its foreign investors. It is hardly surprising that at the beginning of the year Franco Montini—a regular writer on the prospects of the Italian cinema—expressed his doubts on the situation in Italy, which threatens to halt productions rather than fostering new ones. Commenting on Medusa’s downsizing due to the closure of movie theaters and the emergence, facilitated by digital innovations, of new and smaller production and distribution ventures Montini explained:

a causa del forte ridimensionamento dell’attività di Medusa, si è esaurita una delle due fonti essenziali di approvvigionamento della produzione. Ma con la fine del duopolio Rai/Mediaset, che ha caratterizzato il panorama produttivo delle recenti stagioni, si è creato un vuoto difficile da colmare. Se poi si aggiunge una realtà segnata da contributi pubblici sempre più scarsi e da un tax shelter a rischio c’è poco da essere ottimisti.⁹

⁸ See the “Normativa” pages of the “Direzione Generale per il Cinema” section at the “Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo” official webpage: <http://www.cinema.beniculturali.it/>. And on the history of the “Articolo 28” see Franco Montini’s article, “Cinema, successi e fallimenti dell’articolo 28,” *la Repubblica*, March 27, 2006, 29.

⁹ “Il cinema italiano salvato da Hollywood meno investimenti, le major colmano il vuoto,” *la Repubblica*, January, 14, 2013, 53: (due to the substantial downsizing of Medusa’s activities, we lost one of the two primary sources of production subsidies. But with the end of the duopoly Rai/Mediaset, which characterized the productive cycles of

The nature of the various laws and economic policies undertaken by a country's legislative body in matters of its arts—in conjunction with the interests of the major investors and players in the sector—can be understood as a direct expression of that country's regard for its cultural heritage. On this front Italy is often shamed by comparisons with France by those who point to Italy's lack of self-esteem compared to the pride of its northern neighbour. While the Italian Republic, through its Constitution, recognizes the artistic and economic value of the medium of the cinema,¹⁰ in praxis and in cultural habits Italians do not support such claims. Italians seek conventional entertainment and by and large do not value and nurture their centers of film culture, the indigenous and autochthonous works of emerging filmmakers. Most prefer to watch TV—or increasingly stare at computer and gadget screens—and Italian television's most popular shows are either built on templates borrowed from American programs, or made of dubbed soap operas and series like *Baywatch*, *The Simpsons*, *Family Guy*, and more recent American sales like *True Blood*, *Supernatural*, *Criminal Minds*, *Vampire Diaries*, and others, some of which are watched via satellite TV. *Videocrazia* passes the scepter to forms of *digitocrazia*.

Cases of Italian broadcasters devoting prime-time space to Italian films pale in comparison to French initiatives; and when Italian broadcasters do commit to prime time shows for Italian films they take the lion's share. As one writer put it: “Anche per quanto riguarda il cinema in Tv nella spesso richiamata Francia i grandi network investono molto di più, limitandosi peraltro al pre-acquisto [...] e non come accade da noi, una situazione in cui le Tv producono, distribuiscono e prendono tutti i diritti di sfruttamento del prodotto.”¹¹ Unlike other neighboring nations, in matters of art and media trends the love Italians feel for their culture appears to be buried under multiple layers of conformist behaviors. To cite another European case, Germany—a country, among others, very much interested in Italian cinema—includes a “cultural eligibility test” in its requirements for film grant applications to the German Federal Film Fund (GFFF) from its own filmmakers, though it supports all film genre categories. How would Italian filmmakers—or viewers, one should also ask—fare in a cultural test aimed at assessing their knowledge and love of Italian cinema? If national cinemas are to survive, it would be imperative to pass such a test. Will the “new wave” of Italian screenwriters and directors take up the cultural-baton of their predecessors, the first, second, and third wave of cineastes who committed their energy and talents to tell the truly Italian story?

recent seasons, a void very hard to grapple with emerged. If we were also to account for ever-more scarce public grants and for a ‘tax shelter’ that risks to disappear there is very little left to be optimistic about).

¹⁰ “1. La Repubblica, in attuazione degli articoli 21 e 33 della Costituzione, riconosce il cinema quale fondamentale mezzo di espressione artistica, di formazione culturale e di comunicazione sociale. 2. Le attività cinematografiche sono riconosciute di rilevante interesse generale, anche in considerazione della loro importanza economica ed industriali.” (*1. The Republic, in force of the articles 21 and 33 of the Constitution, deems the cinema a fundamental means of artistic expression, of cultural education and social communication. 2 The activities pertaining to the cinema are deemed of relevant general interest, also in view of their economic and industrial importance.*) “Codice dei beni culturali e del paesaggio, ai sensi dell'articolo 10 della legge 6 luglio 2002, n. 137,” del *Parlamento Italiano*, January 22, 2004, accessed August 3, 2013, www.parlamento.it/parlam/leggi/deleghe/04042dl.htm.

¹¹ Elena D’Alessandri, “Il cinema in Italia nel 2012,” *Millecanali* (June 25, 2013), http://www.millecanali.it/il-cinema-in-italia-nel-2012/0,1254,57_ART_211613,00.html. (Even with regards to films on TV, in the often cited France the big networks invest much more, limiting themselves to the pre-purchases of rights [...] and not as it is the case in Italy, where TV networks produce, distribute and keep all the sales-rights).

The turn of the century did show some positive signs, including, on the information front, the initiatives brought about by the publisher “il Castoro” and the launch of websites like www.cinemaitaliano.info. Italian film historian Peter Bondanella identifies in the new generation of filmmakers—those born in the sixties or early seventies, and whose debut occurred at the end of the twenty-first century or into the new millennium—promising signs and talents: “[T]he state of Italian cinema in the first decade of the new millennium seems promising [...] [F]ilms appear that raise questions, cause scandals, do well at the box office, and earn international recognition, festival prizes, and critical acclaim.”¹² Among these, Paolo Virzì, the director of films such as *Caterina va in città* (*Caterina in the Big City*, 2003) and *Tutta la vita davanti* (*A Whole Life Ahead*, 2008), appears to be one true heir of the *commedia all’italiana* tradition. Kim Rossi Stuart also made a surprising debut as a director with the dramatic film *Anche libero va bene* (*Libero: Along the Ridge*, 2006), which in some respects offers an update on the social and internal dynamics of the Italian family, as seen in *Il ferroviere* (*The Railroad Man*, 1956) by Pietro Germi, in the Italian realist tradition.¹³ To this day the principal and most popular Italian genres continue to be those of comedy and drama, and while some find critical value in any film that scores success at the box office, the Checco Zalone type of phenomenon brings back memories of Moretti’s diegetic criticism in *Ecce bombo* (1978) of the serializations featuring Alberto Sordi (1920-2003): “Te lo meriti Alberto Sordi!” (*You deserve the Alberto Sordi type!*) Changes in cultural trends and social mores have varyingly informed certain cinematic styles over the years, and the critical significance of their aesthetic and cultural merits is continually, and rightly, placed under scrutiny.

Italy has continued to do well on the technical and artistic sides, such as cinematography, costume and art design, and musical scores. Italian cinema has a tradition of excellence in such fields.¹⁴ Where, then, does Italy need to boost its scores? According to some, a creative sector where Italian cinema seems to be losing traction is the writing department, and the reason most often given is money, not talent.¹⁵ The script indeed has been, at different times, and in many cases still is, the number-one problem in several national cinemas, including those of Italy, Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Canada to cite a North American example. Money is undoubtedly an important and motivating factor, as the American writing budgets suggest, but is it ultimately the reason for Italy’s misses or missed-hits? What are the benchmarks or standards that authorize us to regard a national cinema as mediocre? When does a national cinema become mediocre? Several experts in the field, including directors, scriptwriters, producers, critics and film scholars, give particularly low marks to Italian film scripts, suggesting the sapping of ideas and a loss of solid writing. In the past, Italy’s renowned scriptwriters—Cesare Zavattini (1902-1989), Tullio Pinelli (1908-2009), Suso Cecchi D’Amico (1914-2010), Tonino Guerra (1920-2012), Ugo Pirro (1920-2008), and Ennio De Concini (1923-2008), among others, some of whom also produced works of

¹² Peter Bondanella, *A History of Italian Cinema* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 559.

¹³ On the direction of Italian cinema in the new millennium see: Anthony Cristiano, “Silvio Soldini’s *Giorni e nuvole* and Paolo Sorrentino’s *Il divo*: The Differing Styles and Chief Directions of the New Italian Cinema?” *La Libellula* 4 (December 2012): 36-49, <http://www.lalibellulaitalianistica.it/blog/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Anthony-Cristiano.pdf>.

¹⁴ Even critics who may be cynical towards Italian cinema will recognize the outstanding craftsmanship and talents of several Italian artists: Vittorio Storaro, Giuseppe Rotunno, Dante Spinotti, Piero Tosi, Danilo Donati, Milena Canonero, Dante Ferretti, Ennio Morricone, and Nicola Piovani—to mention only a few—are among the world’s most admired professionals of the industry in their respective fields.

¹⁵ Roberto Faenza, “Cinema italiano: Roberto Faenza, ‘serve il coraggio di nuove idee,’” *Nanni Magazine, Cronaca Cinema* (March 14, 2012), <http://www.nannimagazine.it/notizie/cultura-e-spettacoli/cinema/cronaca-cinema/14/03/2012/cinema-italiano-roberto-faenza-serve-il-coraggio-di-nuove-idee/8274>.

literature—scored international success for their terse and robust writing, the apparent simplicity of which betrayed an intellectual depth and breadth rarely seen in contemporary Italian cinema. According to one authoritative opinion, that of Suso Cecchi D’Amico, as reported in a 2005 interview on the *Corriere della Sera*, the poverty lies in the conceptualization of Italian projects, their writing, their aims and their style, but not in monetary resources:

Per far rinascere il cinema italiano in un momento così poco interessante e così poco creativo l’ideale sarebbe azzerare tutto [...] Niente finanziamenti statali, nessun aiuto obbligato, nessuna concessione da parte del sistema politico, comunale o governativo che sia. È l’unica strada percorribile per dare la possibilità a chi ha davvero buone idee e buoni progetti di vederli realizzati.¹⁶

If some value is to be found in the provocative words of “the dean” of the arts of Italian scriptwriting, the issues facing national cinemas are those of national identity and culture. The depletion of ideas is related to matters of historical cognizance and cultural worth. It is a state of poverty within that is being pointed to as the “condition” in need of some cure. The richness found, in theory and practice, in predecessors like Zavattini, D’Amico, and Olmi, resides in their cultural identity, a regional cultural identity it might be stressed, and in their ability to project a universal humanness : to relate to the universal via the particular and the local. The debut films mentioned at the beginning of this article show positive signs in the writing department; the films scored success on different fronts, *Io sono Li* for the breadth of its cross-cultural and economic dilemmas and *Corpo celeste* for the depth of its existential and socio-religious conundrums.

Cotroneo’s debut film—on some aspects of which he elaborates in the interview below, along with information about his own career as a scriptwriter and first-time director—is likewise an example of good writing, that of a contemplative and introverted *affabulatore* who digs into his memories to summon up a peculiar picture of 1970s Naples. His film bears the signs of a director-in-training, one in the process of learning to develop a personal signature, but his approach in some respects recalls Ettore Scola’s. Though as a scriptwriter, Cotroneo has written a number of films for TV and the cinema—some of which have been very successful—it would be unfair to provide a critical assessment of his work as a first-time director. Many among the new generation of Italian filmmakers are still working at their *opera seconda*, and only a sufficient body of work will reveal the merits of their aesthetic, formal, and thematic concerns. At that time Cotroneo may become more cognizant of the decisions a director makes, and discern the “how” and “what” of his work in clearer terms, whereby his “making use of” a certain item or approach is driven by a process of selection, one formal strategy opposed to another, aimed at achieving an intended goal. Italian first-time directors are not alone in confounding the mastery of their directorial approaches with their thematic aims. Homologization and conformity to dominant models and trends are the nemeses of colorful cultural differences. Aesthetic strategies and formal distinctions are critical to

¹⁶ Barbara Palombelli, “Non date soldi al cinema: rinascerà,” *Corriere della Sera*, October 8, 2005, 41. (To make Italian cinema live again—at a time when there appears be little creativity and interest for it—the ideal thing would be to start over [...] No governmental grants, no mandatory help, no assents from the political system, at the city or federal levels. It is the only possible route to give the possibility to whom has really good ideas and good projects to see them realized).

the extent that they contribute to identifying the ‘character of’ the medium, its abilities and its distinct cultural or civic function. Similar differences entail the discrimination of distinguishing traits that contribute to aesthetic, cultural, and ethic integrity. They contribute to identifying a sense of community and nationhood.

A century of commodifying aims on the part of economic forces has impoverished the arts, including cinema. If, as part of this same process, cultural traits and the diverse identities they subtend were to become meaningless, the regional arts would no longer have any explicatory function or reason to exist. The crucial question then may be: Will national cinemas succeed in maintaining their distinct characteristics, separate from those of satellite television and globalizing Internet trends? Will they find in new media a space to play their traditional aesthetic roles? If national cinemas are to survive in the current global and media climate there seems to be agreement that they ought to regenerate and renew themselves. As Millicent Marcus, among others, pointed out back in 2002, by “identifying the signs of renewal in the *lingua materna* of the cinema” the critic—and I would add the filmmaker and the viewers in their respective roles—can help “cultivate an appropriate level of receptivity.”¹⁷ She fittingly cites Maurizio Nichetti’s film *Ladri di saponette* (*The Icicle Thief*, 1989) as an articulation of the ongoing “battle” between Italy’s renowned cinematic tradition and TV’s homologizing effect for solely commercial ends. The implications of Nichetti’s “parable” may be understood as an illustration of the widening gap between two worldviews and modes of expression, which in the eighties were those of TV and the (lost) tradition of the cinema. The evolution of media trends and practices has a direct bearing on cultural identity, on personal and collective expressions of being, on “who” we are as a people and “how” and “what” we are as nations. Today, despite some positive signs, we are at a new crossroad, a forked path, and posing the ongoing question of the fundamental role of the cinema amounts to asking ourselves once again questions pertaining to individual identity and national story. If we were to compare the cinema to a pun in Borges’ labyrinth, losing the cinema would make it easier for us to get out of the current maze, but it would also leave us poorer in the end. The alternative is to work on the script: “because good writing belongs to no one in particular, not even to my other [whether rich or poor, big or small], but rather to language and tradition.”¹⁸

Ivan Cotroneo began his career as a writer with renowned Italian publishing firm Bompiani, and published his first novel *Il re del mondo* (*The King of the World*) in 2003. After quitting his law studies in Naples he moved to Rome and graduated at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in scriptwriting. He has since written several screenplays for both TV and Film, including *Mine vaganti* (*Loose Cannons*, 2010), which won the “Globo d’Oro” the same year in the best-screenplay category the script of which also earned Cotroneo the 2011 “Premio Suso Cecchi D’Amico,” and the “Premio Tonino Guerra.” In the same year he directs his first feature film *La kryptonite nella borsa* (*Kryptonite!*), from the eponymous third novel he published with Bompiani in 2007, and produced by the Indigo Film firm founded 1994 by three fellow attendees of the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome, Nicola Giuliano, Francesca Cima, and Carlotta Calori. The following interview with Ivan Cotroneo was conducted in Italian at the TIFF Lightbox in 2012, while he attended the Canadian premiere of his film at the Toronto Italian Film Festival.

¹⁷ Millicent Marcus, *After Fellini: National Cinema in the Postmodern Age* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2002), 8.

¹⁸ Jorge Luis Borges, “Borges and I,” in *Jorge Luis Borges: Selected Poems*, trans. Kenneth Krabbenhoft, ed. Alexander Coleman (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 92-93.

Interview Conducted at the Toronto International Film Festival Lightbox, King Street, Toronto (Canada):

Ivan Cotroneo: My name is Ivan Cotroneo, and we are in Toronto right now, where I've come to attend the first annual Italian Film Festival. Today is June 27, 2012.

Anthony Cristiano: The first thing I'd like to ask is how you fell in love with cinema? What brought you to it? I know you're a screenwriter, what led you to want to take on also directing?

IC: Well, first of all my parents took me to the movies a lot. We lived in Naples, and our idea of going out, my parents' idea of going out and letting me have some fun, was to take me to the movies rather than to the park; so as a child I saw many films. And they had these odd criteria regarding the kind of movies that they took me to. Many of the films were not suitable for my age. They treated me as a mature viewer. I saw *Frenzy* (Alfred Hitchcock) when it came out: that was in 1972, so I was four. In other words, I saw films made for people much older than myself. And I've always been in love with cinema, an enthusiast spectator. I didn't take Cinema Studies at the university, I studied Law... I had this passion for writing, and the cinema and my writing passion complemented each other. So just before committing to Law, I recognized that, in fact, I would have been happier doing something else, that is, writing, working in film. So I applied to the *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia*, where you have to pass a test to get in, and where, at the time, every two years, they took only six students into the scriptwriting program. I was very lucky because the Admissions Committee consisted of two people: Suso Cecchi D'Amico and Age (Agenor Incrocci), who read what I had written; and subsequently I was given a test. I told them how important cinema was for me and from there, in 1990, at the age of twenty-two, I began to study cinema, in Rome. And at the *Centro*, at the school, I also caught up on all the things I didn't know; there was a video-library and lots of screenplays. My teachers were Age, Suso Cecchi D'Amico, Nicola Badalucco, Giorgio Arlorio: people who wrote and made the history of Italian cinema. So I began to write. I began to write screenplays; I published books. But I always liked the set, so much so that afterwards, when I completed my studies at the *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia*, the first job I found was that of assistant director to Pappi Corsicato for two of his films, *Libera* (*Free*, 1993) and *I buchi neri* (*The Black Holes*, 1995). Then I continued to write, and I kept going to film sets—when I could, when the directors allowed me to—as I wrote. And a few years ago Francesca Cima and Nicola Giuliano—the producers of Paolo Sorrentino's films, but also of *La ragazza del lago* (*The Girl by the Lake*, 2007) and *La doppia ora* (*The Double Hour*, 2009)—read the novel I wrote, *La kryptonite nella borsa* (Bompiani, 2007), and they thought that it might be a good story for a movie. So I was involved as a writer, and we started to talk about the plot, that significant changes that would be made to the novel; but I felt very close to the story, so I began to tell them how I saw the 1970s' setting, the kind of wardrobe for the actors, the design of the sets, the lighting, the colors, the actors, etc. At one point, seeing how confident I was, they looked at me and said, "Well, why not do it yourself?" And so I made the decision, I felt that talking to them about the project made me realize how close I was to the subject matter, the character of which, as I said yesterday, is a partially autobiographical story, at least in the matter of setting. I lived all my childhood in Naples, so I decided to accept the offer. I was offered at other times the opportunity to direct the screenplays I had written, but even when I wrote them, I never felt so close, so confident as in this case. So I said "yes," and the transition—from screenwriter to

director—was a most beautiful experience, so much so that I can't wait to direct my second film. I love working as a writer for others, helping other filmmakers make their films, write out their worlds, but I really enjoyed this new adventure, that of directing, and now I'm writing my second film as I contemporaneously keep writing for others.

AC: *I'd say your film is a comedy, and I thought it part of the Commedia all'italiana tradition, updated in matter of forms and themes—though it is set in the seventies, from the point-of-view of a new century. Do you then relate, as a director, to any of these and, considering this is your debut film, are you inspired by one particular director, in the history of Italian cinema?*

IC: I admire many of them, even the ones who are apparently very distant from my own way of seeing things, from what I have done. I like very much the great masters of Italian cinema, obviously. I'm in love with Visconti, Pasolini, and Fellini's films, I like the comedies written by Age and Scarpelli (Agenore Incrocci and Furio Scarpelli),¹⁹ including the ones for Scola, and I'm thinking of *La terrazza* (*The Terrace*, 1980), and *C'eravamo tanto amati* (*We All Loved Each Other So Much*, 1974). I also like—and hope to be able to show this influence in my own work—(Pietro) Germi's regional style. *Sedotta e abbandonata* (*Seduced and Abandoned*, 1964) is one of my cult films, as well as *Io la conoscevo bene* (*I Knew Her Well*, Antonio Pietrangeli, 1965). I like very much the attention paid by the screenwriters of the time—Suso Cecchi D'Amico, truly the greatest Italian screenwriter of all time, but also writers Age and Scarpelli—the particular attention they paid to female characters, which I try to place in my film, both the films I write and the one I directed. And at the same time—along with all this—my film education is also partly indebted to American independent cinema, or some minor strand of European cinema. So that my first film, for example—which is certainly influenced by the Italian tradition—in my opinion is also influenced by films like *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006), or *My Life as a Dog* (1985) by Lasse Halström, as well as films by John Boorman such as *Deliverance* (1972) As a viewer, how shall I put it...? I'm certainly imbued with the tradition of Italian cinema, but I also think that my cinematic education has been enriched, gradually, by so many other outside influences. The same is true for my writing; as a writer I feel very close to certain twentieth-century storytellers, Elsa Morante, Raffaele La Capria, all the way to (Pier Vittorio) Tondelli, but I read and have absorbed the typical American minimalist style, from (Raymond) Carver, from (Bret) Easton Ellis. It's funny how these influences combine too, how this contamination becomes conspicuous in my film: I suppose through the choice of music, the choices I made for a certain type of comedy, which is very local, because the film is set in Naples but in a sense also has its own attraction, so that my film—which is certainly a realistic film in many respects—shows digressions into fantasy, a child's

¹⁹ Age and Scarpelli were the scriptwriters of *commedia all'italiana* masterworks directed by Mario Monicelli, Luigi Comencini, Dino Risi, and Ettore Scola, among others. For an overview of these Italian comedies and the history of Italy during the 'economic boom' see Veronica Rota's "Lo specchio della vita: cinema e pubblico nell'Italia del boom" in *Storia Contemporanea* A.A. 1999/2000. Online. <http://digilander.libero.it/vera77/tesine/storia/boom.pdf>; and Stefano Leoncini's "Les génériques et incipits des « comédies historiques » italiennes (1959-1963) : un défi de composition" in *Cahiers de narratologie* 19 (2010). Online. <http://narratologie.revues.org/6159>.

imagination—the Superman who comes back to life in the child’s imagination—it includes dream-like scenes that point to other styles of cinema.

AC: Yes, I can certainly see the influence of the Italian tradition, even though there’s this turn toward fantasy. From a formal point of view though—the editing, the photography, the development of the story—in matters of form are you more imbued with American aesthetics, if you were to distinguish the dominant influence between the two?

IC: No, I can’t really make this distinction between form and narrative. I actually think that form *is* narrative, you get a sense of this by looking at the way I make use of music, which is quite different from how Italians use it: there are ballets, musical sequences, similar to—if we think of styles found in Europe—how a French director would use them. The French are very fond of the connection between music and form, which is also related to narration. The “ghost” character in my film, for example, resembles the character of Carmen Maura in *Volver* by Almodóvar. In my film, though, the role of women, as I see it, has a lot to do with the way Rossellini depicted women in his films, the women of Rossellini’s cinema, and also some of the women in Visconti’s films: that kind of passion, of unreleased power. In the cinema that I like, form is an important part of the story, I can’t separate it from the unfolding of the story; as a viewer, I very much like to see form coincide with content. I do not believe form to be separate from or an overlay onto the story—like something that shows how good the writer is in writing a story, or how good the director is in designing the camerawork. The camera movements, the visual strategy and so forth, make sense, rather, because they all have a very strong narrative sense. The first time Truffaut did this, it was perceived as a shock at the formal level. During the interrogation of the child protagonist, in *The Four Hundred Blows* (1959), he gives you only a close-up of the child throughout, never a reverse-shot: this is a very daring formal choice, and yet one doesn’t perceive it as a formal choice because in reality it’s a narrative choice. As I see it, this type of form is part of the narrative. And yet I think both arguments are valid. For example, I wasn’t familiar with the use they made of pop songs: the way in which the Stefania Sandrelli character²⁰ takes her life—formally, a very new way for that time, and still very modern—which has little to do with the *Commedia all’italiana* tradition; it looks much more like some contemporary French cinema, rather.

AC: At a subconscious level—state of mind which you may or may not be aware of—you may have been influenced by scenes from Fellini’s films. For example, when the child is learning how to pronounce certain words one may think of *Amarcord* (1973). And for the idea of the imaginary friend one thinks of American cinema, its “abuse” of this topos; it’s not something uniquely Italian. The American movies you may have watched...

IC: Definitely. I think that what we love transforms us. I love Fellini. And a certain kind of American cinema has transformed the way I see things. I hope so, because I’m convinced that the beautiful experiences we have, as readers or viewers, transform us, so that they end up affecting what we write. I would be a very sad reader if I thought that what I read did not affect the way I write, and likewise as a spectator when I see a movie I like I feel different, after seeing it; I may have seen something I didn’t know about, and this new, different, thing leads me, even subconsciously, to find inspiration in that kind of beauty.

²⁰ Here Cotroneo is speaking of Antonio Pietrangeli’s 1965 film *Io la conoscevo bene* (*I Knew Her Well*)—mentioned earlier in the interview—and of the diegetic and extra-diegetic use of period pop music in the soundtrack of the same, which among other things works as a sort of *contrappunto* and even contrast to the development of the narrative.

AC: What would you say contemporary cinema is telling us about Italy? Your film in some respects is an autobiographical film, and tells stories of the Seventies. As such it conveys your ideas about those years, your own very personal way of reviewing the seventies, because we all have our own stories to tell, personal memories. Yet, in making the film your vision begins with, or is positioned by, the perspective of 2010, or 2011: and so what do you think this film says about Italy's contemporary state of affairs, even though it is a film about 1973?

IC: This is a very interesting question. I made this film about the 1970s after having written other films on those years, *La prima linea* (*The Front Line*, 2009), which deals with the tragedy of terrorism, and *Paz* (2002), which had to do with how heroin destroyed the younger generation. But I wanted to convey the oneiric element of the seventies, the dream of liberty and freedom, the transformation of the female figure in society, all the promises that were broken by a culture increasingly based on money and image-making. Telling about the seventies for me also meant telling about a period very close to us, but very distant from a social point of view, a time when one had a much more relaxed relationship with one's body, for example. We were not subjected to rigid behavioral patterns as we are today; it was a world in which creativity and personal happiness, the realization of a career, did not depend strictly on the amount of money one could earn. So I tried to tell, how should I put it... to retell those years not with any sense of nostalgia, but rather with a sense of regret. In this way it is a sort of political story of contemporary Italy, by contrast, because today we are completely overwhelmed by physical and behavioral models, by capitalist models, because today no young person chooses a job based on what makes them happy, but only on the basis of how much money it earns you. For me, telling about the seventies, on the one hand, is a way to try to do justice to the beauty of those years, the things I haven't written about, and on the other, it's a way to say that a state of happiness that goes beyond the assessment of how rich, beautiful, thin, or like an advertising model one is, is possible. I believe that contemporary Italian cinema, through various forms, tries to speak the discomfort we live in today. This discomfort is sometimes focused on a specific theme, (Emanuele) Crialesi's cinema recounts the discomfort generated by unjust Italian laws for foreigners, immigration rejection laws; or films like *Gomorra* (*Gomorra*, 2008) on cultural and environmental devastation. But also when we make Italy's brand of comedies: Verdone's latest film that talks about the end of relationships and the generation of males between thirty-five and forty-five who are unable to cope with life's challenges. I think that we all try to talk, in different forms, through drama, comedy, or more realistic themes, about the hardships we live through in today's Italy—an Italy which we all pretty much would like somewhat different than what it has become.

AC: A quick question that springs from what you just said. Wouldn't you agree that you romanticized a little the image of those years?

IC: Definitely, definitely. I have a rather romantic idea of the seventies, and also of Naples. I became somewhat aware of this while I was filming, and then it became conspicuous when I saw the finished film. For example, the image of Naples in the film, which is a partly true and partly fictionalized image, even embellished if you will, is born out of my impatience to see my city constantly represented via unflattering news reports, always, as it were, in a strictly realistic fashion. I believe that the truth of those years can be seen through different perspectives and not only through their tragedies, terrorism, drugs, etc., but also in a film about the hippies of the seventies; as always the truth affords us multiple points of view.

AC: With regard to Italian law, at the time when you went from being exclusively a screenwriter to directing your first film, the laws on cinema, Articles 28.8, etc., all those measures that should help one make films, what do you think of these provisions, of the current policy? How

difficult was it? Was there a lot of pressure on a debut film, a film that had to score success in order to allow you to continue, to make a second? What are the pros and what are the criticisms of the Italian situation in terms of law?

IC: Well, I have been very fortunate in that I have worked with producers who, in addition to being very good, have a conviction, which they constantly express in their work. I speak of Nicola Giuliano and Francesca Cima, who think that—they have made important debut films, such as (Paolo) Sorrentino's, (Andrea) Molaioli's—a new director ought to be helped when making his first film. At the time of the first film, one needs more resources. That it, it is wrong, according to my producers, for a director to be left to do as best as he (or she) can with little means, and if that were the case he would never get to move forward and make his second film. The debut film is the opportunity to show a director's worth. I've been supported by them in that I was allowed abundant time for pre-production and a long and convenient shooting schedule. They acted in such a way—the last movie they released before producing mine was an international co-production, *This Must Be the Place* (2011), starring Sean Penn, Sorrentino's film—as to expend their talents to support me, a first-time director who is known as a writer but not as a director. This allowed us to make the film with a little help reserved for first films, about 400,000 Euros if I'm not mistaken. The point is that we're in a dire situation in Italy in terms of laws, in that in Italy we have no law for the cinema. I am part of an association called "100 Autori"²¹ that is fighting for legislation on matters of cinema, which we do not have at the moment. We're not asking for State grants, but to be given working conditions, to be given the economic tools that would enable us to make films. We're asking for a "Credit Pact" like those existing in any respected national cinema, as in France for example. We ask that those who earn capital from our work—the various firms—be obligated to invest in a new production with the money they have earned. Rather than asking for grants, we're asking for legislation that makes it cost-effective to invest in cinema. We ask that the movie theaters within the cities be preserved. We ask that Italian distribution not be overpowered by giant companies, especially American *colossi*—that put out eight hundred copies of a film at a time, making it impossible for us to be competitive. We ask for an entire set of laws—which in France, for example, are the rule, and which allow French cinema to be more combative than our cinema—laws that facilitate the process of making films. We have a small film industry, and it is in trouble. It is an asset in our country that employs hundreds of thousands of people, and it needs help, not humanitarian aid, but laws that make it attractive for an entrepreneur to invest in cinema. At the moment, the actions of such entrepreneurs are not seen as an investment for cultural purposes. We need more visibility for our cinema, for our films, because when an American blockbuster is released, with eight hundred copies at a time, there are no laws that require a multiplex owner to schedule a local film, a film produced domestically, in the same nation where the movie theater is located; again, in France, for example, there is such a law. In France television networks are obliged to broadcast the films in prime time (those produced in France), something that is missing in Italy. This obligation is constantly ignored because there is no regulation, that is, there is a legal basis for it but no rules that spell out what happens to a television network that doesn't comply. In France, we have Sky with networks dedicated to cinema, and which continually broadcasts Italian

²¹ The "100 Autori" (Associazione della autorialità cinetelevisiva—Association for authors of cinema and television works) is a Roman based association of scriptwriters and directors of both fiction and documentary works for TV, film, and new media. It was founded in 2008 and it counts 500 registered members. Its chief objective is solidarity among visual artists who endeavor to solicit Italian new laws in matters of media, that guarantee high quality and competitive shows. <http://www.100autori.it/> Accessed August 4, 2013.

films; yet Sky is not obliged to invest in the production of Italian cinema. In Italy, we have a quite disastrous situation: we are waiting for legislation that would organize all of this, that would allow our industry to grow and support itself. From the point of view of the state of the arts, with respect to talents, I am very happy. The year in which I made my debut film saw several very interesting debut films, which have been hits with critics and/or audiences. That was also the year in which Garrone won the Grand Jury Prize at Cannes, and the year in which the Taviani brothers won the Golden Bear in Berlin. Our cinema is in very good health in terms of talent. We need to be considered a proper industry that has its own laws and regulations.

AC: Laws do exist, though; there is a lot of documentation on the subject. Up until last year, there were the Tax Shelter and Credit laws. When you speak of the need for laws, you're not ignoring that there are a number that already exist?

IC: Well no, because the Tax Shelter and Tax Credit we had require renewal each time, every six months. As long as the Tax Credit needs to be renewed every six months, it is impossible for any production to put out a film.

AC: Other points I'd like to bring up: apparently Italians do not like Italian films. Why? Why won't they go to see Italian films? You may remember the legal problems of Cecchi Gori at the beginning of the new millennium, for example. Is there a reason for Italians not to watch Italian films, to ignore the history of Italian cinema? Italian films are watched more in the south than in the north of the country, according to ANICA statistics. Why do the majority of Italians, between an Italian film and an American film, prefer to watch the American one?

IC: I have several explanations for this: first of all, we live in a country that does not have a high regard for culture—especially in recent years, thanks to the politicians we had. We heard government ministers say that “you can’t support yourself with culture,” which is an absurdity because culture allows many people to make a living. “Cultural operators,” as they are called in Italy—even a (theater or film) electrician is a cultural operator because he or she takes part in a creative process and cultural work—in different ways earn and support themselves with this kind of work. Partly, Italians read less than their European counterparts; they read very little. There is no cultural policy; (Italy is) a country so rich in art history, in artistic heritage; this is not sufficiently valued. We’ve always had to manage, as best as we could. I’m not surprised that the public prefers to see a foreign film, which is highly publicized, which comes out in eight hundred copies, which has the support of powerful firms that can invest in it. I believe we should forge a cultural policy that begins with school programs. For instance—it’s much easier to understand at the present time—the film *Terraferma* (*Mainland*, 2011) that questions immigration policies. I believe that in any history course of twentieth-century Italian cinema, it should be mandatory to see Visconti’s *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (*Rocco and His Brothers*, 1960), to understand what we have been. If today’s kids, sixteen- and fifteen-year-olds, saw *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* and knew that it depicts the history of Italy, the Italy of fifty years ago, they would think twice before mistreating—generalizing of course—people different from them, besides the way Northern Italians mistreat Southern Italians. There are a number of reasons, and I believe that we should, in some respects, re-found Italy, civilly.

AC: Re-educate it?

IC: Re-educate it, yes. As a kid I remember studying *Educazione Civica* (Civics) at school; it included many topics. We should make use of literature and cinema as teaching tools, to show that we are the same people, those who now kick immigrants out of Italy. We are the same people who, in times of hardship, sought help in several other countries, including Canada, in fact. We’ve had our own difficulties. I believe that we lack this type of programming, we fail to consider a film

as a work of art; besides being industrial products, besides comedies made for entertainment purposes, films tell us about the time in which we live in, and they tell it very well. They have served us historically very well for this purpose and can do so again now. Obviously we are living a transitional moment, globally. The existence of movie theaters, watching a film in a movie theater as a custom, is being threatened. I know I represent the retro-guard, because I'm a nostalgic; I think of the film as a ritual you perform with other people. Of course, I'm happy to have the chance to watch as many times as I like all the movies I want on DVD, in the original language. But for me, watching a movie, fundamentally, means going to the cinema.

AC: You're probably aware of the charge that Italian directors and scriptwriters are too Americanized. The Americanization of Italy, beginning with the time of Rossellini and De Sica, with the Marshal Plan—Eduardo De Filippo brought up the issue humorously—with the American films that we missed during the war, the film noir they had made. There is also the fact that Americans polarize the industry worldwide and that they tend to have the final say on what happens to the Italian films as well. For example, even Crialesse's film, which I have seen and which I knew dealt with a major issue: after being awarded the David of Donatello prizes etc., and being presented by the Italian authorities as the Oscar-candidate film, we received some shocking news. The Italian newspapers wrote about it: why was it rejected? Officially, there is only one category for the rest of the world—even though they've given other prizes before to Italians, directing, acting, etc.—the category of "foreign film." How do you think Italian writers and directors should act—not politically, because you're not a politician—in order to be true to themselves, if this is the problem? So as to not be Americanized, in matters of language and forms, I speak of form and themes, how can they not be enslaved by the American model, so as not to fall into the trap of the "not-a-good-enough-film otherwise the Americans would have nominated it"?

IC: Yes, I believe there is only one possible path, which is that of—I think of myself, but I would think this applies to others as well—being true to ourselves, true to the stories we want to tell, and to how we want to tell them. I do not believe that the great historical authors, and I'm thinking of Fellini, ever wondered if opening *8 1/2* (1963) with the dream sequence he could be understood, if it could be suitable for an American audience, or to a European audience, or if only he and his wife would have appreciated it (or his psychoanalyst who knew her dreams). I believe he was eager to do something close to his heart and make it the way he saw it; I do not believe it is useful to pursue the approval of someone else, or look for a success formula. I do not think there are any recipes for a box-office success, for critical acclaim, or for making a good movie. All we can do is try to do our work as conscientiously as possible. I see my work as that of telling a story to a receptive listener, because if I think of telling the story just for myself, it's like being locked in an empty room with one's own monologue—my work would be meaningless. The work that I do automatically brings me to try to tell a story, to seek an audience, even just one person, someone to tell my stories to.

AC: How do you imagine your ideal viewer to be?

IC: I know neither the age nor the passions of this person. I like to think of a viewer who, in a movie theater, wants to be captivated by the story, without having to impose any ideas on my part, such as my ideas or ideas that are understood as my own, someone to whom I can tell a story with fascinating characters, possibly, characters that make viewers laugh and cry, that move them, interesting characters, with a story that possibly surprises them, or that they do not know. I believe this is all we can do; we cannot, or it would be a big mistake to try to, be different from what we are. As in life, you must not change in order to please someone, or to try to be loved by someone.

We can only do our best to show the person who we actually are. And if this has some value, it will meet up with someone on the other side.

AC: Good. Ivan, thanks for the interview, which gives me a chance to “check the pulse,” as they say here in Canada, from the point of view of someone working in the Italian film industry. Is there anything else you’d like to add, any confession you’d like to make, some secret you’d like to reveal on the *Kryptonite nella borsa*, ha, ha?

IC: Not really. I’d like to add only one thing, about yesterday’s screening, that touched me here in Toronto. I was here a few years ago to present two films, one was *Io sono l’amore* (*I Am Love*, 2009), and the other was *La prima linea* at the TIFF (Toronto International Film Festival). It gave the impression of a festival very different from all the other film festivals I’ve gone to; a festival that the city supported. I felt that the success of the TIFF lay not so much in the big movie stars, the great directors, or the quality of the films I watched—which, however, was very high—but in the fact that it was a festival experienced very much by the city. I felt it to be a city made up of people who wanted to get into a movie theater—and not wait for the release of the film on DVD and watch it on a computer screen—sometimes even in the early hours of the morning, at eight o’clock, and be there to live this experience together. This is the type of audience, a very passionate audience, I found once again gathered to watch my film yesterday evening. A very special audience.

AC: Different from Italian festival audiences?

IC: Yes, different from the Italian festival experience; yes, more involved. I saw something similar—among the festivals that I’ve been to—at the Festival del Cinema di Roma, where I presented the *La kryptonite nella borsa*. That too is a festival where the city is very involved; more than the critics, the participation of the city is really what matters. But here in Toronto, it is raised to the highest power. And this, besides delighting me very much, gave me a lot of confidence, because it reminds me that telling a story can be a beautiful thing, that there is a world of people out there waiting to receive a story. This, for those who do the kind of work I do, is very stimulating.

AC: Very good. I have another question, if you could answer very briefly, I’d like to ask you names of old-guard directors, I speak of those born after WWII or during the war. Is there a living Italian director or directors—if you could mention two or three names—and then one or two Europeans and/or Americans who inspire you, or who you think are pointing in the right direction?

IC: Rather than being inspired, I would say that there are a few directors whose work I always go to see because I find their work important for me and for my life; even if my own cinema is very different, their work seems to exert a great influence on me. I’m thinking of Bertolucci—Bertolucci’s filmography has accompanied my life—of Gianni Amelio and Marco Bellocchio. They are, in my opinion, the great masters of the old guard, whom we fortunately still have with us, who make interesting films that I can’t wait to see. I saw *Io e te* (*Me and You*, 2012) by Bertolucci, a beautiful film; I saw *Il primo uomo* (*The First Man*, 2011) by Amelio; it is a film of a superb vitality. I’m very much looking forward to seeing Bellocchio’s new film, *Bella addormentata* (*Dormant Beauty*, 2012).

AC: You haven’t mentioned (Ermanno) Olmi...

IC: No, I haven’t. I must say that Olmi—whom I respect a lot as a director, and admire—is a director to whom I feel less close, emotionally, than Bertolucci. I will remember, for the rest of my life, the first time I saw *La strategia del ragno* (*The Spider’s Stratagem*, 1970), or *Novecento* (1900, 1976), or...

AC: *Ultimo tango a Parigi* (*Last Tango in Paris*, 1972)?

IC: *Tango in Paris* of course. Just as I remember my first vision of *I pugni in tasca* (*Fists in the Pocket*, 1965), as I remember the excitement in seeing *Il ladro di bambini* (*Stolen Children*,

1992), or *Le porte aperte* (*Open Doors*, 1990), or *Lamerica* (1994), it's not that I don't like Olmi's cinema, he's a master of Italian cinema; but for some reason, the work of the directors I mentioned resonates more in me. Among the European directors that interest me a lot—though you specifically asked for living directors—a director who no longer lives who has transformed my life is definitely Fassbinder. Among the living directors, I'm interested in a certain French cinema, for example that of (André) Téchiné whom I really like. I'm interested in Almodóvar, obviously, a particular part of his filmography. And in England, I would say Ken Loach.

AC: Thanks, Ivan.

IC: Thanks very much.

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