

The Cinematographic Face of Garibaldi

Fascist Propaganda as a Model for the War to Come¹

Bruno Surace

Introduction

Cinema has occupied a peculiar position in the propaganda strategies adopted by authoritarian and totalitarian states. In fact, if we analyze the three most famous 20th-century dictatorships (German Nazism, Italian Fascism and Soviet Communism), we see in all of them a particular form of encoding of film messages during the periods of the regime.² The purpose of this contribution is to investigate the Italian manifestation, and especially the strategies implemented in the creation of cinematographic propaganda on the Garibaldi-Risorgimento theme. In this regard, I will discuss, with the help of different disciplines, *Il grido dell'aquila* (1923, dir. Mario Volpe (1894–1968))

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² See, for example, Andrea Giuseppe Muratore, *L'arma più forte: Censura e ricerca del consenso nel cinema del ventennio fascista* (Cosenza: Pellegrini editore, 2017); Francesco Fabiani, *Cineprese di regime: Il cinema nei regimi fascista, nazista e sovietico* (Brescia: Temperino rosso, 2017); David Gillespie, *Early Soviet Cinema: Innovation, Ideology and Propaganda* (London/New York: Wallflower, 2000); Richard Taylor, *The Politics of Soviet Cinema: 1917–1929* (London/New York/Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Linda Schulte-Sasse, *Entertaining the Third Reich: Illusions of Wholeness in Nazi Cinema* (Durham, NC/London: Duke University Press, 1996); Eric Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and its Afterlife* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

and *1860* (1934, dir. Alessandro Blasetti (1900–1987)), both films that make the Garibaldian motif their thematic fulcrum and which are relevant from the point of view of a historiographical analysis of the merits of Fascist propaganda. The aim is to provide insight on the use of the means of communication in the historical epoch of the Fascist regime and to propose a historical framework that transcends simplistic opinions as to merits and restores complexity, both at an aesthetic-hermeneutic level and at a historical-sociological one, to the debate regarding the devices deployed in the creation of specific messages by the Mussolinian propaganda organs.

Propaganda during the Fascist regime was, as is understandable in an authoritarian state model, pervasive. It touched on multiple media and social life spheres, from the anchoring of Catholic sensitivities (which had been tense since the capture of Rome and had become increasingly troubled thanks to the climate of conflict initiated by Pope Pius IX's (1792–1878) rejection of the Legge delle Guarentigie (1871), or the Law of Guarantees) to the state through the gargantuan operation of the Lateran Pacts (1929), to the intense symbolic intervention on urban spatiality that was invested with the values promoted by the regime, both in a purely linguistic-toponymic key (Predappio, in Emilia-Romagna, for example, was apostrophized as the «city of the Duce») and certainly also from an architectural point of view through the operations highlighted by George Mosse, among others, in his *The Nationalization of the Masses* (1975).

There were also interventions in education, sport, and any other form of cultural activity that could in some way contribute to the formation of a sought-after shared imaginary capable of conveying adhesion—and conviction—to Benito Mussolini's (1883–1945) conception of the state. As can be easily understood, cinema was not exempt from certain more or less evident processes of manipulation, either in its forms or in its contents, even if it should be specified that Mussolini was not immediately aware of the propaganda scope of this medium, since he »did not rate fictional cinema as highly as he did

documentary, and did not follow the example of Hitler and Stalin who took over cinema as soon as they came to power.³

The dictator's interest in stories narrated through the screen was, in fact, only very gradually aroused, although following the March on Rome in 1922—a highly symbolic event—he had publicly declared that cinema was »the strongest weapon,« and in 1924 he founded the famous *Istituto Luce* (The Educational Cinematographic Union), a real cinematographic production house designed to propagate Fascist ideology.⁴ Thus, despite an initial lack of awareness, particular attention slowly began to be paid to that organ of representation, which exercised a notable influence on Italian audiences, perhaps also due to its innate predisposition to offer an »escape route« from a reality that was certainly difficult for many citizens to bear. If cinema existed and was especially popular when it staged fictional stories, then these too had to be subservient to the Fascist state through submission to censorship and strenuous control of the content produced. Fascist cinema can therefore be defined as being *channeled towards a unicum*, which, as we will see, is symbolic rather than thematic. Inevitably, it is very difficult to find Italian films produced during the Fascist period that contradict the dictates of Fascist »philosophy,« since it is unlikely that a director would have produced a work that, from the outset, might risk eventually being banned. Nonetheless, it must be borne in mind that, although the opposite may easily be posited, of the approximately 800 films produced in Italy during the Fascist era, only a low percentage constituted an exercise in the faithful, unexpurgated exposition of Fascist ideals; the others were constructed according to more complex aesthetic schemes, which enabled the transmission of specific contents by encoding them under precise symbols and narrations, capable of eliciting allegiance even if they were not superficial-

3 Gianfranco Casadio, *Il grigio e il nero: Spettacolo e propaganda nel cinema italiano degli anni Trenta (1931–1943)* (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1989), 12. All translations from Italian are my own.

4 On the Istituto Luce, see Ernesto G. Laura, *Le stagioni dell'aquila: Storia dell'Istituto Luce* (Roma: Istituto Luce, 1997).

ly »very fascist« (or »*fascistissime*,« an unfortunate term proposed by Mussolini in 1925).⁵ Indeed:

An overall evaluation of Fascist film policy must necessarily include judgments of a different kind. The Mussolini regime did not create cinema in Italy but limited itself to recognizing—indeed, with a certain slowness—its precious propaganda potential and to taking various measures aimed at ensuring its conformity with the cultural and political objectives of Fascism. After the hesitations of the 1920s, the regime began to move more resolutely towards the integration of the film industry into the larger cultural organization of the state.⁶

It should be remembered, in fact, that not all the directors who in some way contributed to Fascism (and this also applies to art forms other than cinema) subsequently found themselves in the years to come professing the same ideology they had upheld in the past; for some of them, it had mostly been a passage, and had not always been voluntarily embarked upon:

The fact of having collaborated, during the years of the regime, in the realization of various works containing, in a more or less evident and convincing way, elements of war propaganda does not compromise the maturation of the director and does not hinder his arrival at openly anti-Fascist positions, albeit more moral in character than political in the strict sense. Like Rossellini, ... Mario Camerini and Alessandro Blasetti found their artistic and political sensibilities naturally maturing in the transition to open criticism of their Fascist past.⁷

5 By »very fascist,« I refer to the term used for that group of Mussolini's laws enacted between 1925 and 1926 which allowed the transition to the fascist police-authoritarian regime.

6 Philip Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso: Fascismo e mass media* (Bari: Laterza, 1975), 321.

7 Maurizio Zinni, *Fascisti di celluloido: La memoria del ventennio nel cinema italiano (1945–2000)* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2010), 19.

In this contribution, I will therefore investigate the aforementioned symbologies, focusing on two emblematic films that embody the filmic styles used in the creation of consensus and were, in general, the hermeneutics and aesthetics of reference adopted by the Fascist propaganda machine in the cinematographic sphere. The choice of *Il grido dell'aquila*, »the first full-fledged Fascist film,«⁸ by Mario Volpe (1923) and *1860* by Alessandro Blasetti (1934) was motivated by precise requirements of semiotic and historiographic relevance since both share the *mythologization* of the Risorgimento in a popular key, and, in particular, the figure of Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807–1882):

The films of the Risorgimento from the period 1923–1927 reflect this debate precisely. In the first place, by explicitly trying to connect the Risorgimento and Fascism, placing old and new fighters, red shirts and black shirts, side by side. Thus was relaunched a Garibaldi filmography that looked to Fascism. A typical example of this cinematography was *Il grido dell'aquila*, a 1923 film of Florentine authorship, [the scriptwriter] Valentino Soldani and the director Mario Volpe, commissioned by the Fascist Institute of National Propaganda of Florence, with a well-identified project: to connect the First World War, Fascism and the army, making a connection between Garibaldi's red shirts and the Fascist black shirts with the daring link between the enterprise of the Thousand and the March on Rome ...⁹

Furthermore, if the first in some way initiates the Fascist style of cinema, which will in any case be rather complex and rich, as already mentioned, the second refers to an already more mature phase (12 years after the symbolic establishment of the regime), and it will

8 Alberto De Bernardi and Scipione Guarracino, *Il fascismo: Dizionario di storia, personaggi, cultura, economia, fonti e dibattito storiografico* (Milano: Mondadori, 1998), 210.

9 Fabio Bertini, *La cineteca di Clío: Il film come riflesso della storia e come autobiografia sociale* (Firenze: Università di Firenze, 2008), 4.

therefore be stimulating to compare the two filmic texts, highlighting both their similarities and differences.

Il grido dell'aquila and 1860

The films of Volpe and Blasetti, although united by the figure of Garibaldi and the Risorgimento theme that will be discussed later, are constructed in radically different ways from many points of view. *1860* is in fact what can be strictly defined as a historical film, since it is set—except for the contemporary ending—in the year of the expedition of the Thousand, whereas *Il grido dell'aquila* is mostly a tale of current events (in 1923) while evoking images of 1860–61 through interesting dreamlike statements: »... the historical film by definition refers to a past reality known to most viewers prior to the film, either from experience or from representations, they enjoy the effect of recognition ...«¹⁰

In Volpe's work, various stories, more or less complete, intertwine to converge at the end in the mythicization of Garibaldi and his enterprise: there is a central episode with a strongly anti-communist slant which shows an attempted proletarian revolt, and around this is woven a tale of unrequited love, the story of a bumbling soldier who becomes a street puppeteer, an account (not so marginal) of intergenerational communication focused precisely on the meaning of history. In *1860*, in contrast, there is no such narrative-episodic profusion: the main plot—although also interwoven with more implicit references—is unique, telling the story of the Sicilian Carmeliddu who travels northwards along the Italian peninsula and then, after various vicissitudes, participates in the Garibaldian expedition and can finally embrace his beloved Gesuzza again before fighting in the glorious Battle of Calatafimi (1860) against the Bourbons.

10 Marcia Landy, *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 183.

However, the identification of a difference on the plane of manifestation of the two texts¹¹ does not mean denying their indisputable shared polysemy. In fact, both conceal surreptitious meanings and multiple and often shared symbolologies underneath their respective events. Fascist cinema, as already mentioned in the opening words, was not necessarily characterized by explicit propaganda, but often acted at deeper levels.¹² In this case, the Risorgimento theme is conveyed as a reason for the pride and unification of Fascist supporters, called upon to render possible the culmination of the values embodied by the Garibaldian epic. However, Fascist propaganda hinged on numerous other themes, many of which were far more effective—for socio-cultural reasons—than the central Garibaldian one; examples include the exaltation of the Italian colonial spirit¹³ or a certain representation of ruralism as a symbol of immaculate purity,¹⁴ rather than the numerous idolatries of the Roman Empire or auto-epideictic works on the March on Rome, the epitome of which is probably Blasetti's *Vecchia guardia* (*Old Guard*) from 1934. In other words, it was not an indispensable requirement that each film necessarily concern

11 The plane of manifestation cited here is a concept referring to the canonical generative path proposed by Algirdas Julien Greimas (1917–1992), a well-known Lithuanian linguist and semiologist. For present purposes it is not considered necessary to go into the technical level of Greimas' semiotic taxonomy, but it is enough for the reader to know the proposed subdivision of the emergence of meaning into three levels: content, manifestation, and expression. For further information, we recommend any basic manual of narrative theory or general semiotics.

12 For an analysis of persuasive strategies in propaganda, see Gladys Thum and Marcella Thum, *The Persuaders: Propaganda in War and Peace* (New York: Atheneum, 1972).

13 For further information on this specific theme, we recommend watching the contemporary film *Pays Barbare* (2013, dir. Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi).

14 An entire chapter could be devoted to, for example, the choices of costumes made by Blasetti in *1860*. He in fact contrasts the uniforms of the Bourbons and the elegant clothes of the Roman and Genoese bourgeoisie with the ragged sheepskins worn by Carmeliddu in conformity with the emphasized ruralism of his Sicilian village.

one semiosphere¹⁵ exclusively, and in fact some of the themes mentioned, among others, may appear only briefly in the films that will be analyzed, creating interesting veins of meaning and denoting one of the fundamental characteristics of Fascist propaganda: the creation of an interrelated narrative network, a *Gestalt* where every element was of support to others and where solid and untouchable internal coherence reigned, indispensable to obviate a structural collapse of the entire system.

In support of this particular conception, one may consider the dialogue that might be established between *1860* and *Il grido dell'aquila*, which support each other, together forming a potential macro-text in which they are united through Fascist isotopies (to all intents and purposes, the entire Blasetti film could constitute one of the episodes of memory present in that of Volpe). Nonetheless, and we thus come to the heart of the matter, in order for the aforementioned narrative network to sustain itself, it is necessary for the deeper layers, the symbolic or semi-symbolic ones, to know how to communicate with one other, and therefore how to be governed by an architecture of a certain type.

Key Elements

The Masks

The two films under analysis were previously described as polysemic, precisely because of the strong presence of allegories built around their central narratives. To all effects, indeed, Fascist cinema exhibits, as in some ways Soviet cinema does, a tendency towards visual meta-

15 The term is drawn from the semiotics of Jurij Lotman and was coined in 1984. It defines the complex environment in which the signs of a given space-time culture circulate and which defines what is part of this culture and what, conversely, should be excluded and considered as a non-culture. See Jurij Lotman, «O semiosfere,» *Sign Systems Studies (Trudy po znakovym sistemam)* 17 (1984): 5–23.

phor in most of its films, which aims to establish marked semantic links between one shot and another, capable of creating causal relationships supported by precise ideological bases through a certain stylistic mannerism. It is a strategy designed to achieve a specific symbolic effectiveness.¹⁶ Brunetta writes:

If, at the level of propaganda, Fascist cinema preferred »mild« and watered-down tones to those of a glorious and triumphant epic, this fact favored the creation of a common ground of stylistic convergence in which very different personalities found themselves side by side. The lack of a unitary style, a »fascist style,« wanted and imposed from above, favored ... the contamination of all styles, from the imitation of the Soviet film to the American one, from the documentary to avant-garde research, but it also helped an entire generation of filmmakers free themselves from a series of genuinely critical reviews of their own role and the degree of their own »compromise« within the structures of the regime.¹⁷

In *Il grido dell'aquila*, very evocative symbolic-allegorical highlighting can be observed. One of the very first semiotic operations that Volpe carries out is that of inserting popular masks into the film, which from a position of initial inertia then progressively intervene in the narration. The reference to these precise »figures of the popular imagination« constitutes a strong act of engagement of the audience, a request for active participation. In fact, the masks of the *commedia dell'arte*¹⁸ (Arlecchino/Harlequin, Pulcinella/Punch, Balanzone, Gianduja, Meneghino, and many others) are carriers of stories that are different but intertwined and, above all, rooted in the *Erfahrungs-*

16 On the idea of effective images, see Massimo Leone, ed., *Lexia 17–18: Effective Images/Efficacious Images* (Roma: Aracne 2014).

17 Gian Piero Brunetta, *Cinema italiano tra le due guerre: Fascismo e politica cinematografica* (Milano: Mursia, 1975), 91.

18 On the *commedia dell'arte*, see Allardyce Nicoll, *The World of Harlequin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1963).

raum und Erwartungshorizont of a certain audience.¹⁹ Knowing how to exploit them as a vehicle for certain messages implies awareness of the leverage exercised by a »delegated enunciation«: it is no longer the Duce who tells you about the ignominy of certain Italians and the glory of others, but rather some of his symbolic emissaries, whom the audience already knows and *trusts*. Volpe, in fact, proves his ability to operate through specific communication registers, which, curiously (or maybe not so curiously), are also those of today's advertising when it entrusts its messages to the testimonial or mascot.

The masks therefore act in place of Volpe; they are a simulacrum of him, just as he himself in turn acts on behalf of Mussolini, assuming the role of delegated enunciator. The masks, however, have an added value on account of the contents they convey *per se*, since they profess to be representations of a lively and multicolored Italy, initially somnolent in the film but then awake and ready for action. In this case, Harlequin acts as a fundamental episodic pivot and in some way also as a more subterranean exercise of analysis, since on stage he somehow anticipates the double superimposition of the unknown soldier—a reference to a patriotic nostalgia—in the rest of the film. The evolution of the events of the masks is thus an allegory of the construction of Italy. If the masks are a reference to the respective Italian regions that they commonly represent, they constitute only the starting point of Volpe's symbolic apparatus.

The Abjection of the Snake

»Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the Lord God had made« (Genesis 3.1). This biblical verse triggers the widespread sense of wariness experienced by humans around these animals, atavistically associated with a specific symbolism, which

19 See Reinhart Koselleck, »Erfahrungsraum« und »Erwartungshorizont«: Zwei historische Kategorien,« in Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2010), 349–375.

portrays them as devious and abject. A prominent role in *Il grido dell'aquila* is occupied by the figure of the snake, absolutely decontextualized from the events represented. This is not a unique case, nor is it a prerogative of Fascist cinema, as demonstrated by the famous mechanical peacock, an allegory of the vain Alexander Kerensky (1881–1970) in *October* (1927) by the Soviet master Sergej Mikhajlovič Ejzenštein (1898–1948).²⁰ Three times during the film, Volpe inserts a brief shot consisting solely of two entangled snakes (probably small pythons) contorting themselves.

While in relation to masks the interpretative exercise was in some ways relatively obvious, the current example bears more thorough investigation. In fact, these three shots are not random, but are artfully placed at particular points in the montage, coinciding with the presentation of the communist (highlighted by a zooming in that displays his pin with the hammer and sickle motif, further proof of a certain interest in the symbolic codification of the narrative) or the inciter of the crowds, and with the proletarian revolt of the workers who will lose their battle. The snake is therefore the *other*, and in this case the communist *other*, that is, what is identified as the ideological nemesis of Fascism. The choice of this animal implies an appeal to specific spectatorial encyclopedias, relying on widespread popular biblicalism and on the well-known—at least in a folkloristic dimension—episode of the temptator snake in Eden. There is no more efficient emblem than that figure which, in Catholic Italy, is responsible for the original sin, thus being identified with incomparable perfidy. Volpe's rhetorical strategy therefore turns out to be rather subtle, as he knows how to manipulate the viewer by playing on the xenophobic

20 »The figure of Kerensky was also born from the commutation of the characters of major ›peacock‹ and the haughty and contemptuous baron Wilhelm von Ejrck, satirically portrayed by Maupassant in *Mademoiselle Fifl*. ... Ejzenštein talks about this short story in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, in relation to the exchange of structures.« Maurizio Del Ministro, *Cinema tra immaginario e utopia* (Bari: Dedalo, 1984), 190.



Figs. 1 and 2: Snakes in *Il grido dell'aquila* and mechanical peacock in *October*.

predisposition configured by the regime and pointing to *otherness*—in this case towards the most fearful of *others*: the communist—without directly representing it. The director thus approaches a very high level of symbolism, rendering the idea without explicitly staging it: »The eidetic image is an image that achieves a fusion of visual configuration and idea, form, vision and concept. It is an image-idea, a visual structure, impregnated with a particular intellectual content. It is an image that unifies and renders indissoluble the visual and the intellectual, configuration and concept.«²¹

Like an advertiser, Volpe knows how to prevail on his viewers through appeal, working on unconscious levels, evoking specific causalities in an *agreed penetration*. As will be seen in the next section on the merits of Garibaldi's central theme, the director works in the balance between will and representation. In other words, he works on the visual sign, starting from its connotation:

On the basis of ideas developed by Hjelmslev, the French semiologist Roland Barthes proposed in the 1960s an important definition of connotation, that effect whereby in certain signs, to a central and denotative meaning would be added a second meaning, often of an emotional nature, a semantic halo, in short, a parasitic communication. ... For example, if the tricolor designates (arbitrarily and in a denotative way) Italy, this sign can, in a certain political context, become the signifier of a new sign, which recalls values such as patriotism, or perhaps in other circumstances the national football team.²²

The masks are Italy asleep or awake, while the snake is the perfidy of the communist troublemaking *other*; elsewhere, Volpe adds shots of donkeys and rabbits, but, above all, he constructs the entirety of his film on Garibaldi.

21 Paolo Bertetto, *Lo specchio e il simulacro* (Milano: Bompiani, 2008), 159.

22 Ugo Volli, *Il nuovo libro della comunicazione: Che cosa significa comunicare: idee, tecnologie, strumenti, modelli* (Milano: Il saggiautore, 2010), 53.

1860 by Blasetti

If the detection of primary allegorical devices in *Il grido dell'aquila* proves easy due to its predisposition to a certain type of exegetic, in the case of *1860*, a procedure of this type is more difficult. As already mentioned, the film is, unlike that of Volpe, rather linear. It does not follow an episodic trend interspersed with dreamlike moments and memories; on the contrary, the story of Carmeliddu, a Sicilian »picciotto« (a sort of low-level, trainee mafioso), has a fixed beginning and end, and the focus is essentially on his experiences, except in the initial and final moments, where the most markedly epic tone emerges and the crowd occupies the scene. However, just as Volpe, through a repertoire of strongly codified symbolic images, aimed to convey the Fascist conception utilizing the figure of Garibaldi as the greatest Mussolinian archetype, in the same way, Blasetti—with rather refined formalism—deposits a precise ideological transliteration in the sub-text, which is also found in *Il grido dell'aquila*: Mussolini and Garibaldi are the mirror of a shared, Italic heroism. The figure of Garibaldi has in fact been used propagandistically on several occasions in Italy, especially when there was a need to identify a symbol that was at the same time a war leader and an authentic patriot:

This use of Garibaldi to (re)associate militarism with national unity led, in turn, to his appropriation by Mussolini's Fascists, who were seeking to co-opt the Risorgimento and rewrite it as their own foundation story. An attempt was made to ›Fascistise‹ Garibaldi by stressing continuities between his and Mussolini's actions (red shirts and black shirts; the marches on Rome) ... In the mid-1930s, the first professorial chairs in Risorgimento history were established at Italian universities, and in 1934 Blasetti's film *1860*, about the expedition of Garibaldi's Thousand to Sicily, appeared on Italian screens. Fascism was not, however, the last word on Garibaldi and the Garibaldian cult. Also during the 1930s, the opposition to Fascism sought to combat the aggressive nationalism of the Fascist regime by reinvoking

Garibaldi as the symbol of popular liberation and internationalism. Agitating against Mussolini's intervention on the side of Franco in the Spanish Civil War, Carlo Rosselli, leader of the new Action Party, proclaimed ›today in Spain, tomorrow in Italy‹. Volunteers for Spain were organised into groups called ›Garibaldi brigades‹, and these fought with the Republican Popular Front against Franco and his supporters. The ›second Risorgimento‹ (1943–5) also saw communist Garibaldi brigades fight in the Resistance in Italy and Yugoslavia.²³

In *1860*, specific dynamics of symbolization clearly emerge, and metaphors of various kinds are nevertheless detectable. For example, the xenophobic theme is evident, here codified in terms of linguistic and national *otherness*: the Bourbons who threaten peaceful Sicily with their militarized presence are *others*; the French who exhibit an obvious feeling of superiority and a total lack of cooperation towards Carmeliddu in Civitavecchia are *others*; the Germans are also *others*. National identity solidifies on the representation of an *other*, iridescent and imbued with its own peculiar monstrosity.²⁴ The theme of the different as hostile to the unity of the Italian homeland therefore stands out in both films without being explicitly stated in direct terms: in Volpe's work, this is embodied in the communist, and, in that of Blasetti, in the foreigner or non-Italian. It matters little if the object of the representation enjoys dubious verisimilitude (the epic of the Sicilian *picciotto* sometimes takes on completely caricatured connotations, as in fact the events in Volpe's film do), »because *1860* is a crossroads of contradictory determinations and impulses, of dissonant yet honest and sincere voices,«²⁵ and what is important is that

23 Lucy Riall, *Garibaldi: Invention of a Hero* (New Haven, CT/London: Yale University Press, 2007), 6.

24 On the relationship between representation and otherness, see Tarcisio Lancioni, *E inseguiremo ancora unicorni: Alterità immaginate e dinamiche culturali* (Udine: Mimesis, 2020).

25 Alessandro De Filippo, »*1860* di Blasetti, l'intenzione di andare al vero,« in *Sulla strada dei mille: Cinema e Risorgimento in Sicilia*, ed. Sebastiano Gesù (Catania: Brancato, 2011), 79.

the viewer is able to grasp a series of contents without these being forcibly imposed on him. What takes place is more than anything else a mechanism of suggestion, a request that is made to the viewers of the film to put themselves in the protagonist's shoes.

Technical Specifications

At the end of this brief allegoresis of the two films in question, it is important to note how the ideological architecture is not governed exclusively by narrative and symbolic components, but also by some formal choices. An example of this is a shot from *1860*, relevant precisely because of its metaphorical-allegorical value.

After various tribulations, Carmeliddu manages to reach Genoa to exhort Garibaldi to descend into Sicily. It is a step towards liberation and a life of serenity and, after an initial moment of discouragement due to some *fake news*²⁶ about Garibaldi's alleged abandonment, the expedition starts. Shortly afterwards, the narrative moves to Sicily, at the dawn of the Battle of Calatafimi, but Blasetti lingers on some white flowers in the foreground, similar to peach blossoms.

This shot is perfectly unnecessary within the narrative, yet it is presented as the opening frame of Garibaldi's arrival in Sicily, immediately after the textual insertion, also not strictly necessary for narrative purposes, bearing the following words: »Considering that in times of war it is necessary that civil and military powers be concentrated in the hands of a single man, I assume in the name of Vittorio Emanuele, King of Italy, the Dictatorship of Sicily. Giuseppe Garibaldi. Salemi, May 14, 1860.«²⁷ It is a so-called »establishing shot« or, maybe, a »pillow shot,«²⁸ that is, shots »which have little or

26 On this topic, Marc Bloch's *Réflexions d'un historien sur les fausses nouvelles de la guerre* (Paris: Allia, 1994) is recommended reading.

27 My translation from the Italian caption.

28 See Noël Burch, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979).



Figs. 3 and 4: Different focus in the same shot.

no narrative significance.«²⁹ In fact, Blasetti wants to communicate here through completely de-narrativized and purely iconic-visual symbolic registers. The flowers are almost motionless, merely stirred by a light breeze, and the camera captures their still beauty, and then, with an almost imperceptible zoom-out movement, focuses in a different way on their background, constructed around precise codes of figuration since it depicts the bayonets which in turn are immobile and intertwined one with the other. The extremely codified value of this image is undeniable, rendered with the technical and stylistic care of a director who during the entire film does not hesitate to play skillfully with the registers of the cinematographic medium, examples of which are the constant camera movements (especially in situations of battle but also and above all of dialogue), a characteristic and not obvious use of the off-screen (as in the formidable sequence when Carmeliddu finds himself isolated in the endless sea), and so on.

In short, it is not only the choice of the symbol that reigns supreme, and the same—albeit with different tones—applies to Volpe, but also and in equal measure the manner of its staging.

The visual and auditory distinctions paint a melodramatic canvas in which the lines are clearly drawn between friend and foe, patriot and interloper. The assignment of horizontal and vertical positions is metaphoric. The images of reclining and rising, like movement and stasis, become important as a way of measuring progress, but are also proleptic insofar as the notion of rising is associated with the notion of Risorgimento. The enemy is also identified with jarring sounds, abrupt interruptions, entrances and exits, while softly played patriotic music identifies the Sicilians.³⁰

29 Martha P. Nochimson, *World on Film: An Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell, 2010), 209.

30 Marcia Landy, *The Folklore of Consensus: Theatricality in the Italian Cinema, 1930–1943* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press 1998), 145.

Numerous other examples of the value of technique in Fascist propaganda cinema exist, but we will limit ourselves here to underlining two more: the use of sound in *1860* compared to silence in *Il grido dell'aquila*, and the final march in the latter. In Blasetti's film, there are three different types of sounds: the voices in the dialogues, music, and voices-off. The sound goes hand in hand with the visual and indeed often overdetermines its essence, starting from the most evident element: a marked use of musical tones, which may be distinctly epic at times, as in the case of the final battle, while at others decidedly gloomier, as Landy points out, and which are often halfway between the intradiegetic and the extradiegetic. The off-screen voices mark the rhythms of the narration, permitting the necessary temporal ellipses. Finally, speech plays a further prominent role when Blasetti highlights the accents and the linguistic discrepancies between the Italians (united by an idiom and characterized by individual dialects) and the *others*. Without going into a deeper analysis, this tripartite division of sound, which is variously significant in terms of conveying the message of the film (and basically of Fascism), stands as an observation of the importance of technique in the evolution of the cinematographic medium. In *Il grido dell'aquila*, in fact, it is not possible to identify elements of this type since it is a silent film, although it would still be naive to consider it a simpler film or one that lacks an expressive component. In it, instead, other stylistic choices intervene, such as the aforementioned oneiric-episodic progression and the permeating allegorical charge. For his part, therefore, Volpe does not fail, although perhaps to a lesser extent than Blasetti, to perform some stylistic exercises that are anything but obvious. An example of this is one of the last shots showing the arrival of Fascists from all parts of Italy, ready to march on Rome. In this brief scene (slightly longer than Blasetti's flower shots), Volpe outdoes himself with a masterfully calculated long shot. The troops can be seen arriving in the distance and crossing the screen, and what clearly emerges is the multitude of people within the frame that follow one another in an endless flow, an ideal counting of the presumably boundless consensus in favor of Mussolini. Of course, the manipulative and

propagandistic intent of stylistic operations of this kind, aimed at building an apologetic view of the March on Rome, is clear, but this does not prevent us from being able to analyze its aesthetic value in order to grasp the peculiarities that make the films we are analyzing objects of study that can be explored in a historiographical context in which we try to abstract the production strategies of the persuasive message. In particular, a wonderful essay by Pierre Sorlin cautions against any simplistic or one-sided interpretation of this type of film:

However, if we compare all the elements listed above, we must admit that [the film] was not Mussolini's and that, in many respects, it proposed a political line that did not correspond to that of the Duce. *Il grido dell'aquila* was not addressed to the daring or the *squadristi*, it was aimed at two types of spectators: on the one hand to the discharged soldiers, and on the other to the middle class; he was able to comfort the veterans, happy to be seen again, in the last sequence, the monument of the unknown soldier, and to reassure that part of the bourgeoisie that the red danger had terrified. ... In the context, we cannot speak of the spectator's identification with the characters, it is rather an automatic adhesion, the figures are too contrasting to give space to a moment of hesitation, the audience must necessarily hate the bad guys.³¹

Technique and style, symbols and superficial narration are therefore not elements to be considered as watertight compartments but components that cooperate in the rendering of the defined product. During the Fascist era, this was never necessarily a mass product but was very often achieved according to several keys, in such a way that it was intended for different types of audience, in other words, channeled or targeted. In fact, as Sorlin points out, the Risorgimento theme would certainly resonate more with some subjects than it would with others.

31 Pierre Sorlin, «Il grido dell'aquila», ultima tappa del primo cinema italiano,« in *A nuova luce: Cinema muto italiano*, ed. Michele Canosa (Bologna: Clueb, 2001), 253–254.



Figs. 5 and 6: Marching crowd in *Il grido dell'aquila* and an unconscious Carmeliddu in 1860.

Garibaldi Between Will and Representation

The Garibaldian Risorgimento is therefore the strong symbolic nucleus in the two films under analysis and, to a large extent, is present in a whole series of films dating back to the Fascist era. In *Il grido dell'aquila*, Garibaldi is the memory of the glorious exploits of the Thousand who unified Italy, and, in *1860*, a hope for a better present no longer subject to the oppression and atrocities of foreign tyrants. As said before, the rhetorical modalities of the presentation of the theme are different but potentially intertwined, since they rest on the basic assumption that Garibaldi is a sort of Mussolinian alter ego, a model for the Duce himself, symbolically united with him as a war hero, as demonstrated by the ceremonies in honor of Garibaldi organized by the Duce:

For Mussolini, Genoa was meant to be a period of respectful silence and mourning; a brief period, however, which was not to be extended to the whole nation—not even to the communities along the path of the train carrying Anita towards Roman resurrection. At the same time, the Genoese spectacle was to stimulate the narrative memory of its audience by means of its aesthetics, so as to ensure the symbolic historicization of *garibaldinismo* as a nineteenth-century phenomenon. In correspondence with Mussolini's express directions, the core of the parade which accompanied the precious coffin appeared like the central room of a historical museum. Framed between the municipal valets (dressed in their historical uniforms) and the funeral carriage, the Garibaldians, all dressed up in their glorious red shirts and riding in open horse-drawn carriages, were separated from both the Blackshirts and the first world war veterans who followed the carriage. They were being put on display as *living relics* of Garibaldi's time. The parade's implicit codification of this memory-time was then reinforced by another *coup de théâtre* devised by Mussolini himself: Anita's coffin was carried in a solemnly decorated funeral carriage pulled by four black horses.³²

32 Claudio Fogu, »Fascism and Historic Representation: The 1932 Garibaldian Cel-

So, from a stylistic point of view, a parallel emerges in the endings of both Volpe's and Blasetti's films, which are orchestrated and contrived in such a way as to bring their respective events to their only possible conclusion: the confirmation of the Fascist ideal. Only Blasetti was subsequently to »renew« on his ending, adducing some sort of constraint (a not unlikely circumstance), and in fact the version of *1860* reissued after the war no longer shows the Fascists' march on the Foro Mussolini:

For example, a film like Mario Volpe's *Il grido dell'aquila* (1923), even if set at the end of the First World War, shows an ex-Garibaldian who participates together with the Blackshirts in the March on Rome. Roughly, such a conclusion serves to highlight the continuity between Risorgimento ideals and Fascist »revolution.« And again, in Alessandro Blasetti's *1860* (1934), something happens that is the same and contrary to Volpe's film. The film, starting after the war, is presented in an amputated version, trying to make people forget that in the original version, the film ended with a pompous vision of the Fascist phalanxes that paraded in front of the Garibaldian veterans against the background of the Foro Mussolini.³³

But which Garibaldi is being staged? In what form and in what guise? In both films, the »hero of two worlds« basically never appears in first-person and yet is always present in the background in stories, anecdotes, events, and icons. Volpe evokes him—among other ways—through the words of his grandfather Pasquale, a blind »Garibaldino of the Mountains« who, prostrated by an existence now nearing its end, is galvanized by the memory of the invigorating expedition of the Thousand in which he took part in a glorious past. Garibaldi here is nothing more than a name, a tension towards something, a sort of presence halfway between will and representation. Only for brief, epic moments does his image appear, already deeply iconized, in an effigy

brations,« in »The Aesthetics of Fascism,« special issue, *Journal of Contemporary History* 31, no. 2 (1996): 328–329.

33 Giancarlo Giraud, »Dieci film sul Risorgimento,« *Il tempietto* 9 (2009): 159.

that shows his solid and incorruptible posture. It is his absent image that acts as the engine for the whole narrative, just as it is in *1860*. Here, in fact, it would have been easier to use a real actor to impersonate the leader drawing his brave soldiers with him, but this figure is seen very rarely and never well, and is again a pretext around and behind which to build specific messages, which are as aesthetic as they are political for the director. This is how Blasetti himself described his relationship with the image of the leader:

The only precise intention that I had was to frame Garibaldi at a great distance, so that he would remain like a historical aura in relation to these Garibaldians and so that a disturbing close-up would not emerge. I made only one, a half close-up of Garibaldi, who was eating an onion or an apple—I don't remember what he was holding—while giving orders; and it was a three-quarter view, like this ... precisely because I was repelled by [the idea of] taking this figure and bringing it thus to the fore.³⁴

Therefore the central theme exists precisely because it is fragmented (and this is specific to the cinematographic medium, which, through montage and other linguistic features, operates a constant fragmentation of the representation); as an evocation, Garibaldi is suspended between the universe of diegesis and that of the spectator, not portrayable as completely fictional because in this way he would be assimilated to a character, admirable but nevertheless inscribed in a precise narrative context, nor at the same time can he be denied an albeit minimal appearance, lest nothing be perceived of him. Thus, through a mechanism of passages balanced between exposure and concealment, Garibaldi becomes a myth imbued with a »superhomistic« aura, and, moreover, being a myth in the shadows, the way is paved for him to be a direct reference to Mussolini.

34 From an interview with Blasetti. Tullio Kezich, *Cinecittà anni Trenta* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1979).

Perlocutionary Garibaldi

Garibaldi (his memory) gives new life to Volpe's blind man; Garibaldi (the hope he embodies) spurs the young and naive Carmeliddu on to improbable Italic heights; Garibaldi, as we have seen in the previous section, is also in what does not appear, a *praesentia in absentia*. Garibaldi can be seen because *he makes things happen*.

The experiential dimension is strongly present in Fascist propaganda, and cinema does not exempt itself from this characteristic. There is a need to create a passionate (and unconditional) involvement in the regime, and one of the tactics for this is to not let a restrictive attitude be directly perceived but rather to rouse the recipients of the communication to participate in the first person, to become protagonists—in the Italic proscenium—of the heroic messages they are witnessing. Let us not forget that Mussolini's speech from the balcony of Palazzo Venezia in Rome on 10 June 1940, announcing Italy's entry into the war, was a solo performance delivered in the first person plural and filled with vocatives from the very beginning: »Fighters by land, sea and air! Blackshirts of the revolution and the legions! Men and women of Italy, of the Empire and of the Kingdom of Albania!«³⁵ Therefore, a further value of the Garibaldian construct in Fascist cinema is centered on experience »because it is not the General who is waging the war, but the Italian people as a whole who are fighting to free themselves.«³⁶ For this reason, too, the leader is never directly represented but essentially exists in indirect references, from which it can be deduced that while he is the guide that the people need, it is the people themselves who make the enterprise possible. This approach is *de facto* imbued with populism, since it is precisely on this that one of the major dynamics implemented by certain communicative organs hinges. Although *1860* cannot in fact be defined

35 Original quotation: »Combattenti di terra, di mare e dell'aria. Camicie nere della rivoluzione e delle legioni. Uomini e donne d'Italia, dell'Impero e del Regno d'Albania.«

36 De Filippo, »1860 di Blasetti,« 80.

as a »crudely propagandistic«³⁷ film if not in the finale (subsequently eliminated) with its »bold vision of the fascist phalanxes parading in front of the Garibaldi veterans, against the imperial background of the Mussolini Forum,«³⁸ it proposes »a »populist« vision—omitting, of course, the bloody repressions carried out by the Garibaldians—in which the popular classes play a role; while Fascist historians—but also others—have pointed out, almost unanimously, how the unification of Italy was achieved by an elite of aristocrats and bourgeois.«³⁹ Proof of the aforementioned vision, in addition to the preponderance of the popular classes, is the strenuous ruralism that emerges in both films, as well as a certain not always veiled mockery of the bourgeois classes. But Garibaldi, who unites people and incites them to action, eliminates class differences in the creation of his utopian Italy. In 1860, he is awaited by the whole community of the Sicilian village, including the priest who at the end exclaims in relief: »Garibaldi has arrived!« Eventually, from Civitavecchia to Genoa, everyone agrees that »the time to discuss is over, the time to act has begun.«

The »politics of doing,« a rhetorical expression that resonates with numerous echoes even in the 21st century, is therefore intrinsically connected to the strong—we might say »laterally persuasive«—perlocutive dimension proposed in both films.⁴⁰ Even in *Il grido dell'aquila*, it is the memory of Garibaldi that becomes the trigger from a state of inertia to one of action, producing one of the most obvious connections with Fascism. Pasquale's grandson, Beppino, listens attentively

37 Gianfranco Gori, *Alessandro Blasetti* (Firenze: La nuova Italia, 1983), 41.

38 From Filippo Sacchi's review of the film in *Il Corriere della Sera*, March 30, 1934.

39 Gori, *Alessandro Blasetti*, 44.

40 »The perlocutionary act relates to the effect that is induced in the audience. Persuading, infuriating, calming or inspiring someone are perlocutionary acts. They can be intended or unintended, but what distinguishes perlocutionary from illocutionary acts, for Austin, is that while illocutionary acts always rely upon the existence of conventions, perlocutionary acts are natural or non-conventional.« A. P. Martinich, »Philosophy of Language,« in *Philosophy of Meaning, Knowledge and Value in the Twentieth Century*, ed. John V. Canfield (London/New York: Routledge, 1997), 24. The general theory is in John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

to the glowing tales about his grandfather's heroic past, which see him marching twice on Rome, until—moved by a sort of invisible spirit—he decides to act himself, and not by chance, in the following way: he goes to where some people are writing pro-Lenin slogans on a wall and joyfully sets about driving them away with blows from his truncheon (which he nicknames »Saint Truncheon«). From a narratological point of view, not only does Beppino act in chasing the writers away but they too are acting in their decision to write. This banal observation indicates how Garibaldi's appeal to experience refers to a Manichean experience, which clearly distinguishes between morally right and regrettably wrong, fully in accordance with the Fascist dictates constructed by the numerous allegorical references mentioned above. Consistency must reign supreme in the construction of careful propaganda, and the call to action is valid only if it conforms, even morally, to Fascism.

The Stereotype and the Prototype

For memory, allegory, delegated enunciators, connotation, implicit reference, and more or less evident rhetorical exercise, there is a rigorous conceptual place (or rather a space): the Past. Mussolini is the Present, and indeed is the new Garibaldi, his explicit extension, which is not symbolized but reified, shown in his immanence.

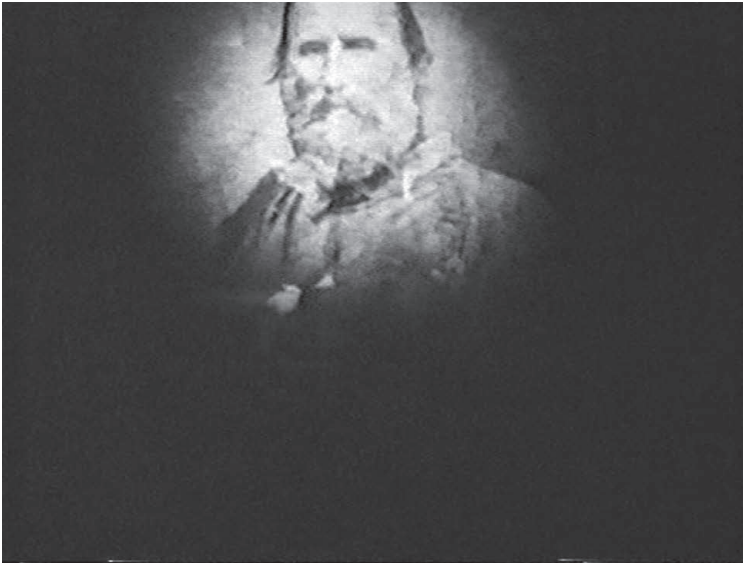
1860 was set in the year of the Enterprise of the Thousand, but it embodied the theme of popular participation in the enterprise also against the »political« hesitations and the functionality of the Garibaldian enterprise to national cohesion, always and in any case on the assumption that in those synergies was concealed the fundamental synergy between leader and people that Fascism attributed to itself.⁴¹

41 Bertini, *La cineteca di Clio*, 5.

This consideration emerges from an analytical reading of the two films examined so far. The whole system that has been analyzed seems to be subservient to the creation of a fertile ground for the Duce's *mise-en-scène* as a direct consequence of metaphor, the highest (and only) appropriate exegesis. In this sense, the ending of *Il grido dell'aquila* is exemplary: the memory of Garibaldi's enterprise, in a mixture of dreamlike and real that in other contexts we would not hesitate to define as typical of the postmodern, blends with symbolic Italian images: there is the eagle and the 'fascies,' and then concreteness increasingly takes hold with images of fields, industries, and ships, symbolizing the utopian opulence to which Fascism would lead, all culminating with a still image of the Duce (this cinematographic strategy was considered so effective that it constituted the dominant rhetoric of *Triumph des Willens* (1935) by Leni Riefenstahl (1902–2003), the most important Nazi propaganda film). Shortly before that, sumptuous images of the March on Rome, in which the Garibaldian veteran participates with renewed vitality, follow one after the other in a longer-than-average sequence of the film to trace the grandeur of the Fascist enterprise. These sequences have never been judged positively by critics, nor have those at the end of *1860* which similarly link the Garibaldian Risorgimento with Mussolini's march, and which Blasetti himself cut in the post-war period by virtue of his subsequently attained anti-Fascist awareness.

As De Filippo points out, the choice of such manifestly celebratory endings does not always prove effective, which is quite understandable from the point of view of an audience who, up to a certain point, is stimulated by a rich symbolic production, only to then be subjected to a mere exercise in self-praise.⁴² Nonetheless, it must be considered how Fascist cinema was in any case constantly being scrutinized by powerful censorship and review bodies, and if choices of a certain type cannot therefore be justified from an aesthetic perspective, they are nonetheless comprehensible from a historiographical point of view.

42 Alessandro De Filippo, «1860 di Blasetti, l'intenzione di andare al vero,» in *Sulla strada dei mille: Cinema e Risorgimento in Sicilia*, ed. Sebastiano Gesù (Catania: Brancato, 2011), 79.



Figs. 7 and 8: Effigies of Garibaldi in *Il grido dell'aquila* and 1860 respectively.

What emerges is a Garibaldi who is at the same time stereotype and prototype: stereotype in that he is stripped of any introspection, reduced to an icon conveying a predefined set of values with which ›good‹ Italians must bond unless they want to be accused of deviance (and subjected to the dire reprisals that would follow such an accusation in a dictatorial Fascist state); and prototype since his figure seems to constitute a basis for experimentation for the construction of a certain image of Mussolini. However, it should be remembered that the pyramid concept⁴³ of a media monopoly that inculcates a series of contents into an inert mass is, to put it mildly, highly simplistic; it does not take into account all those feedback mechanisms that inevitably condition the spheres of power, even in situations of authoritarian regimes where, and this is worth bearing in mind, the possibilities of dialogue with the highest hierarchies are limited, if not almost entirely absent. It follows that the figure of Mussolini was constantly revised also on the basis of popular consensus and that cinema and the imaginary he helped to form could act as a valid sociological laboratory in this sense.

In fact, it was between 1929 and 1934 that, according to De Felice, Italy experienced »the five-year history called the band of *maturity* of fascism, that is, the years of greatest prestige and of greatest plebiscite adherence to the regime.«⁴⁴ And *1860* came out in 1934, ten years after *Il grido dell'aquila*, following a whole series of other media products which—some more and some less—contributed to this rise in consensus. Mussolini therefore at the same time creates and rides this wave, and Garibaldi, or rather the icon of him that is gradually being

43 The theory of the hypodermic needle or magic bullet theory was developed by authors such as Paul Lazarsfeld (1901–1976), in the context of the sociology of communication, around the studies of *mass media* in the 1920s in the USA: »The theory equates the media with an intravenous injection: certain values, ideas and attitudes are *injected* into the individual media user, resulting in particular behaviour. The recipient is seen as a passive and helpless victim of media impact.« Pieter J. Fourie, *Media Studies: Media History, Media and Society* (Cape Town: Juta, 2007), 232.

44 Vito Zagarrò, *L'immagine del fascismo: La re-visione del cinema e dei media nel regime* (Roma: Bulzoni, 2009), 93.

built, his idol, serves him as a springboard but also as an experimental prototype. Sealing this union is the mythicization of the March on Rome, associated with the expedition of the Thousand, as happens in the film by Volpe and, with slight modifications, in the first version of that of Blasetti.

Conclusion

In this contribution, I have often spoken of the effects of the meaning of a film on the audience and of specific encodings of messages capable of provoking different reactions. It is indispensable to consider the role of the public in the propaganda communication process that is commonly often thought of as being one-way. In fact, if this were the case, why strive to create films that are so complex in the construction of their symbols and, above all, why relegate Garibaldi to a position of quasi-absence? It would make no sense, except perhaps to play with the stylistic registers of the medium used to create an aesthetically innovative or stimulating product, but then one would fall further into a paradox, since one of the decisive factors of innovation, if not the main one, is precisely the public.

The propaganda machine was therefore well aware of how the dynamics from below contributed, through tendencies, conceptual movements, common thought, and identity mechanisms, to influencing media production, and cinema was fully inserted into this logic. Instead of a vertical vision of media communication, it is therefore preferable to place oneself in the perspective postulated by Carlo Ginzburg.⁴⁵ This author introduced the model of circularity, whereby the working classes are able to influence the upper classes and consequently the producers of communication through a return mechanism (although it is not clear to what extent this influence occurs),

45 Carlo Ginzburg, *Il formaggio e i vermi. Il cosmo di un mugnaio del '500* (Torino: Einaudi, 1976).

and that of configuration, which presupposes a social dynamism in which the movement of each element leads to a global shift in a perspective of interdependence. This explains the accuracy of the rhetorical constructions of Volpe, Blasetti, and the numerous other authors who contributed to the development of cinema in the Fascist era. The film and the public, especially in a regime context where artistic freedom was largely suppressed, behaved—and behave—like two complementary levers, and it is probably for this reason, as well as for those previously discussed, that Garibaldi never appears directly and lives in a dimension other than that which can be experienced by the spectator: he must never obscure Mussolini but only assist in his rise and consensus. Directors could therefore not afford to stage a product built according to improvised or poorly calculated models because the audience constantly re-elaborated—and re-elaborates—and is able to accept or reject a certain message, as well as manipulate it.⁴⁶ Conformity to Fascism had to be studied; it was not enough to do everything in an exercise of exaltation. The entire critical debate on the aesthetic value or otherwise of films written and directed in an era where any media content was strictly subject to constraints and serious acts of censorship can be summed up in the comment to *1860* in Morandini's dictionary of cinema:

Much appreciated by the critics (but not by the public) of the time, considered after the war one of the incunabula of neorealism, then the object of a long historicist controversy, crucified for its obvious or implicit consonances with the propaganda of the Fascist regime (the missing 5 minutes from the original edition contained the grossest signs of it), today it counts for its stylistic dryness (not without influ-

46 In this regard, it is advisable also to view the reader models proposed by Umberto Eco (1932–2016) in texts such as *Lector in fabula* (1985): he postulates, for example, the possibility of a model reader (that is, as conceived by the author), but also that of a resistant reader who can reject or manipulate the interpretation of the message beyond the limits desired by the author. In the same way, there would also be a model author, that is, the one imagined by the empirical reader.

ences from Soviet cinema), the discovery of the landscape, the courageous choice of types and popular characters, the effectiveness of the editing, and Garibaldi's role as hero and demiurge who physically appears only in six quick shots.⁴⁷

In conclusion, a closeness between political history and the history of cinema can be deduced, which must lead to a particular examination of the media in different historical periods. Decoding a film—or a photograph, text, military report, and so on—in the awareness of how mediums and receivers build an interrelated system,⁴⁸ and taking into account the absolute importance of the aesthetic-hermeneutical processes elaborated by the builders of communication, therefore becomes a further and fundamental methodological stage in the understanding of the historical and sociological processes in operation in a given epoch. This is even more important in the case of films produced within war contexts, for propaganda purposes, in which we can detect a specific *Zeitgeist*, peculiar aesthetics, imaginaries, and rhetorical strategies which—with the aid of an in-depth textual analysis—acquire a proper documental dimension.⁴⁹

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47 *Il Morandini* is one of the most famous dictionaries of Italian cinema. This review is taken from the 2009 edition.

48 I discussed this thesis in 2019. See Bruno Surace, »Le intenzioni della memoria. Ipotesi per una teleologia semiotica da *Das Ghetto* a *A Film Unfinished*,« in *Lexia—Intentionality*, eds. Massimo Leone and Zhang Jiang (Roma: Aracne, 2019), 29–30.

49 A fundamental work with this approach is Nicholas Reeves, *The Power of Film Propaganda. Myth or Reality?* (London/New York: Continuum, 1999).

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