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Mass Culture and Sovereignty: The American Challenge to European Cinemas, 1920–1960*

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“Then, one day we saw hanging on the walls great posters as long as serpents. At every street-corner a man, his face covered with a red handkerchief, leveled a revolver at the peaceful passersby. . . . We rushed into the cinemas and realized immediately that everything had changed.” While the Great War wasted away Europe’s resources, the American cinema occupied the home fronts. For the Parisian futurist Philippe Soupault, the flickering images of Pearl White’s “almost ferocious smile” announced “the revolution, the beginning of a new world.”¹ By the mid-1920s, the sway of America’s cultural industries was so powerful that some Europeans questioned whether old-world states still exercised sovereignty over their citizens’ leisure. In England, “the bulk of picture goers are Americanized to an extent that makes them regard the British film as a foreign film,” commented a *London Daily Express* writer in 1927; “they talk America, think America, dream America; we have several million people, mostly women, who, to all intents and purposes, are temporary American citizens.”²

From the 1920s, this outpouring of cultural artifacts and images presented European societies with a set of challenges at least as complex and confounding as that posed by American manufacturers’ intense competition.³ The first challenge came from the free-floating quality of American commercial culture

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¹ Philippe Soupault, *The American Influence in Europe*, trans. Babette Hughes and Glenn Hughes (Seattle, 1930), p. 13.

² A. G. Atkinson in the *London Daily Express*, quoted in *J. Walter Thompson Co. Newsletter* 183 (July 1, 1927): 320.

³ The influence of U.S. mass culture abroad has been debated widely, though less by historians than by sociologists and students of mass communications. The various schools of thought, roughly speaking, reflect their authors’ assessments of the virtues and vices of American mass culture within the United States itself. The position that

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as it followed the globalizing tendencies of the capitalist marketplace, overriding nation-state boundaries and eluding political controls. As it did so, it subverted two ideals of national community long in contention on the Continent. The one, originating in France, rested on an identification of sovereignty with a shared cultural legacy long nurtured within that country's historic political boundaries; it extended citizenship to all who upheld French high culture's universalizing values and rationalist precepts—or, at least, who shared the language in which they were couched. The other originated in Germany: based on the idea of a *Kulturnation*, it antedated modern German statehood, aspired to build a community of blood and belief, and designed territorial ambitions along ethnic and linguistic lines.⁴

American commercial culture also posed a challenge in its apparent classlessness. Forming a new cultural koine, it trespassed over conventional cultural lines. The products of a society in which the intense commodification of culture had tended to blur social distinctions, the American movies (not to mention other commercialized forms of popular culture such as jazz or the detective story) moved into the more visibly class-stratified cultures of continental Europe, where neither its conservative messages nor its more subversive ones were familiar enough to be culled readily.⁵ Hence, American mass culture challenged the distinctions between high and low, elite and popular cultures that since the seventeenth century had arisen in response to

U.S. cultural industries have abetted American "cultural imperialism" has been argued most emphatically by the sociologist Herbert Schiller. His and related work is summarized in Kaarle Nordenstreng and Herbert I. Schiller, eds., *National Sovereignty and International Communication* (Norwood, N.J., 1979). Oliver Boyd-Barrett's article "Media Imperialism: Towards an International Framework of Analysis of Media Systems," in *Mass Communications and Society*, ed. J. Curran, M. Gurevitch, and J. Woollacott (London, 1977), pp. 116–41, explores the usefulness of this approach in relation to the media. Jeremy Tunstall, in *The Media Are American: Anglo-American Media in the World* (London, 1977), offers a global perspective, giving numerous if often contradictory cases. The historian Emily Rosenberg's *Spreading the American Dream* (Westport, Conn., 1982), gives the broad outlines of American cultural expansionism. This and related studies are examined in my "Americanism for Export," *Wedge* 7–8 (Winter–Spring 1985): 74–81.

⁴ On European nationalisms, see Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1983); in addition to Hans Kohn, *Nationalism: Its Meaning and History* (Princeton, N.J., 1955). Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (London, 1983) is especially helpful in putting European notions of nationhood in a global context.

⁵ The contradictory reception of American commercial cultures in Europe is suggested in various essays in C. W. E. Bigsby, ed., *Superculture: American Popular Culture and Europe* (London, 1975); and most subtly of all in the work of Reyner Banham; see his "Europe and American Design," in *Lessons from America*, ed. Richard Rose (London, 1974), pp. 67–91.

the democratizing tendencies attendant on the print revolution.⁶ The eighteenth-century conservative had found it deplorable that Leibnitz and his maid might read the same book; his early twentieth-century counterpart bemoaned the fact that the parson's wife sat nearby his maid at Sunday matinees, equally rapt in the gaze of Hollywood stars, and that intellectuals and workingmen alike delighted in Charlie Chaplin's antiauthoritarian antics.

Not least of all, the prodigious turnover of themes, styles, and messages fostered by American commercial culture underscored the volatility of social order in postwar societies. That the New World was subject to fads and wild fluctuations in public opinion had long been remarked upon by European observers.⁷ Yet the American economy had also seemed expansive enough to satisfy the desires unleashed by the marketplace. Moreover, social customs appeared so thoroughly homogenized that rapidly changing styles would not precipitate social unrest. Finally, the United States' constitutional structures seemed so firmly embedded that the political system stood firm before the unsettling turnover of traditions. In Europe, by contrast, where the political order appeared so unsettled, cultural distinctions and entrenched mores offered security. The bourgeois who boldly confronted revolutionary outbursts, as Lucien Romier once remarked, broke down if his slippers were misplaced.⁸

These challenges proved especially formidable during the interwar decades, even more so than in the post-World War II era, when America's real presence was greater, U.S. personnel were actively involved in rebuilding local industries, and movies made in the U.S.A. were identified with the inroads

⁶ The parallel was first drawn by H. A. Innis, in his idiosyncratic essay *Empire and Communications* (Oxford, 1950), esp. pp. 173–217, and now more systematically in Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 1983).

⁷ Signally, this genre of comment originated with Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York, 1945), vol. 2, bk. 2, chaps. 13–14, bk. 3, 1–21.

⁸ In Lucien Romier's *La promotion de la femme* (Paris, 1930), pp. 91 ff.; similar arguments are made in his better-known *Who Will Be Master: Europe or America?* trans. M. Josephson (New York, 1928), esp. pp. 106–34, 178–229. The differences between American and European cultures, viewed in light of the emergence—and threat—of mass culture have been remarked on by leading European intellectuals and social commentators, figures as diverse as Matthew Arnold, Ortega y Gasset, F. R. Leavis, and George Orwell, not to mention Antonio Gramsci and Herbert Marcuse. The origins of the peculiar relationship between market and culture, and among political elites, intellectuals, and mass publics is examined in Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780–1950* (New York, 1983). That the class-stratified character of cultural tastes has become a sociological given and an aesthetic norm in contemporary Europe, or in France, at least, is argued in Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London and New York, 1986).

everywhere of the American way of life.⁹ During the 1920s and 1930s, America's movie industry offered an entirely new paradigm for organizing cultural production on industrial lines: what Fordism was to global car manufacturing, the Hollywood studio system was to promoting a mass-produced, internationally marketed cultural commodity. Between 1918, when the U.S. industry established its leadership in Europe, and the 1960s, when television aggravated a severe slump in movie demand, causing a restructuring of the industry that led to more dispersed and varied systems of production, the American cinema dominated European markets. Not only did it set the pace of innovation and promote new professional identities—it also fostered new consumer solidarities and reshaped cultural genres.

During the interwar years there was also a highly visible effort to devise strategies of resistance to the domination of U.S. commercial culture. From the 1920s, European policymakers, intellectuals, and party leaders sought to define what was “national” about popular culture and to distinguish how European cultural traditions differed from American models in terms of their relationship to the market, the political system, and the forming of social consensus. By the war years, these had culminated in efforts within Nazi Germany and Mussolini's Italy to build an entire alternative to American mass culture, one that was protected from international cultural flows, putatively cross-class, nationalistic yet marketable, and, of course, susceptible to local political manipulation.

That the ultimate defeat of a self-styled European alternative to Americanism coincided with the Allied triumph over Germany in World War II is not fortuitous. German culture was in many ways identified with the era of hegemony of print culture, and during the interwar years the German cultural industry presented the United States with its most powerful competition. German expansionism also posed the gravest threat to the Versailles treaty system, the premise of which was that cultural-linguistic territorial units would somehow yield market areas that were both big enough to support free-trade capitalism and sufficiently homogeneous in ethnic terms to overcome political strife.¹⁰ Finally, in its wartime New Order, the Third Reich laid claim to being the standard-bearer of a renaissance European community, revitalized by the fundamentalist values of a racially pure state and with economic dimensions at least equal to America's own.¹¹ Germany's defeat paved the way for

⁹ There is no overall history of the cultural impact of the United States in post-1945 Europe. Much useful information in regard to the impact of the movies is given in Thomas Guback, *The International Film Industry: Western Europe and America since 1945* (Bloomington, Ind., 1969).

¹⁰ Innis, pp. 208–9.

¹¹ The regionalist economic logic underlying German expansionism is set out in Alan S. Milward's fine studies, especially *The New Order and the French Economy*

the European states to accede to an American peace premised on the free trade of goods *and* ideas and thereby relinquish a conception of nationhood that presumed sovereignty over culture.

To claim that the U.S. cinema achieved a sustained advantage over European filmmaking after 1914 is not to argue that the latter was backward in any conventional sense—even though European observers, not to mention U.S. businessmen, often contended as much.¹² French and Italian producers were at least as prominent as Americans in international markets during the pre-1914 era. The French had a worldwide distribution network and production companies that rapidly absorbed motifs and techniques from other nations' cinemas; they were also the leading equipment manufacturers, with plants set up in and servicing the U.S. market.¹³ Throughout the interwar years, Europe—especially central Europe—supplied Hollywood with some of its most virtuoso performers, enterprising producers, and brilliant directors. It is not implausible that European producers on their own would eventually have embarked on mass production—much as European automobile manufacturers did under competitive pressures—capitalizing on all varieties of local innovations. Yet even as they did so, they acknowledged the U.S. cinema's supremacy and tended to identify whatever was innovative and “modern” with American precedents.

Nor are the reasons why the United States acquired leadership so quickly and overwhelmingly wholly obvious. True, the European industries were all damaged in one way or another by the war: they were closed down for the duration of the hostilities or turned to war purposes, and their capital was depleted at the very moment that U.S. firms were merging, retooling, and preparing to mount export drives. In all cases, European firms were dependent on export markets, whereas in the United States the costs of production were amortized on the vast home market, enabling firms to market their products abroad at very low cost. In Europe, wartime regulations probably hampered rapid adjustment to postwar economic conditions, making it harder to respond

(Oxford, 1970), and *War, Economy and Society, 1939–1945* (London, 1977). See also Andreas Hilgruber's provocative *Germany and the Two World Wars*, trans. William C. Kirby (Cambridge, 1981), esp. pp. 78 ff., 91–92.

¹² These commonplaces are amply illustrated in both American and European trade journals such as the U.S. *Variety* and the French *La cinématographie française* and were soon the substance of popular fictions, most notably Sinclair Lewis's *Dodsworth*.

¹³ The French and Italian movie industries stood out: see Richard Abel's carefully researched *French Cinema: The First Wave, 1915–1929* (Princeton, N.J., 1984), esp. chap. 1. On Italy, see Aldo Bernardini, *Cinema muto italiano: Arte, divismo, e mercato, 1910–1914* (Bari and Rome, 1982). Both Sweden and Denmark had powerful cinema establishments too, though on a smaller scale, a fact that raises fascinating

to American competition. Finally, tastes had changed: whether this was because of war trauma, postwar social conflicts, or the presence of new, more proletarian, more female, and more youthful publics is unclear. In any case, European moviemakers, used to working with theatrical conventions, seemed not to respond to these new desires.

At the same time, the U.S. industry came out of the war prepared to sustain its initial advantage. Its major strength came from the great scale of its enterprise. The American home market, the biggest in the West, was from 1920 protected by tariffs and exclusionary distribution networks, while its potential world language market—if the British dominions are included—far surpassed Germany's eighty million, as well as France's sixty million and Italy's fifty million. Fierce competition among American firms had favored big producers: by the postwar period, four or five giant firms had formed cartels controlling the distribution and exhibition networks. Well capitalized, the so-called Majors (Paramount, Fox, Loew's [MGM], and Warner Bros.) picked up quickly on the assembly line and scientific marketing techniques worked out in other industries. Bitter competition continued to prompt innovation, not only in production—Hollywood being the first to promote sound, animated cartoons, color, and television broadcasting—but in merchandising as well: Hollywood led the way with the feature film, the movie palace, the chain-store distribution system, and public relations campaigns.¹⁴ In the immediate postwar years, the Hollywood producers pressed their advantage against European competitors: beginning with booking offices, then establishing their own distribution subsidiaries and occasionally investing in first-run theaters as well, they sought to monopolize control of distribution, exhibition, and equipment manufacture. They were greatly aided in this endeavor by their capacity to organize as a sector. The Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) acted as cartel and lobby and, with the establishment of the Hays office in 1930, as censorship bureau as well; although often wracked by rivalries, it was brutally singleminded in the face of competition from foreign and small domestic firms.

questions about what accounted for international commercial and artistic success before the era of American hegemony.

¹⁴ In addition to classics such as Peter Bächlin, *Histoire économique du cinéma* (Paris, 1947), a translation of *Der Film als Ware*; Lewis Jacobs, *The Rise of the American Film* (New York, 1939); and Henri Mércillon, *Cinéma et monopoles: Le cinéma aux Etats-Unis* (Paris, 1953), several recent studies by U.S. film historians are devoted to the American industry. In addition to Gorham Kindem, ed., *The American Movie Industry: The Business of Motion Pictures* (Carbondale, Ill., 1982), see David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristen Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York, 1985). See also Douglas Gomery's "Film Culture and Industry: Recent Formulations in Economic History," *Iris* 2 (1984): 17–30.

Government support proved a more important factor than is commonly suggested in either American or foreign accounts. European states enforced tariffs, set quotas, and dispensed economic subsidies, but they never provided the kind of precise, enthusiastic feedback on trade matters afforded by Julius Klein's Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Trade inside the Department of Commerce. Moreover, Hoover and, more generally, the Republican presidents of the 1920s, encouraged self-regulation, which, at the same time as it fostered conformity, also helped forestall extraneous state regulations.¹⁵ Monopoly practices, though restricted at home, were encouraged for use abroad, and tariffs against foreign imports abetted discrimination against imported films on the part of U.S. distribution and exhibition networks. W. R. Hays, the so-called czar of Hollywood in his capacity as chief executive of the MPPDA, was titled "ambassador" abroad; although a private-sector plenipotentiary, he was empowered by the U.S. government to threaten boycotts in the event of obstacles to American entry.¹⁶

Along with its economic predominance, the U.S. motion-picture industry established a kind of cultural superiority. To understand its nature means raising the vexed issue of consumer choice: did European publics freely prefer American cinema because they judged it superior to their own; or did they choose it because local alternatives were foreclosed by unfair trade practices? Intellectual opinion was much divided. If a few critics sought to dismiss the preference for U.S. movies as "cultural imperialism," most others argued that moviegoers preferred the American product not only because it was better technically (in set design, lighting, and editing), but also because the acting style was more natural and spontaneous, the narrative more compelling, and the rendering of daily life more accurate. Naturally, such assessments begged the more fundamental issue of why those attributes made a film "better."¹⁷ In any case, even intellectuals who were anti-American appreciated the vigor of U.S. filmmaking. Indeed, they invoked the successes of Hollywood in

¹⁵ Rosenberg (n. 3 above), pp. 138–201.

¹⁶ Frank Southard, *American Industry in Europe* (Boston and New York, 1931), pp. 93–102.

¹⁷ The subject of audiences is just beginning to be addressed by film historians. See, e.g., Jeanne Allen, "The Film Viewer as Consumer," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 5 (1980): 481–99. The thesis that response was socially differentiated among European publics is noted by I. C. Jarvie, *Towards a Sociology of the Cinema* (London, 1970), pp. 95 ff.; on working-class receptivity to American mass media in Britain, see Herbert Gans, "Hollywood Films on British Screens: An Analysis of the Function of American Culture Abroad," *Social Problems* 9 (1962): 324–28. Although the methods and conclusions of early surveys are debatable, responses to them offer a useful resource for researchers. See, e.g., J. P. Mayer, *Sociology of Film: Studies and Documents* (London, 1946), and his *British Cinemas and Their Audiences* (London, 1948), in which Mayer reprints large numbers of so-called motion-picture autobiographies.

order to legitimate film as an art form and to defend their own positive assessments of the film medium against traditionalists who inveighed against the socially and culturally degenerative effects of movie culture.¹⁸

Arguably, American movies were more responsive to consumer desires than European films. Beyond appealing images of consumer abundance, they presented novel and attractive social identities to the increasingly socially mixed publics of interwar Europe—thus the companionate couple, the tough working girl, the hero-entrepreneur. American movies also offered practical lessons about fashion, makeup, and courtship, as well as the “art of the artistic embrace”—all useful skills in societies in which women were going out more and in which social mores were undergoing rapid change.¹⁹ The reason for the U.S. cinema’s appeal to widely diverse publics was not unconnected to its relocation to Hollywood from its East Coast birthplace. By this move the U.S. cinema made a clean break with the kinds of theatrical conventions that remained dear to European filmmakers well into the thirties. True, American filmmaking thereby relinquished its popular origins as well. However, in Hollywood it continued to draw on urban vaudeville styles and the keen market sense of immigrant entrepreneurs to develop a fast-changing idiom pitched to a vast polyglot public. From the 1920s, Hollywood was an international center to which foreign actors, technicians, and directors came in search of fame, skills, and work, especially as Hollywood raided talent elsewhere in the process of subduing competition. In this sense, Hollywood epitomized the enduring capacity of the American “empire without frontiers” to discover, process, and redistribute techniques, styles, and tastes of global provenance.

The innovation that, at least in the interwar decade, seemed to tie together all of the features of Hollywood moviemaking was the star system.²⁰ At bottom, this was a business strategy suited to mobilizing huge capital in order

¹⁸ For a typical stance in support of the U.S. cinema, see Philippe Soupault, *The American Influence in Europe* (n. 1 above), and his playful account, “Europe’s High-brows Hail Mickey Mouse,” *Literary Digest*, vol. 110 (August 8, 1931). The position against is typified by Mario Verdone, *Gli intellettuali e il cinema* (Rome, 1952). The lines between American and European positions and between a traditionalist and modern cinematographic culture were sketched out clearly in the mid-1930s in contributions to *Le rôle intellectuel du cinéma* (Paris, 1937).

¹⁹ An interpretation of the impact of U.S. movies on European women is offered in my conference paper “Puritan Minds, Pagan Bodies: Americanization and Models of Modern Womanhood in Interwar Europe” (paper delivered at the Rockefeller Foundation conference, Bellagio, “Women in Dark Times,” August 10–14, 1987).

²⁰ On the star system, see Douglas Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System* (New York, 1986); as well as anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker’s *Hollywood, the Dream Factory* (London, 1951). The phenomenon is discussed in terms of its sociopsychological effects in Edgar Morin, *The Stars* (New York, 1960).

to produce and sell a standardized good to the widest possible audience. For purposes of production, tycoons obtained a monopoly over their human capital by binding the starlets to the film studio by long-term contracts. In terms of sales, the stars acted as known quantities; like brand names they guaranteed the quality of the product, enabling manufacturers to standardize product definition. As a result, movies came to be sold unpreviewed, not just on the basis of quantity—that is, by reel-can footage—but also on the basis of their contents, as assayed by the actors involved. Not least of all, the stars were important cultural vehicles: fictive yet not unreal, they referred to a universalized human condition in such a way as to appeal to ethnically diverse, socially mixed publics. To publicize the stars' attributes to an ever more physically distant, culturally diverse audience, Hollywood publicity agents plied a more and more specialized tabloid press and far-flung networks of fan clubs with images, information, and gossip.

In this distinctive form, Americanism in the movie industry was generally perceived as standing in sharp contrast to the prevailing European models of cinema organization. The American cinema stood for major economies of scale, capital-intensive technologies, and standardization; it favored an action-filled cinematographic narrative focused on the star and pitched to a cross-class audience. Its promoters were professionals who were formed outside of traditional centers of culture, within the industry, and who were closely attuned to the problem of marketing their products. By contrast, the European tradition was identified with decentralized artisan-atelier shops and was associated with theatrical and dramatic conventions attuned to well-defined publics. It rested on a commercial network mediated by intellectuals—meaning directors, technicians, and actors (who moved back and forth between the theater and cinema) as well as cultural organizers and critics.

Whether Europeans could defend these traditions without changing their very essence was highly problematic. Purely from an economic viewpoint, it was quite profitable to tie one's fortunes to American production, as the leading French and Italian firms did in the 1920s by relinquishing film production in order to specialize in the distribution of U.S. movies. From a cultural perspective, "national" was, at least initially, practically impossible to define: after all, what was innately "national" about, say, Italian silent films produced by aristocratic Roman hobbyists? Or, for that matter, what was recognizably "foreign" about American movies among publics that, at least through the mid-1920s, were uncoached by cinema critics and would for the most part have been oblivious to whether fantasy train robberies or Apaches of the Far West were invented in Hollywood or shot on sets in France's Camargue region? But even if there were consensus on the existence and desirability of a national style, could such a cinema be commercially viable without exports? And, as German nationalists worried in the 1930s,

if foreign outlets were necessary, could a *Kulturnation's* cinema still stay true to its soul?²¹

Overall, responses to the American cinema in interwar Europe depended less on actual quantities of American imports or the degree to which these cut into local output than on factors such as the degree of organization of the sector as a whole, traditions of state intervention, and the attitudes of intellectuals and political elites.²² Not least of all, the nature of the response depended on the role the cinema was perceived to play in shaping national identities.

In very broad terms, we can distinguish responses in the 1920s from those in the 1930s. In the earlier period it was usually business alone that worried about the competition, and government policy stopped at the rough and usually futile mechanism of protecting markets with contingency systems or quotas. The latter were easily circumvented by making “quota quickies”—these films, financed by U.S. companies abroad to fill European government requirements that a certain percentage of the movies distributed annually be locally made, were deliberately slipshod so that they offered no competition with Hollywood productions. Meanwhile, intellectuals addressed the problem of defining the cinema’s functions in the cultural system. The later period was characterized by the rise of strong cultural nationalism and economic protectionism. The advent of the sound feature in the early 1930s accentuated these positions. The outcome was a heightened effort to protect local industries, to identify the special qualities of local cinema art, to expand the economic marketability of cinema domestically and abroad, and to influence moviegoers to appreciate indigenous products.

²¹ The complex issue of identifying what is “national” about national motion-picture production is taken up by film historian and critic Philip Rosen in “History, Textuality, Nation: Kracauer, Burch and Some Problems in the Study of National Cinema,” *Iris* 2 (1984): 69–84, in which there is ample reference to two of the most problematic cases, those of Germany and Japan.

²² In 1925 France, there were 577 American imports to only 68 domestic productions; this amounted to 83 percent of the total of 693 motion pictures distributed nationwide; in 1929 France the ratio was 211 U.S. films to 52 local productions or 48 percent of the total (the difference coming from Germany and elsewhere). In Italy, U.S. imports accounted for 65 percent of the films released in 1925 and 75 percent in 1929. In 1926 Germany, U.S. imports outweighed local production 229 to 202 and accounted for 44 percent of the total films distributed; by 1929, American imports had fallen (142 against Germany’s 192) and equaled 30 percent of the total 426 films distributed. See Georges Sadoul, *Histoire générale du cinéma: L’art muet, 1919–1929* (Paris, 1975), 2:29; Ugo Ugoletti, *Stato e cinematografo* (Rome, 1930), p. 23. On Italy, see also Libero Bizzari, “L’economia cinematografica,” in *La città del cinema: Produzione e lavoro nel cinema italiano, 1930–1971*, ed. Assessorato della cultura del Comune di Rome (Rome, 1979), p. 40.

The difficulties encountered in defending local movie industries against American domination were especially evident in 1920s France, where one might have expected a protectionist coalition to form most readily. After all, the French movie industry had been the world's biggest supplier up to 1914, its leading firms, Gaumont and Pathé, dominating international distribution networks. Moreover, since the Enlightenment the power of the French nation abroad had often been measured in terms of the cosmopolitanism of French high culture. French intellectuals were indeed the first and most vociferous decriers of American cultural imperialism.²³

Yet no protectionist coalition shaped up. Once the major French firms had sized up the United States' advantages of scale on international markets and calculated the shallowness of their own home outlets, they simply abandoned feature production.²⁴ Thereafter, feature filmmaking fell largely into the hands of a few medium-sized firms (e.g., Albatros, Aubert, and Ermolieff), several "American-style" producers (Osso, Haik, Diamant-Berger, Sapène, Natan, Nalpas) whose aspirations to make Hollywood-type superproductions were often boosted by their connections to U.S. capital, and, finally, a quantity of small-scale, often one-shot independents, who—whatever their virtues—were not easily organized as a sector.²⁵ In this way the dominant corporate strategies, by strengthening their ties with U.S. capital, actually accentuated sectoral divisions within France. As a result, small and medium producers were pitted against American distributors and their French connections, and independent French exhibitors were placed at the mercy of foreign-dominated distribution chains.

Nor were French intellectuals readily able to mount any coherent defense of a national cinema, nor even to define what "national" meant. A more traditionalist set, including supporters of Edmond Rostand's 1918 proposal on behalf of a *ligue française du cinéma* and various spokesmen for a *comédie française cinématographique*, urged that the cinema be dignified with the same tax breaks and subsidies as the theater. Nationalist ideologues, like those

²³ On the French movie industry, see in addition to Abel, pp. 5–65, the classic work of Sadoul, *Histoire générale du cinéma: L'art muet, 1919–1929*, 1:7–50, 2:309–73.

²⁴ Around 1930, the number of movie theaters in France numbered 2,400 compared to 18,000 in the United States, 3,730 in Germany, and about 3,000 in England (Abel, p. 12). Note that these figures reflect neither the size of theaters nor the frequency of attendance, both of which, however, were probably far greater in the United States, England, and Germany. In *L'industrie du cinéma: Le cinéma sonore* (Bordeaux, 1933), p. 88, André Chevanne estimated that, in 1928, on the average, 15 percent of the European population went to the cinema weekly, whereas only 12 percent of the French did.

²⁵ Abel (n. 13 above), pp. 51–64.

who backed Action Française's 1922 appeal for a *groupe de défense* for French films, supplicated the state to support cinema art and thereby to defend the quality of French culture against the crass quantity of materialist civilization.²⁶ Meanwhile, communist and socialist intellectuals sought to develop alternative circuits and easier credit terms for independent producers. Among the Left's best-known figures was the critic Léon Moussinac, who became the defendant in a four-year court case brought by Jean Sapène and his company Cinéroman after Moussinac, in *L'humanité*, panned MGM's *Jim the Harpoonist* (1926). The charge was that Moussinac, by "inciting the public to boo" at what he plainly called a "bad film," had damaged the film's commercial value. The critic was ultimately exonerated in 1930.²⁷ In the meantime, the case had become a left-wing cause-célèbre. At issue seemed to be the possibility of building an alternative to the prevailing cinema that would be both radical and national. This cinema would have defended independent, engaged filmmakers against big and foreign capital, incited moviegoers to be critical rather than submissive consumers, and defended the workers' movement against the Right.

Ultimately, the government's decision to set up a state commission to study the cinema responded less, it appeared, to industrial pressure than to the voice of intellectuals and to foreign precedents. Headed by the then minister of instruction Edward Herriot in his capacity as head of the Beaux-Arts bureau, the commission had a threefold goal: to grant the industry the same legal rights as the theater; to establish a permanent body to defend French cinema; and to accord the industry the same protection as that enjoyed by film industries elsewhere. Herriot was unduly optimistic that the French industry, once granted a *régime de protection*, would reciprocate by establishing "unity within itself." Accordingly, he proposed a quota: one locally produced film had to be shown for every four produced abroad. Immediately the MPPDA threatened a boycott of the French market, and French distributors and exhibitors, cowed by that prospect, protested the plan. Eventually, after a personal meeting with Hays, Herriot settled for a more modest quota of seven to one, which was near the market ratio. In 1932 Minister of Commerce Bonnet reconfirmed these accords; the only trade-off was lower American tariffs on champagne—in itself a humiliating reminder of the terms of exchange then prevailing in Franco-American trade.²⁸

²⁶ Marcel Lapiere, *Les cent visages du cinema* (Paris, 1948), pp. 144–45; also Paul Monaco, *Cinema and Society in France and Germany* (New York, 1976); p. 42.

²⁷ Elizabeth Grottle Strelbel, *French Social Cinema of the 1930s* (New York, 1980), pp. 76–77.

²⁸ Paul Leglise, *Histoire de la politique du cinéma français*, vol. 1 of *Le cinéma et la Troisième République* (Paris), esp. pp. 61–102, 261–66.

In the 1920s, the Italian response was not dissimilar to that of the French, notwithstanding the protectionist tendencies manifest in the Fascist government after 1925. Italy too had been a leading movie exporter before the war. During its first Golden Age from 1910 to 1920, the Italian cinema was recognized for having invented the multireel epic and *divismo*, an early version of the star system. After the war, however, Italian entrepreneurs, unlike the big French producers, shied away from fixed investments in distribution, equipment manufacture, or film development. In the face of the “American invasion” and with support from Italian big banks, they mistakenly thought to exploit their prewar successes by putting everything into costly but potentially high-profit colossals like *Quo Vadis*. In 1919, producers, distributors, and a few exhibitors banded together in a well-capitalized consortium, the *Unione Cinematografica Italiana*, or UCI, hoping thereby to compete head-on with the giant American firms.²⁹

Not surprisingly, this strategy failed, for it took no account of increasing export competition from the United States and Germany, changes in public taste during the war, or the shaky state of the Italian banking system. In 1923, UCI went into bankruptcy proceedings. The year following, while filming *Ben Hur* on location in Rome, the director Fred Niblow dealt the Italian industry a coup de grace. As the troupe monopolized studio space and employed hundreds of laborers and extras at inflated wages, it brought all other production to a standstill; when it finally packed up for Hollywood later that year, it left the Italian movie industry in shambles.³⁰

The survivors of this invasion learned early the need to adapt to the American cinema’s strengths. Not fortuitously, Italy’s most resilient entrepreneur, the Turinese Stefano Pittaluga, proved an attentive observer of the U.S. industry’s vertical integration. From the mid-1920s he worked from the bottom up, dealing mainly with American releases (he was exclusive distributor in Italy for Warners’ First National and Universal) as well as those of local producers to build up his own distribution and exhibition system. In 1927, Pittaluga also acquired Italy’s largest studios, those of Cines in Rome’s Via Veio. But he rarely ventured into production—at least not until after 1929, when sound features promised to make this a more profitable undertaking in Italy. Understandably, given this dependence on American imports—the *total* Italian output averaging only sixteen to seventeen features annually from 1925

²⁹ On the Italian industry in the 1920s, see the magisterial work of Gian Piero Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano, 1895–1945* (Rome, 1979); see also his earlier, often thematically clearer *Cinema italiano tra le due guerre* (Milan, 1975). In addition, see Libero Bizzari and Libero Solaroli, *L’industria cinematografica italiana* (Florence, 1958); and Ernesto Cauda, *Il film italiano* (Rome, 1932).

³⁰ Bizzari and Solaroli, p. 28.

to 1930—no strong voice was raised on behalf of state protection. The most that was asked for was to reduce box office taxes and to enact a mild quota, the latter obviously being a measure that divided entrepreneurial opinion.

More generally, the debates on the Italian cinema's "renaissance"—whether and when it would occur—made constant reference to America. American movie craft, like U.S. technology, was considered a variant on cultural modernity; hence it was a weapon against the D'Annunzian affectations of an aesthetically discredited and commercially unprofitable theatrical style with aristocratic origins. For the time being, the argument seemed to go, national output was so insignificant that to close out foreign sources could only encourage the pretensions of old-guard culture. Italian attitudes toward the U.S. cinema thus combined the utter self-confidence and dim parochialism sometimes found in intellectuals' discourse on other subjects related to modernity. Thus, in one moment the U.S. "menace" would be conjured up to castigate Pittaluga for not being sufficiently interested in national production, and in the next, the American example would be cited for emulation.³¹ The curious result would be carried over into 1930s Fascist policies; exceptional familiarity with Americanism, even outright imitation, was not considered antithetical to forming a self-consciously nationalist mass culture.

Given Fascism's own protectionist impulses after 1926, its slowness to safeguard national movie production may appear surprising. However, for most of the first decade of its rule, the Fascist government treated consensus as something explicitly political and hence to be shaped by outright propagandistic manipulations.³² Whereas the regime sought to control news information, forestalling the exhibition of Fox newsreels by establishing a state monopoly over information in 1925 and setting up the Istituto Luce to produce and distribute its own newsreels, it passed over feature films as being art and entertainment. In any event, the contingency accords that were passed with the law of July 16, 1927, calling for all first-run movie houses to reserve one day in ten for Italian productions, recognized (perhaps unwittingly) that American imports were indispensable. According to one calculation, this measure

³¹ Before the better-known film journalism of the thirties commenced (including *Bianco e nero* and *Cinema*) and fan magazines such as *Ciné-illustrazione* acquired wide circulation, middle-class opinion about the cinema was shaped in various best-selling books such as Mino Doletti, *Aneddoti del cinema* (Bologna, 1930); Arnaldo Fraccaroli, *Hollywood: Paese di avventura* (Milan, 1929); and E. Margadonna, *Cinema ieri e oggi* (Milan, 1932); in addition to fan magazines such as Guglielmo Giannini's widely circulated *Kines*.

³² On this aspect of state policy, see Mino Argentieri, *L'occhio del regime: Informazione e propaganda nel cinema del fascismo* (Florence, 1979); also Philip V. Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso* (Bari, 1975).

called for a yearly production of fifty films to be effective, when the actual output until the mid-thirties was only about one-third of that.³³

Not even the German industry could ward off U.S. competition, in spite of receiving more and more state favors, marshaling enormous creative energies, and having access to the huge central-European market. Arguably, German producers began with yet another advantage—namely, the industry's newness. As late as 1914, only 15 percent of the features distributed locally were produced there, the bulk of the rest being imported from France, Denmark, and Sweden. However, during the Great War the German High Command and leading industrialists recognized the importance of having a nationally oriented, centrally controlled movie output. In 1917, while central Europe was blockaded by the Entente, a combination of state and private interests founded the Universum Film AG, better known as UFA. By 1918, in addition to occupying a commanding position among German film companies, it had the biggest and best-equipped studios in Europe. It also had built up its own distribution networks, owning a string of movie theaters outright. This proved to be a major strength, for in the movie business control over distribution was key to determining what was produced. By the early 1920s, UFA was rapidly becoming the pivot of a rich central European cinema culture with a cross-national language market of about eighty million.³⁴

In the face of U.S. competition the German industry, led by UFA (whose state-held stock was bought out by the Deutsche Bank after the war), developed some counterstrategies which a more tradition-bound cinema like the Italian could not, and which the big French firms precluded by winding down investment in production. According to Erich Pommer, who in 1921 became production chief at UFA after the company bought out his own firm, Decla-Bioskop, the highly stylized expressionist film exemplified product specialization as opposed to mass manufacture: it turned the peculiarities of German filmmaking—including its theatrical traditions, talented writers, and stock of fine actors—into a marketing strength against Hollywood's standardized products.³⁵ Naturally, its success in finding foreign markets was greatly helped by early Weimar's great inflationary spiral. Almost from the start, then, exports became indispensable to the industry's health, as the domestic market amortized only about 30–40 percent of the rapidly rising production costs.

³³ Bizzari (n. 22 above), pp. 39–40.

³⁴ Julian Petley, *Capital and Culture: German Cinema, 1933–1945* (London, 1979), esp. pp. 29 ff.; Jurgen Spiker, *Film und Kapital* (Berlin, 1975), pp. 9–79; in addition to H. H. Wollenberg, *Fifty Years of German Film Making* (London, 1948).

³⁵ George Huaco, *Sociology of Film Art* (New York, 1965), p. 31; also Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler* (Princeton, N.J., 1947), esp. pp. 65, 131–37.

The American industry's dismay at German export competition, especially in France, explains the rapidity with which American firms responded to the crisis of German industry in the wake of currency stabilization in 1924. As Germany's export boom collapsed, its home markets were flooded with U.S. imports. Meanwhile Hollywood flaunted its power over the fledgling UFA-Stadt, drawing away some of Germany's major cinema talent (including Pommer) with high salaries and the promise of stimulating, if frenetic, work conditions. UFA itself was diversified enough not to lose its dominant position among German firms; as usual, the small firm specializing in production was worst hit by the export crisis. But by 1925 UFA too needed a bailout. Failing to obtain it from either the state or big private investors, it was forced to conclude an unfavorable deal with Paramount and MGM. The upshot of this was a loan of seventeen million Reichsmarks at 7.5 percent interest, in exchange for which UFA joined a new distribution company, the infamously exploitative and short-lived Parufamet. Company policy called for UFA to distribute twenty films from each of its partners, showing these for a minimum half-week each in all UFA-owned cinemas, while the two American concerns promised to use their home circuits to distribute ten UFA films per year. In 1926, UFA as well as some smaller German companies were forced to conclude similar agreements with other major American firms.

Such agreements marked the high point of the U.S. industry's attempts to buy into and thereby weaken its strongest competitor. However, the move did not solve the German industry's grave financial problems. Moreover, it incited German nationalists who, unlike the more traditionalist French Right, with its fears of mass culture, were not squeamish about exploiting the new medium's potential and profitability. In early 1927 Alfred Hugenberg's multimedia conglomerate acquired a majority share in UFA, buying out American interests, apparently with some help from the foreign ministry and the minister of the economy. This move, followed by measures to consolidate UFA's market position by rationalizing production schedules, strengthening exports, and branching out into the technical sector, was treated as a major victory for nationalist-conservatives against U.S. imperialism.³⁶ Indeed, by 1928, there was a discernible pattern of crisis, restructuring, and growth in the German industry that would be accentuated after the Nazi takeover. The interests of the dominant firms, of the state, and of nationalist ideologues thus coalesced to build a vertically integrated, strongly capitalized industrial establishment. Oriented to the broad markets of central Europe, it was sufficiently diversified and innovative to keep pace with American cinema in the next major phase of movie history, the development of the sound feature.

³⁶ Petley, pp. 36–41; also Wilfried von Bredow and Rolf Zurek, *Film und Gesellschaft in Deutschland: Dokumenten und Materialien* (Hamburg, 1975), pp. 135–236.

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In the several years after 1927 when the enterprising Warner Company produced the first “talkie,” *The Jazz Singer*, Hollywood precipitated a process of competitive innovation throughout the West that transformed every aspect of moviemaking from production techniques to exhibition. Huge new investments were called for as feature costs doubled and tripled and theaters had to be refitted with sound equipment. The sound film also changed marketing strategies. Initially spurring moviegoing to new heights—at a moment when markets had become unpredictable as a result of the economic crisis—sound also raised the longer-term problem of serving polyglot publics. To strengthen their hold in Europe, the Majors broadened their continental operations. Paramount’s decision to open its own production studios in 1930 at Joinville-Paris to make original-language versions of its U.S. films was perhaps the most visible evidence of this new expansionism. Geared to assembly-line rhythms, it brought to continental Europe the most advanced division of labor ever seen in movie manufacture.³⁷

For Europeans, the sound film presented at once a new menace and new opportunities. Certainly it threatened cultural identity more than the silent film: “Noise yes, words no” went one antisound slogan from France. American language (not even “real English”) was an assault on the ears. Worse, it shattered the “complicity of silence” which, for many filmmakers and theoreticians, was the very key to cinematic art. Some feared that with sound, moviemakers would regress, forsaking the montage techniques peculiar to moviemaking for the anachronistic panning effects of filmed theater.³⁸ However, the domestic output was likely better suited to satisfy the public’s expectations of sound than the dull subtitling, poor quality post-synchronization, and amateurish dubbing of foreign imports. Beyond cornering their own

³⁷ On the development of sound in the United States, see Bächlin, *Histoire économique du cinéma* (n. 14 above), pp. 60 ff.; also Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System* (n. 20 above), pp. 5–26. On Paramount-Joinville, see the description of Ilya Ehrenburg, “C’est un film Paramount,” *Révue du cinéma* (June 1, 1931), pp. 7–24; and Dudley Andrew, “Sound in France: The Origins of a Native School,” *Yale French Studies* 60 (1980): 94–114, esp. 100–101. Directors as varied as Gance, Duvivier, Marc Allegret, Calvalcanti, and Camerini worked at Joinville.

³⁸ See esp. René Jeanne, “L’invasion cinématographique américaine,” *Révue des deux mondes* (February 15, 1930), pp. 857–84, and his “La France et le film parlant,” *Révue des deux mondes* (June 1, 1930), pp. 533–54; also Alexandre Arnoux, *Du muet au parlant: Mémoire d’un témoin* (Paris, 1946); and Lapierre, pp. 206–32. René Clair recalls his doubts and ultimate conversion to sound in *Réflexion faites: Notes pour servir à l’histoire* (Paris, 1951), as do other protagonists in the special number of *Cinématographe* 47 (May 1979): 1–27 devoted to *Du muet au parlant*.

markets, producers from the big European-language areas also hoped to exploit the distress of smaller nations, like Sweden and Denmark, whose high-quality products had hitherto occupied tidy little niches in the international silent film market. For some market leaders, such as the German-Dutch sound equipment combine Tobis-Klangfilm-Küchenmeister, inventor of the T-Ergon sound film process, the changeover meant quick, sure, and big profits.³⁹

Indeed, sound appeared to have “nationalized the cinema.”⁴⁰ Sound accentuated the cultural distinctiveness of home production; it heightened defenses against a new round of American investment; and finally, it raised the problem of how to commercialize national cultural products in order to use export markets to offset shallow home demand and higher costs of production.

In France, the prospect of an Anglo-American “linguistic imperialism” compounding the threat of economic colonization accentuated efforts to define the so-called national essence of French filmmaking. The cinema had just recently been recognized as “Art” by the cultural establishment when the *Semaine du Cinéma*, sponsored by the Beaux-Arts at the Sorbonne in 1929, was endorsed by conservative critics such as *Le Figaro*’s editor Lucien Romier; that left only the diehard—preeminently that self-styled *contempteur du progrès* Georges Duhamel, author of the best-selling *America the Menace* (1931)—to excoriate the pernicious effects of standardized images on the *foules anonymes*.⁴¹ As art, the medium was now subject to the same critical standards applied to high culture: film criticism became a cottage industry. At the same time, practical minds formulated criteria by which to distinguish hybrid coproductions from genuine national products and ways to translate the Americanized vocabulary of filmmaking into French. The editors of mass circulation magazines, not least those who were most beholden to U.S. fan magazines for their format, pretended to educate movie spectators about the differences between national and American mass culture. The beauty contest, although never so widespread as in the United States, had become a French institution by the mid-1930s, as had the fan club. Its intent, aside from promoting the sponsors and avowedly recruiting fresh local talent for the industry, was to domesticate the new beauty standards, sexual mores, and social habits fostered by American films.⁴²

³⁹ On the European response, see Douglas Gomery, “Economic Struggles and Hollywood Imperialism: Europe Converts to Sound,” *Yale French Studies* 60 (Winter 1980): 80–93; see also Southard (n. 16 above); Chevanne (n. 24 above); and Andrew (n. 37 above).

⁴⁰ Chevanne, p. 40.

⁴¹ In Georges Duhamel, *L’humanité et l’automate* (Paris, 1933), pp. 9–11, 188–90.

⁴² The special appeal by fan magazines to the constitution of new kinds of female publics is visible in the columns of 1930s mass-circulation reviews such as *Cinémonde*,

Yet from an economic standpoint, the French cinema adjusted very awkwardly to the new market conditions. Between 1929 and 1931, Gaumont and Pathé combined with other firms to enter the sound field, Gaumont forming Gaumont-Franco-Aubert Films, while Pathé merged with Natan. But those who believed that these mergers signaled a rebirth of the industry were deluded. In 1932 Gaumont went into bankruptcy, and in the two years following, Pathé-Natan's capital was depleted by the new partner's unsound if not downright shady investments. Although officialdom dismissed their operations as chaotic and fly-by-night, small firms produced most films, albeit with more difficulty than in the twenties. For not only were costs higher, but in addition distribution had become even more concentrated in American hands: by 1935 seven of the thirteen national distribution chains, including the very largest, were either U.S. company subsidiaries or in friendly French hands.⁴³

In the wake of the Gaumont bankruptcy, the state joined key intellectual figures in pressing for a more cohesive structure in the film industry as a whole. Under advice from industry spokesmen, the Beaux-Arts' director Petsche proposed an UFA-style reorganization, the pillar of which was to be Gaumont-Franco-Aubert. However, 1934 France was neither World War I Germany nor the Nazi state; nor, for that matter, did the French state have the powers of the Vichy regime, in which such an idea was eventually welcomed—except insofar as the reorganized industry threatened to compete with the grasping monolith UFA! The French competitors of Gaumont-Franco-Aubert were opposed to the reorganization (admittedly, UFA's competitors had reacted similarly in Germany), and exhibitors, distributors, and producers were still at odds about their interests in regulating the sector. The next year, in response to widespread protests over the industry's economic plight, the government once more proposed to intervene. The Carmoy report, drawn up by the inspector of finances to call attention to the *situation allarmante*, led the National Economic Council in May 1936 to back state aid in the form of tax relief, credits, and tariffs.⁴⁴ It also proposed to support self-regulation by laying out a national statute and reopening negotiations over the latest and, as always, unsatisfactory Franco-American contingency agreements. How-

Cinémiroir, and *Confidential* in France, and *Ciné-illustrazione* and *Piccola* in Italy, not to mention various women's magazines published by the Berlin-based House of Ullstein from the mid-1920s.

⁴³ See Andrew and Strelbel (n. 27 above). More generally on governmental policy toward the cinema in the thirties, see Leglise (n. 28 above) and the findings of the Carmoy inquiry in Conseil National Economique, *L'industrie cinématographique* (Paris, 1936).

⁴⁴ Leglise, pp. 75 ff., 106–7. See also Conseil National Economique, *L'industrie cinématographique*.

ever, the industry, although now led by a triumvirate of spokesmen representing its various branches—not yet by the Hollywood-style czar that some recommended—remained thoroughly divided on what more to ask of state intervention. This was especially true now that the Popular Front was in power and the Left unions were putting forward demands to nationalize the industry. In the next two years, parliamentary inquiries calling attention to the disorganization of the sector appealed for *une très grande sévérité corporative* to strengthen the industry as a whole.⁴⁵ But these inquiries also failed to propose any solution.

In the process of documenting its claim that the sector was in chaos, the government inadvertently revealed the source of the French cinema's considerable creativity in those years. The Rénaitour Commission cited the proliferation of independent, often one-film enterprises (158 newly formed in 1935, with a total capitalization of seventeen million francs; 175 in 1936, totaling only twelve million francs), commenting on their high failure rate.⁴⁶ Yet these independent, small-time enterprises, using the Pathé, Gaumont, or Eclair studios and renting much of their equipment, appear to have accounted for significant production increases in the late 1930s. How much these enterprises supported the filmmaking of the Popular Front era and vice versa calls for further inquiry. In any event, the years of 1935 through 1939 were years of success for the French cinema—or, if not for the industry as a whole, certainly for the “poetic realism” of the Popular Front film. Like the German expressionist film of the 1920s and Italian neorealism in the late forties, this was a specialized product that garnered success not only at home but abroad as well.⁴⁷

In Italy the Fascist regime, once launched on its program of “reaching out to the people,” became increasingly susceptible to cultural and political arguments on behalf of state intervention. For the younger intellectuals especially, cinema was the ideal medium for bridging the gap between elite and mass cultures. Though avowedly supporting a national cinema industry, these younger intellectuals still did not unequivocally reject Americanism. Partly this was dictated by realism: even though production had picked up slightly after 1931, total output was still so modest (the ratio of imports to Italian films running nine to one in 1934) that to curb American sources was unthinkable. Italian backwardness was held to be so great (an authoritative 1934 report to Mussolini maintained that Italy was five years behind in all aspects of movie manufacture) that perforce the cinema must take stock of foreign

⁴⁵ Jean-Michel Rénaitour, ed., *Où va le cinéma français?* (Paris, 1937).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁴⁷ Strebel, pp. 115–17.

experiences.⁴⁸ Given the choice between European and American models, it was obvious, as Mussolini's son, Vittorio, observed in his journal *Cinema* in late 1936, that the United States' "technical virtuosity and fluid narrative styles" were superior in every way to "heavy-handed German trauma" and the "trite farce and double entendre" of the French.⁴⁹ Sympathy for Americanism was also dictated by a misplaced confidence that Italian filmmakers could borrow Hollywood technology without being beholden to Hollywood themes. They could appropriate the "solid commercial structure" and "narrative style" "made in the USA"; then, boasted the young Mussolini in a 1937 issue of the official *Popolo d'Italia*, "we can begin to talk about Fascist cinema."⁵⁰ In sum, filmmakers and critics sought a form of state intervention that would be both protective and nurturing, yet at the same time tolerant of experimentation. Behind this was a logic that could justify either a slavish Americanism or a vehement anti-Americanism, or, as in the thirties, both at once.

This demand was obviously so confused as to be untranslatable into any coherent policy. Its inconsistencies were in fact reflected in improvised legislation, the unintended effect of which was to give any clear-sighted entrepreneurs unusual leverage in making final decisions. Since 1927 the Fascist government had adopted various stopgap protectionist measures; but not until 1934, after it had set up a general Directorate of Cinematography responsible to the undersecretary of press and propaganda (later the minister of popular culture), was it presented with a strategy for state intervention in the film sector. This was drawn up by Luigi Freddi, the Directorate's new chief, a foreign correspondent and former editor of *Popolo d'Italia*, just after his return from a month-long stay in Hollywood. Freddi's goal, as one historian characterized it, was to build a state-run MGM;⁵¹ this was to be powerful

⁴⁸ Luigi Freddi, "Rapporto sulla cinematografia," June 22, 1934, in Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Presidenza Consiglio Ministri, 1934–36, f. 3/2.2 1397, sf. Freddi, Luigi.

⁴⁹ Luigi Freddi, *Il cinema* (Rome, 1949), 1:297. On the response to Americanism more generally, see Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano, 1895–1945* (n. 24 above), pp. 213–19, 227, 409–16; also Adriano Aprà, "La 'rinascita' sulla pagina cinematografica del 'Tevere,' 1929–1930," in *Nuovi materiali sul cinema italiano, 1929–1943*, Quaderno 71 (Pesaro, 1976), pp. 60–85; in this same collection, see also Lucilla Albano, "Volontà-possibilità del cinema fascista: Riviste e periodici degli anni trenta in Italia," pp. 101–36.

⁵⁰ Freddi, *Il cinema*, 1:297.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1:46 ff., 64. On the thirties, see the interpretative framework of Lorenzo Quaglietti: "Il cinema degli anni trenta in Italia: Primi elementi per un'analisi politico-strutturale," in *Materiali sul cinema italiano, 1929–1943*, Quaderno 63 (Pesaro, 1975); and Freddi, *Il cinema*, 1:293 ff.

enough to integrate production, distribution, and exhibition, yet free of day-to-day political interference. For this he sought massive state aid and stepped-up protection.

However, counseling against such measures, at least for the time being, were considerations of both cost and the desirability of maintaining serene relations with the United States. In 1934, Mussolini had only just been apprised of the Istituto Luce's extravagant waste the year before of four million lire (about 550,000 dollars) on Giovacchino Forzano's propaganda-art epic *Camicia nera*, a film that was both a critical failure and a box-office flop.⁵² Moreover, after the bankrupt Cines-Pittaluga was audited by the recently founded Institute for Industrial Reconstruction (IRI) in 1933–34, regime officials had doubtless been apprised that, while distribution might pay off, risk taking on feature films was best turned back to private enterprise. As a result, when the government decided to put up funds to build new production studios in late 1935, it did so at the behest of the industrialist Roncoroni, who only that year had purchased the production side of Cines from IRI. In its dealing with American firms, the Fascist state showed similar caution. In November 1936, after a visit from Hays, Mussolini reversed a previous order to curb imports in order to stop capital outflows—an order that had certainly not been incomprehensible given that the United States had lent support to the League of Nations' sanctions against Italy and that approximately 70 percent of the gross earnings from new film releases in 1935 had gone to U.S. companies.

Ultimately, a mixed solution involving both state and private enterprise prevailed over the plan for a government monopoly; the argument that protectionism plus subsidies might yield increased productivity triumphed over political and cultural arguments on behalf of total state control. No doubt, too, the process of intervention was simplified by the fact that Italy was a dictatorship, and in Italy (unlike France, where there were many competing claims), there was only one major claimant at any given moment: Pittaluga from 1926 through 1931; his successor at Cines, Emilio Cecchi, in 1932–33; and, finally, Roncoroni from 1935 to 1939. Pittaluga's negotiations with the state resulted in the law of June 18, 1931—a happy precedent for future petitioners for state help: having produced all but one of the thirteen bona fide Italian films made that year, his company naturally profited from a measure that awarded bonuses in proportion to box-office receipts. In far greater measure, the government's construction of Cinecittà was a bonus for private

⁵² "Attività svolta dell'Istituto nell'esercizio 1933: Relazione a S. E. dal Presidente dell'Istituto M. Paolucci de' Calboli," March 31, 1934, pp. 20, 36, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Minculpop. 170.20.

enterprise. Inaugurated by Mussolini on April 28, 1937, less than two years after it was commissioned to replace the old Cines studios of Via Veio—which providentially had burned to the ground just nine months after Roncoroni had acquired them from IRI—Cinecittà's huge studios were a European moviemaker's dream; they combined a craft-based organization with the most technologically advanced equipment in Europe, under the supervision of a Hollywood-trained Italian engineer.⁵³ The Alfieri Law of June 16, 1938 offered still another incentive to movie entrepreneurs by granting an automatic bonus equal to 12–25 percent of gross receipts for any film whose script had passed censorship, regardless of artistic or other merits.

In light of these favors, the industry accepted without comment the government's decision in late 1938 to establish a complete monopoly over distribution. The state administration already had a stake in this domain: IRI had retained Cines's distribution and exhibition network, and since 1935 this had been run out of the Ente Nazionale Industria Cinematografica (ENIC), a special parastate office headed by the director of the Istituto Luce. The decision to use ENIC as a clearing agency for imported as well as domestic feature films was dictated mainly by the need to stanch capital outflows, even if, for propaganda purposes, it was trumpeted as a blow for cultural autarchy against plutocratic decay. The government still hoped that some compromise might be reached to keep the American Majors from withdrawing from Italian markets—which they did at the very end of 1938—and that in any case the Minors (including RKO, Universal, and United Artists), which already used Italian distributors, would stay on. But these companies proved unable to cope with the complex clearing arrangements devised by the dictatorship, and under pressure from the Big Four American producers, they too withdrew.

Although Italian exhibitors initially feared that they could not compensate for the loss with domestic products and that moviegoers who were deprived of Clark Gable and Gary Cooper would desert the theaters, they were relieved to find that neither was the case. Domestic output quickly took up the slack, and after several months of uncertainty audience attendance picked up again, demonstrating that by the late thirties the moviegoing habit had become stronger than allegiance to any single star or style. This habit certainly opened up opportunities for domestic products, especially for all kinds of Hollywood imitations.⁵⁴

⁵³ Bizzari and Solaroli (n. 29 above), pp. 32–41. On Cinecittà: Lucilla Albano, "Hollywood: Cinelandia. . .," in *Cinema italiano sotto il fascismo*, ed. Riccardo Redi (Venice, 1979), pp. 219–32.

⁵⁴ More generally on this period, see Jean A. Gili, "Pouvoir politique et intérêts économiques: L'industrie du cinéma en Italie pendant la période fasciste," *Film échange* 9 (Winter 1980): 67–88. Fascist worries about the repercussions of the new legislation

By the end of the decade, Fascist Italy had become a movie investor's paradise, with a protected market in rapid expansion as the moviegoing public grew from 348 million attending annually in 1938 to 477 million in 1942; state-financed production studios (which after Roncoroni's death in 1939 passed into government hands); a state-sponsored distribution cartel to allocate markets; and finally, big bonuses, rewarded for quantity rather than quality—on the basis of box-office receipts rather than for artistic merits or cinematic professions of political faith. Under these circumstances, new investors entered the market and production flourished. By wartime, output had risen from thirty-one films in 1927 to the 1940 total of eighty-three; in 1942, 119 features were produced.⁵⁵ Of these, remarkably few were political in any conventional sense. The most typical, if not the most numerous, were in the "white telephone" style, a clever commercial blend of Italian social commentary and Hollywood melodramatic formulae. A significant few directors mixed American and French realist genres—the gangster film and the film noir—to form the new national, albeit oppositional, cultural style that in the postwar years would develop into the Italian neorealist school.⁵⁶

Compared to the making-do of the improvisatory French and Italian efforts, the autarchic policies pursued in the Third Reich to build a national cinema look like part of a grand design. In fact, they resulted from an unusual combination of circumstances, namely industrial concentration, ideological cohesiveness, and dictatorial intervention. The Nazis came to power with an organicist nationalist ideology that, it was anticipated, would express its *völkisch* nature through the movie medium. However, within the Nazi party, there were diverse positions on how this should occur. As might be expected, the extremist-populist wing proposed a movement cinema: this meant favoring movies with an explicitly political or propagandistic content and helping out small and independent theater owners, many of whom apparently were Nazi

on audiences and on the American minor filmmakers is now well documented in Brunetta, pp. 293–97, 515–19; see also Libero Solaroli, "Profilo di storia economica del cinema italiano," in Peter Bächlin, *Il cinema come industria* (Milan, 1958), pp. 198–99.

⁵⁵ Bizzari (n. 22 above), p. 40.

⁵⁶ The most vivid and subtle Italian analysis of the mix of old and new genres is in Francesco Savio, *Ma l'amore no: Realismo, formalismo, propaganda e telefoni bianchi nel cinema italiano del regime, 1930–1943* (Milan, 1975). Two recent U.S. works bring textual analysis and a sensitivity to issues of popular cultural production to the study of the formation of these genres: Marcia Landy, *The Italian Commercial Cinema, 1931–1943* (Princeton, N.J., 1986); and James Hay, *Popular Film Culture in Fascist Italy* (Bloomington, Ind., 1987), which contains an interesting section on "American Images in Fascist Italy," pp. 64–98.

stalwarts. In contrast, the institutional wing, including the Reich's propaganda minister Goebbels, a zealous movie fan, contended that economic soundness and artistic merit should be guiding precepts and that state policy should be oriented toward developing the already existing industrial structure. The history of the German cinema in the decade after the Nazi seizure of power pivoted around altering this industrial structure to make it at once commercially sound and ideologically compatible with the Nazi notion of movie culture.⁵⁷ More specifically, this involved beating foreign competition at home and especially abroad by curbing intracompany rivalries within Germany, cutting costs, building up the shallow domestic market, and, finally, developing genres with international appeal.

When the Nazis came to power, the movie industry was in a particularly good position to formulate demands for help. To cope with the slump of the preceding four years, the industry's professional groups, led by the Spitzorganisation der deutschen Film Industrie, had already sought out state intervention. With the so-called SPIO Plan of 1932, this exceptionally powerful interest group—which, since its foundation in 1923, had represented not only producers and distributors but exhibitors as well—proposed to codify its regulatory powers by becoming a state administrative agency. With UFA's chief executive Ludwig Klitzsch as its head, the SPIO was strong enough to secure itself a voice in the new government which, though not yet prepared to address ideological issues related to the German cinema, was responsive to its economic problems. After consulting with the SPIO leadership, it founded the Reichsfilmkammer and the Filmkredit bank, in which major positions were occupied by leading trade spokesmen. For the time being there was no market test of Goebbels's so-called theory to the effect that "the nationalist and racialist purity of autochthonous sources would give [German cinema] the vitality to transit international barriers." The relatively few explicitly Nazi films made in 1934–35 were for domestic consumption rather than for international audiences.⁵⁸

The more complicated issue of reconciling commercial appeal with a specifically Nazi cinema style arose as the industry's profits slumped in 1936–37. Partly this was because costs were rising as a result of sound production and partly because of the huge salaries paid to German stars for whose services UFA had to compete against Paris and Hollywood. It was also the result of a long-term decline in exports, further aggravated in those years by foreign

⁵⁷ On the Nazis' reorganization of the cinema, see Petley (n. 34 above); and Spiker (n. 34 above), pp. 80–181.

⁵⁸ Cited from his April 30, 1935 speech at the closing session of the International Film Congress in Berlin, in Francis Courtade and Pierre Cadars, *Le cinéma Nazi* (Paris, 1972), pp. 318–19.

boycotts of Nazi films. Exports had covered 40 percent of movie costs in 1932–33; they covered only 6–7 percent in 1936–37.⁵⁹

The regime's response to this crisis was fourfold. First, it promoted another round of concentration and rationalization. Hugenberg was removed as head of the board of UFA and the company was put under direct state authority; in the next three years, its operations were coordinated with the three other industry leaders so that, by 1939, German film production could be characterized as a state-protected oligopoly. Second, the government sought to build up domestic consumption—not, it appears, by promoting the fan club, the movie magazine, or the giveaways typical of U.S. marketing campaigns during the Depression and widely imitated in Europe, but by mobilizing the Nazi political apparatus (Kraft durch Freude and traveling cinemas), discounting tickets, and sponsoring the UFA “revivals.” Third, it developed its own star system, substituting German stars for Hollywood favorites and imitating American genres. “At least until the grass takes deep enough root to squeeze out the weeds”: that, according to one Berlin producer, was the reason why gangster films were still being made on studio lots in the spring of 1939, complete with pleasant-looking policemen and clerks in shirt sleeves, telephone-studded desks and skyscraper backdrops.⁶⁰ Finally, the regime broadened its export market, at first by peaceable means, through coproduction arrangements with Italy, Austria, and France, and then by force, with the annexation of Austria and Czechoslovakia and the subsequent invasion of all of continental Europe.

Even before the war began, this policy had begun to show results. From 1937, production increased to about eighty films per year, studio use increased, and innovations in sound technology and color (UFA- and AGFA-color) began to be applied to production. American imports dropped rapidly from sixty-four in 1933 to twenty in 1939, when Goebbels, using Anatole Litvak's *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* as a pretext, sought to ban U.S. film imports altogether.⁶¹ Finally, there was a big increase in audiences—not just a wid-

⁵⁹ Petley, p. 60.

⁶⁰ As observed by the Milan-based *L'ambrosiano*'s chief movie critic Emilio Ceretti, “Rassegna della stampa,” *Bianco e nero* 3 (June 1939): 110. On the Nazis' emulation of the star system, see in addition to Courtade and Cadars, Cinzia Romani, *Le dive del Terzo Reich* (Rome, 1981); and Richard Traubner, “The Sound and the Führer,” *Film Comment* 14 (July–August 1978): 17–23.

⁶¹ According to Goebbels's “orders of the day” on February 28, 1941 (*Secret Conferences of Dr. Goebbels, October 1939–March 1943*, ed. Willi A. Boelke, trans. Ewald Osers [London, 1967], pp. 123–24), American films were still in circulation at that date. Ultimately the flow was halted as a result of the commercial disruptions attendant on the war rather than the repeated, evidently futile draconian orders to stop them.

ening of the market as Nazi Germany expanded out of the Old Reich but a deepening as well.

The Nazis' self-styled European "alternative" to the American cinema was ultimately established by outright conquest rather than economic-cultural competition. In the scale of its continental market, the dimensions of the giant UFI holding company (set up in January 1942 to consolidate the assets of all major firms, including UFA, involved in motion pictures) were at least equal to the American industry's home outlets. In its technical accomplishments it was certainly a peer. It even had its own equivalent of Hollywood flair, the so-called UFA style. Topping it all off was the International Film Chamber; this body, intended by its chief promoter Goebbels to be the European counterpart of the powerful MPPDA, ostensibly represented all continental filmmakers and distributors and was launched under the slogan "European cinema" just after the fall of France. The "unitary order" backed by the Nazis depended on pressures other than market forces: political controls, meaning army censorship, confiscations (especially of extensive Jewish properties), and a monopoly over news sources. It also called for the manipulation of commercial accords, including business agreements that involved UFI in coproduction and direct investment in new national cinema corporations such as France's Continental, the Italian Europa Film, and Hungary's Messter Company, as well as distribution accords that gave it about sixteen thousand outlets by the early 1940s.⁶²

Although the war made this German-dominated alternative possible, proposals for a common front against U.S. competition had come up before. Indeed, since the mid-1920s, rather than provoking animosity, the German industry had increasingly appeared to French and Italian competitors to offer the only viable European leadership. In some very concrete ways the German industry did indeed promote unity. For one thing, it fostered a flourishing middle-European cinema culture by drawing to Berlin directors, actors, and technicians from Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Rumania. It also helped put French firms back into the European market. Thus, by making

⁶² Marcus S. Phillips, "The German Film Industry and the New Order," in *The Shaping of the Nazi State*, ed. Peter D. Stachura (London, 1978), pp. 257–81. For Europe as a whole see Georges Sadoul, *Histoire générale du cinéma*, vol. 6, *Le cinéma pendant la guerre, 1939–1945* (Paris, 1954), pp. 8–70. On this period in France, see also Paul Leglise, *Histoire de la politique cinématographique*, vol. 2, *Entre deux républiques, 1940–1946* (Paris, 1976); Jacques Siclier, *La France de Pétain et son cinéma* (Paris, 1981); and especially the brief analytical pieces of Stéphane Levy-Klein, "Sur le cinéma français des années, 1940–1944: Pt. 1, L'organisation," *Positif* 168 (April 1975): 23–30, and pt. 2, "Les réalisations," 170 (June 1975): 35–44; and most recently, Evelyn Ehrlich, *Cinema of Paradox: French Filmmaking under the German Occupation* (New York, 1985).

accords with the German company in 1930, the Gaumont-Franco-Aubert conglomerate had been able to enter into cartel agreements regarding distribution with Klangfilm and UFA; and by establishing a trust relationship with Tobis-Küchenmeister it had entered the sound equipment market.⁶³ Since 1932, the SPIO had urged other European lobbies to emulate its own vertically organized interest group structure in order to combat the influence of the MPPDA. By 1937 the SPIO's influence proved so threatening that the American group, along with British trade representatives, decided to boycott the International Film Congress set for July in Paris. Their grounds were that the periodic meetings (the previous one had been held in Berlin in 1935) were becoming tools of a German-led, anti-American continental bloc.⁶⁴

As the German cinema came to dominate the continental market during the war, the Nazi regime was compelled to address a more fundamental tension: that between producing a widely marketable commodity and creating a "national" cinema to legitimate nation-state power. In the United States, as noted earlier, this problem was resolved more or less automatically. From the start the industry acted like a sponge, absorbing its personnel and themes from many of the same cultural sources that subsequently constituted its new markets. Its own national public was ethnically diverse and socially less stratified than any European public. Finally, its own test of the value of the product was shamelessly measured by corporate balance sheets and box-office figures. In sum, being international by necessity, there was no need for it to resort to cosmopolitan artifice of the kind which, as caricatured by the French cinema critics Jeanne and Ford, led some European producers in quest of polyglot publics to devise plots figuring an American ingenue whose brother is an Austrian comic and whose mother is an Italian vamp married to a French leading man.⁶⁵

Much more self-consciously, Nazi Germany moved to make German cinema salable abroad as it relied more and more on export markets. Judging by his keen interest in keeping abreast of the American competition, Goebbels seems to have grasped that even captive audiences had to be turned into eager consumers. He held biweekly showings of American films for German producers, and his diaries and conferences are dotted with object lessons from his reading of American cultural history for the eventual benefit of his close collaborators. Two of these object lessons are relevant here. The first one,

⁶³ Abel (n. 13 above), pp. 28–30, 35. Andrew (n. 37 above) is especially good on the strong presence of Tobis and other German firms in France from the mid-twenties to the mid-thirties.

⁶⁴ Leglise (n. 28 above), 1:93, 152; Lapierre (n. 26 above), p. 499.

⁶⁵ René Jeanne and Charles Ford, *Le cinéma et la presse, 1895–1960* (Paris), pp. 419–20.

drawn from observing U.S. relations with its Canadian and South American markets, held that Germany might tolerate native producers, but only if they preserved a purely local character and were kept from acquiring a commercial base and corporate identity of their own. The second lesson acknowledged that the Americans were “masters” at taking their own (admittedly scarce) “cultural stock,” freeing it of “political ballast,” and making it palatable to a mass public.⁶⁶ German cineasts had to do likewise if the New Order was to acquire not just a politico-military dimension but an economic and cultural unity as well. On these grounds, from early 1942 Goebbels justified a policy of promoting entertainment or *Unterhaltungsfilm*: of the seventy-two motion pictures commissioned from UFI for 1945, sixty-four were in this escapist style.⁶⁷

One production in particular epitomizes the changed relationship between culture and sovereignty implied in this choice. The extravagant *Baron von Münchhausen* was commissioned in 1941 with an eye to the 1943 celebration of UFA’s twenty-fifth anniversary and the tenth since the Nazi “renascence” of the German cinema. Directed by the Hungarian Josef von Baky and starring Germany’s most popular actor, Hans Albers, it tells the tale of the eighteenth-century Saxon libertine, a contemporary of Casanova, Dr. Faustus, Cagliostro, and the Baron of Crac. Imperturbably adventurous, aided by fabulous trick techniques (to help von Baky, Goebbels reportedly procured Korda and Disney films),⁶⁸ the Baron effortlessly crossed frontiers: from Saxony to Moscow, from the Caliphate and Venice to the moon and back. The medium was dazzling Agfa-color, the message none, except that at a contemporary high-bourgeois soirée the Baron, having recounted his early exploits, at last renounces the Faustian inquietude of eternal youth to age in peaceably *bürgerlich* style with his beloved wife. In this way, the Nazis’ cinema too transcended the boundaries of nation-state culture to appeal to a cross-class, trans-European public. That it did so in this splendidly crafted work by counterposing to Hollywood’s modern myths the archaic fantasies of a domesticated pre-nation-state cosmopolitanism suggests that the Nazis had lost out to the competition even before they lost the war.

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As the victorious Americans swept away two decades of protectionist measures, the U.S. movie industry, at least in the short run, was able to impose

⁶⁶ Cited in Louis P. Lochner, ed. and trans., *The Goebbels Diaries* (London, 1948), pp. 151, 165; see also Boelke, ed., pp. 123–24.

⁶⁷ Courtade and Cadars, pp. 298–99.

⁶⁸ David Stewart Hull, *Film in the Third Reich* (Berkeley, 1969), p. 253.

its own conditions. The great UFI empire was divided up by occupation zone, pending plans to dismantle it completely. Meanwhile, American interests insisted on a free-trade policy which, while purporting to lay the foundations for a de-Nazified and competitive German cinema, effectively guaranteed that the German industry would be hobbled for decades. In May 1946 Léon Blum signed an agreement with Secretary of State Byrnes ending the prewar French import quota of 120 films per year. The new accords allowed for a screen quota of sorts; that is, it reserved four weeks each quarter for French films. Nevertheless, the 1945 production boomlet of ninety-six films, which indicated that France had indeed developed a considerable industrial capacity while under UFI protection during the war years, collapsed. By 1947, American movies had overrun the country.⁶⁹ With the abolition of the ENIC monopoly and the annulment of the Alfieri Law in October 1945, Italy, like Germany, became a wholly open market. In 1946, 850 imports were released, of which 600 were American. Meanwhile, the local industry produced sixty-five films. By 1948 the U.S. imports stood at 668, whereas Italian output had dropped to fifty-four, the former earning 75 percent of all revenues, the latter, a mere 13 percent.⁷⁰

Evidence of this overwhelming American presence in postwar Europe is not offered to argue that a European-based cinema production had been wholly crushed. On the contrary, in the next several years European governments granted selective aid to industry and sought to limit capital exports. The combination of mild protectionism (which nevertheless accommodated U.S. coproduction arrangements) and direct investments and incentives enabled the French and Italian industries to survive the postwar U.S. export offensive, to husband their energies in the early fifties, and, finally, to display a new vigor during the Economic Miracle of the early 1960s as the U.S. industry itself went into a decade-long period of slump and restructuring. The points to be made here are three: First, such measures were now being justified on corporatist grounds, by the desire to defend the cinema as a sector rather than by any grander claim to defend national identities. Second, in the worst case, Germany, cottage industries cropped up—as in Bavaria, which, though completely immersed in the Hollywood experience, cultivated singular talents such as Wim Wenders and Werner Fassbinder who lent momentum to the German New Wave of the sixties. Third, in the best case, Italy, the industry as a whole revived and flourished, though arguably as part and parcel of an American-dominated global restructuring of the cinema production system.

⁶⁹ On the U.S. presence in postwar Europe, see the indispensable work of Thomas Guback together with subsequent updates of his research, the major arguments of which are summarized in Thomas Guback, "Cultural Identity and Film in the European Economic Community," *Cinema Journal* 14 (1974): 2–7.

⁷⁰ Bizzari (n. 22 above), p. 41.

Judging by the case of Italy—which by the early sixties had become Europe’s biggest movie market and the world’s second largest film exporter—it seems that reproducing the American model, albeit with some significant stylistic innovations and building on a strong craft legacy, had become the key to picking up the slack in the U.S. industry.⁷¹ Some of the Italian cinema’s strengths were of course inherited from the interwar era: such was the centralized plant of Cinecittà which, refurbished by state funds, turned Rome of the sixties into “Hollywood on the Tiber.” But there was also the scrappy entrepreneurship of a ragtag capitalism habituated to ferreting out market niches and rapidly adapting to stylistic shifts both internationally and in the home market. Not least of all, Cinecittà cultivated the realist genre; at one time promoted by Fascist ideologues to “reach out to the people,” it had then been turned against Fascist bombast by Americanizing radicals during the wartime years, becoming immediately after the war the distinctive and (momentarily) highly successful trademark of the new Italian cinema.

Much in the same way that changes during the interwar years were bound up with the U.S. challenge, these postwar innovations more or less immediately responded to the increased influence of Hollywood. In the first place, post-1947 governments accepted the massive influx of American films not simply so as to avoid irritating the Majors or in order to appease the State Department but also because the Hollywood style was compatible with regnant conservative ideologies. The Christian Democratic party claimed Hollywood stars as its allies during the crucial 1948 electoral campaign and tempered Church zealotry with Catholic ecumenicism when it came to devising its own bonus systems and interpreting censorship rules in the conformist spirit of the Hays Code. *Meno stracci, più gambe* (Less rags, more legs) was the motto of Giulio Andreotti, who was in charge of movie legislation while undersecretary to the president of the Council of Ministers in the late 1940s.⁷² His policy was motivated equally by distaste for the radical politics of Italian neorealism and the desire to promote sales abroad.

The second condition for Italian success was a well-developed movie industry organization. The industry’s major trade association, ANICA (or Associazione nazionale industrie cinematografiche e affini), which from its foundation in 1945 included representatives of U.S. firms, prided itself on operating like an American interest group, lobbying for state aid and laying down industry production codes. It also cultivated amicable relations with its

⁷¹ On postwar Italy, see Gian Piero Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano, 1945–agli anni ottanta* (Rome, 1982), p. 198, and Lorenzo Quaglietti, *Storia economico-politica del cinema italiano, 1945–1980* (Rome, 1980).

⁷² Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano, 1945–agli anni ottanta*, pp. 34 ff.; Bizzari, pp. 41–42.

powerful U.S. counterpart, now reorganized as the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA)—a relationship which, while not guaranteeing any special economic favors, kept Italian entrepreneurs abreast of Hollywood production styles and business methods and helped attract American investment. Indeed, the third condition underlying the Italian movie “miracle” was this immediate and massive American involvement in coproduction arrangements. Mobilizing Italian as well as foreign capital and overhauling local work methods, it brought Italian moviemakers face-to-face with the familiar Hollywood genres. The outcome was a burst of inventiveness: the spaghetti western, to take one example, reinterpreted the genre. With its hyped-up rhythms and gratuitous slaughter, it was soon a leading item on the industry balance sheets. The last condition was the big yet well-articulated home market. This had been stretched by the widespread habit of frequent movie-going acquired as a result of postwar U.S. dumping. This market was sustained far longer in Italy than elsewhere in Europe due to the lack of competition from other entertainment such as television.⁷³ Articulated by a huge, often redundant network of commercial and private circuits, the Italian market attracted a public that was both massive and specialized—broad enough to absorb prodigious quantities of Hollywood B films and their local imitations, yet deep enough to sustain quality production as well.

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As the Italian case suggests, neither the flourishing of local cultural production nor its crisis necessarily confirms the validity of my argument: that American mass culture, as the most prolific disseminator of images in history, challenged a European notion of the scale and character of sovereignty that was originally based on print culture. Admittedly, the vast dimensions of the American market initially had made possible the unusual economies of scale that gave American cultural products, if not a monopoly, a powerful competitive edge abroad. However, the American artifact—in part because at home it appealed to an ethnically diverse, relatively egalitarian population—also was able to appeal to European publics. This double power—economic

⁷³ Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano*, p. 56, who notes that from 1950 to 1955 theaters in Italy opened at the astounding rate of 1,100 per year for a total of 6,629 in 1955, giving Italy the most movie seats per capita of any country save Sweden. In general, for fascinating anecdotes and intelligent analysis of the enduring U.S. influence in Italian cinema, see *La città del cinema* (n. 22 above); also the marvelous memoirs collected by Francesco Savio: *Cinecittà anni trenta: Parlano 116 protagonisti del secondo cinema italiano, 1930–1943*, 3 vols., ed. Tullio Kezich (Rome, 1979). The influence of American genres is studied in Roberto Compari, *Hollywood-Cinecittà: Il racconto che cambia* (Milan, 1980).

and cultural—intrinsic to a commodity like film, confounded European interests opposed to Americanism. Basically these interests pursued two paths: one was to secure their market positions, by protection, subsidies, or conquest; the other was to police their cultures, by political manipulation or censorship.

Yet neither strategy halted the seemingly irresistible movement of American cultural models through the international markets. At the time of the Popular Fronts, MGM's trade journal *Voice of the Lion* was rallying thousands of little children in Laurel-Hardiste fan clubs.⁷⁴ In 1937, as Mussolini's regime was drawing up plans to close out the U.S. Majors, the Duce's own son, Vittorio, was in Hollywood to conclude a deal with Hal Roach to film Italian operas. Not even the most self-isolating system was impervious: in the autarchic Germany of the early forties, actresses drove about in their *schlagsahne* automobiles and directors drew movie-mogul salaries while Propaganda Minister Goebbels was exhorting UFI producers to make quality entertainment for the Reich's captive audiences by studying the standardized plot lines and happy endings of Hollywood. The cases are too numerous and their outcomes too repetitive to lay blame on a lack of national or sectoral will, on capitalist capitulation to foreigners, or on the gullibility and bad taste of mass publics.

Did the diffusion of the American model signify transfers of power, as was feared in Europe? In a very general sense, the spread of the mechanized image, by rooting U.S. culture in European civil society, did indeed secure the influence of what might be called an "open-frontier imperialism." Like the "faded nationality" of *The Magic Mountain's* Mynheer Peppercorn, American cinema possessed a bedazzling fatuousness. Discombobulating the seasoned alliances and rationalist certainties of Old World culture, it generated new solidarities as well as new communities of resistance.

Looking within the old territorial boundaries, a number of trends are obvious. Perhaps the least remarkable were the new economies of scale in cultural production; these operated in the movie industry the way giant-sized corporations acted in other sectors, damaging yet not irrevocably eliminating the resilient small and independent producers. Less obviously, the intrusion of U.S. models favored new cultural elites: the media counterparts of J.-J. Servan-Schreiber and Françoise Giroud in the sixties were the 1930s' U.S.-connected movie producers, distributors, and movie magazine editors: Diamant-Berger, Sapène, Osso, Haik, and *Cinémiroir's* Jean Vignaud in France; Pittaluga, Rizzoli, Umberto Notari, and Guglielmo Giannini of *Kines* in Italy; Erich Pommer and the Ullstein brothers in Germany. Political men insofar as

⁷⁴ See *Le lion vous parle*, MGM's monthly promotional and fan magazine, 1934–39, esp. 1935–36.

they appealed to public loyalties, yet standing outside of any conventional division between Right and Left, they used American capital, technologies, and symbolism to transform, if not the basic substance of political power, the style in which it appeared.

Perhaps the least understood trend was the world of possibilities this emerging mass culture opened up to the consumer-spectator. It is unnecessary to contend that the public was in some way empowered by movie culture in order to be able to say that, by its dissemination, power was thereby subtracted from traditional authorities. In the major study of audience response in the interwar era, undertaken by the German refugee sociologist J. P. Mayer at the behest of Britain's leading cinema producer J. Arthur Rank in the mid-forties, dozens of the respondents, mainly working-class women, indicated how significant American movies had been for the formation of what might be described as a "new-woman" peer culture.⁷⁵ More than just a distraction, the cinema was a place where women could go unescorted, often with female family members or friends; movies were a major subject of discussion and memory, influencing mannerisms and fashion. As such, the cinema afforded a kind of imaginary space; this, *pace* mass cultural theorists, offered possibilities of individual development practically impervious to the clumsy discipline of traditional state, community, or familial authorities.

The effects of the change in the scale of cultural production *across* territorial boundaries is at least as complicated as that *within* them. Although mass cultural organization may now be described as transnational, this has not meant a transfer of power abroad—at least not in the sense inferred from defenses of culture couched in terms of national sovereignty, whether phrased in the language of the Right, in terms of tradition and identity, or of the Left, in protest against cultural imperialism.⁷⁶

In the past, of course, technological edges have often been used by states to establish monopolies and thereby to consolidate political control. To defend against such monopolies, national elites sought either to appropriate or to supersede the new technologies. However, mass culture raises a different order of problem. Unlike the technological transfers of the early industrial revolution, mass publics as well as elites have become involved in new consumption patterns and cultural habits. The cultural market has thus sensitized entire populations to the "civilization" of the dominant state within the international system, subjecting it to a new universe of discourse, imprinting it with what William Appleman Williams in *Empire as a Way of Life*

⁷⁵ See J. P. Mayer, both *British Cinemas and Their Audiences* and *Sociology of Film: Studies and Documents* (n. 17 above).

⁷⁶ The rejection of such defenses of national culture is emphatic in Alain Masson, "Halte à l'américanisation," *Positif* 248 (November 1981): 2.

characterized as the “imperial confusion of an economically defined way of life with a culturally defined standard of living.”⁷⁷

In the effort to mount defenses against this “imperial confusion,” it is tempting to forget that the twentieth-century communications revolution spearheaded by the United States had radically altered all previous notions of boundaries. Recognizing this fundamental change must mean questioning all those policies that explicitly or implicitly presume that the national-territorial scale of cultural production is still intact or might be reconstituted by means of appropriate agencies. These include, first, a transnational or Common Market–related organization to protect against the supranational scale of Americanism;⁷⁸ second, middle-level systems of state patronage to defend hybrid productions and bilateral relations;⁷⁹ and third, a microlevel or subnational support system to encourage the independent, small, or vanguard producer within the interstices of national society.⁸⁰

All such strategies ignore the fact that the format and the images of American mass culture are now universal. Yet the *Ecce Bombo* of Italy’s Woody Allen, Nanni Moretti, or the avowedly Americanized radicalism of the German Wim Wenders, are no less expressions of an Americanized idiom than the Hollywood fairy-tale spectacular *E.T.* In this context, the alternatives of more market or less, small scale or large, become illusory. Accordingly, there is perhaps something for the critic or policymaker to learn from Roland Barthes’s “mythologist,” whose starting premise is that any cultural product that is so widely distributed is by its very nature ambiguous, and who, therefore, sets out to comprehend its ambiguity.⁸¹ To avoid old debates, we might accept that American cinema is “good,” like French wine; the problem is to determine how the myth of its goodness was constructed and spread.

⁷⁷ William Appleman Williams, *Empire as a Way of Life* (New York, 1980), p. 220.

⁷⁸ As exemplified by Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber in *The American Challenge* (New York, 1968); cf. Guback’s critique of this position in “Cultural Identity and Film in the European Economic Community” (n. 69 above).

⁷⁹ As exemplified by government intervention in postwar French cinema according to René Bonnell’s careful study, *Le cinéma exploité* (Paris, 1978). On the obstruction by national interest groups of a Common Market policy on the cinema, see Don R. Le Duc, “The Common Market Film Industry: Beyond Law and Economics,” in Kindem, ed. (n. 14 above), pp. 361–72.

⁸⁰ As advocated by, say, Jean-Luc Godard in the press release for *La chinoise* (1967), in which he called for “two or three Vietnams in the bosom of the vast Hollywood-Cinecittà-Mosfilm-Pinewood, etc., Empire,” as cited in Thomas Elsaesser, “Two Decades in Another Country: Hollywood and the *Cinéphiles*,” in Bigsby, ed. (n. 5 above), p. 216.

⁸¹ Annette Lavers, comp. and trans., *Mythologies* (New York, 1972), pp. 156–57.