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## Italian Neorealism Goes East

*Authorship, Realism, Socialism*

Festivals, awards ceremonies, retrospectives, and distribution enabled Italian neorealism to exert a lasting influence on film cultures around the world. To date, the impact of this production trend has been primarily considered in relation to how western nations such as the United States, France, Britain, and Germany helped to shape the reputation of Italian postwar cinema.<sup>1)</sup> In particular, scholars have examined how institutions and policies in these countries heralded several neorealist films as modernist cinematic masterpieces (as André Bazin did), honored them with awards, produced nationally specific variants such as the German Trümmerfilme, and increased their cultural visibility by releasing them.

However, neorealism also made inroads into Eastern Europe. For example, these pictures were later rejected by some Soviet filmmakers, including Andrei Tarkovsky, who dismissed *A HUSBAND FOR ANNA* (Italian Title: *UN MARITO PER ANNA ZACCHEO*, 1953) as melodramatic kitsch, opining:

In the final scene of *GIVE ANNA GIACCIEIA A HUSBAND* [sic] de Santis [sic] puts his hero and heroine on either side of a metal gate [...]. The gate positively shouts: now the couple are [sic] split up, they'll never be happy, it's all over. And so a specific, individual, unique event is turned into something utterly banal because it has been forced to take on a trivial form.<sup>2)</sup>

1) Claudio Bioni, 'Il cinema italiano oltre confine', in Callisto Cosulich (ed.), *Storia del cinema italiano. 1945/1948*, vol. VII (Venezia: Marsilio/Bianco & Nero, 2003); Hermann Kappelhoff, Bernhard Gross and Daniel Illger (eds), *Demokratisierung der Wahrnehmung? Das Westeuropäische Nachkriegskino* (Berlin: Vorwerk 8, 2010); Christopher Wagstaff, 'Il cinema italiano visto dalla Gran Bretagna', in Paolo Bertetto (ed.), *Storia del cinema italiano. Uno sguardo d'insieme* (Venezia: Marsilio/Bianco & Nero, 2011); Nathaniel Brennan, 'Marketing, Meaning, Branding Neorealism: Advertising and Promoting Italian Cinema in Postwar America', in Saverio Giovacchini and Robert Sklar (eds), *Global Neorealism: The Transnational History of a Film Style* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), pp. 87–102; Caroline Eades, 'Another 'Cinéma de Papà' for the French New Wave?', in Giovacchini and Sklar (eds), *Global Neorealism*, pp. 103–124.

2) Andrei Tarkovsky, 'Zapechatlennoe vremya' (1967); 'Imprinted Time', in *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair (Austin: University of Texas, 1989), p. 73.

Moreover, the Czechoslovak filmmaker Jaromil Jireš recalled that students of Prague's FAMU film school starting their classes in the 1950s with renditions of the beggars' song from *MIRACLE IN MILAN* (Italian Title: *MIRACOLO A MILANO*, 1950).<sup>3)</sup> While it is known that neorealism influenced the style of Eastern European films, little has been said about its contributions to film cultures in the region.<sup>4)</sup> In response, this essay examines the circulation in Czechoslovak cultural discourse of notions of authorship relating to neorealist cinema, by way of an analysis of the reception of the films from 1945 to 1955 in two film magazines, *Kino* and *Film a doba*.<sup>5)</sup> This period is bookended by the emergence of neorealism and the nationalization of the Czechoslovak film industry, and Czechoslovak journalists' somewhat belated response to the 1953 decline of the trend. It needs stressing that the Czechoslovak film distribution sector underwent significant changes following the deaths of the two political figures that exerted the greatest control over culture in this nation: Soviet Leader Josip Stalin and Czechoslovak President Klement Gottwald. Within a year of their passing in 1953, the number of western films imported into Czechoslovakia increased. Even though the number of Italian imports remained fairly low, strong attendance in the mid 1950s indicates that they were relatively appealing.<sup>6)</sup>

The case of Italian neorealism's presence in East-Central European film culture suggests we might benefit from adding a fourth conceptualization of transnational cinema to the three identified by Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim.<sup>7)</sup> The first of their approaches identifies scholarship focusing "on a national/transnational binary, which sees the national model as 'limiting', while the transnational becomes a subtler means of understanding cinema's relationship to the cultural and economic formations that are rarely contained within national boundaries".<sup>8)</sup> Higbee and Hwee Lim argue that this approach concen-

3) Francesco Pitassio, 'Trent'anni dopo. Conversazione con Jaromil Jireš', *Cinema & Cinema*, vol. 19, no. 65 (1992), p. 114.

4) On the connections between Italian neorealism and East-European cinema see for example Antonín and Mira Liehm, *The Most Important Art: Eastern European Cinema after 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); Marek Haltof, *Polish National Cinema* (New York: Berghahn, 2002); Peter Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). In addition to aesthetic influences, recent historiography has shed light on neorealism's roles in professional training and film cultures. See for example Oksana Bulgakowa, 'Cinema sovietico: dal realismo al disgelo: 1941–1960', in Gian Piero Brunetta (ed.), *Storia del cinema mondiale*, vol. III/\*, *L'Europa. Le cinematografie nazionali* (Torino: Einaudi, 2000), pp. 681–735; Masha Salazkina, 'Soviet-Italian cinematic exchanges, 1920s–1950s: from early Soviet film theory to neorealism', in Giovacchini and Sklar (eds), *Global Neorealism*, pp. 37–51; Eva Näripea, 'National space, (trans)national cinema: Estonian film in the 1960s', in Anikó Imre (ed.), *A Companion to Eastern European Cinemas* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 244–264; Evgenija Garbolevsky, 'Mirrors of death: subversive subtexts in Bulgarian cinema, 1964–1979', in Sanja Bahun and John Haynes (eds), *Cinema, State Socialism and Society in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, 1917–1989: Re-Visions* (Abingdon, NY: Routledge, 2014), pp. 77–93.

5) This essay focuses on magazines rather than newspapers. A survey of such publications is welcomed but beyond the limited scope of this essay.

6) From 1945 to 1955, Italian imports did not surpass six percent of the films released in Czechoslovakia, significantly less than their share of the British, French or Soviet markets. For a survey of film distribution in Czechoslovakia see Ladislav Pištora, 'Filmoví návštěvníci a kina na území České republiky. Od roku 1945 do současnosti', *Iluminace*, vol. 9, no. 2 (1997), pp. 63–106.

7) Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim, 'Concepts of transnational cinema: towards a critical transnationalism in film studies', *Transnational Cinemas*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2010), pp. 7–21.

8) *Ibid.*, p. 9.

trates on production, distribution, and exhibition, but downplays the cultural and political processes which facilitate the movement of people and products.<sup>9)</sup> The second approach examines supranational exchange, wherein genres, practices, and heritage circulate within a specific region.<sup>10)</sup> The third approach challenges the purported Eurocentricism of many film cultures by shining a light on diasporic and exilic cinemas.<sup>11)</sup> Yet each of these approaches struggles to accommodate the transnational dimensions of postwar neorealism, as these films and the personnel behind them circulated in international events like festivals. I would like to propose that a fourth category would recognize the simultaneously national and transnational dimensions of films produced within a given nation-state. On the one hand, we would accept that conceptions of the national derive from the specific social and cultural conditions under which films are made. On the other, however, we would note that the transnational derives from the internationally circulating cultural, political, aesthetic formations that inform the production, content, and circulation of such films. This approach suggests that we might benefit from paying greater attention to the roles political entities play in building the transnational circuits in which are supported and exhibited products marked in specifically ideological and aesthetic terms.

### Karlovy Vary, Authorship, and Humanism

The Czechoslovak critical reception of neorealism can be divided into three phases. These phases reflected the dominant critical stance toward the relationships between representation and reality, wherein critics assigned specific roles to neorealism and championed filmmakers whose work they felt best exemplified these roles. During the first phase — which I will call “novelty” — neorealism was framed as a new cinematic development. During the second phase, “a symbol”, neorealism was transformed into an emblem of the challenges progressive filmmakers were seen to face under capitalism. The third phase, “specificity”, emphasized the distinct stylistic elements of neorealist films. Thus, where existing historiography frames neorealism as a starting point of modern cinema — with authorship occupying a prominent position therein — I would like to complicate this position, by arguing that neorealism came in myriad forms and that several models of authorship were championed by different agents at different times.

The three phases of the Czechoslovak critical reception of Italian neorealism reflected the principal foci of the film festival known initially as Mariánské Lázně and later as Karlovy Vary (hereafter simply Karlovy Vary), in relation to which the films were mainly discussed.<sup>12)</sup> At first, the organizers of this festival sought to promote national cultures within an international arena and through an international ideology. The festival was designed

9) Ibid., p. 9.

10) Ibid., p. 9.

11) Ibid., pp. 9–10.

12) Jindřiška Bláhová, ‘Národní, mezinárodní, globální. Proměny rolí filmového festivalu v Mariánských Lázních/Karlovy Vary, 1946 až 1959’, in Pavel Skopal (ed.), *Naplánovaná kinematografie. Český filmový průmysl 1945 až 1960* (Praha: Academia, 2012), p. 296.

to attract Leftist filmmakers from both sides of the Iron Curtain.<sup>13)</sup> In order to achieve this goal, its organizers showcased a selection of films produced in State-socialist countries, alongside others from western nations.<sup>14)</sup> As Jindřiška Bláhová has argued, the early years of the festival can be divided into three chapters. The first (1945–1947) championed Czech-made films over those of other liberated nations, and sought to construct a national cinematic canon, thus effectively using an international framework to promote a national cinema. “In cinema, examining a concrete reality has a critical importance. [...]. First of all, the filmmaker needs to capture this reality and out of it create a new one”, wrote Brousil, in a book originally published in 1941, but significantly republished immediately after the war. “[T]he reality of things and stories is a needed means to fashion his own conception and image of life”.<sup>15)</sup> By contrast, during the second chapter, echoing Soviet dogma (1948–1952), journalists primarily discussed neorealism from a thematic and ideological perspective — as a mean of depicting social realities in a capitalist country — and measured it against Moscow’s demands for western films to showcase social inequality. The third chapter, (1953–1959), which followed the deaths of Gottwald and Stalin, is distinguished by commentators concentrating on the style of, and the pleasures of consuming, neorealist films.

Karlovy Vary facilitated Italian-Czechoslovak exchanges in a number of ways. In particular, it provided a meeting point for a pan-European network of progressive intellectuals that had formed around neorealism, and channel through which Czechoslovak films could be distributed in Italy.<sup>16)</sup> Articles, screenplays, and books were translated into Czech,<sup>17)</sup> while filmmakers such as Giuseppe De Santis and Cesare Zavattini were invited to teach at FAMU. What is more, festival president Antonín Matěj Brousil was asked to speak at an international conference on “Cinema and the Modern Man” — a landmark event in the history of neorealism.<sup>18)</sup> Personal relationships also played a major role in

13) See Bláhová’s survey of 1950s sources in *Ibid.*

14) A number of the films screened there were later circulated through the Film Festival of the Workers, while others were released on the Czechoslovak market where they drew the attention of the country’s film critics. For a survey of Italian comments on Czechoslovak cinema and the Czechoslovak film market from 1945 to 1968 see Francesco Pitassio, ‘For the peace, for a new Man, for a better world!’: Italian leftist culture and Czechoslovak cinema, 1945–1968’, in Imre (ed.), *A Companion to Eastern European Cinema*, pp. 265–288. For a discussion of the Film Festival of the Workers see Luděk Havel, ‘“O nového člověka, o dokonalejší život, o nový festival”. Filmový festival pracujících’, in Skopal (ed.), *Naplánovaná kinematografie*, pp. 312–358.

15) Original: “Toto pozorování hmotné skutečnosti je ve filmu nesmírně důležité. [...] Filmař [...] nejdříve musí zachytit tuto skutečnost a z ní teprve vytváří skutečnost novou. Realita věcí a příběhů je mu nutným prostřednictvím, s jehož pomocí skládá teprve své pojetí a obraz života”, Antonín Matěj Brousil, *Film a národnost* (Praha: Československé filmové nakladatelství, 1946).

16) Pitassio, ‘For the Peace’.

17) This was the case, for instance, of two screenplays, Giuseppe De Santis’ *Lidé a vlci* (Praha: ČSF, 1958), and Cesare Zavattini’s *Střecha* (Praha: ČSF, 1958); see also Guido Aristarco, *Dějiny filmových teorií* (Praha: Orbis, 1968).

18) See Umberto Barbaro (ed.), *Il Cinema e l’uomo moderno* (Milano: Le edizioni sociali, 1950). Brousil also helped to secure a Soviet presence at the Venice International Film Festival and placed Leftist Italian critics in the jury at the 1949 festival, a point at which the escalation of the cold war put a strain on East-West relations. See Stefano Pisu, *Stalin a Venezia. L’Urss alla Mostra del cinema fra diplomazia culturale e scontro ideologico (1932–1953)* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2013), pp. 209–214.



consolidating such exchanges, as did bilingualism; the Czech film critic Oldřich Kautský spoke Italian, for example, and Brousil was fluent in French., the political culture of the Soviet Union remained a key influence on Italian-Czechoslovak relations after 1948 however.

On both sides of the Iron Curtain, claims-makers lauded neorealism, celebrating its main practitioners, and spotlighting its impact on local film cultures. This trend played a key role in transforming conceptions of film authorship. In particular, it precipitated a shift away from models derived from other sectors of the arts, which in Italy usually meant theater. During the postwar years, the film director was elevated to a master of film assembly for whom non-professional performers were little more than malleable resources.<sup>19)</sup>

At this time, neorealist directors also became unofficial ambassadors for cinematic “humanism” — an ethics of international solidarity based on films that promoted human rights issues. From 1948, Moscow’s foreign and cultural policies appropriated the rhetoric of humanism, employing buzzwords such as “peace”, “humankind”, and “people”. Intellectuals for Peace and the World Peace Council, both products of Cominform, represented arguably the most overt attempts to establish an international network beyond the Iron Curtain.<sup>20)</sup> These organizations sought to bring together intellectuals from East and West to legitimize State-socialism. At the core of this policy, and of central importance to its impact on cinema, was an international approach that promoted popular forms based on their international ideological thrust (their status as national cinemas notwithstanding). Humanism implied realism due to its focus on vulnerable people suffering through harsh wartime conditions.<sup>21)</sup> In this respect, neorealist directors exemplified what Michel Foucault described as the “author-function”, inasmuch as they invoked “a certain discursive set and [indicated] the status of this discourse within a society and a culture”.<sup>22)</sup> Notions of realism and authorship often generated contradictions relating to the value critics placed on plausibly rendering everyday life and on realizing individual style. These positions were reweighted in the Czechoslovak reception of neorealism, firstly through the imposition of a normative interpretation of authorship, and secondly through what Eric Hirsch and Paul Sellors dubbed the “author-norm”.<sup>23)</sup>

19) Francesco Pitassio, ‘Due soldi di speranza. Considerazioni intorno al dibattito sull’attore non professionista nel Neorealismo’, *L’asino di B. Quaderni di ricerca sul teatro e altro*, no. 12 (2007), pp. 147–163.

20) Philippe Buton, ‘Partigiani della pace’, in Silvio Pons and Robert Service (eds), *Dizionario del comunismo nel XX secolo*, vol. II M–Z (Torino: Einaudi, 2007), pp. 110–111.

21) Pierre Sorlin, ‘Traditions and social change in the French and Italian cinema of the reconstruction’, in Nicholas Hewitt (ed.), *The Culture of Reconstruction: European Literature, Thought and Film, 1945–1950* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989), pp. 88–102; Pierre Sorlin, *European Cinemas, European Societies* (London: Routledge, 1991); David Forgacs, ‘Photography and the denarrativization of cinematic practice in Italy, 1935–55’, in Laurent Guido and Olivier Lugon (eds), *Between Still and Moving Images* (Herts: John Libbey, 2012), pp. 245–260.

22) Michel Foucault, ‘What is an author?’, in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*, trans. Josué V. Harari (London: Penguin, 1984), p. 107. See also Jeff Bell, ‘The director-function: auteur theory and poststructuralism’, *Fotogenia*, no. 3 (1996), pp. 187–193.

23) Eric Donald Hirsch, ‘On justifying interpretive norms’, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 43, no. 1 (1984), pp. 89–91. My approach in this essay is indebted to Sellors’ approach to authorship. See C. Paul Sellors, *Film Authorship: Auteurs and Other Myths* (London: Wallflower, 2010), pp. 106–107. Hirsch argues that

### The Czechoslovak Critical Reception of Italian Neorealism: Phase One — Novelty

During the first phase, Czechoslovak film magazines provided a space for Italian Leftist intellectuals who were not affiliated with the Communist Party to promote neorealism alongside the work of French documentarians and art film makers such as Jean Cocteau and Georges Rouquier.<sup>24)</sup> In *Kino*, prominent Italian intellectuals such as Guido Aristarco and Angelo Maria Ripellino argued that neorealism captured contemporary Italian social reality and political issues without comprising artistic integrity, singling out directors Luchino Visconti and Aldo Vergano for praise. Concurrently, their Czechoslovak counterparts related Italian neorealism to other European pictures about the war and its aftermath. Such films articulated the postwar humanist ethics, which organizations like UNESCO identified as capable of overcoming national differences and maintaining peace. Czechoslovak critics saw neorealism, like the nation from which it emerged, as something of an oddity; as a sudden explosion of anarchy expressed through film style, social engagement, and the dynamics of everyday life.<sup>25)</sup> Thus, Kautský struggled to comprehend the habitus of Milanese movie-goers, noting:

I just did not get it. First of all, why do Italian audiences drag their small children to late afternoon or night screenings, sleepy and dirty, hanging with their small hands from their mothers' shoulders? Why, when they scream in protest at any projection problems or mistakes in the film, don't these people care about the noise their children make? Watching an American western in an Italian movie theatre is worth the cost of trip to Italy alone.<sup>26)</sup>

During this phase, critics considered neorealism to be a spontaneous response to the war, based largely on the films' unpolished look and their depiction of the harsh realities of the day. Brož, for example, heralded Rossellini as an impressionist on account of his war trilogy's fragmented rendition of the brutalities heaped upon the Italian Resistance and Europeans generally, suggesting the films exemplified neorealism as an outburst of reality

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linguistic codes do not incontrovertibly determine the meaning of a text. In order to achieve this outcome, subcodes are required, attributing a normative role to one value (or a set of values); in the case of socialist realism, socialist ideology and its perspective on social reality. An author-norm does not prioritize a specific value, in terms of style or content, but promotes the role of an individual subject behind the text, determining its shape and meaning.

24) Guido Aristarco, 'Kontrastní tendence v současném českém filmu', *Kino*, 17 May 1946, p. 104; Id., 'Georges Rouquier. Farrebique', *Kino*, 9 May 1947, pp. 372–373; Id., 'Cocteau a film', *Kino*, 1 August 1947, p. 614; Angelo Maria Ripellino, 'O soudobém italském filmu', *Kino*, 4 July 1947, pp. 530–531, 535.

25) Anon., 'Italský film o Německu', *Kino*, 6 February 1948, pp. 110–111.

26) Originál: "Několik jevů jsem nemohl pochopit. Předně proč italský divák s sebou tahá malé děti na večerní představení a proč je vůbec tahá po nocích, spící a umouněné, s ručičkami visícíma mámám přes ramena. Proč jejich povyk vůbec nevadí divákům, kteří každou chybu projekce a třeba zdánlivou chybu v ději komentují hlučnými protesty. Zhlédnout americkou cowbojku v italském kinu je požitek, stojící za zvláštní výlet do Itálie". Oldřich Kautský, 'Italské obecenstvo', *Kino*, 21 November 1947, p. 875. The article was the result of a survey of postwar Italian cinema that UNESCO commissioned in the late 1940s.

in cinema.<sup>27)</sup> Here, the director was reduced to little more than a conduit through which the portrayal of contemporary social conditions flows. Ideologically, neorealism was thus seen to constitute an Italian way of moving toward a progressive portrayal of the heroism of the Resistance movement and the suffering of European populations under Fascism and Nazism: the less obtrusive the style the better. In this respect, the director was effectively positioned as an anonymous narrator.

### **The Czechoslovak Critical Reception of Italian Neorealism: Phase Two — A Symbol**

Lasting until 1953, the second phase of the Czechoslovak reception of neorealism followed the Communist coup of February 1948. This development reformed the national cultural sphere, including cinema. Italian film critics who had previously contributed to Czechoslovak magazines were superseded by new voices affiliated with the Italian Communist Party, as *Kino* and *Film a doba* published the work of Ugo Casiraghi, Glauco Viazzi, and Virgilio Tosi.<sup>28)</sup> These critics' views did not differ significantly from those of Brousil, Kautský, and Jaroslav Brož.<sup>29)</sup> They felt that, at its best, neorealism expressed the obstacles progressive filmmakers faced in western countries under the Marshall Plan. According to this view, the Marshall Plan not only affected film markets, but also forced recently liberated populations to submit to economic, social, political, and cultural policies that had been drafted elsewhere, and to respond to the logics of capitalism. Thus, filmmakers were urged not to question social or political developments, which made life difficult for progressives who were routinely deprived of financial backing. This view, cemented by concerns over a postwar influx of American mass culture into Europe, served to strengthen the bonds between anti-American western cultural elites and their dogmatic peers behind the Iron Curtain. These critics saw the Italian government as a reactionary force sabotaging a new generation of talent using a politically motivated style of filmmaking to spotlight the shortcoming of Italian society under capitalism. The worst these critics found in neo-

27) See Brož, *Rossellini filmuje v ruinách Berlína*. Alongside Rossellini, the all but forgotten Aldo Vergano was considered a key figure in this phase. Vergano was hired alongside Tadeusz Kański to co-direct *THE DEVIL'S REVINE* (Polish Title: *CZARCI ŻLEB*, 1950). He likely received this opportunity because of his relationship to the Italian Communist film theoretician Umberto Barbaro, who, at the time was teaching at the Łódź Film Academy, and was also the head of the Film Section of Italia-URSS, an organization promoting Italian-Soviet relations through various cultural exchanges.

28) Ugo Casiraghi, 'K problémům pokrokového filmu v Itálii', *Kino*, 21 May 1953, pp. 170–171, 176; Id., 'Italský film ve stavu trvalého ohrožení', *Film a doba*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1953), pp. 82–86; Id., 'Hold italským protifašistům z let dvacátých', *Film a doba*, vol. 3, no. 2 (1954), pp. 351–353; Glauco Viazzi, 'Tři vítězství italské kinematografie', *Kino*, 2 August 1951, p. 386; Id., 'Achtung! Banditen!', *Kino*, 31 January 1952, pp. 64–65; Id., 'Nejkrásnější', *Kino*, 8 May 1952, p. 215; Id., 'Plášť', *Kino*, 29 January 1953, p. 43; Id., 'Případ režiséra Renata Castellaniho. Na okraj filmu „Za dva groše naděje“', *Film a doba*, vol. 1, no. 6 (1952), pp. 360–364; Virgilio Tosi, 'Vyhledky italského filmu', *Kino*, 8 June 1950, pp. 264–265.

29) Oldřich Kautský, 'Soumrak herectví', *Kino*, 25 September 1952, pp. 396–397; Id., 'De Sica píše otazník', *Kino*, 1 January 1953, p. 13; Id., 'Neorealismus není konečná stanice', *Kino*, vol. 8, no. 16 (30. 7. 1953), pp. 253, 256; Jaroslav Brož, 'Soumrak italského filmu', *Kino*, 23 November 1950, pp. 558–559; bž., 'Zloděj kol', *Kino*, 3 March 1952, p. 17; bž., 'Mlýn na Pádu', *Kino*, 17 January 1952, unpaginated; bž., 'Řím v hodině jedenácté', *Kino*, 17 July 1952, p. 295.

realism was an ill-defined ideological stance exemplified by characters that made “un-socialist” decisions. A case in point being *THE PATH OF HOPE* (Italian Title: *IL CAMMINO DELLA SPERANZA*, 1950), which follows a group of unemployed miners fleeing Sicily and encountering struggling workers in Northern Italy, before finally securing employment in France. This film was condemned in Italy for thematizing issues that the government did not want highlighting, such as social inequality, class struggle, and emigration. However, it was also criticized behind the Iron Curtain for failing sufficiently to associate workers with class struggle or Marxist ideology.

During this phase, Soviet socialist realism became the benchmark against which such critics measured the realist cinemas of every other nation. However, given their capitalist systems, it was felt that western nations could not reasonably be expected to aspire to such standards. For example, Czech Communist director Jiří Sequens asked rhetorically:

Isn't the new Italian cinematic realism just a romantic exaggeration, embellishing the merits of the Italian people vis-à-vis winning peace and democracy? [...] Although the new Italian cinematic realism is innovative insofar as it casts an unromantic eye on reality — and although it is almost photographically realistic, exact, pitiless in its form — It still it fails to capture the moral quality fully determining war and postwar Soviet cinema.<sup>30)</sup>

This phase was also characterized by critical approaches which evaluated Italian neorealism primarily in terms of its political themes and positions. At the time, the state paid significant attention to the themes of films entering the Czechoslovak market; following Soviet practice, scripts were scrutinized prior to filming, as were those pictures imported into the country.<sup>31)</sup> Although the start of the Cold War had polarized the international cultural scene, Italian neorealism was accepted to have demonstrated that socially and politically engaged cinema could be produced in western nations. At this time, the production trend was mainly valued either for critically addressing social issues or for exemplifying filmmakers' encounters with censorship or hostility to their progressive intentions. In terms of the former, *THE BICYCLE THIEF* (Italian Title: *LADRI DI BICICLETTE*, 1948) was celebrated for revealing social inequalities in capitalist nations, thereby implicitly supporting the goals of State-socialism. The latter dovetailed with a slogan used to promote the Karlovy Vary Film Festival: “fighting for peace, a new man, and a better world”. Progressive Italian filmmakers were seen to part of the same community struggling for a brighter social future, thus highlighting a need for revolutionary action in the West. Consequently, the Czechoslovak press paid a great deal of attention to claims that a number of Italian

30) Original: “Není nový italský filmový realismus jen romantickým zveličováním a překreslením zásluh italského lidu na věci míru vítězství demokracie v minulé válce? [...]. Přesto tedy, že je novoitalský filmový realismus objevený v prostém, nepatetickém pohledu na skutečnost, přesto, že je téměř fotograficky realistický, přesný a nemilosrdný ve své formě, přece nemá v sobě ono mravní oprávnění, které je stoprocentním průvodcem válečného a těsně poválečného filmu sovětského”. Jiří Sequens, ‘O poslání a odpovědnosti evropského filmového realismu’, *Kino*, 23 April 1948, pp. 324–325.

31) See Ivan Klimeš, ‘Za vizí centrálního řízení filmové tvorby’, *Illuminace*, vol. 12, no. 4 (2000), pp. 135–139; Jiří Knapík, ‘Filmová aféra L.P. 1949’, *Illuminace*, vol. 12, no. 4 (2000), pp. 97–119.



productions — including those helmed by De Santis, Germi, Lattuada, and Visconti — had been interrupted by the authorities.<sup>32)</sup>

Attention was also paid to narration. It was suggested that the plots of neorealist films should conform to a preexisting ideological scheme positing that the duty of national culture was authentically to portray everyday life; a notion suggesting social conditions in capitalist societies could only ever be unequal. Critics therefore tended to categorize neorealist films by their principal social concerns. For example, where *THE BICYCLE THIEF* and *ROME: 11* (Italian Title: *ROMA ORE 11*, 1952) were considered to be films about unemployment, *UNDER THE OLIVE TREE* (Italian Title: *NON C'È PACE TRA GLI ULIVI*, 1951) and *THE EARTH TREMBLES* (Italian Title: *LA TERRA TREMA*, 1948) were seen as foregrounding rural issues. Czechoslovak film critics all but ignored the stylistic qualities of De Sica's films but praised *SHOESHINE* (Italian Title: *SCIUSCIÀ*, 1946), *THE BICYCLE THIEF*, *MIRACLE IN MILAN*, and *UMBERTO D.* (1952) for centralizing social inequality. Similarly, Vittorio De Sica was celebrated for embodying a new notion of authorship, in which he rendered compassionately the people's suffering under oppressive circumstances, rather than simply indulging his stylistic predilections.<sup>33)</sup> This model was seen to have been perfected in the much-praised *ATTENTION! BANDITS!* (*ACHTUNG! BANDITI!*, 1951), in which it was used to showcase the economic under-classes finding political guidance during resistance. This film's director, Carlo Lizzani, who had already received an award at the 1950 Karlovy Vary film festival for his documentary *SOMETHING CHANGED IN SOUTHERN ITALY* (Italian Title: *AL SUD QUALCOSA È CAMBIATO*, 1949), received a similar accolade a year later for his new film.<sup>34)</sup> By contrast, Czechoslovak critics dismissed *STROMBOLI* (*STROMBOLI, TERRA DI DIO*, 1948). In suggesting that director Roberto Rossellini's had betrayed realism, they revealed a personal sense of neorealism as wholly predicated on the depiction of social inequality. For this reason, Rossellini was accused of succumbing to the financial temptations of primarily commercial filmmaking.

32) vk, 'Italský film se brání', *Kino*, 17 March 1949, p. 83; Tosi, *Výhlídky italského filmu*; Jaroslav Brož, 'Soumrak italského filmu', *Kino*, 23 November 1950, pp. 558–559; Antonín Navrátil, 'Díla pokrokových vlivů v západních filmových produkcích', *Kino*, 16 August 1951, pp. 409–411; Anon., 'Nenatočené filmy italských režisérů', *Kino*, 15 November 1951, p. 555; Osvald Stein, 'Filmová kultura západu v boji proti Hollywoodu', *Kino*, 18 August 1952, pp. 361–363. Italian Leftist culture pursued a similar strategy. A series of reports published in the mid 1950s in the journal *Cinema Nuovo* as "I film che avrebbero voluto fare" (English-language translation 'Films they would have liked to make') denounced the lack of financial support provided to supposedly valuable film projects.

33) -jab-, 'Zloděj kol', *Kino*, 27 September 1951, pp. 478–479; bž., 'Zloděj kol', *Kino*, 3 August 1952, p. 17.

34) Lizzani's commitment to political causes was such that he even gave a copy of *ATTENTION! BANDITS!* to a North Korean delegation as a sign of solidarity and of his support for this country in its war with the South. See Carlo Lizzani, 'Italská bužoasie a filmy o národním osvobozeneckém hnutí', *Film a doba*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1952), pp. 163–164.

### The Czechoslovak Critical Reception of Italian Neorealism: Phase Three — Specificity

By 1953, the Czechoslovak critical scene had changed significantly, with unprecedented attention paid to cinema, especially film style and narrative. Nevertheless, supporters of socialist realism, such as the critics mentioned above, singled out some neorealist films for close analysis.<sup>35)</sup> At this time, Cesare Zavattini became a key figure after he suggested that neorealism should be seen less as representing reality as a predictable set of social processes prescribed by the laws of dialectic materialism than as a vehicle with which the camera could record and reproduce phenomenological reality.<sup>36)</sup> This filmmaker's significance to the period is encapsulated by his receipt in 1955 of an International Peace Prize, an award previously given to prominent artists and thinkers including Pablo Picasso, Bertolt Brecht, Vítězslav Nezval, and Paul Robeson.<sup>37)</sup> Established with an overtly anti-imperialist agenda in 1949 by the World Peace Council, this ideologically inflected honor was given to artists, filmmakers, and organizations that were seen to have contributed to world peace. Himself neither an orthodox Communist by Soviet standards nor a socialist realist director, Zavattini's receipt of this accolade situated this filmmaker, and, by extension, the neorealism with which he was associated, within a pantheon of revered Leftist films and filmmakers. It also provided an endorsement of a different type of realism to socialist realism: one that did not offer exclusively social criticism. This step would have been unconceivable five years earlier.

During phase three, the focus of the Czechoslovak critical reception of Italian neorealism changed as this trend was perceived as a poly-stylistic phenomenon,<sup>38)</sup> as ideological control loosened and as attention to film style increased. Critics typically focused on narration and style, and were less concerned with evaluating films ideologically. This shift in attitude was partly a product of Moscow's validation of neorealism, following a retrospective of key works at the city's Dom Kino theater in late 1953. As early as the first half of 1954, *Kino* and *Film a doba* published translations of articles that had been written about the films by Ilya Ehrenburg and Alexander Dovzhenko respectively.<sup>39)</sup> These studies introduced new criteria with which to evaluate neorealist films. They stressed neorealism's propensity for ambiguous characters that did not represent extremes of either virtue or immorality, its heritage in Italian art and global cinema, and their view that its style was of greater value than its political themes. These new evaluative frameworks in turn redirected critical attention to other neorealist filmmakers. For the first time since the end of the

35) See for example Oldřich Kautský, 'Řím v 11 hodin. Skutečnost vyprávěná umělcem', *Kino*, 22 October 1953, pp. 346–348; Id., 'Romeo a Julie na vesnici', *Kino*, 25 March 1954, pp. 106–107; Id., 'Pravda romantická', *Kino*, 8 April 1954, pp. 122–123; Oldřich Kautský, 'Ulička a přece celý svět', *Kino*, 29 July 1954, p. 253; Id., 'Italský usměv', *Kino*, 21 October 1954, pp. 346–347.

36) Cesare Zavattini, 'Několik myšlenek o filmu', *Film a doba*, vol. 1, no. 6 (1953), pp. 931–941.

37) Jan Chotek, 'Světové ceny míru filmovým pracovníkům', *Film a doba*, vol. 3, no. 5–6 (1955), pp. 269–271. Zavattini shared this award with the Dutch documentarian Joris Ivens.

38) Francesco Casetti, 'Style as a site of negotiation: the case of realism and neorealism', <<http://francescocasetti.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/style-as-site-of-negotiation.pdf>> [accessed 18 April 2014].

39) Ilja Ehrenburg, 'O italských filmech', *Kino*, 28 January 1954, p. 44; Alexander Dovzhenko, 'Pokrokové síly italské filmové tvorby', *Film a doba*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1954), pp. 155–159.

war, the plausible depiction of reality was seen as an aesthetic choice executed calculatedly by creative talent, as evinced in the reception of *ROME: 11* or *THE MILL ON THE PO* (Italian Title: *IL MULINO DEL PO*, 1949). Moreover, a successful realist film was no longer considered to require dramatic plotting, a shift exemplified by the praise lavished upon the neorealist comedy *TWO CENTS WORTH OF HOPE* (Italian Title: *DUE SOLDI DI SPERANZA*, 1952).<sup>40)</sup> The titles of these articles, which can be translated into English as “Romantic Truth” and “Reality as told by an artist”, emphasized that the truth could indeed be romantic and that reality could be captured by an artist. These shifts in critical discussion enabled Rossellini to be recuperated as a master of improvisation.<sup>41)</sup> Filmmakers were credited with constructing a narrative based on choices that operated outside of ideological demands. After a lengthy period of time, Marxist frameworks had provided a means by which directors could be credited with fashioning films that expressed their own perspectives. Filmmakers could finally claim authority of their films.

## Conclusion

In the postwar era, Italian neorealism enabled Czechoslovak film critics to promote various ideological and stylistic frameworks that remind us of the shifting notions of art, political commitment, realism, and authorship. Our understandings of neorealism whether as a production trend or as a collection of film styles or as both should not be limited to its aesthetic impact or its status as an inaugurator of modernist cinema. Neorealism was influential on both sides of the Iron Curtain, because it dovetailed with ideological positions, social and ethics issues, transnational film production and critical trends, and film festivals’ changing policies to the East and the West. This trend offered multiple access points to audiences and critics, and its myriad models of authorship posited a range of perspectives on social issues. The opaqueness, for which Bazin famously praised *PAISAN* (Italian Title: *PAISÀ*, 1946) was therefore by no means limited to its *mise-en-scène*.

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40) Kautský, ‘Řím v 11 hodin’; Id., *Romeo a Julie na vesnici*; Id., ‘Pravda romantická’; Kautský, ‘Ulička a přece celý svět’; Id., ‘Italský usměv’.

41) -ro-, ‘Roberto Rossellini zastáncem improvisace’, *Film a doba*, vol. 4, 7–8 (1955), p. 377.

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## SUMMARY

**Italian Neorealism Goes East: Authorship, Realism, Socialism****Francesco Pitassio**

Festivals, awards ceremonies, retrospectives, and distribution enabled Italian neorealism to exert a lasting influence on film cultures around the world. Yet, while it is known that this trend influenced the style of Eastern European cinema, little has been said about its contributions to film cultures in the region. In response, this essay examines the circulation in Czechoslovak cultural discourse of notions of authorship relating to neorealist cinema. The essay examines the reception of the films in two film magazines, *Kino* and *Film a doba*, from 1945 to 1955 — a period bookended by the emergence of neorealism and the nationalization of the Czechoslovak film industry, and by Czechoslovak journalists' somewhat belated response to the 1953 decline of the trend.