

# **Between Documentary and Neorealism: Marshall Plan Films in Italy (1948-1955)**

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## *Introduction*

This article charts the multi-strand networks of individuals (filmmakers, industrialists, and bureaucrats), institutions (US, Italian, and multi-national) and ideas that constituted the transnational enterprise of Marshall Plan sponsored films produced in Italy from 1948 to 1955. It is a detailed investigation of two groups of films produced under the banner of two different state government information agencies: the official Marshall Plan (MP) and Mutual Security Agency (MSA) Films, and the official films of the Centro di documentazione (Documentation Center), also known as the Italian Information Agency. These films have emerged from several different US and Italian archives since the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> Films such as *Talking to the Italians* (Marcellini Film for ECA, 1950); *The Struggle for Men's Minds* (Europa Telefilm for MSA, 1952); *Made in Italy* (Romolo Marcellini for INCOM and Centro, 1952); *L'Italia e il mondo (Italy and the World)*, Romolo Marcellini for LUCE and Centro, 1953); *L'Italia d'oggi (Italy Today)*, Romolo Marcellini for Europa Telefilm Rome, MSA, 1953); *Due civiltà si incontrano ([Two Civilizations Meet]*, Vittorio Gallo for INCOM, 1954); *Più che un amicizia (More than a Friendship)*, Vittorio Gallo for INCOM, 1957) are evidence of the interconnected work of the MP and MSA and the work of the Centro and the Istituto Nazionale LUCE (LUCE). Close viewing of these titles has revealed that the productions make use of much of the same archival stock footage and feature similar voice-over narrations in both their Italian and English-language versions.

This study examines the films' formal, rhetorical, and aesthetic continuities alongside their production histories and reveals the inextricable links between the networks of filmmakers and capital for state-sponsored film production in Italy at the beginning of the Cold War. The work of US and Italian government and commercial film producers formed an intertwined and mutually constitutive network that harnessed the cinematic apparatus in the service of a transformative and transnational project of state building. While Marshall Plan bureaucrats sought to redefine political entities in specific and bounded terms, the collaborations between US and Italian government officials and filmmakers suggest that the ebb and flow between these

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<sup>1</sup> These films and their related textual documentation have been found in the following United States repositories: 1. The US National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), 2. Library of Congress (LOC); and in the following Italian repositories: 3. Cineteca di Bologna, 4. Cineteca del Friuli, 5. Istituto LUCE, with an excellent web archive where some of these films can be viewed: [www.archiviolute.com/archivio](http://www.archiviolute.com/archivio), 6. Archivio Centrale dello Stato (The Central State Archives of Rome (ACS)), and 7. the Video Archive of the Department of Information and Publishing, Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers (Italian government), Rome (PCM). In addition, three French archives hold French versions of some of the Italian films: 8. Établissement Cinématographique et Photographique Des Armées (ECPA) in Fort d'Ivry, 9. Service de la Communication-Pole Audiovisuel, Ministère de l'Agriculture et de la Pêche. (Formerly Service Cinématographique du Ministère de l'Agriculture) (MAP-PAV) in Paris, and 10. Archives françaises du film (CNC) in Bois d'Arcy.

groups allowed for a continuous transformation of their intersubjectivity. For example, consider the US government's use of Italy as a test case for the US-led post-WWII growth of neoliberal democracy in Europe. This case study of the Marshall Plan films in Italy both questions and responds to the material and ideological limits of the Italian Marshall Plan films as sites of postwar consensus building.

### *Italian Film: A Mirror of Social Responsibility?*

In September 1951 the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) monthly bulletin, the *Courier*,<sup>2</sup> was devoted solely to the subject of cinema. Ross McLean, the head of the UNESCO Films and Visual Information Division, introduced this special issue by advocating for film and its role in fostering understanding among nations.<sup>3</sup> The humanitarian language and rhetoric employed by McLean remain familiar today. He writes:

The study of film as a means to human understanding is not a mere intellectual exercise. It is part of a continuing study we have all got to make in our search for harmony in a tortured world. The power of the film to entertain and to distract, to move to action, to hatred and contempt, to compassion and respect, is everywhere agreed.<sup>4</sup>

These are sentiments one might expect from organizations like the United Nations (UN), chartered in 1945, and its sister organization UNESCO, which ratified its constitution a year later. The most intriguing aspects of this special bulletin are its focus on the persuasive qualities of visual media and the films and nations that are featured prominently within its pages: Italy, the United States, the UK, and France. With the sole exception of Italy, all the nations featured in this bulletin are members of "The Group of Five" – the permanent member nations of the UN that comprise the UN Security Council. Two other Group of Five nations are conspicuously absent from this bulletin: China and the Russian Federation (formerly the USSR). McLean goes on to advocate for the development of cinema over radio and print media as the most effective form of communication across political and ideological boundaries, stating:

The frontiers which divide mankind are not only, and not even mainly, the national or political frontiers. They are frontiers of the mind and the spirit which spring from limitations of training and experience, differences of memory and tradition and belief and taste, and the willful or accidental exploitation of these

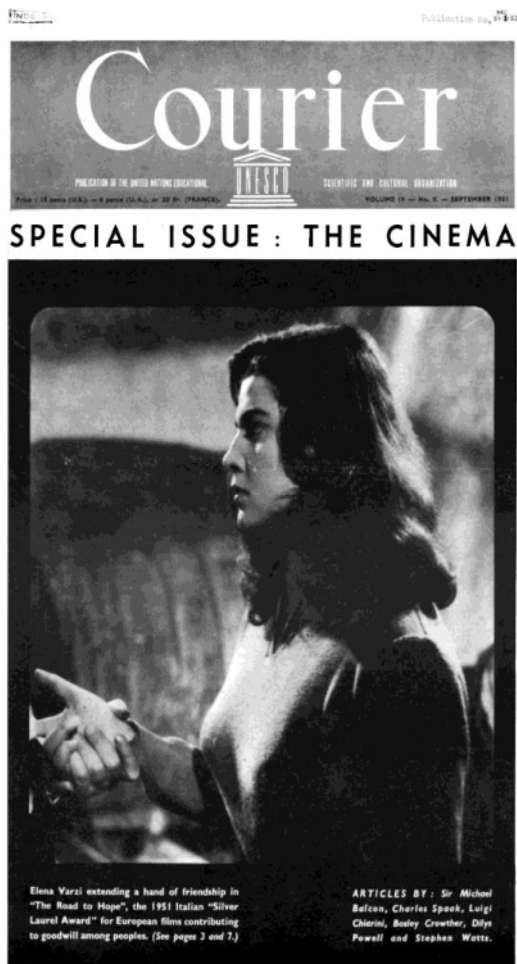
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<sup>2</sup> The UNESCO *Courier* began publication in 1946, with the mission to "promote UNESCO's ideals, maintain a platform for the dialogue between cultures and provide a forum for international debate." For further description of the journal and its role for UNESCO, see: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco-courier/the-magazine/>. Accessed July 10, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Ross McLean, "International Understanding and the Cinema," *Courier* Vol. IV, No. 9 (UNESCO publication, September 1951): 2

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

limitations and differences for sinister ends.<sup>5</sup>



The theme and tone for this bulletin is undoubtedly set. Eschewing words, the cover of the special issue features a black and white production still of a young, attractive Italian actress named Elena Varzi. She is featured in a medium close-up in profile, looking longingly screen left, with her right hand extended and held tightly by the hand of a male actor who is represented in this frame solely by the presence of his hand. This is an image from a now little-known Italian Neorealist film, *Il Cammino della Speranza* (*The Road to Hope*, 1950), directed by Pietro Germi and written by Federico Fellini. This film won the Silver Bear at the 1951 Berlin International film festival for its representation of European cooperation. The story that *Il Cammino della Speranza* tells is melodramatic and chaotic, featuring a whirlwind tour through Italy. This journey is not a vacation taken for fun or delight, but a journey brought about by economic necessity. The protagonists have no choice but to flee from Sicily to Naples and then further on to the north of Italy, at one point even considering the possibility of moving to France, in order to find work and a better life for themselves and their children. While this film is a fictionalized account, its story reflects the actual and immediate postwar moment that preceded Italy's economic miracle between 1950 and 1963.<sup>6</sup>

The lead article in this issue does not feature the films of the UK, the United States, or France. Instead, Italian cinema is held up as the ideal model for fostering the UN's internationalist and humanitarian message, and consequently the model against which British, American, and French films will be measured throughout this special bulletin. Following McLean's introductory editorial, the first article that appears is titled "Italian Film: A Mirror of Social Responsibility," written by Luigi Chiarini. Chiarini, a somewhat controversial figure in Italian cinema by 1951 due to his cooperation with the Fascist regime, was still an internationally recognized film critic. He was the cofounder with Umberto Barbaro of Italy's first state-run film school, il Centro

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> For a nuanced discussion of *il miracolo economico* – the name most often used to describe the sustained period of economic growth in Italy from 1950 to 1963, which also brought about a rebirth of the arts and culture industries in Italy – see Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through 20<sup>th</sup> Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005); David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society: From Fascism to the Cold War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); N. F. R. Crafts and Gianni Toniolo, *Economic Growth in Europe since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Michael J. Hogan, *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain, and the Reconstruction of Western Europe 1947-1952* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Sperimentale di Cinematografia (Centro Sperimentale), which opened its doors in 1936 with the full support of Mussolini's Fascist regime, and an editor of *Bianco e Nero*, Italy's most important film journal and still in publication today, which was closely tied to the Centro Sperimentale from the journal's founding in 1937, and which remained closely linked to the work of the Centro Sperimentale during the postwar shift from Fascist-sponsored filmmaking (1923-1943) to the Neorealist moment (1944-1952).<sup>7</sup>

Chiarini's article on the contemporary status of Italian cinema in the international arena circa 1951 boldly proclaimed that Neorealism was the new humanism, driven by neither political nor ideological motivations, but by

the need to express the seething passions roused by the harrowing experiences of the war; to reassert, in art, those human values which had been trampled and crushed underfoot; and to combat violence, injustice and poverty by claiming respect for the human being.<sup>8</sup>

In the context of this UNESCO publication, it is evident that Chiarini was not simply praising contemporary Italian cinema in order to advance the position of the newly revived commercial Italian cinema on the international stage. By asserting the primary status of Neorealism as a humanistic aesthetic, Chiarini was then able to suggest that this particular form of postwar feature filmmaking in Italy could serve as a model for other forms of Italian and international cinemas, such as the documentary, which Chiarini claimed had suffered greatly due to the disruption of the networks of production and distribution of non-fiction films in Italy during the Fascist era.<sup>9</sup> Chiarini recognized the imminent end of the Neorealist moment, demonstrating that by 1948 the political, economic, and ideological climate that allowed for Italian Neorealism to flourish and garner the attention of the world with the international distribution of films by Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio DeSica, Luchino Visconti, and others had indeed shifted.

Chiarini's commentary in this UNESCO publication in fact echoed the rhetoric of the most widely recognized international film critic of Italian postwar cinema, André Bazin. While

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<sup>7</sup> The development of state sponsored filmmaking and the intersections of cinematic institutions and the state in Italy from the 1920s through the 1960s can be further explored in the following texts: Mino Argentieri, *L'occhio del regime: informazione e propaganda nel cinema del fascismo* (Firenze: Vallecchi Editore, 1979); Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Giampaolo Bernagozzi, *Il mito dell'immagine* (Bologna: Editrice CLUEB, 1983); Marco Bertozzi, *Storia del documentario italiano* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2008); Gian Piero Brunetta, *The history of Italian cinema: a guide to Italian film from its origins to the twenty-first century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Philip V. Cannistraro, *The Organization of Totalitarian Culture: Cultural Policy and the Mass Media in Fascist Italy, 1922-1945* (dissertation, Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, 1972); Luciano Cheles and Lucio Sponza, *The Art of Persuasion: Political Communication in Italy from 1945 to the 1990s* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, distributed in the USA by Palgrave, 2001); Richard Dyer MacCann, *The People's Films: A Political History of US Government Motion Pictures* (New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1973); Nicoletta Misler, *La via italiana al realismo: la politica culturale artistica del P.C.I. dal 1944 al 1956* (Milano: Gabriele Mazzotta Editore, 1973); Ivelise Perniola, *Oltre il neorealismo: documentari d'autore e realta italiana del dopoguerra* (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 2004); and Steven Ricci, *Cinema & Fascism: Italian Film and Society, 1922-1943* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Luigi Chiarini, "The Italian Film: A Mirror of Mankind's Social Responsibility," *Courier* Vol. IV, No. 9 (UNESCO publication, September 1951): 3.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

Bazin recognized that some aspects of the new Italian project of representing realism in fiction filmmaking had been embodied by Italian filmmakers prior to the Liberation, he also asserted that Neorealism constituted an artistic and political revolution and was not simply a nationalist project, but a transnational one.<sup>10</sup> Chiarini cleverly invoked one of the most widely (internationally) distributed and simultaneously contested (banned) Neorealist films,<sup>11</sup> claiming that despite the fact that the characters are speaking mostly in dialect, *Roma Città Aperta* (dir. Roberto Rossellini, 1944) is

[u]niversally understandable; in the Italians, the citizens of Rome, the spectator everywhere, whatever his nationality sees man, his passions, his feelings and his sufferings; he sees men who, though victims of the blind brutality of war, are neither conquered nor resigned, but are capable of fighting to the bitter end for the attainment of a better world where man will no longer live like a wolf among wolves.<sup>12</sup>

Chiarini's reflections amplify and extend McLean's introductory approach to this *Courier* issue. The bulletin goes on to feature an article on the current internationalist trends in British cinema, written by noted *Sunday Times* critic Dylis Powell, as well as a second article on cinema in the UK titled "The Feature Carries on the Documentary Tradition," which was written not by a critic but by the successful film producer Sir Michael Balcon. While Balcon makes a case for a continuation of the already established practice of blending elements of fiction and non-fiction films, as is evident in British films made in 1940-45, he goes on to state that it is the American cinema that has developed the most sophisticated means of subtle persuasion, and that in order to achieve international success the British cinema must work to bring its own distinct brand of national narratives to the screen.

*The New York Times* film critic Bosley Crowther then weighs in with an article titled "The American Film: More Than Just Sex and Gangsters a Trend Toward Social Dramas Exposing Prejudice and Injustice." Crowther is quick to point out that the reviews of many international critics regarding the crass commercial nature of Hollywood cinema are not to be dismissed, but that a closer look at the American cinematic output since the beginning of the 1940s demonstrated that even in Hollywood film producers were beginning to recognize the potential of commercial cinema as "a cultural force for social good."<sup>13</sup> Finally, an article discussing the current humanitarian trends in French postwar cinema returns to the themes introduced by Chiarini. Charles Spaak, the President of the Screenwriters Guild of France, pushes the envelope, demanding that the French film industry pursue a model of socially

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<sup>10</sup> André Bazin, "Cinematic Realism and the Italian School of the Liberation," in *What is Cinema*, trans. Timothy Barnard (Montreal: Caboose, 2009); see also Luca Ciminati, "The Role of Documentary in the Formation of Neorealist Cinema" in Saverio Giovacchini, and Robert Sklar, eds., *Global Neorealism: The Transitional History of a Film Style* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> For discussions of the international distribution of the film after its Grand Prize win at Cannes in 1946 see Virginia Lee Warren, *The New York Times* "Delayed Censorship," *The New York Times*, December 7, 1947; David Forgacs, *Rome Open City* (London: BFI, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Chiarini, "Italian Film," 4.

<sup>13</sup> Bosley Crowther, "The American Film: More Than Just Sex and Gangsters a Trend Toward Social Dramas Exposing Prejudice and Injustice," *Courier* Vol. IV, No. 9 (UNESCO publication, September 1951), 6.

responsible filmmaking more akin to what Italian Neorealism has presented to the world. In an article titled “Mr. Film Censor... ‘Must Everything in the Garden Be Lovely?’” Spaak argues that in France the films that are being produced and distributed do nothing to address the important issues facing his nation and the world. Instead they gloss over “the nation’s inner secret life” only to put on screen the official and conventional views approved by the French postwar government. Spaak sees the potential of the cinema to foster international cooperation, but insists that French film is still mired in a myopic nationalism, and thus proclaims:

In our comfortable seat in the darkened cinema, we are lulled into thinking that all is for the best in the best possible of worlds; any uneasiness aroused by the newsreel is dispelled by the documentary film and the feature film that follow.<sup>14</sup>

In calling for his own country to develop a form of cinema that more closely reflected the Italian Neorealist aesthetic, while also employing the techniques of subtle persuasion that the American cinema mastered to great effect, Spaak’s critique implies that France would do well to draw on Italian and American cinematic models to bridge the divide between the harsh images of the newsreel and the censored vision of humanity that he believed French documentary and feature films promoted in the initial postwar moment.

Examining the critiques of national cinemas featured in this issue of the *Courier* in the order in which they were originally presented to the reader reveals the importance of the editorial placement of Chiarini’s article on the status of Italian national cinema as the national cinema best poised to bridge international political and cultural divides at the beginning of the Cold War. He urged the international audience to think of Italy not only through the lens of the works of Rossellini, DeSica, Zavattini, and their Neorealist colleagues, but to imagine other possibilities for a cinema of social responsibility, and to fully reclaim the documentary form for Italy. Chiarini states:

Side by side with feature films, it is to be hoped that in the future more progress will be made in the artistic, scientific and cultural documentary, which is a potentially important medium for spreading abroad a knowledge of our traditions, our genius and our national characteristics – in a word, the soul of our country.<sup>15</sup>

The United States had effectively mobilized such a model of collaboration on the home front and in Italy during WWII. In June 1944, just days after the Allies entered the city of Rome, the Allied Control Commission (ACC) took possession of Cinecittà through a one-page property requisition paper written in both Italian and English. Under the direction of US Navy Rear Admiral Ellery Stone, the Allied Film Board in Italy immediately put Italian filmmakers back to work creating documentary, propaganda, and newsreel films for the Allied Control Commission,

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<sup>14</sup> Charles Spaak, “Mr. Film Censor... ‘Must Everything in the Garden be Lovely?’” *Courier* Vol. IV, No. 9 (UNESCO publication, September 1951): 11.

<sup>15</sup> Chiarini, “Italian Film,” 3.

a program that would continue until 1947.<sup>16</sup> These films were produced for Italians, by Italians, but the message that the films delivered was clearly dictated by US military authority, under the executive leadership of General George C. Marshall, the US Army Chief of Staff. During his time as the head of the US Army, General Marshall consistently advocated for a more sophisticated deployment of the cinematic apparatus in the service of the state. Marshall actively encouraged and petitioned for educational films for US servicemen as well as educational and documentary films for the citizens of allied and occupied countries.

Shortly before the end of the war, on June 11, 1945, General Marshall – at this point a 43-year veteran of the US Armed Forces – spoke to the members of the Maryland Historical society on the subject of learning the lessons of history, stating that:

It would be a fine thing if a way were found to amplify or improve the teaching of history through the medium of the motion picture in our grammar and high schools. I believe a man with the talents of Frank Capra could present outlines of certain broad phases of history in such a manner that it would make a deep impression on the schoolboy. He did a superb job along this same line for the army. The student would acquire an understanding that would stick in his mind. Some better means of teaching the salient lessons of history to the majority of the people is an inherent necessity for a democracy. We urgently need a more effective system of instruction and I am sure the motion picture medium can be of much assistance. There is an obligation, it seems to me, to explore these possibilities.<sup>17</sup>

This speech was delivered just two weeks before the UN delegates met in San Francisco on June 26, 1945 to ratify the UN charter. It would seem that the opportunity to speak to a civic group on the lofty goal of cooperation among nations at a moment when battles were still being waged in the Pacific Theater, not far from the shores of San Francisco, was not lost on this future Secretary of State, who served from 1947 to 1949 under President Harry S. Truman, and whose name is today more closely associated with peacetime efforts to rebuild Western Europe's nation states than with his strategic wartime efforts to bring about the ultimate defeat of the Axis Powers. General Marshall closed his speech with the following words:

What is going on now in San Francisco, and what comes next, makes it especially important historically to understand the other fellow's point of view. . . [S]omehow or other these different points of view must be merged. I know no other way than by a thorough knowledge of the lessons – not the specific dates –

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<sup>16</sup> Noa Steimatsky, "The Cinecittà Refugee Camp," *OCTOBER* 128 (Spring 2009): 32.

<sup>17</sup> Retrieved from: <http://www.marshallfoundation.org/Database.htm>, Document #5-160. Document Copy Text Source: George C. Marshall Papers, Pentagon Office Collection, Speeches, George C. Marshall Research Library, Lexington, Virginia. Document Format: Typed transcript. Marshall had been invited to address the Maryland Historical Society by its president, George L. Radcliffe, the junior senator from Maryland and a member of the Democratic Party. The remarks printed here are from a Marshall-edited transcript made by the historical society. It was published as "Some Lessons of History," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 40 (September 1945): 175-84.

of history. My present interests are centered in two things, the early completion of this war and the measures this country will take to avoid future wars.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, by 1948, in his capacity as US Secretary of State, he lent his name to the Truman Administration's massive economic recovery program for Western Europe.<sup>19</sup>

Italy was at the center of this rebuilding effort, as both a recipient of US economic aid and as a strong stakeholder in the creation of a new form of European democracy. Between 1945 and 1948 – the years leading up to Italy's so-called economic miracle – the Italian government chose not to adopt any bold or comprehensive domestic reconstruction plans. Italy was crippled partly due to the devastating losses suffered during the war, but also because of the sense of shame it harbored for its Fascist past.<sup>20</sup> By 1947, however, Italy had managed to quickly recoup its international image by reemploying the myth of self-representation, “*Italiani brava gente*” – an image that had originated during Italy's first colonial enterprises claiming the intrinsic goodness of the Italian people<sup>21</sup> – and Italy's moderate leaders began to disenfranchise the Left, which was led by the Italian Communist Party (Partito Comunista Italiano, PCI) under Palmiro Togliatti. The moderates gained much ground in the severe winter of 1946-47, which resulted in drastic food shortages. With no concrete plan in place to resolve this shortage, the Left lost the support of its labor base whose standards of living had decreased dramatically postwar. Through the maneuverings of the center-right Christian Democratic party (La Democrazia Cristiana, DC), led by Alcide De Gasperi – solidly in power by April 1948 with the help of covert American support – Italy now worked to regain a respectable international reputation by partnering with both its European neighbors and the United States. By 1950, these partnerships seemed to be bearing fruit in terms of increased industrial productivity throughout Italy, and, more importantly for the United States and the Truman Administration's so-called Marshall Plan, they were

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> The official name of the Marshall Plan is actually the European Recovery Program. Historians and statesmen have attributed the coinage of the label “The Marshall Plan” to a speech made by George C. Marshall in 1947 at or during the Harvard commencement ceremonies. In fact, in the records of George C. Marshall, Marshall himself recalls that when he requested the chance to speak at Harvard during the 1947 commencement exercises he said that he would welcome the opportunity to “make a few remarks” after the alumni luncheon. It is widely accepted by historians today that it was very important in 1947 for Marshall to keep this offer to Europe under the radar; this may well explain why there is not a single known photograph or piece of film footage of this event. Marshall's goal in using his unofficial platform at Harvard was to get the message to Europeans through less official channels and to then see what they would do about it. Marshall's own metaphor for this approach was “quietly tossing the Europeans a football with a message wrapped around it.” It seems that it was most likely Dean Acheson who put a bug in the appropriate ears so that British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin would be sure to hear about it in short order. This approach is very much in keeping with the type of information campaigns Marshall had employed through film and other forms of media while in charge of the US Army. (See Charles Wolfe, “Mapping *Why We Fight*: Frank Capra and the US Army Orientation Film in World War II” in Cynthia A. Lucia Barto, Roy Grundman, and Art Simon, *The Wiley-Blackwell History of American Film* (Chichester,: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> Chiarella Esposito, *America's Feeble Weapon: Funding the Marshall Plan in France and Italy, 1948-1950*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994).

<sup>21</sup> For a nuanced discussion of the genealogy of this identity myth and its function as an ideological laundry for reformulating and then setting aside disquieting moments of national shame that Italians continue to employ today, see Paolo Favero, “Italians, the ‘Good People’: Reflections on National Self-Representation in Contemporary Italian Debates on Xenophobia and War,” *Outlines – Critical Practice Studies* No. 2 (2010): 138-153.

successful in terms of Communist containment, a goal to which the Italian centrist government was also strongly committed.<sup>22</sup>

### *Italian and American Marshall Plan Films in Italy: A Mirror of Productivity?*

In the pivotal postwar moment, the work of producing non-fiction films in order to re-educate the Italians, who had switched allegiances during the war, was no longer simply the domain of the occupying military governing body of the United States. It became a joint peacetime effort of the US Department of State under the auspices of the European Recovery Program (ERP), most commonly known as the Marshall Plan (MP), and the Italian government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi, who survived ongoing, heated battles between his ruling party, the Christian Democrats, and the Italian Communist Party to retain his position as Prime Minister from 1945 to 1953. He would serve eight consecutive years as the leader of eight consecutive coalition governments.<sup>23</sup> Undoubtedly General Marshall, in his new position as Secretary of State under President Harry Truman, greatly influenced the forms of public education that the State Department pursued and implemented. To this day, the Marshall Plan remains the most productive and successful peacetime media propaganda campaign that the US government has ever mounted.<sup>24</sup> The success of this program was due in part to the fact that while funding and ideas for the films' scenarios may have originally come from Washington, filmmakers indigenous to the countries that the Marshall Plan targeted produced the films themselves.

This corpus of over 300 films<sup>25</sup> has received little more attention than a footnote in standard historical accounts of international documentary cinema and in studies of post-World

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<sup>22</sup> For further documentation of the shift in the balance of power in Italian politics between 1946 and 1950, and the role of US intervention in postwar Italy, see: Esposito, *America's Feeble Weapon*; John Gillingham, *European Integration, 1950-2003: Superstate or New Market Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); John Gimbel, *The Origins of the Marshall Plan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976); Richard T. Griffiths, ed., *Explorations in OEEC History* (Paris: The Organizations for Economic Co-operations and Development, 1997); and Harry Bayard Price, *The Marshall Plan and Its Meaning* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1955).

<sup>23</sup> General information on the De Gasperi administration culled from "De Gasperi Through American Eyes" by Steven F. White, in *Italian Politics and Society*, No.61 (Fall/Winter 2005), and "The Italian Stabilization of 1947: Domestic and International Factors," by Juan Carlos Martinez Oliva (Institute of European Studies, 2007). More specific information on the US-sponsored covert operation to assist De Gasperi in maintaining control of the Italian government can be found in *The United States and the Making of Postwar France, 1945-1954* by Irwin M. Wall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Wall demonstrates that it was DeGaulle in France who first reached out to Secretary of State Marshall to enlist US support in securing the 1948 general elections in Italy. In one of the CIA's first covert operations, the United States organized a multinational effort between the UK, France, and the United States to successfully defeat the Italian Communist Party. The United States invested 10 million dollars in this effort, and this sum set the benchmark for further US-backed efforts to control Communism in Western Europe. For a detailed account of the CIA's 1948 actions in Italy see James E. Miller, "Taking Off the Gloves: The United States and the Italian Elections of 1948," *Diplomatic History*, 7 (1983): 35-55. The US government's official Congressional reports and admonition of these activities were first made public in 1976; they are popularly known as "The Church Committee" Volumes I and II. They are now openly available through the US Government Printing Office.

<sup>24</sup> See Hogan, *The Marshall Plan*.

<sup>25</sup> New titles and multiple language versions continue to surface through the ongoing archival research of Linda R. Christenson, the official Marshall Plan filmographer. Her work can be accessed through the virtual archive "The Marshall Plan Filmography" of the George C. Marshall Foundation: <http://www.marshallfilms.org/mpfdetail.asp>.

War II US and Italian diplomatic history. Yet this understudied body of films negotiated complex political and ideological terrain in both Italy and the United States, producing multiple narratives of history, civic discourse and cultural identity that challenge the familiar narrative of economic productivity and progress that the Truman and De Gasperi governments intended these films to promote. Italy produced more films for the MP between 1948 and 1951 than any other MP country. In 1950 alone, Italian productions outnumbered those of every other country by nearly three to one, and these Italian films were also adapted to fit the media campaigns of other ERP countries.<sup>26</sup> The disproportionate number of films produced in Italy compared to other countries speaks to the key place that Italy held for the United States in the battleground against Communism; the equally disproportionate silence on these films speaks to their disturbing self-gratifying narratives about the “Italian-ness” of cinema Italian style.

When Chiarini claimed in 1951 that Italian scientific, educational, cultural, and documentary films were not being successfully produced, this was not exactly the case. In arguing for a renewed Italian non-fiction film industry, Chiarini's rhetoric demonstrated a political and ideological move to wrest the contemporary Italian non-fiction film industry from the hands of American political, economic and commercial interests. Chiarini left out a large part of the story, neglecting the corpus of Marshall Plan films conceived, produced and directed by Italians that were distributed throughout Italy and translated into multiple languages for distribution across Europe through a variety of international networks. It is tempting to claim that Chiarini's exclusion of the MP films was entirely intentional. Yet this does not quite gel with his call for a new form of international cooperation among filmmakers and governmental institutions. While it is indeed evident that Chiarini intended to continue to assert an Italian genealogy for many of the advances in fiction and documentary filmmaking of which he spoke, it would not make sense for him to do so by excluding a significant number of Italian productions from his account.

The role of Italian filmmakers and the Italian film industry in the MP film productions for all of Europe is remarkably absent in the title and credit sequences of many Italian MP films. The films most often bear an official seal of the ERP, the ECA (Economic Cooperation Administration), the MP, and the MSA (Mutual Security Agency),<sup>27</sup> or they feature the logo of an Italian film production company that had been established, with the help of De Gasperi's Italian Centro di documentazione, to produce and distribute informational and documentary films. The archival record reveals the names of Italian filmmakers and businessmen in the official document and correspondence files of the US Department of State, housed at the US National Archives, but the films themselves, which are also housed at the US National Archives, are often lacking these specific names. One might assume that many of the well-known Italian filmmakers who produced these short form documentaries did not wish to be associated with these films, and that they were using the profits to make more sophisticated forms of commercial entertainment for distribution at home and abroad. While these filmmakers did indeed use the funds they earned producing MP shorts for their own projects, this was not the only reason for this working anonymity.

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<sup>26</sup> Official Pamphlet of the Economic Cooperation Administration, *Annual Report on the Information Program, 2nd year, 1950*, compiled by ECA Paris, printed by Georges Lang, Paris.

<sup>27</sup> Each of these different acronyms represents the various organizations responsible for the distribution of postwar aid that the US government appropriated and supplied to Western Europe. This article focuses specifically on the organizations' roles in the production and distribution of films that promoted and demonstrated the US and Italian governments' ongoing efforts to rebuild Italy and Western Europe.

The reasons for this practice were manifold and reinforce the fact that US and Italian political, cultural, and economic motives for the collaborative process of MP filmmaking in Italy were interrelated, complex, and varied. Beginning during WWII and continuing through the years of the MP Information Program, informational and documentary films made under the auspices of the US government granted the sole official credit for their production to the US government. This rule reversed the official practice of the US government during the New Deal era, in which individual directors', cinematographers', screenwriters', and composers' names were boldly emblazoned on their productions.<sup>28</sup> More importantly for the Italian side of this equation, recent scholarship on the history of the Italian documentary film movement has revealed that among Italian documentarians this practice predated the MP era. In an unsigned article in *Bianco e nero* from February 1940, an anonymous author recounts his experience at a private screening of documentaries produced in the UK by the cosmopolitan intellectual and filmmaker Alberto Cavalcanti,<sup>29</sup> who joined John Grierson's Empire Marketing Board in 1934 and became a major figure in the British documentary movement through the 1930s. The anonymous author laments this Italian practice of what could be termed "erasure of authorship":

We saw a private screening of some documentaries produced in Great Britain by Alberto Cavalcanti. Short films made on the cheap, but realized by people with great enthusiasm and with a great sense of cinema. What interested us the most was the way in which sound was used . . . [I]nstead, in our Italian documentaries, which are rarely shown in our theaters, there is not much to be impressed by in terms of sound. Almost always sound consists simply of generic and banal music that comments on one image after the next. And, by the way individuals whose names are not shown in the films credit sequences produce the majority of Italian documentaries.<sup>30</sup>

This passage from a 1940 Italian-language publication implies that this practice had indeed been in effect for some time in Italian documentary circles. It would make sense that such a practice was employed in the 1920s as Italian documentary cinema became more closely aligned with the Italian state. One of the goals of the Fascist project was to rewrite history by employing the "strongest arm of the state." *Cinema è l'arma più forte* became a rallying cry of Mussolini by the mid 1930s: the official motto of Cinecittà in 1936, it was emblazoned on banners and cinema caravans that traveled the length of the Italian peninsula. Attributing these revisionist documentaries to the whole of Italy, rather than to specific individuals, hence may speak to a

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<sup>28</sup> Films that immediately come to mind are *The Plow that Broke the Plains* (dir. Pare Lorentz, for the US Resettlement Administration, 1936) and *The River* (dir. Pare Lorentz, for the Farm Security Administration, 1938). These films also prominently featured the names of composer Virgil Thomson, cinematographers Floyd Crosby, Leo Hurwitz, Paul Strand, Willard Van Dyke, and others. It is also worth noting that these films had screened in Italy to great acclaim, with *The River* winning the award for "Best Documentary" at the Venice International Film Festival in 1938, the same year in which Mussolini's regime would begin to actively limit the number of American films allowed on Italian screens.

<sup>29</sup> Alberto Cavalcanti was of Italian origin, but Brazilian-born and French-educated.

<sup>30</sup> Translation of passage from *Bianco e nero*, 2, 7 (February 1949): 67 from Luca Caminati's article "The Role of Documentary Film in the Formation of Italian Neorealist Cinema" in Giovacchini and Sklar, *Global Neorealism*, 11-12. (Underlined passage is my emphasis.)

much larger project of Italian nation-building in which the cinema played an equally critical role during the Fascist and the postwar eras.

To return once again to Chiarini's words from 1951, the postwar iteration of the project of reinvigorating a sense of Italian nationalism through the apparatus of cinema called specifically for Italian documentary films to speak to and for the "soul" of Italy. Ironically, at the moment when Chiarini was seeking to present postwar Italian cinema to the world in a future-oriented, benevolent, internationalist, and humanitarian light, the Italian MP filmmakers were actively reinforcing an established practice of Italy's recent Fascist past. In this seemingly innocent act of erasure of individual authorship, the Italian filmmakers were demonstrating a form of embodied continuity with a past they wished to suppress. This was a past that they no longer needed to address directly, because their cinema's institutional practices embraced and enfolded this past into its contemporary configuration of state-sponsored filmmaking that was already redefining Italy's role in the international film market.

As the archival record of US intervention in the postwar recovery of Italy continues to open, the public and private repositories where the material record of Marshall Plan film production in Italy resides reveal themselves as sites of perpetual renegotiation. Chiarini was attempting to carry out one such renegotiation in an international public arena in 1951, by recognizing that Italian film and Italian filmmakers were already bridging the traditional institutional divides between commercial and state-sponsored filmmaking, and simultaneously bridging the formal and aesthetic divides between fiction and non-fiction filmmaking. Thus the words that Italian, British, American, and French film critics penned for the UNESCO *Courier*, along with the words spoken by General George Marshall, demonstrate that while these individuals articulated their contemporary moment in nationalist, internationalist, and humanist terms, they were already engaged in a thoroughly transnational cinematic project that would resonate not only through their national cinematic institutions, but more importantly through their international diplomatic institutions. In this critical moment of political and economic upheaval, the Marshall Plan was an unprecedented modernization drive for Italy, based on the economics of productivity and economic integration. Thus the MP films in Italy, along with Italian Neorealist films, Italian comedies, and American, British and French feature and documentary films, renegotiated national and international aesthetic traditions and constituted the basis for cementing transnational industrial practices in documentary and non-fiction filmmaking that would become a model for the burgeoning development rhetoric and humanitarian efforts of non-governmental organizations such as the UN and inter-governmental organizations such as NATO, both of whom went on to model their visual information programs on the MP information campaign.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> In 1946 Italy was still considered a pre-capitalist state or at most a developing democracy. In much the same manner that Mussolini had sought to re-imagine Italy's past and secure Italy's status by recalling the days of the Roman Empire in films produced during the Fascist era, the MP filmmakers in Italy, encouraged by both US and Italian diplomats and bureaucrats, produced films that simultaneously suppressed images of the recent monarchic and Fascist eras and revived the ideals of democracy and republican government of Ancient Rome (and Greece), skipping over centuries of war and conflict in order to lay claim to a political and governmental system which had also influenced the American political system. As David Ellwood has noted, Italy was in a state of near civil war when the MP started, following the searing experience of the April 1948 elections. However, the country had given itself a new anti-Fascist constitution, based on the parties of the Resistance. Italians were engaged in a high stakes debate regarding their identity as a nation and the United States took the opportunity to ally itself with certain ruling factions in Italy in order to exploit this. The 1948 experience had convinced the Americans that propaganda was

Italy had become a Cold War frontier country, a fact that would become key to larger US policies of containment after Korea, during which the MP film productions became more militarized. Italy provides the most prolific and compelling case for understanding how the apparatuses of cinema and the state worked together to write and rewrite through censure, erasure, and finally reinvention their role in producing non-fiction films for the Marshall Plan propaganda and recovery effort, which are recognized as authoritative texts of Americanization.<sup>32</sup> The challenge of the MP propaganda campaign was to teach capitalist economics to the masses, a challenge that was, and still is, very difficult. David Ellwood has noted that there was an actual, metal tag attached to a rail car carrying MP goods in Italy that read: “*Il benessere rafforza la libertà*” (wellbeing strengthens or reinforces freedom). One could ask: what sort of a proposition is this in the Italy of 1948-49, coming out of Fascism, civil war, invasions, and general destruction? The MP filmmakers worked to convince Italians that to achieve this American ideal, Italians must embrace “productivity” and competition. Italians could see with their own eyes all the reconstruction underway and all the goods coming into their markets, but there remained a very basic question: what are they doing it for?<sup>33</sup> Through an examination of the MP films in Italy, one can better understand these texts as indicative of the process of Americanization, a process in which Italians and Americans were complicit. One must also examine these texts in order to continue to interrogate the immediate and residual results of the MP project. The reconstruction of Italian non-fiction and informational film production in the post-WWII era relied on the vestiges of a pre-established organizational infrastructure that persisted between Italy and the United States during the war. Despite a series of political and ideological ruptures that ostensibly placed the two countries in opposition during the Fascist era, American and Italian governmental and commercial film interests had been deeply entrenched and invested in each other’s success for decades.<sup>34</sup> The immediate postwar moment represents the most active period of reinvestment in Italian cinema by US governmental and commercial interests, and simultaneously the most active period in the reconstruction of Italy’s film industry by Italian commercial and political interests.

Secretary of State Marshall’s speech to the Maryland State Historical Society in 1945 anticipated how the Marshall Plan would assist not only in funding actual reconstruction projects in Italy, but more importantly in rewriting Italy’s national narrative. When Marshall optimistically stated that the medium of film was the ideal medium through which to impart “not the specific dates of history” but its “salient lessons,” thereby impressing upon the moviegoer the necessity for a democratic society, he was not speaking hyperbolically. Likewise, the American and Italian agents who came on board to create this filmic record of Italy’s postwar reconstruction were earnestly engaged in a project of economic, political, and cultural recovery through a newly negotiated form of state-funded filmmaking. Yet notwithstanding the

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crucial, because the Communists could have come to power by electoral means. The Americans were convinced that Communism was only so strong in Italy because the economy and the ruling class were still underdeveloped.

<sup>32</sup> De Grazia, 285-293.

<sup>33</sup> These remarks attributed to David Ellwood are based on unpublished correspondence between Ellwood and the author.

<sup>34</sup> These affiliations can be traced to the turn of the twentieth century and to the work of Edison’s New York-based American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, and the Società Italiana Cines in Rome along with Itala Films in Torino. For a thorough history of early transnational cinematic exchanges between commercial and documentary film producers in Italy and the United States, see Bertozzi; Giorgio Bertellini, *Italy in Early American Cinema: Race, Landscape and the Picturesque* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010); Bernagozzi, *Il mito dell’immagine*; Brunetta, *History of Italian Cinema*.

fundamental accord of all agents involved in this process of “Americanization,” my account here of the production and distribution of Marshall Plan films in Italy from 1948 to 1955 seeks to demonstrate how efforts to create a transnational consensus can be complicated by the competing institutional forces that have allowed the very material record of Italy’s postwar reclamation to become buried in archival repositories.

There is a pattern in the narratives that persist regarding the gaps in the production histories of the MP films. Beginning with the UNESCO *Courier* article in which Chiarini dismisses this entire body of work at the very moment in which it is being produced, and of which he surely must have had first-hand knowledge since his contemporaries from the Centro and LUCE, such as Vittorio Gallo, Romolo Marcellini, and noted *Corriere della Sera*<sup>35</sup> film critic Tullio Kezich, to name just a few, were actively involved in the production of MP films as screenwriters, producers, and directors, leads one to ask: Are the Marshall Plan films made by Italians, for Italians under the careful guidance (and often times censure) of US diplomats heading the MP Film Section offices (in Washington, Paris and Rome) to be considered Italian films or American films? These films are neither entirely Italian nor entirely American. They are the patrimony of both nations and both national cinemas. To immediately appreciate the complexity of the institutional forces at play, it is essential to look at the film producers and the films themselves.

### *Talking to the Italians*



Two images from the ECA film *Talking to the Italians* (1950). The image on the left is the title slate for this ECA production, which reported on the Marshall Plan’s activities in Italy to Americans at home. The image on the right is a movie house in Rome, circa 1949. The film’s narrator informs the viewer that Italians are watching Marshall Plan films in theaters such as the “Super Cinema” pictured here.

A 1948 Act of Congress created a temporary US agency known as the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA) to administer the economic and diplomatic concerns of the US

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<sup>35</sup> The *Corriere della Sera* (*Evening Courier*) is one of Italy’s oldest daily newspapers, founded in Milan in 1876, and it is still read widely today. Its most noted journalists have included writers and intellectuals such as Eugenio Montale, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Italo Calvino, and Oriana Fallaci. For many years it has had a “third page” devoted entirely to writings and editorials on culture in Italy. The “third page” idea came about during the Fascist era when Fascists spoke about their new form of state-building as the “third way.”

government's European Recovery Program (ERP), commonly known as The Marshall Plan (MP). The head of the ECA was given full cabinet rank alongside the Secretary of State, and the ECA launched a full-scale information campaign in 1948 using all media sources available to them: print media, traveling exhibitions (in the form of stage plays, children's puppet theater, and cultural expositions), radio, television, and film. The ECA's output was prolific in all forms of media, yet film garnered the most attention at the time of the ECA's creation. This attention persists today. The filmic record produced by an amalgamation of US and Italian state-funded institutions and private organizations can be located and viewed in archives in the United States, Italy, and beyond, and presently constitutes the most comprehensive visual historical and archival record of US intervention in postwar Italy.

The Italian government agency that was a sort of counterpart organization to the ECA was the Italian State Information Agency known as the Centro di documentazione (Documentation Center, hereafter Centro), modeled on the US State Department's United States Information Service (USIS).<sup>36</sup> The Centro was formed in 1951, coincidentally the same year that the ECA ceased to administer US government information and economic programs in Italy.<sup>37</sup> The Centro remained in existence as an Italian government-funded agency until 1960, when the state-sponsored short film was being replaced by state-sponsored television documentaries. While Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi and many other members of the Italian Parliament were eager to distance themselves from US government recovery efforts in Italy by 1951 in order to ally themselves more closely with intra-European networks of capital and governance, the US government and US commercial interests were not quite ready to relinquish their role in the economic, political, and cultural reconstruction of Italy. Therefore the Mutual Security Agency (MSA) was created by an Act of Congress in 1951, and the MSA assumed the work of the ECA until 1953. The MSA films were produced and distributed at the height of the Korean War and represent a much more militarized form of propaganda than the earlier productivity films of the MP. The MSA continued to distribute US economic aid in Italy and to produce information campaigns that provide a visual record linking the work of the ERP/MP to the MSA.<sup>38</sup> The De

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<sup>36</sup> The USIS is the United States Information Service; it was the overseas name for the United States Information Agency (USIA). For a thorough discussion of the role of the USIS and USIA in postwar Italy see Simona Tobia, *Advertising America: The United States Information Service in Italy (1945-1956)* (Milan: LED Edizioni Universitarie, 2008).

<sup>37</sup> Strictly speaking, the Marshall Plan had ceased to exist as an actual, on-the-ground US government-funded recovery effort for Italy (and all 17 countries in Europe that it assisted). Yet the MP officials who had administered funds and programs in Italy from 1948 to 1951 carried on, employing Italian filmmakers and producing films for the Italian public, now under the new MSA banner.

<sup>38</sup> The Mutual Security Act of 1951 was the successor to the Mutual Defense Assistance Act and the Economic Cooperation Act of 1948, which administered the Marshall plan. It became law on 10 October 1951 and created a new, independent agency, the Mutual Security Agency, to supervise all foreign aid programs including military assistance and economic programs that bolstered the defense capability of U.S. allies globally. It authorized nearly 7.5 billion in US aid in its first year. While the Act only authorized the existence of the Mutual Security Agency through 1953, the Act was extended each year by Congressional appropriations and the goal of mutual security continued unabated until 1961, under the direction of the Foreign Operations Administration. Averell Harriman, who had been instrumental in creating the ECA Information Unit, was the Director of the MSA from October 1951 to January 1953. See the records available at: <http://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/harriman-william-averell>. This is the official site of the Office of the Historian, US Department of State. When Congress abolished the MSA in August of 1953, officially transferring the work of the agency to the Foreign Operations Administration (FOA), which operated within the larger US Department of State structure in Italy through the US Embassy in Rome, it took some time for the MSA workers to close up shop. Between 1954 and 1955 MSA workers completed

Gasperi government's organization of a separate Italian Information Agency film unit, which produced films with Italian and American government funds, can be viewed as a political sleight of hand that allowed the Italians to reconcile their role as active recipients of US aid and active producers of US government-sponsored information campaigns with their own collective and individual desires to reclaim Italian cinema for Italy,<sup>39</sup> while simultaneously allowing the United States to remain an active yet silent partner.

The trail of paper records in US archives suggests that the majority of the funding for the films' productions came from the US government. Likewise, the documents in US archives indicate that US government officials often determined the general themes of the films, while the work of translating these themes of recovery and redevelopment for an Italian audience relied greatly on the input of Italian filmmakers and bureaucrats. The conservation of these film prints in Italian archives also suggests that their value for Italians lies in their identification as form of cultural patrimony. They represent a particular type of short-form Italian documentary film production that influenced the re-growth of Italian cinema in the postwar era. By connecting the institutional and production histories of these two groups of films and the subsequent movements and eventual deposits of the films in a variety of archival repositories, we can compose from the archival traces a map of the networks of production and distribution through which these films were linked, once again demonstrating that this transnational visual information campaign could not have functioned so successfully had the United States or Italy attempted to launch the campaign independently.

In order to understand the significance of Marshall Plan film production in Italy it is necessary to understand the overall structure and composition of the ECA Information Program in Europe and film's role within this system. President Truman chose Republican industrialist Paul Hoffman to head the ECA's Washington headquarters and to serve as the liaison between Congress, US commercial interests and the American public.<sup>40</sup> While Hoffman served as the official face of the ECA at home, convincing Congress and the American citizens to invest their tax dollars (the eventual cost would total \$12.5 billion) in the rebuilding of Europe, Democratic politician and diplomat Averell Harriman,<sup>41</sup> Secretary of Commerce under Truman from 1946-

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MSA assignments and projects – especially films – for which funding had not yet been depleted, and worked to organize the official records of the ERP/MP and MSA for eventual return and deposit in Washington, DC. For a fuller account of this transition see Albert Hensing, "The Marshall Plan's European Film Unit, 1948-1955: a memoir and filmography," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 14:3 (1994): 269-297.

<sup>39</sup> Archivists at ACS in Rome have stated that uncataloged paper documentation does exist in their archives, but to date very few historians have been able to access these records directly. Fortunately, Italian Studies scholar Paola Bonifazio did have the chance to access some of these contracts between the Centro and Italian film producers. See her reports on these unique, uncataloged materials in Paola Bonifazio, "Narrating Modernization: Documentary Film in Cold War Italy (1948-1955)" (doctoral dissertation, Ann Arbor, MI: UMI/ProQuest, 2008).

<sup>40</sup> From 1935 to 1948, Hoffman, a life-long Republican Party member, served as president of Studebaker. He took a leave of absence to spend a two-year term (1948-50) as director of the Economic Cooperation Administration, administering the Marshall Plan aid program to Europe following World War II. From 1950 to 1953 he also served as the president of the Ford Foundation. He served as Chairman of the Board of Studebaker from 1953 to 1956. He was a delegate to the United Nations from 1956 to 1957, and managing director of the UN Special Fund (later called the UN Development Program) from 1959 to 1972.

<sup>41</sup> Harriman and Hoffman never did see eye to eye; they were politically opposed on several issues, beyond those over which Truman gave them jurisdiction. Harriman began his international diplomatic career as FDR's Special Envoy to Europe from 1941-1943; he then went on to serve as US Ambassador to the USSR from 1943-1946, US Ambassador to Britain in 1946, and then as Truman's Secretary of Commerce from 1946-1948, where he played a pivotal role in the administration of the Marshall Plan in Paris, France, remaining there for two years as the

1948, was dispatched to Paris in 1948 to structure the ECA's European operations. He remained in Paris until 1951 and was responsible for setting up the Information Division.

Harriman appointed *Washington Post* journalist Alfred Friendly as the Information Division Director, but Friendly returned to Washington in 1949 and Roscoe Drummond assumed the role of Director from 1949 until 1951. Drummond, too, had a journalistic pedigree; as a syndicated political columnist he began his career covering the presidency of Calvin Coolidge. With his media savvy, Drummond quickly established several branches within the Information Division that were divided by media form and function. He called on contacts from the field of labor management and organizing to set up the Labor Information Office, which in turn managed the Research and Analysis Section and the Special Media Section.

Within the Special Media Section there were three distinct units. The Visual Information Unit was in charge of producing and distributing pamphlets and other MP-conceived publications (such as graphic novels, magazines, and even fiction), posters and displays, traveling exhibitions, and competitions (such as essay writing contests among schoolchildren in the countries receiving MP aid). The Radio Unit was also further divided into three groups: newscasts, documentary programs, and entertainment programs. And last but not least, there was the Film Unit. The Film Unit was further segmented into three working groups: newsreels, documentary programming, and technical training films. Drummond hired Lothar Wolff, the chief film editor for Louis de Rochemont's *The March of Time*, as the Chief of the Marshall Plan Film Unit.

This was a significant choice for the Film Unit; *The March of Time* series had created its own genre of screen journalism that combined the newsreel, re-enactments, and the documentary form to create a hybrid form of news entertainment. At the height of its production and distribution in the 1930s and during World War II, the *March of Time* was distributed both domestically and internationally and these films often shared marquee space with the feature film they accompanied.<sup>42</sup> While the *March of Time* was creating these staged scenarios based on official news reports from the field and usually incorporated actuality footage into each episode, much of the footage was a recreation, a form of mimesis occurring more or less in real time with the actual events that the episodes represented. The official print, radio, and film news outlets

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European Coordinator of the ERP. While in Paris he established friendly relations between the CIA, AFL-CIO, and the ECA. In 1951, President Truman dispatched him to Tehran to broker an agreement between the UK and Iran. He then reassumed his position with the ERP, but this time under the new title of Director of the Mutual Security Agency (MSA) that replaced the ECA/MP. He served as Governor of New York from 1955-1958 and was a Democratic Candidate for Presidential Nomination in 1952 and 1956.

<sup>42</sup> Building on research originally conducted by Raymond Fielding, Jack Ellis recognizes *The March of Time* as the first of the genre of "compilation documentary." See Jack C. Ellis, and Betsy A. MacLane, *A New History of Documentary Film* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 78; but Jay Leyda's earlier monograph *Films Beget Films* (New York: Hill and Wang), originally published in 1964, traces a different genealogy for the compilation genre of documentary, while still recognizing that films constructed using newsreel footage and found footage do indeed represent a strong link to the further development of the documentary film genre. Instead, the *March of Time* can be considered a form of entertainment and propaganda film often masquerading as hard news or documentary. *The March of Time* series' use of newsreel and found footage intercut with staged scenarios is what makes this case most clearly. The most well documented instance of staging by the *March of Time* was for their reports "Palestine" (1935) and "Inside Nazi Germany" (1938). Studio sets in New Jersey were made to resemble the streets and shops of Germany, where actors portraying Jews and Nazis could be seen engaged in tussles outside Jewish shops, entire scenes were staged where Jewish storefronts were vandalized, and so on. See Raymond Fielding, *The March of Time, 1935-1951*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 199; Michael E. Birdwell, *Celluloid Soldiers: The Warner Bros. Campaign Against Nazism* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 30.

covered the events with much greater accuracy, but the visual and emotional impact of the *March of Time* series on the American public cannot be overlooked.

The influence of this series was also felt in Italy by the late 1930s, making a strong impact on Sandro Pallavicini, a businessman who formed the INCOM (*Industria Cortometraggi* [short film industry]) group in 1938. Coming from a family of merchants, Pallavicini began his career in the family business selling electrical appliances for the home, and soon became involved in orchestrating publicity campaigns for these products. Following the Fascist model of corporativism,<sup>43</sup> he expanded his interests into the fields of public relations and journalism, and with a few other private partners from the Cedraschi family of Swiss-Milanese investors he entered the newsreel market immediately after WWII, producing the first run of *March of Time*-inspired INCOM newsreels in 1946 under the label *La Settimana INCOM* (*The INCOM Weekly*).

From their inception, Pallavicini's newsreels demonstrated pro-American sentiment. The first number produced by INCOM in February 1946 featured an interview with Admiral Ellery Stone, the Admiral in Chief of the Allied Command. This particular newsreel was titled *L'Italia muove i primi passi sulla strada per la democrazia* (*Italy takes its first steps toward democracy*), and it was followed up by the short *Thanks, America* (this was the original Italian title). Gian Piero Brunetta cites this title in his comprehensive *Storia del cinema italiano* (*History of Italian Cinema*), noting that during the 1948 elections when De Gasperi consolidated power, Pallavicini's INCOM newsreels were cobbled together from materials supplied to him by American news and government sources. This was the same approach that ECA would take in 1950 for the twelve-episode MP monthly newsreel series "ERP in Action" (ECA Film Unit in cooperation with Fox-Movietone News, Paris, for ECA/OSR), the first episode of which featured De Gasperi digging the first shovel of earth in an MP-funded land reclamation project.



La Settimana INCOM logo: screen capture from opening credit sequence of episode No. 1, 1946.

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<sup>43</sup> For a nuanced discussion of the Fascist's "third way" that was not strictly socialism or capitalism, but a combination of the best of both political-economic systems see Jeffrey T. Schnapp, ed., *A Primer of Italian Fascism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

Brunetta claims that right after De Gasperi's victory, Pallavicini showed up at the US State Department offices in Rome to claim the rewards that American diplomats had promised him. According to Brunetta, the American Ambassador to Italy, James Clement Dunn, personally penned a letter to the State Department on April 27, 1948 urging the United States not only to continue to regularly fund the work of INCOM, but to increase their funding of Pallavicini's pro-American newsreel series.<sup>44</sup> Thus, choosing *March of Time* veteran Wolff to head the ECA film unit in Paris demonstrates that from the outset the US State Department officials understood and intended that the ECA Information Division's work was to inform and entertain the targeted European audiences in a style that borrowed from American and Italian forms of the compilation documentary/entertainment newsreel. And by choosing to fund the work of Pallavicini's INCOM series with funds that did not come from the MP coffers, the US government forged links with private film producers in Italy that would persist beyond the MP years.

In addition to the work of the ECA Paris Film Unit, there was a Field Section Country Missions Chief that operated under the ECA Press Relations Officer rather than the ECA Special Projects Advisor. There were 18 Country Missions in all.<sup>45</sup> In addition to accepting mutual and reciprocal forms of industrial and agricultural assistance, by employing Europeans to produce the information programs of the Information Division, the European Cooperation Act enabled a *de facto* Marshall Plan for European journalists, photographers, broadcasters, and filmmakers. The Country Missions had a considerable degree of autonomy in determining how the MP message and aid would reach its people, but not as much autonomy in creating the overarching message. As a general rule, the message was designed and delivered in the form of printed propaganda, pre-packaged traveling exhibitions, and completed radio broadcasts, and films commissioned and approved by Paris headquarters. Films were first produced with English narration for review at headquarters, and then translated into various languages for distribution through the MP countries. Italy proved to be an exception to the rule.

### *Talking to the Americans*

The structure of the Italian Country Mission was somewhat different than most ECA Country Missions. The MP office in Rome contained its own Information Office, as all Country Missions did, but it also ran what can be considered a film sub-unit office. This office, run by John Secondari, the Assistant Chief of the Information Division for Italy, was located at 62 Via Vittorio Veneto, alongside the US State Department offices and the offices of other foreign embassies in Italy. The reason for this sub-unit office was twofold. First, the US fear of the spread of Communism in Italy and France meant that from the outset of the ECA's media activities in Europe a special focus was placed on these two countries. France was the seat of

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<sup>44</sup> Gian Piero Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano*, vol. 3 (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1993), 5.

<sup>45</sup> Article 2 of the European Cooperation Act established the right of the ECA to engage in "dissemination of information," and this article was adopted by the agreement of all signatory nations; there were 17 nations (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and West Germany) and one occupied territory (Trieste).<sup>45</sup> Together, these units and divisions covered the MP countries with all forms of propaganda in order to, as Albert Hemsing (the last Paris Film Unit Chief) later recalled, "Give Europeans the facts and figures on Marshall Aid, to stimulate industrial and agricultural productivity, and to promote the idea of a European community, see Hemsing, 270.

ECA's European headquarters, so it seemed logical to create an outpost for the Film Unit in Rome.<sup>46</sup> By the time the ECA Film Unit was officially in operation in 1948, keeping the PCI from sweeping the Italian national elections was a key focus of US foreign policy in Europe.

The Italian film sub-unit produced a visual record of ECA's efforts to rebuild the Italian economy and to constitute a pro-US Italian national political agenda. This joint reclamation effort was not without critical sources of resistance within the reorganized Italian postwar government. In addition to resistance to De Gasperi from within the ruling DC party, the Communist Party, led by the charismatic figure of Palmiro Togliatti, was an extremely outspoken voice for a new form of collective action, emanating from its stronghold in the city of Bologna. Despite the power struggle between Rome and Bologna and the fact that several PCI members held local, regional, and national parliamentary seats, ECA's anti-communist information campaigns were successful in recruiting key figures such as Bologna's Communist Mayor Giuseppe Dozza (who served five consecutive terms from 1945-1966 representing the PCI coalition) to appear in MP films such as *Talking to the Italians* and *Emilia* (Vittorio Gallo, Gallo Films Rome for ECA, 1951) as well as in other MP information campaigns, demonstrating that a postwar political and economic alliance persisted between Italy and the United States, and that the United States worked to forge alliances within the PCI and the DC. The second reason for the wealth of output from the Rome film sub-unit was that Secondari had personal ambitions to work in the commercial feature film industry and the television industry, and he intended to use his knowledge of the Italian language and Italian customs, his connections in the ECA, and his pre-established connections to media outlets in Italy from his time as a radio correspondent to realize some of his own personal creative projects.<sup>47</sup> Unfortunately, as is the case with the records of the Paris Information Unit, the paper records of this Unit are still considered "lost."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Since 1947 the US State Department, National Security Council (NSC), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and Psychological Warfare Branch (PWB) had been focusing intense efforts in terms of personnel and funding on containing the rise of the Italian Communist Party in local, regional and national elections. These agencies were also intent on containing the PCI's connections to the USSR and fostering their support for the Marshall Plan. For a detailed report of the US government's Cold War strategy in postwar Italy, see Vincent M. Barnett, Jr., "Competitive Coexistence and the Communist Challenge in Italy," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. LXX, No. 2 (June 1955): 230-257. See also Barnett's article published in the Italian language in 1950, "Il Piano Marshall nell'area del Mediterraneo," *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali* (Milan: Quaderni dell'angelicum, 1950). Barnett was a Harvard-educated political scientist who worked for the Office of Price Administration and the War Production Board during WWII. From 1948 to 1950, he served with the Economic Cooperation Administration Mission in Italy. He was chief of economic affairs at the US Embassy in Rome in 1951-52 and the embassy's counselor for economic affairs from 1958-60, see Price, 275-276, 340, 363-364, and Hogan, *The Marshall Plan*, 139, 145, 152.

<sup>47</sup> Secondari was actually born in Rome in 1920, but immigrated to the United States, eventually serving in the US Army during World War II. He stayed on in Europe after the war, working first for CBS news before assuming his post with the MP Italian Country Mission Information Unit, where he remained until 1951.

<sup>48</sup> Secondari died unexpectedly in 1975, before he had the chance to write a memoir, like some of the ECA Unit Chiefs did in their twilight years. However, I was able to locate some of Secondari's correspondence files mixed in with a heap of unsorted telegrams that track the correspondence of Wolff, Secondari, Hoffman, Schulberg, and others between Rome, Paris, and Washington. These files include the Secret telegram quoted above, and they are filed in the general ECA Information Division country files at NARA. These "misfiled" materials were part of Secondari's personal correspondence with the Paris office, and they help to chart a partial history of the Italian Information Unit, as well as Secondari's personal ambitions to rise from his rank as a radio reporter for CBS to become a *bona fide* radio and film director and producer.



A rare glimpse of John Secondari captured on film in *Talking to the Italians* (1950). Secondari is seen here in his office at 62 Via Vittorio Veneto working with his secretary to draft a treatment for an Italian Marshall Plan film.

One of the first comprehensive accounts of the ECA Information Division's work in Italy that was produced on Secondari's watch by Italian filmmakers was the film *Talking to the Italians* (Marcellini Film for ECA, 1950). This film was made to show the American public the importance of its US tax-dollar contributions to the Italian recovery effort. *Talking to the Italians* was one of the select MP films that was part of two television documentary series – *The Marshall Plan in Action* and *Strength for the Free World* – that ran from 1950-1953 (bridging both the official MP and MSA years) in select Sunday evening high-viewing time slots on the ABC network.<sup>49</sup> The publicity for *The Marshall Plan in Action* subtitled the series “A Report to America Via ABC Television,” and advertised the show as “A timely, instructive and entertaining series – showing how the Marshall Plan is aiding Europe to build strength against internal subversion and external Communist aggression,” through “a new medium that contributes to world understanding.”<sup>50</sup> This tagline reinforces Secretary of State Marshall's ideas regarding the educational power of film, just as it echoes the words of UNESCO and Chiarini on the international humanitarian role that documentary film must play in forming and maintaining a democratic civil society.<sup>51</sup> Once again reinforcing links between US and Italian commercial and governmental film interests, what is even more striking is that of the 30 MP films selected

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<sup>49</sup> Despite the relative unpopularity of “The Marshall Plan in Action” series at home, where it screened for 26 consecutive weeks in a Sunday time slot, the series was renewed by the MSA, and continued its run on ABC in varying Sunday programming slots until 1953.

<sup>50</sup> This information is taken directly from a 1951 ECA pamphlet promoting the ABC TV series. *The Marshall Plan in Action: A Report to America via ABC Television*, ECA, Washington, DC 1951. This Pamphlet courtesy of the non-circulating collections of the University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Ga. For information on the *Strength for the Free World* series on ABC TV see Elizabeth Heffelfinger, “Black Marketeers and Other Bad Actors: Narratives of Economic Citizenship in American Film, 1945-1955,” doctoral dissertation (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 2005), 176-231.

<sup>51</sup> The *ERP in Action* series (a Fox-Movietone News compilation documentary) and the *March of Time* series rounded out ABC's weekly documentary programming under the MP and MSA banner.

for rotation on ABC for *The Marshall Plan in Action* series, 14 were Italian MP productions.<sup>52</sup> *Talking to the Italians* directly addresses this intertwined Italian and American agenda, illustrating what David Ellwood has aptly termed the inherent tensions between Italy and the United States as a struggle between “American intentions and Italian priorities.”<sup>53</sup> The goal of the US State Department’s ECA Italian Mission is bluntly stated in the first minute of the film by the English-speaking narrator, heard while a medium shot of the American flag waving on the balcony of the 300 year old Palazzo Margherita, the US Embassy building in Rome that was once home to Italy’s first queen, Margherita, fills the screen.

The Italian Mission feels there are two messages it must get across to all Italians: that Italy is being reconstructed and the extent to which ERP is contributing to this reconstruction.

The job has its problems and especially in Italy. During the Fascist regime Italians were the objects of one of the most thorough propaganda campaigns in history and it is not surprising that today they are a little skeptical of all information.

The purpose of this documentary is to show you in brief how we handle this problem.<sup>54</sup>



Screen capture of Palazzo Margherita  
from *Talking to the Italians* (1950).

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<sup>52</sup> This is undoubtedly due to Secondari’s established relationship with American broadcasters and with Italian film producers and bolsters the observation that personal career objectives figured strongly into this US government-ABC contract. By 1957, John Secondari would be head of news programming for ABC TV.

<sup>53</sup> David Ellwood, “The propaganda of the Marshall Plan in Italy in a Cold War Context,” *Intelligence and National Security*, 18: 225-236 (2003): 232.

<sup>54</sup> *Talking to the Italians* has no official production date, but it was first assumed by historian David Ellwood to be 1950, due to the form and content of the film. The film’s official credits do not list a director, but they do credit the production company Marcellini Film. Based on research conducted into the ECA files and the filmographies and production histories of individual Italian filmmakers, it can be stated with certainty that this film was produced and directed by Romolo Marcellini. A 16mm film print and video copy of this film can be found at the US National Archives in RG 306 no. 306.3803.

Once the narrator has established the precise problem of joint Italian and American reeducation through propaganda, he quickly describes how US-sponsored film and information campaigns will achieve the ERP's desired outcome:

An important aspect of the Italian Mission's work is that it never appears itself as the issuing agency for any of its publicity. Consequently Italians get their information about what the ERP is doing in their country from Italian hands. For instance, radio broadcasts. These broadcasts are generally prepared by the ECA Studios in Rome, but they are put on the air by the Italian Radio Network as their own shows, and the same is true of press releases, they are printed by Italian newspapers as their reporter's own, individual efforts.

This 23-minute film was directed and produced by the Italian filmmaker and Fascist sympathizer Romolo Marcellini, who had served as the assistant director on *Scipione l'africano* (dir. Carmine Gallone, 1937), the first full-scale feature film spectacle made at the newly opened Fascist-government-funded Cinecittà studios in Rome. Marcellini honed his craft as a cameraman for newsreels and documentary shorts in the 1920s and 1930s, eventually shifting to fiction feature films during the late 1930s and early 1940s. He returned to his documentary roots working for the ECA Film Unit after the war, and then vacillated between Italian documentary and feature film production until 1960, when he produced the feature-length documentary record of the Rome Summer Olympics.<sup>55</sup> Relying on film industry connections that Marcellini had developed before and during the war, in the late 1940s he established the short-lived Marcellini Film production company to funnel US money into commercial Italian coffers in order to do precisely what *Talking to the Italians* described – to provide the Italian (and in this particular case, also the American) public with the US government's message via Italian hands. Marcellini also directed and produced the MSA title *Italia d' Oggi (Italy Today, 1952)* for Italian audiences, under the name of another short-lived company set up to funnel US money into Italian coffers: Europa Telefilm. Europa Telefilm seemed to alternate its name between the full moniker mentioned above or simply "Telefilm," or "Telefilm Rome," and in other instances "Telefilm Europa." Regardless of the order of appearance of the words by which the production company referred to itself, between 1948 and 1954 the two Italian film directors whose names continued to appear alongside this production company's credits were Romolo Marcellini and Vittorio Gallo. Both Gallo and Marcellini produced films for the ECA/MSA and for the Centro and LUCE, and both received support from the US and Italian governments, as well as private funders.

Gallo, like Marcellini, honed his craft as a documentary filmmaker in the 1920s and 1930s. Under the Fascist regime he was in charge of LUCE and therefore LUCE's newsreel arm *Giornale LUCE* from 1937 until 1945. In 1943 Gallo had retreated from Rome to Venice with the Fascists and while in exile remained in charge of the much-depleted LUCE newsreel organization, which was suffering competition from German and American propaganda

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<sup>55</sup> *La grande Olimpiade* (produced by the Italian National Olympic Committee and LUCE, 1961) was the aesthetic and stylistic culmination of Marcellini's film career and remains an outstanding example of Cold War-era state-sponsored film making in Italy.

productions by 1944.<sup>56</sup> The practice of playing both sides against the middle existed in Italy during the Second World War, and simply carried over to the MP era. Cases in point: Marcellini's work for the Centro included the "Italian" films *Made in Italy* (produced for INCOM and Centro, 1952), and *L'Italia e il mondo* (produced for LUCE and Centro, 1953), which echo the sentiment and the images in *Talking to the Italians* and *Italia d'oggi*, two of Marcellini's official ECA production credits. Likewise, Vittorio Gallo resumed his role in postwar democratic Italy for LUCE while also producing such ECA titles as *Land Redeemed* (Italian title: *Bonifiche*, Telefilm Rome for ECA 1950) and *Appian Way* (Italian title: *La via Appia*, Telefilm Rome for ECA, 1950). Coincidentally, both of these films were part of the ABC TV MP/MSA programming from 1950-1953. Thus, the two men most responsible for constructing an image of Fascism in film during the era of what the narrator in *Talking to the Italians* called "one of the most thorough propaganda campaigns in history," were the same men responsible for representing post-Fascist Italy to an international audience through documentary, newsreel, and compilation films. The Fascist imaginary of a renewed Roman Empire depicted in the LUCE newsreels of the late 1930s and early 1940s featuring images of Mussolini, his cult of uniforms and his Roman salutes, were replaced by the Cold War imaginary of liberal social democracy depicted in the Italian MP films.

The resulting cultural productions of US and Italian government information agencies succeeded in encouraging Italians at every level of society to engage in more conspicuous forms of consumption while also providing a larger international market for Italian cultural products. This fact is directly addressed in *Talking to the Italians* when the narrator describes one of the most popular weekly postwar Italian radio shows, produced at the ECA offices in Rome and broadcast by the Italian state run RAI network (*Radio Televisione Italiana*): *Italy Incorporated*. The narrator informs the (American) viewer that this documentary radio show reaches 8 million Italian speakers throughout the world weekly, including Italian-speaking immigrant and diasporic populations in the United States, North Africa, Australia, Latin America, and other European nation states. The narrator goes on to state that the show is predicated on the thesis that "all Italians are stock holders in one huge corporation, Italy; and that each stockholder has the duty to see to it that his corporation stays on its feet and prospers through his work."

Ironically, this postwar American ideal of a new Italy and a new Italian citizen working to support the state economically and spiritually by placing a high value on national identity as a collective commodity seemed to retool the Fascist notion of corporativism.<sup>57</sup> This passage is accompanied by images of the production crew at work, traveling the cities and towns of Italy,

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<sup>56</sup> While the situation in Italy during the later years of the war fractured many of the main film companies in Rome that had just begun to consolidate state and private interests toward the end of Mussolini's reign, these companies were not so easily dismantled. Those that sympathized with the Fascist government in exile (the Italian Socialist Republic, SRI) had transferred their base of operations north, but maintained their legal base in Rome. Thus, they could still work in both zones of Italy and when the Allies inevitably captured Rome the Italian film producers quickly resumed work there under Allied occupation, see Luisa Quatermaine, *Mussolini's Last Republic: Propaganda and Politics in the Italian Social Republic (R.S.I.) 1943-45* (Exeter: Elmbank Publications, 2000), 69-72.

<sup>57</sup> In 1932 Ugo Spirito, a self-proclaimed fascist and actualist, wrote his treatise "Corporativism as Absolute Liberalism and Absolute Socialism," describing the essence of corporativism as a system that "opposes bureaucratic management but bureaucratizes the nation, (turning every individual into an official), that resists private management and assigns public value to the work performed by individuals." For further discussion of Spirito's role in Italian Fascism see Schnapp, *Primer of Italian Fascism*. It is not coincidental that a number of the Italian MP films that have resurfaced since the mid 1990s were found in the archives of the Fondazione Ugo Spirito (Ugo Spirito Foundation) in Rome.

mobile recording devices in hand, as they interview the “stockholders” of Italy. Recognizably Italian faces are featured in close up in the foreground as iconic Italian architecture and landscapes fill the background of the frame. The words that the Italians can be heard speaking here, in their own language, are not translated for this film, suggesting an added air of authenticity for the intended American audience of this film. In short order the faces of the working men and women of Italy are replaced by images of the annual *Fiera Milano* (Milan Expo) – the largest industrial and commercial fair in all of Europe, which brought in hundreds of thousands of international visitors in 1950 alone to view and purchase the latest innovations in Italian commercial and industrial products and design. The audience also sees Italian filmmakers at work creating ERP films, as the narrator states that ECA estimates that every Italian viewed at least six ERP films in 1950 alone. This behind-the-scenes look at the production of Italian culture is intentional, and reinforces the MP message that the Italians are the agents of their own reconstruction.



Italian cameramen at work on ECA productions as featured in *Talking to the Italians* (1950).

### *Constructing a Transnational Conversation*

Marcellini’s film *Italia d’oggi*, which was also produced for the ECA, but for Italian rather than American audiences, takes a slightly different approach to the reinvigorated Italian marketplace. The hustle and bustle in the montage of images of Rome on display here are even more polished images of Rome than those Americans could see in *Talking to the Italians*. Traffic cops along the Via Veneto beckon the viewer to stop and visit the cafes, bars and fashion houses that line the city’s downtown business district as the Italian narrator reminds Italian viewers that “the Rome of 6 years ago has been nearly forgotten.” In its place we see “the Italy that tourists see, the Italy that appears in international newspapers and magazines, not the Italy that Italians see.” This film reminds us that the other face of Italy, the one that Italians know all too well, still exists yet remains hidden underneath a veneer of reconstructed edifices that can crumble if Italians do not continue to rebuild for themselves. The message here is that MP aid has helped, but it is only the beginning. Italians must continue this redevelopment project on their own steam. The montage of fine jewelry, clothing and leather goods quickly dissolves into image after image of Italians at work and play, in rebuilt factories and on flourishing farms. The human body in constant

locomotion replaces the human form adorned in the latest Italian fashion. Motorized scooters, automobiles, motorized farm equipment, industrial sailing vessels, and trains fill the screen and continue to carry Italians toward their own futures. *Italia d'oggi's* message is not at all incongruent with the message of *Talking to the Italians*, yet in watching the two films side by side it is evident that the strength of the ECA's message in Italy was achieved because Italian filmmakers such as Marcellini could more effectively employ a didactic form and style that spoke directly to Italian audiences and built upon the aesthetic traditions of early Italian state-sponsored films.

In a similar register, Marcellini's film *Made In Italy* (1952, INCOM for Centro), which was aimed at Italian audiences despite its English title, reminds Italians that they have the power and agency to rebuild their nation. Just like *Italia d'oggi*, Marcellini's *Made In Italy* contrasts iconic images of Italy that would be recognizable to tourists such as picturesque landscapes, seaside mountain villages, and monuments, with an Italy that would be more recognizable to Italians. (Incidentally, it uses the same stock footage of the Milan Expo that American audiences saw in *Talking to the Italians*.) Marcellini takes his Italian audience on a tour from the North to the South of Italy showing newly mechanized labor in the factory and on the farm.<sup>58</sup> Italians are invited to become tourists in their own country. Some of the images are nearly identical to those in *Italia d' Oggi*. Yet *Made in Italy* pushes the notion of the new postwar consumerist Italian identity even further, making Italy itself, and not simply the industrial and artisanal products of Italy, the cultural product for foreign consumption. *Made in Italy* even features a cameo appearance by the internationally recognized Neorealist director Vittorio DeSica, who is filmed smoking a cigar as the voice-over commentary notes that, thanks to DeSica, the tobacco industry is also thriving. Of course, DeSica would have also been familiar to Italian audiences as an actor who had been active in the Italian film industry since the 1920s.

Again, there are instances of overlap between the Italian feature film industry and the Italian state-sponsored documentary film industry, as well as a collaboration between a filmmaker known to have been a Fascist sympathizer (Marcellini) and a Neorealist whose political tendencies swung much further to the left (DeSica). This form of collaboration also emphasizes the great degree of opportunism that was at play in this postwar moment when so much was at stake for the Italian people and government. The gap between the end of the Fascist era and the beginning of the Cold War era was an exceptional period during which filmmakers, industrialists, and politicians were continuously reinventing and reconstructing their personal, political, and national identities.

These small non-fiction films by filmmakers such as Marcellini, which were simultaneously produced and promoted by both the Italian Centro distribution networks and the US State Department's distribution networks, may seem to have abandoned the more sophisticated aesthetic ideas that documentary filmmakers had cultivated internationally throughout the 1930s in favor of the hybrid form of entertainment and newsreel that *The March of Time* epitomized. But these shifts in practice that occur in the 1940s and 1950s seem to be motivated less by a rejection of earlier high-minded experiments with form and aesthetics than by a conscious decision on the part of the state bureaucrats and filmmakers engaged in these projects to address viewers in a more direct and playful fashion, without entirely neglecting the documentary style to which viewers had become accustomed. If one were to examine the images presented in these non-fiction shorts without their heavy-handed voice over narrations and over-

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<sup>58</sup> Bonifazio, 205.

orchestrated musical tracks, the images alone reveal an attentive camera eye that juxtaposes the stillness and the motion of bodies, machines and landscapes with a quiet power. Too quiet, perhaps, for the government officials who hoped to convince the films' viewers of their political agendas.

In a June 1951 screening of several of the ECA films at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York, Lothar Wolff, the Chief of the ECA Paris Film Unit, told the audience that this more sophisticated European aesthetic had in fact not been abandoned:

All of them [the films] were prepared by Europeans exclusively *for* Europeans. European producers – numbering some of the world's most outstanding documentary specialists – were allowed by their American supervisors in ECA's motion picture section to tell the Marshall Plan story in the style most appreciated by their fellow Europeans . . . If their paces seems somewhat slower than Americans are accustomed to, and if the propaganda content seems perhaps too subtle, it should be remembered that these techniques are considered most effective for transatlantic audiences.<sup>59</sup>

The mere fact that the ECA chose MOMA, rather than a commercial movie house or a state house, as the venue for their screening indicates that the ECA program directors were aware of the dialogue that was occurring among international film critics such as André Bazin, Umberto Barbaro, and Luigi Chiarini regarding the nature of film as art and as a medium for exercising social responsibility. The ECA officials presented themselves as individuals who did not simply view these productions as information or propaganda films, but as an art form whose genealogy could be traced to prewar international experiments with the documentary form. Further supporting the ECA's acknowledgement of the need to circulate information about their film programming not only through diplomatic and humanitarian networks but also through networks of film critics, the ECA's special printed pamphlets for the ABC-TV series cite a review of the films from *The Saturday Review of Literature's* "The Film Forum," which states:

We have gotten a truly remarkable series of films, showing in detail the enormous work of reconstructing war-torn Europe, emphasizing with truth the contributions of Europeans themselves . . . Excellent documentaries in and of themselves and deserve to be widely seen in this country . . . But there can be no doubt that the films are very useful in promoting what we like to call international understanding, for they give us vivid insight into the ways of life and problems of other lands.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Lothar Wolff's lecture notes, provided to Albert Hemsing by Mrs. Vee Wolff. Notes are dated June 15, 1951. Notes provided to author courtesy of Linda Christenson, Marshall Plan filmographer.

<sup>60</sup> *The Marshall Plan in Action*.

### *Keeping the Italians and Americans Talking*

While the basic policy for getting films made was established by Paris, the second head of the MP Film Unit Paris office, Stuart Schulberg, recalls that each country and each production team posed unique problems for the ECA, for it was impossible to map the same formula onto 18 distinct countries and cultures. When an ECA Country Mission office would request aid from Paris to develop a national information program, Paris would often dispatch someone from headquarters with film expertise into the field to help the local information officer. Together, they would develop a plan for one or a series of films, and they would suggest outside producers where necessary, but did their best to find local filmmakers and technicians to create the films, often signing contracts with local teams as soon as they found them.<sup>61</sup> Meanwhile, in Italy, Secondari seemed to remain the captain of his own ship.

Secondari capitalized on ECA Paris's belief that giving the local contractors the highest degree of autonomy possible could only help the dissemination of the MP message, because it would demonstrate to the Europeans that American government and ideology, as well as American business practices, were inherently democratic. So they encouraged local contractors to prepare their own scripts and directors to develop their own style. They would only intervene as a last resort, and most often it was in the final phases of post-production, in order to prepare commentaries for the films. From all accounts, it would seem that the work flowed smoothly between ECA Paris and the country missions. The majority of the contract producers did not retain the rights to distribute their films theatrically, these rights remained with the ECA, but Schulberg notes that the local contract producers were able to leverage their ECA work into building their own independent careers in their home countries. Still, the networks of distribution remained more diffuse than ECA Paris would have liked, and this lack of a centrally focused distribution system allowed for Country Mission officers such as Secondari to broker deals that were not simply serving the state, but that were also serving individual and commercial interests that varied greatly among the MP countries. In the case of Italy, scenarios for MP films slated for release across the MP countries were coming directly from Italy. Italian directors outmaneuvered directors from other countries to produce these MP films and the local Italian producers maintained distribution rights to their films. Again, a mix of personal and political affiliations helps to explain this situation.

One workaround for retaining rights to the films was the practice that occurred in Italy. With nearly identical MP films being produced by ECA/MSA and by LUCE and INCOM, the Italians were able to retain the rights to distribute their films internationally by using much of the same B-roll footage from film to film, editing it together in a different sequence, and adding new narration, titles and credits. Like his Italian counterparts, Secondari was adept at playing all sides against the middle. He was not just involved in the information campaigns and films specific to Italy, he also actively wrote scripts and organized the production units for several of the MP films that both ECA Paris and the Greek Country Mission wanted to realize in Greece. In fact, Secondari recruited Vittorio Gallo to direct and produce one of the films to come out of Greece that featured efforts to rebuild networks of transit through the Greek islands where rural routes were most easily traversed by mule pack rather than modern automated transport. Secondari attempted to wrest control of this production, which he and Gallo had tentatively titled "Mule

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<sup>61</sup> For instance, in the UK British Pathé was, much to their surprise, left on their own to produce the films they desired, while at the German Country Mission an ECA representative from Paris was stationed in their cutting room, *Ibid.*, 10.

Story,” from ECA Paris, which had already agreed to give this film with the working title “Corinth Canal” to the Dutch director John Ferno under the supervision of British Pathé. Pathé had already contracted to produce *Adventures in Sardinia* (1950), a joint ECA-UNRRA-Rockefeller Foundation-funded film in the Italian island region of Sardinia, and Secondari did not want to let another Mediterranean title slip into the hands of the British production team. In April 1950, Secondari continued to work with Vittorio Gallo to take “Mule Story/Corinth” out of the hands of ECA Paris. But Paris stood firm, having selected Ferno, a cinematographer and documentarian best known for his collaboration with Joris Ivens in the late 1930s and early 1940s. In a telegram from Rome to Paris, Ambassador Zellerbach gently reminded headquarters that earlier discussions had already occurred between Paris and Rome, and that an unofficial OK had been given to Secondari to recruit Gallo and his Italian production team to travel to Greece to make this film, and that Gallo had already signed a contract. Lothar Wolff quickly responded to this telegram. In the end Gallo and his associates in Rome produced a film, but according to ECA memos the film’s length was considerably shortened.<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately, this film is among the titles that are still missing from the MP film archives. In order to appease Secondari and ECA Rome after the “Mule Story” mishap, the film, now officially titled *Corinth Canal* (1950), maintained John Ferno as both producer and director, but Secondari wangled Italian filmmaker Nelo Risi as assistant director on Ferno’s production team.<sup>63</sup>

In a similar situation, Secondari contacted the Paris office to discuss the production of a Technicolor film on the housing problem in the southern Italian town of Matera, where ECA had already constructed three new housing settlements and extensive land reclamation. It seemed to be slated for production through a British film unit, but Secondari did not want to let this film slip away from ECA Rome. Through creative financing, Secondari negotiated a deal that would benefit the ECA, Kay Harrison (Technicolor’s world director), and the local Italian film producers. Secondari had come up with three different ways to balance the production costs and credits among ECA, Technicolor, and local interests.<sup>64</sup> Directed by Romolo Marcellini, written and narrated by John Secondari, and photographed in Technicolor by British cameraman Cyril Knowles, *Life and Death of a Cave City* (Documento Film for ECA Italy, 1950) demonstrated Secondari’s ability to finesse a multinational film production and to satisfy all parties involved. With *Life and Death of a Cave City*, Secondari was finally successful in convincing ECA headquarters to allow him to put his name in the film’s opening credits.<sup>65</sup> This occasion bears

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<sup>62</sup> Telegram from John Secondari to Lothar Wolff, 29 April 1950, NARA RG 469: ENTRY 1030, Office of SRE (1948-1953) Information Division Country Files, 1948-50 Greece-Italy, Box 11.

<sup>63</sup> Earlier that same year, in January 1950, Secondari had specifically petitioned his superior, Charles Edmundson, Acting Information Officer for the ECA Special Mission to Italy, sending him a number of scenarios for MP films he wanted ECA Paris to approve. In April of 1950 he also petitioned to be able to use his own name in by-lines on ECA film and radio productions in which he served as director, writer, or producer. A May 1950 memo from Roscoe Drummond to Edmundson insists that all ECA Information Division officers should refrain from using their by-lines in this capacity. The goal of the ECA Information Division was in keeping with the goal of the MP to help Europeans help themselves; this necessitated that titles and credits be granted to the local country producers and not to US government workers. This did not stop Secondari from continuing to petition Drummond and Wolff to use his name on projects he believed to be his. Memo from Roscoe Drummond, Director European Information Division to Charles Edmundson, Acting Information Officer ECA Special Mission to Italy, 19 May 1950, NARA RG 469: ENTRY 1030, Office of SRE (1948-1953) Information Division Country Files, 1948-50 Greece-Italy, Box 11.

<sup>64</sup> Telegram from John Secondari to ECA Paris 21 June 1950, NARA RG 469: ENTRY 1030, Office of SRE (1948-1953) Information Division Country Files, 1948-50 Greece-Italy, Box 11.

<sup>65</sup> ECA’s official *Catalogue of Documentary Films*, printed and distributed by ECA Washington in 1951, provides some sense of the extent of autonomy and maneuvering that occurred at the ECA Rome film sub-unit office. While

mention, as a manifestation of the Italian and American intersubjectivity that, until the production of *Life and Death of a Cave City*, remained invisible to the Italian, American, and international audiences viewing these films. Secondari's film, like *Secondari the man* is a very material, tangible record of the transformative, transnational practices embodied by the Marshall Plan films.

In May of 1950, another Italian American with a journalistic pedigree and ambitions to work in the commercial feature film industry, Frank Gervasi, came on board to replace the Acting Information Chief in Rome (Edmundson) and to assume the role of Chief. He served as Secondari's superior and remained in the Rome Office until 1954.<sup>66</sup> Together, Gervasi and Secondari worked to keep the Italian Information Unit at the top of the ECA food chain, and to promote their own ambitious personal agendas. Just days after Gervasi became Chief of the Rome Information Unit, Secondari sent a memorandum on the subject of "A New Information Program" to J.D. Zellerbach, the US Ambassador to Italy. Secondari laid out 26 points for reassessing and reorganizing the ERP's Information program, which had just reached its halfway point (Congress had only approved funding to 1952). Most of this memorandum focused on the political and organizational shifts that Secondari had observed in Italy since 1948. The underlying thrust of these 26 points was that the Information Unit must take a more active role in the creation and dissemination of anti-Communist propaganda and that the current structure of ECA and USIS cooperation and reeducation through documentary film had not been the most effective strategy. Secondari points out that in Italy the economic success of the Marshall Plan worked against the Information Unit. He claimed that Italians had willingly forgotten how they had struggled as recently as 1948, and proposed that in order to keep the Italians' interest the Information Unit needed to find a way to infiltrate the local media to such an extent that they simply became a part of the everyday life of ordinary Italians. He observed that the Italians no longer wanted reminders of what the United States did to help them; they simply wanted to enjoy their newfound economic prosperity. Secondari proposed a solution to overcome the Communist threat, which he believed was more of a straw man than an actual danger to US economic interests in Italy. Item 22 reads as follows:

22. The solutions to this may be found in one of two alternatives:
  - A. Completely commercialize our information program and pay for every bit of medium that we use, or
  - B. Exert such political pressures as we control to guarantee the free use of newspapers, radio, cinema, etc.

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the catalog contains a one-page entry for each ECA film produced through December 1951, the final page of the catalog is an alphabetical list of 38 additional films produced under the sponsorship of ECA Country Missions, indicating that "These films are primarily of local interest." The country of production is provided for each title. Of the 38 titles, 28 are Italian productions, many of which are available in Italian and English-language versions. One of the titles, *Trip Without A Passport*, was written, directed, and produced by Secondari.<sup>65</sup> Needless to say, Secondari was an ambitious and busy man.

<sup>66</sup> Gervasi was a renowned foreign correspondent who had been living in Europe since the 1930s. During WWII he had worked as the Rome Bureau Chief for Hearst International News Service. While working for the ECA he scripted two feature films, which were produced and distributed in Italy and internationally. The first, *Il Tesoro di Rommel*, directed by none other than Romolo Marcellini, was finally released in 1955. The second, *La donna più bella del mondo*, also released in 1955 (dir. Robert Z. Leonard), was a comedy starring Gina Lollobrigida that featured a multinational production team.

C. Prepare and put into operation our information program jointly with the Italian Government. Such a program would be financed exclusively by us. Political and economic differences could be smoothed by discussion. Media would be guaranteed by the Italian Government that controls most of them either financially or politically.<sup>67</sup>

It seems that, over the course of the next two years of the MP's information and propaganda campaigns, Secondari's suggestions to his superiors in the State Department were largely heeded. The types of collaborations Secondari advocated were certainly at work in Italy and seemed to benefit all concerned parties – so much so for Secondari personally that in 1951 he stepped down from his role as Assistant Chief for the Rome Information Unit and stayed on in Italy as a private citizen, writing four novels in six years, using his bureaucratic experience as source material for his independent creative pursuits. He adapted one of these novels into the screenplay for *Three Coins in a Fountain* (dir. Jean Negulesco, 1954), which featured three young, single and female US government secretaries looking for love in postwar Rome.<sup>68</sup> By 1952 the task of advocating for a thorough meshing of political, institutional and commercial interests in Italy became the sole work of Frank Gervasi. In this second phase of the MP/MSA, Gervasi was successful in recruiting more Italian filmmakers who had worked under Fascism as well as up-and-coming Italian filmmakers and technical crews to promote the MP message in ways that continued to intertwine American ideology, American money and Italian commercial and political agendas. Gervasi had been working steadily since 1950 to integrate the work of the Italian Information Unit into the social and political life of Italians. In December 1950 he sent a 26-page report to ECA Paris outlining the covert and overt strategies in place in Italy. He speaks of an Italian organization called EPOCA that operated the fleet of cinema caravans under contract with the ERP. Gervasi, in his report, seems a bit eager to please headquarters in Paris, but the report is useful for the details that it provides about the organization of the mobile screening efforts and the shift in tone of MP productions.<sup>69</sup>

David Ellwood has made note of the dummy company, *Organizzazione Epoca*, which was “set up not to proclaim, but to conceal the American origins of its operations.” He goes on to state that neither Italians, nor American journalists dispatched to Italy to cover this charming MP story were taken in.<sup>70</sup> Whether or not the Italians swallowed the MP message whole, the cooperation of Italian workers and their willingness to represent businesses that were entirely

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<sup>67</sup> Memorandum from J.H. Secondari to J.D. Zellerbach, “A New Information Program,” 12 May 1950, NARA RG 469: ENTRY 1030, Office of SRE (1948-1953) Information Division Country Files, 1948-50 Greece-Italy, Box 11.

<sup>68</sup> A viewer-submitted synopsis of this film on imdb.com, written by Fiona Kelleghan, demonstrates just how much of Secondari's personal experience in Rome figured into his fictionalized accounts, going so far as to caricature himself: “In this romantic comedy, three American roommates working in Italy wish for the man of their dreams after throwing coins into Rome's magnificent Trevi Fountain. A secretary at a government agency sets out to win the heart of her employer, a smooth-talking novelist, while her co-worker defies office regulations by romancing an Italian who works at the agency. Finally, office newcomer Maria meets a real Italian Prince Charming and falls madly in love. Now the only thing the three hopeful ladies need to do is seal their fate.” See: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0047580/plotsummary>

<sup>69</sup> Report from Frank Gervasi, ECA Special Mission to Italy to Roscoe Drummond, Director ECA Paris, 22 December 1950. NARA RG 469: ENTRY 1030, Office of SRE (1948-1953) Information Division Country Files, 1948-50 Greece-Italy, Box 11.

<sup>70</sup> David Ellwood, “You Too Can be Like Us: Selling the Marshall Plan,” *History Today* Vol. 48, Issue 10 (1998): 33-39.

funded by the US government as independent Italian endeavors further demonstrates the imbrications of American and Italian commercial and political interests in the creation and dissemination of MP films.<sup>71</sup>

While such pro-American Italian productions may seem incongruous with the general shift in the political climate that was occurring by 1953 as US foreign policy became less and less concerned with promoting the image of the United States as good neighbors and faithful allies, it makes sense when one understands that the visual information campaign that began under the MP banner could now be carried out by the USIA film units in Washington and in Rome. Two full-color INCOM newsreels that spoke of the common cultural, political, and ethnic identities of Americans and Italians were staples of the USIS libraries during the 1950s: *Due civiltà si incontrano* (*Two Civilizations Meet*, Vittorio Gallo for IINCOM, 1954) and *Più che un'amicizia* (*More than a Friendship*, Vittorio Gallo for INCOM, 1957).<sup>72</sup> Each film tells the story of the strong bonds that continue to link the people of the US and Italy. And, true to compilation documentary form, the same stock images of the Empire State Building and New York City streets, complete with a dark blue Fiat Cinquecento and a red Fiat Spider driving down Fifth Avenue amid a sea of yellow cabs, can be seen in both films, despite the three-year gap in their release dates. Similar to the images seen in *Talking to the Italians*, these INCOM shorts lay bare the art and technique of filmmaking, depicting the men behind the camera; only this time it is a WABC camera for Channel 13 in New York City, and the Italian voice-over narration tells us that the camera operator is an American of Italian origin. Anyone watching these films in the immediate post-MP era would get the impression that Italy and America could not exist without each other.

Leaving the “good neighbor” work to Eisenhower’s newly formed USIA, the final years of MP/MSA film production in Paris and Rome were spent creating films that strengthened NATO’s defenses, in an effort to achieve security and stability rather than growth and cooperation. The forward-looking economic policy of the MP years was quickly replaced by a defensive posture that promoted an atmosphere of distrust while attempting to maintain a sense of the need for collective security.<sup>73</sup> While the transition from the MP to the MSA leadership was going on in Paris, there was also much activity at the former MP Information Unit offices in Rome, which remained open under the direction of Frank Gervasi until 1954, when he jumped ship to fully immerse himself in commercial cinematic production in Italy, before eventually returning to the United States in the 1960s.

Once the official MP years were over, the Italian Country Mission was renamed the MSA Special Mission to Italy for Economic Cooperation. It was still housed at 62 Via Vittorio Veneto

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<sup>71</sup> While the filmmakers gained prestige, for the most part the ECA maintained the rights to disseminate their message as they saw fit; but they could only do so if European distributors were willing to purchase or license their product. The ECA was intent on maintaining European theatrical distribution because the theaters would actually provide the necessary statistics for attendance reports. This information was much more difficult to gather on the non-theatrical circuit. In order to ensure that European producers would pick up these shorts and include them in their theatrical programs, the ECA Film Unit established the precedent of only directly mentioning the MP once in a one-reel production and twice in a two-reel production (very few films were longer than two reels). Thus, no matter what the reality, the message that continued to be projected most clearly in ECA-sponsored productions was that Europeans were rebuilding Europe.

<sup>72</sup> Both of these films can be viewed in their entirety via the Istituto LUCE’s archival portal: [www.archivioluca.com/archivio](http://www.archivioluca.com/archivio)

<sup>73</sup> The rapid shifts in American foreign policy would soon shift the locus of US visual information campaigns away from Europe and toward Indochina; thus the ECA Paris Film Unit offices hastily closed in October 1955.

in Rome, and there was still an Information Unit position devoted to developing film, TV and radio programs to promote the MSA message, but instead of an active program of media production, the position became more passive or custodial, with the new title of “Audio-visual specialist.”<sup>74</sup> The ECA Film Units in Paris and Rome, however, were not entirely dismantled. Defense and security were the MSA’s top priorities, but as long as some funding remained for media campaigns, Paris and Rome saw fit to use it. The theme of mutual security was reflected in the films produced by the Paris Film Unit, as well as by a number of films produced by Italian commercial and governmental producers (thanks to the Secondari-Gervasi approach); therefore the MSA allowed these projects to continue. Knowing that funding would soon run out, MSA Washington saw no need to close up shop entirely until Congressional appropriations had officially dried up.<sup>75</sup>

### *A Transnational Conversation*

By 1951, the Marshall Plan-sponsored reconstruction efforts in Italy had been underway for three years, and Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi had been in power for six years. Understandably, the string of postwar and anti-Fascist governments had been wary of engaging in their own full-scale mass media propaganda campaign to help rebuild Italian morale. Thus from 1948 to 1951 the ECA Information Unit primarily waged this campaign for Italy. The resulting collaborations between US and Italian governmental and commercial interests tended to present Italians with ideas as absolutes, which coincidentally replicated the Fascist model of corporativism whereby



Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi as featured in *The Struggle for Men’s Minds* (MSA, 1952)

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<sup>74</sup> Landis Bennett was appointed to this position in Rome. The MSA did not seek out members of the media to fill any vacant positions within the individual Country Mission Information Units. Instead, they chose seasoned bureaucrats to carry out Washington’s agenda, pushing films in much the same way they might push papers.

<sup>75</sup> The Mutual Security Act of 1951 remained on the books, so it was not outside the realm of possibility that someone in the US legislature, if encouraged, would try to reinvigorate funding for visual information campaigns. The diplomatic record shows that as late as 1957 US officials were advocating for continued economic and military support for the UK, France, and Italy; see “Report from John B. Hollinger of the International Cooperation Administration, Washington, DC to President Eisenhower” Issue Date: Aug 20, 1957. Declassified Date: July 24, 1991. SECRET. Reproduced in *Declassified Documents Reference System* (Farmington Hills, Mich.: Gale, 2011).

Italian citizens remained in the position of being governed (the bureaucratization of the nation) rather than the position of active involvement in self governance.<sup>76</sup> Looking toward and thinking beyond the ECA model, De Gasperi's statements on the creation of an official Italian information campaign appeared in the daily newspaper *Il Messaggero* in 1950:

The Government has the duty to make known what it is doing and why it is doing it, and it will not be a bad thing if, through an impartial documentation, the public is kept well informed of the problems of public administration and the solutions adopted or envisaged.<sup>77</sup>

This statement implies that an Italian visual information campaign would employ a very similar rhetoric to the US-sponsored Marshall Plan visual information campaign already underway in Italy. De Gasperi's claims that the Italian government will be providing the necessary solutions leads one to the conclusion that for the majority of Italian citizens the rationalization of their social and economic life would continue in a manner that assigns public value to their individual labors. This public value was in fact amplified through film.

It would take another year, until August 1951, to inaugurate the new Centro di documentazione, and longer still, until early 1952, for the Centro's Italian information unit to be up and running at full speed, after De Gasperi's successful passage of a bill in the Italian Parliament that enabled the reorganization of the Prime Minister's office (*Presidenza del Consiglio*). This reorganization positioned the Prime Minister's office as the principal coordinator and the final check on all state-sponsored information campaigns. This coincided perfectly with the ECA's initial dismantling in Paris and Rome as the MSA moved in to replace them by the end of 1952. While the purported goal of the Centro was that it function as an instrument of the state that would represent rather than dictate "the political expression of a people,"<sup>78</sup> De Gasperi's Centro campaigns did not depict or encourage the type of participatory democracy that his rhetoric implied. Instead, in films such as Marcellini's *L'Italia e il mondo* (*Italy and the World*, 1953), one of the early films produced for the Centro that borrows stock images from Marcellini's ECA productions, much time is spent comparing Italy and the United States and demonstrating that Italy's return to the realm of international politics was essentially the result of Italy's close ties to the United States and to postwar MP projects to modernize Italian industry. *L'Italia e il mondo* seems to be more of an effort to satisfy Italy's US government funders than an effort to promote Italian political and economic autonomy. While this compilation documentary does employ Italy metonymically, positioning the country as the principal agent in the creation of NATO and the OEEC, this revisionist historiography of Italian international relations from 1945 to 1952 is all the more fascinating for its episodic structure that chronicles each year in the life of the new Italian nation as a chapter in a book, with the first page

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<sup>76</sup> Maria Adelaide Frabotta, "Government propaganda: official newsreels and documentaries in the 1950s," in *The Art of Persuasion: Political Communication in Italy from 1945 to the 1990s*, eds. Luciano Cheles and Lucio Sponza (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 50.

<sup>77</sup> Trans. Maria Adelaide Frabotta and quoted in A. De Gasperi, "Presentazione," *Documenti di vita italiana*, I (1951), 1. According to Frabotta, the editorial staff of this magazine was housed at the offices of the Centro di documentazione.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

of each chapter featuring an indexical still photo to capture the essence of that particular year in politics. In fact, the opening scene of the film takes place in a library – a repository of knowledge and an institutional site of knowledge production – further reinforcing an archival and historiographic frame for the film as the Italian voice-over narration states, “Yesterday, this was the news. Today this is history.” Each compilation scene in this short film, made up of many easily recognizable stock newsreel images depicting government officials and political rallies in Eastern and Western Europe, is bookended by still photographs representing, to borrow and bend a phrase from the publishers of *Life Magazine*, “the year in a picture.”

Eight tumultuous years of Italian political, social and economic life are condensed into eleven minutes of film. In little more than four minutes Marcellini’s film has forgiven Italy its Fascist past and its alliance with the Axis powers and has positioned Italy front and center at the table of the 1949 Council of Europe. The year 1950 sees Italy petitioning for entry to the UN (eventually achieved in 1955) and by the time the film arrives at the chapter on 1951, the narrator has let it be known that, “1951 closes the door to the past” and to the “anachronistic conditions” of the immediate postwar moment. At this juncture, Marcellini’s film briefly leaves Italy and Western Europe, waving the MSA and NATO banners as Korea and the USSR are foregrounded and the Soviets become the revisionists who have changed the course of history by invading Korea. Holding to the established MP film style, images of MP aid arriving in Italy punctuate several of the chapters in *L’Italia e il mondo*. In the final chapter of the film, stock newsreel images of President Truman and Prime Minister De Gasperi’s September 1951 meeting in Washington, DC appear onscreen as the narrator reminds us again that Italy has closed the anachronistic chapters on her past, entering 1952 liberated and on the shoulders of MP aid programs. This narration is reinforced with a montage of images of Marshall Plan propaganda posters advocating for European unity and solidarity that comingle the American flag with the flags of Europe in a dove’s nest. The message is quite clear: even in this new era of autonomy and prosperity for Italy, Italy and the United States remain “birds of a feather.”

Similar to the US State Department’s ECA model, De Gasperi stated that the Centro was not to function as a news outlet, but more or less as a public relations agency that would document in film, photos, radio, and print the work that the Italian local, provincial, and national governments were already carrying out and distill the most important aspects of these campaigns for the general public in and beyond Italy. In order to achieve this aim, an expert staff was required. As was the case with the ECA, several key directors were plucked from the world of journalism. The Centro’s first director was Gastone Silvano Spinetti. Spinetti was a journalist who got his start in the Miniculpop (Ministry of Popular Culture) under Mussolini. Both Spinetti and De Gasperi concurred that the principal role of the Centro was “to document and disseminate, both at home and abroad, information on activities of the public administration, with a special focus on reconstruction.”<sup>79</sup> This reconstruction was the very concrete and traceable rebuilding of Italy brick by brick, but also the less tangible reconstruction of an Italian national identity – an identity that had been in constant flux since the end of World War I due to the remarkable range of explanations and manifestations of Fascist culture and ideology that Mussolini’s regime accommodated. Holding on to some of the aesthetics employed under fascism to publicize the land reclamation campaigns and public works projects or *bonifiche*, Spinetti relied primarily on visual media to convey the Centro’s message of reconstruction. This

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 51. Spinetti remained at the helm of the Centro from its inception until 1957 and saw the Centro through four different government administrations, but claims that he did his best work while De Gasperi was in office.

was particularly important due to the high illiteracy rate in Italy (15%) during this era. The newsreels commissioned by the Centro were distributed through commercial movie theaters in Italy, usually running for at least 4 days and printed (film printing) in numbers large enough to allow each newsreel title to reach 1,500 theaters.<sup>80</sup> From 1951 to 1960 the Centro di documentazione commissioned the production of roughly 200 films that were contracted out to private production companies such as Astra, Orizzonte Cinematografica, Atlante, Gamma, and Documento Film. Documento Film was one of the main private partners for the Centro's visual information campaign in Italy; Documento Film was also a private producer of ECA Information Unit films, as evidenced by the opening credits on several ECA Italian productions conceived by John Secondari, such as the Technicolor short *Life and Death of a Cave City* (dir. Romolo Marcellini, 1949/50).

Once again, a direct overlap between the ECA Film Unit producers and the Italian Information Agency producers exists, demonstrating a strong continuity in style, form and content between the ECA and the Centro productions. In addition to employing private Italian film companies, LUCE produced many shorts for the Centro under their label *Giornale Luce*. Thus, the narrator's emphasis on the break in continuity between past and present in the Centro-sponsored *L'Italia e il mondo* does not account for the fact that *Giornale Luce* is the same label that was responsible for producing the newsreels of Mussolini's regime and the postwar Centro newsreels.<sup>81</sup> The map is messy and the terrain it traverses is rugged, yet the road does return to Rome and to the Marshall Plan film. By 1951, approximately 100 original films had been produced through ECA Paris and Rome, and thanks to both Schulberg's and Secondari's industry savvy and experience, the majority of ECA film production was consolidated between Paris and Rome, and the majority of film processing was centered in Amsterdam.<sup>82</sup> The efficient production network was the result of careful planning and industrial know-how that Schulberg had learned through his lifetime experience as the offspring of Paramount studios founder B. P. Schulberg. The small multilingual team that Wolff initially assembled in Paris grew into an impressive organization that managed the planning and supervising of documentary film production and distribution all over Western Europe. As Schulberg states, "This was not only sound psychology; it was a regular *documentary* Marshall Plan, for ECA contracts sent many good filmmakers back to work and many labs into overtime production."<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> The circulation of film titles and prints was carefully reported and tracked by the Centro di documentazione offices in Rome. These records are part of the archive of the Presidenza del Consiglio, and thanks to the ongoing work of archivist and historian Maria Adelaide Frabotta, we now know that between 1952 and 1953 the number of theaters in Italy increased from 14,676 to 15,500 in order to meet the demands of an expanding national information campaign.

<sup>81</sup> LUCE had been liquidated in 1945, but the studio buildings remained in operation as both a refugee camp and as a studio lot for private Italian, British, French, and American companies until its reorganization and reincorporation as a state funded institution in 1952.

<sup>82</sup> While it is important to make note of the fact that the ECA recognized that these films could affect not only their intended European audiences, but also American audiences, the main goal of the ECA remained the creation and support of a 16mm educational and instructional film production and distribution network that featured Europeans speaking to Europeans.

<sup>83</sup> Stuart Schulberg, "Making Marshall Plan Movies," *Film News* (September 1951): 10.

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### *Filmography*

- La Via Appia (The Appian Way)*. 1950. Directed by Vittorio Gallo, photography by Francesco Vitrotti. Produced by Telefilm, Rome, for ECA Italy. (NARA, ACS)
- Aquila*. 1949/1950. Written, produced, and directed by Jacopo Erbi. Introducing Natale Peretti. Photography by Franco & Gianni Vitrotti; music composed and conducted by Mario Bugamelli and played by the Orchestra of Radio Trieste. Assistant Director, Tullio Kezich; Assistant Producer, Tullio Mainardi. Produced for ECA Italy. (NARA, ACS)
- Battle of San Pietro*. 1945. Directed by John Huston. Produced by the US Army Pictorial Service.
- Dobbiamo vivere ancora*. c. 1949/1950. Directed by Vittorio Gallo. Produced by Phoenix Films for ECA Italy. (ACS, NARA)
- La donna più bella del mondo. (Beautiful but Dangerous)* 1955. Directed by Robert Z. Leonard. Written by Cesare Cavagna, Liana Ferri, Maleno Malenotti, Luciano Martino, Mario Monicelli, Piero Pierotti, Franco Solinas, Giovanna Soria. Dialogue by Frank Gervasi. Cinematography by Mario Bava. Music by Renzo Rossellini. Produced by Maleno Malenotti.
- ERP in Action Series (No 1 – 11)*. A series of 12 monthly newsreels produced in 1950 by the ECA Film Unit in cooperation with Fox-Movietone News, Paris, for ECA/OSR. (NARA)
- Italia d'Oggi*. 1953. Directed by Romolo Marcellini, photography by Rino Filippini and Vittorio del Monte, editing by Pino Giomini. Music by Paolo Girlando, played by the Orchestra Sinfonica di Santa Cecilia, conducted by the composer. Production director, Pietro Notarianni. Narrated by Gino Visentini. Produced by Europa Telefilm, Rome, for MSA Italy. \* Features footage of Anna Magnani and Vittorio DeSica. (ACS, NARA)
- L'Italia e il mondo*. 1953. Directed by Romolo Marcellini. Produced by Istituto LUCE for Centro di documentazione. Realized by Fabrizio Schneider Graziosi. (LUCE).
- Land Redeemed (Bonifiche)*. 1950. Directed by Vittorio Gallo. Produced by Telefilm Rome for ECA Italy. Photography by Francesco Vitrotti. Music by Marco Tamanini. (ACS, NARA)
- Made in Italy*. 1952. Directed by Romolo Marcellini. Produced by Income for Centro di documentazione. Realized by Raimundo Musu. Cinematography by Arturo Climati. (PCM, LUCE)
- The Marshall Plan at Work in Italy*. 1950. Directed by James Hill. Produced by Jim Mellor. Script by Arthur Calder Marshall. Narration by Jack Ralph. Produced by Editorial Film Productions Ltd, London, for ECA/OSR. (NARA, IWM)
- Più che un' amicizia*. 1957. Directed by Vittorio Gallo for INCOM. (LUCE)
- The Plow That Broke the Plains*. 1936. Directed by Pare Lorentz. Produced by the US Resettlement Administration.

*Roma Città Aperta.* 1944. Written by Sergio Amidei (uncredited), Alberto Consiglio (uncredited), Federico Fellini, and Roberto Rossellini. Produced by Giuseppe Amato, Ferruccio DeMartino, Rod E. Geiger, Roberto Rossellini.

*The River.* 1938. Directed by Pare Lorentz. Produced by the Farm Security Administration.

*Struggle for Men's Minds.* 1952. Produced by Europa Telefilm for MSA. (NARA)

*Talking to the Italians.* c. 1950. Produced by ECA Italy.

*Tempo Massimo.* 1934. Directed by Mario Matoli. Produced by Za-Bum.

*Il tesoro di Rommel.* 1955. Directed by Romolo Marcellini. Written by Gino DeSantis, Duncan Elliott, Frank Gervasi, Ugo Guerra, and Romolo Marcellini. Produced by Hans Haas and Luigi Rovere.

*Thanks America!* 1948. Directed by Domenico Paoletta. Music By Raffaele Gervasio. Narrated by Orson Welles. Produced by INCOM. (LUCE)

*Three Coins in a Fountain.* 1954. Directed by Jean Negulesco. Written by John Secondari and John Patrick. Produced by 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Film Corporation.