

Lutz Klinkhammer
Clemens Zimmermann
(Eds.)

Cinema as a Political Media. Germany and Italy Compared, 1945–1950s

HEIDELBERG
UNIVERSITY PUBLISHING

Lutz Klinkhammer, Clemens Zimmermann (Eds.)

Cinema as a Political Media

Germany and Italy Compared, 1945–1950s

HEIDELBERG
UNIVERSITY PUBLISHING

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.



This work is protected by copyright and/or related rights, but accessible free of charge. Use, in particular reproduction, is only permitted within the legal limits of copyright law or with the consent of the copyright holder.

Published by Heidelberg University Publishing (heiUP)
Heidelberg 2021.

The electronic open access version of this work is permanently available on Heidelberg University Publishing's website: <https://heiup.uni-heidelberg.de>
URN: [urn:nbn:de:bsz:16-heiup-book-651-9](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bsz:16-heiup-book-651-9)
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17885/heiup.651>

Text © 2021 by the authors.

Typesetting: werksatz · Büro für Typografie und Buchgestaltung, Berlin

ISSN (Print) 2700-144X
ISSN (Online) 2700-1458

ISBN 978-3-96822-017-8 (Hardcover)
ISBN 978-3-96822-016-1 (Softcover)
ISBN 978-3-96822-015-4 (PDF)

Clemens Zimmermann

Introduction: Cinema as a Political Medium – Germany and Italy Compared from 1945 to the 1950s

The Aims of this Volume

Abstract

This introductory chapter, firstly, aims at an understanding of the cinematic landscapes of both involved countries and discusses key features of the after-war period. In both countries the cinema was highly relevant in the popular culture of the time. In Italy, explicit political films attracted huge audiences, in a lesser degree in the four zones of the besieged Germany under allied control. But genre-productions like the Heimatfilm were not as un-political as they appeared. Like in Italy, competition by American productions was very strong, and in the American Zone these productions enjoyed political support. The German film industry was weak and fractured, whereas the Italian production recovered in astonishing speed. In both countries Church and bourgeois milieus met the growth of the sphere of the popular, not at last American film, with reservations and resistance. Although in Italy film censorship was abandoned after 1945, productions were increasingly under the pressure of relevant authorities which made use of financing tools, and also the directors were under pressure of moral control. In Germany, the film production was practically completely controlled by the respective Allied Powers. Neither German film in Italy nor Italian film in Germany played, until the beginning 1950s, any role in the cinema landscapes nor film markets of both countries. Secondly, the contribution discusses issues of German film-genres as the “rubble-film”. It is argued that the negative image of post-war German cinema has now begun to change fundamentally. In Italy, post-war film and neorealism cannot be equated. Apart from the canonized productions, historicising dramas, also musical films and Vaudeville films as well as purely classical domestic dramas were successful. Regarding the explicitly political productions, the myth of a collective Italian resistance figured prominently, indeed this was decisive to the popularity of certain neorealist productions. Silences in Italian cinema were to some degree the result of a growing reluctance to engage in any deeper reflection, as the Christian Democracy party became the dominant force (in cultural policy) and investigation into the involvement of Catholic milieus in the Fascist regime was certainly undesir-

able. Ultimately, censorship “cooperated” with a shift in public taste towards a cinema of entertainment (which brought an embattled film industry much-needed capital in the face of US imports). Thirdly, the article elucidates the main interests in this volume: the political construction of the post-war film and its potential functions in the politics of remembrance, the treatment of the political burdens of the Nazi/ Fascist regimes, the treatment of anti-Semitism, the awareness of the Holocaust and the role of anti-Fascist films in a transnational perspective. Furthermore, aesthetic issues of post-war films are explored, as well as questions of ‘quality’.

1 Comparative Approaches and Cinema as a Popular-Cultural Practice

Comparative approaches have until recently been a very rare occurrence in studies of the history of film.¹ As yet there has been no comparison of post-war cinema in Germany and Italy, especially not of the emerging historical narratives in the cinematic landscapes of both countries. This volume seeks to take a step in this direction.

In both Germany and Italy between 1945 and the early 1950s, cinema was highly relevant to popular culture. The number of cinemas in Italy rose from 6 551 (1944/1945), peaking at 10 629 in 1956. Smaller cities especially profited from the expansion of cinema-going, including in the south, a development that was only possible due to modest ticket prices.²

In Germany, the cinema industry was restarted at an early stage. Entrance fees were low, and in the western zones already by 1947 there were 460 million cinema-goers.³ A rapid boom followed: audiences in West Germany grew until 1950 to 487 million cinema-goers annually, with 4 000 cinemas at their disposal.⁴ Despite the different intervening film policies of the occupying powers, there was a film market with impressive rates of attendance and, equally, a discursive horizon across the whole of Germany.

1 On the divergent aesthetic potential of the film industries in Germany, Austria, France, and Italy, cf. Hermann Kappelhoff/Bernhard Groß/Daniel Illger (Eds.), *Demokratisierung der Wahrnehmung? Das westeuropäische Nachkriegskino*, Berlin 2010.

2 Domenico De Gregorio, *Cinema and Television Audiences in Italy*, in: *Gazette* 11,1 (1965), pp. 68–81, at pp. 68–70.

3 Johannes Hauser, *Neuaufbau der westdeutschen Filmwirtschaft 1945–1955 und der Einfluss der US-amerikanischen Filmpolitik*, Pfaffenweiler 1989, p. 376.

4 Hauptverband deutscher Filmtheater (Ed.), *50 Jahre Kino in Deutschland*, Berlin 2000, p. 17.

Like in Italy, competition from American productions was very strong and, in the American Zone, enjoyed political support.⁵ The German film industry was weak and fragmented – among other reasons because of political orders for its demerging. On the one hand the studios had to be rebuilt, while on the other the production budgets were so low that it was difficult to catch up with American productions.⁶ After the end of the occupation period, attendance in West Germany grew constantly until 1957 to 800 million (equivalent to 12 attendances per inhabitant). Going to the cinema was a staple part of leisure culture, and big-name stars and cinematic events were celebrated in a variety of media. Through reviews, film was present in the daily newspapers, and the collective imagination was much supported by the “Wochenschau” (weekly newsreels). Altogether the preferences of audiences for certain genres changed little until the 1960s, and film ranking lists show a remarkable continuity regarding style and certain star actors. On the one hand, in only a few cases did American and other foreign productions find a place among the chart toppers.⁷ At the same time, German productions could not compete with their lavishly financed American counterparts. Although German films were both cheaper and more popular, US productions, according to Ina Merkel, still found a large market. Merkel, in her most recent book, has underlined the diverse situation of cinematic culture after the war: while cinema-goers continued to prefer German films with their shared style, audiences were also (productively) confronted with the concerns and style of the allies’ film productions. Merkel also evaluates the preferences and (possible) modes of reception of German audiences, watching, for example, home-front tales from the perspective of rural America. Allied film inscribed itself “in an intuitive way ... into the perception of the audience”.⁸ The relation of the “popular” and the “political” (understood broadly) was also clear:

5 Cf. Thomas Brandmeier, *Kampf ums Nachkriegsprogramm. Überläufer, alte deutsche Tonfilme und alliierte Filme im deutschen Kino nach 1945*, in: Hans-Michael Bock/Jan Distelmeyer/Jörg Schöning (Eds.), *Träume in Trümmern. Film-Produktion und Propaganda in Europa 1940–1950*, München 2009, pp. 56–202.

6 Hauser, *Neuaufbau* (see note 3), p. 353.

7 Anna Sarah Vielhaber, *Der populäre deutsche Film 1930–1970*, Norderstedt 2012. Cf. also Heide Fehrenbach, *Cinema in Democratizing Germany. Reconstructing National Identity after Hitler*, Chapel Hill-London 1995, pp. 48–168, who, however, too reductively identifies the “popular” with the “Heimat” film.

8 Ina Merkel, *Kapitulation im Kino. Zur Kultur der Besatzung im Jahr 1945*, Berlin 2016, pp. 276–282, 340.

“Post-war cinema ... not only provided a forum for the articulation of collective identities; more than this ... it acted as a symbolic vehicle for new models of consuming femininity. This was especially true of the so-called women’s genres: romantic, domestic, and musical melodramas that, alongside the *Heimatfilm*, war films, comedies, and the historical epic, were the stuff of home-produced popular cinema through the 1950s.”⁹

Taken as a whole, post-war German film (that is, to the end of the 1950s) is in need of reappraisal. It is to be anticipated that new light may be shed on the topic not only through careful reevaluation but also, and especially, by taking a comparative and transnational perspective. An obvious candidate for comparison with (West) Germany is Italy. Not only did Italy become internationally recognised for its cinema post 1945, but despite financial and political difficulties, it developed an independent film industry of much broader scope in terms of content and aesthetics than did Germany. In neorealism it created a movement that, though limited in its market share, was highly influential internationally, and whose successful cinematic innovations and contemporary, frequently socially critical focus, remain impressive today. By comparison, the *Trümmerfilm* (“rubble film”) could not reach such a degree of effectiveness; all the same, the constructive contribution it made to reflecting present-day realities must be acknowledged. The loss of existing structures and the depiction of war-related trauma – often cited as motifs of the *Trümmerfilm* – is also present in many neorealist works. A further line of enquiry to be pursued for both countries is the extent to which cinematic content and forms of representation were affected by political influence, and what continuities are apparent with regard to content, genre, and film-makers.¹⁰

9 Erica Carter, *How German Is She? Post War West German Reconstruction and the Consuming Woman*, Ann Arbor 1997, pp. 175–176.

10 Cf. the pioneering collection by Claudia Dillmann / Olaf Möller (Eds.), *Geliebt und Verdrängt. Das Kino der jungen Bundesrepublik Deutschland von 1949 bis 1963*, Frankfurt a. M. 2016; English version: *Beloved and Rejected. Cinema in the Young Federal Republic of Germany from 1949 to 1963*, Frankfurt a. M. 2016. The range of this volume reaches from “The Pact with the Audience. The Production Conditions of the Adenauer Cinema” (Claudia Dillmann, pp. 26–37) to “The Professor, the Tourist, and the Bombshell. The Young Federal Republic of Germany in Italian Cinema” (Marco Grosoli, pp. 304–313). Cf. also Johannes Hürter / Tobias Hof (Eds.), *Verfilmte Trümmerlandschaften. Nachkriegserzählungen im internationalen Kino 1945–1949*, Berlin-Boston 2019 (Schriftenreihe der Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte 119).

In both countries the Church and conservative middle-class milieus met the growth of the popular sphere, not least American film, with reservation and resistance.¹¹ Although in Italy film censorship was officially abandoned after 1945, productions continued to be under increasing pressure from the relevant authorities with access to funding tools. Directors were also controlled by means of moral pressure and sometimes direct legal control. In Germany, film production, which was growing only slowly, was in practice completely controlled by the respective Allied Power, in particular in the Soviet Zone, and with less regard to moral than political issues.¹²

One profound difference between the political cultures of the two countries was that after 1943/1945 Italy regained its national independence. Italian audiences obviously appreciated engaging with national events of the most recent past. This conformed to the developing political master narratives, and cinematic events were a vehicle for political identity formation, placing the Italians on the side of the victorious powers. Furthermore, they appealed to the audience through realistic dialogue and their comic or melodramatic elements. Politically relevant film-making thus occurred within very different cultural-political contexts, increasingly so in Germany with the emerging Cold War, during which enemy stereotypes and the country's division increased. On the whole, in the political and culture-political field, polarisation in Italy was much more pronounced than in the western zones of Germany, where the moderate shape of the three-party system soon became apparent, notwithstanding the renewed intrusion of National Socialist functionaries into the state apparatus that occurred increasingly after 1950.

It is necessary to broaden the perspective to transnational relations and intersecting perceptions. Before and after 1945, Italian cinema was barely present in Germany for economic and film-cultural reasons. It was not until the beginning of the 1950s that either German or Italian film played any role in the cinematic landscapes or film markets of the other country. After 1950, however, they captured a not inconsiderable share of the foreign market and interest increased, especially among cineaste circles. The first co-productions arose only around 1960. Left-wing film reviews initially considered Wolfgang Staudte and the DEFA productions a renewal of German film culture. Some of these works were

11 Daniela Treveri Gennari, *Post-War Italian Cinema. American Intervention, Vatican Interests*, New York 2010, pp. 15–37.

12 Cf. Gabriele Clemens, *Umerziehung durch Film. Britische und amerikanische Filmpolitik in Deutschland 1945–1949*, in: Harro Segeberg, *Mediale Mobilmachung*, vol. 2: *Hollywood, Exil und Nachkrieg*, München 2006, pp. 243–271, at p. 244; Peter Pleyer, *Deutscher Nachkriegsfilm 1946–1948*, Münster 1965, pp. 24–25, 31, 196.

presented in Venice. By 1950 at the latest there was great disappointment in the level of cinema in the Federal Republic of Germany, as has been shown by Francesco Bono.¹³

It is consequently necessary to establish how Italian and German films were each generally perceived in Germany and Italy, respectively. Reception was certainly more widespread than has until now been assumed, for instance in the quality press. While some of the 1960s wave of Italian *resistenza* films were released – sometimes abridged – in the Federal Republic, arousing considerable controversy,¹⁴ almost all of the productions of the 1940s and 1950s were relegated to film clubs and were presumably known only to initiates.¹⁵

Another common feature of both the West-German and the Italian film markets is the competition from American films. In Italy in 1950, the market share of American films was 63.7 %, so broad audiences were welcoming American genres and actors.¹⁶ To a lesser degree this may also be said about German audiences of the 1930s until the early 1950s.

2 German Post-war Cinema

Research on post-war cinema, which in this collection will be considered up to the end of the 1950s, has long had among its postulates that the specifically German genre of the *Trümmerfilm* (“rubble film”) enjoyed little public success and failed to break away from the melodrama and the visual language of the UFA era. In addition, it avoided taking a

13 Francesco Bono, Der (west)deutsche Film der 1950er Jahre aus italienischer Perspektive, in: Irmbert Schenk (Ed.), *Medien der 1950er Jahre (BRD und DDR)*, Marburg 2012 (Marburger Hefte zur Medienwissenschaft 54/55), pp. 47–61.

14 Cf. Johannes Lill, *Völkerfreundschaft im Kalten Krieg? Die politischen, kulturellen und ökonomischen Beziehungen der DDR zu Italien 1949–1973*, Frankfurt a. M. 2001; Andrea Hindrichs, “Teutonen” in Arkadien. Deutsche auswärtige Kulturpolitik in Italien von 1949–1970 zwischen Steuerungsversuch und dem Wunsch nach Anerkennung, München 2010.

15 Cf. Anne Paech, Die Schule der Zuschauer. Zur Geschichte der Filmclub-Bewegung, in: Hilmar Hoffmann/Walter Schobert (Eds.), *Zwischen gestern und Morgen. Westdeutscher Nachkriegsfilm 1946–1962*, Frankfurt a. M. 1989, pp. 226–245; Fehrenbach, *Cinema* (see note 7), pp. 169–210.

16 David Forgacz/Stephen Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War*, Bloomington-Indianapolis 2007, p. 126, on the relation of Italian and American productions *ibid.*, pp. 127–140; cf. also Daniela Treveri-Gennari/Catherine O’Rawe/Danielle Hopkins, *In Search of Italian Cinema Audiences in the 1940s and 1950s. Gender, Genre and National Identity*, in: *Participations* 8,2 (2011), pp. 539–553, and the subsequent publications from this research project.

position with regard to the causes of the war and the violence of the National Socialist regime, and chose to focus instead on the question of individual culpability, even in such remarkable and internationally recognised films as “Die Mörder sind unter uns” (“The Murderers Are Among Us”, 1946) by Wolfgang Staudte.¹⁷ It has been posited as fact that, into the 1950s, West-German film-makers, unlike their Italian counterparts, generally lacked any “oppositional impetus” and there was no reflection on war crimes committed by the Wehrmacht and the SS, so that the Italian context did not even figure. As the years went on, escapist and artistically meaningless productions with no international resonance are said to have predominated by a wide margin, especially as films of this type were evidently popular with audiences – the film industry as a whole experienced a boom. In this evaluation, film-history research has in effect subscribed to the radically rejectionist stance of New German Cinema and the Oberhausen signatories from the early 1960s, adopting their point of view that it was only with the change of generation that (West-)German film once again acquired a character of its own. Reservations about this narrative are justified, however. Firstly, there are always notable counter-examples to described tendencies. Secondly, films intended for entertainment made up the bulk of domestic production and consumption in other countries, too,¹⁸ not the outstanding works that are later canonised as significant for the period. Thirdly, attention should be given to the question of whether concentration on the realistic depiction of contemporary problems, as well as the motifs of “reconstruction” and aesthetic renewal, led to a losing sight of the past – or if one should rather consider exemplary, critical films such as “In jenen Tagen” or the “Berliner Ballade”, in which anti-Semitism, the presence of death and destruction, the atmosphere of angst in the Nazi era, the conditions of survival after the war were clearly deplored. Or is it not useful to keep in mind the “Film ohne Titel” with its play on genre and satirical view of the post-war situation?¹⁹

17 Cf. Hester Bear, *Dismantling the Dream Factory. Gender, German Cinema, and the Postwar Quest for a New Film Language*, New York-Oxford 2009, pp. 21–48; Eckhard Papst, “Die Mörder sind unter uns”. Filmische Selbstfindung und Auftakt für den Trümmerfilm, in: Martin Nies (Ed.), *Deutsche Selbstbilder in den Medien. Film – 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*, Marburg 2012, pp. 25–51, at pp. 30–31, 45.

18 Pierre Sorlin, *People’s Choice – sie haben die Wahl. Warum gingen britische, französische und italienische Zuschauer in den 50er Jahren ins Kino?*, in: Irmbert Schenk (Ed.), *Erlebnisort Kino*, Marburg 2000, pp. 95–111.

19 Cf. Hester Baer, *When Fantasy Meets Reality. Authorship and Stardom in Rudolf Jugert’s “Film without a Title” (1948)*, in: Baer, *Dismantling* (see note 17), pp. 49–72. This film was positively received by leading film critics: *Drei Personen suchen einen Film. 3 000 Mark für einen Titel*, in: *Der Spiegel*, no. 5, 31.1.1948 (URL: <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-44415666.html>; 2. 11.

The negative image of post-war German cinema has begun to change fundamentally and there is urgent need of a differentiated appraisal of the topic.²⁰ On the one hand this means a revision in the interpretation of individual examples of *Trümmerfilm*. On the other hand, it is becoming clearer that cinema needs to be viewed within the overall context of its epoch's signature character, as well as within the framework of the "history of modernisation" of the Federal Republic and, consequently, in a "new integrated historiography of the media"²¹, which attaches a higher priority to questions of discourse, the international framework, and concrete conditions of film production, including the dimension of media policy.

Post-war German film (which comprised far more than the *Trümmerfilm* even before the genre was superseded) should therefore be treated more discriminatingly, with a realisation that they originated in a context of limited logistic, personnel, and funding possibilities. The issues they dealt included coming to terms with the Nazi past, anti-Semitism, social criticism (in the DEFA films), the difficulties of the immediate post-war period, and retaining an optimistic attitude to life. Even though a peculiar ambivalence seems to typify the *Trümmerfilm*, above all – as Bernhard Groß has demonstrated – at the aesthetic level, the potential for "original realism" is recognisable in the heterogeneity of early post-war German cinema. One's research perspective should accordingly not be limited to inadequacies in content, but should instead look into the films' actual functioning in terms of mediating meaning, and into the audio-visual, that is, the aesthetic aspects of their experience.²²

2020); Trümmer, Storys und Legenden. Zur Situation des deutschen Films, in: Die Zeit, no. 12, 14. 3. 1948 (URL: <http://www.zeit.de/1948/12/truemmer-storys-und-legenden>; 2. 11. 2020). Regarding "Berliner Ballade" cf. Hesters Baer's chapter "Kampf dem Kampf". Aesthetic Experimentation and Social Satire in the Ballad of Berlin", in: Baer, Dismantling (see note 17), pp. 157–174.

20 Cf. Bastian Blachut/Imme Klages/Sebastian Kuhn, Deutsches Nachkriegskino 1945–1962: Ort der Reflexion? Zur Einleitung, in Bastian Blachut/Imme Klages/Sebastian Kuhn (Eds.), Reflexionen des beschädigten Lebens? Nachkriegskino in Deutschland zwischen 1945 und 1962, Konstanz 2015, pp. 15–37. Bernhard Groß, Morituri te salutant – Der frühe deutsche Nachkriegsfilm und seine Politik des Gemeinplatzes, in: *ibid.*, pp. 89–118, stresses the ambivalence of the interpretation of the past in German post-war film. For a critical view cf. also Daniel Jonah Wolpert, Opfer der Zeit. Freitod und Neubeginn in den deutschen Filmen der unmittelbaren Nachkriegsjahre, in: *ibid.*, pp. 57–73.

21 Knuth Hickethier, Medien-Modernisierung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in den 1950er Jahren, in: Schenk (Ed.), Medien der 1950er Jahre (see note 13), pp. 12–23, at p. 18.

22 Bernhard Groß, Die Filme sind unter uns. Zur Geschichtlichkeit des frühen deutschen Nachkriegskinos: Trümmer-, Genre-, Dokumentarfilm, Berlin 2015, pp. 13–15, 376–77; cf. also Robert R. Shandley, Trümmerfilme. Das deutsche Kino der Nachkriegszeit, Berlin 2010, p. 81, p. 281; Thomas

In Germany and Italy, film-history research is becoming aware that the *Trümmerfilm* had to improvise just as much as neorealist cinema did (although the latter was both much more strongly politicised and more explicit). It is, additionally, aware that *Trümmerfilm* showed people in the process of starting again from scratch, and presented the openness of the social circumstances (though not the *Stunde Null* or “Zero Hour”). Occasionally they sought to apportion responsibility for the situation, mostly in terms of individual moral categories, for which the genre has always found criticism.

In Italy, post-war film and neorealism cannot simply be equated. The market share of neorealist films is estimated to have been ten per cent, varying according to how generous the definition is. Besides those productions that have since been canonised, historical dramas, musicals, and Vaudeville films, as well as purely classical domestic dramas such as “*La vita ricomincia*” (“*Life Begins Anew*”, 1945), achieved success. Other examples are “*Aquila nera*” (“*Black Eagle*”, 1945/1946) by Riccardo Freda, an adaptation of a novel by Pushkin, and “*I miserabili*” (“*Les Misérables*”, 1948), again by Freda, after the novel by Victor Hugo.²³ Accordingly, recent research has aimed at a much broader range of the film market, which is not to say that further research into iconic productions is not worth the effort – as has recently been shown by Bernhard Groß in his poetological work emphasising de-heroising trends in German post-war film – including a wide range of political documentaries.²⁴

3 Post-war Italian Cinema in Perspective

The myth of a collective Italian resistance figured prominently in Italian cinema and indeed was decisive to the popularity of certain neorealist productions. As has been frequently demonstrated, the *Resistenza* was a complex of experiences in which the media played a large communicative role. The same is true of the corresponding belief that the Italians *per se* were (politically) “good”, giving the impression that the issue of Italian popular involvement in Fascism was addressed in very few films – for instance Zampa’s

Christen, *Der deutsche Trümmerfilm*, in: id. (Ed.), *Einführung in die Filmgeschichte*, vol. 2, Marburg 2016, pp. 59–74, at p. 64.

23 A comedy about everyday life starring Totò, “*Fifa e arena*”, by Mario Mattòli, attracted an audience of five million and ranked no. 1 in 1948. “*Totò cerca casa*” dealt comically with the subject of housing shortage, ridiculed bureaucracy and clientelism, and ranked no. 3 in 1949; Mathias Sabourdin (Ed.), *Dictionnaire du Cinéma Italien. Ses créateurs de 1943 à nos jours*, Paris 2014, pp. 1137–1139.

24 Groß, *Die Filme sind unter uns* (see note 22).

“Anni difficili” (“Difficult Years”, 1948), disparaged on both the left and the right – or otherwise only episodically. The necessity of examining such episodes more closely has become clear, especially those often unnoticed examples, in which the viewer’s implication in the regime is briefly illuminated. Such examination should, therefore, not only focus on representations of the enemy supplied by the *Resistenza*. It is beyond doubt that in many post-war Italian films, Fascism appears as something alien, something not intrinsically Italian, and that Fascists are represented as henchmen of the Germans, or even as figures of ridicule.²⁵

It turns out that, in Italy, politically committed films discussing recent history and the present, such as “Roma città aperta”, were often also publicly successful, at least until 1948. Other examples are “Due lettere anonime” (“Two Anonymous Letters”, 1945) by Mario Camerini, “Avanti a lui tremava tutta Roma” (“Before him all Rome trembled”, 1946) by Carmine Gallone, which reached fifth position in the cinema charts in 1946,²⁶ and “Come persi la Guerra” (“How I Lost the War”, 1947) by Carlo Borghesio, a slapstick comedy, which demonstrated through surrealistic turns that the Italians were thoroughly unwarlike and, in fact, a pawn in the hands of foreign powers. In 1947 this film ranked second among the audiences. “Anni difficili” by Luigi Zampa, where – completely uniquely – the Fascist past of the average Italian was represented, ranked third among audiences. In 1946, “Il bandito” (“The Bandit”) by Lattuada also ranked third. Here it should be noted that, although the film is clearly political, it also displays elements of crime and action film, which helped to contribute to its success. Maurizio Zinni identifies four phases in the reception of Fascism, two relevant to the period considered here. In the first, neorealistic phase, Fascism is portrayed as alien and as having taken the

25 On the portrayal of the enemy: Filippo Focardi, *Il cattivo tedesco e il bravo italiano*, Roma 2013 (German edition: *Falsche Freunde? Italiens Geschichtspolitik und die Frage der Mitschuld am zweiten Weltkrieg*, Paderborn 2015). Cf. for a critical view of attempts to marginalise the Italian resistance in historiography, and on the persistence of the self-perception of Italians in terms of the “good Italian”: Lutz Klinkhammer, *Der Resistenza-Mythos und Italiens faschistische Vergangenheit*, in: Holger Afflerbach/Christoph Cornelissen (Eds.), *Sieger und Besiegte. Materielle und ideelle Neuorientierungen nach 1945*, Tübingen-Basel 1997, pp. 119–139. Cf. also: *La Resistenza nel cinema italiano 1945/1995*, Genova 1995; this commented bibliography lists 24 *Resistenza* films for 1945–1950, 21 for 1951–1960, and 33 for 1961–1970. In none of the film descriptions contained in this documentation, and none of the cited reviews, is the representation of the *Resistenza* coupled with reflection on the fascist system of rule, with the sole exception of “Anni difficili” from 1948, whose subject matter was “explosive” in the words of one reviewer. Cf. also Vito Zagarrro, *Cinema e antifascismo. Alla ricerca di un epos nazionale*, Soveria Mannelli 2015.

26 The following figures according to Sabourdin, *Dictionnaire du Cinéma italien* (see note 23), pp. 1137–1140; Roberto Poppi, *I Film. Tutti i Film italiani dal 1945 al 1959*, vol. 2, Roma 2007.

Italians by surprise, thus leaving them innocent; the second phase of denial, lasting into the second half of the 1950s, ends in the climate of the Cold War. Social fulfilment is embodied in the *Don Camillo* series.²⁷

Metaphorical silences and lacunae in Italian cinema were to some degree the result of a growing reluctance to engage in any deeper reflection. Once the Christian Democracy party became the dominant force (in cultural policy), investigation into the involvement of Catholic milieus in the Fascist regime certainly became undesirable. Ultimately censorship “cooperated” with a shift in public taste towards a cinema of entertainment (bringing an embattled film industry much-needed capital in the face of US imports).

4 Aims and Themes of this Volume

1) The first important focus of this volume is the political construction of post-war film and its potential functioning in the politics of remembrance. This volume’s transnational, comparative approach seeks to open up a fresh perspective on self-interpretations of the past in film, as well as on the relationship between Italian and German cinema.²⁸ This approach hopes to achieve more than the usual presentation of results (the outcome, generally, of an interpretation of individual films and auteurs). The aim is to regard both plot and narrative in significant single productions, as well as the contexts in which contemporary discussion of the horrors of the past took place.²⁹

27 Maurizio Zinni, *Fascisti di celluloide. La memoria del ventennio nel cinema italiano (1945–2000)*, Venezia 2010, esp. pp. 14–44; compare also with Giacomo Lichtner, *Fascism in Italian Cinema since 1945. The Politics and Aesthetics of Memory*, Basingstoke 2013, esp. pp. 63, 69, 72–73; Fehrenbach, *Cinema* (see note 7), pp. 118–147.

28 Cf. Valentina Leonhard, *Völkerfreundschaft vor der Leinwand? Die deutsch-italienische Kino-Achse 1938–1943*, in: Francesco Bono/Johannes Roschlau (Eds.), *Tenöre, Touristen, Gastarbeiter. Deutsch-italienische Filmbeziehungen*, München 2011, pp. 44–56; Alfons Maria Arns, *Das Trauma des “Nazismo”. Roberto Rossellini und Deutschland*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 93–106 regarding “*La paura*” (1954), “*Il generale della Rovere*” (1959), “*Era notte in Roma*” (1960) and “*Anno uno*” (1974); Chris Wahl, *Man spricht “italienisch”. Italien im bundesdeutschen Film der 1950er Jahre*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 132–168; Lukas Schaefer, *Kritik ohne Grenzen. Nonkonformistische Filmkultur in Italien und Westdeutschland nach 1945 in transnationaler Perspektive*, Stuttgart 2018; Lukas Schaefer, “*Sie nennen es Realismus*”. Die Zeitschrift *Filmkritik* und der internationale Film der 1950er Jahre, in: Blachut/Klages/Kuhn (Eds.), *Reflexionen* (see note 20), pp. 314–332.

29 Heinz-B. Heller, *Verstümmelt, verboten, verdrängt. Rezeptionsaspekte des internationalen Films im westdeutschen Kino der 1950er Jahre*, in: Schenk, *Medien der 1950er Jahre* (see note 13), pp. 34–46.

This collection therefore aims to reflect the now altered, more complex research situation in both countries, to contribute to a new way of viewing the political content of post-war film, and to unravel a little the national narratives in film-history writing and contemporary historiography. To what extent did treatment of the past, specifically the political burdens of the Nazi and Fascist regimes, reflect general tendencies of the period, as manifested in other media? Was social criticism, common in early neorealism, also practised later? And did the *Trümmerfilm* avoid it altogether from the start? Just how strongly the Fascist regime was supported and maintained by the Italians themselves was apparently only alluded to indirectly if at all in cinema. We should therefore consider how far critical reflection could be said to have taken place in rudimentary form in *Resistenza* film. Another question is how far critical reflection on occupying regimes, the causes of the war, and the involvement of the population in the crimes of the Nazi and Fascist systems was possible both in Italy and in Germany. What traces of such critical reflection are to be found in the relevant films (including those films produced in war time in the Soviet Union and the USA)?

Here, Ina Merkel, in her “Decency and resistance. Narrative patterns in anti-Fascist American, Soviet, and European Films (1940–1950)” offers a far-reaching comparison of anti-Fascist film, going back to the war. Considerable national differences in film-making are here identified. It is indeed regrettable that most of the relevant films made in the USA and in the Soviet Union were never shown to German audiences. When that did occur, as in the case of “Zhdi menya” (“Wait for Me”, 1943/1945), German women were “moved to tears”. The author demonstrates the different perspectives of individual film productions on Nazi Germany and the range of “occupation films” shot between 1942 to 1950 in Eastern and Western Europe, and concludes that the *dispositif* of violence and resistance is present in all the productions discussed. The films, furthermore, “showed the effort and courage that it had meant to defend oneself or even just to stay decent” which, one may add, surfaces in only a few German productions, such as in Helmut Käutner’s “In jenen Tagen” (“In Those Days”, 1947).

Bernhard Groß, in his comparative contribution “Building configurations of contingent and substantial communities. Differences between Italian and German post-war cinema aesthetics” firstly underlines some German examples of convergence to Italian neorealist cinema. Secondly, in the course of his basic research approach, he seeks to relate the historicity of individual experience and filmic constructions, especially the tensions inherent in gaps between the “image” and the “audio-visual” spaces. Thirdly, at the level of content, he analyses different concepts of “community” in relevant films from the two countries – such as “the analogy between murder and suicide” in “Germania anno zero” (“Germany, Year Zero”, 1948) and “Irgendwo in Berlin” (“Somewhere in Berlin”, 1946) – and underlines the rejection of films emphasising the atrocities of the Nazi past.

In the latter film, the author sees a revival of organicist or “substantial” concepts of “community” and reveals striking similarities between its imagery and that of previous Nazi films. In this rather pessimistic view of a contingent and fragile mode of community building, one has to conclude that German post-war film was unable to offer a truly constructive and pluralistic conception of a new society.

2) A second important focus of this volume is the image complex of the “other”. It would seem that “(the) Italian”, as person or national character, is hardly to be found in German film, although future research may gain more differentiated insight. One thing is clear: where “image” relates to an image of the enemy, here the Germans appear as such, as the “other”, as anti-Christ, and as the barbarian revisited. In “Roma città aperta” (“Rome Open City”, 1945) by Roberto Rossellini this becomes obvious, at the latest, in the torture scenes, where all the Germans featuring in the film are equated with the SS.³⁰ In “Achtung! Banditi!” (“Attention! Bandits!”, 1951) by Carlo Lizzani, the Germans are portrayed, simplistically, as mindless perpetrators “characterised by sexual perversion, sadism, psychic disorders, and drug addiction”.³¹ This should not simply be understood as a “construct” by a director who had himself actively contributed to Fascist cinema, but as a result of the harsh, lived experiences of German occupation with its shootings, deportations, and humiliations, which were now being referred to ever more strongly. Obviously, in retrospect, this contributed to the understanding of oneself in Italy as “victims” and as a *brava gente* which, by way of its *resistenza*, had regained national sovereignty and dignity.³² A related theme is that of which past³³ it is that is to be remembered in film. Is there such a thing as the envisaging of a democratised, more socially just society in the

30 Ulrich Döge, *Barbaren mit humanen Zügen. Bilder des Deutschen in Filmen Roberto Rossellini*, Trier 2009, p. 1. Cf. also Peter Bondanella, *The Films of Roberto Rossellini*, Cambridge 1993, pp. 45–63.

31 Massimo Perinelli, *Fluchtlinien des Neorealismus. Der organlose Körper der italienischen Nachkriegszeit, 1943–1949*, Bielefeld 2009, p. 191; cf. also Massimo Perinelli, *Achtung! Tedeschi! Trümmerfilm, Neorealismus und das Bild der Deutschen im italienischen Nachkriegsfilm*, in: Blachut / Klages / Kuhn (Eds.), *Reflexionen* (see note 20), pp. 271–296; Stefania Parigi, *L’immagine di guerra. La resistenza nel cinema italiano dell’immediato dopoguerra*, in: Vito Zagarrío (Ed.), *Cinema e antifascismo. Alla ricerca di un epos nazionale*, Soveria Manelli 2015, pp. 35–50; cf. also the documentary work: *Comitato Regionale per il 50° Anniversario delle Lotta di Liberazione* (Ed.), *La resistenza del Cinema Italiano*, Genova 1995; Monique Hofmann, *Die Deutschen im italienischen Spielfilm nach 1945. Die filmische Darstellung der Deutschen und des Nationalsozialismus*, Hamburg 2014.

32 Sara Pesce, *Memoria e immaginario. La seconda guerra mondiale nel cinema italiano*, Recco 2008, pp. 65–75.

33 In discussion of how the past was represented in film and, consequently, what constructs of national self-image were elaborated, it is important to differentiate strictly between depictions of

future? What forms of victimisation were presented in cinema, and to what extent did they correlate with other media such as political satire (in magazines and newspapers) and historiographical interpretation? As regards remembrance of the war, what themes and constellations (such as the combatant returning from Russia in “Il bandito”) became filmic ciphers that were used to produce interpretations of the past? And how did directors deal with the reluctantly addressed issue of guilt and responsibility for the genocide of European Jews?

Daniel Wolpert’s “Bodies of Evidence, Burdens of Proof. Reason before the Court of Cinema after the Third Reich” compares three significant dramas of post-war film production, Eugen Yorck’s universalistic “Morituri” (1948), Georg Wilhelm Pabst’s “Der Prozess” (“The Trial”, 1948), and Erich Engel’s “Affaire Blum” (“The Blum Affair”, 1948), which saw the Jews as Cassandra figures, and anti-Semitism as a side effect of social conflicts. Wolpert also hints at the background of all three, the “visual totality” of Veit Harlan’s “Jud Süß” (1940). As the author shows, the three films discussed offered “a lens through which post-war narratives about moral legitimacy might be framed”. If effective enough, the Nazi period would then not appear to have occurred as an “accident” in the otherwise humanistic development of German history, but arose as an outcome of earlier concepts of the racially constructed *Volksgemeinschaft*.

Robert S. C. Gordon in “Production, Myth and Misprision in Early Holocaust Cinema. ‘L’ebreo errante” looks at a largely unknown film from 1948, the multi-faceted “L’ebreo errante” (Italian for “the Wandering Jew”), “as a powerful example” of the relation of Italian cinema to war and fascism. Through this example, Gordon provides a complementary view to the until-now dominant leftist perspective in this field, and stresses the argument that it was this film that “proved capable or willing” to address the genocide directly and centrally. The author makes clear to what extent the film transgressed rules of decency and links it to numerous other productions. Finally, in an example of his multi-disciplinary approach, he traces evidence for a state of awareness of the Holocaust among the greater public and in personal memory.

Damiano Garofalo in “Images of the Germans in Post-war Italian cinema” gives an overview of representation of Nazis in Italian post-war audio-visual culture, including in *Resistenza* films such as “Achtung! Banditi!” (1951) and the holocaust film “Kapò” (1959), which develops a more differentiated, ambiguous picture of villainous German characters. He does so by not only placing the films in their political context, but also categorising them within the principal periods of representative history: The post-war

the Republic of Salò, with its war of liberation or civil war on the one hand, and depictions of the 20 years of fascist rule preceding it, on the other.

period being followed by a period of transition and, from around 1979, of psycho-sexually discursive works.

Maurizio Zinni in “Italians and not Italians. Fascism and national identity in post-war Italian cinema” explores the desire within society and in the national political parties to remove fascism from among the significant component of the national identity, and explains how cinema was to become one of the points of reference in the fabrication of a public narration, presenting a population without guilt for the Fascist past. Those to blame (a small group of Fascists) were depicted as a minority easily recognisable through their behaviour. Even if critical directors tried to reintroduce Fascists as a kind of “national” protagonist in order to criticise Fascist tendencies of past and present times, commercial cinema was calling time on fascism as painlessly as possible, with the effect that Fascist characters were effectively re-included into the community and into the nation’s historical narrative.

In order to better understand the relationship between Italian cinema and the Second World War, Philip Cooke and Gianluca Fantoni offer in “Where Do We Go from Here. The Moral and Material Reconstruction of Italian Cinema after World War II (1945–1955)” an analysis of the difficulties that post-war film-makers encountered during this troubled decade. The issues the producers and authors had to deal with included the material constraints of the early post-war years, censorship and the political climate of the Cold War, and the need to establish new political relations, particularly with the aim of obtaining a protectionistic legislation for cinema.

3) The chapters of this book present more than a selection of (indeed important) iconic films. They instead discuss a fairly wide selection of films and – going beyond discourse-historical approaches – illuminate their backgrounds in terms of film-production policy, censorship practices,³⁴ and the question of addressing broader audiences. For Germany, all four occupation zones (and their conditioning by the respective occupying powers) are included, and for analyses beyond 1949/1950 in particular, international contexts and direct influences (censorship regulations, film-subsidy systems) are considered. Alternative models of film distribution, such as the internationally active and coordinated Catholic parish cinemas, analogous distribution channels in the western allied zones, and later the Federal Republic of Germany, will be dealt with, including the

34 Cf. Jürgen Berger, *Bürger heißt zahlen – und manchmal auch zensieren. Die Filmbürgschaften des Bundes 1950–1955*, in: Hoffmann / Schobert (Eds.), *Zwischen gestern und morgen* (see note 15), pp. 80–97.

role of the FSK (Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle der Filmwirtschaft) rating system and the Catholic Film-Dienst (Film Service).³⁵

Claudia Dillmann in “Film policies and cinema audiences in Germany” sheds a noticeably critical light on the quality of the West-German post-war film industry, as well as the wide-ranging censorship practices (including via film funding) of the authorities, not least in preventing the screening of East-German films. This is a point that has to date been insufficiently explored. Dillmann analyses the choice of films with which audiences were presented and hints at the importance of reappraisal of the Nazi period, explaining why *Trümmerfilm* had little chance in the context of audiences’ “traditionalism”.

Christian Kuchler, in his contribution on “Politics, morals, and cinema: Catholic film work in post-war Germany”, discusses the extensive activities of the Catholic film movement. Besides demonstrating examples of ideological concealment and the difficulties of censorship in the Adenauer Republic, the author also provides insights into the cinematic landscape in general. The treatment of the film “Die Sünderin” (“The Sinner”, 1951) especially shows the difficulties of the intended project of “rechristianisation” of post-war society, which was effective to a certain degree only in rural regions where no other moral alternatives existed and the supply of community events was rather scarce. The activity of the Catholic Church was much more influential in the Italian case, as Lutz Klinkhammer describes in his “Popular and Catholic cinema in Italy, 1944–1954: What lessons about the past did the ‘morally sane’ and educative film communicate to Italian audiences?”. From 1948 to 1955, neorealism had a problematic standing, and films dealing with the resistance against “nazifascism” appeared less and less on the screens. Christian Democratic leaders and the Vatican hierarchy aimed to moralise society through cinema by trying to promote “morally good” films with the aid of state intervention. Even if, for reasons of economic and audience preference, the parish cinema system failed to reach the standards given by Vatican authorities, popular Catholic cinema contributed in orienting Italian society favourably towards the predominant Christian Democrats.

4) Last but not least: What reciprocal influence was there between the two countries? What role did censorship and self-censorship on the part of the film-makers play? What films from one country were screened in the other? What *fora* and *loci* of film-policy and film-aesthetic discourse can be identified (up to the 1950s)? And which convergent

35 Cf. Ruggero Eugeni/Dario Edoardo Viganò (Eds.), *Attraverso lo schermo. Cinema e cultura cattolica in Italia*, vol. 2, Roma 2006; Daniel Biltereyst/Daniela Treveri Gennari (Eds.), *Moralizing Cinema. Film, Catholicism, and Power*, New York 2015; Christian Kuchler, *Kirche und Kino. Katholische Filmarbeit in Bayern (1945–1965)*, Paderborn 2006; Jürgen Kniep, “Keine Jugendfreigabe”. Filmzensur in Westdeutschland 1949–1990, Göttingen 2010, pp. 25–86.

and/or divergent tendencies existed in relation to entertainment films?³⁶ How did the “critical” cinematic discourse of a *cinema nuovo* develop – earlier and more vigorously in Italy – in respected film periodicals and academic-style film clubs, as a forerunner of political change in cinematic discourse, and in an incipient, though widely noticed, reorientation of film production (the New German Cinema)?

Lukas Schaefer, in “European critical film culture: Italian and West-German film magazines in an international context” shows that, at least in small (but soon hegemonic) intellectual milieus, there was wide-ranging and intense contact between the makers of a European critical film culture. Since the formation of the critical journals “Cinema Nuovo” and “Filmkritik”, both sides, but especially in Germany, profited from the experience of the discourses and productions of their counterparts. Transnationality manifested itself not only “in reading and imitating foreign film auteurs” but in developing common categories of political conscientiousness and cultural critique. In the view of “Filmkritik”, Italian realism was a tool to “refresh the German ‘wasteland’”. Contact with Eastern Europe was also important in this intellectual movement, coinciding with the beginnings of a new left in the FRG. Finally, German left-wing film-makers would proclaim their emancipation from the seemingly corrupt state of the German film scene and industry in the early 1960s.

5 Outlook

After the war the Italian film industry recovered much more quickly and sustainably than the fragmented German film industry. In each case popular genres clearly met with the most positive response. Iconic political productions were unsuccessful in both countries, but especially in Germany, as the example of “Ehe im Schatten” (“Marriage in the Shadows”, 1947) shows. However, until 1949 Italian audiences clearly had a more positive attitude towards political-national stories born out of the *Resistenza* than the German audience did towards the rather circumspect, tragic, intellectual, and critical *Trümmerfilm*. In Italy it was easier to identify with the content and protagonists of political films, and the attitude was largely one of self-assurance.

For both countries it is obvious that cinema is a relevant medium for political discourse. This is, after all, what this book analyses first of all: what topics appear; in what way film works as a medium of remembrance and of current culture-political issues

36 Cf. Antje Dechert, *Stars all’Italiana. Kino und Körperdiskurse in Italien 1930–1965*, Köln-Weimar-Wien 2014.

and conflicts; how politicised were the high-quality films; and how dependent on power relations is the cinematographic discourse, including among those acting as film critics?

Despite the continuity of its actors, Italian cinema was clearly more progressive. In Germany there were few first-class achievements, among them the reflective and extremely modern satire “Film ohne Titel” (“Film Without a Title”, 1947), mentioned above.

Italian post-war film contributed directly to the issue of social progress and to the building of the avowed anti-Fascist nation, while German films reflected on the disaster that had taken place. Their film markets, however, showed remarkable parallels. Until the 1950s, knowledge of productions in the counterpart nation was minimal. It becomes clear that the immediate post-war era, until the early 1950s, can ultimately only be understood not only in the light of what had happened, but also by considering what was to come: that is, against the background of medial and socio-cultural “modernisation narrations”.³⁷

Already in 1948/1949 the market share of popular, apolitical cinema had clearly risen in both countries.³⁸ The time of polarising debates, in particular of the *epurazioni*, was already coming to an end. In 1949, “Catene” ranked in first place when it came to market success. Here was a sentimental drama about women which, however, also included some elements of realistic depiction of everyday life. Tellingly, though, in 1950 the historical drama “Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei” (“The Last Days of Pompeii”) by Paolo Moffa reached the number one position in the cinema charts. Around 1950, one can say there was a degree of de-politicisation and banalisation of the national film in both countries due to audience taste (always an independent variable in the history of cinema), the film policy of the Christian Democrats, and increasing censorship,³⁹ as well as, in Italy, the Communists’ loss of political influence and opposition from the newly powerful Church to neorealism.⁴⁰

37 Hickethier, *Medien-Modernisierung* (see note 21), at p. 18.

38 Sabourdin, *Dictionnaire* (see note 23), pp. 1129–1140.

39 “Anni facili” (“Easy Years”, 1953) by Zampa was blocked by censorship, and war criminal Rodolfo Graziani filed a charge against the director; Zinni, *Fascisti* (see note 27), p. 61.

40 *Ibid.*, pp. 43–44, 53–54. In the view of David Forgacz, neorealism, understood as “a set of cultural practices and products” was “effectively finished at least by the mid 1950s, if not earlier ...” due to the Cold War, Catholic censorship, and increasing self-critique in the left cultural milieu; David Forgacz, *The Making and Unmaking of Neorealism in Postwar Italy*, in: Nicholas Hewitt (Ed.), *The Culture of Reconstruction. European Literature, Thought and Film, 1945–1950*, New York 1989, pp. 50–60, at pp. 51, 55–57. Cf. also Stephen Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow. The Italian Communists and the Challenge of Mass Culture, 1943–1991*, Durham-London 2000, pp. 42–105.