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Book Review: Schooling in Modernity: The Politics of Sponsored Films in Postwar Italy by Paola Bonifazio

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**Author:**

Emiliano Guaraldo Rodriguez, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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Bonifazio, Paola, *Schooling in Modernity: The Politics of Sponsored Films in Postwar Italy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014. Pp. 305. ISBN 1442615982 (paperback). \$34.46.

For decades, the thousands of films that compose the cinematic production of Italian industrial giants such as FIAT, Olivetti, ENI, Edison, AEM, and of government sponsored cinema had failed to raise the critical attention they deserve among Italianists and cultural scholars, as only a handful of works on this topic have been published so far. During recent years though, industrial cinema seems to have finally achieved more appeal among academics. Today, we can access the enormous catalogue of industrial, corporate and government sponsored cinema thanks to the invaluable work of archives such as *Archivio Cinema d'Impresa*, *Archivio Cinema Industriale*, and *Archivio ENI*, which have preserved, restored and, in the last years, even digitized thousands of movies. Critical literature on the matter, though, is still sparse. So far, most of the critical works on these cinematic traditions, often regarded as “cultural oddities,” have been of historiographic nature or have been limited to the compiling of the film production of specific corporations. For example, Italian film scholar Giulio Latini's most recent work, *L'Energia e lo Sguardo* (2012), is a comprehensive and detailed look at the films directed by Gilbert Bovay and produced by ENI in the 1960s.

Paola Bonifazio's *Schooling in Modernity: The Politics of Sponsored Films in Postwar Italy* is the first successful attempt to analyze in-depth the influence of industrial and sponsored cinema on the shaping and reconstruction of Italian post-war society. Choosing the right approach to analyze industrial cinema is not an easy task. The few scholars that have been interested in this topic, while obviously recognizing the uniqueness of industrial cinema, have treated it mostly as a different function of cinematic language and have often focused on its aesthetic and historical value. Instead, very compellingly, Bonifazio extends her analysis far beyond the cinematic dimension of these products and tries to view them as “a lens through which to study how private sponsorships competed with governmental information agencies in instructing Italian citizens on appropriate conduct in a capitalist economy and welfare society” (53). Moreover, sponsored and corporate cinemas are re-imagined by Bonifazio as bio-political technologies of power and governmentality. A recurring and very fitting definition through the book is Foucault's idea of pastoral power, which can be explained as a configuration of the state as an assemblage of technologies and techniques that allow it to shape the collective subjectivity of the population, and consequently, to predict and guide its values, aspirations, and desires. This is the conceptual framework within which, according to Bonifazio, we should be approaching industrial and sponsored films.

In chapter 1, *Work, Welfare, Neorealism*, Bonifazio analyzes the way in which post-war government sponsored films can be read as a tool of construction of a new, modern, and responsible citizenry. According to Bonifazio, through these films “the state fostered (rather than repressed) individual desires [...] and it also surveilled the outcomes of such desires by controlling people's social and sexual behaviors” (30). Simultaneously, these films attempted to go beyond neorealist accounts of Italian post-war society by showing a supposedly more “real” Italian reality in its making, from the point of view of the state power. Chapter 2 *Sneaky Sponsors*, is the logical continuation of the first chapter. In this case, the attention of the author is directed towards the films sponsored by Italian corporations such as Olivetti, FIAT, and Edisonvolta, which share striking similarities with the government-funded ones. Bonifazio's argument in this chapter is extremely intriguing: “the congruities [of corporate sponsored films] with governmental films derived from the fact that Italian industries used cinematography [...] as tools of social engineering rather than advertisements for their products” (52). These films, aimed at the transformation and “homogenization of blue- and white-collar workers into a modern middle-class of consumers,” reveal the long-term cultural intentions of the Italian industrial corporate power (53). Cinefiat's films promoted the usage of the woman's image as a visual strategy for commercial advertisement. In her

analysis, Bonifazio establishes a complex connection between the exploitation of the woman's body and the promotion of cars. The male workers' subjectivity is affected as "Cinefiat shorts used the female body not only to titillate male desires of consumption, but also to construct their masculine agency as both workers and citizens, expressed in the form of sexual or economic transactions" (59). The cultural and social shifts occurring in post-war Italy extend also to the organization of living spaces. In *Filming the Housing Revolution*, Bonifazio focuses on the "rivoluzione abitativa" of the 1950s, which involved mass urbanization processes and the rise of new modalities of living and management of urban space and populations, as well as the emergence of the housing industry. New neighborhoods were being built and urban areas emerged from the ruins of war. Bonifazio goes through the history of the housing revolution, reviewing the work of the private and public institutions involved. In this third chapter, I found methodologically interesting the spatial analysis of commercial films such as De Sica's *Ladri di Biciclette*, and Pasolini's *Mamma Roma* and *Accattone*. Such an analysis serves to better understand the radical impact that the reorganization of space had on the everyday lives of the Italian sub-proletarian population. The films advertising the new housing solutions also had an important role in re-imposing the traditional family and the traditional gender roles at the center of Italian society. These films, indeed, promoted modernization, but not at the cost of traditional gender hierarchies, which, conversely, had to be protected and conserved.

The book does not limit its scope to the relationship between state bio-power and culture, but it also tackles the depiction of the Southern / Northern economic and cultural divide. *South Like North* is the title of a 1960 film sponsored by Olivetti, which aimed to display the radical modernization of Southern Italy and of its citizens in a positive light. This chapter, the fourth, argues that this type of operation, not limited solely to *Sud come Nord*, "while appearing to promote a renaissance of the South, enforced a 'northern' conception of the world by educating southern people on the imperative of work, productivity, and efficiency" (116). The study of the conflict between the constructions of South and North, supported by readings of Franco Cassano and Roberto Dainotto among others, leads to the perspective-change of chapter five, *United Europe Starts in School*. Here, Bonifazio takes into account some educational films sponsored by the American government and targeted at Italian youth. These films' purpose was to foster a sense of belonging to the western world in Italian students, while repressing possible communist sympathies and fascist nostalgias and, at the same time, educating the youth to the values of the modern capitalist world. Clearly, these films have a strong significance in the framework of the early history of European political and economic integration, a process that could not have been successful if not supported by international efforts for a shared education and an integrated, westernized, capitalist worldview. In the final chapter, *Histories through Tabloids*, Bonifazio addresses the creation of a post-war shared historical experience promoted by the *Settimana Incom*, the popular video-tabloid. In this chapter Bonifazio shows familiarity both with the classic (Hayden White) and the most recent theoretical developments (found footage theory) in media history and the philosophy of history.

Finally, one of the most striking feats of *Schooling in Modernity* is the impressive and detailed thirty-six page filmography, which is an essential tool for potential future research. Bonifazio's work reveals a promising methodology for the future of Italian studies, as she expertly engages in both archival and theoretical work. In this sense, *Schooling in Modernity* is an exemplary text for what it could mean to do Italian studies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Both rigorous and creative, Bonifazio's theoretical and methodological framework, which is deeply rooted in French bio-political thought and in Italian theory, as well as in cultural and film studies, is complex yet extremely clear even for the less "theory-friendly" readers.

EMILIANO GUARALDO RODRIGUEZ  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill