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**Abstract:** Represented as a male-dominated space, the office is a privileged site of production of masculine identities in comedy Italian style. The high-ranking male clerical worker is therein depicted as a paradigm of successful masculinity in the Italian economy's boom years. A trademark of successful masculinity, office design and its filmic representations has evolved throughout the decades, to reflect status and rank, and also a muted aesthetic taste. Comedy Italian style was not the first to represent office interior space as much as to appropriate it (alongside the restaurant, the beach, and the modern kitchen) to express a new paradigm of success and participate in the establishment of modern societal practices. Failure to live up to these standards of professional and, most importantly, financial success is at the center of most comedies Italian style depicting life in the office. This essay considers films such as Gianni Puccini's 1959 *L'impiegato*, Dino Risi's *I complessi* (1965) and *Vedo Nudo* (1969), along with some selected examples from 1970s *Fantozzi* film series. In the cyclical reiteration of his failure, Fantozzi is the antithesis of the ideal of the man of success, by definition the climatic point of a gradual process of self-betterment, which the films' very episodic nature precludes.

**Keywords:** office, labor culture, troubled masculinity, Fantozzi, grotesque.

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# Italian Office Workers from Comedy Italian Style to Ugo Fantozzi: A Gendered Perspective

PAOLA D'AMORA

Represented as a typically “male-codified” space, the office is a privileged site of production of masculine identities in comedy Italian style.<sup>1</sup> The high-ranking male clerical worker is therein depicted as a paradigm of successful masculinity in the Italian economy’s boom years. Combining charisma, leadership, and elegance, the business manager stands as a path to modern consumption patterns by showing what it means to be a man at the time of male-targeted cosmetic products. Failure to live up to these standards of professional and, most importantly, financial success is at the center of most comedies Italian style depicting life in the office. Media representations of these new models of masculinity are extensively studied in Sandro Bellassai’s work, *L’invenzione della virilità* (2011), in which print and television advertisements are examined as a compromise between the old, traditional values, and the modern demands of consumer culture. Bellassai’s study, and in particular his attention to ads targeted at office workers, offers an ideal lens through which to investigate Italian cinema’s response to such societal changes. Bellassai has highlighted the ways in which a sense of alienation, uncertainty, and bewilderment underpinned the new idea of the successful man: the tone of such representations was decidedly pessimistic, like a dismayed description of a battlefield after the enemy’s victory.<sup>2</sup> For the ways they point to the consequences of an inhumane modernity threatening the biological extinction of the man *qua* male, and an inherent risk of male feminization, cinematic representations of working masculinity such as Federico Fellini’s *La dolce vita* (1960), Luchino Visconti’s *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (*Rocco and his Brothers*, 1960), or novels like Luciano Bianciardi’s *La vita agra* (*It’s a Hard Life*, 1963), reflect the new *status quo*.<sup>3</sup> Shaped through the reassuring language of the media, the new model of masculinity sought a compromise between traditional notions of Spartan, unembellished virility and the demands of consumer culture, proposing that greater care be paid to male beauty and style.<sup>4</sup> “Success” was a critical term in the vocabulary of media divulgence of reformed models of masculinity, and one used to supplant traditional values from the past: the new man was meant to pursue ambition and avoid indulging in any activity not immediately translatable into materialistic advantage for the individual. Tolerant towards women and relatively liberal, the new man had to appear “inclined towards life’s pleasures and luxury goods; moderately narcissistic and individualistic; brilliant in society and competitive; pragmatic, skeptical, and cynical as needed.”<sup>5</sup>

In combining efficiency, success, and hierarchy, the *cultura di stampo aziendalista*, or the business-inspired culture, emerged as the ideal synthesis between traditional and modern masculine attributes and offered a male-dominated world in which the managerial figure struck a perfect balance between interpersonal skills and authority in disciplining unruliness and indolence.<sup>6</sup> Failure to live up to these standards of success is the focus of most of the Italian comedies featuring models of frustrated masculinity, typically identified with some well-known personas interpreted by actors like Marcello Mastroianni, Alberto Sordi, and Nino Manfredi, among others. The figure of the *inetto*, the inept man,

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<sup>1</sup> Fullwood, *Cinema, Gender and Everyday Space in Comedy, Italian Style*, 96.

<sup>2</sup> Bellassai, *L’invenzione della virilità*, 112.

<sup>3</sup> Bellassai, 112. All translations from Italian to English and from English to Italian are mine.

<sup>4</sup> As Bellassai explains, traditional virility entailed ethical rigor, respect for one’s homeland, and a sense of abnegation and sacrifice. Bellassai, 116.

<sup>5</sup> Bellassai, 115.

<sup>6</sup> Bellassai, 119.

studied and described through Mastroianni's performances in Jacqueline Reich's volume *Beyond the Latin Lover*, is described as an anti-hero, "a man in conflict with an unsettled and at times unsettling political and sexual environment."<sup>7</sup> Often characterized by his passivity, the *inetto* is further defined by increased artistic sensitivity and intellectualism. In sharing with the narcissistic type the need for external validation of his own self-worth, the *inetto* tries to mask his mediocrity behind the façade of the *bella figura*, "the public manifestation of the private self through behavior and appearance" thus conceding to the performative character of Italian masculinity.<sup>8</sup>

Scholarly attention has been increasingly drawn to the use of certain spaces in comedy Italian style signifiers of wealth and as a commonly intelligible status symbol. The beach, the nightclub, the modern kitchen, and the car, among others, seemingly reflect and in most cases populate the desires and ambitions of the people for whom these luxury items and practices are still unavailable and unattainable. To borrow Mariapia Comand's succinct and effective interpretation of the renovated spaces of comedy Italian style, "the choice of the *habitat* suggests the *habitus*," as to signal the coexistence of old and new social and behavioral patterns.<sup>9</sup> While not new to the Italian cinematic tradition, in this period the office acquires some modern and elegant features on its way to becoming the ideal setting for the representation of the prototypically successful man. A spacious, modern office is in contrast with the cubicle layout reflecting a man's subordinate rank and inferior position. Films such as Carlo Lizzani's *La vita agra* (1964) and Dino Risi's *Il profeta* (1968) offer examples in which spatial constraints exacerbate workers' malaise and each film offers an extreme solution: either bombing the workplace or unexpectedly pulling up stakes in order to lead a more reclusive lifestyle.

A trademark of successful masculinity, office design and its filmic representations has evolved throughout the decades, to reflect status and rank, and also a muted aesthetic taste. On this matter, in her work *Cinema, Gender and Everyday Space: Comedy, Italian Style*, Natalie Fullwood explains: "The shift in executive office design is a spatial representation of changing models of successful masculinity. This is not to say that the films were reflecting a changed state of affairs, but rather that they were participating, throughout their representation of office spaces, in a wider debate taking place via the media on what models of successful masculinity might look like."<sup>10</sup> Carmine de Carmine (Renato Rascel) makes his appearance in his supervisor's bombastic office in Alberto Lattuada's *Il cappotto* (1942), where he is confronted with austere, antique, and imposing furniture as totems of privilege and prestige. The magnified office interior crushes Rascel's into Lilliputian dimensions—an ominous reminder of his inferior rank. The interior office space in Gianni Puccini's *L'impiegato* (1959), sited in a historical building in the center of Rome, also reflects the traditional Italian aesthetic in its frescoed ceilings and antique furniture.<sup>11</sup> Modern office layouts feature "streamlined, modular furniture, venetian blinds, an aesthetic of perpendicular lines, and iconic modern accessories; the executive ashtray and the designer lamp become key props," elements proposed and advertised through a wide repertoire of pictures published on the monthly magazine "L'ufficio moderno," in which best organizational practices to maximize efficiency were also discussed.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover*, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Reich, 25.

<sup>9</sup> Comand, *Commedia all'italiana*, 15.

<sup>10</sup> Fullwood, *Cinema, Gender and Everyday Space in Comedy, Italian Style*, 101.

<sup>11</sup> Other examples of this kind of traditional aesthetic are found in *Il vedovo*, *Il moralista*, and *I complessi*.

<sup>12</sup> Fullwood, *Cinema, Gender and Everyday Space in Comedy, Italian Style*, 100.

*Office-Centered Narratives: A Roadmap*

While acknowledging the great complexity of comedy Italian style as a cultural and artistic phenomenon, I intentionally limited my scope here to the analysis of a few case studies in which office work is functional to the film's narrative development. The present investigation does not intend to be an exhaustive catalog of all comedies Italian style featuring interior office space; it is instead a reflection on filmic representations of Italian labor culture in some critical years of expansion of the service sector in Italy.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, this essay does not aim to propose a new critical approach in the interpretation of comedy Italian style as a genre; rather, it subscribes to, and builds on, extant scholarship with the hope of making a contribution to the discourse of labor in Italian cinema from the point of view of office workers. Significant recent scholarly attention has focused on the representation of blue-collar workers and the factory, especially with regard to their social and political prominence.<sup>14</sup> To my knowledge, no Italian or English language study has exclusively examined representations of office workers in Italian cinema; these films have been catalogued and regarded in the light of a broader discourse on cinematic representations of labor, with no particular distinction paid to each category's specificity. This scarce interest might be ascribed to an inherent lack of cinematic appeal that a subject like an office work might offer and as a consequence, to the limited availability of office-centered film productions from the period I explore.

The rapid expansion of the Italian service sector brought about a radical shift in labor culture along with an exponential growth in the demand of office-based employment. Mandatory schooling also contributed to the creation of this "army" of office workers and their urbanization. The sizeable magnitude of this cultural phenomenon is widely represented in cinema, and in comedy Italian style, with a particular emphasis on the everyman's struggle to adapt to these socio-cultural changes. My specific interest in the topic at hand originally stems from the popular cultural phenomenon of the Fantozzi film saga, which, released in the mid-1970s, effectively frames and comments upon the previous decade's deluded expectations of unlimited upward trajectory of development and progress through the lens of parody. Searching for Fantozzi's genesis, and with the aim to more firmly ground this figure and its extraordinary success, I focus on comedy Italian style. A gender-oriented investigation of this narrative genealogy will help identify continuities and common tropes.

I will first focus on one film *L'impiegato* by Gianni Puccini, and two episodes from Dino Risi's films, "Una giornata decisiva" and "Ornella," respectively from *I complessi* (1965) and *Vedo Nudo* (1969). These films and episodes have been chosen for their strong internal continuities, which are: Nino Manfredi is the protagonist of each text; Manfredi appears as an office worker; and each text centers on office work. This is followed by an examination of the fictional character Ugo Fantozzi, created and played by Italian comedian Paolo Villaggio. Fantozzi's films constitute a saga of extraordinary, intergenerational success among Italian audiences whose popularity has outlived the recently deceased Villaggio. Fantozzi is without a doubt known and appreciated as the prototypical representation of an office worker in Italian cinema. I do not regard 1970s cinema, and of Fantozzi among the others, as the result of the death and decomposition of auteur cinema and comedy Italian style from the previous decade. My attempt to draw continuities and transformations between these

<sup>13</sup> British historian Paul Ginsborg reports the massive numeric increase of the third sector as a prominent feature of those years and subsequent decades. Growing from 1,970,000 in 1951, to 2,650,000 in 1961, and 3,300,000 in 1971, white-collar workers were "the fastest growing sector of the Italian workforce." Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 237.

<sup>14</sup> Among the others, see Edoardo Zaccagnini's 2007 *I mostri al lavoro: contadini, operai, commendatori ed impiegati nella commedia all'italiana*, Elisa Veronesi's 2004 *Cinema e lavoro: la rappresentazione dell'identità adulta fra miti, successo e precarietà*, and Carlo Carotti's 1992 *Alla ricerca del paradiso: l'operaio nel cinema italiano*, all engaging with the working class as a homogeneous entity.

two periods of Italian cinema is not meant as a descending (nor ascending) trajectory of some qualitative nature. I instead examine filmic productions from these two periods as a reflection and a product of the cultural and social milieus in which they were produced. Finally, Fantozzi's films are analyzed here for their own intrinsic value in relation to the Italian labor culture they interpret and represent, as well as in the light of the prominent cultural and stylistic legacy of comedy Italian style, within the scope of the films I study. In the present essay, I will not address Soviet authors, such as Nikolai Gogol, for their literary rendition of the life and miseries of the bureaucrats of Imperial Russia, or Franz Kafka's style, which have also seemingly influenced and inspired Fantozzi's film series.<sup>15</sup>

### *Women in the Office*

Traditionally anchored to male, heterosexual star personas, comedy Italian style as a genre capitalizes on its protagonists' failure to comply with social norms and gender-dictated expectations, which include keeping up with the pace of modernization through securing their families' and their own individual access to luxury consumptions goods and summer vacations. Women are principally depicted in the familial context as demanding wives exacerbating and often taking to comic extreme their husbands' sense of inadequacy, such as in Vittorio De Sica's *Il boom* (1963). In this film, for example, in order to provide for his wife's luxurious lifestyle, Giovanni Alberti (Alberto Sordi) agrees to sell his own eye to a rich one-eyed businessman in need of a donor for a cornea transplant. Dino Risi's *Il profeta* similarly depicts the wife character as the perfect consumer whose unrealistic expectations and insatiable demands lead her husband (Vittorio Gassman) to abandon his household and his car in the midst of a Sunday traffic jam in favor of the secluded life of a hermit.

Commonly codified as a male-dominated genre, comedy Italian style represents men's failure to fulfill women's expectations, and live up to a certain standard of financial and romantic success. Natalie Fullwood salutarily identifies the relatively scarce attention paid to female characters beyond their sex appeal, a trait particularly evident in office-centered narratives.<sup>16</sup> However limited in number and centrality, female workers are a constant presence in Italian comedies depicting life in the office. Often anchored to the role of secretaries at the side of a more prominent male managerial figure, female workers only acquire narrative relevance in the context of office romance. Films such as Dino Risi's *Vedo nudo* and *I complessi*, in the respective episodes "Ornella" and "Una giornata decisiva," include the roles of Ms. Carletti (the protagonist's potential partner) and Gabriella (object of his romantic interest). Aesthetically appealing female secretaries are included in office narratives as the prerogative of high-ranking managerial figures, as partners in extra-marital affairs, at best, or less notably, as the pure decorative accessory of an elegant and sleek office design.

Gianni Puccini's *L'impiegato* stands out as a noticeable exception to this trend. Young and attractive inspector Jacobetti (Eleonora Rossi Drago) holds a managerial role in an office dominated by insubordinate male workers. Tasked with modernizing both the inefficient mindset and the counter-productive office design of the Roman *Ufficio beni immobili*—where Nando Guida (Nino Manfredi) is employed—Jacobetti confronts the established practice of the leisurely paced workday wherein "time is not wasted, it is rather used to one's own advantage."<sup>17</sup> The workers' resistance to

<sup>15</sup> For a study on the topic, see Emilio Cagnoni in *Fantozzi e Kafka, il ragioniere sotto processo e le sue tragicomiche mutazioni* (Roma: L'epos, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> Fullwood, *Cinema, Gender, and Everyday Space in Comedy Italian Style*, 11.

<sup>17</sup> "In questo ufficio non si perde tempo, lo si usa a proprio vantaggio" clarifies the *Ufficio beni immobili* director to a patron lamenting the employees' inefficiency.

Jacobetti's modernization practices, along with her romantic involvement with Nando, eventually softens her disposition and austere demeanor, thus leading to her resignation.

Although exceptional for its employment of a strong female role in the office, *L'impiegato* reinstates the inherently conservative principles dominating most of its contemporary filmic production. Jacobetti's resignation re-establishes the initial *status quo* and traditional gender roles: she is stripped of both her task and her clothes—she is shown in sexy lingerie in one of Nando's reveries—thus allowing the Roman workers to continue undisturbed in the performance of their duties, at their leisurely pace. Inspector Jacobetti's intervention in the Roman office threatens to diminish the workers' gender performativity. Not only are the workers thwarted in their attempts to sexually objectify the inspector, and in this way symbolically castrated, but their customary work avoidance, a trademark of successful masculinity in most office-centered narratives, is curbed.

Nando is a bachelor who lives with his sister, Lisetta, who provides for their household maintenance with domestic work. She represents an ancillary role in support of her brother's office employment and assists him in his daily routine of grooming and dressing, a scene expanded and loosely re-proposed in *Fantozzi* (1975), where Pina Fantozzi has taken Lisetta's in expediting her husband's morning ritual. As Maggie Gunsberg explains, while the actors of comedy Italian style impersonate an "Everyman type" Italianness, "their various ostensibly ungendered Everyman images do not include 'woman.' On the contrary, they serve to ensure that masculinity and its interests dominate the screen, to the exclusion of the feminine point of view."<sup>18</sup> Marginal or scarcely successful female roles are nothing new, as Lucia Cardone explains in the conclusive part of her gendered analysis of comedy Italian style—"even when they prevail over men, at best, they [women] succeed in securing for themselves a better accommodation within the limited spectrum of acceptable roles, maybe comforted by a modern household, or by appearing as astute and unfaithful wives, shrewd lovers, or emancipated women."<sup>19</sup>

While fully endorsing Gunsberg's and Cardone's observations on the centrality of the male point of view in comedy Italian style, I wish to shift the attention to two examples in which the male bearer of the look is feminized to the advantage of more dominant forms of masculinity.

### *L'inetto at Work: Nino Manfredi's Personas*

"Una giornata decisiva" is part of a three-episode 1965 film by Dino Risi, in which Nino Manfredi features as Quirino Raganelli, a prototype of ineptitude.<sup>20</sup> This thirty-minute sequence is a crescendo of misunderstandings in which Quirino, in love with his colleague Gabriella (Ilaria Occhini) and preparing to marry her, proves nonetheless unable to protect her from the unwanted attention of her former suitor, Alvaro. Tormented by self-doubt and introversion, inclined to passivity, non-confrontational Quirino is incapable of taking control of his sentimental situation. He eventually

<sup>18</sup> Gunsberg, *Italian Cinema: Gender and Genre*, 62.

<sup>19</sup> "In fondo non c'è nulla di veramente nuovo... nelle altre donne della commedia all'italiana: anche quando hanno la meglio sull'uomo, riescono tutt'al più ad assicurarsi una sistemazione migliore nell'orizzonte dei ruoli consentiti, magari confortate dalle comodità dei ménage moderni, attestandosi come mogli furbe e infedeli, amanti astute o donne emancipate." Cardone, "Donne impreviste," 27.

<sup>20</sup> The second episode features Ugo Tognazzi in "Il complesso della schiava nubiana," while the third, "Guglielmo il dentone," features Alberto Sordi.

attracts his other female colleague, Miss Giulia, who exploits Quirino's politeness and indecisiveness, leading him to her house, where she literally and metaphorically locks him in.

An accountant at Ultramarket, Quirino plans to take advantage of a company-sponsored day trip hosted by his manager to finally propose to Gabriella. The episode's reliance on Manfredi's own voiceover to expose his thoughts in several, scattered moments of introspective reflection serves to heighten his ineptitude vis-à-vis his more proactive, determined peers. The episode shows a succession of Quirino's failed attempts at impressing or simply approaching Gabriella: overly focused on picking his words and planning his next move in order to impress her with a *bella figura*, he acts too late or not at all. Once at the villa, a violent thunderstorm interrupts the reception and Quirino and Gabriella take shelter in a poolside cabana, in which Gabriella encourages the marriage proposal. Gabriella involved with the older, married Alvaro hopes that Quirino's intercession will help bring the affair to a close.

Quirino's lack of assertiveness is overcompensated by his excess of introspection and apprehension. While not directly taking place in the Ultramarket's offices, the episode displays clearly defined power imbalances among the employees by reinstating them. Like schoolboys on a trip, the workers play tricks at the expense of weaker, or, like in Quirino's case, less assertive individuals. The weakest in the group, he is physically pushed in front of Ultramarket's president and forced to deliver a speech in the name of all the workers. When offered several occasions to propose to Gabriella or to compliment her, Quirino introduces new, unrelated topics of conversation. Manipulated and outsmarted by Giulia, he is dragged to her apartment and introduced to her parents as her suitor. His extreme sensitivity leads him to fall prey to the blatant dishonesty of Alvaro, who succeeds in convincing Quirino of the difficulties inherent to his position, torn as he is, between Gabriella's demands and compassion for his miserable wife, who would not survive the end of their marriage.

"Una giornata decisiva" capitalizes on a crescendo of misunderstandings Quirino proves unable to clarify. Traditional elements of comedy Italian style are in place, exacerbated in their gender dichotomies and expectations about Quirino's ineptitude vis-à-vis the romantic pursuit. Not unlike other films from the same genre, this comedy showcases Manfredi's character's inability to cope with modern society in favor of his older, more experienced colleagues such as Alvaro. And yet, several elements in the episode suggests a feminization of his point of view in both his inability to disclose his feelings towards a complacent woman (Gabriella) and make them public, and in falling victim himself to his suitor (Giulia). A complete overturning of the male pursuer/female pursued dichotomy exacerbates the gender role reversal thus presenting Quirino's point of view as feminine.

A later film (1969) from the same director features Nino Manfredi in the role of Ercole/Ornella, a post office worker. It is the episode "Ornella," from Dino Risi's *Vedo Nudo*, a seven-part catalog of sex-centered narratives, each starring Manfredi in the role of different men variously dominated by their sexual quirks, ranging from zoophilia, to love for engines—a wealthy businessman can only get aroused while lying on a railroad, underneath a passing train.<sup>21</sup> A play on transvestitism,

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<sup>21</sup> In the first episode, "La diva," Manfredi is professor Cacopardo, head physician in a hospital where a famous actress (Sylvia Koscina) drives a man seriously injured from a car accident. Physicians and nurses, along with Cacopardo, are thrilled about Koscina's presence and leave the hospital unattended to talk to her and take pictures. When the actress finally leaves, it is too late for the injured man. In the second episode, "Udienza a porte chiuse," Manfredi performs in the role of a semi-literate, central Italian farmer, who is on trial for having sexually abused a hen. Being summoned by the hen's owners, he has to repay them with the value of the animal, 5,000 liras, and can eventually take it home with him. The third episode is "Ornella," which I examine in greater detail in the above section. In episode four, "Guardone," Manfredi is a voyeur, who after spying on a woman getting undressed in the opposite building, realizes that in fact the person on whom he has been spying, is a reflection of his own body in a mirror. Episode five, "L'ultima vergine," features a slight change: the protagonist is a woman from Spoleto, who, refusing her suitors, is preserving her virginity. The city is terrified of the presence of a serial killer assaulting women and so is she, who is left alone in her apartment by her mother, who had to leave for Rome to attend a funeral. After having spent the night in fear, the very next day, a

the episode “Ornella” pivots on a series of binary inversions: props and phrases are flipped in order to reiterate the gender reversal enacted by Ercole/Ornella, the protagonist.

Employed at a post office in Rome, Ercole attracts his colleagues’ attention and in particular, Miss Carletti’s, for, despite being single, he proves indifferent to her manifest romantic interest. Curiosity develops, as Carletti begins to inquire about Ercole’s private life by making conjectures about his potential involvement with a married woman. The episode narrative transitions from the public space of the post office to the intimacy of his apartment, where he is finally able to open and comfortably read a letter addressed to Ornella Dominici. In a woman’s gown and slippers, his hair parted on the side to contour his face, Ercole/Ornella shares with his cat, Fabiola, the warm, affectionate words of his correspondent, Carlo Alberto Ribaud (Enrico Maria Salerno). Despite never having met her in person, Carlo Alberto has grown enamored with Ornella, whose letters, as he admits, largely surpass in grace and femininity those from other women responding to his posting in a magazine. Determined to see Ornella, Carlo Alberto informs her about his imminent business trip to Rome and suggests they meet. Forced by the circumstances, Ercole pretends to be Ornella’s brother to excuse his sister’s absence. However, a series of mix-ups complicates Ercole’s story as a consequence of Carlo Alberto’s pressing questions about his sister and her personality.

New to the city, Carlo Alberto is hosted at Ercole’s house, which he presents as Ornella’s; the simultaneous presence of men’s and women’s toiletries and pieces of clothing baffles Carlo Alberto, who attributes this oddity to Ornella’s emotional unavailability. From this point on, the narrative pivots around Ercole’s maladroitness attempts to hide the truth from Carlo Alberto. While identifying himself as heterosexual, Carlo Alberto indulges into intimate revelations about his relationship with his deceased wife, Rosina, building up to Ercole’s discomfort towards his patently repressed need for homosociality and eventually, oblivious misogyny. Pervaded by a sense of relief immediately following Rosina’s funeral, Carlo Alberto describes her as a materialistic, sexually demanding woman. Ornella’s intelligence and sensitivity, so unusual for a woman, he confesses, are qualities he seeks in a partner, who, regardless of their physical appearance, could constitute his ideal life companion with their sole inner beauty. The episode culminates with Carlo Alberto’s decision to spend the night in what he still believes is Ornella’s apartment. Incongruities within Ercole’s narrative about his sister’s life and personality develop, especially when at bedtime he appears in a female nightgown. A close-up dwells on his alarmed expression as, upon turning off the lights to sleep, Carlo Alberto casually addresses him with a “Buonanotte, Ornella.”

The episode predicates on a succession of binary inversions evocative of Ercole/Ornella’s transvestitism. Upon his arrival, Ercole justifies his presence in his sister’s apartment by claiming to be in charge of feeding the plants and watering the cat; Ercole wants to make Carlo Alberto comfortable by asking him if he needs to use the restroom to wash his feet, not his hands—as he meant; they swap sugar and salt in the preparation of recipes, respectively adding them to pasta and

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man, Manfredi, who remarkably resembles the pictures circulated by the media, shows up at her door. In the hope to have her life spared, she undresses and drags the man to bed. The sexual encounter is consumed, and while still in bed with the alleged murderer, she turns on the television to learn that the serial killer has been captured. Episode six, “Motrice mia!” stars Manfredi in the role of a man affected by an unconventional sexual oddity: he can only get sexually aroused by lying on the rails, while a train is passing. He gets in touch with the train station to gather information about the train connecting Paris to Rome; after a spat with his wife, he leaves the apartment and soon reveals the nature of his romantic encounter; he is going to the station to fulfill his erotic desire. In the final episode, after which the film is named, Manfredi is a man affected by a peculiar problem: he can see all women naked. After a collapse, for which he is treated in a clinic, he is finally healed and discharged from what has been diagnosed as “a sexual induced intoxication” due to his job—he works in the advertisement industry—and to the overwhelming presence of nudity all around him, which among the other problems, causes him to be physically impotent with women. However, he soon discovers that his disease has not been cured, it has just evolved into something different: he sees naked men.



espresso; finally, presented with a portrait of Ercole's mother he mistakenly believes her to be his father due the presence of a dark shade on her upper lip, which is in fact a moustache. This series of mix-ups is functional to the blurring and confounding of Carlo Alberto's expectations about gender, which in fact prove to be utterly arbitrary. What Carlo Alberto deems to be Ornella's "exquisitely feminine tone" emerging from her letters is the product of a man's mind, Ercole's, with whom he shares profound affinities and numerous common interests.

In commenting upon Dino Risi's artistic predilection towards episodic films, Gian Piero Brunetta assimilates the director's penchant for collecting and classifying the diverse manifestations of the human spirit to the scientific interest of an entomologist or of an anthropologist.<sup>22</sup> As a way of "registering the phenomenology of life," episode-structured films offer a repertoire of changing human types in their presenting a catalog of different case studies. When compared to Risi's most notorious episode film, *I mostri* (1963), *Vedo nudo* stands out for its emphasis on the description of several unconventional sex-centered practices, evocative, in this respect, of Foucault's identification in his *History of Sexuality*.<sup>23</sup> In compartmentalizing each human type in the space of one episode, *Vedo Nudo* isolates individual sexual practices while compiling a series of "case studies," primary object of what Foucault calls a *scientia sexualis*—a quest for the truth of sex, geared towards the formation of an interplay between knowledge and power.<sup>24</sup>

In "Ornella," homosexual desire and transvestitism are presented as part of a confessional ritual deployed through the intimate reading of letters, sheltered and enabled by the anonymity of the exchange. Functional to the production of the truth of sex, confession became a critical moment in the transformation of sex into discourse, for it prompted individuals to speak the unspeakable truth about their thoughts and desires, and in doing so contributed to the reinforcement of heterogeneous sexualities.<sup>25</sup> As a potentially progressive depiction of transgender and queer subjectivities, the film finds its limitations in its very episodic structure. Isolated and confined in the space of unrelated consecutive episodes, disparate sexual practices represented in *Vedo Nudo* are exposed and put under scrutiny in the form of a cabinet of curiosities.

The feminine tone Carlo Alberto identifies in Ornella's letters is in fact Ercole's voice. While limited or altogether absent, the female point of view is represented through Ercole's experience, which would be inappropriate to reduce to a non-dominant form of masculinity. While marginalized as a "case study" by the film's episodic nature, Ercole's character transcends traditional dichotomies by fully embracing an alternative model of gender performativity—he writes, behaves, and dresses as a woman.

### *The Fantozzi Phenomenon: Genesis and Early Development*

Accountant Ugo Fantozzi is the fictional character and protagonist of a ten-episode film saga released between 1975 and 1999. These films are structured in a succession of unrelated sketches that preserve

<sup>22</sup> Brunetta, *Storia del cinema Italiano*, 379.

<sup>23</sup> This is reminiscent of the age of classification and medicalization of sexual practices in the establishment of a behavioral norm that would secure the conservation and the proliferation of the human species, primarily the bourgeoisie. The annexation of sexual irregularities to mental illness was established, according to the French theorist, in the attempt to describe and ban all possible deviations and casual pleasures in order to "ensure population, reproduce labor capacity, and perpetuate the form of social relations." Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 36.

<sup>24</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 57.

<sup>25</sup> Foucault, 59.

an internal narrative coherence for their reliance on slight variations on the same topic—Fantozzi’s ruinous misfortune—and on the employment of the same actors throughout the years.<sup>26</sup> The series’ episodic structure also promotes a solid network of intra-textual references contributing to the creation of a notorious linguistic repertoire, reiterated and developed throughout the decades. For its reliance on standard Italian over dialect and regional varieties, we can take Fantozzi as emblematic of a kind of average Italianness, thus marking a significant turn away from traditional comicality, characterized by linguistic and moral localisms.<sup>27</sup> Part of national popular culture and collective imagination, the film series has given birth to a distinctive and currently recognizable use of the Italian language whose best exemplifications are incorrect subjunctive verbs (“vadi,” “batti,”) and plural forms (“i diti”), along with commonly quoted and understood phrases from the films.<sup>28</sup>

Fantozzi’s transmediatic trajectory is representative of a transitional decade in the evolution of spectatorship practices and stardom formation. Facilitated in their ascent to popularity by the mass-scale diffusion of television, Fantozzi’s films offer a representation of nationally shared linguistic and societal practices. Paolo Villaggio debuted with the character of the *ragioniere* in a 1968 television variety show, *Quelli della Domenica*, and subsequently in 1969, *È Domenica, ma senza impegno*, in which he became known to the vast majority of the Italian television audience along with other, less long-lived personas.<sup>29</sup> Fantozzi subsequently acquired transmediatic resonance through his literary and filmic adaptations.<sup>29</sup> These filmic adaptations preserved Fantozzi’s relevance and fame until today, over forty years since its first movie theater appearance in 1975.<sup>30</sup> A synonym of maladroitness and submissiveness, the adjective “fantozziano” is a universally known reference among the great majority of native Italian speakers, as well as a testament to the film series’ enduring popularity.

Fantozzi stands out as the prototypical representation of the Italian *impiegato*, a subordinate office worker whose entire existence is defined and dominated by his rank and his signature work attire, his a suit and a *coppola*, or flat cap. Fantozzi’s work and leisure time dramatically overlap in a seemingly perennial extension of his time at the office; Ragionier Filini, his co-worker, is the inexorable organizer of independent and company-sponsored disastrous initiatives, at times escorted by the ominous presence of the infamous *nuvoletta dell’impiegato*, a small personal cloud looming over Fantozzi’s head and promptly releasing torrential rain. Leisure time interactions are therefore represented as a reinstatement and reiteration of office-based power structures whereby dominant colleagues prevail over Fantozzi, and are in return subjected to the management’s rules.

The Fantozzi film series portrays a successful parody of work and leisure time consumption by representing the ultimate failure of the 1960s’ dream of wealth and upward mobility. Unregulated

<sup>26</sup> With the exception of Pina Fantozzi, interpreted by Liu Bosisio, subsequently replaced by Milena Vukotic, and Geometra Calboni, interpreted by Giuseppe Anatrelli, replaced, after his death in 1981, by Riccardo Garrone.

<sup>27</sup> Anzemo, *Gli anni delle cose*, 25.

<sup>28</sup> Among the others: “La poltrona in pelle umana,” “la salivazione azzerata,” and “La Corazzata Kotiomkin è una cagata pazzesca.”

<sup>29</sup> Inspiration for Fantozzi’s films comes from Paolo Villaggio’s novels about the life and work of accountant Ugo Fantozzi. A prolific writer, Villaggio has authored several books. Among the others published by Rizzoli are: *Fantozzi* (1971), *Il secondo tragico libro di Fantozzi* (1974), *Le lettere di Fantozzi* (1976), *Fantozzi contro tutti* (1979), and *Fantozzi subisce ancora* (1983). For the Mondadori publishing house, Villaggio wrote: *Caro Direttore, ci scrivo...: lettere del tragico Ragioniere, raccolte da Paolo Villaggio* (1993), *Fantozzi saluta e se ne va: le ultime lettere del rag. Ugo Fantozzi* (1994), and *Tragica vita del Ragioniere Fantozzi* (2012).

<sup>30</sup> The ten films include: *Fantozzi* (1975), *Il secondo tragico Fantozzi* (1976), *Fantozzi contro tutti* (1980), *Fantozzi subisce ancora* (1983), *Superfantozzi* (1986), *Fantozzi va in pensione* (1988), *Fantozzi alla riscossa* (1990), *Fantozzi in paradiso* (1993), *Fantozzi-Il ritorno* (1996), and *Fantozzi 2000-La clonazione* (1999).

domain of bodily exposure and seasonal indulgence in comedy Italian style, the beach in *Fantozzi* is instead configured as the receptacle of consumer society's waste—a desolated and desolating landscape of plastic and contamination. The rat-fish and Franchino are the two startling evolutionary outcomes that testify to the irreversible corruption of nature and society in *Fantozzi subisce ancora* (1983). The former are the swarming inhabitants of the beach-landfill, while the latter parodies a leftist intellectual whom harshly condemns Fantozzi and his colleagues for their disengagement from high culture and their poorly concealed bourgeois moral bigotry. A similar scenario is presented in *Il secondo tragico Fantozzi* (1976), on the occasion of Fantozzi and Filini's Sunday hunt. Advertised by the organizer, Filini, as a secluded, prime location for hunting, the area is instead represented as an overly crowded arena (620 hunters in 14 square meters, as the voice-over informs) of mano-a-mano battle. Other men are the only available shooting targets, given the utter absence of wildlife—a tragic metaphor for the human struggle for survival upon depletion of natural resources. In conjunction with these other widely explored and exploited spaces of unchecked consumption, the office is represented as the stage of human toil and labor in the perennial pursuit and maintenance of dissatisfactory and self-destructing, post-modern, everyday practices.

Comedy Italian style was not the first to represent office interior space.<sup>31</sup> Rather, it has rather appropriated the office (alongside the restaurant, the beach, and the modern kitchen) to express a new paradigm of success and participate in the establishment of modern societal practices. Confined, overcrowded, and monitored office spaces aggravate workers' conditions in the representation of their malaise vis-à-vis their supervisors—whose status is reflected in spacious, elegant, executive offices. Similarly, the *Fantozzi* film saga is not unprecedented in the depiction of subordinate employees' sharp disadvantage in the spatial allocation of office resources; it has rather appropriated and represented such trope in the terms of parody. Claudio Giunta has observed that, prior to the transmediatic appearance of the *Fantozzi* character, some of his main and most successful features had already been seen in cinematic predecessors. As Giunta observed, “Villaggio has been able to give us something that we did not have before: it is not submission or deference, which are tropes already present in Bersezio's *Travet*; it is not the unbearable climate of hostility in the office, the cold war among colleagues, which was already a motif in Gogol; it is something similar to what Bakhtin has called the ‘de-crowning of the hero.’”<sup>32</sup> The management of the Megaditta, where Fantozzi is employed, is a parody of the once authoritative, intimidating supervisors populating executive suites in the previous decades. Modern interior design has gained the proverbial features that have now penetrated the Italian collective imagination—above all, the chair made of human skin, the infamous “poltrona in pelle umana,” crafted with the skin of former employees as a token of loyalty and unconditional dedication to their managers.

The Megaditta leadership is a sacred entity; the employees' relationship to management is one of deference and blind obedience, that is, faith. Management occupies the top floor of the building to which the employees are allowed to ascend as a post-mortem journey to the after-life. In the first episode of the film saga, *Fantozzi* (1975), the accountant is escorted to the Megadirettore Galattico's office where he is granted the possibility of repentance and absolution for his radical anti-capitalist ideological positions. Fantozzi can eventually appreciate the infamous chair (whose human skin he

<sup>31</sup> Among previous examples of interior office space we find Mario Soldati's 1945 *Le miserie del signor Travet* (*His Young Wife*), and Alberto Lattuada's 1952 *Il cappotto* (*The Overcoat*), just to name a few.

<sup>32</sup> “Villaggio ha saputo darci qualcosa che prima non c'era: non la sottomissione e l'ossequio, che sono dei luoghi comuni dai tempi del *Travet* di Bersezio; e nemmeno l'aria irrespirabile dell'ufficio, la guerra silenziosa tra impiegati, che è già un motivo di Gogol; ma qualcosa di simile a ciò che Bakhtin ha chiamato lo ‘scoronamento dell'eroe.’” Giunta, “Diventare Fantozzi,” 2.

identifies as Ragionier Fonelli's) and becomes part of a decorative aquarium, where worthy employees blissfully swim and savor the beatitude of the afterlife.

A rigidly structured corporation, the lower division of Megaditta is managed by dubious characters who gain the leadership through hereditary succession—the whim of the many counts, viscounts, dukes, and other nobility subjects Fantozzi and his colleagues to capricious and preposterous office rules. In the second film of the saga, *Il secondo tragico Fantozzi* (1976), as a result of a raffle held in the firm's cafeteria, Fantozzi is awarded the privilege to escort the Duca Conte Semenzara to his yearly trip to the renowned Monte Carlo Casino—a much desirable experience for all employees, who, in case of victory, were considered to bring good luck and therefore promoted to lifelong benefits. In the span of two hours, as a consequence of the Duca Conte's fruitful bets, Fantozzi is portrayed in an office made gradually more sophisticated by the appearance of fancy props in alternate montage with piles of tokens appearing on Semenzara's table at the casino. Villaggio's voiceover describes the accountant's fortuitous professional ascent:

In quelle due ore salì vertiginosamente quasi tutti i gradini della gerarchia aziendale, anche a tre a tre. *Impiegato di settima*: scrivania in mogano, poltroncina in skai o finta pelle, telefono, pianta di ficus, simbolo del potere. *Impiegato di quinta*: lampada di opalina, piano di cristallo, naïf jugoslavo alla parete, due piante di ficus. *Impiegato di prima*: quattro piante di ficus, tre telefoni, dittafono, sei quadri naïf, tappeto e moquette per terra. Era arrivato fino alla soglia della dirigenza, vale a dire: serra di piante di ficus e poltrona in pelle umana, quando la fortuna voltò rovinosamente le spalle al Semenzara.<sup>33</sup>

At the apex of Fantozzi's fortuitous rise to the highest rank in the firm, Semenzara begins to lose money. Held responsible for the ruinous outcome of the game, the Duca Conte brutally dismisses Fantozzi addressing him as *menagramo*, a jinx. Along with his good reputation as bearer of good luck, the accountant is deprived of all perspectives of professional advancement, loosely dependent upon the whim of the alternate fortune affecting the Duca Conte's gambling.

The episode clearly undermines the equation between success and hard work, for incompetent, superstitious, and foolish individuals alternate in the Megaditta's management. Fantozzi's professional ascent is a short-lived mirage, at the end of which he finds himself tied at 12<sup>th</sup> rank, the firm's lowest. His desk is located in a corner underneath a staircase, piled high with paperwork his colleagues have dumped on him. Fantozzi's extended work schedule is a recurring trope throughout the saga, in which it is abundantly clear that no promotion or reward can possibly ensue. The opposite is true; being successful means getting away with not working. Miss Silvani, Fantozzi's historical crush, can conveniently relieve herself from work by passing it on Fantozzi and leave early in the company of the shrewd Geometra Calboni, Fantozzi's rival in the romantic pursuit of Silvani.

As the failure of both his professional and romantic endeavors demonstrate, Fantozzi can only experience scattered, provisional, illusory moments of ascent irrevocably culminating in the re-establishment of the initial order—be it his return to a lowly rank following a temporary, fortuitous promotion, or his meager return home to his wife after an ill-fated romantic escape. The episodic nature of *Fantozzi* films underscores a narrative circularity epitomizing the title character's immutable and unredeemable position vis-à-vis his cannier co-workers. In the cyclical reiteration of his failure, Fantozzi is the antithesis of the ideal of the man of success, by definition the climatic point of a gradual

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<sup>33</sup> “Luckily enough, in those two hours, Fantozzi rapidly climbed all ranks of the firm's hierarchy. *Seventh rank employee*: mahogany desk, leatherette or faux leather chair, telephone, a ficus plant, symbol of power. *Fifth rank employee*: opaline lamp, crystal desktop, naïve-style Yugoslavian painting, two ficus plants. *First rank employee*: four ficus plants, three telephones, a dictaphone, six naïve paintings, rug and carpet. He climbed up to the threshold of leadership, that is: a greenhouse worth of ficus plants and a human skin chair, when Fortune ferociously turned her back to Semenzara.”

process of self-betterment, which the films' very episodic nature precludes.

Consistent in its focus on the character of Ugo Fantozzi, throughout the decades and since its release, the film series has engendered a well-established, still vital mythography of a loser, the modern-day cinematic heir of comedy Italian style's figure of the *inetto*, the inept man. While sharing with the *inetto* a fundamental failure to succeed, Fantozzi has lost any intellectual, introspective inclination inasmuch as the corporeal and the body have become the pivots of his ineptitude. The obsessive insistence on Fantozzi's miniscule, mutilated, dysfunctional, genitalia speaks to his inability to succeed in the public space of the office, as well as in private, thus actualizing the risk of emasculation vis-à-vis more dominant forms of masculinity. This risk, connected to the display of one's deviant self, presents interesting continuities with *la bella figura*, a trope of masculinity identified and analyzed through comedies Italian style in the context of the construction of Sicilian types of masculinity in 1950s and 1960s. Aimed at protecting one's own honor and female family members' respectability, *la bella figura* is conceived as a moment of public display of qualities in front of the others, and whose reverse side, *la brutta figura*, constitutes the risk of showing a bad face in public.<sup>34</sup> For the way it indicates the dichotomy of looking/being looked at, *la bella figura* underpins the existence of a public space—which for Reich is the *piazza*—as a site of production and establishment of masculine identities.<sup>35</sup>

In the *Fantozzi* film series, the office has replaced the square as the public space where *la bella figura*, or its appalling counterpart, *la brutta figura*, unfold before the eyes of a witnessing crowd of colleagues and supervisors. Unlike the *inetto*'s quest for social and peer validation attained through successful public appearance, the loser's self-display is involuntary for he is doomed to remain the object, never the subject, of the gaze. Fantozzi's ineptitude is twofold: first, it is moral impotence for his outright lack of assertiveness and willpower in guarding his own respectability as well his family's—as constituted by wife Pina, and daughter Mariangela; secondarily, it is physical impotence, significantly suggested by the obsessive insistence on his corporeal pain and mutilation targeting especially his genitalia.

Traditional gender dichotomies are uprooted in the inherent risk of feminization and genital mutilation, reinforced and exacerbated by dominant forms of masculinity (Calboni) and grotesque reversals of idealized female beauty; Miss Silvani is the only prominent female character in the office and is represented as a parody of a *femme fatale*. Unanimously elected by her colleagues as “Miss Fourth Floor” (Miss quarto piano), Silvani is in fact represented as cynical opportunist whose affected coquetry and illusory promise of romance are means to extort favors and money from Fantozzi. Her grotesque mannerisms are continuous with Fantozzi's own domestic life and, in particular, the uncanny figures of Pina and Mariangela—the paramount embodiment of the grotesque body for her hybrid human/animal appearance, which is in fact a play on transvestitism, since a man was cast in the role.<sup>36</sup>

Produced in the 1970's cultural climate, the *Fantozzi* film series reflects in style and structure much of the filmic productions from the same time period. The films' episodic nature coheres with the stylistic choices of other directors from the late 1960s and 1970s. The *Fantozzi* series' serial nature reflects television productions more generally and the increasingly popularity of the serial format.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, slapstick elements and brief displays of nudity touch upon popular genres such as classic

<sup>34</sup> The idea, from Gloria Nardini, is elaborated in Reich's analysis of masculinities and the figure of the inept in Italian comedies in Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover*, 3.

<sup>35</sup> Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover*, 2.

<sup>36</sup> Interpreted by a boy (Plinio Fernando), Mariangela is targeted and represented as a monkey-human hybrid throughout the entire film series.

<sup>37</sup> For the serial nature of cinematic productions in the 1970s see Bellavita, “Il cinema dei mostri,” in *Gli anni delle cose*.

and erotic comedy, which, since the latter half of the 1960s depicted a society that Maurizio Grande harshly characterized as “insensitive, absent-minded, cynical, indifferent, blind, arrogant, violent, amoral, sarcastic, chameleonic, avid for success and ready to obtain it with any means.”<sup>38</sup> The series lacked, in the words of the Italian critic, any “historical memory and love for their Country, deprived as they were of any hope for the future and of a collective aspiration.”<sup>39</sup> These are the “monsters,” the heroes of a decomposing world that elected the grotesque as a key stylistic feature in the mediation of its destructive incontrollable instincts.<sup>40</sup> Paolo Villaggio’s work and popular cinema altogether are thus identified as the result of this decomposition, the morbid remains of such society, analyzed in the framework of a descending qualitative trajectory of progressive degeneration. The “triumphant servility” (trionfante servilismo) of Villaggio is configured as “reality’s raw material” (la materia bruta del reale) paving the way for “the comic gag, the obscenity, the ‘new pornography’ of dull banalities, the invasion of overflowing morbid flesh that degrades the screen to a mishmash of waste and trash.”<sup>41</sup>

This progressive trend in the history of Italian cinema has been variously addressed and interpreted as an irreversible departure from auteur cinema originating in the second half of the decade. In his scholarship on 1960s Italian cinema, Emiliano Morreale has characterized these years as interested by a “split between ‘high’ cinema, affected by a progressive decrease in audience, and popular cinema, increasingly oriented towards ‘low’ genres, from spaghetti western and *mondo-movie*, to 1970s genres such as erotic comedies, Dario Argento-style thrillers, and the ‘poliziottesco.’”<sup>42</sup> Auteur cinema and comedy Italian style’s undisputed value and legacy offer an optimal framework in the analysis of popular genres from the 1970s, however, enhancing the risk of an essentially qualitative judgment of the latter’s stylistic features, fundamentally regarded as the demise of the golden age of Italian cinema, the endpoint of a descending trajectory, rather than as a genuine product of particular cultural and social circumstances. Such approach tends to overlook the cultural and social specificities of these filmic productions to the detriment of their intrinsic value as a reflection and as a consequence of muted taste, needs, and political milieu. Giacomo Manzoli’s work on popular cinema, *Da Ercole a Fantozzi*, offers an accurate and insightful analysis of the ways in which these genres underpin complex relationships between the cinematic medium and this massive re-articulation of popular taste eventually escalating in a veritable class struggle. While presenting the Fantozzi phenomenon as the manifestation of contrasting cultural stances thereby represented, Manzoli identifies in the opposition between the employees and their management the symptoms of a latent dialectical opposition between lowbrow and highbrow culture. The great merit of this successful film saga has been, in his words, to “condense in an economic and efficient fashion a wide array of universally shared meanings that are

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<sup>38</sup> “La commedia italiana mette in scena una società sorda, distratta, cinica, indifferente, cieca, spavalda, aggressiva, amorale, beffarda, camaleontica, avida di successo e pronta a pagarlo a ogni prezzo; senza spessore storico o sentimento nazionale, priva del senso del futuro e di progettualità collettiva.” Grande, *Abiti nuziali e biglietti di banca*, 65.

<sup>39</sup> Grande, 65.

<sup>40</sup> Grande, 99.

<sup>41</sup> “È aperta la strada alla barzelletta, alla battuta oscena, alla ‘nuova pornografia’ dell’ovvietà ottusa, alla invasione della carne che straripa da ogni lato e che riduce lo schermo a una accozzaglia di rifiuti e di avanzzi.” Grande, 105.

<sup>42</sup> “A partire dalla metà del decennio si assisterà alla divaricazione tra un cinema ‘alto’ sempre più privo di pubblico, e di un cinema popolare sempre più indirizzato verso generi ‘bassi’, dal western all’italiana al mondo-movie fino ai generi degli anni Settanta come la commedia sexy, il thriller alla Dario Argento, il ‘poliziottesco’” Morreale, *Cinema d'autore degli anni Sessanta*, 10.

hard to express for the great majority of their recipients.”<sup>43</sup> Respective aspirations and interests of the Megaditta's management and their subordinate workers are thus regarded as the terms of a universally intelligible and transversally relatable cultural negotiation which the Fantozzi film saga has been able to interpret and effortlessly translate in the language of the parody.

In addition to the above-examined literature on the Fantozzi phenomenon, few other monographs have been dedicated to the subject, in addition to sporadic mentions in larger works on Italian popular cinema. It is worth remembering Emilio Cagnoni's investigation of Fantozzi and the literature of Franz Kafka, as well as Fabrizio Buratto's *Fantozzi: una maschera italiana*, a comprehensive description of this character's features, also including an interview with Villaggio. The Fantozzi character's extraordinary popularity and longevity speaks for its enduring relevance and also for its value as a testament to its contemporary societal practices, language, and unique representation of Italian labor culture. Often quoted and nostalgically rehearsed, Fantozzi's language and gags have become an inherent part of Italian collective memory; it is not uncommon to find references to this popular character and his misadventures in national newspaper, on social media, and in casual conversations. And yet, an analytical rather than descriptive approach would help us in trying to grasp and explain, not only to commemorate, the magnitude of this mass phenomenon that Fantozzi has been and still is today.

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<sup>43</sup> "La fama...è dovuta alla sua capacità di condensare, in modo straordinariamente economico ed efficace, una serie di significati socialmente condivisi ma difficilmente concettualizzabili per la maggior parte dei destinatari" Manzoli, *Da Ercole a Fantozzi*, 201.

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