

## Italian Visual Cultures

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### Introduction

In the winter of 1996, a 'Visual Culture Questionnaire' containing four questions was sent to a range of US-based art and architecture historians, film theorists, literary critics and artists. The responses were published in the journal *October*.<sup>1</sup> The volume remains a watershed in the way the field of visual culture is conceptualised. Nowadays most departments and programmes of Italian Studies in the UK, Ireland, and North America include the study of visual culture, though, as we shall see, what goes into the Visual Culture box can vary considerably.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Visual Culture Questionnaire', *October*, 77 (Summer 1996), 25-70. The issue had contributions from: Svetlana Alpers; Emily Apter; Carol Armstrong; Susan Buck-Morss; Tom Conley; Jonathan Crary; Thomas Crow; Tom Gunning; Michael Ann Holly; Martin Jay; Thomas Dacosta Kaufmann; Silvia Kolbowski; Sylvia Lavin; Stephen Melville; Helen Molesworth; Keith Moxey; D. N. Rodowick; Geoff Waite; Christopher Wood. *October*, published by MIT Press, with its blend of contemporary art, criticism, and theory, had a major role in the shake-up of art historical methodologies in Anglophone countries.

The birth of the new disciplinary field of Visual Culture in the late 1990s had a particular impact on art history, which had already undergone considerable transformation in the 1980s as it morphed into the 'new art history'. The socio-historical and semiotic models that were still prevalent at the time and coexisted with formalist analysis and connoisseurship, gave way to discourses of psychoanalysis, gender, race, technology, and economics. It was also around this time that art history became a less prominent fixture in the journal *Italian Studies*.<sup>2</sup> In many ways this made perfect sense: the increasing centrality of cinema and Cultural Studies, in research and teaching terms, made the study of art history, especially if traditionally conceived, less relevant to Italian Studies at the turn of the millennium.

Italian Visual Culture was much broader than the often narrowly conceived focus on the fine arts, which became increasingly the preserve of traditionally trained art historians, from those interested in the history of collecting and connoisseurship to those focusing on archival research. The bedding in of new art history did not mark the end of traditional art history but coincided with a shift away from the fine arts by cultural and literary historians working from within the discipline of Italian Studies in the UK and Ireland.

The *October* questionnaire posed four questions, two of which are particularly interesting in the context of a reassessment of the place of the study of visual culture in Italian Studies now. It asked whether the new emphasis on visual culture was a way to reconnect with what earlier generations of art historians, such as Riegl and Warburg, had

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<sup>2</sup> Francis Haskell was the last art historian to sit on the Editorial Board; he served between 1961 and 1989 and was not replaced.

done, i.e. a practice of art history that need not be constrained within medium boundaries (art, architecture, cinema, or photography histories) but that saw wider scholarly possibilities in the study of the interconnection between artistic media and broader intellectual and scientific fields.<sup>3</sup> The study of medieval and early modern Italian culture traditionally has had (and continues to retain) a much closer link with the fields of art history and material culture and its foundational practices.<sup>4</sup> When art history became established as an academic discipline in the late nineteenth century, and especially in the interwar period, art historians saw themselves as experts in the material, visual, intellectual, literary, and socio-economic interconnections that made the study of their objects possible. The intellectual reach was widely conceived but then progressively narrowed in the postwar period.

The other question from the *October* questionnaire that has special relevance in considering the state of the study of visual culture and its future direction addressed the institutional pressures in US faculties to move towards ‘the interdisciplinarity of visual culture’ (*October*, p. 25). The question is particularly interesting in the current climate in which interdisciplinarity is perceived as normative — funding by UK research councils under the umbrella of United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI) is clearly linked to an interdisciplinary agenda (as is the UK government’s new industrial strategy (14 July 2016)), and the Irish Research Council also sees interdisciplinary research as central to

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<sup>3</sup> This was a tradition which stemmed from the tradition of *Kulturgeschichte*, and was particularly linked to the cultural history of the material world and the work of Karl Lamprecht (Aby Warburg was his student) and his ‘total history’ of an illuminated manuscript (artistic, political, economic, and material).

<sup>4</sup> One can think of the work of art historians such as Cynthia Hahn on relics and reliquaries, or Jeffrey Hamburger on illuminated manuscripts and the culture of the High and Later Middle Ages, as examples of the type of interdisciplinary art historical approach which remains in rich dialogue with scholars of medieval Italian Studies. Likewise, works by Charles Dempsey, Evelyn Welch, and Patricia Fortini Brown feature in the syllabi of courses on Renaissance Italy in both Art History and Italian Studies departments.

tackling the most pressing national and global challenges as we enter the third decade of the twenty-first century.<sup>5</sup>

What we can ask, over two decades on from the *October* survey, is whether the birth of the new field of visual culture, or Visual Culture Studies,<sup>6</sup> also signalled a distinct shift from old disciplinary practices to new interdisciplinary models, and what impact this research field has had on the discipline of Italian Studies. In this article we consider the broad and perhaps unwieldy field of Visual Culture; we then focus on screen studies and photography, as important case-study areas in the analysis of current research and teaching practices and future directions of the disciplines. Our focus is on twentieth- and twenty-first century visual culture, partly because of our specialisms, and partly because the development of Visual Cultural Studies as a field, as we shall see, is more commonly connected with the modern period.

### **Who's Afraid of Images?**

When Mieke Bal published *Reading 'Rembrandt'*, in 1991, she spoke of her adventurous crossing of borders, moving from a tradition of literary studies to the study of visual art in relation to literature, at a time when she felt 'locked up within the academic field of "literary studies"'.<sup>7</sup> She also commented on the 'overwhelmingly visual dimension' in our

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<sup>5</sup> REF2021 has placed renewed emphasis on interdisciplinary research with the appointment of panel members specifically dedicated to evaluate interdisciplinary research. The AHRC 2019 Delivery Plan sees interdisciplinarity as key for tackling contemporary challenges: <https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/strategy/ahrc-delivery-plan-2019/> [all online references cited in this article were accessed on 4/02/2020].

<sup>6</sup> See *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. by Nicholas Mirzoeff (New York: Routledge, 1998); Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999); *Visual Culture Reader*, ed. by Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (London: Sage, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> Mieke Bal, *Reading 'Rembrandt'; Beyond the Word—Image Opposition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. xiii.

culture, which prompted her to study more systematically the interplay between visual and verbal elements. Looking back, the 1990s saw the most sustained and influential reconceptualisation of the modes of study of images and the interrelationship between literary and visual culture.

In his landmark 1994 text, *Picture Theory*, W. J. T. Mitchell claimed: ‘all media are mixed media, and all representations are heterogeneous; there are no “purely” visual or verbal arts, though the impulse to purify media is one of the central utopian gestures of modernism’.<sup>8</sup> He also noted that ‘recent developments in art history, film theory, and what is loosely called “cultural studies” make the notion of a purely verbal literacy increasingly problematic’ (p. 6). The volume remains a core contribution to the way we look at the relationship between verbal and visual, text and image, and the terminology that we use to talk about this.<sup>9</sup>

The ‘visual turn’ was one of several ‘turns’ which, since the 1990s, have marked substantial changes to the way a number of disciplines began to interact more openly. Mitchell saw this as a movement of convergence between an array of disciplines — he included semiotics, philosophical enquiries into art and representation, studies in cinema and mass media, and comparative studies in the arts — which refocused our attention onto visual culture. Whilst the concept of the ‘visual turn’ was much criticised at the time as an attack on the study of literature, it sparked a renewed and more critically nuanced interest in the relationship between literature and the visual.

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<sup>8</sup> W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory. Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> See also the highly influential W. J. T. Mitchell, ‘The Pictorial Turn’, *ArtForum*, 30.7 (March 1992), 89-94.

Mitchell helped to open up the field of art history and literary studies to a much wider area of visual production, away from the canonical focus on the fine arts and architecture, and helped to reposition the study of the visual as central to the study of culture, acknowledging the fundamental imbrication between the textual and the visual, and the rich potential of the critical intersection between the interpretive tools of literary studies and those more traditionally associated with the study of visual and material culture. The 'visual turn' signalled the need to go beyond the focus on semiotics as the inter-theory that could bridge the gap between the textual and the visual. It also helped to sharpen the critical focus on our 'ways of seeing',<sup>10</sup> and on issues of production of power and agency through the use of media.

The term visual culture has now lost its initial controversial import but we would argue that it remains productively unstable. In the first issue of the *Journal of Visual Culture*, James Elkins put forward a definition of the field which tried to draw some boundaries around the vast array of complex (partly) visual material that constituted the core of visual studies, and defined it as 'predominantly about film, photography, advertising, video and the internet. It is primarily not about painting, sculpture or architecture, and it is rarely about any media before 1950 except early film and photography'.<sup>11</sup> Nicholas Mirzoeff, on the other hand, saw it as a separate field of study able to go from 'oil painting to the internet'.<sup>12</sup> The issue at stake in the late 1990s and early 2000s seemed to be whether the field ought to focus on the study of images and/or

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<sup>10</sup> The 1972 television series *Ways of Seeing* – created by John Berger and producer Mik Dibb for BBC Two – and their book of the same name, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972), continue to have resonance today and were instrumental in initiating a much wider public dialogue about the constructed nature of seeing as interpreting.

<sup>11</sup> James Elkins, 'Preface to the Book. A Skeptical Introduction to Visual Culture', *JVC* 1 (2002), 93-99 (p. 94).

<sup>12</sup> *The Visual Culture Reader*, p. 3.

also on the centrality of vision in our lives; the latter had the potential to encompass the literary but risked being too broad and abstracted from its object(s) of study. Elkins for instance had critiqued the semiotic reading of painting in that it overlooked the 'subsemiotic' that constitutes different elements/figures in a painting (e.g. the brushstrokes, the chiaroscuro).<sup>13</sup> James Heffernan had raised the question of why we do not have a word which denotes the visual counterpart of literacy, i.e. the 'word which designates the capacity to interpret pictures',<sup>14</sup> and linked this lack to the perception still at large that painting is a record of perception.<sup>15</sup>

One of the most productive ideas to emerge from the debate on visual culture and the rich body of theoretical work at the turn of the millennium is contained in a nutshell in Heffernan's statement of its ultimate aim: 'to show how the interdependence of image and word inspires, drives, and complicates the work of poets, artists, and art critics from ancient times to our own'.<sup>16</sup> It is a call for a breaking down of disciplinary field barriers (but not necessarily of disciplines *per se*), which invites a theoretically rich interconnection and exchange which is open to and aware of the complexity of cultural production and media.

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<sup>13</sup> James Elkins 'Marks, Traces, *Traits*, *Contours*, *Orli*, and *Splendores*: Non Semiotic Elements in Pictures', *Critical Enquiry*, 21 (1995), 822-60. See also Mieke Bal, who in *Reading Rembrandt* talks about 'subsemiotic' marks.

<sup>14</sup> James A. W. Heffernan, *Cultivating Picturacy. Visual Arts and Verbal Interventions* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006), p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> For Norman Bryson, the emphasis is on the viewer as interpreter and the need to understand this viewer not as synchronic but rather as diachronic because historically constructed. This position opposed the 'doctrine of perceptualism' as propounded by Gombrich. See Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

<sup>16</sup> Heffernan, p. 9.

## Italian Visual Culture Studies

Within the field of visual culture, the perceived contribution of Italian Studies so far has been marginal.<sup>17</sup> Lee Rodney in 2006 observed: 'if art history has its origins in Italian, French and German sources, visual culture [...] is a product of Anglo-American discourse alone'.<sup>18</sup> Whilst one could easily view this as the product of a biased, Anglocentric view of old Europe, the field has tended to be dominated by United States-based researchers.<sup>19</sup> The study of visual culture within Italian Studies has however not only grown in importance, especially because of its centrality in teaching practice, but has acquired an established position within the broader field of Cultural Studies. In *Italian Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, David Forgacs and Robert Lumley positioned the study of Italian visual culture centre stage: cinema, stardom, fashion and cultural consumption, cartoons, television and the press, imagined geographies and identities, were among the ways in which the volume helped to rethink our approach to the study of modern Italian culture.<sup>20</sup> Yet, in the editorial of the first issue of *Italian Studies (Cultural Studies)* in 2010, Derek Duncan pointed to Italian Cultural Studies as 'an admittedly ill-defined, and perhaps still controversial area', whose boundaries were still being questioned.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Clodagh Brook, Florian Mussgnug, and Giuliana Pieri, 'Italian Studies: An Interdisciplinary Perspective', *Italian Studies*, 72.4 (2018), 380-92. See in particular the section 'Visual Arts'.

<sup>18</sup> Lee Rodney, 'Visual Culture: The Study of the Visual after the Cultural Turn', *JVC*, 5.3 (2006), 427-30 (p. 429). This was a review of Margaret Dikovitskaya, *Visual Culture: The Study of the Visual after the Cultural Turn* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> See Federico Fastelli, 'Letteratura e cultura visuale. Stato dell'arte e qualche minima proposta', *LEA-Lingue e Letterature d'Occidente*, 7 (2018), pp. 681-96, <http://dx.doi.org/10.13128/LEA-1824-484x-2417>.

<sup>20</sup> *Italian Cultural Studies: An Introduction* ed. by David Forgacs and Robert Lumley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>21</sup> See *Italian Studies*, 65.3 (2010), 308-09.



The opening up of Italian Studies to the study of Italy's visual culture is of course only relatively 'new' if looked at from the perspective of modern Italian Studies; the study of medieval and early modern Italy has always been very receptive to a broader interdisciplinary understanding of its objects of study. The shift towards visual culture happened concurrently with a migration of disciplinary fields from departments and specialist journals: history of art, which had been retreating out of Italian Studies since the late 1980s, moved out almost entirely (as noted above); cinema moved in temporarily and then moved partially out again in favour of specialist publications, whilst it remains core to many teaching programmes. The impression is one of shifting perspectives and disciplinary alliances, as institutional pressures redesign the intellectual and departmental spaces Italian Studies occupies in the academy.

One interesting case in point is that of the history of art and architecture under Fascism, which over the past decade has moved out of specialist departments and has become much more central to the way Italian historians and Italianists approach the study of the culture of Fascist Italy. The shift towards a more nuanced and multi-disciplinary understanding of Italian Fascism offers a model for the way we could approach the study of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Visual Culture in Italy. For instance, the 1932 *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista* has been studied by a number of scholars, who have engaged critically with the complex layering of its iconographic programme; the interplay of architecture, art and design; its place in display and exhibition history; the documentary history of the project and its protagonists; the embodied memories of those who visited the show; the cinematic projection of the exhibition; the propaganda literature accompanying it; and its rich body of photographic

material.<sup>22</sup> The political and ideological message could not be disentangled from these differing elements but exists at the intersection of them, a proof, if one were needed, of the need for both highly specialist disciplinary knowledge but also the wider interdisciplinary intellectual ambition required for the study of visual culture.<sup>23</sup>

### **Italian Screen Studies**

In the last decade or so, Italian film studies, both in English-speaking and Italoophone contexts, has undergone a process of profound self-reflection and self-interrogation. UK, American, and Italian scholars, in particular, have co-organised panels and roundtables at the American Association of Italian Studies annual conference, in an effort to spotlight new methodologies and to move the discipline away from what was often felt to be a conservative focus on great auteurs and on highlights of a national ‘masterpiece tradition’ (neorealism, the arthouse cinema of the 1960s, and so on).<sup>24</sup> In the meantime, the Society for Italian Studies conferences have seen a diminution in the presence of film and media studies panels. This ‘masterpiece tradition’ is what Alan O’Leary, in a recent attempt to deconstruct and systematise the assumptions upon which much scholarship on Italian cinema has rested, called ‘the Standard Model of Italian cinema history’.<sup>25</sup> As Millicent Marcus and the late Peter Bondanella have noted, in articles commissioned by O’Leary for

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<sup>22</sup> Libero Andreotti, ‘The Aesthetics of War: The Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution’, *Journal of Architectural Education*, 45. 2 (1992), 76-86; Jeffrey Schnapp, ‘Fascism’s Museum in Motion’, *Journal of Architectural Education*, 45. 2 (1992), 87-97; Marla Stone, ‘Staging Fascism: The Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 28. 2 (1993), 215-43; Antonella Russo, *Il fascismo in mostra* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1999).

<sup>23</sup> W. T. J. Mitchell, ‘Interdisciplinarity and Visual Culture’, *Art Bulletin*, 77 (1995), 540-44.

<sup>24</sup> Millicent Marcus’s *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986) is still a reference point for this kind of auteur-based valorisation of a select number of great neorealist films.

<sup>25</sup> Alan O’Leary, ‘What is Italian Cinema?’, in *California Italian Studies*, 7.1 (2017): <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7z9275bz>.

Special Issues on cinema in *Italian Studies* and *The Italianist* respectively, and in which they reflect on their experiences as pioneers in teaching Italian cinema in North America, the subject developed as an academic area according to models derived from literary studies. As Marcus says, 'I fell back on the critical paradigms I knew best — those forged in the study of literature, theatre, and history of art'.<sup>26</sup> Bondanella admitted that in introducing Italian film courses in 1974 at Indiana University he was motivated by a desire to show colleagues that the study of cinema was not 'soft', as well as more pragmatic factors: 'frankly, my motives were both intellectual and mercenary. I was initially just as interested in boosting the Italian enrolment and increasing interest in our language program as I was in writing on the Italian cinema'.<sup>27</sup> Much of the early work on Italian cinema outside Italy was thus oriented towards close textual analysis: the early essays by Christopher Wagstaff for *The Italianist*, the first UK Italian Studies journal to discuss film, are notable in this regard, especially as Wagstaff later went on to study the mechanisms of the film industry.<sup>28</sup>

Since Marcus, Bondanella, Wagstaff, and others started their teaching and research the landscape of the discipline has changed enormously. Even since the 2008 issue of *Italian Studies* on 'Thinking Italian Film', edited by Alan O'Leary and Catherine O'Rawe, which declared the 'need for a sustained attempt to develop a set of approaches to the subject within an interdisciplinary framework', there have been tectonic changes.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Millicent Marcus, 'A Coming-of-Age Story: Some Thoughts on the Rise of Italian Film Studies in the United States', in *Italian Studies*, 63.2 (2008), 266-69 (p. 267).

<sup>27</sup> Peter Bondanella, 'My Path to Italian Cinema', in *The Italianist*, 31.2 (2011), 276-80 (p. 276).

<sup>28</sup> See Wagstaff's 'Forty-Seven Shots of Bertolucci's *Il Conformista*', *The Italianist*, 2.1 (1982), 76-101, and 'The Construction of Point of View in Bertolucci's *Il Conformista*', *The Italianist*, 3.1 (1983), 64-71.

<sup>29</sup> Alan O'Leary and Catherine O'Rawe, 'Preface', *Italian Studies*, 63.2 (2008), 171-72 (p. 171).

Italian film studies has moved to encompass television and other screen forms, becoming attentive to transmedia forms, and being distinguished by the richness and variety of approaches now acquiring visibility. It would be impossible to give a comprehensive account of the field, but this section will highlight some notable areas of growth, which are valuable also because of their potential contribution to the field of Italian Studies as a whole. For those interested in more exhaustive accounts of the state of the discipline, we refer readers to three recent and forthcoming companions to Italian cinema, as well as to the tables of contents of *The Italianist's* annual film issue (inaugurated in 2009), and the *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies*, founded in 2012.<sup>30</sup>

In 2008, Bondanella declared: 'I am convinced that the future of Italian film scholarship must rest on not just theory but formalistic criticism of individual works as well as serious archival work of all kinds'.<sup>31</sup> The field of New Cinema History, which offers a multi-disciplinary approach drawing upon history, geography, economics, cultural studies, sociology, and anthropology, is attentive to place-specific and particularised experiences of cinema-going, and patterns of distribution and exhibition, as well as to often overlooked local sources and archives. Understanding 'cinema as a set of processes, practices, events, spaces, performances, connections, embodiments, relationships, exchanges and memories', has now become part of Italian screen studies.<sup>32</sup> David Forgacs

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<sup>30</sup> *The Italian Cinema Book*, ed. by Peter Bondanella (London: British Film Institute, 2013); *A Companion to Italian Cinema*, ed. by Frank Burke (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017); *Italian Cinema from the Silent Screen to the Digital Image*, ed. by Joseph Luzzi (London: Bloomsbury, forthcoming).

<sup>31</sup> Bondanella, 'My Path to Italian Cinema', p. 280.

<sup>32</sup> Robert C. Allen, 'Getting to "Going to the Show"', *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 8.3 (2010), 264–76 (p. 266). See the recent *Routledge Companion to New Cinema History*, ed. by Daniel Biltereyst, Richard Maltby, and Philippe Meers (London: Routledge, 2019). See also, in the Italian context, work by Giorgio Bertellini, including 'Sovereign Consumption: Italian Americans' Transnational Film Culture in 1920s New York City', in *Making Italian America: Consumer Culture and the Production of Ethnic Identities*, ed. by Simone Cinotto (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), pp. 83-99; *Spettatori: forme*

and Stephen Gundle's 2008 book, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War*, was based on material and archival sources, as well as a reliance on oral history, in order to highlight the appeal of popular cinema in the broader context of cultural consumption in the post-war period.<sup>33</sup> The project *Italian Cinema Audiences 1945-60*, funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) (2013-16), also adopted this approach, blending oral history with archival material on film distribution and exhibition in order to supply a thick description of the place of cinema in post-war Italian society.<sup>34</sup> Production history is also an area gaining momentum: the AHRC has also funded Stephen Gundle's project on *Producers and Production Practices in the History of Italian Cinema, 1949-1970* (2016-19): the project is digitising the archive of producer Franco Cristaldi, and making available an online database of producers' archives, in collaboration with the Cineteca di Bologna.<sup>35</sup> On a more micro level, Dalila Missero's article on the untold history of female editors from the silent era to the 1970s is a

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*di consumo e pubblici del cinema in Italia, 1930-1960*, ed. by Mariagrazia Fanchi and Elena Mosconi (Venice: Marsilio, 2002); Mariagrazia Fanchi, 'Tra donne sole: Cinema, Cultural Consumption and the Female Condition in Post-war Italy', in *Film-Kino-Zuschauer: Filmrezeption. Film-Cinema-Spectator: Film Reception*, ed. by I. Schenk, M. Tröhler, and Y. Zimmermann (Marburg: Schüren, 2010), pp. 305-18; Damiano Garofalo, *Political Audiences: A Reception History of Early Italian Television* (Milan: Mimesis, 2016).

<sup>33</sup> David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

<sup>34</sup> See [www.italiancinemaaudiences.org](http://www.italiancinemaaudiences.org), and Daniela Treveri Gennari, Silvia Dibeltulo, Danielle Hipkins and Catherine O'Rawe, 'Analysing Memories through Video-Interviews: a Case Study of Post-war Italian Cinema going', in *The Routledge Companion to New Cinema History*, pp. 244-54.

<sup>35</sup> [https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/film/research/current/italian\\_producers\\_project/](https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/film/research/current/italian_producers_project/). On an even larger scale, the European Research Council grant awarded to Sarah Street for a collaborative investigation of the history of film studios in Italy, the UK, France, and Germany, makes clear the need for transnational projects, though Brexit inevitably casts doubt about the future of such partnerships. See <http://uobwww.isys.bristol.ac.uk/film/news/2019/sarah-street-erc-grant.html>.

blueprint for how feminist industry history, as a part of cultural history, might be written.<sup>36</sup>

Popular Italian cinema is now studied extensively, through the lenses of gender and sexuality, genre studies, star studies, reception studies, as well as with a prevalence of more familiar symptomatic and ideological readings of its functions. The conference held at King's College London in 2009 on *Popular Italian Cinema*, organised by Louis Bayman and Sergio Rigoletto (which also produced an edited volume) was an important attempt to systematise thinking in this area.<sup>37</sup> Recent work on post-war melodrama, on the spaghetti western, on the despised *cinapanettone filone*, on teen films, and on popular comedy in general illustrates the richness of these areas.<sup>38</sup> It is important also to highlight, in relation to star studies, the book by Jacqueline Reich on Maciste, which demonstrates the need for theoretically and historically informed analysis of the stars of Italian silent cinema also, an area which is often overlooked.<sup>39</sup>

In general, we are witnessing a flourishing of approaches that transcend textual or formal analysis and that engage with practices of circulation, with how screen media is consumed, and how viewers interact with it and consume it in a culture dominated by media convergence. While we often think of convergence as a function of new media, it

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<sup>36</sup> Dalila Missero, 'Titillating Cuts: Genealogies of Women Editors in Italian Cinema', *Feminist Media Histories*, 4.4 (2018), 57-82.

<sup>37</sup> *Popular Italian Cinema*, ed. by Louis Bayman and Sergio Rigoletto (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>38</sup> See Louis Bayman, *The Operatic and the Everyday in Postwar Italian Film Melodrama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014); Austin Fisher, *Radical Frontiers in the Spaghetti Western: Politics, Violence and Popular Italian Cinema* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011); Alan O'Leary, *Fenomenologia del cinapanettone* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino, 2013); Danielle Hipkins, *Italy's Other Women: Gender and Prostitution in Italian Cinema, 1940-1965* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016); Giacomo Manzoli, *Da Ercole a Fantozzi. Cinema popolare e società italiana dal boom economico alla neotelevisione (1958-1976)* (Florence: Carocci, 2013).

<sup>39</sup> Jacqueline Reich, *The Maciste Films of Italian Silent Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

can also open up media archaeologies: as Mary P. Wood notes, ‘the idea of convergence in our digital world encompasses the survival and presence in the market place of low-budget cult films made in the 1960s and 1970s, and the development of more or less obsessive fan communities’.<sup>40</sup> One of the most interesting current projects on the circulation and consumption of Italian film is funded by the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (PRIN 2015), on *The International Circulation of Italian Cinema*. The project, led by Massimo Scaglioni of the Catholic University of Milan, aims to map out the forms of distribution and circulation of Italian cinema abroad, and in doing so, show how this circulation ‘helps to shape and model an idea of Italian cinema and, more broadly, of Italian culture and “made in Italy”’.<sup>41</sup>

The value of these approaches lies in their ability to excavate the textual surround of film and TV texts, and to show how institutions, markets, and press discourses work together to offer a particular view of Italian culture or of ‘brand Italy’. TV plays a key role in this transnational branding, and the recent work on Italian *serialità* and the export of Italian ‘quality television’ provides a way to read these narratives as a form of ‘international patrimony’, and to connect them to other representations and discourses around Italy’s ‘tainted heritage’ seen in press discourse or in popular histories of Italy.<sup>42</sup> The reference to ‘tainted heritage’ comes from Alan O’Leary’s work on exportable films

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<sup>40</sup> Mary P. Wood, ‘Contemporary Italian Film in the New Media World’, in *A Companion to Italian Cinema*, pp. 303-21 (p. 311).

<sup>41</sup> [www.italiancinema.it/about](http://www.italiancinema.it/about).

<sup>42</sup> See Dana Renga, ‘Suburra. La serie as “Patrimonio internazionale/International Patrimony”’, *Series: International Journal of TV Serial Narratives*, 4.1 (2018), 63-80, <https://series.unibo.it/article/view/7815>. On Italian ‘quality’ television, see *Tutta un’altra fiction. La serialità pay in Italia e nel mondo. Il modello Sky*, ed. by Massimo Scaglioni and Luca Barra (Rome: Carocci, 2013), and Giancarlo Lombardi, ‘Rethinking Italian Television Studies’, *The Italianist*, 34.2 (2014), 260–62.

about the *anni di piombo*, and offers an understanding of the problematic allure of the 'dark heart of Italy' for both domestic and non-Italian audiences.<sup>43</sup>

The traditional vocation of Italian cinema, which was seen to revolve around *impegno* and social themes, has not been neglected, however. In addition to an enduring attention to neorealism, which is often still taught and researched on, particularly by those in film studies departments,<sup>44</sup> Italy's migration crisis has provoked productive work on visual narratives of the border, of the Mediterranean, and of Italy's place in a global pattern of movement of people.<sup>45</sup> In a broader context, the UK AHRC-funded *Transnationalizing Modern Languages* project (2014-17) has shown how issues of the transnational and the transcultural are at the heart of our discipline, and has encouraged a productive rethinking of how we might conceive and explore national culture and its articulation.<sup>46</sup>

### **Photography in Italian Studies**

Whilst Italian art and cinema hold a well-established if shifting position within Italian Studies, photography continues to occupy a marginal place despite its increasing relevance within the field of Visual Culture.<sup>47</sup> Scholars and photography historians have

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<sup>43</sup> See O'Leary, *Tragedia all'italiana: Italian Cinema and Italian Terrorisms, 1970-2010* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 245. See also Tobias Jones's bestseller, *The Dark Heart of Italy* (London: Faber, 2003).

<sup>44</sup> See Danielle Hipkins and Dana Renga, 'A New Canon? Contemporary Italian Cinema and Television and the Role of Quality in the Anglophone Curriculum', *Comunicazioni sociali*, 38.3 (2016), 375-97, part of a Special Issue on *Italian Quality Cinema: Institutions, Taste, Cultural Legitimation*, ed. by Claudio Bioni, Danielle Hipkins, and Paolo Noto.

<sup>45</sup> See Federica Mazzara, *Reframing Migration: Lampedusa, Border Spectacle and the Aesthetics of Subversion* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019); Áine O'Healy, *Migrant Anxieties: Italian Cinema in a Transnational Frame* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019)

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.transnationalmodernlanguages.ac.uk/>.

<sup>47</sup> Kathrin Yacavone's reflection on photography in French Studies is particularly useful to understand the Italian case: 'Introduction: Mapping Photography in French and



identified the various reasons for such an approach to photography, including: Italy's overpowering painterly history; the influence of Crocean idealistic aesthetics; and the long-term polarisations that have placed documentary photography on one side and artistic photography on the other.<sup>48</sup>

The national, cultural, and social positioning of Italian photography has also been problematic. Unlike neorealist cinema, for instance, which has often been perceived as an Italian phenomenon, it is difficult to define Italian photography or the Italian-ness of photography. Moreover, photography in Italy has not easily and uniformly conformed to canonical norms, having been used and exploited for multiple purposes and agendas, from the pedagogical to the political and commercial.<sup>49</sup> At the same time, especially in the first half of the twentieth century, the geographical distribution and use of photography, like that of the press, tended to be non-homogeneous due to the varied levels of wealth and education within the Italian regions, and to the disjointed activities of photo associations and publications.<sup>50</sup> The use of the camera, too, has often resisted defined patterns, having been adopted for utilitarian, social, or communicative purposes and for more sophisticated forms of mediation and representation, fluctuating between idle *dilettantismo* and mere *professionismo*. Moreover, photography's authors, unlike literary

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Francophone French Cultures' *Nottingham French Studies*, 53.2 (2014), 115–21. See also Luigi Tomassini, 'Una "dialettica ferma"? Storici e fotografia in Italia fra "linguistic turn" e "visual studies"', *Memoria e ricerca*, 40 (2012), 93-110.

<sup>48</sup> Italo Zannier, *Storia della fotografia italiana dalle origini agli anni '50* (Castel Maggiore: Quinlan, 2012), p. 13; Ando Gilardi, 'Creatività e informazione fotografica', in *Storia dell'arte italiana III. Vol 2. II. Illustrazione fotografica* (Turin: Einaudi, 1981), pp. 545-86.

<sup>49</sup> Gabriele D'Autilia, *Storia della fotografia in Italia dal 1839 a oggi* (Turin: Einaudi, 2012), pp. 8-9.

<sup>50</sup> Luigi Tomassini, 'Fotografia e consumi visuali', in *Storia d'Italia. Annali 27. I consumi*, ed. by Stefano Cavazza and Emanuela Scarpellini (Turin: Einaudi, 2018), pp. 595-620.

authors and cinema directors, have barely been recognised as producers of culture, even when photography has been used as a mass product.<sup>51</sup>

The heterogeneous cultural, social, and geographical configuration and fragmentation of the country have undoubtedly all played a crucial role in the polycentric nature of its photographic aesthetics, products, and practices. It is therefore, as many scholars agree, essentially by looking at Italy's rich visual culture, together with the problematic question of its connection to modernity, that we need to understand and study photography in Italy,<sup>52</sup> and, consequently, to embrace it more confidently within the field of Italian Studies.

Unsurprisingly, the particularity of photography in Italian Studies lies in the continued lack of attention devoted to it in the twenty-first century. Photography, indeed, plays with time, space, and meaning by capturing a moment in the past and moving it to new interpretations in subsequent viewings. The term itself has historically referred to a multitude of chemical processes, types of prints, and reproductive technologies, including cameraless works. The hesitation in handling its mercurial nature, and the problematic location of its ambiguous boundaries, have therefore often produced uncritical and illustrative approaches to the medium, with few attempts at consistent investigation. Maria Antonella Pelizzari also points out how the scarcity of international distribution of books on Italian photography, together with a marginal place within the art market, have contributed to making the history of photography in Italy relatively unknown overseas, even today.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> D'Autilia, p. 9.

<sup>52</sup> *Storia d'Italia. Annali 2. L'immagine fotografica, 1845-1945*. ed. by Carlo Bertelli and Giulio Bollati (Turin: Einaudi, 1979); Maria Antonella Pelizzari, *Photography and Italy* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011).

<sup>53</sup> Pelizzari, pp. 7-8. It should be clarified that throughout the twentieth century, studies on photography in Italy and Italian photographers have predominantly and traditionally

The absence of any discussion of photography in some of the most influential Anglophone studies on Italian culture and Italian Cultural Studies is emblematic. For instance, although *Italian Cultural Studies* and *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture*, published respectively in 1996 and 2001, have covered press, theatre, cinema, television, and art in modern Italy, with the aim of providing a broad impression of the complexity of modern Italian culture, photography's role in modern Italy was not discussed in either.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, the two-volume study of *New Perspectives in Italian Cultural Studies*, edited by academics in the United States, approached Italian Cultural Studies as a field of complex national and international imbrications and cultural contaminations. Although two sections *are* devoted to the arts and cinema, there is no discussion of photography.<sup>55</sup> Jonathan White, in his *Italian Cultural Lineages*, has searched for a definition of Italian culture and identity by looking at how eighteenth- and nineteenth-century cosmoramas, magic lanterns, and *mondi nuovi* can help us to understand modes of popular viewing in contemporary cinema and television in Italy. The role of modern photography in Italy's visual culture is, however, once again largely overlooked.<sup>56</sup> A brief acknowledgment of Italian photography appears in the *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Italian Culture* edited by academics in Australia and published in 2000. Among entries ranging from food and religion to spas, sport to comics,

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appeared in specialised academic publications on the history of art, and later on visual culture.

<sup>54</sup> *Italian Cultural Studies: An Introduction; The Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture*, ed. by Zygmunt G. Barański and Rebecca J. West (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>55</sup> *New Perspectives in Italian Cultural Studies*, ed. by Graziella Parati, 2 vols (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2013).

<sup>56</sup> Jonathan White, *Italian Cultural Lineages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

pop music, and television, we find a short historical overview on photography in Italy in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>57</sup>

It is primarily in the last ten years that we have seen a surge of interest in and new recognition for the photographic history and culture of Italy, thanks to an innovative shift in the traditional disciplinary classification of photography in Italian Studies publications, conferences, and other initiatives. Examples include several conferences, beginning with *Enlightening Encounters: Italian Literature and Photography through Time* (University of Warwick, 2009), which aimed at fostering a word-image approach in Italian Studies that had been well explored in other cultural and linguistic contexts, and led to publication of the volume, *Enlightening Encounters: Photography in Italian Literature*, edited by Giorgia Alù and Nancy Pedri.<sup>58</sup> The 2013 ASMI conference, *Iconic Images in Modern Italy: Politics, Culture and Society*, was followed by the publication of a Special Issue for the journal *Modern Italy*, edited by Alessandra Antola Swan and Martina Caruso, where photography in Italian culture was the focus of diverse interventions by scholars from the fields of art history, film studies, and the history of photography.<sup>59</sup>

As this new strand has emerged more strongly, scholars in the UK, United States, Australia, and New Zealand – collaborating also with academics in Italy – have focused on Italian photography's multifaceted nature and practices, rather than presenting it as something consistent and visually recognisable. For instance, in his 2011 volume, *Looters, Photographers, and Thieves*, Pasquale Verdicchio adopted an intertextual approach to examine how both photography and written texts have contributed to our contemporary

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<sup>57</sup> *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Italian Culture*, ed. by Gino Moliterno (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>58</sup> *Enlightening Encounters: Photography in Italian Literature*, ed. by Giorgia Alù and Nancy Pedri (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015).

<sup>59</sup> Special Issue on *Iconic Images in Modern Italy: Politics, Culture and Society*, ed. by Alessandra Antola Swan and Martina Caruso, *Modern Italy* 21.4 (2016).

visual education. Analysing the dialogue between the works of such nationally diverse photographers as Tina Modotti, Giovanni Verga, Baron von Gloeden, Jacob Riis, and Lewis Hine, Verdicchio shows how their images are the product of national or colonial agendas aimed at the construction of an Italian ‘type’ to respond to the needs of the new nation founded in the 1860s.<sup>60</sup> David Forgacs’s *Italy’s Margins* (2014) demonstrated how photographs, together with a variety of other literary and visual texts, have acted significantly since unification as agents of political and ideological power, both in the understanding of specific groups and places as marginal, and consequently in the construction and circulation of historically accepted ideas of Italy.<sup>61</sup> In the same year, *Stillness in Motion*, edited by Sarah Patricia Hill and Giuliana Minghelli, provided a unique look at how a country that entered the modern industrial age only tardily has engaged with the medium, and explored what this can reveal about both Italy and photography.<sup>62</sup>

Other studies, such as Martina Caruso’s inspiring recent book on Italian humanist photography from Fascism to the Cold War,<sup>63</sup> as well as *Photography as Power*, edited by Marco Andreani and Nicoletta Pazzaglia, are steadily expanding discussion of the

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<sup>60</sup> Pasquale Verdicchio, *Looters, Photographers, and Thieves: Aspects of Italian Photographic Culture in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011).

<sup>61</sup> David Forgacs, *Italy’s Margins: Social Exclusion and Nation Formation since 1861* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). See also Lindsay Harris, ‘Photography of the “Primitive” in Italy: Perceptions of the Peasantry at the Turn of the Twentieth Century’, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 17.3 (2012), 310–30.

<sup>62</sup> *Stillness in Motion: Italy, Photography and the Meaning of Modernity*, ed. by Sarah Patricia Hill and Giuliana Minghelli (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014). Another early example is ‘The Modern Image: Intersections of Photography, Literature and Cinema in Italian Culture’, ed. by Giuliana Minghelli, a Special Issue for *L’anello che non tiene*, 20-21.1-2 (Spring-Fall 2008-2009).

<sup>63</sup> Martina Caruso, *Italian Humanist Photography from Fascism to the Cold War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

cultural, social, and political authority of the photographic image in Italy.<sup>64</sup> Individual journal articles have looked at the way identities are shaped in the mediation of memories and the persistence of the past through images, as in the case of photographs in family albums and in the printed media.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, although initiatives on specific photographers are still rare within the field of Italian Studies, the conference *How to Think in Images? Luigi Ghirri and Photography* (University of Leicester and the British School at Rome, 2013), and Marina Spunta's steady scholarly work have unquestionably expanded the discussion on Ghirri's wide range of interests and projects, by positioning his work within global artistic debates.<sup>66</sup>

Over the years, artists and writers have employed the flexible medium of photography as a means for the exploration of personal and collective questions, memory and nostalgia, identity and belonging, through diverse hybrid forms of expression. A brief list of examples could include: the Futurists' montages and collages; Luigi Crocenzi's photo-books; Antonio Porta's visual poetry; the cross-media explorations of Gruppo 70; Lalla Romano's ekphrastic writing; Italo Calvino's meditations on the photographic image; Fossati and Messori's collaboration; Franco Vaccari's conceptual realism; or

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<sup>64</sup> Alessandra Antola Swan and Martina Caruso, 'Introduction: Iconic Images in Modern Italy: Politics, Culture and Society', *Modern Italy*, 21.4 (2016), 325-28; *Photography as Power: Dominance and Resistance through the Italian Lens*, ed. by Marco Andreani and Nicoletta Pazzaglia (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019).

<sup>65</sup> Andrea Hajek "Mmmmm quanti, ma quanti ricordi mi evocano queste foto ...": Facebook and the 1977 Family Album: The Digital (R)evolution of a Protest Generation', *Italian Studies*, 67.3 (2012), 375-96; Giuliana Minghelli, 'Icons of Remorse: Photography, Anthropology and the Erasure of History in 1950s Italy', *Modern Italy*, 21.4 (2016), 383-407.

<sup>66</sup> See *Luigi Ghirri and the Photography of Place: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. by Marina Spunta and Jacopo Benci (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2017), and Marina Spunta, "Il Profilo Delle Nuvole": Luigi Ghirri's Photography and the "New" Italian Landscape', *Italian Studies*, 61.1 (2006), 114-36. Critical and theoretical analyses, in English, on the work of specific Italian photographers have appeared in specialised scholarly publications in visual culture.

Gabriele Basilico's urban images.<sup>67</sup> Consequently, theoretical frameworks from art history, the theory of photography, sociology, literary and cultural studies, as well as architecture and landscape studies, have been fruitfully employed by scholars to convey the varied uses and expressions of photography in Italy.

Kathrin Yacavone argues that by studying photography as a mere part of the larger field of 'visual culture', there is a risk of neglecting its technological, aesthetic, and historic particularity.<sup>68</sup> It is this particularity of photography, we argue, that Italian Studies has recently been endeavouring to explore, while making the multidimensional nature of the medium emerge also as a vehicle for understanding how other arts and cultural and literary creations have changed over the years. For Elizabeth Edwards, in fact, photographs disturb disciplinary conventions, forcing scholars to be more aware of the assumptions that animate their work.<sup>69</sup> Representative of Edwards's point is the way in which studies on photography stimulate community engagement and outreach through exhibitions and other public initiatives where scholars in Italian Studies can attain alternative spaces, partnerships, and multimedia outlets for interdisciplinary and transnational research. Relevant examples include the partnership of Marina Spunta with

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<sup>67</sup> See Marina Spunta, 'Fossati's and Messori's *Viaggio in un paesaggio terrestre: An Imaginative Journey Through Writing, Photography, Landscape, and Painting*', *Italian Studies*, 66.1 (2011), 93-111; Alexandra Tommasini, 'Anti-Icon Icon: Gabriele Basilico's Photography of the Italian Urban Landscape', *Modern Italy*, 21.4 (2016), 427-40; Giuliana Pieri and Emanuela Patti, 'Technological Poetry: Interconnections between *Impegno*, Media and Gender in Gruppo 70 (1963-1968)', *Italian Studies*, 72.3 (2017), 323-37. One recent study that has looked at the relationship between photography and Italian cinema is Giorgio Bertellini, 'Early Italian Cinema and Photography', in *Silent Italian Cinema: A Reader*, ed. by Giorgio Bertellini (London: John Libbey & Company, 2013), pp. 49-68.

<sup>68</sup> Yacavone, 'Introduction'.

<sup>69</sup> Elizabeth Edwards, 'Thoughts on Photography and the Practice of History', in *The Ethics of Seeing: Photography and Twentieth-Century German History*, ed. by Jennifer Evans, Paul Betts and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2018), pp. 23-36 (p. 25).

Rome's MAXXI Museum for the Luigi Ghirri retrospective in 2013; and the 2018 exhibition *Neo Realismo: The New Image in Italy, 1932-1960* (at Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò, New York), which hosted conversations led by Italian Studies, Art History, and Film Studies scholars together with museum curators.

Challenging disciplinary boundaries illuminates how diverse cultural and intellectual practices and products construct ideology and consciousness. Indeed, photography provides an important vehicle for the exploration of questions concerning racialised identities, minorities, gender, and marginalisation, as in the recent body of work on photography and psychiatry in Italy,<sup>70</sup> as well as in studies in line with flourishing work on Italian (post)colonialism, migration, and diaspora.<sup>71</sup> Scholars have in particular considered more carefully the role of visibility and how forms of representation and spectacle are activated through the overbearing presence of digital technologies, and politics of visibility, in the construction of Otherness, or what Gary Shapiro has called a 'visual regime'.<sup>72</sup> Yet for Susan Sontag we should focus on the impact

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<sup>70</sup> Forgacs, *Italy's Margins*; John Foot, 'Photography and Radical Psychiatry in Italy in the 1960s. The Case of the Photobook *Morire Di Classe* (1969)', *History of Psychiatry*, 26.1 (2015), 19–35; Alvisè Sforza Tarabochia, 'Photography, Psychiatry, and Impegno: *Morire Di Classe* (1969) Between Neorealism and Postmodernism', *The Italianist*, 38.1 (2018), 48–69.

<sup>71</sup> See, for instance, P. R. Anderson, 'On Photographs at War: Images of the South African 6th Armored Division in Italy 1944–1945', *Safundi*, 15.2-3 (2014), 197–225; Giorgia Alù, 'Order and Otherness in a Photographic Shot: Italians Abroad and the Great War', *Modern Italy*, 22.3 (2017), 291–314; Gaia Giuliani, *Race, Nation and Gender in Modern Italy: Intersectional Representations in Visual Culture* (New York: Palgrave, 2019).

<sup>72</sup> Gary Shapiro, *Archaeologies of Vision: Foucault and Nietzsche on Seeing and Saying* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003). On visibility and recent migration in Italy consider *Facce da straniero. 30 anni di fotografia e giornalismo sull'immigrazione italiana*, ed. by Luca Gariglio, Andrea Pogliano, and Riccardo Zanini (Milan: Mondadori, 2010); Paolo Cuttitta, *Lo spettacolo del confine. Lampedusa tra produzione e messa in scena della frontiera* (Milan: Mimesis, 2012); *Destination Italy. Representing Migration in Contemporary Media and Narrative*, ed. by Emma Bond, Guido Bonsaver, and Federico Faloppa (Bern: Peter Lang, 2015). On photography and Italian colonialism see: Silvana Palma, 'The Seen, the Unseen, the Invented: Misrepresentations of African "Otherness" in the Making of a Colony. Eritrea, 1885-1896', *Cahiers d'Études africaines*, 177 (2005), 39-



photography has in altering and enlarging the viewer's response through its grammar and new visual codes, rather than simply searching for photography's power in what it portrays.<sup>73</sup> Photography— whether reliable or unpredictable — is an incisive source of aesthetic and emotional response in relation to dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, trauma, and war. *Beyond Borders: Transnational Italy*, an exhibition held in Rome, London, New York, and Addis Ababa – organised within the above-mentioned *Transnationalizing Modern Languages (TML)* project – is a further example of a recent initiative beyond scholarly publications that has dedicated particular attention to the interlacing of experiences of displacement and memory, and to the way people can look at and use photographs as potent means of resistance and crossing of borders.

### **Future Directions and Conclusions**

What are the next steps in Visual Culture in Italian Studies then? And what else needs to be done?

Within screen studies, in methodological terms, the most stimulating and important new critical approach is undoubtedly the video-essay, a form of scholarship which uses the video form to engage with and analyse screen texts.<sup>74</sup> The online journal *[in]Transition* has had a large influence here: it is the first peer-reviewed, academic journal of videographic film and moving image studies. Directed by an international editorial team, and with several Italianists on the editorial board, among the essays

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69; Loredana Polezzi, 'Il pieno e il vuoto; Visual Representations of Africa in Italian Accounts of Colonial Experiences', *Italian Studies*, 67.3 (2012), 336-59; Forgacs, *Italy's Margins*.

<sup>73</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, [1977] 1989).

<sup>74</sup> See Christian Keathley, Jason Mittell, and Catherine Grant, *The Videographic Essay: Criticism in Sound and Image* (Montreal: Caboose, 2019).

published have been Austin Fisher's on the spaghetti western (2015).<sup>75</sup> Other examples of the form and its potential uses are Pasquale Iannone's 'The Bal(l)ade of Anna Magnani', and Sarah Culhane's 'Street Cries and Street Fights: Anna Magnani, Sophia Loren and the *popolana*'.<sup>76</sup> As those pieces show, the video-essay is clearly a form that lends itself readily to performance analysis. It also addresses and encourages contact with the materiality of film form, and provokes a kind of reworking which is in tune with contemporary cultural and fan practices of media engagement.

In general, within the discipline of Italian screen studies we are witnessing a breakdown of the boundaries between high and low, between Italian and non-Italian cultural forms, and a movement away from the centrality of the text to a focus on the historical conditions of production and reception.<sup>77</sup> A quotation from Luca Barra and Massimo Scaglioni is useful here to sum up some of this move from text to context:

more generally, the borders between different media — cinema, television and digital media — are being redrawn, on at least three levels: *production models and*

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<sup>75</sup> Fisher, 'Spaghetthis in Translation': <http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/intransition/2015/05/25/spaghetthis-translation>. The journal has also published two video essays on neorealism: Christian Keathley, 'What is Neorealism? (Kogonada)' (2013), <http://mediacommons.org/intransition/2014/02/28/what-neorealism-kogonada>; and Jordan Tynes and Maurizio Viano, 'Frames of Mind' (2015): <http://mediacommons.org/intransition/2015/03/12/frames-mind>.

<sup>76</sup> Iannone's essay can be found at: [https://www.academia.edu/10506189/The\\_Bal\\_l\\_ade\\_of\\_Anna\\_Magnani](https://www.academia.edu/10506189/The_Bal_l_ade_of_Anna_Magnani). Culhane's video-essay is linked to her article 'Street Cries and Street Fights: Anna Magnani, Sophia Loren and the *popolana*', *The Italianist. Film*, 37.2 (2017), 254-62: <https://vimeo.com/181644106>. See also Alan O'Leary's 2019 video-essay on *The Battle of Algiers*, 'Occupying Time', in *[in]Transition*): <https://vimeo.com/290311136>.

<sup>77</sup> See Damiano Garofalo, 'Italian Cinema in The Shadow of Film Festival Crisis', <https://www.italiancinema.it/italian-cinema-in-the-shadow-of-film-festival-crisis/>, an output of the aforementioned research project *The International Circulation of Italian Cinema*.

*routines [...]; content and imageries* that are given currency (characterised by an emergence of narratives that traverse several media to build extended stories and broad narrative ecosystems); and the *expression of the audience's tastes and consumption practices* (where television, and TV series in particular, undergo an overall cultural reappraisal that grants a new idea of quality and legitimacy to the medium, historically deemed inferior to cinema, at least as regards its aesthetic discourse and its cultural 'distinction').<sup>78</sup>

A similar discussion is valid for photography. As Peter D. Osborne notes, there is now a tendency to consider photography – or the frequently adopted term of 'the photographic' – as 'a multiply located practice made up of a federation of somewhat disaggregated but coterminous practices, including those of other contiguous media forms such as film and video'.<sup>79</sup> A reassessment of the borders between cinematographic media and photography in Italian Studies is certainly invigorated by recent developments in the still/moving field that, in the last few years, have called for studies on the interplay between stasis and motion.<sup>80</sup> Such interplay responds to new media technologies and confronts the omnipresence of film, video, and the projected image also in contemporary

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<sup>78</sup> Luca Barra and Massimo Scaglioni, 'One Story, Two Media: Strategies and Intended Audiences in Italian Productions for Cinema and Television', *Comunicazioni sociali*, 38.3 (2016), 412-25 (p. 414: emphasis added), Special Issue on *Italian Quality Cinema*, ed. by Claudio Bioni, Danielle Hipkins, Paolo Noto.

<sup>79</sup> Peter D. Osborne, *Photography and the Contemporary Cultural Condition. Commemorating the Present* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 6.

<sup>80</sup> Examples of recent studies in this field are: *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, ed. by Karen Redrobe and Jean Ma (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Eivind Røssaak, *Between Stillness and Motion: Film, Photography, Algorithms* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011); Laurent Guido and Olivier Lugon, *Between Still and Moving Images* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012); Claudio Marra, *Fotografia e Arti Visive* (Rome: Carrocci, 2014.) On digitalised forms and intermedia, see *Heterogeneous Objects: Intermedia and Photography After Modernism*, ed. by Raphael Pirenne and Alexander Streitberger (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2013).

art practice. Through augmented and mixed reality, surfacing media, and multisensorial participation among others, screen, photography, and other visual arts interconnect, often for projects engaging with cultural and environmental heritage and community in Italy.<sup>81</sup>

There are certainly more areas where the theory and history of photography in Italian Studies need to attain more visibility and further insights. These include, for instance, the demand for more focused and consistent explorations of the strategies and logic of consumption – along the lines seen in screen studies – as well as questions concerning staging, display, and record-keeping (i.e., in archives) in specific socio-cultural situations; studies of photography's ability to provide multilayered popular and institutional memories of historical events in contemporary Italy; and investigations on salient topics like photography and Artificial Intelligence (for example, facial recognition or emotion mapping). Moreover, by taking account of how research has essentially been based on mostly British, American, French, and German theoretical approaches, we could point out how photography, and visual culture in general, should sit more comfortably alongside and in dialogue with Italian critical theory, aesthetics and contemporary philosophy, for instance, in relation to form, ideology, semiotics, or to the ontological and ethical position of images (ex: from Eco to Perniola and the more recent work of Emanuele Coccia or Enrica Lisciani-Petrini). There is still much to explore, including the perspective of the subjects physically directly facing the lens; or the marginalised as both

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<sup>81</sup> See, for instance, the Augmented Reality project *Cthulhu: An Investigation on Very Low Frequencies in L'Aquila* (2016), carried out by the Department of Human Sciences in L'Aquila, Intermed Lab, and Komplex Live Cinema Group, with the collaboration of Italian scholars Massimo Fusillo and Mirko Lino from L'Aquila University: Mirko Lino, 'Il videomapping in Augmented Reality. Surfacing media e urban storytelling in Cthulhu di KOMPLEX-Live Cinema Group', *Cinergie. Il cinema e le altre arti*, 14 (2018), 83-95; and <http://www.komplex.city/>.

viewer of images and user of the camera. Additionally, women's roles in modern and contemporary Italy as both makers and viewers of photographs, and as witnesses and reformers rather than essentially subjects of the medium, still require solid research.<sup>82</sup>

As we have noted above, both what we teach and what we research in Italian Studies is in rich dialogue with clusters of disciplinary fields; new alliances are forged and some old ties are lost (at least temporarily) as our discipline shifts and creates new complex transnational trajectories of cultural exchange. Italian Studies syllabi in Anglophone countries have come to accommodate screen studies quite extensively, yet they still tend to lack any direct and sustained engagement with the socio-cultural expression of photography, though the photographic image remains a core medium in our teaching practice.<sup>83</sup> The study of fashion and design figures only marginally in our university curricula, despite the role played by these two disciplines in global pop culture as signifiers of Italian creativity, and their economic centrality since the end of World War II. The study of Italian art, with a persistent focus on the Renaissance, is a common if marginal feature in Italian Studies in Anglophone countries. In the post-unification period, only Futurism, Italian art under Fascism and, occasionally, *Arte Povera* find space in our crowded curricula, testifying to the enduring interest in the Italian avant-garde and *neo-avanguardia*. Yet much Italian modern and contemporary art is simply not taught or

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<sup>82</sup> See two recent explorations of women and photography in Italian Studies: Alessandra Antola, 'Ghitta Carell and Italian Studio Photography in the 1930s', *Modern Italy*, 16.3 (2011), 249–73; Giorgia Alù, *Journeys Exposed: Women's Writing, Photography and Mobility* (London: Routledge, 2019).

<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, albeit often timidly due to current pressures in language curricula, some scholars in Italian Studies departments have recently introduced discussions and analyses of photography as object, and as artistic, political, and cultural expression, as well as mode of seeing, alongside study of Italian literary and cultural practices, thus demonstrating how the inclusion of photography in the study of Italian culture is now understood to be both timely and appropriate. Leading examples here include McGill University, Canada; University of Victoria, New Zealand; University of Sydney, Australia; and Leicester University, UK.

researched, whether from within Italian Studies or in specialist departments of art history and visual culture, and remains the exclusive domain of Italian departments of *Storia dell'arte moderna e contemporanea* on Italian soil, potentially isolating the study of twentieth- and twenty-first-century art rather than exploring the rich web of interconnections with other media and practices. In conclusion, as the examples of screen studies and photography have shown, the past two decades have seen an extraordinary opening up of the discipline of Italian Studies towards the study of visual culture. Whilst more needs to be done, we view this a positive challenge to a productively unstable canon, and a move towards better acknowledgement of the rich intermedial and interartistic exchange which characterises Italian culture.