

# Introduction

It is a hot, sunny day in Rome, and a large number of women are gathering at the Cinecittà film studios with their young daughters. Raised voices fill the air with an atmosphere of expectation. The girls are waiting to be auditioned for a part reserved for an 8-year-old in a new film to be directed by Alessandro Blasetti. The women have clearly been waiting for some time. At the much-anticipated summons, they push through the open doors of the studio, leaving only one of their number outside desperately searching for her daughter. This mother, Maddalena Cecconi, is a lower-class woman from the Pietralata district, a home visitor who dispenses injections. She is a keen cinema-goer, who wants to get her daughter Maria into the movies. As soon as she has located the wandering girl and hustled her into the studio, she starts to elbow her way to the front of the throng. Before long, she gains the director's attention and secures an opportunity for Maria to show off her limited gifts. A novice at the audition game, Maddalena will soon discover that a whole world of dance and music teachers, drama instructors, dress-makers and hairdressers exists to feed the aspirations of the ambitious parents and prepare their children for the entertainment industry. She will also find out that there are unscrupulous individuals who claim to have special access to directors and who, for money, will advance the cause of this or that girl. One of them, a cynical and somewhat peripheral character named Annovazzi, seeks to seduce Maddalena and profit financially from her dreams. He has sensed that Maria, unlike many of the girls who have been trained to the point that they appear to be already professionalized, is an unpolished innocent. Indeed, for all her mother's passionate promotion, she is a plain child who seems to lack nearly all of the requisites for the advertised role. Maddalena's husband does not share her ambition and remonstrates with her about her obsession with their daughter's career. He seeks repeatedly to persuade her that she is wasting her time. Yet she must learn for herself that fame is not a golden chalice and that a movie role, even if it is obtained, does not solve all life's problems. It is when she peeps at the director and

his team viewing the screen test – and realizes that some of them are laughing derisively at Maria’s tearful failure to perform – that she wakes from her dream. Amid loud cries and expressions of desperation, she flees the studio. When she is tracked down and informed that Maria is being offered the part, she refuses the money that is offered to her. Chastened, she instead embraces a normal life for her away from the limelight.

Luchino Visconti’s *Bellissima* (1951) is one of two or three films that are often said to mark the end of postwar neorealism. It is a film that is informed by none of the hopeful optimism that inspired the first works to appear after the end of the war. There is no idea of cinema as a witness, as the cultural arm of the anti-fascist Resistance, or as a contributor to the building of a new democratic Italy. Though some of the practices associated with neorealism mark the film – including scenes shot in the Pietralata quarter of Rome and the use of some non-professional actors and choral elements – the focus on a real event or problem (which had once been unemployment, homelessness etc.) is here turned on cinema itself. The director is played by real-life director Alessandro Blasetti, who, though he is shown to be kindly, was enraged when he discovered that his entry is to the tune of the charlatan’s theme from Donizetti’s opera *L’elisir d’amore*.<sup>1</sup> Visconti does not portray the medium as an instrument of emancipation and collective engagement but rather as a tool of oppression due to its capacity to distort and individualize demands for social mobility. By the year it was made, much had changed in Italy, and the passion for reform had dissipated. No longer was the country struggling to emerge from the ordeal of dictatorship, civil war and foreign occupation. No longer were the political forces cooperating to rebuild and lay the foundations of a stable democracy. No longer were artists, writers and film-makers convinced that they could contribute to the weaving of a new reformist texture in civil life. And no longer was the film industry in a state of suspension. Though the material and moral scars of Fascism and war remained, reconstruction was well advanced, and a republican constitution had been established. Political leadership was in the hands of the Christian Democrats, a force that enjoyed the backing of both the Church and the United States. This powerful support had ensured that the party secured nearly 50 per cent of the vote in the watershed 1948 election. The left, which had confidently expected to set the agenda in postwar Italy, had been ousted from power. While the Socialists and Communists still counted on a high level of support in the north and centre of the country, they were confined to opposition. The refurbishment of state support for the film industry contributed to

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a situation in which impulses to political change and social reform were replaced by a drive to uncomplicated entertainment.

*Bellissima* belongs to a small group of films made at the time about cinema and the mass media, all of them exposures of the reality underlying the alluring imagery. It is a text that portrays a world in which everyday life has been moulded by practices of media consumption with negative effects. Stardom and its lure figure prominently among these. The film is about the mechanisms of fame and the passions and ambitions that are fuelled by it. It comments on the neorealist practice of non-professional casting while also itself being cast in part in this way.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the film offers an indicator of the state of the star system at the start of the 1950s, since the main roles were attributed to Anna Magnani (Maddalena), the actress who had established herself in 1945 as the face of neorealism and shortly thereafter became Italy's number one box office draw, and to Walter Chiari (Annovazzi), an actor normally employed in comedies whose growing popularity among the young was seen by the producer Salvo D'Angelo – who had lost money on Visconti's previous film, *La terra trema* (The Earth Trembles, 1948) – to offer a guarantee of success at the box office.<sup>3</sup>

Visconti had wanted to work with Magnani ever since he had sought to cast her in his 1942 film *Ossessione*.<sup>4</sup> He was intrigued by her vital energy and emotional intensity, her ability to blend the theatrical with the ordinary and by her utter dedication to her art. *Bellissima* was his third film, after *Ossessione* and *La terra trema*. The plot outline written by the writer and cultural organizer Cesare Zavattini provided him with the opportunity he had been looking for. For all its critical thrust, the film is something of a star vehicle. It is constructed around Magnani and the persona she had built up over several films. In homage to Magnani's by now well-established histrionic performance mode, she was provided with opportunities to enter fully into the part of the working-class housewife. The production team worked with her in this regard, as the writer Suso Cecchi d'Amico, who revised Zavattini's story to meet the director's requirement that the initially lower middle-class Maddalena should become working class, later revealed.<sup>5</sup> Her black costume was allegedly acquired from a woman who was stopped in the street and offered money in return for her clothes. Moreover, Magnani was personally involved in the selection of the non-professional actors who would play her character's husband and daughter. Gastone Renzelli, who played blunt husband Spartaco, was an abattoir worker whose strong physique and handsome countenance won her approval. She took little Tina Apicella, who played Maria, so much to her

heart that she even asked her parents if she could adopt her (the request was refused).<sup>6</sup> The director abandoned his custom of absolute perfectionist directorial control for her. The actress was allowed to freewheel and to improvise, and in one domestic scene, Maddalena/Magnani reflects on the nature of performance as she grooms herself in front of a mirror.<sup>7</sup> Visconti would continue his exploration of Magnani's star persona in the episode he directed of the film *Siamo Donne* (All About Love, 1953). Also conceived by Zavattini, the film was intended to reflect, in a series of episodes, on a real aspect of the life of a number of famous actresses.

Much to D'Angelo and Visconti's chagrin, *Bellissima* was not a box office success. Though Magnani was still highly respected as an actress, her star appeal had waned, and the film did nothing to relaunch it. Her character was in keeping with the 'woman of the people' persona she had established in *Roma città aperta* (Rome Open City, 1945), but by the early 1950s this persona had already been re-proposed on several occasions and had become something of a cliché. Furthermore, as the disruptions of war receded, it was no longer in tune with the social and cultural climate in the country. A new generation of female stars emerging from beauty contests was asserting itself. Magnani would henceforth find most success abroad, notably in her Oscar-winning role of Serafina the feisty Italian widow in Daniel Mann's *The Rose Tattoo* (1955). The 26-year-old Walter Chiari drew little benefit from the film either, beyond the kudos of working with an acknowledged master.

*Bellissima* highlights some of the problems that film directors belonging to the neorealist school had with stars and stardom. In principle, they did not like stars and what they signified in terms of cinema's relationship with its audiences. Stars were a product of an undemocratic strain in mass culture, Zavattini argued, which promoted heroes and exceptional individuals over ordinary men and women.<sup>8</sup> The aim of neorealist film-makers was to demystify cinema and turn it into a tool of collective emancipation and progress. Hence, stories were derived from recent real experiences or were inspired by social problems. Actors, where possible, were drawn from popular theatre or were taken from everyday life. Magnani was a case apart because she was seen as a star of a different type, almost an anti-star, who had gone beyond convention to turn screen acting into art. Though in radical counter-tendency to the norms of commercial film-making, neorealism would have an immediate impact and a lasting influence on Italian cinema. But the moment of its flowering was only ever a relatively brief and partial experience, even if it constituted one of the most glorious and important in film history. It

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was also less dramatically external to conventional film production than legend would have it. From the start, neorealist directors had to come to terms with – or rely on – many pre-existing talents, competences, structures and channels of support. These included technical staff, studios, writers, production companies (sometimes) and artistic personnel, all of which were part of a wider film industry. Stars, who had briefly seemed irrelevant, would soon make a return as the industry recovered and began to expand.

This book is concerned with the place of stars and stardom in postwar cinema and society. It seeks to address a series of questions about the role of stars in the complex period of political transition and economic reconstruction that came after five years of war, nearly two of civil war, a double foreign occupation and the end of a dictatorship that had lasted for more than two decades. How did established stars manage the turbulent transition from dictatorship to democracy, from war to peace, from autarky to competition? What consequences did the return of Hollywood stars have for domestic Italian stars and stardom? What impact did neorealism's efforts to abolish or refashion the star system have? Did new stars emerge against or through these efforts? How far did the star system that was taking shape in the early 1950s represent a substantial break with that which had been in place in the early 1940s? What were its hallmarks and distinctive features? Did star typologies change in terms of their gender, age, social extraction and appearance? How did performance styles change in the period? How important were film stars in actively shaping postwar Italian identity?

The mere existence of these questions is an indicator of how far Italy between 1945 and 1953 was a highly mediatized society. Despite the claim that neorealist films emerged in an industrial void, regular production resumed soon after the end of the conflict, and a small number of companies were re-establishing themselves. Though some postwar films, perhaps especially some belonging to, or influenced by, neorealism, present an image of the country as backward, Fascism had promoted a great expansion of the mass media.<sup>9</sup> Postwar films show us hunger, homelessness, ragged clothing, exploitative working conditions and unemployment, phenomena of displacement and general suffering, but they also feature radio, advertising and commercial initiatives, the press, popular music of various types and, of course, cinema itself. The striking growth of cinema as a leisure activity in the postwar years was driven by commercial forces, political and cultural actors, including the Church and the parties, and by audience demand. Cinema represented a window on the world, a form of citizenship, a distraction, a place of

socialization and of erotic awakening.<sup>10</sup> It was a collective experience and a trigger for the individual imagination. The stars were implicated in all of these and therein lies their importance. They offer a unique way of understanding a society and its media during a crucial period of transition. The star system was a barometer of the different impulses and experiences. It bore witness to established affections, desires for change, hopes and aspirations as well as vanities and disappointments.

### **The Study of Italian Stars and Stardom**

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In recent years, stars and stardom have become an important topic of study. Once, interest in the industrial aspects of film-making, cinema as a mass entertainment and the popular consumption of films was largely confined to the disciplines of sociology and economics. Political science was concerned with cinema only insofar as it became an instrument of propaganda or an area of government regulation and intervention. History paid little attention to the mass media and its products, though the sub-discipline of film history gained much ground from the 1980s. In its initial phases as an academic discipline, film studies was more concerned with film as art than commerce, and in consequence the processes of film production and distribution received little systematic attention. For all these reasons, the study of stars was mainly left to journalists and popular writers. Richard Dyer's pioneering text *Stars* (first published in 1979), which for many years would constitute the essential reference point for all studies of stars and stardom in the English-speaking world, marked a significant shift.<sup>11</sup> Though mainly concerned with Hollywood, Dyer acknowledged a debt to European sociologists like Edgar Morin and Francesco Alberoni, who, two decades earlier, had focused on the social processes and functions of stardom,<sup>12</sup> as well as to an older generation of scholars and theorists, and academics of his own generation who were engaged in opening up a new field of inquiry. Dyer remained keenly interested in film texts, but he was well aware that stardom could not be studied solely through them. If their significance was to be grasped, then attention needed to be paid to everything from fan letters and advertising posters to personal biographies, public images and physical characteristics. His key aim was to understand stars as cultural symbols, to interpret the ideas that were associated with them and to assess their power in lending visibility to oppositional currents and alternative values. Questions of national cinema interested him less.

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In the study of Italian cinema, stars occupied, if anything, an even less prominent position that they did in the study of Hollywood. Neorealism, its auteurs and their successors constituted the main focus, while genres and popular cinema came a distant second.<sup>13</sup> The industry was tackled by specialists in film economics and those keen to denounce the role of the state or of capital or both. Almost the only people to write about stars were journalists and a handful of sociologists of the Alberoni school.<sup>14</sup> In the 1980s and 1990s, Italy's leading film historian, Gian Piero Brunetta, was at the forefront of efforts to widen the perspective on cinema's role in Italian society. In his many works, it is not simply an art but also a collective experience, a force for modernization, a commercial activity, an instrument of Americanization, a sphere of cultural conflict, a focus of identity and a locus of memory. In his histories of Italian cinema, stars receive some treatment and even dedicated chapters.<sup>15</sup> Working within a sociocultural framework, feminist film scholars like Giovanna Grigniffini approached the question from the point of view of the representation of women, with female stars acting as forces for change in a context in which barriers to emancipation remained strong.<sup>16</sup>

In recent years, things have changed. Star studies have diversified to bring more clearly into focus the factors bearing on the production and circulation of star images, the role of the actor's labour in contributing to these and the specific historical contexts in which given stars have prospered.<sup>17</sup> A variety of cultural and historical approaches have shed light on the way in which stars have functioned as economic agents, diplomatic forces, cultural ideals and national symbols. While, in Italy, most work on stars still takes place around festivals and in journalism, there have been some innovations. It is significant that a number of chapters on stars have been published in the official multi-volume, multi-author *Storia del cinema italiano*, which began to appear in the early 2000s. In contrast to volumes edited between the 1970s and the early 1990s for Marsilio by Lino Micciché, Giorgio Tinazzi and others, which accorded serious attention to the film industry and to genre production, but which completely lacked any attention to stars,<sup>18</sup> the monumental volumes of this collective history give some space to the theme. This is not to say that the matter has been tackled exhaustively. A close examination of the contents of the volumes shows that often it is approached obliquely, through a focus on actors (volumes on 1934–39 and 1940–44), on stars who constitute exemplars of approaches to acting (volumes on 1949–53 and 1965–69) or via individuals of exceptional note such as Vittorio De Sica, Alida Valli or Totò. The only volume that offers a variety of approaches is the one dedicated to the

period 1945–48, though together these treatments occupy fourteen pages out of 514 (minus appendices). Even in the overarching volume entitled *Uno sguardo d'insieme*, the theme of the actor is preferred to that of the star.<sup>19</sup> This is not to suggest that actors are not an important topic. On the contrary, there is ample scope for more work on performance, casting, the screen actor's craft, as well as gesture and voice. But the study of stars takes in a range of issues that goes beyond these. In particular, it necessarily involves matters of marketing, promotion, genre, press and other media coverage, reception and cultural and political meaning.

Though significant chapters and articles have appeared in Italian, only a few stars have been the object of systematic attention. The Neapolitan comedian Totò has been the subject of a number of book-length studies,<sup>20</sup> while another comic actor, Alberto Sordi, has been the subject of several volumes.<sup>21</sup> Female stars have on the whole received more attention than the men, though the biographical approach has been dominant. A special issue of the film magazine *Bianco & Nero* dedicated to Alida Valli, and based in part on the actress's private papers, constitutes a rare example of sustained study.<sup>22</sup> Fandom remains under-researched, though Federico Vitella and Reka Buckley have produced a number of innovative articles on this theme.<sup>23</sup> On the whole, political and cultural historians have not granted stars much status. Even in books and series on national identity, they hardly figure at all. In the publisher Il Mulino's series *Identità italiana*, the only star to merit a volume is the indisputably significant Amedeo Nazzari, whose heyday was in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>24</sup>

In the English-speaking world, several studies have appeared in recent years. Angela Dalle Vacche's explorations of female stars of silent cinema opened up a neglected field.<sup>25</sup> Marcia Landy's *Stardom Italian Style; Screen Performance and Personality in Italian Cinema* offered a view of the changing qualities of Italian stars from the silent era to the early twenty-first century.<sup>26</sup> Centred on screen performance rather than extra-textual factors, the book highlighted the importance of bodies and was unusual in stressing direction – even to the point of taking directors themselves to be stars.<sup>27</sup> Buckley's articles on Gina Lollobrigida, Elsa Martinelli and Italian glamour offer important close readings of key stars and star images.<sup>28</sup> In contrast to Landy, she stresses the public images of stars and their relationships with the fashion world, the press and fans. Jacqueline Reich's book-length studies of Marcello Mastroianni and Maciste offer new perspectives on masculinity and stardom,<sup>29</sup> which have also been developed by Catherine O'Rawe in relation to contemporary cinema.<sup>30</sup> Reich and O'Rawe's co-authored *Divi: la mascolinità nel*



*cinema italiano* provides the first overtly gendered reading of Italian male stardom, starting from the premises that ‘Mediterranean masculinity is defined in the public rather than the private sphere’ and that ‘the forms of modern masculinity are fragile, unstable and constantly subject to uncontrollable changes’.<sup>31</sup>

Stardom is a theme that I have returned to on several occasions since the publication of my article ‘Sophia Loren: Italian Icon’ in the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* in 1995 and my chapter on ‘Fame, Fashion and Style: The Italian Star System’ in David Forgacs and Robert Lumley’s edited volume *Italian Cultural Studies: An Introduction*.<sup>32</sup> Most recently, in *Mussolini’s Dream Factory: Film Stardom in Fascist Italy*, I sought to draw attention to the neglected phenomenon of interwar stardom.<sup>33</sup> My intention was to assert the importance of film stars in the study of Fascist society while, at the same time, drawing on the historiography of Fascism to illuminate the understanding of the film stars of the period. I explored the lives and careers of a number of prominent stars using a wide range of primary materials including the press, publicity, public and private archives, memoirs, and published interviews as well as film texts. Though I sought to address the postwar fate of the individual stars and to analyse popular memory of the stars of the period, I did not deal directly with the way stars were contested, debated and reconfigured by the cinema of the post-fascist period or the ways in which a transition occurred between one star system and another. These are the central topics of the present volume.

## Themes and Method

Italian cinema of the years between 1945 and 1952 has been extensively studied. It has always been the main focus of scholars in the English-speaking world, and it is probably fair to say that more has also been published about it in Italian than on any other period in the national cinema’s history. The reason for this is not mysterious. The films that have been grouped together by critics under the label of neorealism won almost immediate international recognition. At a vital moment in world history, they constituted a hugely influential body of work that connected cinema with the social and with ideas of citizenship. They pioneered a new method of film-making that was tied to the exploration of social questions. They also helped change the image of Italy in the eyes of the country’s people and the world. Through films like *Roma città aperta* (Rome Open City, Roberto Rossellini,

1945), *Paisà* (Roberto Rossellini, 1946), *Sciuscià* (Vittorio De Sica, 1946) and *Ladri di biciclette* (Bicycle Thieves, Vittorio De Sica, 1948), a country that had been the ally of Nazi Germany for much of the war, and that was regarded with suspicion by Allied governments, managed to attract great sympathy for the sacrifices and sufferings of its people. Neorealism was and remains a cultural tendency of great significance, and for this reason it continues to be the subject of research and publications.

Sometimes, though increasingly less frequently, there has been a tendency to see neorealism as being synonymous with the whole of Italian cinema of the immediate postwar years. This convention in turn has been used to judge later films in terms of how far they matched up to earlier work. Alan O'Leary and Catherine O'Rawe, and also Aine O'Healy, have deplored what the latter calls 'the embalment of realism as the gold standard of Italian film-making'.<sup>34</sup> By now, it is well established that neorealism rose and fell in a context in which commercial cinema, though seriously weakened by the disruptions and conflicts of the final two years of the war, was also producing and distributing films that had no aim but to entertain. Despite a desire on the part of some critics and ideologues to mark a clear distance between the films of a small group of neorealist masters and the rest of Italian cinema, neorealist film-makers were never completely isolated or separate from the usual channels of film production and distribution. Ideas along these lines that were advanced cautiously in a volume edited by Alberto Farassino in 1989 have been brought into the mainstream in recent work by Stefania Parigi and by Francesco Pitassio and Paolo Noto.<sup>35</sup> Of the three most prominent directors, only Roberto Rossellini could be argued to have operated consistently outside the industry. But, even in his case, this could be contested. Though he was undoubtedly the least commercially minded (and commercially successful) of the trio, he on occasion acted as his own producer, he worked with professional actors – stars even – as well as non-professionals, he sought finance for his films from conventional sources (including Samuel Goldwyn and RKO, once he linked up with Ingrid Bergman) and his films were presented and released in a conventional way. *La terra trema* (The Earth Trembles, 1948), Visconti's first film of the period, following his 1942 debut *Ossessione*, was a radical rejection of most tenets of commercial cinema, though – like the star vehicle *Bellissima* – it was produced by Salvo D'Angelo, whose Universalia company was an offshoot of the Vatican-sponsored Orbis. In the same period, D'Angelo pioneered Italian-French co-productions with the blockbuster *Fabiola* (Alessandro Blasetti, 1949). As for De Sica, his in-

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novative and widely praised postwar films were informed by his long experience as an actor in light comedies. Though several of his films were essentially self-produced, they were made to a high professional standard in all respects except the casting.

Not surprisingly, there were a number of attempts to break the pattern of commercial film production. However, channels of alternative production, such as the partisans' association ANPI's support for Giuseppe De Santis's *Caccia tragica* (1947) and the cooperative of authors and spectators that made Carlo Lizzani's first films, were problematic and short-lived. Within a short time, production companies that were keen to develop strategies for different segments of the market intervened to support the projects of novice directors like De Santis, Lizzani, Pietro Germi and Renato Castellani, who wanted to take cinema into new and more socially aware directions. Such support injected resources but came at a cost, which manifested itself in pressure, for example, to cast established stars or to build new ones. Though producers were less resistant than some directors to casting stars who had made their names in the 1930s or early 1940s, they were also happy to endorse efforts to create new stars. They mostly understood that the social, economic and political conditions of the late 1940s were so different that inevitably there would have to be adjustments to the star system, even if they were initially sceptical of De Santis's declared aim to 'produce the neorealist star, the national popular star system in which the audience can see itself sublimated'.<sup>36</sup>

Fascist cinema had produced a number of stars who resonated with the public, and by the early 1940s there was a functioning star system that served to add commercial appeal to the dominant comedy, musical and dramatic genres. After the fall of Mussolini in 1943, and the interruption of film production, the stars were left largely to fend for themselves. A few opted to quit cinema and withdraw into private life, but most expected to resume their careers and did not see themselves as in any way contaminated by an association with the regime. In reality, very few stars would make a successful transition into postwar cinema that was anything more than short-lived.<sup>37</sup> Within a few years, a new star system was taking shape that largely excluded prewar names, though some were able to continue working, even at a high level, albeit without any special glamour. The reasons for this transition may seem obvious. A closer examination of the situation reveals a complex picture to which the position of production companies, the preferences of directors, the tastes of the public, personal choices and opportunities, existing star images and the challenges of Hollywood all contributed.

Most stars of the late Fascist period were under contract to one production company or another, with the state-owned Cines company having the most illustrious roster. The lack of continuity in production in the postwar years led to a situation in which old agreements fell by the wayside and few performers received the sort of attention and range of offers that had once been afforded them. Most passed from one film to another with little continuity, many contracts being confined to one film. Some had assistants or family members to guide them, but agents did not become commonplace until well into the 1950s. David O Selznick's recruitment of Alida Valli in 1946 led to a legal dispute with Minerva, which claimed to have her under contract,<sup>38</sup> but this was a rare instance of an artist whose strong commercial value was relatively undimmed. Comedy performers were the first to be tied to production companies on account of their box office appeal and the serial nature of much of their work.

Most stars operated at several levels of cinema. After her triumphant performance as the tragic Pina in *Roma città aperta*, Anna Magnani made a series of popular comedies in which she varied or reprised the persona she established in that film. Nazzari, the greatest star of the Fascist period, was bypassed by the leading neorealists but much appreciated by producers, who were keen to harness his continuing box office appeal. Although the transition was anything but smooth, his completion of the passage from prewar to postwar stardom ensured that an extensive overhaul in the star system was configured as an evolution. Aldo Fabrizi worked with Rossellini in *Roma città aperta* and *Francesco giullare di Dio* (Francis, God's Jester, 1950) while also acting in drama and comedy and turning to direction for *Emigrantes* (Emigrants, 1949). This ability to move across genres and between auteur works and popular cinema means that the stars offer a unique insight into the workings of the film industry and cinema's relationship to society, as well as into the rise and fall of neorealism.

This book will seek to situate the trajectories of the stars in a specific social, political and cultural context. It will explore performances, lifestyles and public images for the purpose of explaining how stars were perceived, how they won favour, established personae and became public figures and collective symbols. It will also examine the various factors that contributed to significant shifts in the mechanisms of recruitment of screen actors and to the qualities that they required. Whereas most prewar actors had a background in the theatre or had studied at the Centro sperimentale film school, many postwar stars had little training and had to learn screen acting on the job. This applied both to the younger women

who entered the world of cinema after winning beauty contests or working in advertising or for photoromance magazines and to the men who were recruited from the world of sport. The de-professionalization of film acting was a result of both the concern of directors associated with neorealism to widen the pool from which screen performers were drawn and the postwar shift to post-synchronized sound. Though deskilling gave rise to criticism and protest, it was a key element of the way cinema represented everyday milieus in a realistic way and explored national characteristics and aspirations.

The book is divided into four parts. Part I addresses issues relating to the postwar context. Separate chapters deal with the efforts of film-makers to rise to the opportunities and challenges of the return to democracy, the situation of the film industry, the star system in general and the public. The next two parts explore in detail the case studies of ten stars.

Part II is dedicated to five stars who began their careers under Fascism and who, with greater or lesser success, continued working in the postwar years. Inevitably, there are several possible candidates for close examination who are omitted for reasons of space. By opting to cover Massimo Girotti, Clara Calamai, Anna Magnani, Aldo Fabrizi and Andrea Checchi, I have had to leave out others, including Gino Cervi, Alida Valli, Isa Miranda and Carlo Ninchi. While I have written elsewhere about Miranda and Valli,<sup>39</sup> I hope at some point to be able to render justice to Cervi and Ninchi. Checchi's inclusion requires some explanation, since he was neither a big star nor did he leave a significant mark on the popular imagination. He features because he was identified by some contributors to neorealism, notably De Santis and Lizzani, as the ideal face of a cinema that was no longer dominated by the twin poles of propaganda and escapism. His downbeat manner made him suitable, it was felt, to represent the new age of the common man. This intention was barely realized, though Checchi did appear in leading roles in several postwar films. His failure to become a popular favourite provides insights into the nature of postwar stardom and the changing tastes that bore on it.

Part III is concerned with three stars who emerged in the postwar years – Silvana Mangano, Silvana Pampanini and Raf Vallone – and two actors who began their screen careers in the 1930s: Totò and Amedeo Nazzari. The comic actor Totò worked almost entirely in variety theatre and revues until he made a series of highly successful films in the late 1940s. From then, he became one of the film industry's most bankable stars. The reinvention of Nazzari, for reasons outlined above, was one of the more striking developments of the 1950s. In all cases, the

film careers of the selected stars are examined solely in relation to the period up to 1952, even though some of them had far longer careers.

In Part IV, two important themes are explored: the role of the many non-professional actors who were recruited to cinema in this period and the ways in which the internationalization of film production affected the star system.

This study draws on a wide range of sources. Film texts are accorded due importance and many are closely scrutinized. Press sources are extensively used to study the wider public images of stars and to capture contemporary perceptions of them. I have also drawn on archives, memoirs, biographies, collections of testimonies and interviews. Publicity material and posters are a valuable source for anyone exploring star images, and I have made recourse to these where possible. Exhibition catalogues, volumes on single stars and collections of journalistic pieces have provided further material.

## Notes

1. See Faldini and Fofi, *L'avventurosa storia del cinema italiano: raccontata dai suoi protagonisti, 1935-1959*, 248. Visconti pacified Blasetti by writing to him explaining that his intention was to suggest that, in the final analysis, all directors were charlatans, including himself.
2. The film's storyline was conceived by the writer Cesare Zavattini, one of neorealism's architects and its chief theorist and promoter, after he witnessed the scenes that accompanied the open auditions for the part of a young girl in Blasetti's film *Prima Comunione* (Father's Dilemma, 1950). See Faldini and Fofi, *L'avventurosa storia*, 248.
3. Testimony of Suso Cecchi d'Amico in *ibid.*, 247.
4. The actress withdrew on account of her pregnancy and was replaced by Clara Calamai (see Chapter 6).
5. Testimony of Suso Cecchi d'Amico in Faldini and Fofi, *L'avventurosa storia*, 248.
6. Governi, *Nannarella*, 157–58.
7. For a discussion of this scene, see Marcus, 'Visconti's *Bellissima*: the Diva, the Mirror and the Screen', 9–17.
8. C. Zavattini, 'A Thesis on Neo-Realism' (1952), in Overbey, *Springtime in Italy: A Reader on Neo-Realism*, 73, 76.
9. Forgacs and Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War*, Chapter 7.
10. *Ibid.*, Chapters 1 and 2.
11. Dyer, *Stars*.
12. Morin, *Les stars*; Alberoni, *L'élite senza potere: ricerca sociologica sul divismo*.
13. This situation was forcefully lamented in O'Leary and O'Rawe, 'Against Realism: On a "Certain Tendency" in Italian Film Criticism', 107–28.
14. For example, Rositi, 'Personalità e divismo in Italia durante il periodo fascista', 9–48.

15. Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano: dal 1945 agli anni Ottanta*, 247–60; Brunetta, *Cent'anni di cinema italiano*, Chapters 13 and 22.
16. G. Grignaffini, 'Il femminile nel cinema italiano: racconti di rinascita', in Brunetta, *Identità italiana e identità europea nel cinema italiano dal 1945 al miracolo economico*, 357–87; Grignaffini, 'Female Identity and Italian Cinema of the 1950s', in Bruno and Nadotti, *Off Screen: Women & Film in Italy*, 111–23.
17. See, for example, P. McDonald, 'Film Acting', in Hill and Church Gibson, *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, 30–50; Baron and Carnicke, *Reframing Screen Performance*; McLean, *Being Rita Hayworth: Labor, Identity and Hollywood Stardom*; Bolton and Wright, *Lasting Screen Stars: Images that Fade and Personas that Endure*.
18. Among these are Micciché, *Il neorealismo cinematografico italiano*; Tinazzi, *Il cinema italiano degli anni '50*; Zagarrio, *Dietro lo schermo: ragionamenti sui modi di produzione cinematografici in Italia*.
19. F. Pitassio, 'L'attore', in Bertetto, *Storia del cinema italiano: uno sguardo d'insieme*, 192–207.
20. See Chapter 10 of this volume.
21. For example, Livi, *Alberto Sordi*; Schiavina, *Alberto Sordi: storia di un commediante*; Fofi, *Alberto Sordi: l'Italia in bianco e nero*.
22. Comand and Gundle, 'Alida Valli', 586.
23. See Chapter 4.
24. Gubitosi, *Amedeo Nazzari*.
25. Dalle Vacche, *Diva: Defiance and Passion in Early Italian Cinema*.
26. Landy, *Stardom Italian Style: Personality and Performance in Italian Cinema*.
27. A decision criticized by O'Rawe in her 2010 review article 'Italian Star Studies', 286–92.
28. Buckley, 'National Body: Gina Lollobrigida and the Cult of the Star in the 1950s', 527–47; Buckley, 'Elsa Martinelli: Italy's Audrey Hepburn', 327–40; Buckley, 'Glamour and the Italian Female Film Stars of the 1950s', 267–89.
29. Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover: Marcello Mastroianni, Masculinity and Italian Cinema*; Reich, *The Maciste Films of Italian Silent Cinema*.
30. O'Rawe, *Stars and Masculinities in Contemporary Italian Cinema*.
31. Reich and O'Rawe, *Divi: la mascolinità nel cinema italiano*, 6–7.
32. Gundle, 'Sophia Loren: Italian Icon', 367–85; S. Gundle, 'Fame, Fashion and Style: The Italian Star System', in Forgacs and Lumley, *Italian Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, 309–26.
33. Gundle, *Mussolini's Dream Factory: Film Stardom in Fascist Italy*. The volume grew out of a 2002 chapter 'Film Stars and Society in Fascist Italy' published in Reich and Garofalo, *Reviewing Fascism: Italian Cinema, 1922–1943*.
34. O'Leary and O'Rawe, 'Against Realism', 107–28; O'Healy, 'Towards a Transnational Approach to the Study of Contemporary Cinema', 268–71.
35. Farassino, 'Neorealismo: cinema italiano, 1945–1949; Parigi, Neorealismo: il nuovo cinema del dopoguerra; Pitassio and Noto, *Il cinema neorealista*.
36. M. Giusti, 'Mignone è partito: divi attori e caratteristi', in Farassino, *Neorealism*, 67.
37. See S. Ambrosino, 'Il cinema ricomincia: attori e registi fra "continuità" e "frattura"', in Farassino, *Neorealismo*, 65–66.
38. Pellizzari and Valentinetti, *Il romanzo di Alida Valli*, 91.
39. See Gundle, *Mussolini's Dream Factory*, Chapters 5 and 10 and Gundle, 'Alida Valli in Hollywood: From Star of Fascist Cinema to "Selznick Siren"', 559–87 as well as Comand and Gundle, 'Alida Valli'.