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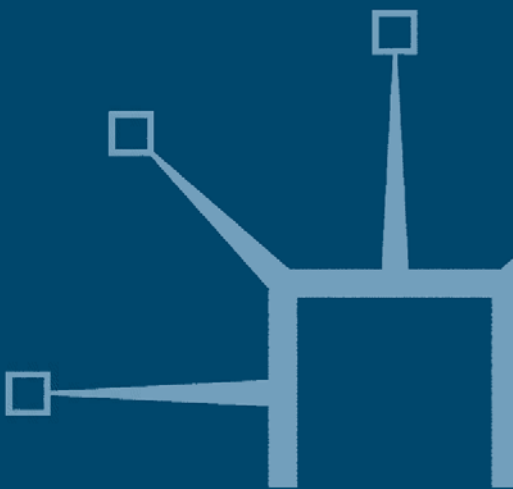
Italian Cinema

Gender and Genre

Maggie Günsberg



Italian Cinema: Gender and Genre

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Italian Cinema

Gender and Genre

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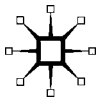

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This book is dedicated to my mother, Ruth Fornelli-Günsberg, and to the memory of my father, Luitpold Günsberg.

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Introduction

This book explores gender representation in a set of key Italian film genres from the late 1940s to the early 1970s: melodrama, *commedia all'italiana*, peplum, horror and the spaghetti western. The area under scrutiny is therefore the interface between ideology and cultural production, with overarching patriarchy as one of the major ideologies informing mainstream cinematic output in Italy. The central focus is on an analysis of gender as portrayed through the formal properties of cinema, an analysis informed by feminist theory.

Cinematic genre properties shape gender representation. They do so according to an interacting series of factors, which shift and change over time: first, historical, political, topographical and socioeconomic context affecting patterns of cultural production and consumption; second, the status of film as commodity (rather than 'art for art's sake') produced by the Italian film industry for a highly competitive, profit-oriented, international market; and third, formal cinematic properties in areas of iconography, narrative and soundtrack, contingent on technological innovation, funding, production values, directorial taste and target audience. Working in conjunction with these factors, the basic characteristics of the cinematic image as surface, and of the screen as mirror and at times also shop window, bring into play gender-related issues of spectatorial identification involving dynamics of desire, voyeurism and fetishism.

The notion of surface invoking these dynamics is fundamental to imaging the body, itself theorized in terms of surface in contemporary debates on gender, performativity, subjectivity and multiple identity politics. Following the influential work of Judith Butler (1990), and in line with feminist opposition to patriarchal ideologizing of gender as a biologically determined inner essence shaping a

stable, unified identity, gender is currently conceptualized as a process (rather than as a fixed given) and as performative. In terms that resonate particularly with the performance arts, gender is constituted by being repetitively performed on the body-as-surface and in a public forum. The element of process is foregrounded by the moving medium of cinema, or motion pictures, while the screen-as-surface provides a key parallel to the body-as-surface upon and through which gender is performed. In the repetitive production and reproduction of gender as it materializes and is negotiated on screen, the fixity desired by patriarchal ideology unravels as signification itself is displayed and deconstructed as process.

At the same time, the patriarchal drive towards fixed, hierarchical gender identities is also apparent. This book centres on the tension between these two gender constructs, a dynamic which is at its most obvious in those genres dealing with body-spectacle (peplum, horror and spaghetti western). In these genres the focus is on the boundary between genders, often as this interacts with boundaries between sexualities, races, classes, ages, nationalities, life and death, the human and non-human. Somewhat paradoxically, then, the emphasis in these kinds of mainstream film, differentiated and grouped as they are of necessity by fixed characteristics, appears to be on signification and classification not as fixity, but as process. Visual pleasure in particular is often generated by the spectacular dissolving and merging of boundaries that are usually reassuringly firmed up and reinstated by the film's closure.

Linked to this apparent paradox is the tension in the concept of genre itself between its classificatory meaning (in which sense it is used as a marketing and analytical tool), and its greater flexibility and permeability in practice in terms of the characteristics of individual films. In relation to this last point, films embodying hybrid genres are common, a production strategy aimed at wider audiences often when the marketability of individual genres is seen to flag. In effect, films participate in, rather than belong to, genres (Neale 2000, pp. 24–5). The role of the audience as consumer is central to the notion of genre as a matter not just of production, but of spectatorial expectation (Neale 2000, p. 31). This has its roots in classical rhetoric and poetics, with Aristotle's belief in the necessity of audience-friendly verisimilitude, and, especially pertinent to spectacle, his notion of vividness as the convincing placing of events before the eyes of the audience. Definition and classification of film genres are still the subject of a Hollywood-focused debate that has become increasingly open to wider

and, as Neale puts it, more 'multidimensional' definitions, pointing up the tension inherent in the term itself (Hutchings 1995, Altman 1999, Neale 2000).

While genre as a classificatory term has been used in cinema criticism since Bazin's use of it in relation to the western in the 1950s, films have always been categorized into groups for marketing purposes from the early days of cinema. However, particular periods of success in the cinema industry as a commercial, profit-oriented business are associated with peak genre production, distribution and exhibition. In this context, genre cinema is often taken to refer to *popular* genre productions, in the sense of commercially profitable films that pull in mass audiences. Unlike auteur or art cinema, this type of film involves the use of stars and high production values, expressly aimed at maximizing box office takings in eras of cinema-going as a major form of mass entertainment. The first such peak period of popular genre production took place in Hollywood from 1930 to 1948, the heyday of the studio system. This was geared to mainly repetitive formula, star-dominated cinema, much of which was distributed and shown in Italy. Eight Hollywood studios between them produced an array of genres (Hayward 2000, pp. 363–75). In Italy it was not until the late 1940s that the first popular genre productions, in the sense of commercial productions for mass consumption, appeared.

In the immediate postwar period, 1945–53, most films shown in Italy were genre productions from before the war (comedy, historical drama, romance, thriller), with only 259 out of 822 feature films by directors associated with the auteurist art cinema of neorealism (Forgacs 1990, p. 117). Of all postwar production, such as cineopera, it was the domestically popular melodramas of Matarazzo (chapter 1) that shifted genre production into a higher gear from 1949. However, the peak popular genre period for Italy in terms of profit, and including production for export (a necessity given the small domestic market), began at the end of the 1950s. At this point, in conjunction with the economic miracle of 1958–63, an array of genres was produced. Set in this period, classic satirical *commedia all'italiana* (chapter 2), like the melodramatic genre from which it took over, proved successful with Italian audiences. However, in terms of both export as well as domestic success, genre production was dominated by the peplum, also from this era (chapter 3), and the spaghetti western which succeeded it (chapter 5). As far as classic horror (chapter 4), similarly coinciding with the boom, is concerned, neither criterion of domestic success nor huge export profits qualify this genre for inclusion in this study. However, there is a

recognized, well-defined corpus of films that has also gained cult status internationally (especially around the British actress Barbara Steele), and offers its own variant of the Hollywood and British Hammer genre. As can be seen from the genres selected, this study is restricted to the peak period of popular, commercial Italian genre production, in other words, mainly the 1950s and 1960s.

From the 1950s Italy became mainly an exporter of genre cinema, and by the mid-1960s export earnings equalled domestic receipts (Wagstaff 1995, p. 106). However, it is important to remember that Italian genre production itself pre-dates this popular, commercially successful period. Epic spectacles such as Pastrone's *Cabiria* (1914) were already being produced and exported at the beginning of the century, while nearly two-thirds of Italian cinema production during the period 1935–7 (52 out of 82 films) consisted of genre films (particularly romantic comedy and semi-dialect farce) (Forgacs 1990, p. 77). Some critics argue that all cinema, including art or auteur cinema, is essentially a form or genre of cinema, and Wagstaff draws attention to Farassino's observation that Italian cinema has always been genre cinema, for a time 'swamped' with the style of neorealism (Wagstaff 1996, p. 226). This study does not intend to rehearse the genre debate in all its complexity, but takes Tudor's standpoint of genre as a set of cultural conventions. In other words, 'genre is what we collectively believe it to be' (Neale 2000, p. 18).

This analysis of gender representation in the various genres is set in the context of Italian genre cinema as an industry, a brief summary of which now follows. The history of this industry is a shifting scene shaped by historical and political, as well as economic and cultural factors, affecting both the production and consumption of film as it develops into a mass medium. Most notable of the factors are: the disruptive effects on the industry of two world wars, including German and then American occupation; Fascist financial and strategic underpinning of the industry; postwar state protectionism in the form of tax rebates and screen quotas aimed at ensuring a specific proportion of Italian films on the domestic cinema circuit, followed by inducements encouraging US investment in the Italian film industry; State and Church censorship, a combination further facilitated from 1948 by the coming to power of the Democrazia Cristiana (Christian Democrats) as ruling party of the new Republic; the economic boom of 1958–63 and the consequent increase in South to North migration, both entailing significant cultural shifts in value-systems and traditions; an almost constant diet of US (as opposed to Italian national) films, apart from

during the Second World War; the advent of television in 1954 and the consequent fall in cinema audiences as its increasingly widespread use affected the distribution and exhibition, and so also the production, of film; the effects on production of a recognition on the part of the industry of changing audience composition, expectations, and reception strategies; and the withdrawal of US investment in the 1970s.

Given the market context of cinema in general and Italian genre cinema in particular, account must be taken of various changing commercial factors as well as simply of the type of films made in Italy. Crucially, the production side of the industry (the genre of films made, how films are even defined as 'Italian' in cases of cross-national co-productions, whether they are aimed at the domestic or export market), is governed by macroeconomic (state- and market-led) and micro-financial constraints (Wagstaff 1995, p. 98). Positive commercial outcomes are the profits resulting when income at the distribution, exhibition and consumption end of the industry exceeds initial expenditure, in a commodity production sector of high original, first copy cost, but relatively low unit, or future run, cost (Forgacs 1990, p. 3). Profits take effect at the level of domestic and export markets, the most successful outcomes being achieved in cases of vertical integration, when production, distribution and exhibition are managed by the same or affiliated companies, as was the case in the Hollywood studio era, but rarely in Italy. Two important and related issues for the commercial outcomes of Italian genre cinema, then, are the composition of the *domestic* market for Italian films in relation to imported (mostly US) films; and the changing size of the *export* market for Italian films in relation to the domestic market (if imports of foreign films exceed export of Italian films, the industry suffers a deficit). Crucially, higher profit margins mean greater investment at the production end of the industry; in other words, films can be made in greater numbers. For our purposes, it is important to note that contextual commercial and market factors impinge directly on the production of a film: on the diegesis, the iconography of stardom and *mise en scène*, the look and sound of genre films and, within this ambit, on the way the films portray social categories such as gender, class, race and age.

To flesh out further the role of Italian genre cinema in the domestic and export market, Wagstaff identifies a trend in Italy's move in 1950 from being a producer and exporter of art films (a type of film with which Italy has been traditionally and over-exclusively associated), to one of popular genre films, which profited from critical acclaim for neo-realist films (Wagstaff 1995, p. 106; 1998, p. 81). He notes that popular

genres were deliberately used by the industry to entice the Italian domestic public away from American film imports (for which Italy gradually replaced the UK as largest European market), citing particular genres: musicals, melodrama, comedy and adventure (under which latter heading can be situated the peplum and the spaghetti western) (Wagstaff 1998, p. 76). Maximizing the domestic market for Italian films was crucial in providing a base for an export market, because the home market was too small to provide sufficient receipts from Italian films to cover the costs of production. At the same time, Italy's cinema attendance figures, comparatively high within Europe, created a central market for imported American, French and UK films, a factor damaging to the Italian cinema industry. However, the balance between imported foreign films and exported Italian films did improve in Italy's favour for a time.[1] It did so directly in line with the production and, importantly, co-production of popular genre films.[2]

The number of Italian films shown in Italy exceeded US films between 1961 (213 Italian vs 144 US) and 1965 (182 vs 140), with a high point in 1964 (315 vs 152) (Monaco 1966, table 4). These were the years of the peplum and the beginnings of the spaghetti western. By the late 1960s Italy was making more films than Hollywood, at a rate of 300 per annum (dropping to only 100 in 1995) (Wagstaff 1996, p. 228). By the early 1970s, which marked the beginning of the demise of the golden era of the spaghetti western, the export market for Italian films was collapsing as the US withdrew investment (Wagstaff 1995, p. 114; 1996, p. 220). Key to achieving a more favourable position for Italian films in the domestic market, which in turn led to a re-opening of the export market for Italian productions, had been protective legislation in 1949, with the Democrazia Cristiana supporting popular genre production (Forgacs 1990, p. 121). The key director of the regime in this period was Matarazzo, with his melodramas. His films saw the beginning of a period of popular genre film-making: melodrama, comedy, musicals, romance, spy and adventure (culminating especially with the peplum and spaghetti western from the late 1950s to the early 1970s) (Wagstaff 1995, p. 110).

Again, it is important to bear in mind that Italian genre films had experienced some export success from 1947, well before the peplum and spaghetti western explosion, but not to the same degree. The post-1947 genre repertoire also included pre-war productions exported in the wake of critically acclaimed neorealist films, the most successful of which incorporated genre elements (like *Roma città aperta*, 1945, and *Riso amaro*, 1949) (Wagstaff 1998, pp. 78–80). Looking back even

further to before the First World War, by 1912 Italian films were enjoying a thriving, world-wide export market for epic, historical genre spectacles (a market subsequently diminished by American protectionism) (Forgacs 1990, p. 51). A revival of this successful genre would take place in the late 1950s with the second peplum cycle.

Focusing now on the composition of the domestic market for Italian genre films, particularly in terms of the size, class, topography and gender composition of film audiences, the scene is a shifting and variegated one, both over time and in the sense that there is not a homogeneous audience, but rather a heterogeneous set of audience groups. It is, of course, unrealistic to attempt to draw a direct correlation between audience characteristics and precise details about spectatorial consumption of gender portrayal in the films. However, some contextual factors are worth noting. First, deliberate audience targeting by the industry in areas of production, distribution, marketing and exhibition; second, the notion of genre as a matter of spectatorial expectation; and third, evolving preferences on the part of audiences over periods of marked historical, political, demographic, social, cultural and religious change. Since the beginning of cinema, the country has experienced colonial aspirations, two world wars, Fascism, foreign occupation, unemployment followed by a boom and economic miracle variously affecting different classes in different regions, the advent of television, advancing consumerism available to some classes, falling birth rates, the women's movement, and changing gender relations at home and in the workplace ratified by laws on adultery, divorce, abortion, family matters and pay.[3]

These issues impact directly on the production of the genre film in various ways corresponding to the industry's need to stimulate the domestic market in a changing sociocultural climate. This entails responding to change, for example by providing disadvantaged classes with cinematic experiences that are reassuringly reactionary, escapist, pre-capitalist and based on traditional gender, race and class values (as in the peplum and the spaghetti western), or, as Gundle suggests, the films may use satire to reassure through scepticism those unable to access galloping consumerism (as in the comedies). In terms of stardom, a classic feature of the genre system, escapism is provided with the glamour of foreign, and particularly US, stars (as in the peplum and spaghetti western), a glamour to which Italian audiences were already well accustomed (Gundle 1990, p. 203). Specifically affected by contextual issues of spectator expectation are details of narrative, such as the balance of formulaic, expected repetition, and

novel, unexpected variation, the precise iconography of stars and the *mise en scène*, and use of soundtrack, all of which inflect the portrayal of gender.

Catering for the export market also affects production strategies for genre films. In terms of stars, the use of US stars obviously works well for the US market (the major target export market for Italian films) and other English-speaking markets like the UK. From a technical point of view, high production values competing with Hollywood are a feature of genre films aimed at both the domestic and export markets. Dubbing of genre films for mass foreign audiences (as opposed to sub-titling for art films) becomes an issue from 1951, when dubbing into English began (Wagstaff 1998, p. 80). A crucial element for a foreign market such as the US and the UK is the Italian exoticism of the product, with the peplum in particular often celebrating Roman history and mythology. The spaghetti western, on the other hand, provides an Italian-style makeover of the classic US western genre achieving worldwide success with, at its high points, groundbreaking iconography and soundtrack. A guiding concern throughout this study is the role of gender representation in the Italianization of pre-existing genres, such as the rooting of the film in contemporary Italian settings (superficially in melodrama, more pointedly in *commedia all'italiana*), or in the Formalist mechanisms of alienation, or 'making strange', whereby Italian cinema creates its own genre versions (such as the parodic element of excess in the peplum, horror and spaghetti western).[4]

There now follows an overview of the domestic market in terms of interlinking factors of size, topography, class, gender, and genre reception. In terms of size, there was a pre-war rise in ticket sales from 344 million tickets in 1938 to 470 million in 1942, attributable to the cheapness of ticket prices (Monaco 1966, table 1; Forgacs 1990, p. 93). Figures rose even more sharply after the war, from 417 million in 1946 to 819 million in 1955, with the period 1945–55 the golden age of cinema-going in Italy and encompassing the successful era of melodrama (Monaco 1966, table 1). This rise was facilitated by an increase in the number of cinemas after the war, many financed and managed by the Church, whose control over distribution allowed it powers of censorship over production and exhibition. These Church cinemas (*cinema di parocchia* or *sale parocchiali*) were set up, often in rural and peripheral urban areas, with the support of the Christian Democrat Party.

During the postwar period 5,000 of these small cinemas were established (Forgacs 1990, p. 50; Wagstaff 1995, pp. 113–14). By 1953 there were 7,000, accounting for over one-third of all cinemas in Italy

(Forgacs 1990, p. 121). With 2,755 *sale parocchiali* recorded in the North in 1954, the majority by implication were located in the South (Ginsborg 1990, p. 31). Prior to 1945 there had been no rural network, with cinema-going mainly a city centre pursuit of the *piccola borghesia*. The resurgence of postwar cinema, from which melodrama profited, was due in large part to the establishment of these rural and periferal urban cinemas featuring *terza visione* (third-run) films, which accounted for 70 per cent of receipts (Aprà and Carabba 1976, p. 71).[5] From a pre-war figure of 5,500 cinemas, by 1953 the total number of cinemas had risen to 15,000 (Forgacs 1990, p. 121). By 1965, however, there were several thousand fewer (11,616), a decline that would become more severe in the next decade (Monaco 1966, table 20). The relationship between numbers of cinemas and spectators is particularly germane to the shortfall facing domestic exhibition income. In comparison with other countries, Italy's many cinemas did not generate as high a number of ticket sales because of the smaller size of the population. So while Italy's 11,616 cinemas sold 675 million tickets in 1965, America, with only just over 11 per cent more cinemas (13,000) sold 2,288 million. Similarly, whereas Italy had almost six times as many cinemas as England (which had 1,995), Italian spectators numbered only just over twice as many as English spectators (675 vs 327 million) (Monaco 1966, table 20).

None the less, at the end of the Second World War the public's expenditure on cinema in Italy exceeded that on all other leisure pursuits taken together (Wagstaff 1998, p. 219). By 1954 cinema was the second largest industry in Italy after the construction industry, representing almost one per cent of total net income, and employing one worker in 200 (Wagstaff 1995, p. 97). The centrality of cinema-going in Italy in the 1950s and 1960s is attributed by Gundle to its relative cheapness in relation to expensive consumerism, high levels of poverty and low levels of development (Gundle 1990, p. 202). Despite the popularity of cinema-going in the 1950s, and boom attendance in 1955, cinema receipts began to fall in 1956, for the first time since the war. This was partly because of the advent of television in 1954, with nationwide coverage by 1957, and partly because of sharp ticket price increases (Forgacs 1990, p. 126). A steady decline can be traced from 1956 (790 million tickets) to 1981 (215 million), with the 1970s seeing a worldwide fall in cinema audiences because of the spread of television. The period 1975–80 marked the demise of the Italian *terza visione* rural and provincial exhibition sector as a result of withdrawal of American investment, a factor in the decline of the spaghetti

western (Forgacs 1990, p. 147, Wagstaff 1995, pp. 113–15). Comparing television spectatorship with that of cinema, in 1956 the number of television sets in Italy numbered 366,000, rising steadily to 6,417,000 in 1965 (with each set obviously capable of attracting large numbers of viewers, especially in bars where television was first available) (Monaco 1966, table 22). Cinema spectators, on the other hand, showed a drop in number from a peak of 819 million in 1955 to 675 million in 1965, although this was still sizeable in relation to other European countries (Monaco 1966, table 1).

In the long term, film as opposed to cinema audiences in Italy, as elsewhere, were not lost, but simply recaptured by changes in distribution, exhibition and sales outlets (Forgacs 1996, p. 283, Wagstaff 1995, p. 115, 1996, p. 220). These outlets sought out audiences away from cinemas, with films sold for home viewing to television (deregulated in 1976) and to video companies, with VCR sales increasing dramatically in the 1980s (Forgacs 1996, p. 283). By 1965, at the point when the spaghetti western was taking over from the peplum in the adventure strand, the average number of films watched on television per annum exceeded those watched in the cinema by a ratio of three to two (Monaco 1966, table I). By the late 1980s, television and video provided the cinema industry's most lucrative outlet, while the 1990s saw a boosting of retail points for pre-recorded cassettes (in the period 1988–92 these rose from 744,000 to 12.4 million) (Forgacs 1996, p. 283). New trends in film consumption have therefore been, and continue to be, shaped by fast-moving technological development (most recently DVD), rather than being instigated by the cinema industry itself.

This summary of the size of film audiences has treated Italy as a whole. However, topographical distinctions apply which also interact with audience differences in class, gender and genre reception. Forgacs specifies differentials regarding the topography of the 'spaces of culture', such as cinema. First, that between the more affluent industrial North-West and Centre (Rome), and the underdeveloped, mainly agricultural regions of the mainland South, the islands, and the North-East; and second, cutting across this differential, that between urban and rural, and, in the case of main cities like Rome, central-urban versus peripheral-urban (Forgacs 1990, p. 15). In terms of maximizing the domestic market, the key issue for the Italian cinema industry was the expansion of audiences from the wealthier, industrialized urban centres of the North-West and Centre, to include the poorer, rural areas of the South, the islands and the North-East.

In other words, cinema-going had to shift from the pre-1945 situation of being mainly a leisure pursuit for the predominantly northern urban petty bourgeoisie (Wagstaff cites students, shopkeepers and bank employees), to become a mass, cross-country, cross-class leisure pursuit, including the urban working classes and agricultural workers (Wagstaff 1996, p. 218). This affected the type of film made, with art films directed at *prima visione* cinemas in urban centres, while the peplum and spaghetti western, for example, often went straight to *terza visione* cinemas. In an overview of this shift, Gundle observes cinema-going in Italy to have been a mainly urban pursuit in the 1930s and 1940s, expanding to include rural areas and small towns from the 1950s to the mid-1970s, followed by a shrinking back of this latter type of audience in the 1980s, after which urban and metropolitan centres once again become the major locus for cinema-going (Gundle 1990, pp. 199–203).

As noted earlier, during the course of postwar expansion and massification of the cinema market, a rural and provincial network of cinemas was established by the Church, particularly in the South. Forgacs records that, among the southern regions, Calabria experienced one of the highest growth rates in expenditure on cinema-going during the period 1952–8, with 1958 seeing nearly 40 per cent of Calabrese *comuni* provided with cinemas (Forgacs 1996, p. 278). This is significant when compared with the pre-war period when Calabria, along with Basilicata, showed the lowest national per capita expenditure on cinema-going in an era when this was low-cost entertainment (Forgacs 1990, p. 22). In relation to class inequality as measured in cultural terms of literacy, use of standard language as opposed to local dialect and access to formal education, Calabria also manifested the highest rates of illiteracy (Forgacs 1996, p. 278). The link between illiteracy and the appeal of sound (as opposed to silent, inter-titled) cinema, as requiring not literate, but visual skill, is self-evident. The same can be said of television (initially labelled the *cinema dei poveri*), the cross-country spread of which by the late 1950s coincided with the period when cinema had reached all areas and all classes. Only a decade later, the smaller local and rural cinemas providing the industry with important third run venues for Italian films, and the poorer classes with cheap tickets, began to close (Wagstaff 1996, p. 218). The *terza visione* cinema circuit was replaced by television, showing an average of 5,000 films, both art and genre, per annum (Wagstaff 1995, pp. 114–15).

With regard to the types of film seen by Italian cinema audiences, a major factor is the dominance on Italian screens of films from another

nation and culture: the US.[6] This has implications for traditional perceptions of Italian cinema as wholly and integrally Italian, a perception that fails to distinguish between the production and exhibition sectors comprising the industry, as well as not accounting for the workings of the industry in the world market. From 1916 to 1965 Italians saw primarily American films, but chose increasingly to see Italian films in the 1950s and 1960s, the period covered by this study (Wagstaff 1995, p. 108, 1996, p. 219).[7] The 1950s and 1960s are two relatively unique decades during which cinema itself occupied a singular position in popular leisure, not least in its social role of helping to ease the processes of economic transformation for the less well-off, and is also a period when US cinema was marginalized (Gundle 1990, p. 221).

The particularly successful era for Italian cinema from the late 1950s to the end of the 1960s is represented by the big export genres (the peplum and spaghetti western), and art films by directors like Antonioni and Fellini. As far as genre films are concerned, the expansion and massification of the cinema market in Italy by the late 1950s was marked by films overtly directed towards the South, with box office returns for Italian films in Northern urban areas matched by those from the provinces and rural areas (Wagstaff 1996, p. 218). Genres like melodrama, comedy, peplum, spaghetti western and spy all figure importantly in this 1950s and 1960s scenario of expansion. In relation to topography and audience preference, it seems that comedy, the peplum and spaghetti western were particularly popular in the South (both provincial and rural areas); erotic and spy genres fared better in the North; while melodrama did well everywhere (Spinazzola 1974, Wagstaff 1996, pp. 224–5). A class and culture divide also exists, unsurprisingly, in that genre films were popular with 'ordinary' cinemagoers, while critics preferred neorealism and art films (Wagstaff 1995, p. 110).

In the 1960s the genres were infused by the increasingly popular erotic genre, or *sexy* documentary, which took off at the beginning of the decade with films whose titles included terms like *notti*, *neon*, *nudo* and *proibito* (Spinazzola 1974, pp. 318–36, Gundle 1990). This development led to the eroticization of every genre in Italian cinema from around the mid-1960s onwards in the industry's frantic efforts to recapture audiences (a phenomenon not unique to Italian cinema, with UK films of the late 1960s and 1970s also marked by eroticization). This is an important consideration, particularly for the horror genre, already inherently sexual prior to any contemporary erotic overlay, as well as the peplum, *commedia all'italiana* and some

spaghetti westerns. The market for erotica has always traditionally been male (a gender-specificity now no longer recognized to be the case). This raises the issue of audience composition in terms of gender, topography, class and viewing preferences. Data gathered in 1956 have been used to assert that in Italy more men than women, uniquely among the advanced industrial nations, went to the cinema (Pinna *et al*. 1958, p. 61). This may well have been the case, given the severity of patriarchal surveillance of female movement, especially during a period in which erosion of Catholic family values had not yet taken effect, as would be the case once television became more widespread and social changes like migration began to make an impact on traditional customs.

However, Pinna's study is based on provincial Sardinia (Thiesi, with a population of only 3,500) and provincial Italy (Scarperia, a predominantly rural centre of 7,000 inhabitants some 30 kilometres from Florence), both areas likely to be more conservative in the gender formation of its cinema audiences than large Northern cities featuring *prima visione* cinemas. Moreover, as the 1960s progressed, increasing numbers of women entered the labour market, gaining correspondingly more disposable income, as well as greater freedom in public space (at least in the major urban centres of the North and Centre). *Commedia all'italiana* already includes independent, mobile career women in contrast to melodrama from the previous decade, in which work is depicted as a prelude to marriage. Even in the early 1950s, melodrama was clearly targeted at a predominantly female *fotoromanzo* readership tranformed into cinema audience. It is also difficult to believe that the targeting of *dive* (female stars) and their fashions at female audiences has ever been less than in other cinema-going countries, even if female cinema attendance was more tightly regulated. Cinema basically became a mass medium by the 1950s, with the composition of the audience increasingly characterized thereafter by a broad base in terms of gender, class and topography.

The issue of consumption as the final step in the cinema industry cycle, following production, marketing, distribution and exhibition, is currently a site of contestation, with the influence of cultural studies leading to consumption-led, rather than text-led analyses of spectatorship (Mayne 1997). After many years in which the film-as-text has dominated as the focus of theoretical attention, with the emphasis on methodologies such as psychoanalysis and deconstruction accounting for the construction of spectator positions from within the film, a more recent cultural studies approach has addressed issues geared more to

the consumption of the film. This move away from theory as a production-led method, to an empirical approach that is consumption-led, has not been unproblematic. Difficulties remain with the empirical research required by the cultural studies approach, such as the availability and subjectivity of data, and, not least, the pitfalls of data analysis itself (Stacey 1994). In particular, data on Italian audience composition in terms of gender, class, age and response to individual genres are patchy. Pure theory, on the other hand, runs the risk of leaving out vital issues such as historical, political, social and cultural context.

In its investigation of gender representation across the genres, this study attempts to plot a path through these conflicting approaches, following a text-led approach informed by the notion of spectatorship linked to multiple identity politics and involving active negotiation of meaning and desire. In other words, the focus will be on the formal properties of the film-as-text – a text, however, that is regarded as a cultural product shaped by the various contexts and conditions of its production and consumption. Arguments concerning the strategies of audience consumption of gender representation on screen remain speculative, using data when available, but generally taking the form of hypotheses informed both by the social and cultural climate in which the films were viewed, and contemporary theories of spectatorship as fantasy-work involving shifts between various identities.

Properties specific to the construction of the cinematic image and soundtrack are crucial in shaping strategies of spectatorship, with point of view directed by the camera eye through an array of different types of shot (such as panning, long shot, extreme and medium close-up, shot-reverse-shot), lighting and editing styles. Consumption of the screen image also offers participation in a dynamics of desire set in motion by the various mechanisms of identification, scopophilia (pleasure-in-looking), voyeurism and fetishism, and the sheer complexities of the gaze in a cinematic context (Gamman and Marshment 1988, Cowie 1997). The dynamic of desire is particularly relevant to the phenomenon of stardom so integral to popular genre cinema, in what has been called the industry of desire (Dyer 1987, 1998, Gledhill 1991).

Germane to these textual issues, which are discussed in more detail alongside the film analyses, are the specific formal properties of genre films in general, and of individual genres in particular. These formal generic properties shape the way gender is portrayed. Basically, genre films are formulaic, catering to audience expectations, so that the

balance between repetition and variation of formal properties is crucial (the dichotomy of the unoriginal, repetitive and familiar versus the original, varied and unexpected mentioned earlier in relation to market strategies for maximizing audience numbers). As Warshow states: 'originality is to be welcomed only in the degree that it intensifies the expected experience without fundamentally altering it' (Cawelti 1976, p. 9). Repetition takes place in terms of stars, plot elements, sets, costumes, shots, scenes and soundtrack motifs, particularly in the series formation of genre cinema. As Brunetta explains, the specialized characteristics developed by stars forge identities not differences, allowing the industry to market the star-as-commodity according to star-identification practices (Brunetta 1993, I, p. 76). On the other hand, as far as variation is concerned, this can, and indeed must, take place to a degree in some or all of these areas. Of interest for our purposes is the way in which repetition and variation shape gender portrayal.

The formal properties subject to repetition and variation in genre films can be categorized into three areas: narrative, iconography and soundtrack (the last including diegetic and extradiegetic speech, and musical and non-musical motifs). While all genres may have some formal properties in common, individual genres are often additionally characterized by special inflections of particular properties in these groups. In the case of narrative, genres feature variations of realist narrative structures basic to classic cinema (as opposed to non-narrative art cinema). These structures take the form of stasis, disorder, the overcoming of obstacles, dénouement and closure, accompanied by the restoration of law and order, and, in a gender context, restoration of patriarchal law (Neale 1996, pp. 20–30).[8]

As regards iconography, each genre features different variations regarding the basic *mise en scène* (in terms of the relationship between framing of shots, setting, lighting, colour, costume and actors' movements), types of shot, editing style or montage, use of stars, costume and couture, colour, degree of exposure of the body, skin and hair colour, and the overall presence or absence of the spectacular (Neale 1996, pp. 20–30). Use of shots is particularly interesting in terms of genre specificity. Wagstaff records the pioneering use of the tracking shot with a moving camera in the silent peplum *Cabiria* in 1914, with all spectacular events taking place in one shot before the camera. Melodrama favours the reverse-angle montage of close-up revealing emotion, and the medium close-up two-shot focusing on couples, whereas comedy prefers the more distancing effect of the *mise en scène*, with the entire scene on view (Wagstaff 1996, p. 222, Giannetti

1999, p. 11). The close-up is a shot also used to record terror in the horror film, while the spaghetti western's inflection of the American genre features the inclusion of extreme close-up in a way hitherto uncommon in an action genre.

These formal properties of narrative and iconography, complemented (rather than contradicted in genre cinema) by the soundtrack, together determine the ways in which gender is portrayed on screen. While narrative remains an essential ingredient of genre (as opposed to some art) cinema, the technological form of the cinematic medium dictates a special emphasis on the visual and therefore iconographic. Unlike its predecessor, the theatre, with its life-size actors and no equivalent of shaping audience vision through a camera eye, cinema technology allows its audience the experience, however illusory in the last resort, of proximity to massively enlarged images and close-ups of performers. As Brunetta points out, technological advances in filmmaking used by genre cinema focus attention to the body in all its details as primary object of the camera eye. As he puts it: 'a single face, body, or detail, acquires a new capacity to concentrate meaning in a narrative context' (Brunetta 1993, I, p. 73). The sensation of proximity on the part of the audience to the stars on the screen feeds the processes of identification, leading to imitation and reproduction of body language, hairstyle and fashion observed in the films. The body, in all its details of gender (biological and social), sexuality, age, class and racial manifestation, whether in action (the peplum and spaghetti western), on display (the peplum), in disintegration (horror, spaghetti western) or in emotional turmoil (melodrama), becomes a major eroticized focus for the audience, whose scopophilic identificatory drives and desires are stimulated.

The key gender issues to be addressed in the five chapters are as follows. Chapter 1, 'Domestic Bliss: Desire and the Family in Melodrama', examines melodrama from 1949 to 1955 from the viewpoint of cinematic representation of the excess of (illicit) female sexual desire and the consequent punishment of femininity in its motherhood. Desire in the family is also explored through the family romance, especially the dynamics of infantile oedipal and pre-oedipal desire, in the context of the processes of spectator desire. Chapter 2, 'Commodifying Passions: Gender and Consumerism in *Commedia all'italiana*', focuses on the genre's satire, in films from 1958 to 1964, of the deleterious effects on the family of an increasingly materialist culture, notably in the form of conspicuous masculine consumption, and the shift by masculinity from relating to others on a human level