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**Cinematic Representations of Italian Office Workers
From the Death of the Travet to Fantozzi, 1952-1983**

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my father, Domenico, an *impiegato*; to my mother Margherita, to my brother, Luca, and to my fiancé Ioannis, whose invaluable support and love reached me whenever I needed it the most.

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Cinematic Representations of Italian Office Workers
From the Death of the Travet to Fantozzi, 1952-1983

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2017

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In this dissertation, I study the Fantozzi phenomenon within the scope of its most popular filmic renditions and in relation to its previous and contemporary representations of white-collar workers in Italian cinema. Among my primary concerns is the investigation of the origins and establishment of the Fantozzi figure's popularity and unconventional longevity through the films *Fantozzi* and *Il secondo tragico Fantozzi* by Luciano Salce (1975 and 1976), *Fantozzi contro tutti* and *Fantozzi subisce ancora* by Neri Parenti (1980 and 1983).

The chronological terms of my dissertation coincide with the production years of two films: Alberto Lattuada's 1952 *Il cappotto*, and Neri Parenti's 1983 *Fantozzi subisce ancora*. The selected timeframe will allow me to investigate the evolution of discourses and practices on work from the years of post-WWII reconstruction, to the beginning of the post-industrial era. The initial chronological term is functional to the investigation of

postwar rhetoric of work and productivity in the national effort to promote modernization and progress. My analysis will subsequently progress to include comedies Italian style and their protagonists' 1970s evolutions—some featuring traditional actors such as Nino Manfredi and Alberto Sordi, some new, like Paolo Villaggio. The end term of the present dissertation will be 1983, the year of release of the fourth film in the *Fantozzi* series and the outset of what some Italian film critics have referred to as “cinema del riflusso.”

While innovative in its insistence on the work of an impiegato *qua* impiegato, *Fantozzi*'s features and gags are profoundly indebted to previous, Italian and international representations of clerical workers. With the analyses proposed in this dissertation, I seek to construct a coherent narrative on cinematic representations of clerical workers by identifying and contextualizing common themes and clichés across the films.

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Introduction

Ragionier Ugo Fantozzi is an impiegato, an average Italian office worker, and a fictional character created by Italian actor and comedian Paolo Villaggio. Originally featuring in 1968 television show, *Quelli della domenica*, and in 1969 *È domenica, ma senza impegno*, Fantozzi subsequently acquired transmediatic resonance through his literary¹ and filmic adaptations.² A ten-film series preserved Fantozzi's relevance and fame until today, over forty years since its first movie theater appearance in 1975. A synonym of maladroitness and submissiveness, the adjective “fantozziano” is a universally known reference among the great majority of native Italian speakers, as well as a testament to the film series' enduring popularity.

For its reliance on standard Italian over dialect and regional varieties, Fantozzi was conceived and recognized as a national emblem of average Italianness, thus marking a significant turn away from traditional comicality, characterized by linguistic and moral localisms.³ Part of national popular culture and collective imagination, the film series gave birth to a distinctive and currently recognizable use of the Italian language whose best exemplifications are incorrect subjunctive verbs (“vadi,” “batti,”) and plural forms

¹ Inspiration for *Fantozzi*'s films comes from Paolo Villaggio's novels about the life and work of

² Aldo Grasso, *Storia della televisione italiana* (Milano: Garzanti, 2000), 203.

³ Francesco Anzelmo, “Più di un decennio. Gli anni settanta e i libri,” in *Gli anni delle cose, Media e società italiana negli anni settanta*, ed. Fausto Colombo (Milano: Pubblicazioni dell'università Cattolica, 2000), 25.

("i diti"), along with commonly quoted and understood phrases from the films.⁴ Fantozzi's mediatic trajectory is representative of a transitional decade in the evolution of spectatorship practices and stardom formation. Facilitated in their ascent to popularity by the mass-scale diffusion of television, Fantozzi's films offer a representation of nationally shared linguistic and societal practices, whose characters and tropes I wish to examine as a post-industrial development of comedy Italian style's human types.

In this dissertation, I study the Fantozzi phenomenon within the scope of its most popular filmic renditions and in relation to its previous and contemporary representations of white-collar workers in Italian cinema. Among my primary concerns is the investigation of the origins and establishment of the Fantozzi figure's popularity and unconventional longevity through the films *Fantozzi* and *Il secondo tragico Fantozzi* by Luciano Salce (1975 and 1976), *Fantozzi contro tutti* and *Fantozzi subisce ancora* by Neri Parenti (1980 and 1983). Not new to Italian cinema, office workers' presence in film significantly increases in the years of Italy's unprecedented industrial development between 1958 and 1963 commonly referred to as the Italian economic "miracle." British historian Paul Ginsborg reports the massive numeric increase of the third sector as a prominent feature of those years and subsequent decades. Growing from 1,970,000 in 1951, to 2,650,000 in 1961, and 3,300,000 in 1971, white-collar workers were "the fastest growing sector of the Italian workforce."⁵

⁴ Among the others: "La poltrona in pelle umana," "la salivazione azzerata," and "La Corazzata Kotiomkin è una cagata pazzesca."

⁵ Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy, Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 237.

Far from wanting to propose an exhaustive catalog of all Italian films featuring white-collar workers, I instead wish to identify continuities and differences between *Fantozzi* and its preceding and contemporary thematically analogous films. To this end, I narrowed the scope of my research to Italian films in which white-collar work is central to the narrative development. As privileged consumers of mass culture, leisure, and goods, office workers have often times been represented at odds with modernization, new societal values and transformations in comedies Italian style. *La voglia matta* (1962) by Luciano Salce, Vittorio De Sica's *Il boom* (1963), *Il vedovo* (1959), *Il successo* (1963), and *Il tigre* (1967) by Dino Risi, *Adulterio all'italiana* by Pasquale Festa Campanile (1966), Pietro Germi's *Signore e Signori* (1965)⁶ and *Alfredo, Alfredo* (1972), are only few among those films whose protagonists are office workers.

The chronological terms of my dissertation coincide with the production years of two films: Alberto Lattuada's 1952 *Il cappotto*, and Neri Parenti's 1983 *Fantozzi subisce ancora*. The selected timeframe will allow me to investigate the evolution of discourses and practices on work from the years of post-WWII reconstruction, to the beginning of the post-industrial era. The initial chronological term is functional to the investigation of postwar rhetoric of work and productivity in the national effort to promote modernization and progress. While set in 1930s Pavia, Alberto Lattuada's *Il cappotto* points to the widely discussed continuities and similarities between fascist regime, and democratic regime in the establishment of a homogeneous basis of consent within the *petite bourgeoisie*. Embodied by the positive, reassuring figure of the "travet" in a film like

⁶ In this film, only one is a white-collar worker and he happens to be the only decent human being.

Mario Soldati's *Le miserie del signor Travet* (a 1945 adaptation of a 1863 comedy), clerical worker representations take up more somber features, to become the offended, humiliated victim of a fascist employer in postwar film productions (such as in the aforementioned *Il cappotto*, and *Anni difficili* by Luigi Zampa, from 1948).⁷

My analysis will subsequently progress to include comedies Italian style and their protagonists' 1970s evolutions—some featuring traditional actors such as Nino Manfredi and Alberto Sordi, some new, like Paolo Villaggio. The end term of the present dissertation will be 1983, the year of release of the fourth film in the *Fantozzi* series and the outset of what some Italian film critics have referred to as “cinema del riflusso.”

“Il riflusso” is a cultural and a political phenomenon typically referring to the turn of the decade 1970-80, made to coincide with the so-called Marcia dei quarantamila, occurred in Turin on October 14th 1980. As a consequence of a car market crisis, FIAT disposed the temporary layoff (Cassa integrazione) of 24,000 workers at the Mirafiori plant. Thirty-four days of strike ensued to this decision, before a parade of some 40,000 workers including white and blue collars, foremen, and managers marched in the streets of Turin to demand the end of the factory's occupation. The mobilization ended in the trade union's capitulation and in an agreement favorable to FIAT. The event marked a big split among the workers and according to some, the end of a twelve-year political experience.⁸

⁷ Callisto Cosulich, “Il Fantozzi di Paolo Villaggio,” in *Il cinema del riflusso. Film e cineasti italiani degli anni '70* (Venezia: Marsilio Editori, 1997), 379.

⁸ Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy, Society and Politics, 1943-1988*, 404.

As a mediatic phenomenon, “il riflusso” indicates a turn towards the private, and the subsequent tendency towards political disengagement. In the aftermath of the Moro *affaire*, in which Aldo Moro, secretary of the Christian Democratic party is kidnapped and killed by the Red Brigades, the Italian media system has undergone a permanent change. A change brought by the emergence of private television broadcasting, and by the birth of reality as a form of spectacle—tv verità. Fausto Colombo situates in this context the outset of a gradual demise of antiauthoritarian forces, in favor of a valorization of the private, subsequently defined “riflusso” (verso il privato), in which media played a big part.⁹

Cinema del riflusso marks the declining phase of 1970s Italian film industry’s social and political engagement expressed through cinema civile and cinema militante—the former represented by the works of directors such as Pietro Germi, and Damiano Damiani; the latter by directors such as Gregoretti, Pirro, and Risi, in films like *Documenti su Giuseppe Pinelli*, *Il contratto*, and *Viaggio nel Fiat-nam*.¹⁰ Along with Italian media system’s turn towards the private, is *Fantozzi*’s film series evolution into gradually less office-centered narratives. While still featuring in his white-collar attire inclusive of suit and coppola, a flat-hat, Fantozzi becomes the protagonists of a time travel (going from Biblical Earthly Paradise, to ancient Greece, Jerusalem, medieval England and so forth) in *Superfantozzi* by Neri Parenti (1986); to eventually retire in

⁹ Colombo, *Il Paese leggero: Gli Italiani e i media tra contestazione e riflusso 1967-1994* (Bari: Laterza, 2012), 150.

¹⁰ Lino Micciché, “Un decennio di transizione,” in *Il cinema del riflusso. Film e cineasti italiani degli anni ’70*, 5.

1988 *Fantozzi va in pensione*. From this point on, *Fantozzi*'s films will rely on his private life and misfortunes with his wife Pina, and his daughter Mariangela. The last films in the series are: *Fantozzi alla riscossa* (1990), *Fantozzi in paradiso* (1993), *Fantozzi il ritorno* (1996), and *Fantozzi 2000, La clonazione*, by Domenico Saverni (1999).

By limiting the scope of my work to the first four films in the series, I intend to focus specifically on the *Fantozzi*'s films' engagement with clerical work. These four films earned *Fantozzi*'s character's his enduring popularity and remain among the most frequently television broadcasted films in the saga still today. Scarce or no attention has been dedicated to the *Fantozzi* phenomenon with the exception of Giacomo Manzoli's chapter "La rivoluzione non è una mensa aziendale: La corazzata Potemkin," from his 2013 *Da Ercole a Fantozzi: Cinema popolare e società italiana dal boom economico alla neotelevisione (1958-1976)*. Extant Italian and English literature has predominantly concerned itself with cinema and work, where work is either meant as any professional occupation, or as blue-collar work. The former is represented by publications such as Edoardo Zaccagnini's 2007 *I mostri al lavoro: contadini, operai, commendatori ed impiegati nella commedia all'italiana*, Elisa Veronesi's 2004 *Cinema e lavoro: la rappresentazione dell'identità adulta fra miti, successo e precarietà*, and Carlo Carotti's 1992 *Alla ricerca del paradiso: l'operaio nel cinema italiano*, all engaging with the working class as a homogeneous entity—they examine representations of disparate categories of workers as a unitary whole: white and blue collars, rice pickers, miners, street cleaners, and the unemployed are associated by virtue of their engagement with the process of production (or lack thereof). Several conferences and edited Italian language

volumes have engaged with filmic depictions of blue-collar,¹¹ none with clerical workers. English language works include Mary Fullwood's chapter "Masculinity at work," from her 2015 *Cinema, Gender, and Everyday Space in Comedy, Italian Style*, and a section dedicated to work and cinema from *Annali d'italianistica* recent volume, "From Otium to Occupatio, Work and Labor in Italian Culture," published in 2014.

By narrowing the scope of my research to films featuring clerical workers and office-related plots, I hope to construct a coherent narrative on representations of white-collar workers throughout some critical decades of transition in Italian culture and society. In this dissertation, I seek to investigate Fantozzi's films in the light and against the backdrop of previous and contemporary films on white-collars; these films include but are not limited to 1960s comedies Italian style (*L'impiegato* by Gianni Puccini, Dino Risi's *I complessi*, *Vedo Nudo* and *Il profeta*); 1961 *Il posto* by Ermanno Olmi; 1970s *poliziottesco*-inspired dramas (Giuliano Montaldo's *Il giocattolo* and Mario Monicelli's *Un borghese piccolo piccolo*).

Subversive of the Italian post-war rhetoric of work as constitutive of one's identity, white-collar films seemingly portend a radical re-articulation of the neo-realist idea of the redemptive power of work—present in films such as Vittorio De Sica's *Ladri di biciclette* (1948) and *Umberto D.* (1952), as well as in *La terra trema* (1948) by

¹¹ Among the others, see: Giuseppe Sircana's *A partire dall'Apollon : testimonianze e riflessioni su cultura, cinema e mondo del lavoro a quarant'anni dall'autunno caldo* (2010); Sara Cortellazzo and Massimo Quaglia's *Cinema e mondo del lavoro*, on contemporary and international films (2007); Angelo Sismondi and Roberto Tasso's *Tempi moderni: l'immagine del lavoro nel cinema* (2002); *Tempi moderni: l'immagine del lavoro nel cinema* (2002); *Immagini dal lavoro: la fabbrica, la terra, la città, il mare, la miniera, la ferrovia, la frontiera in cento film* (2001); *La sortie des usines: il lavoro industriale nei cento anni del cinema* by AAMOD, the Archivio Audiovisivo del Movimento Operaio e Democratico (1995); and Mario Verdone's *Cinema del lavoro* (1960).

Luchino Visconti, in which the impoverished protagonists' struggle against misery and starvation is emblematic of the Country's rehabilitation from the harshness of war. Members of the *petite* bourgeoisie, the white-collar workers hitherto represented, find themselves at odds with the demands of dependent employment, crushed between their need to consume and their refusal to produce. In the pursuit of their self-interest and individualism, office workers are depicted in their disengagement from work, consistently represented as a non-collective, spontaneous form of dissent from office rules and discipline. In this respect, white-collar films produced in the 1960s are thematically consistent with (and sometimes ascribable to) comedy Italian style, whose protagonists, as Maggie Gunsberg explains, "obey the capitalist, consumerist compulsion for things" for they "still fantasize beyond fulfilling basic needs, and promote the consumerist ethos with dreams of iconic, status-conferring products."¹²

1970s white-collar films I examine variously engage with or divert from both the widespread climate of violence and from the *impegno civile*, prominent features of this decade's cinematic production. In his retrospective account of these years, Andrea Bellavita has identified three concomitant forces affecting Italian film industry, which are: the influence of comedy Italian style, generating both comedies (comico-farsesco), and dramas (cinema militante and cinema impegnato); the emergence of the serial structure in film production—relying on some well-established clichés ascribable to different *filoni* (comico-erotico, poliziottesco, and spaghetti western); and finally, cinema's response to violence—meant as a conflictual relationship between society and

¹² Maggie Gunsberg, *Italian Cinema: Gender and Genre* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 70.

power, and among classes. Produced in the mid-1970s, Fantozzi's films seemingly expose this violence in the form of class conflict—or as we shall see in the course of this dissertation, as a parody thereof. Building on comedy Italian style's *mostri* (the reference is to Dino Risi's 1963 eponymous film), *Fantozzi's* characters' utmost individualism, pursuit of self-interest, and familism could be regarded as these films' response to the muted social and cultural conditions. Bellavita's analysis supports my claim: "Gli strumenti con cui la commedia all'italiana raccontava la vita del cittadino medio sono sottoposti ad un radicale ridimensionamento, perché mutata è la realtà che deve essere descritta."¹³

Bellavita's account of Italian cinema's response to social conflict and violence proposes a threefold categorization, consisting of violence as a theme (cinema militante, cinema civile, and poliziottesco); evasion from violence (comico and comico-erotico); and supernatural or mythical transposition of violence (western and horror).¹⁴ However valid in delineating some macro-tendencies in Italian film industry's production in the 1970s, Bellavita's categories should be regarded as permeable. To limit the scope of my argument to 1970s films I examine in this dissertation, I wish to refer to *Un borghese piccolo piccolo*, *Il giocattolo*, and ultimately, *Fantozzi's* films as examples in which genres and thematic realization of violence and class conflicts overlap. One could in fact argue for the contamination of comedy Italian style, with poliziottesco, and cinema

¹³ Andrea Bellavita, "Il cinema dei mostri," in *Gli anni delle cose, Media e società italiana negli anni settanta*, ed. Fausto Colombo, 56.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

civile's features in both *Un borghese piccolo piccolo*, and *Il giocattolo*; and along with some decidedly slapstick comic elements, identify traces of cinema civile and disinhibited nudity proper of cinema erotico in *Fantozzi*.

In their articulation of a social satire on the topic of white-collars' disengagement from their work, *Fantozzi's* films display some features of cinema civile, defined as "cinema di analisi sociale."¹⁵ A natural continuation or an alter ego of comedy Italian style, cinema civile exposes social injustice and corruption with sarcasm and in a desecrating tone.¹⁶ In the light of this remark, I wish to highlight these films' validity in the discussion of white-collar disengagement from their work and individualism against the backdrop of late 1960s and 1970s factory workers' struggles. Clerical workers' non-collective response to dependent employment and its constraints demands to be interpreted in the light of Workerist movement's slogan of the refusal of work, not meant as a refusal of production altogether, as much as a refusal of work under capitalist relations of production.

Inherently individualistic, petty bourgeois' refusal of work is variously configured as an evasion from the workplace (*Il profeta*), as a form of institutionalized and paid unemployment (*Fantozzi's* films),¹⁷ or as a self-paced practice of spontaneous

¹⁵ Ibid., 60.

¹⁶ Andrea Bellavita, "Il cinema dei mostri," 60.

¹⁷ Far from willing to propose a reading of *Fantozzi's* character as a promoter of class struggle and political engagement, in the course of the following chapters I will attempt to emphasize the ways in which *Fantozzi* and his colleagues' unconventional work practices run counter to the imperative of production and efficiency promoted by the *Megaditta* management.

contribution (*L'impiegato*). My discussion of the ways in which these films engage with white-collar estrangement and non-collective, spontaneous response to work demands, calls for the definition of some analytical terms on which I will hereafter rely.

In referring to workers' disengagement from their work I will privilege the term "estrangement," over the more existentialism-connoted "alienation," a central concept in Karl Marx's early work, and to Frankfurt School's critical thought. As explained in Franco "Bifo" Berardi's analysis, Marx's conception of alienation concerns the condition affecting the worker's own self and humanity ensuing from energy-depleting production process under capitalism.¹⁸ Alienation thus presupposes the existence of an authentically human essence negated by capitalist production and eventually restored by the advent of the communist revolution. In the writings of *Classe operaia* and *Potere operaio*, workers have lost their human essence and labor has become a daily imposition in the construction of disciplinary structures created in modernity.¹⁹ Alienation is the condition workers suffer before turning to active estrangement, that is, into refusal, Bifo explains. In Mario Tronti's writings, alienation is not described as an existential condition, as much as an "estrangement from the mode of production and its rules," as refusal of work.²⁰ In this dissertation, I will use the term estrangement to refer to workers' resistance to the capitalistic production process.

¹⁸ Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy* (Los Angeles: Semiotex(e), 2009), 37.

¹⁹ Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *The Soul at Work from Alienation to Autonomy*, 45.

²⁰ Mario Tronti, "Operai e capitale," op. cit. Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *The Soul at Work from Alienation to Autonomy*, 46.

While acknowledging the fundamental distinction between work and labor, and conceiving it in the terms proposed by Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition*, I will consistently use the term “work” throughout the course of the present dissertation. Arendt envisions “labor,” “work,” and “action” as follows: labor is the toil and trouble, “the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body...the human condition of labor is life itself;” “work” is “the activity which corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence” providing an “artificial world of things;” “action” corresponds instead to the “human condition of plurality” and is expressed in the political life.²¹

Arendt identifies in the categories of means and ends the fundamental distinction between work and labor. Labor produces objects deprived of worldly permanence—things to be consumed—their end is determined by the exhaustion of labor power, whose subsistence is secured by the very products of labor. With work, a completely new thing remains in the world, for the end of work is fabrication, a process that does not need to be repeated. “The impulse toward repetition comes from the craftsman’s need to earn his means of subsistence, in which case his working coincides with his laboring.”²² By “work” I intend to refer to the commonly accepted use of the term, a choice encouraged by Arendt’s idea of work assuming the defining features of labor, whose endless “process is

²¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 7.

²² *Ibid.*, 143.

guaranteed by the ever-recurrent needs of consumption,”²³ which seems to reflect the estranged conditions of the workers represented in the films I examine.

An inherently uncinematic object of representation,²⁴ office work is never represented in its regular performance. In the first chapter, I will propose a reading of workers’ misappropriation of office space and time for non work-related practices as an expression of their insubordination to rules and discipline. I maintain that while office space has been regarded as a site of construction of masculine subjectivities (Fullwood), it is in its deconstruction that workers can claim their independence in the face of formal hierarchies and power structures. In their resistance to the modernization of work practices and office space, the clerks from Puccini’s *L’impiegato*, display a hardened mentality and consolidated work practices—emblemized by the historical frescoed *palazzo* in which their office is hosted threatened to become a sleek, modern, efficiency-oriented space. Envisioned as a site of control and confinement, the office is represented as a place from which to evade in Dino Risi’s *Il profeta*. The office, along with the beach, the restaurant, the highway, is presented as a congested, hostile environment for the proliferation of individualism and lack of civic sense of the Italian people. Workers’ misappropriation of space and time of the office is also central to the *Fantozzi* film series, in which furniture is promptly transformed to accommodate workers’ hobbies and leisure activities—a process which I argue is indicative of the blurring between work time and free time.

²³ Ibid., 125.

²⁴ Professor Karen Pinkus brought this remark to my attention.

In chapter two, I will propose a gender-oriented examination of office power structure in the light of Sandro Bellassai's notion of "reformed masculinity." Framed as a continuation of workers' claim for autonomy from the constraints of dependent employment, I examine romantic pursuits in the office as indicative of formal as well as arbitrary power structures in the office. In the first part of this chapter I engage with three films featuring Nino Manfredi, which are two episodes by Dino Risi from *I complessi* (1965), and *Vedo nudo* (1969), respectively called "Una giornata decisiva," and "Ornella;" and *Il giocattolo* by Giuliano Montaldo. In the second part, I propose a gender-oriented reading of *Fantozzi's* films in the light of theories of the grotesque and the abject body. The analysis of Tinto Brass' 1962 *Chi lavora è perduto* will conclude the chapter. Through the examination of these films, I hope to shed some light on the ways in which Italian cinema has relied on office work in the interpretation and consolidation of new gendered identities in the time period I study.

In chapter three, I investigate white-collar films' appropriation of fascist rhetoric, language, and aesthetics—which, I argue, suggests important continuities between the Regime's and the American-inspired efforts towards modernization and nationalization of the masses—continuities I will bring to light through my examination of the films' depiction of work practices and leisure culture consumption. Historically grounded, this chapter will rely on abundant English and Italian language scholarship on leisure time administration during fascism with the OND (Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro), and in the post-WWII period, with the formation of ENAL (Ente Nazionale Assistenza Lavoratori). In this chapter, I highlight the ways in which *Fantozzi's* films seamlessly exploit fascist

and leftist leisure-time organizations in the construction of a social satire targeting top-down cultural consumption.

In chapter four, I investigate differences and continuities in white-collar films respectively featuring public and private service sector office workers. My analysis will especially focus on petty bourgeois' struggle to either earn or preserve a stable employment, a *posto fisso*. I will begin by analyzing Alberto Lattuada's 1952 *Il cappotto*, whose protagonist's involvement with the Regime is brought to the fore through the film's setting in 1930s Pavia. A comparative examination between *Il cappotto*'s style and Nikolai Gogol's short story *The Overcoat*, will bring to light some continuities between Imperial Russian bureaucrats and public service sector workers under Fascism. I will then progress to the examination of *Un borghese piccolo piccolo* in relation to two other representations of *petite* bourgeoisie in *Una vita difficile* and in Carlo Lizzani's 1964 *La vita agra* (A Bitter Life), films in which, I argue, the personal trajectory of the protagonists becomes emblematic of the *petite* bourgeoisie's engagement with the Italian *Resistenza* and subsequent loss of all ideological commitment vis-à-vis consumerist culture and individualism. The conclusive section of the fourth chapter will be dedicated to Ermanno Olmi's 1960 *Il posto*, in which the private firm's authoritarian paternalism will be functional into the highlighting of some sharp differences from public service sector's workers previously examined.

Chapter One

Insubordinate Italian Impiegati: Misappropriations of Office Space

“Mi spezzo ma non mi impiego,”²⁵ asserts Nando Guida (Nino Manfredi) from Gianni Puccini’s 1959 *L’impiegato*. A play on the Italian aphorism “Mi spezzo ma non mi piego,” Nando’s statement is the expression of his unconditional rejection of a permanent clerical position he is offered. However firm, Nando’s attitude is inconsequential, for he is an *impiegato*, a clerk, in the Roman office of the *Istituto Romano Beni Immobili*, whose insubordination to dependent employment is only manifested in his dreams. As a clerical worker, Nando is in fact expected to bend, especially when his office’s inefficiency becomes the center of a national scandal prompting the implementation of a modernization plan. In charge of reforming office space and workers’ mentality, Inspector Iacobetti’s enforcement of modernization-oriented practices rests on the assumption that sleek, bare workplace design is conducive to efficiency and productivity.

Inherent to their appellation and beyond the most evident meaning of “employed,” “in use,” is the idea of folding, as the very word *in-piegato*, “folded-in” suggests, remarks Karen Pinkus, who has regarded these features as functional to a time-saving measure.²⁶

²⁵ Based off of the Italian saying, “I break, but I do not bend,” Nando says instead “I break, but I do not employ myself,” a pun based on the semantic proximity of the verbs “piegarsi” (to bend) and “impiegarsi” (the employ oneself).

²⁶ Karen Pinkus, *Bodily Regimes, Italian Advertising Under Fascism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 130.

Nando and his colleagues' refusal to bend to office rules and discipline is expressed in their resistance to their office space modernization, from historical frescoed *palazzo* where the *Istituto* is hosted, to a monochromatic, unembellished open plan office. Far from wanting to propose an exhaustive catalog of all Italian films featuring office interiors, in this chapter I seek to investigate film representations of workers' resistance to the equation between modernized office design and productivity.

The office is a widely represented cinematic space, especially in comedy Italian style, where it is configured as the ideal site of modern production in the booming years of economic development. In her gender-oriented investigation of comedies Italian style, Mary Fullwood relies on Sandro Bellassai's notion of "reformed masculinity" for the identification of a connection between office interior design and models of successful masculinity. In particular, Fullwood sees in comedy Italian style protagonists' limited access to luxurious executive offices a way to represent their failure to live up to new standards of success.²⁷ In films such as *Il vedovo*, *Il moralista*, *I complessi* (in the episode "Il complesso della schiava nubiana"), and *Il vigile*, elegant interiors of historic Roman *palazzi* and refined decorations have to be regarded as indicative of power and status.²⁸ On the opposite end of the spectrum is the open plan office, in which aesthetics is subsumed to functionality—modular furniture, parallel aligned desks and designer lamps are key features in private service sector office interiors. Some examples of the latter can

²⁷ Mary Fullwood, *Cinema, Gender and Everyday Space. Comedy, Italian Style* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 96.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 99.

be observed in the films *Vedo Nudo*, *Il Prof. Guido Tersilli primario della clinica villa Celeste*, and *Adulterio all'Italiana*.

Beside Fullwood's 2015 chapter on masculinities at work, no current Italian or English language studies directly engage with cinematic depiction of office space in 1960s and 1970s Italy. Fullwood reports Christopher Budd's 2001 chapter-long study and Merrill Schleier's 2009 book on American skyscraper cinema as the only two exceptions: the former consists of an interdisciplinary investigation of office architecture and its cinematic depictions in the United States; the latter engages with Hollywood representations of skyscrapers hosting offices from silent cinema to the late 1950s.²⁹ In the Italian context, studies on work and cinema exclusively deal with the factory, a privileged object of investigation at the center of numerous conferences and journal issues. No attention has been paid to the office as a cinematic space in spite of its relevance as a critical site of modern forms of production—the historian Paul Ginsborg reports clerical workers to be the fastest growing sector of Italian workforce in the period 1950-1970.³⁰

The present investigation on the office as a cinematic space stems from the *Fantozzi* film series, in which insubordination to discipline is expressed through workers' misappropriation of the workplace space and time for ulterior, non-work related purposes. This phenomenon, known in France as *la perruque*, is studied in Michael de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* as a "diversionary art," which consists in the

²⁹ Ibid., 97.

³⁰ Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 237.

creation or material fabrication of a personal artifact during work time and/or from scraps. This can range, according to what de Certeau reports, from a secretary writing a love letter on the company's time, to somebody building a piece of furniture for their own living room. As a way of operating, *la perruque* stands for users' re-appropriation of the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production, in that it diverges from top-down socially and culturally imposed models aimed at securing the system's reproduction and verification.³¹ Regarded as the operational model of popular culture, *la perruque* reflects the "uses and ruses" of anti-discipline, which makes de Certeau's study similar and contrary to Foucault's.

The *Fantozzi* film saga representation of workers' diversionary practices finds a cinematic precursor in *L'impiegato* by Puccini, in which office time is as the manager states: "they do not waste time, they rather use it to their own advantage." Puccini's film, along with Dino Risi's *Il profeta* (1968) will offer two case studies in which the office is the departing point for practices of anti-discipline: in the former, through the workers' appropriation of the workplace, and in the latter, through the configuration of the office space as a site of confinement.

This chapter's ultimate goal is to propose a diachronic examination of continuities and differences among Italian cinema's representations of office space administration and layout, regarded as fundamental components in the effective enforcement of discipline in the workplace. In this chapter's first section I will highlight the way in which Puccini's

³¹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (Kindle Locations 83-84), Kindle Edition.

film appropriates American-born theories on scientific management of office work and translates them in the language of the comedy. Emblematic of their hardened work practices and mentality, the workers' resistance to modernization is expressed through their sabotage of remodeling projects of their office interior design and furniture refurbishing. I will then proceed to the discussion of Dino Risi's *Il profeta*, in which office design and layout are conceived as instrumental to workers' discipline and control. In depicting work as a modern form of slavery, *Il profeta* magnifies the consequences of the production/consumption imperative of consumerist society through a representation of the office as a space of physical confinement from which to evade. In the second section of this first chapter, I will engage with an examination of workers' horizontal and vertical distribution within the *Megaditta* in the *Fantozzi* film series, respectively indicative of their peer-to-peer interaction (horizontal), and of their relationship to power, embodied by their employers, who occupy the higher floors of the building (vertical).

A WHITE-COLLAR'S DREAM OF UNEMPLOYMENT: GIANNI PUCCINI'S *L'IMPIEGATO*

In her gender-oriented examination of space in comedy Italian style, Mary Fullwood devotes a chapter to the office and to the ways in which the genre codifies such space as "the key site of male work,"³² from which female workers are excluded, in spite of their physical presence. Comedy Italian style's representations of modern office spaces contribute, in Fullwood's analysis, to contemporary media construction of masculinity,

³² Fullwood, *Cinema, Gender and Everyday Space. Comedy, Italian Style*, 98.

thus relying for their comicality on the failure of their protagonists to live up to the standards brought by modernization. While endorsing Fullwood's analysis of the office as a male-codified space, I argue that it is in its very deconstruction and misuse that male identities are established and/or undermined. In the first film I examine, Puccini's *L'impiegato*, the male quest for autonomy lies in the (male) workers' insubordination to discipline expressed through the appropriation of the office's space and time. In this film, the office stands as a male territory, invaded and threatened by the advent of modernization and standardization of the work operation, significantly brought and implemented by Iacobetti, a woman. In the film, the workers claim the space of the office as their own, and can only fully inhabit it through the subversion of its rules.

Produced in 1959, *L'impiegato* features Nino Manfredi in the role of Nando, a white-collar worker. In the opening scene of the film, Nando is a wealthy, extravagant novelist living in a villa on the ocean in California. The house's lavish and outlandish décor constitutes the ideal setting for his creative élan, surrounded as he is by a butler, a cook, a manager, a masseuse, and a typist, to whom, freely inspired by the creativity of the moment, he telephonically dictates his adventure novel. As a successful novelist, Nando's wealth is the result of his effortless, spontaneous creative writing, suited and inspired by the ocean front villa dreamy scenario. The scene's bombastic setting and costumes openly mimic sword-and-sandal films, largely known to the Italian public. However, Nando's effeminate manners and colloquial language in *romanesco* dialect undermine the very founding principles of costume film productions for they confer to the opening scene a banal, trivial tone. The exotic scenario's diverting effect is

unquestionably disrupted upon the arrival at the *villa* of a crowd of angry white-collar workers, Nando's former colleagues. Claiming their share of his wealth and fortune, the employees prompt Nando's invective against the evils of dependent employment and its inherent lack of creativity.

In his invective against the angry crowd, Nando depicts work as a means to survival as the ultimate evil. The exotic scene ends at its climatic moment, in which Joan, an attractive, liberated young woman in lingerie lures him to his bedroom—however, a pan movement of the camera transitions to a clock on the wall, reading eight sharp. Nando is suddenly reminded of an irrevocable, undefined task he describes as a “powerful force” preventing him from spending more time with Joan. A soon-to-be-lit ordinary single bedroom reveals Nando in striped pajamas, woken up by his sister Lisetta's opening of the blinds.

“C'è una sola malattia che uccide: il lavoro”³³ claims Nando. Work is a disease and he is undoubtedly affected by it, for he is an employee at the *Istituto Romano Beni Immobili*. The above-described opening scene at the *villa* sets the tone for the entire film as it encapsulates some of its dominant tropes; among the others, Nando's contempt for money is a symptom of his hatred for employment as a means to survival. In his dream world, income comes as a collateral effect of his prolific imagination, which grants him the gift of impromptu production of adventure novels. Contacted over the phone by the American production house Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, he becomes infuriated at them for

³³ “There is only one disease that kills: work” (All translations from Italian to English are mine, unless otherwise indicated).

having changed the setting of his latest novel. Nando addresses the phone interlocutor colloquially:

I vostri films mi disgustano ... avete completamente rovinato il mio ultimo romanzo *La notte muore la luna*: eh, lo avevo ambientato durante la guerra di Spagna e voi lo avete trascinato tra gli Eschimesi. Sì! La cosa ormai riguarda soltanto il mio legale...niente da fare...prego? Se lei viene qua io le sparo. Ah Metro-Goldwyn, lo sai che nova c'è?! A me i sordi me fanno schifo!³⁴

In spite of their specific settings, Nando's fantasies find their main drive in the presence of Joan, a character from the "Giallo Mondadori," *Morte a Las Vegas*, in whose reading he indulges every night before sleeping. In his dreams, he variously depicts himself as a hero—at times a Native American, or as a soldier—who protects Joan from the villain McNally. Several costume film-inspired digressions are interspersed within *L'impiegato*'s main narrative centered on Nando's life in the office, and at home. These sequences serve to emphasize the impossibility of his redemption in the face of his frustrating private interactions with his sister and friends and repetitive office routine. The oneiric nature of his short-lived redemption satisfies by displacing it Nando's escapist desire and longing for a fulfilling professional and romantic life.³⁵

³⁴ "Your films repel me...you completely ruined my last novel *The Moon Sets at Night*: right, I had set it during the Spanish war and you dragged it among the Eskimos. Yes! This issue only concerns my lawyer at this point...nothing to do...what? If you dare to come here, I will shoot you. Listen, Metro-Goldwyn, you know what? Money makes me sick!"

³⁵ Nando's oneiric and ephemeral redemption anticipates accountant Ugo Fantozzi's several failed attempts at bettering his family and work life. *L'impiegato*'s costume film-inspired digressions build up into a redundant cycle of failure that unfolds upon Nando's waking up; similarly, Fantozzi fails his every attempt

The film's stark contrast between scenes set in the office and costume scenes highlights the ways in which the demands of dependent employment castrate Nando's artistic inclination. The inherent lack of creativity of his position as civil servant appears strictly connected to his as well to his colleagues' insubordinate behavior. Various attempts to circumvent the rules of the office, the employees, as their supervisor says, "Do not waste time; they rather employ it to their own advantage."³⁶ It is precisely in the witty and ingenious expression of dissent towards discipline, that Puccini's employees make of life in the office a cinematic object as captivating and entertaining as the adventures from costume film.

Nando's artistic castration runs parallel to a different, more tangible risk of emasculation posed by the arrival in the Roman office of Inspector Iacobetti (Eleonora Rossi Drago). In charge of the modernization of the office space as well as of the workers' mentality, she is sent from the Milan central office to address the issue of Rome's scarce productivity and obsolete practices. A clear-cut contrast separates Joan, the helpless and subjugated object of male desire—a product of Nando's imagination—from the model of empowered, emancipated femininity embodied by the young Inspector. The latter brings to Rome American-designed work practices and machines

to abandon his wife and start a new family with his co-worker, Ms. Silvani. Professionally unambitious, like Nando from Puccini's film, Fantozzi attempts instead to quit his job altogether. However, as it will become clear later in the saga, in 1988 *Fantozzi va in pensione*, the accountant will suffer great nostalgia for his past employment and will become depressed.

³⁶ A patron of the *Ufficio Romano Beni Immobili* laments the scarce attention he receives from the employees. The office supervisor justifies the worker by calmly explaining that everything is under control and claims that "in questo ufficio non si perde tempo, anzi, lo si impiega a proprio vantaggio."

meant to improve efficiency among the slow-paced Southern employees. Imposing drastic changes to the office routine and administration, she overtly undermines their liberties and autonomy in the attempt to control them and measure the results of their labor. Sweeping away all sources of distraction for the workers, Iacobetti orders the replacement of the old clock with a state of the art machine produced in Boston, significantly called “My conscience,” as to suggest that punctuality on the workplace shall not be determined by fear of punishment, but by inner adherence to the creed of productivity and common good.

Inspector Iacobetti’s modernization plan echoes American-conceived theories on scientific management of office work elaborated by engineer Fredrick Taylor, and subsequently promoted by his followers.³⁷ While mainly targeting the factory floor and the industrial yard, Taylor’s theories were soon to be extended to office work in the belief that “just as the efficiency of an ironworks factory could be increased by the rationalization of its tools and procedures, so too could the office interior.”³⁸ Among the others, Taylorist office theorists concerned themselves with issues such as “the quantity of paper-clips in a manager’s drawer, the optimal angle between a typist’s forearm and torso, the foot-candles required in an accountant’s ledger, and the maximum permitted

³⁷ On the topic of scientific organization of office work in the American context, see the main literature listed in Ronn Daniel’s chapter: Lee Galloway, *Office Management* (1919); William Henry Leffingwell, *Scientific Office Management* (1917); Carl Copeland Parsons, *Business Administration: The Principles of Business Organization and System* (1909); and John William Schulze, *The American Office: Its Organization, Management, and Records* (1913).

³⁸ Ronn Daniel, “The Taylorization of the Modern Interior: Counter-Origins,” in *The Handbook of Interior Design* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 60.

amount of steps to the water fountain.”³⁹ Studies were also conducted on the ideal mixing of artificial and natural lighting as to minimize fatigue among the workers, and speculations were made on the consequences of walls’ color on health. For Taylor’s followers there was no space left for improvisation as every aspect and need was to be evaluated and handled by a team of male experts on the matter, and workers’ activity properly recorded, upon their very arrival in the office through the insertion of a paper card into a mechanical clock.

Puccini’s film takes issue with the implementation of such American-born principles on the scientific management of office work in the Roman office. Iacobetti’s austere plan and theories clashes with the workers’ mentality and practices thus building to the inspector’s frustration and eventually, resignation. Age and gender are the most noticeable obstacles to the implementation of her plan. Initially posing a significant threat to the workers’ masculinity, Iacobetti proposes harsh limitations to their autonomy in the face of the office’s rules—and what is more, her attractive look hastens their emasculation for it undermines the traditionally accepted equation between beauty and docile coquetry. However, later in the film narrative, Nando’s daydream of vengeance, to be executed through the murder of the austere Milanese woman, features a vision of Iacobetti in sexy lingerie lecturing him on a wide array of creative, literary-inspired ways of killing—including death by suffocation inflicted with a silk stocking. The ultimate failure of her modernization plan and her subsequent return to her husband in Milan

³⁹ Ibid., 64-5.

restores the upset social order by reminding the woman her place or lack thereof in the managerial cadres of the *Istituto Romano Beni Immobili*.

In Iacobetti's plan, modernization is to be implemented through control. A new, American-designed clock machine installed in the office records the workers' arrival in the morning through photographs, which are then publicly displayed by the inspector on occasion of a presentation; unaware of being photographed, the workers are variously caught picking their noses, eating, or clocking in several times as a favor to their absent colleagues. Iacobetti mockingly reprimands them suggesting that if they clock in for four people they should be able to produce accordingly. She addresses several aspects of work at the *Istituto*, including the reformation of the workers' posture at the desk, their work attire, and ultimately, a restoration plan targeting the frescoed ceiling of the very building where the *Istituto* is hosted. As to prevent distraction and excitement among the employees, the scientific team establishes to "drown" the female nude paintings, and substitute them with a more neutral hue:

Iacobetti: Architetto! Qui bisogna togliere tutto!

Architetto: Anche le donne nude?

Iacobetti: Soprattutto le donne nude! Sono superflue e il superfluo è dannoso.

...

Architetto: La cosa si può risolvere facilmente: possiamo annegarle. Si fa un finto soffitto più basso, una tinta pastello, morbida, direi beige.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ *Iacobetti*: Architect! We need to get rid of everything in here!

Architect: Do you need the female nudes gone too?

Iacobetti: Especially the female nudes! They are superfluous, therefore detrimental.

...

Architect: We could easily solve this problem: we could drown them. We could install a pastel hue false ceiling, something light colored. I would propose beige.

Iacobetti's attempt to modernize the office and the workers' mentality is clearly depicted as an intrusion in the sole-male environment of the office. The plan is portrayed as an attack to the workers' masculinity implemented through the limitation of their autonomy and leading to the suppression of their very natural instincts—she cites some American studies proving evidence for the strict connection between the color red and a non-specified kind of excitement, which she wishes to subdue with more cautious chromatic choices. Nando's attempt to save the frescoes voices his and his colleagues' concern for the beloved female nudes; those paintings “keep us company,” he claims, and in so doing he purports heteronormativity as a paradigm of inclusion in the office. The workers' wish to preserve the current state of the office is set in contrast to Iacobetti's ideas and American-inspired theories on colors, as well as to those of the architect, whom, in a sophisticated, effeminate tone, suggests to “drown” the women with a faux ceiling.

The above-mentioned scene heavily relies on the play between heterosexual desire vis-à-vis its homosexual/female counterpart. Partially showing in the background, Nando and his colleague Francesco interfere in the color negotiation between Iacobetti and the architect by mocking the latter's voice and pose; they reassure the inspector by informing her that if the nudes trouble the architect, there is no need to drown them, they could simply solve the issue by covering them up with a little dress. Nando and Francesco's mocking of the architect's effeminate tone in proposing color choices for the office interiors signals the gender-based power imbalance between the workers and the scientific team supposed to discipline them: a woman, and a *lesser* man, the architect,

whose questionable virility is further undermined by his ancillary position on Iacobetti's side. The inspector reprimands Francesco and ominously notes his name as to flag him as a disruptive element, and in so doing, prompts Nando's mocking reaction—he warns his friend: “Due. T’ha dato due. Devi tornà a Ottobre,”⁴¹ thus suggesting that Iacobetti's approach to discipline would only be tolerable in the education of schoolboys, not-yet-men, potentially liable to female authority.

Iacobetti's modernization program encompasses the resurfacing of a historical, frescoed building in the Italian Capital and its adaptation into a modern, efficiency-oriented workspace. Unlike the American metropolises, where the scientific management of the office space was conceived and implemented, and where new constructions were made possible by the ample availability of uninhabited spaces, in the Italian context, Iacobetti's plan faces the challenge of transforming pre-existing structures into highly functional working spaces.⁴² An architectural metaphor for the Italian *impiegati* who inhabit it, the building where the *Istituto* is hosted constitutes a bulwark against the modernization brought by the female inspector, and an all-male, immutable safe space for consolidated work practices and mentality.

In Puccini's film, modernization is synonym with emasculation, both personified in the character of Inspector Iacobetti. While initially staging a strong role of working femininity in a traditionally male-constructed genre such as comedy Italian style, the

⁴¹ “You got an F. She failed you. You have to retake the test in October.”

⁴² For the use of newly built skyscraper as narrative's focal point in American cinema in the early years, see Merrill Schleier's chapter “From Stumbling Blocks to Stepping Stones: Harold Lloyd's Skyscraper Films” in *Skyscraper Cinema: Architecture and Gender in American Film*.

film's finale restores the upset social order through the personal and professional dismissal of Iacobetti and her return to her husband in Milan. With very few exceptions, the exclusion of the female point of view is a constant feature of comedy Italian style, a genre oriented towards the reinforcement of traditional gender roles and relations. As explained in Maggie Gunsberg's chapter "Commodifying Passions: Gender and Consumerism in Commedia all'Italiana," in their embodying an Everyman-type of Italianness, the protagonists of such comedies purport a predominantly masculine perspective based on homosocial identities and concerns, always exclusive of the female subjectivity.⁴³

What is more, comedy Italian style pivots on the male characters' struggle to either keep up with the pressing demands of their non-working wives (as in *Il boom* by Vittorio De Sica, or Dino Risi's *Una vita difficile* and *Il giovedì*), or in their inventive efforts to avoid the fatigue of work and still benefit from consumption goods by theft, or lottery (as in Mario Monicelli's *I soliti ignoti* etc.). The first in a long series of comedies relying on thieving as a means to avoid production, *I soliti ignoti*, as Gunsberg explains, "does, however, obey the capitalist, consumerist compulsion for things" for its protagonists "still fantasize beyond fulfilling basic needs, and promote the consumerist ethos with dreams of iconic, status-conferring products."⁴⁴ As office workers in the *Istituto*, Nando and his colleagues avoid this very process of production through the theft of an immaterial good, that is, time, while simultaneously subscribing to the capitalist

⁴³ Gunsberg, *Italian Cinema: Gender and Genre*, 66.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

credo through their regular, state-funded employment and ultimately, through their American-inspired fantasies.

In addition to the reformation of workers' habits and practices in the office, Iacobetti's plan seeks to address the maintenance of their physical and mental hygiene: they are instructed on the proper office dress-code of the *impiegato modello*, on the care of their nails and hair, and ultimately, on the interests and hobbies they should pursue in their spare time. The workers' very living situation becomes central, for they are encouraged to start a loan with the *Istituto* to invest in the purchase of an apartment in the new residential neighborhood, the *Villaggio del piccolo risparmio, il nuovo quartiere residenziale della classe impiegatizia*. The *Villaggio's* map stands as a clear reference to the ultimate consequences of the minute regulation and standardization of both the work environment and of the workers' lifestyle, entailing mental as well as physical constraints; the neighborhood is designed as a Panopticon, a detention center whose circular structure allows the observation of the inmates from a central tower post. In his influential description of the Panopticon from *Discipline and Punish* (1975), the French theorist Michel Foucault has regarded this structure as the architectural embodiment of the society of discipline, in which a state of permanent and therefore unpredictable observation has supplanted the need for physical constraints in the imposition of disciplining practices.

De Certeau's study offers an ideal transition from the society of discipline Foucault describes, and the anti-disciplinary practices implemented in the office as they are represented in the Italian films I examine. In *The practice of Everyday Life*, de

Certeau discusses the manipulation of the mechanism of discipline aimed to evasion as a “way of operating.”⁴⁵ In the everyday tactics of those “already caught in the nets of discipline,” he brings to light the clandestine forms engendering an alternative, hidden production. A reading of the films’ non work-related utilization of the time and space of the office in the light of Foucault’s thought would lead to an increased understanding of the ways in which alternative working practices participate to the network of anti-discipline.

Beside its distinct analogy with a detention center, the relevance of the *Villaggio del piccolo risparmio* reference can be productively read in the light of the film’s contemporary housing projects addressing the material and moral reconstruction of Italy in the aftermath of WWII. Before moving on to explain in what ways the Panopticon-like structure of the *Villaggio* contributes to the construction of a social critique of the constraints of dependent employment, I wish to provide some preliminary information about the *Istituto Romano Beni Stabili*, which the film’s *Beni Immobili* seemingly evokes. The *Istituto Romano Beni Stabili* is a real estate association founded in Rome in 1904 by Edoardo Talamo, a Senator of the Italian Kingdom. Responsible for the construction of residential areas in Rome, the *Istituto* sought to secure social order and decorum by enforcing rules along with the adoption of common social practices on its tenants.

In the introduction to *La casa moderna*, a 1910 booklet featuring illustrations and floor plans of the *Istituto*’s housing projects, Talamo emphasizes the importance of the

⁴⁵ Michael De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Kindle Location 83.

concept of *abitazione*, the dwelling, as a foundation of people’s good health, social solidarity, and sound morals.⁴⁶ Founder and director of the *Istituto*, Talamo distinguishes in Roman society the existence of three classes: the wealthy class, the middle class, and the working masses. Although differently able to provide with their income to the maintenance of their household, these three classes share, in Talamo’s idea, the same need for a “casa moderna”—which the *Istituto* is called to address in the respect of each class’ distinct habits, social status, moral and physical needs.⁴⁷ Talamo presents the residential segregation of each class into designated neighborhoods as a natural consequence of their diverse financial ability: Ludovisi for the affluent, Testaccio and San Lorenzo for the “less fortunate classes.” In addition to providing comfort, cleanness, and hygiene to its inhabitants, the house had a fundamental role in the reinforcement of healthy familiar bonds (“concetto affettuoso e moralizzatore della famiglia”) and civic sense (“fattore di civile educazione”).⁴⁸ Called to address with their intervention the shameful and perilous (“vergognoso e pericoloso”) living conditions brought by poverty and deleterious urban planning, the *Istituto* furnished these insignificant areas (“quartierini”) with water, comfort and decorum.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Edoardo Talamo, *La casa moderna*, 6. <http://www.digibess.it/fedora/repository/openbess:TO043-00115>. Last Accessed April 15th 2017.

⁴⁷ “Ciascuna di queste categorie può sottrarre al proprio reddito una determinata aliquota per la pigione; occorre quindi offrire tre diversi tipi di abitazioni secondo la potenzialità finanziaria, le consuetudini, i bisogni fisici e morali di quelle tre categorie.” Ibid., 10.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ “A ciascuno di questi piccoli quartierini si procurò acqua, comodità, decenza.” Ibid., 13.

However, the creation of these residences and their hygienic restoration are only a part of the *Istituto*'s larger program to educate and discipline the tenants:

Fatta la casa, se non si voleva correre il rischio di vederla presto ridotta nelle sue antiche condizioni, occorreva formare, disciplinare i suoi abitatori: occorreva appunto nella casa costruttivamente, igienicamente bene preparata, creare tutta un'organizzazione, che apportando vantaggi indiscutibili agli inquilini, facesse nascere in ciascuno di essi, insieme all'amore per la propria dimora, il rispetto per i precetti di ordine imposti dall'Istituto al duplice scopo, di concorrere all'elevazione morale della collettività e di giovare alla conservazione ed alla pulizia dei suoi edifici. (14)

To this end, the *Istituto* provided its residents with the services of the Casa del Bambino (whose general direction was assigned to professor Maria Montessori), a first-aid station, and a book library, so that the family, envisioned as a solid institution (facilitated in the performance of their duties by the decorum of their house) could constitute an ideologically coherent continuation of the educational mission promoted by the school.

Founded in 1908 in an area adjacent to via Famagosta and viale delle Milizie in Rome, the residential neighborhood for the middle class represented the most problematic case, whose causes Talamo analyzes in his report:

E ciò deriva dal fatto, che questa classe di cittadini mentre il più delle volte, per i suoi rapporti sociali, conosce ed aspira a quelle comodità individuali che le sue condizioni economiche non le permettono di procurarsi, è restia d'altra parte a quella disciplina che deve necessariamente imporsi nell'organizzazione e nel funzionamento di vantaggi fatti per la collettività; disciplina alla quale invece stupendamente si adatta la classe popolare. (21)

As Talamo subsequently explains, it is among the duties of the building owner to exercise his invisible, permanent surveillance upon the private activities of his tenants' families in order to secure order and hygiene.⁵⁰ Presented as a mutually beneficial practice for the residents and for the *Istituto*, social order, hygiene and respect of the rules constituted an essential condition to the families' occupation of the dwellings: non-complying individuals were subjected to eviction. Unlike the wealthy class and the working mass, the middle class was in need of being constantly monitored, for no other method had proven to be effective in disciplining them, explains Talamo.

While chronologically disconnected from the time in which *L'impiegato* was produced, Talamo's report and the *Istituto*'s ostensibly humanitarian scope of action provide a viable context within which to interpret the film's reference to the *Villaggio del piccolo risparmio*, and more broadly, to highlight the strong continuities among housing, social order, and whole work ethics.⁵¹ Educated and supervised by the *Istituto* through the invisible surveillance of the building owner, of the school, and of the medical facility, tenants were expected to comply with the rules, as to become effective educators for their children and promoters of family values. In the Italian post-war reconstruction phase, urbanization projects were undertaken to physically and morally rehabilitate individuals and their families. In her chapter on sponsored films on the "housing revolution" of those

⁵⁰ "Occorre perciò tempo e tenacità di proposito, in specie da parte del proprietario, il quale non può sottrarsi all'obbligo, che una simile organizzazione gli impone, quello di essere costantemente il disciplinatore non visto delle attività famigliari dei propri inquilini agli scopi dell'ordine e dell'igiene" Ibid., 23.

⁵¹ For an extensive bibliography on housing projects in post-war reconstruction period, see Paola Bonifazio's chapter "Filming the Housing Revolution," from *Schooling in Modernity, The Politics of Sponsored Films in Post-War Italy*.

years, Paola Bonifazio explains how those projects “articulated long-term strategies of governance among the Italian lower and middle classes,” in that they effectively controlled individuals and their families, especially with regard to their location and for the purpose of managing the spreading of crime and disease to the middle class.⁵²

It is in the home that citizens, and through them the governing agency, could take care of the pre-work culture, Bonifazio argues.⁵³ In its open resemblance to a Panopticon structure, the *Villaggio*'s plan exaggerates the discipline inherent to dependent employment and middle class status into the features of control proper of a detention facility.⁵⁴ Relying on the comic magnification of the impositions brought by Iacobetti's modernization plan, *L'impiegato* presents the Roman clerical workers as subjected to various forms of institutionalized control—initially as schoolboys, subsequently as inmates. The analogy between white-collar lifestyle and life in a detention camp is a feature *L'impiegato* shares with Dino Risi's *Il profeta* from 1968, in which escape from the office is envisioned as a consequence of the quotidian exposure to hectic urban lifestyle and consumer culture demands.

⁵² Paola Bonifazio, *Schooling in Modernity: The Politics of Sponsored Films in Post-War Italy* (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 2014), 95.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ *Totò e i sette re di Roma* well exemplifies the analogy between the office and the detention camp. The study of the human type impersonated by the character of Totò (Antonio de Curtis) has been purposefully omitted from the present study for it would constitute a chapter of its own. Time and space limitations have dictated such omission.

DINO RISI'S *IL PROFETA*

“Le invenzioni più faticose del nostro secolo sono la settimana corta e il tempo libero,”⁵⁵ laments Pietro Breccia (Vittorio Gassman) from Dino Risi’s *Il profeta*, featuring the story of a clerical worker who abandons his job and his societal commitments to become a hermit on Mount Soratte, in the outskirts of Rome. In line with comedy Italian style’s dominant themes, this film exposes the consequences of modernization on the average petty bourgeois man by capitalizing on his failure to keep up with the demands of consumer culture—especially embodied by the trope of the non-working, exigent wife. Building on these widely exploited motifs *Il profeta* introduces an original narrative development, represented by its protagonist’s abandonment of the urban conglomeration and of his conjugal life.

Widely exploited *loci* of national-popular leisure-time consumption in comedy Italian style, the beach, the highway, the restaurant, the fully furnished kitchen, and the living room, are here depicted to concur in Pietro’s decision to relinquish the comforts of life in society in favor of a secluded existence. While presented by Gassman’s own voiceover as an opportunity to restore the worker’s depleted energies, these spaces are instead characterized as a uniformly congested, hostile environment for the proliferation of individualism and lack of civic sense of the Italian people. While “constructing a national geography of leisure,”⁵⁶ in which vacation is presented as an ordinary, potentially pernicious practice of everyday life, *Il profeta* debunks the economic miracle

⁵⁵ “The most tiring inventions of our century are five days week and free time.”

⁵⁶ Fullwood, *Cinema, Gender, and Everyday Space: Comedy Italian Style*, 71.

myth by exposing the uneven distribution of material and cultural perks brought by industrial development across the Country. In the next paragraphs, I will attempt to highlight the film's proposed political significance of Pietro's evasion from the office while exploring in what ways the film's representation of uneven distribution of wealth seemingly precludes the possibility of a viable alternative to capitalism.

Pietro's dissatisfaction with the constraints of dependent employment is manifested through his non-collective, spontaneous response: he withdraws from society and becomes self-sufficient by producing and consuming the material means to his survival. Produced in the late 1960s, *Il profeta* could be fruitfully investigated against the backdrop of the Workerist "refusal of work" as to shed some light on the ways in which the film portrays clerical workers' position vis-à-vis collective action and organized dissent.

Envisioned as a positive moment of liberation, the refusal of work does not constitute the refusal of production altogether as much as a refusal to work under the established capitalist relations of production.⁵⁷ Stemming from the workers' desire to become autonomous from the capital and from their desire to free themselves from the timing of the assembly line, the refusal of work is configured as a form of dissent expressed through absenteeism and sabotage.⁵⁸ Franco "Bifo" Berardi explains how with the refusal "liberated individualities deviated with rage from the ideology of sacrifice and

⁵⁷ Michael Hardt, *Radical Thought in Italy: For a Potential Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 2.

⁵⁸ Bifo, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*, 93.

the work ethic: work was denounced as a pure hierarchical repetition, deprived of any intelligence or creativity.”⁵⁹ The estrangement of the workers from the object of their work is a unifying factor of continuity between the factory floor and the office for

As an effect of capitalistic development, industrial labor loses any relation to the concrete character of activity, becoming purely rented out time, objectified in products whose concrete and useful quality does not have any interest other than that of enabling the exchange and the accumulation of plus-value. (60)

“Abstract labor,” meant by Marx as the materialization of labor time into exchange value, anticipates and finds its full realization, in Bifo’s analysis, in the creation of digital work technologies designed and implemented in the post-Fordist phase of capitalistic development.⁶⁰ While still set within a Fordist mode of production (1968), Pietro Breccia’s deskwork can be regarded as estranging abstract labor, for by not requiring superior intellectual energies, it shares with the factory the following three components: immobility (the producer has to remain still, in the assembly line and at his desk, in order for the product to progress); subsumption of worker’s time into exchange value; labor as an imposition of disciplinary structures irrespective of one’s creative and artistic faculties.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 93.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 64. The post-Fordist era of digital technology has led theorists such as Paolo Virno and Maurizio Lazzarato to talk about “immaterial labor,” which unlike Marx’s notion of “abstract labor,” deals specifically with contemporary, digitalized forms of labor producing networks and flows of information. Lazzarato defines it as “the labor that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity.” Virno, *Radical Thought in Italy*, 132.

Regarded as a positive moment of liberation, the refusal of work brought together diverse subjectivities and struggles, that spreading from the large industrial centers, came to question the very relationships of power at stake in the production process. As Carlo Vercellone reports:

The various new forms of social transformation that emerged in Italy in the 1970s—the so-called auto-reduction struggles, the user and consumer strikes, and the radical critiques of the health care system and the total institutions of disciplinary society—all were centered precisely in the attempt to reappropriate the structures of welfare and invert their logic based in the reproduction of the norm of the wage relationship.⁶¹

Inherent to the concept of “estrangement,” preferred in Bifo’s analysis over “alienation,” is the workers’ conscious awareness and willingness to respond to their exploitation with refusal. Regarded from this perspective, estrangement becomes the very premise of action that “makes the liberatory dynamic possible.”⁶² While lacking the collective, organized dimension that would enable his personal condition to become political, Pietro’s aversion towards dependent employment should be interpreted as a form of estrangement. Called to Rome and put under trial for tax evasion as a consequence of his hermitage on the Soratte, Pietro attempts to motivate his choice before the jury by evoking the extenuating circumstances leading to his decision.

⁶¹ Carlo Vercellone, *Radical Thought in Italy*, 83.

⁶² Bifo, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*, 46.

Signor pretore, signori giudici, pubblico e avvocati, cinque anni fa io ero esattamente come voi: ero, e potete controllarlo, un cittadino perfetto. Avevo la macchina e naturalmente anche io come voi consumavo più copertoni che scarpe. Impiegato a reddito fisso, come tutte le mattina arrivavo alle otto e trenta in ufficio pigiato nell'ascensore coi miei cari colleghi ricevevo puntualmente i bacilli dell'ultima asiatica. Eh sì, era un ufficio moderno, con l'aria condizionata troppo caldo d'inverno e troppo freddo d'estate. E così, per otto ore, scimmia ammaestrata a duecentomila lire al mese armeggiavo come un pianista monco sulla calcolatrice non impiegando in quel lavoro, come del resto tutti gli impiegati del mondo, nessuna delle facoltà superiori dell'uomo. Come dire, il mio era potremmo definirlo "un ozio frenetico." Oh, e se poi interrompevo per accendere una sigaretta (io allora ne fumavo ottanta al giorno) il dottor Marcaccini, invisibile capo contabile, che vedeva tutto, mi richiamava immediatamente ai miei doveri impedendomi per carità, di defraudare l'azienda di quei preziosi secondi.⁶³

Pietro concludes his narrative by reminiscing about the day he abandoned his car and wife in a traffic jam on their way home from a Sunday spent at the beach: he leaves his vehicle justifying his departure with a proverbial trip to buy cigarettes, and in so doing, substituting the renunciation to familial values underpinning to the abandonment of one's home, with the refusal of modernization and its credo of consumption.

Pietro's dissent from the constraints of dependent employment is articulated as an evasion from the office, featuring as a permanently monitored site of confinement.

Pietro's defection from the office shall be regarded and interpreted in the light of the

⁶³ "Dear Magistrate, the jury, audience and attorneys: five years ago, I was exactly like you. I was, and you can check on this, a perfect citizen. I had a car and I would wear out, just like you, more tires than shoes. I was a dependent employee with a regular income. I would arrive to my office every morning at 8:30, crushed in the elevator with my beloved colleagues, where I would catch the germs from the latest Asian flu. It was a modern office, with the air conditioning, too cold in the summer and too hot in the winter. And in these conditions, like a trained monkey, for eight hours every day, for two thousand lira per month, I would keep myself busy on the calculator, like a crippled pianist without employing, like all other office workers in this world, none of the superior intellectual faculties of mankind. Mine was, as to say, a frantic sloth. And if I happened to interrupt this task to light up a cigarette (back then I would smoke eighty per day), engineer Marcaccini, the invisible human resources manager, who was omnipresent, would immediately reprimand me, in order to prevent me from subtracting the firm from those precious seconds."

disembodiment of the central, controlling power, which undermines the very terms of the employer/employee conflict. The invisibility of power indicates the permeating and invasive character of the consumerist ethos whose only viable alternative is to be found outside of organized society.

Conceiving dependent work as a form of modern slavery, Pietro breaks free from the constraints of modernized society only to return, in a circular narrative, to his starting point as an ordinary man animated by the desire to earn money to afford luxury goods. Set against the backdrop of an unevenly distributed wealth brought by the Italian economic miracle, Risi's film offers a commentary on the weary lifestyle of people inhabiting a large urban conglomeration, as opposed to the more simplistic and ingenuous approach to media and consumption of the villagers from the Roman countryside. Far from representing the positive end of the spectrum and a sane alternative to the taxing city life, the peasants are instead depicted as uninvolved consumers of a mass culture they do not fully grasp.

Gathered around the local *bar*'s television to watch a report about the mysterious giant of the mountain (Pietro), the inhabitants of the small town adjacent to the Soratte appear absorbed and fascinated by the journalists' sensational event-like news coverage. Impaired in their comprehension by the Italian language and by the journalist's grandiose tone, abuse of epithets, and embellishing literary references, the peasants are utterly disoriented. The bombastic reportage comes to a close, promptly echoed by a voice in the

audience announcing: “Io nun ci so capito gnente!”⁶⁴ Stranded by modern-life comforts (they seem unwilling to venture in *their own* mountain to see the giant for themselves), and their being at odds with media-produced discourse and language, the people at the foothill of Soratte embodies the geographical limits of the economic miracle by unveiling its national, and yet “non-local” character.

In order to exemplify in what ways *Il profeta* uses linguistic boundaries to undermine the validity of homogenizing cultural models, I will briefly refer to Angelo Restivo’s discussion of *Comizi d’amore* (1965), a documentary by Pier Paolo Pasolini, which Restivo says to underpin “the tension between a nationalizing, hegemonizing discourse and the practice of everyday life.”⁶⁵ (77). Shot during the location-scouting phase of *Il vangelo secondo Matteo*, Pasolini’s *Comizi* is an inquest on sex and gender roles conducted in various Italian regions. The film unveils the illusory nature of a general consensus on several controversial issues by debunking the myth of a homogeneous national discourse. *Comizi* maps the geography of Italy’s cultural and ideological diversity in the face of the “*constructedness* of the Symbolic Order,” finally regarded as an “arbitrary covering-over of some traumatic Real.”⁶⁶ Language and dialect work in the documentary and in Risi’s film as a prominent feature in the exposure of the

⁶⁴ “I did not understand a thing!”

⁶⁵ Angelo Restivo, *The Cinema of Economic Miracles: Visuality and Modernization in the Italian Art Film* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 77.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

Italian diversity in the face of television-produced illusion of national linguistic homogeneity.

Pasolini's inquest on people's perception of sex and gender roles is indicative of his ambition to represent reality through the cinematic medium. Restivo identifies the demise of such possibility with the advent and mass-scale diffusion of television, a producer of a completely self-referential system.⁶⁷ A factor of national linguistic and cultural unification, television marked an irrevocable change in the role of cinema inasmuch as it was no longer the sole medium of mass entertainment.⁶⁸ Fournier Lanzoni argues that the advent of television not only changed the habits of the public, but also the star production system in the mid-1970s. Television gave rise to a new generation of actors such as Renato Pozzetto, Enrico Montesano, and Paolo Villaggio, whose debut into comic cinema was due to the popularity they earned through *varietà* programs.⁶⁹

In the conclusive part of this chapter, I will engage with Paolo Villaggio's character, Fantozzi, a cinematic adaptation and synthesis of his other two comedic personas, Giandomenico Fracchia and professor Kranz, widely known to television audience for their regular appearance in *Quelli della domenica*, a variety show hosted by Villaggio in the final years 1968-1971.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 91.

⁶⁸ Remi Fournier Lanzoni, *Comedy Italian Style: The Golden Age of Italian Film Comedies* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 154.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 156.

HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL POWER STRUCTURE IN *FANTOZZI*

In this conclusive section, I wish to propose an examination of the horizontal and vertical distribution of the workers within the space of the firm where Fantozzi is employed, the *Megaditta*, as functional to the representation of power and its structure in the *Fantozzi* saga. For clarity purposes, I organized this conclusive section in two parts: in the first part, I will examine workers' insubordination through the lens of appropriation and misuse of the time and space of the office. This part's ultimate goal is to highlight the ways in which office space and its appropriation for non-work related practices is functional to the films' portrayal of non-collective forms of dissent. I will refer to this section as the horizontal distribution of workers in the office for it pertains to the informal, arbitrary power structures regulating interaction among peers. In the second part of the present section, I will instead engage with what I will refer to as the vertical distribution of the workers in the *Megaditta*, whose top floor is occupied by the invisible, unattainable, god-like figure of the *Megadirettore*. Common employees' physical ascent to the management floor is portrayed as an ascent to heaven, where rebellious and eventually repentant workers find absolution and atonement for their sins. Re-admitted in the working environment as objects or as part of the management's office décor, Fantozzi and his colleagues benefit from the grace of the *Megadirettore*, thus earning forgiveness through penance. My goal for this conclusive part is to unravel the ideological assumptions underpinning to the film series' satire of the gap separating common workers from their management as represented in the vertical distribution of the workers within the building.

The opening scene of 1983 *Fantozzi subisce ancora* depicts clerical workers impatiently waiting to enter the *Megaditta* building while yelling pro-productivity slogans. Villaggio's voiceover solemnly announces that after several years of irreparable damages brought to the Italian economy by absenteeism, people have finally realized the importance of efficiency on the workplace for the common good of the Country:

Con l'alternarsi di saggi governi, il popolo italiano ha ormai raggiunto un alto grado di maturità. I lavoratori, operai e impiegati, hanno finalmente capito che la produttività è alla base del benessere sociale e l'unica strada per uscire dalla crisi.⁷⁰

However, upon their admission into the building, the workers quietly reach their office, only to engage in a frantic ritual of preparation to non-work related activities. An upbeat music accompanies the workers, who liberating themselves from their white-collar suits and dress shirts wear work uniforms, swimsuits, or leisure time apparel. Within the space of few shots, the impatient crowd of office workers is turned into a population of cooks, soccer players, beach goers, athletes, and waiters—one of the workers even dresses as a blind beggar.

Followed in their way out of the *Megaditta*, the workers rush to their second employment, while some others climb to the building rooftop, a makeshift solarium furnished with lounge chairs and bar service. A few privileged members of the ANA, the Associazione Nazionale Assenteisti, leave the building on a helicopter. Like a profane

⁷⁰ "Having been ruled by several sapient governments, the Italian people have finally reached full maturity. The workers, both blue collars and white-collars, have finally comprehended that productivity is the basis of social wellbeing and the only way to overcome the crisis."

national anthem, the notorious tune by Edoardo Vianello, “Abbronzatissima,” animates the entire scene, infusing in the Italian audience an excruciating sense of kinship to the rooftop community of vacationers. Released in 1963, “Abbronzatissima” turns the rooftop scene into a parody of comedy Italian style representations of beach and economic prosperity in films such as *Racconti d’estate* (1958), *Tipi da spiaggia* (1959) and *Diciottenni al sole* (1962).

The scene takes to an extreme white-collar work static, idle nature through the articulation of a stark contrast with leisure activities and non-clerical jobs, also achieved through the upbeat musical score. Lacking an appraisable, tangible outcome to their work, clerical workers turn instead to more dynamic practices, whose meaning and usefulness are immediately exemplified in their work uniforms—as opposed to their plain, homogenizing suits. Directed by Neri Parenti, *Fantozzi subisce ancora*’s opening is a magnification of a similar scene presented three years before in *Fantozzi contro tutti* (1980), by Luciano Salce. In the latter, Villaggio’s voiceover sarcastically asserts that the employees have found in their interest for the common good, a new, motivating incentive to productivity on the workplace. An establishing shot of the façade of the *Megaditta*’s is commented as follows:

Questa è la sede centrale di una megaditta italiana degli anni Ottanta. La crisi del paese, la svalutazione galoppante, hanno finalmente generato nella classe impiegatizia un nuovo, incredibile, morboso attaccamento al lavoro.⁷¹

⁷¹ “This is the main office of a 1980s big Italian firm. The Italian crisis, and the rampant recession have engendered in the class of white-collar workers a new, unbelievable, morbid, dependence from work.”

The imposing building's façade and Villaggio's solemn introduction are soon disproved by the following shots, in which workers are displayed while engaging, undisturbed, in various leisure activities. On four combined desks, some of them are playing Ping-Pong, an iconic activity of summer-time entertainment; Geometra Calboni, Fantozzi's love rival, is trimming his nasal hair, Ragionier Filini is engaging in some carpentry work, two others have adapted a folder cabinet into a standing chess table, in whose drawers they discard unneeded pieces, while someone in the background is comfortably sleeping on a desk.

As in the launch of a rocket in space, an English-language countdown to zero begins, as the office clock reads seconds away from five o' clock, the end of their work-shift. All employees suspend their activities and restore the original purpose of their workspace by hiding their non-work related tools. The roaring sound of a departing rocket comments on the magnitude of the event as a horde of workers evacuate the building by climbing down the windows with a rope, or more conveniently, jumping off of the building to land on a trampoline. Severely impaired in his vision, and in charge of this latter procedure, Ragionier Filini calls his colleagues by their last name when it is their turn to jump; due to an accident in which he drops his glasses, Filini dismisses the team he is directing and causes Fantozzi to land on the bare pavement. Fantozzi's fall is one of the several instances throughout the film series in which the work environment and its features—sharp edges, staircases, machines—are depicted as profoundly and irreversibly hostile to the unlucky accountant.

The scenes here described mark a shift in the understanding of both the workspace and of the workers' subjectivity for they articulate an open satire of consolidated social practices. Produced in the midst of the years of the so-called "cultura del riflusso," entailing utter political disengagement and a return to the private, *Fantozzi's* films expose individualism and self-serving mentality as the most prominent traits of Italian labor culture in the mid-Seventies and early Eighties. Unlike *L'impiegato*, in which workers are often times represented covering for each other,⁷² in *Fantozzi* individualism and the pursuit of private interest are taken to an extreme: it is the war of everyone against everyone—a war Fantozzi is doomed to lose. When in *Fantozzi subisce ancora* (1983), he has to cover for all of his absent colleagues by doing their job he is still the only one getting punished: an inspector walks into the office when everybody is back to their desks and Fantozzi has temporarily left to go to the bathroom after having spent the whole day covering up for them. At the sight of one empty desk, the inspector asks the clerks "Chi manca?"⁷³ and they promptly and unanimously answer: "Fantozzi!"

Slapstick comedy and social satire intertwine in the above-mentioned sequence, with the former being a vehicle to the latter. Fantozzi engages in all extravagant bodily contortions and deformations to run ahead of the *Megaditta* inspector walking through the rooms to check on the workers. The episode, culminating with the punishment of the accountant, underscores the predicament of those who act for the common good.

⁷² The workers exchange favors in order to cover for each other lateness—they take turns at clocking in on time as to allow other people to arrive late.

⁷³ "Who is missing?"

At the end of Puccini's *L'impiegato*, the inspector has to resign and renounce to her reformation plan. The workers' hardened mentality constitutes a stronghold against modernization and efficiency; conversely, in the *Fantozzi* saga, the employees remain in good standing with the management while suffering from the same anti-disciplinarian attitude and being utterly disengaged from their job. They are depicted in devising alternative work practices and still succeeding at keeping their jobs. The upper floors of the *Megaditta* host the management, whom no regular worker has ever seen. Power remains unchallenged and order in place for workers' dissatisfaction has been displaced into the private, in the everyday interactions among colleagues, and ultimately, in the practice of alternative forms of refusal and resistance. In the next conclusive section, I will explore the vertical distribution of workers in space as an articulation of formal power structure.

FANTOZZI'S ASCENT TO POWER: THE VERTICAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE WORKERS IN THE *MEGADITTA*

The vertical distribution of power within the *Megaditta* is exemplified through the use of office interior and design. As the rank and position of the workers increases, so does the office décor sophistication and elegance. In this final section, I will discuss some instances from the films in which, Fantozzi's ascent to power, however temporary and fortuitous, is expressed through the refinement of his office's interiors. No attention has been paid to the study of the relationship between Italian office design and professional qualifications; instead, American-inspired theories about work organization and

efficiency-oriented office design show to have affected Italian cinema's depictions of white-collar work, as we observed in Puccini's *L'impiegato*, and as it will become clear in my examination of office space in the *Fantozzi* film series. To this end, I will rely on an American-conducted study on the evolution of the office space from 1950s to the present day from Christopher Budd, interior designer and architect.⁷⁴

In his discussion of the modern American office, Budd has highlighted how its design and “language” are not only driven by architecture, but also and foremost by the demands of management theory, technological innovation, and economic shifts with an emphasis on the controlling, monitoring, and commanding of the personnel (especially as codified in the works of the French engineer Henri Fayol, of the American Frederick Taylor, and of the German sociologist Max Weber).⁷⁵ This has led, in Budd's analysis, to the absolute subordination of individuality to the service of utility, efficiency, and modernity, as exemplified in the spatial configuration of the Union Carbide building in New York City, designed by SOM (Skidmore, Owings & Merrill). In the Union Carbide, “office space was a physical expression of hierarchy...status or rank was indicated by the size and location of one's office, the number of windows in that office, and the

⁷⁴ Extensive studies exist on the impact of office design on workers' productivity in the United States. For the purpose of my analysis I will limit the scope of my investigation to Budd's for his prominent focus on theories of scientific management applied to office work. For further reference, see among the others: the American Society of Interior Designers; Brill and Margulis' *Using Office Design to Increase Productivity* (1984); Clements-Croome's *An assessment of the Influence of the Indoor Environment on the Productivity of Occupants in Office Design* (2000); several articles from Facility Management Journal of the International Facility Management Association; and Cecil Williams' *The Negotiable Environment: People, White-Collar Work, and the Office* (1985).

⁷⁵ Christopher Budd, *The Office: 1950 to Present*, 3.
<https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2001/workspaces/swfs/theOffice.pdf> Last accessed April 23, 2017.

refinement of its furnishings.”⁷⁶ In a scene from *Il secondo tragico Fantozzi*, the quick escalade of the *Ragioniere* to the highest ranks of the *Megaditta* is visualized through the addition of increasingly more refined and equally unnecessary pieces of office décor.

As in a counter-intuitive progression, the highest floor of the *Megaditta* is occupied by the evanescent figure of the *Direttore dei direttori*, the director of all directors, who inhabiting a church-like, Franciscan-inspired office, grants forgiveness and redemption to disobedient workers—in a parody of Saint Francis’ renunciation to all material goods represented by elegant office features, the *Direttore* benefits from few, sober pieces of furniture and décor. Depicted as superior to all petty disputes animating the employees and their supervisors, the *Direttore* pardons and punishes according to a pseudo-divine justice the repentant workers, who by means of his grace and benevolence, are finally re-admitted into the *Megaditta* as variously functional objects—Fantozzi is once employed as a lighting rod (*Fantozzi*, 1975), or admitted to the collection of former employees populating the *Direttore*’s office aquarium (*Il secondo tragico Fantozzi*, 1976).

As a result of a raffle held in the firm’s cafeteria, Fantozzi is awarded the privilege to escort the Duca Conte Semenzara to his yearly trip to the renowned Monte Carlo Casino—a much desirable experience for all employees, whom, in case of a positive outcome of the games, were to be permanently regarded as grantors of the Duca Conte’s good luck and therefore promoted to lifelong benefits on the workplace. Severely affected by superstition, the Duca Conte Semenzara attributes to Fantozzi’s presence his

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

victory at the casino, demanding from the *Ragioniere* to replicate the same exact actions he was engaging in as when he won the first bet at the roulette. The accountant's promotion is at stake. Forced to gobble twenty-five bottles of *Bertier*, highly carbonated water (openly evocative of the French-produced *Perrier*), Fantozzi starts bloating and floating above the ground while trying to hold himself down by grabbing several objects, reassured by the perspective of a promotion from his rank, the twelfth and last, to the eleventh—an upgrade coming with the benefit of a personal desk and a small faux leather chair.

In the lapse of two hours, as a consequence of the Duca Conte's fruitful bets, Fantozzi is portrayed in an office made gradually more sophisticated by the appearance of pieces of décor in alternate montage with piles of tokens appearing on Semenzara's side of the table at the casino. Villaggio's voiceover describes the accountant's ascent:

Ma in compenso in quelle due ore salì vertiginosamente quasi tutti i gradini della gerarchia aziendale, anche a tre a tre. *Impiegato di settima*: scrivania in mogano, poltroncina in skai o finta pelle, telefono, pianta di ficus, simbolo del potere. *Impiegato di quinta*: lampada di opalina, piano di cristallo, naïf jugoslavo alla parete, due piante di ficus. *Impiegato di prima*: quattro piante di ficus, tre telefoni, dittafono, sei quadri naïf, tappeto e moquette per terra. Era arrivato fino alla soglia della dirigenza, vale a dire: serra di piante di ficus e poltrona in pelle umana, quando la fortuna voltò rovinosamente le spalle al Semenzara.⁷⁷

At the apex of his fortune as well as of his escalade to the highest rank of the firm,

⁷⁷ “Luckily enough, in those two hours, Fantozzi rapidly climbed all ranks of the firm's hierarchy. *Seventh rank employee*: mahogany desk, Leatherette or faux leather chair, telephone, a ficus plant, symbol of power. *Fifth rank employee*: opaline lamp, crystal desktop, naïve-style Yugoslavian painting, two ficus plants. *First rank employee*: four ficus plants, three telephones, a Dictaphone, six naïve paintings, rug and carpet. He had arrived to the threshold of leadership, that is: a greenhouse worth of ficus plants and a human leather chair, when the Fortune ferociously turned her back to Semenzara.”

Semenzara begins to lose his bets and all the tokens progressively disappear along with all the furniture from the office. Held responsible for the ruinous outcome of the game, Semenzara brutally dismisses Fantozzi addressing him as *menagramo*, a jinx. Along with his good reputation of bearer of good luck, the accountant loses all perspectives of professional advancement, loosely dependent upon the whim of the alternate fortune affecting the Duca Conte's gambling.

Atavistic corruption and clientelism affect the *Megaditta's* hierarchy. In the *Fantozzi* saga, being part of the management means being exonerated from work while benefitting from utterly gratuitous and unnecessary comforts. Without some sort of affiliation or sheer good luck, promotion and advancements of career are a remote possibility for the mass of the employees. In the *Megaditta*, power is inherited and the management is composed of a restricted caste of privileged, wealthy, educated men whose pompous names are a staple in the tradition of the saga in their evoking noble ranks and moral qualities.⁷⁸ The exceptional case of the mediocre *Ragionier* Fonelli, whom, from simple clerk, mysteriously ascends to the rank of *Megadirettore* in *Fantozzi subisce ancora* well illustrates the reasons for the employees' professional stagnation:

⁷⁸ In *Fantozzi* (1975) the management is represented by the Onorevole Cavaliere Conte Diego Catellani; in *Il secondo tragico Fantozzi* (1976) they are: the Duca Conte Semenzara, the Direttore Conte Corrado Maria Lobbiam, the Professore Guidobaldo Maria Riccardelli, and the Mega Direttore Galattico Duca Conte Balabam; in *Fantozzi contro tutti* (1980): the Gr. Ladr. Farabut. Di Gr. Croc. Mascalz. Assas. Figl. Di Gr. Putt. Marchese Conte Piermatteo Barambani Megalom., the Visconte Cobram, the Lup. Mann. Conte Vignardelli Bava Ladr. Di Gr. Croc. Figl. Di Putt. Direttore Ereditario, and the Megapresidente Arcangelo; in *Fantozzi subisce ancora* (1983) is the Mega Direttore Naturale Gran. Farabut. Ragionier Fonelli Cobram II.

Attraverso una serie di spiate, di ricatti, di adesioni alla Mafia, alla Camorra, alla Ndrangheta, alla P2, e con quattro abbonamenti a vita a “Famiglia Cristiana,” l’inoffensivo e dimesso ragioniere Fonelli era stato improvvisamente nominato Megadirettore Naturale del personale ed aveva assunto il nome di Cobram II.⁷⁹

Disillusioned towards a fair compensation for their work, the *Megaditta*’s employees resist authority and discipline. As the name of the board of directors proves, the “Gran consiglio dei dieci assenti,” the great council of the ten absentees, dedication and involvement are not the keys to professional achievement.

As a remedy against the pain of love, after being rejected by his young colleague, Ms. Silvani, Fantozzi requests and obtains to be moved to a new office, away from the woman. This episode, from the first film in the saga, *Fantozzi* (1975), features the temporary, short-lived awakening of the accountant’s political consciousness. Fantozzi is in fact moved to a desk side by side with Folagra, “the black, or actually, red sheep, of the firm.” Influenced by Folagra, whose political affiliations to the extreme left are evoked by his large beard and a red cloth around his neck (a distinctive feature of the partisans of the Italian Resistenza), Fantozzi engages in an uninterrupted, three-month frantic examination of “lettture maledette,” seminal works on labor and capitalism, as a

⁷⁹ “Thanks to espionage, blackmailing, affiliations to Mafia, Camorra, Ndrangheta, P2, and aided by four life-long subscriptions to the magazine “Famiglia Cristiana,” the innocuous and humble accountant Fonelli had suddenly been elected Natural Mega Director of the personnel thus receiving the name of Cobram II.”

consequence of which, “he finally saw the truth.”⁸⁰ Troubled by this sudden realization, he exclaims:

Ma allora mi hanno sempre preso per il culo! Ma loro, il padronato, le multinazionali...per vent’anni mi hanno sempre lasciato credere che mi facevano lavorare solo perché loro sono buoni! Altro che essere servile e riconoscente...⁸¹

Upon his return to work, the *Ragioniere* displays in his attire and appearance the results of his months of study: he returns “coi capelli a mezzo collo e un misterioso pacchetto.”⁸² Fantozzi’s mysterious packet is in fact a wrapped rock he uses to crush the upper floor’s window of the *Megaditta* as a sign of dissent. Finding himself isolated by his colleagues, who promptly flee to their offices in order not to be associated with his initiative, Fantozzi is escorted to the last floor of the *Megaditta* to meet the *Megadirettore Galattico*, whom no man had ever seen before.⁸³

The aura of mystery surrounding the director is an open reference to his evanescent and quasi-divine figure. Never having shown himself to his dependent employees, the *Megadirettore* is the subject of rumors circulating among Fantozzi and his colleagues, who have reasons enough to not believe in his human nature, as much as into

⁸⁰ Folagra initiates Fantozzi to his political ideas by slipping on his desk an issue of “Compagni lavoratori,” a leaflet of leftist propaganda.

⁸¹ “This means they have always made a fool of me! The ruling class, the multinational corporations...for twenty years they had me believe that they were letting me work because they are goodhearted! To hell gratitude and obedience...”

⁸² “With long hair and a mysterious package.”

⁸³ On his way to the *Megadirettore*’s office Fantozzi has a “allucinazione punitiva,” a punitive hallucination; he has a vision of himself crucified in the dining hall in front of his colleagues. This exemplary punishment is depicted as a warning to the other workers not to undertake similar actions.

his being an abstract entity. Disoriented by the minimalist office interior—which resembles a church—Fantozzi is appalled by the absence of ficus plants and human leather chairs, which he had associated with the squandering perpetrated by the *Megaditta* management. Gaining absolution for his insurrectionary initiative, Fantozzi is explained that exploitation and class differences are a mere matter of terminology and that, employees and employers are created equal. The *Megadirettore* is a self-proclaimed *medio-progressista*, a moderate progressive, whose political beliefs are oriented towards mild, slow-paced reforms only to be implemented upon widespread agreement among the parts. The director's conciliatory tone subsides Fantozzi's revolutionary intents and lures him into relief at the discovery into his office of a human leather chair—from whose texture Fantozzi recognizes the skin of his colleague *Ragionier* Fonelli—and the presence of an hidden aquarium where worthy employees are allowed to swim. Motivated by sudden gratitude, the *Ragioniere* requests and obtains to join his colleagues in the water tank in the role of goatfish, a missing specimen in the director's collection.

Wronged by two decades of exploitation on the workplace and suddenly enlightened by his *lettura maledette*, Fantozzi is faced with the reassuring tone and the aura of sanctity of the *Megadirettore*, who changes his revolutionary resolves into mild acceptance of the *status quo*. Worthy employees are destined to the ascent to the upper floor of the firm in the shape of a chair or blissfully swimming in the director's aquarium. Having repented for his sins and absolved by the director's infinite grace, Fantozzi earns a place in the water tank with the other clerks, who still wearing their work uniforms, enjoy the beatitude of the afterlife. Only admitted to the upper floor of the *Megaditta* as a

repentant sinner and later employed as an object of décor, Fantozzi is precluded any possibility of personal and professional mobility within the firm. His ascent is a celestial one, admitted as he is by the grace and forgiveness of the *Megadirettore*. Fantozzi's quaint and short-lived political engagement results in the social exclusion on the part of his colleagues who would rather align with the bosses than being associated with his initiative. While being depicted in a position of conflict with the firm's management, the employees, and eventually Fantozzi himself, choose obedience over protest, and gratitude over dissent. Individualistic responses and a strong instinct of self-preservation seem to motivate the workers in the establishment of informal office hierarchies in the pursuit of self-interest and social recognition. In the following chapter, I will explore this power dynamic in the context of romantic affairs in the office.

Chapter Two

Masculinities in the Office: The Inept and the Loser from Nino Manfredi to Fantozzi

Regarded as typically a “male-codified” space, the office is configured as a privileged site of production of masculine identities in Italian cinema.⁸⁴ Work as a defining feature of successful masculinity finds in the high-ranking male clerical worker a paradigm of reformed masculinity in the booming years of Italian economy. Combining charisma, success, and elegance, the business manager stands as a vehicle to modern consumption patterns by showing what it means to be a man at the time of male-targeted cosmetic products. And yet, it is in the very misappropriation of the space of the office and of its purpose that masculinities are affirmed and gender identities established in film representations of white-collar workers. The subversion of office rules and the freedom of not having to work seemingly become the ultimate defining feature of a successful, self-sufficient man.

Stemming from the ingrained idea that being the boss entails freedom from work obligations, insubordinate clerks claim their space of autonomy in the face of office rules and discipline. The subordinate nature of dependent employment seemingly engenders the workers’ desire for self-sufficiency manifested through the re-utilization of the time and space of the office for non-work related practices. In their claim for autonomy from their subordinate position as employees, Italian office workers turn to their hobbies and

⁸⁴ Fullwood, *Cinema, Gender and Everyday Space. Comedy, Italian Style*, 96.

consolidated work practices in the attempt to subdue office's rules to their mentality and inclinations. The pursuit of romantic affairs in the workplace constitutes a privileged moment of interaction in office-centered narratives in Italian cinema, as well as an ideal arena in the establishment of one's claim of independence from the imperatives of a professionally suitable conduct. Traditionally and largely outnumbering their female counterparts, Italian male workers are depicted as competitors in the seduction of a female colleague, an occasion to flaunt their charisma in the face of weaker, lower-ranking, co-workers.

This chapter is organized in two main parts both dealing with office work as a constitutive aspect in the definition of masculinity. In the first part I will engage with three films featuring Nino Manfredi, which are two episodes by Dino Risi from *I complessi* (1965), and *Vedo nudo* (1969), respectively called "Una giornata decisiva," and "Ornella;" and *Il giocattolo* by Giuliano Montaldo. I will then move to the analysis of Tinto Brass' 1962 *Chi lavora è perduto*. In the second part, I will propose a gender-oriented reading of *Fantozzi's* films in the light of theories of the grotesque and the abject body. Through the examination of these films, I hope to shed some light on the ways in which Italian cinema has relied on office work in the interpretation and consolidation of new gendered identities in the time period I study.

STUDIES ON MASCULINITY AND GENDER PERFORMATIVITY

In commenting upon the tone of literary and cinematic representations of the radical changes affecting the commonly accepted idea of masculinity in Italian society in

the years of the economic miracle, Sandro Bellassai has highlighted the way in which a sense of alienation, uncertainty, and bewilderment underpinned to the new idea of man of success: the tone of such representations was decidedly pessimistic, as in a dismayed description of a battlefield after the enemy's victory.⁸⁵ Films like *La dolce vita* (Federico Fellini, 1960), *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (Luchino Visconti, 1960), or novels like *La vita agra* (Luciano Bianciardi, 1963), are representative of the new *status quo*, for they point to the consequences of a inhumane modernity threatening the biological extinction of the man *qua* male, and its inherent risk of feminization.⁸⁶ Shaped through the reassuring language of the media, the new model of masculinity sought a compromise between traditional notions of Spartan, unembellished virility⁸⁷ and the demands of consumer culture, proposing greater care towards male beauty and style.⁸⁸ "Success" was a critical term in the vocabulary of media divulgation of reformed models of masculinity, and one to supplant traditional values from the past: the new man was to pursue ambition and not to indulge in any activity not immediately translatable into materialistic advantage for the individual. Tolerant towards women and relatively liberal, the new man had to appear "inclined towards life's pleasures and luxury goods; rightly narcissistic and

⁸⁵ Sandro Bellassai, *L'invenzione della virilità* (Roma: Carocci, 2011), 119.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁸⁷ As Bellassai explains, traditional virility entailed ethical rigor, respect for one's homeland, and a sense of abnegation and sacrifice.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.

individualistic; brilliant in society and competitive; pragmatic, skeptical, and cynical as needed.”⁸⁹

In associating the values of efficiency, success, and hierarchy, the *cultura di stampo aziendalista*, the business-inspired culture, emerged as the ideal synthesis between traditional and modern masculine attributes—a male-dominated world, in which the managerial figure stroke a perfect balance between interpersonal skills and authority in the disciplining of unruliness and indolence.⁹⁰ Failure to live up to these standards of success is the focus of most part of Italian comedies featuring models of frustrated masculinity, typically identified with some well-known protagonists, such as Marcello Mastroianni, Alberto Sordi, and Nino Manfredi, among the others. The figure of the inept, studied and described throughout the various persona interpreted by Mastroianni in Jacqueline Reich’s volume *Beyond the Latin Lover*, is defined by the author as an anti-hero, “a man in conflict with an unsettled and at times unsettling political and sexual environment.”⁹¹ Often characterized by passivity rather than activity, the inept is defined by increased artistic sensitivity and intellectualism. In sharing with the narcissistic type his need for external validation of his own self-worth, the inept tries to mask his mediocrity behind the façade of the *bella figura*, “the public manifestation of the private

⁸⁹ Ibid., 115.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 119.

⁹¹ Jacqueline Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 1.

self through behavior and appearance”⁹² thus conceding to the performative character of Italian masculinity.

In referring to “masculinity” as a social construction, Reich conjures to the extensive twentieth-century tradition of sexuality as influenced by external institutions, mainly drawn from Michel Foucault’s theory from *The History of Sexuality* (1976).⁹³ Starting from the seventeenth century, as Foucault explains in the section “The repressive hypothesis,” sexual conduct was scrutinized and regulated in order “to transform the sexual conduct of couples into a concerted political and economic behavior,” achieved through “a whole web of discourses, knowledge, analysis, and injunctions settled upon it.”⁹⁴ A code of decency was established in the exclusion of sex and sexuality from commonly accepted, decent, speech, with the result of its own very valorization and intensification⁹⁵ along with the explosion of a wide array of unorthodox sexualities.

Teresa de Lauretis has identified in the exclusion of gender implications, Foucault’s theory’s main fallacy: while not precluding it as a possibility, “in his critical understanding of the technology of sex [Foucault] did not take into account its differential solicitation of male and female subjects” also “ignoring the conflicting

⁹² Ibid., 25.

⁹³ Ibid., xiii.

⁹⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage Book, 1988), 26.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 18.

investments of men and women in the discourses and practices of sexuality.”⁹⁶ Building on Foucault’s theory of “technology of sex,” and on the pre-existing notion of cinema as a social technology (the cinematic apparatus), de Lauretis proposes an interpretation of gender as representation and self-representation, “the product of various social technologies, such as cinema, and institutionalized discourses, epistemologies, and critical practices, as well as practices of daily life.”⁹⁷

As a social technology, cinema contributes to the production of gender identities through the representation of reiterated practices and behavioral models. It is my primary interest in this chapter to investigate cinema’s representations of gendered identities and practices through the lens of work; more specifically, how Italian films from the 1960s and 1970s participated in the construction of social discourses on working masculinity in critical years of transition from old to new models. Narrowing the scope of the present study to white-collar films will allow me to investigate the very paradigm of “reformed masculinity” and success: the office worker.

NINO MANFREDI IN “UNA GIORNATA DECISIVA” FROM DINO RISI’S *I COMPLESSI*

“Una giornata decisiva” is part of a three-episode 1965 film by Dino Risi, in which Nino Manfredi features as the Quirino Raganelli, a prototype of ineptitude.⁹⁸ The thirty minutes sequence is a crescendo of misunderstandings in which Quirino, in love

⁹⁶ Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender, Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 3.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹⁸ The second episode features Ugo Tognazzi in “Il complesso della schiava nubiana,” while the third, “Guglielmo il dentone,” features Alberto Sordi.

with his colleague Gabriella (Ilaria Occhini), reciprocated and willing to marry her, proves unable to protect her from the unwanted attention of her former lover, Alvaro. Tormented by self-doubt and introversion, inclined to passivity and non-confrontational, Quirino is incapable of taking control over his sentimental situation. He eventually attracts the attention of his colleague, Ms. Giulia, who exploits Quirino's politeness and indecisiveness to her own advantage—initially by misinterpreting his good manners as a manifestation of his romantic interests towards her, and subsequently, by forcing him to her house.

An accountant at Ultramarket, Quirino plans to take advantage of a company-sponsored day trip hosted by his manager to finally propose to Gabriella. The trip grants Quirino an unusual availability of time and privacy compared to the constraints of office routine—an availability on which he relies to win over his natural ineptitude. A panoramic long shot of EUR, Rome's business center, reveals Quirino walking towards the bus that will transport him and his colleagues to the reception. An internal monologue testifies to his passive temperament:

Quirino: “Il fazzoletto ce l’ho, le sigarette pure, forse l’ombrello lo potevo lasciare a casa. Ma no, no, e se poi piove? Io ste gite collettive le odio, ma ho fatto bene a venire, almeno posso parlare a Gabriella. E se le comprassi un fiore? Così capisce subito che sono io che tutte le mattine glie fa trovà una rosa sul tavolo. E appena capita l’occasione, le chiedo di sposarmi. Beh, insomma, oggi bisogna che me decida.”⁹⁹

⁹⁹ *Quirino*: “Handkerchief: I got it. Cigarettes too. Maybe I could have left the umbrella home. Or maybe, not. What if it rains? I hate these social gatherings. But it was a good idea to come at least I will be able to talk to Gabriella. What if I buy her a flower? This way she would figure immediately out that it is me who leaves a rose on her desk every morning. And as soon as I am given a chance, I will propose to her. Oh well, today is a decisive day.”

The episode's reliance on Manfredi's own voiceover to expose his thoughts in several, scatter moments of introspective reflection serves to heighten his ineptitude vis-à-vis his more proactive, determined peers. Quirino's inner voice reveals his non-confrontational attitude and his outdated chivalry and respect in the face of his impudent colleagues—Carloni, the first clerk he encounters, complains about the money he had to invest in the collective purchase of a golden plate to honor the Ultramarket's president's career. Abiding to the new idea of man of success, Carloni expresses his dissent towards the firm's initiative for no immediate gain will stem from it—which is instead a loss of time and money for the employees.

The episode features a succession of Quirino's failed attempts at impressing or simply approaching Gabriella: overly focused on picking his words and planning his next move in order to impress her with a *bella figura*, he acts too late or not at all. Once at the villa, a violent thunderstorm interrupts the reception and Quirino and Gabriella take shelter in a changing-hut next to the pool, in which Gabriella, predicting Quirino's intentions, and reciprocating his desire, encourages the marriage proposal. However, Gabriella is involved with her older colleague, Alvaro, with whom she had a two-year extra-marital affair—Alvaro is in fact married and by refusing to leave his wife, has prompted Gabriella to end their relationship. Confiding in Quirino to talk to Alvaro to clarify their intentions, Gabriella instructs him on the situation; however, Quirino, faced with the unwanted suitor's assertive demeanor, avoids confrontation and in doing so, omits to inform him about their mutual feelings.

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

Master of the understatement, Quirino repeatedly succeeds in blowing the most favorable occasions to declare himself; alone with Gabriella in the changing-hut, Quirino beats around the bush in order to delay the proposal:

Quirino: “Carina questa cabina. Sembra d’essere in ascensore!”

Gabriella: “Ha fatto caso? Quando ci si trova in due in ascensore non si sa mai cosa dire.”

Quirino: “Io ce l’avrei una cosa da dire. Si ricorda quando in ufficio mancò la luce, io mi avvicinai a lei e le dissi: chissà se con la congiuntura ci sarà una riduzione di personale.”

Gabriella: “Sì, me lo ricordo.”

Quirino: “Beh, mica era questo che le volevo dire.”

Gabriella: “E che voleva dire?”

Quirino: “È che se lei mi guarda io non posso.”¹⁰⁰

This episode’s comicality entirely relies on Quirino’s extreme ineptitude: unable to approach Gabriella during their bus ride to the villa, Quirino is also impotent in his attempt to confront Alvaro, and ultimately, in rejecting Giulia’s unwanted romantic attention. This last outrage to Quirino and Gabriella’s plan is constructed on a series of misunderstandings, which Quirino is unable to clarify and his colleague Giulia determined to validate. Quirino’s excessive politeness and refined manners are taken to a grotesque extreme, as he is unable to do his best interest against Giulia’s attempt at presenting his courtesy as a flirt: he turns to her in the effort to dissimulate his interest for Gabriella, thus avoiding confrontation.

Quirino ends up like a prisoner of his own ineptitude; upon their return to Rome, the employees disembark the bus to arrange their return home with independent transportation. Disappointed with Quirino’s cowardice, Gabriella leaves with a friend. Seizing the opportunity, Ms. Giulia forces him to walk her home and then upstairs for a

¹⁰⁰ *Quirino*: “Nice hut, isn’t it. It feels like being in an elevator!”

Gabriella: “Have you ever noticed? When two people are alone in an elevator, they never know what to say.”

Quirino: “I have something to say. Do you remember about that one time when the light went off in the office? I came to you and I said: I am wondering if the current economic conjuncture will lead to personnel layoffs.”

Gabriella: “Yes, I do remeber.”

Quirino: “Well, that was not what I meant to say.”

Gabriella: “And what did you want to say?”

Quirino: “I can’t say it if you look at me.”¹⁰⁰

nightcap, where he is introduced to her family. Unable to refuse, Quirino accepts the invitation provided that he won't stay for long ("solo cinque minuti"¹⁰¹) and is accompanied through the building's gate, which shuts closed behind his back. A prolonged still shot on the gate's bars shows Quirino disappearing in the background on the somber notes of an organ, while protesting: "Sì, ma poi come esco?"¹⁰²

An emblematic depiction of ineptitude, "Una giornata decisiva," exemplifies through Quirino's character a gender role reversal. He fails to live up to the expectations inherent to his role as a man for he avoids confrontation with Alvaro while falling himself prey to the pressure exercised by a woman, Giulia. While not set in the office, the episode indicates that work-defined hierarchies are still in place. Quirino envisions in the large space of the villa and in the time availability afforded by the daylong trip, an occasion to free himself from the constraint of desk-to-desk scarcely private interactions. Stranded in the changing hut by the thunderstorm alone with Gabriella, Quirino evokes an episode in which, facilitated by the dark due to a power outage in the office, he finally approached her to declare his love, but instead introduced a work-related topic of conversation. However favored by the new circumstances, Quirino proves unable to follow up to his intentions inasmuch as he lets Gabriella take the initiative to kiss him. Office power structures are seemingly ingrained in Quirino's conduct thus impairing his validation of masculinity in the face of gender-oriented social expectations and behavior.

¹⁰¹ "Five minutes only."

¹⁰² "All right, but how do I get out then?"

NINO MANFREDI IN “ORNELLA” FROM *VEDO NUDO*

“Ornella” is an episode from Dino Risi’s 1969 *Vedo Nudo*, a seven-part catalog of sex-centered narratives, each starring Nino Manfredi in the role of different men variously dominated by their sexual quirks, ranging from zoophilia, to love for engines—a wealthy businessman can only get aroused while lying on a railroad, underneath a passing train.¹⁰³ A play on transvestitism, the episode “Ornella” pivots on a series of binary inversions: props and phrases are flipped in order to reiterate the gender reversal enacted by Ercole/Ornella, the protagonist.

¹⁰³ In the first episode, “La diva,” Manfredi is professor Cacopardo, head physician in a hospital where a famous actress (Sylvia Koscina) drives a man seriously injured from a car accident. Physicians and nurses, along with Cacopardo, are thrilled for Koscina’s presence and leave the hospital unattended to talk to her and take pictures. When the actress finally leaves, it is too late for the injured man. In the second episode, “Udienza a porte chiuse,” Manfredi performs in the role of a semi-literate center Italian farmer, who is under trial for having sexually abused a hen. Being summoned by the hen’s owners, he has to refund them with the value of the animal, 5,000 Liras, and can eventually take it home with him. The third episode is “Ornella,” which I examine in greater detail in the above section. In episode four, “Guardone,” Manfredi is a voyeur, who after spying a woman getting undressed in the across building, realizes that in fact the person whom he has been spying, is a reflection of his own body in a mirror. Episode five, “L’ultima vergine,” features a slight change: the protagonist is a woman from Spoleto, who, refusing her suitors, is preserving her virginity. The city is terrified by the presence of a serial killer assaulting women and so is she, who is left alone in her apartment by her mother, who had to leave for Rome to attend a funeral. After having spent the night in fear, the very next day, a man, Manfredi, who remarkably resembles the pictures circulated by the media, shows up at her door. In the hope to have her life spared, she undresses and drags the man to bed. The sexual encounter is consumed, and while still in bed with the alleged murderer, she turns on the television to learn that the serial killer has been captured. Episode six, “Motrice mia!” stars Manfredi in the role of a man affected from an unconventional sexual oddity: he can only get sexually aroused by lying on the rails, while a train is passing. He gets in touch with the train station to gather information about the train connecting Paris to Rome; after a spat with his wife, he leaves the apartment and soon reveals the nature of his romantic encounter; he is going to the station to fulfill his erotic desire. In the final episode, after which the film is named, Manfredi is a man affected from a peculiar problem: he can see all women naked. After a collapse, for which he is treated in a clinic, he is finally healed and discharged from what has been diagnosed as “a sexual induced intoxication” due to his job—he works in the advertisement industry—and to the overwhelming presence of nudity all around him, which among the other problems, causes him to be physically impotent with women. However, he soon discovers that his disease has not been cured, it has just evolved into something different: he sees naked men.

Employed at a post office in Rome, Ercole attracts his colleagues' attention and in particular, Ms. Carletti's, for, despite being single, he resists the latter's manifest romantic interest. Curiosity develops, as Carletti begins to inquire about Ercole's private life by making conjectures about his potential involvement with a married woman, and more generally, in the attempt to befriend him, and in so doing, to learn more about his employment of spare time—she eventually prompts Ercole's abashed reaction when asking to address him by his first name, which he admittedly detests. The episode's narrative transitions from the public space of the post office, to the streets on his walk home, and finally, to the intimacy of his apartment, where he is finally able to open and comfortably read a letter addressed to Ornella Dominici—which he has subtracted from a pile of incoming mail from Turin. In a woman's gown and slippers, his hair parted on the side to contour his face, Ercole/Ornella shares with his cat, Fabiola, the warm, affectionate words of his correspondent, Carlo Alberto Ribaudò (Enrico Maria Salerno). Despite never having met her in person, Carlo Alberto has grown enamored with Ornella, whose letters, he admits, largely surpass in grace and femininity those from other women responding to his posting on a magazine. Determined to see Ornella, Carlo Alberto informs her about his imminent business trip to Rome and suggests they should meet at the airport. Forced by the circumstances, Ercole pretends to be Ornella's brother to excuse his sister's unexpected departure from Rome due to their old aunt's illness. However, a series of mix-ups complicates Ercole's story, for, willing to learn the truth, Carlo Alberto surprises him with pressing questions about his sister's personality and reasons behind her sudden departure.

New to the city, Carlo Alberto is hosted for dinner at Ercole's house, which he is presented as Ornella's; the simultaneous presence of objects traditionally and respectively targeted for male and female consumers baffles Carlo Alberto, who attributes this oddity to Ornella's emotional unavailability. From this point on, the narrative pivots around Ercole's maladroit attempts to hide the truth from Carlo Alberto, and their sharing of confessions about the latter's late wife and praising of Ornella's prominently feminine and gracious taste and temperament. While limiting himself to heterosexual partnership, Carlo Alberto indulges into intimate revelations about his relationship with his deceased wife, Rosina, building up to Ercole's discomfort towards his patently repressed need for homosociality and eventually, oblivious misogyny. Pervaded by a sense of relief immediately following her funeral, Carlo Alberto describes Rosina as a materialistic woman, for she expected sexual intercourse to happen up to two or three times per month, an excess for Carlo Alberto, who would have preferred to invest his time into conversing, reading, or playing music; Ornella's intelligence and sensitivity, so unusual for a woman, he confesses, are qualities he seeks in a partner, who, regardless of their physical appearance, could constitute with their sole inner beauty his ideal life companion. The episode culminates with Carlo Alberto's decision to spend the night in what he still believes is Ornella's apartment, in order to attend a soccer game with Ercole on the following day, before leaving for Turin. However, upon sleeping, Ercole's appearance in a woman's pajamas and the particular care he takes in hosting him, along with a series of inconsistencies in Ercole's explanations, lead Carlo Alberto to greet him goodnight by addressing him as "Ornella."

Since Carlo Alberto's arrival in Ercole's apartment, the episode's narrative development hinges on a succession of binary inversions that are evocative of Ercole/Ornella's transvestitism: upon his arrival, Ercole justifies his presence in his sister's apartment by claiming to be in charge of feeding the plants and watering the cat; Ercole wants to make Carlo Alberto comfortable by asking him if he needs to use the restroom to wash his feet, not his hands—as he meant; they swap sugar and salt in the preparation of recipes, respectively adding them to pasta and espresso; finally, presented with a portrait of Ercole's mother he mistakenly believes her to be his father due the presence of a dark shade on her upper lip, which is in fact a moustache. This series of mix-ups is functional to the blurring and confounding of Carlo Alberto's expectations about gender, which in fact prove to be utterly arbitrary. What Carlo Alberto deems to be Ornella's "exquisitely feminine tone" emerging from her letters is the product of a man's mind, Ercole's, with whom he shares profound affinities and numerous common interests.

While suggesting a reading of gender as a result of socially consolidated practices and arbitrary constructions, by queering Manfredi's identity, "Ornella" debunks publicity and media-proposed models of mass consumption—the episode openly displays several leading branded products, such as *Barilla* pasta, *bio Presto* dish soap, *J&B* whiskey, *Personna* razors, orderly disposed in a fully furnished, appliance-complete family-suitable apartment. The inscription of Ercole's post office employment and his subsequent partaking of mass consumption culture into his practice of transvestitism offers a liberating potential of alternative models of appropriation and experiencing of

modernization, in the face of the heteronormative, and yet repressed paradigm purported by Carlo Alberto's character—who is also a clerk, and more specifically, an accountant in a large car manufacture in Turin, presumably FIAT.

In commenting upon Dino Risi's artistic predilection towards episode films, Gian Piero Brunetta assimilates the director's penchant for collecting and classifying the diverse manifestations of the human spirit to the scientific interest of an entomologist or of an anthropologist.¹⁰⁴ As a way of "registering the phenomenology of life," episode-structured films offer a repertoire of changing human types in their presenting a catalog of different case studies. When compared to Risi's most notorious episode film, *I mostri* (1963), *Vedo nudo* stands out for its emphasis on the description of several sex-centered unusual practices, evocative, in this respect, of Foucault's identification in his *History of Sexuality*, of the modern age, from the nineteenth century onward, as the age of classification and medicalization of sexual practices in the establishment of a behavioral norm that would secure the conservation and the proliferation of the human species, primarily the bourgeoisie. The annexation of sexual irregularities to mental illness was established, according to the French theorist, in the attempt to describe and ban all possible deviations and casual pleasures in order to "ensure population, reproduce labor capacity, and perpetuate the form of social relations."¹⁰⁵ In his compartmentalizing each human type in the space of one episode, Risi's *Vedo Nudo* isolates individual sexual

¹⁰⁴ Gian Piero Brunetta, *Storia del cinema Italiano*, vol. 4 (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1998), 379.

¹⁰⁵ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 36.

practices while compiling a series of “case studies,” primary object of what Foucault calls a *scientia sexualis*—a quest for the truth of sex, geared towards the formation of an interplay between knowledge and power.¹⁰⁶ For the first time, sexuality was defined as a domain susceptible to pathological processes, therefore in need of therapeutic or normalizing interventions.¹⁰⁷

Functional to the production of the truth of sex, confession became a critical moment in the transformation of sex into discourse, for it prompted individuals to speak the unspeakable truth about their thoughts and desires, and in so doing it contributed to the reinforcement of heterogeneous sexualities.¹⁰⁸ In “Ornella,” homosexual desire and transvestitism are presented as part of a confessional ritual deployed through the intimate reading of letters, sheltered and enabled by the anonymity of the exchange. As a potentially progressive depiction of transgender and queer subjectivities, the film finds its limitations in its very episodic structure. Isolated and confined in the space of unrelated consecutive episodes, disparate sexual practices represented in *Vedo Nudo* are exposed and put under scrutiny in the form of a catalog of oddness.

***IL GIOCATTOLO* BY GIULIANO MONTALDO**

In 1979, Nino Manfredi stars as a private firm accountant from Milan, in *Il*

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 57.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 68.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 59.

giocattolo by Giuliano Montaldo. Openly inspired to the widely popular genre of poliziottesco movies, the film presents the story of Vittorio Barletta, *il Ragioniere con la pistola*, the armed accountant, who “breaks bad,” going from subservient victim of his employer and former classmate, Nicola Griffo, to media-hunted crime punisher. Witness of a supermarket robbery in which he gets accidentally shot in a leg, Vittorio resolves to buy a gun for self-defense purposes. He jokingly motivates his decision to his skeptical and uneasy wife, Ada, by enlisting the purchase of the weapon as a necessary good of mass consumption required by the socio-political circumstances: “Ci siamo fatti il frigorifero, la lavatrice, la macchina, la televisione a colori e adesso mi faccio la pistola. Ce l'hanno tutti. Sono l'unico disarmato.”¹⁰⁹ Initially motivated by self-defense, his involvement with guns grows deeper as he meets Sauro, a southern policeman who invites him to practice firing, thus discovering Vittorio’s natural talent. Sauro and Vittorio’s first, casual encounter takes place at the gym, where Sauro rescues him from a man who is physically threatening him as a result of a trivial accident. Their relationship develops to become progressively more ambiguous as they spend time together and discover several common interests, which they share in passionate, intense conversations.

However, on occasion of one of their outings at a restaurant, Sauro recognizes a criminal among the guests, and in the attempt to arrest him, gets involved in a firing, shot and killed. Vittorio, in charge of calling the police to back up the operation, drops the phone at the sight of the murder, and promptly kills Sauro’s assassin on his way out of

¹⁰⁹ “We bought a refrigerator, a washing-machine, a car, a color TV, and now we’ll buy a gun. Everybody has one. I am the only one left unharmed.”

the locale. From this point on, he becomes the center of both media and of crime's attention while undergoing a series of unfortunate events at work. As a trusted man in Griffo's company he was responsible of the infamous task of transporting large amounts of cash in a briefcase handcuffed to his wrist. As a consequence of the supermarket robbery, the job is transferred to a former police officer, with serious repercussions on his paycheck.

Vittorio's low rank in the firm is reflected in the poor treatment he receives. After being dismissed from the money transportation duty, he gradually loses power and is eventually fired. Prosecuted by the police for having wounded three people who had attacked him to vindicate the restaurant murder, unemployed and overcome by paranoia, Vittorio is determined to pay a visit to his former employer Griffo and seek vengeance. However, on his way out, fearing for his life his wife Ada tries to stop him: intentionally firing a bullet to assert her will, she accidentally shoots him dead.

With Sauro and thanks to him, Vittorio discovers his innate talent with guns, employed as an overt phallic metaphor throughout the film. While never fully realized, homoeroticism is a constantly hinted possibility in their friendship—they are often depicted amiably conversing completely naked about spaghetti western and guns, their common interests, in the gym's locker room. Sauro encourages Vittorio to cultivate his natural good aim, and when robbed of his brand new, expensive gun, Sauro will surprise his friend with a new one. They discuss with passion about the weapon's qualities in front of Ada, praising its length and features, leaving her out of the conversation and of the frame, for they physically obliterate her presence from the screen.

Il giocattolo delineates the evolution of Manfredi's character from lawful citizen, subservient worker and defenseless man, to dexterous shooter and fearless avenger. Drawing inspiration from the then popularly acclaimed genre of poliziottesco films, *Il giocattolo* also attests to the influence of comedy—whose dark humor (pivoted on Manfredi's comedic persona) fully reflects the political climate of violence from the late 1970s and functions to exacerbate narrative tension. Far from engendering liberating moments of comic relief, Vittorio's humor underscores his impotence vis-à-vis crime and financial distress—with his underpaid employment he is unable to afford medical care for his sick wife. He reacts with irony to injustices over which he has no power or control.

Vittorio's subordinate position in the office contributes to undermine his precarious masculinity. Chained to a briefcase, he is the possession of his friend and boss Nicola, who disposes of his spare time by subtracting him from private family commitment without warning. Vittorio's preoccupation with work troubles Ada, who grows resentful when her husband does not take seriously her frequent migraines, early symptoms of a graver health problem, which he interprets as an excuse to avoid sex. Frustrated with his lack of compassion, Ada translates her discomfort in formal bureaucratic language, which she sarcastically presents as the only effective approach to communicate with her husband. Ada's resentment towards Vittorio's job comes from his subservient demeanor and unconditional availability to satisfy Griffo's requests—a subordination which he fails to acknowledge.

Vittorio's acquisition of the gun marks a decisive moment in the development of his character: empowered by the weapon, he redeems his threatened masculinity in the

face of the judiciary system's fallacies, and from his subservient role in the office. An expert guide, Sauro initiates him to the practice of shooting, providing him with the means to survive violence and seek justice on his own terms. Sauro's death functions to dissipate suspicions about his homosexuality, cast on his character by a series of ambiguities displayed in the first half of the film. He goes as far as to attempt to persuade Griffo's wife to relieve her conjugal sexual frustration with him, and successfully seduced by his daughter instead, lies with her. Far from wanting to propose a psychoanalytical reading of *Il giocattolo*, I contend that it is through the death of his friend and master Sauro, that Vittorio can affirm his masculinity transitioning from victim to executioner, eventually empowered by the possession of the gun, which I regard as a phallic metaphor.

Produced in the late 1970s, a violent decade of mass bombing and state terrorism, *Il giocattolo* reflects and roughly concludes its contemporary cinematic trend of *poliziottesco* films, and cinema d'impegno, socially engaged cinema exposing current issues—of which Montaldo's film could be regarded as a synthesis. A dispensable but not sufficient condition to the establishment of Vittorio's masculine subjectivity, his clerical employment and status as a law-abiding citizen run contrary to his successful adaptation in the changed socio-political climate—demonstrated in the film through Vittorio's reference to mass consumption goods. His accounting job provided his household with a refrigerator, a color television and a car, no longer sufficient means of social affirmation.

FANTOZZI AND THE GROTESQUE

It has been argued that episode-structured films stand as an occasion to push the limits of the grotesque beyond socially acceptable terms, for their comprising of a large selection of immoral, and yet diverse behaviors.¹¹⁰ While pivoting on a sketch structure, *Fantozzi's* films present an internal narrative consistency for their revolving around a well-defined set of characters, known to the Italian audience and to some extent, predictable.¹¹¹ Furthermore, this episodic structure promotes a solid network of intra-textual references contributing to the creation of a notorious linguistic repertoire, reiterated and developed throughout the entire film series. Central figure in each film's episode, accountant Ugo Fantozzi is the unredeemed scapegoat of his sly colleagues and of society at large. A paradigm of bad luck, Fantozzi experiences scattered, provisional, illusory moments of professional and social ascent, all of which irrevocably culminating in the re-establishment of the initial order—be it his recession to his low rank in the office after a temporary, fortuitous promotion, or his meager return home to his wife after an ill-fated romantic escape. *Fantozzi* films' episodic nature underscores a narrative circularity for it epitomizes Fantozzi's immutable, unredeemable position vis-à-vis his slier, cannier, co-workers. In his cyclical re-enactment of failure, Fantozzi is the antonym of the ideal of the man of success, by definition the climatic point of a gradual process of self-betterment, which the films' very episodic nature precludes.

¹¹⁰ Fournier Lanzoni, *Comedy Italian Style: The Golden Age of Italian Film Comedies*, 95.

¹¹¹ For their reliance on *fixed* types, *Fantozzi* films resemble the masks of the *commedia dell'arte*, a form of improvisational theater started in sixteenth century.

Consistent in its focus on the character of Ugo Fantozzi, throughout the decades and since its release, the film series has engendered a well-established, still vital mythography of a loser, the modern-day cinematic heir of comedy Italian style's figure of the *inetto*. While sharing with the *inetto* a fundamental inability to succeed, the character of Fantozzi has lost any intellectual, introspective inclination inasmuch as the corporeal and the body have become the pivots of his inaptitude. The obsessive insistence on Fantozzi's minuscule, mutilated, dysfunctional, genitalia speaks to his abjection and cultural unintelligibility in that he eludes any binary codification of gender and sex.¹¹² In *Bodies that Matter* Judith Butler has instead argued that the feminine as *specular* is included, whereas it is the *excessive* feminine to be erased.¹¹³

In its resisting the norm, the excessive female body coincides with the grotesque as a bodily category, which, while threatening to become a tautology, for the female is always defined in opposition to the male, does not guarantee nor exclude the presence of male bodies and/or subjectivities; as Mary Russo clarifies in her gender-oriented studies of the grotesque: "The category of the female grotesque is crucial to identity-formation for both men and women as a space of risk and abjection."¹¹⁴ The subversive potential intrinsic to the exposure of the deformed, abnormal, typically female body is a traditionally feminine possibility, one to be found in the risk of "making a spectacle of

¹¹² Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter, On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 2.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹¹⁴ Mary fragrantly fragrantly, *The Female Grotesque, Risk, Excess, Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 12.

oneself.” This risk, connected to the display of one’s deviant self, presents interesting continuities with *la bella figura*, a trope of masculinity identified and analyzed through comedies Italian style in the context of the construction of Sicilian types of masculinity in 1950s and 1960s (Reich). Aimed at protecting one’s own honor and their family’s female members’ respectability, *la bella figura* is conceived as a moment of public display of qualities in front of the others, and whose reverse side is constituted by *la brutta figura*, the risk of showing a bad face in public.¹¹⁵ In its granting the dichotomy of looking/being looked at,¹¹⁶ *la bella figura* underpins to the existence of a public space—which in Reich’s analysis is the *piazza*, the square—as a site of production and establishment of masculine identities.

In Italian white-collar films, the office is the public space where *la bella figura*, or its appalling counterpart, *la brutta figura*, unfold, before the eyes of a witnessing crowd of colleagues and supervisors. Unlike the *inetto*’s quest for social and peer validation attained through successful public appearance, the loser’s self-display is involuntary for he is doomed to remain the object, and never the subject of the look. This feature draws the loser closer to the freak, conceived in Russo’s analysis, as a “being to be viewed,”¹¹⁷ which, starting from the nineteenth century had increasingly been regarded as part of a world of spectacle to take place in multiple venues. Fantozzi makes a spectacle of himself

¹¹⁵ The idea, from Gloria Nardini, is elaborated in Reich’s analysis of masculinities and the figure of the innet in Italian comedies in *Beyond the Latin Lover*, 3.

¹¹⁶ Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover: Marcello Mastroianni, Masculinity, and Italian Cinema*, 2

¹¹⁷ Russo, *The Female Grotesque*, 79.

only partially because he is a “freak of nature” (an unconventionally shaped body), inasmuch as he is a “freak of culture,”¹¹⁸ a product of discursive formations. At odds with public linguistic articulation, the *Ragioniere* is often depicted as incapable of proper enunciation due to physical or emotional impairments such as intense pain or embarrassing, power-imbalanced situations. Because of his lack of (re)action, the accountant becomes objectified into a passive self-display, resembling in this respect the freak show: “they [the freaks] are often caged and most often they are silent while a barker narrates their exotic lives.”¹¹⁹ Paolo Villaggio’s own voiceover often comments upon Fantozzi’s own misfortunes providing background knowledge, and in several instances, sarcastically anticipating the tragic consequences of the character’s deeds—and in so doing, supplanting the accountant’s utter lack of agency.¹²⁰

Central themes in the film series are Fantozzi’s rotten luck, along with his hopeless, exasperated impotence; the former, symbolized by the so-called “nuvoletta dell’impiegato,” is a dark, pregnant, cloud impending over his head, releasing abundant amounts of rain on occasion of outdoor private initiatives undertaken by Fantozzi and his

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 80.

¹²⁰ Throughout the *Fantozzi* film series, a few, memorable moments of redemption occur. In *Fantozzi* (1975) he stands up for his colleagues expressing his contempt for the *Battleship Potemkin* he and his co-workers are repeatedly forced to watch; in the same film, he refuses to lose a pool game against the Onorevole Catellani and in so doing to obtain a promotion; in *Il secondo tragico Fantozzi* (1976), he uses his family savings to escape with Ms. Silvani to the island of Capri; in *Fantozzi alla riscossa* (1990), (which has been left out of the present work), the *Ragioniere* even stands out against the Mafia, refusing to be bribed and witness in their favor, when called to fulfill his jury duty at a trial. And yet, Fantozzi’s moments of redemption are ephemeral and short-lived for they all end with the re-establishment of the initial order. The episodic nature of each film contributes to reinstate such order by positioning the accountant back where he started. The films’ development is cyclical rather than linear.

colleagues. The latter, Fantozzi's inability to react, is twofold: first of all, it is moral impotence for his outright lack of assertiveness and willpower in guarding his family's and his own respectability; secondarily, it is physical impotence, significantly suggested by the obsessive insistence on his corporeal pain and mutilation, especially targeting his genitalia. Flattened, twisted, burned, dismembered, smacked, Fantozzi's anatomical extremities epitomize the deformed grotesque body, for their experiencing of the abnormal and the excess. The trope of the physical mutilation, and in particular the threat to one's sexual and reproductive potential through castration contributes to the risk of loss of one's masculinity inherent to the position of the subordinate white-collar worker. Recurring references to Fantozzi's genitalia's functionality and size are emblematic of the accountant's moral ineptitude and excessive subjugation to power and its abuses. The films' reliance on Fantozzi's body and its aberrant transformations reflects the centrality occupied by the deformed, unconventional body in the grotesque as an aesthetical category.

In several instances throughout the film series, Villaggio's voiceover suggests the non-human quality of Fantozzi's undertakings and of the hyperbolic physical torments he endures, including but not limited to swellings, burnings, falls, and amputations. In a specular position to Fantozzi's own non-human quality, are his family members: his wife Pina and their daughter Mariangela. Performed by a man (Plinio Fernando), Mariangela Fantozzi's character is consistently constructed as a monkey/human hybrid throughout the films, and targeted in a series of simian-centered gags: she is often referred to as *babbuina* (baboon), or *bertuccia* (Barbary ape), in an escalation of slips of the tongue

originating from the word *bambina*, girl; or mistaken for a monkey by her own father—as a little girl, Mariangela plays with a monkey doll, while as an adult, on multiple occasions, she finds herself next to monkeys which happen to wear her same outfit. On the verge with the human, is Pina (Liù Bosisio, and Milena Vukotic), Fantozzi’s unassuming wife, who is also characterized as “barely human,” or as a “monster” respectively by Fantozzi himself, and by Cecco (Diego Abatantuono), the baker’s nephew with whom she falls in love in *Fantozzi contro tutti* (1980).

Fantozzi films’ insistence upon the human/non-human boundary raises some analytical questions, which I wish to address in the present study of the grotesque from a gendered perspective. Often dismissed as “grotesque,” *Fantozzi* films display several significant differences in their proposing the non-human as the hyperbolic expression of the excess, be it an excess of pain or an excess of ugliness—differences which become manifest when considering Fantozzi’s own non-human, grotesque, qualities vis-à-vis Pina and Mariangela’s. In his occupying the public space of the office, *Ragionier* Fantozzi is the fulcrum of a longstanding series of humiliations due to his mediocrity and inability to react: his non-human nature stems from his unconventional position in the face of socially viable and acceptable practices; also presented as grotesque bodies, Pina and Mariangela’s characters are constructed as non-human as a result of their monstrous, thus unspeakable nature. Unlike Fantozzi, they pertain to the domestic, private space of the house, grotesque entities on their own terms.

For the purpose of this argument, I endorse Russo’s formulation of the comic and the uncanny grotesque as a critique to conventional nineteenth and twentieth century

examinations, which have failed to “acknowledge or incorporate the social relations of gender”¹²¹ leaving the notion of female grotesque “repressed and undeveloped.”¹²² Russo proposes a distinction between the comic grotesque commonly associated to the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin on carnival from *Rabelais and His World*, and the grotesque meant as the strange and the uncanny, associated with Wolfgang Kayser’s *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*, as well as with Freud’s essay “On the Uncanny,” both of which heavily rely on the trope of the body —“in the first case, the grotesque body is conceived of first and foremost as a social body...and its associations with degradation, filth, death, and rebirth;”¹²³ in the second case, the grotesque “is most strongly related to the psychic register and to the bodily as cultural projection of an inner state...the strange image of the body which emerges in this formulation is never entirely locatable in or apart from the psyche which depends upon the body image as a ‘prop.’”¹²⁴ In providing a definition for her notion of female grotesque, Russo makes recourse to Freud’s essay on the uncanny, which is presented as “that class of the frightening which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar.”¹²⁵ The uncanny consists in a de-familiarization of a once familiar object and of the subsequent sense of distance from it. In his definition of the uncanny, Freud provides the word’s translation in several languages: the German

¹²¹ Ibid., 63.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid., 8.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 9.

¹²⁵ Sigmund Freud, “On the uncanny” Last Accessed April 23, 2017.
<http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/freud1.pdf>

word in particular, *unheimlich*, is connected to the word *das Heimlich*, which pertains to the domestic, the familiar, and the space of the home. The inversion of the prefix *un-*, is the negation of this feeling of comfort, the “unhomely.” Fantozzi’s alienated domestic life is a recurring motif in the film series, as he often expresses shock and dismay at the sight of his wife and daughter, reacting as if he were seeing them for the first time.

Lacking any agency whatsoever,¹²⁶ Pina and Mariangela are presented as uncanny domestic presences in the Fantozzi’s household in that they are ugly and ultimately, *excessive*. The emphasis is on the corrupt and aging female body as the privileged site of grotesque. The public display of their aging and abnormal bodies in the face of socially acceptable beauty standards is played upon and reinforced by the objectifying male gaze, based on a purely aesthetical paradigm. The wake-up scene from *Fantozzi* (1975) is representative of both the public and the uncanny connotations of the grotesque for it combines the non-human meant as hyperbolic undertaking (*Fantozzi*), and the non-human as a bodily feature (Pina).

After sixteen years of daily practice, Fantozzi has succeeded in maximizing sleep by setting his alarm to 7:51 instead of 6:15 and still clock in on time in the office. As Villaggio’s voiceover informs us, Fantozzi’s achievement poses a challenge to human potential:

¹²⁶ An exception to this is represented in the third film of the saga, *Fantozzi contro tutti*, in which Pina falls in love with another man, Cecco, a baker. However, her romantic engagement does not lead to an affair because of Cecco’s lack of interest towards her. The *status quo* of the Fantozzi family remains unaltered.

Per arrivare a timbrare il cartellino d'entrata alle 8 e 30 precise, Fantozzi, sedici anni fa, cominciò col mettere la sveglia alle 6 e un quarto: oggi, a forza di esperimenti e perfezionamenti continui, è arrivato a metterla alle 7:51... vale a dire al limite delle possibilità umane! Tutto è calcolato sul filo dei secondi: cinque secondi per riprendere conoscenza, quattro secondi per superare il quotidiano impatto con la vista della moglie, più sei per chiedersi – come sempre senza risposta – cosa mai lo spinse un giorno a sposare quella specie di curioso animale domestico.¹²⁷

Fantozzi's non-human undertaking consists of his attempt to get ready for work within what most people would find an unreasonably limited timeframe—Fantozzi is thus non-human in his being unique vis-à-vis commonly accepted and viable practices.¹²⁸ Impaired by an accident—one of his shoelaces breaks—instead of walking his way out to the bus stop, he decides to jump off the balcony and ride the bus while passing on the contiguous highway. Fantozzi's determination to catch the bus “al volo,” on the go, raises his wife's concern as well as his neighbors'. Vainly reminded of his physical unfitness to the ambitious enterprise by Pina, Fantozzi enthusiastically confesses that despite never having attempted it, catching the bus “al volo” has always been a dream, a monumental endeavor in the face of his monotonous white-collar routine: “Non l'ho mai fatto, ma l'ho sempre sognato,” he declares while opening the curtains on his way out. The *Ragioniere's* initiative attracts the support and the concerned admiration of his neighbors,

¹²⁷ “In order to clock in at 8:30 sharp, sixteen years ago, Fantozzi, started by setting his alarm at 6:15. Today, as a result of consistent experiments and improvements, he has managed to set it at 7:51, that is, the limit of human possibilities! Everything is accurately timed: five seconds to regain consciousness, four seconds to overcome the daily shock provoked by the sight of his wife, and six additional seconds to wonder—as always without finding an answer—what on earth pushed him, one day, to marry that subspecies of weird domestic animal.”

¹²⁸ Fantozzi's non-human nature finds interesting echoes in Foucault's theory on governmentality and regulation of the body. His daily wake-up practice constitutes a minute regulation of his life that, as described in Foucault's 1977-78 lecture series *Security, Territory, Population*, shapes and controls his behavior.

who, although not informed, do not hesitate to find a plausible reason to his climbing off the balcony and past the highway's guardrail: to a woman asking "Ma cosa fa?" "What is he up to?" somebody promptly responds "Prende l'autobus al volo!" as to explain a self-evident truth.

Fantozzi's undertaking from this episode challenges conventionally acceptable practices and is so doing, stands out as non-human. On the other hand, his wife Pina, featured as "a subspecies of weird domestic animal," is also addressed as a non-human entity, for the reasons that are her physical appearance and unattractiveness. In this respect, Pina is unaccountable on the terms of the binary opposition between masculine/feminine for she is secluded in the private realm of the house, and therefore constructed as a form of grotesque on her own terms, excluded by virtue of her *excessive* body. Some prominent stylistic features contribute to the construction of her character as abjection by highlighting her physical *monstrousness*. Villaggio's voiceover assumes Fantozzi's point of view in the introduction of Pina, who, unflatteringly dressed and groomed appears as an uncanny presence in the deplorable existence of the accountant.

Alternatively assuming the point of view of the objectifying male gaze within the space of his house, Fantozzi always occupies a place of subordination in public. By suffering the displacement of the male-on-female domination in the workplace, Fantozzi's character can be productively inscribed into the extensively studied idea of gender identity not as a pre-given attribute, but as a result of reiterated social practices. The romantic pursuit of his unfulfilled extra-conjugal affair with Ms. Silvani underscores Fantozzi's character as always endangered vis-à-vis the risk of castration and

feminization; he makes a spectacle of himself for he becomes the target of physical pain and humiliation to the advantage of his shrewd love competitor, *Geometra* Calboni, a decayed Latin lover figure.

Manipulating Fantozzi into investing his family's saving into a romantic escape to Capri, Ms. Silvani is in fact planning to reunite with Calboni on the island after a spat due to the latter's infidelity, at the financial and sentimental expense of her desperate suitor—in this episode Fantozzi abandons his wife and daughter without an explanation (*Il secondo tragico Fantozzi*). Constantly measured against Calboni's alleged achievements, Silvani challenges Fantozzi to beat his water-ski record by surfing between two sea-stacks off the island's shore. In the attempt to impress Silvani, Fantozzi crashes into one of them falling prey to a memory lapse, which she promptly exploits to stage a narrative about their sexual intercourse which would eventually absolve her from fulfilling Fantozzi's expectations about their romantic escape.

Upon his wake-up from the incident, Fantozzi finds himself in the hotel suite's master bedroom and puzzled about the situation—Silvani had arranged for him to sleep on the couch—asks her for an explanation. A back-warding tracking camera movement reveals Silvani sitting in front of a vanity mirror in a contiguous room; busy with her make-up, Silvani does not bother interrupting the procedure thus impairing proper enunciation and making her recollections of Fantozzi's masculine prowess into a barely intelligible articulation:

Fantozzi: Signorina, ma io...buongiorno...ma io ho dormito sul letto
matrimoniale?

Silvani: Tì tì!

Fantozzi: Come?
Silvani: Eh sì, Fantozzi.
Fantozzi: E cosa ho fatto?
Silvani: Tutto!
Fantozzi: Come?
Silvani: Tutto, Fantozzi!
...
Fantozzi: Però io Signorina, di questa notte, non mi ricordo quasi più niente...
Silvani: Meglio, Fantozzi.¹²⁹

Carried away by the joy of the sexual encounter, Fantozzi indulges in an expression of sentimentalism, which Silvani praises by calling him a poet while concluding her remark by snorting and spitting into her make-up as to dilute it.

Unresponsive to Silvani's obscene behavior and blind to her blatant sentimental disengagement, Fantozzi is willing to accept her harried account of the facts, as well as her claims about Calboni's alleged accomplishments. Fantozzi's gullibility into embracing Silvani's narrative about his masculinity and validation thereof in the face of her other suitor, calls attention to the notion of gender as a reiterated series of performative acts, which to some extent enact their own referent: performativity produces

¹²⁹ *Fantozzi*: Signorina, but I...good morning...but have I slept in the master bedroom?

Silvani: Yep.

Fantozzi: What?

Silvani: Yes indeed, Fantozzi.

Fantozzi: And what did I do?

Silvani: Everything!

Fantozzi: What?

Silvani: Everything, Fantozzi!

...

Fantozzi: But Signorina, from this past night, I barely remember anything at all...

Silvani: Better this way, Fantozzi.

that what it names, for to name is to make, Butler observes.¹³⁰ As a result of the normative practice of reiterations, gendered bodies are produced and inscribed in a system of cultural intelligibility, which always entails a process of arbitrary demarcation and exclusion. By naming Calboni's alleged accomplishments, Silvani reiterates the normative practice of gendered identity formation thus pointing to masculinity's very performative component and arbitrariness—her stories are untrue. Furthermore, Calboni's own attributes as a decayed Latin lover figure rest on the notion of masculine validation to be produced through a set of performative practices aimed at the display of one's qualities and charisma, purposefully unmasked by his inherent cynicism and mischievousness.

Eventually reunited, Calboni and Silvani occupy the Capri hotel suite thus leaving Fantozzi out, in his underwear; unaware of his arrival on the island, Fantozzi intends to seduce Silvani by providing a miniature-sized bottle of champagne, seemingly proportioned to his financial means. However, upon his return to the hotel, a porter from room service makes his appearance holding an exceptionally large bottle of the same wine brand as his to be delivered to Silvani's room. The indisputable phallic symbolism behind the bottles' sizing underscores Fantozzi's failure and humiliation as, due to the two's clearly audible conversation, Silvani swears to her conjugal fidelity by revealing the truth about the trick played on Fantozzi.

¹³⁰ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 107.

The cyclical occurrence of Fantozzi's public display of ineptitude points to the establishment of a cult of counter-masculinity, for he systematically overthrows the foundational terms of a heteronormative practice. In this last instance from *Fantozzi subisce ancora, la bella figura*, as a trope of masculinity entailing the preservation of one's honor and the defense of one's family's female members, is debunked through Fantozzi's lack of agency vis-à-vis the hyper-masculine character of Loris Batacchi, a colleague of his daughter Mariangela, who has abused and impregnated her.

Pretending to be social workers, Ugo and his wife pay a visit to the man in order to elicit a confession and force him to take on his paternal responsibilities. However, upon their arrival in Loris' apartment, which he calls an office, they learn that, known as a relentless Latin lover among his colleagues at the post office where both him and Mariangela are employed, he had been challenged to succeed in exchange for money in a sexual intercourse with Fantozzi's daughter in the face of her repulsive physical appearance. Loris' apartment is a sanctuary of eroticism, decorated with obscene prints and statues, furnished with a file cabinet cataloguing in alphabetical order names and pictures of his endless sexual partners.¹³¹

Inhibited by Loris' verbal incontinence and overwhelming eagerness to share the chronicles of his sexual enterprises, Fantozzi and Pina fail to inform him about their daughter's pregnancy; instead, they become prey themselves to Loris' exuberance for he attempts to involve Pina in his program of rehabilitation and rejuvenation to be

¹³¹ Batacchi claims to have engaged in sexual intercourse with 80,000 "victims," as many people as the population of Sant'Arcangelo in Romagna, presumably, his hometown.

implemented through sexual practice and in this way, awakens Fantozzi's interest. Unable to stand up for his outraged wife, Fantozzi himself is eventually pushed on Batacchi's bed, to serve as a model for a practical demonstration of his sexual abilities. At last, Pina takes over in the situation and forces her hesitant husband out of Batacchi's apartment; Fantozzi softly opposes himself to the initiative: "Ma siamo incinti! Eh, cioè, voglio dire...e Mariangela?"¹³²

The *Fantozzi* series' insistence on the accountant's physical attributes finds in the Loris Batacchi's episode its climatic expression for it openly points to his twofold sexual impotence; on the one hand, Fantozzi fails to preserve his family's honor by forcing Loris to take up his responsibilities as a father; on the other hand, he falls himself prey of his obscene language and demeanor while showing a manifest interest in Loris' sexual prowess. In a complete reversal of the masculine trope of *la bella figura*, Fantozzi upsets the terms of the heteronormative gender performance by becoming, like his wife, the onlooker of Loris' own enactment. Suffering the reversal of the traditional male-on-female domination, Fantozzi is the constantly endangered subject of the risk of feminization in the public realm of the office, and more generally in his spare time.

CHI LAVORA È PERDUTO BY TINTO BRASS

Tinto Brass' cinematic debut, 1963 *Chi lavora è perduto* engages with its protagonist's, Bonifacio (Sady Rebbot), refusal of work and of ideologies. Profoundly

¹³² "And yet we are pregnant! No, I mean...what about Mariangela?"

indebted for its cinematography to French *nouvelle vague*, the film progresses through a series of narrative digressions and bracket sequences occasioned by Bonifacio's mnemonic recollection of his past. Also inspired to French film for its analogous treatment of spatial and temporal connections, the film's progression mimics its protagonist's aimless wandering in the streets of Venice, thus escaping a clear geographical and chronological nexus of causality. The film's stylistic choice indicates a clear break with the conventions of narrative cinema, while also proposing anarchism and detachment from all past and present ideologies through the psychological peregrinations of its protagonist.

An extensively represented trope in Italian cinema brought to popularity by Federico Fellini's *I vitelloni* (1953), youth's disengagement from work is not a novelty at the time when Brass' film is released, nor does it constitute a recent social phenomenon. However, my choice to include *Chi lavora è perduto* in the context of the present research originates from the film's precise choice to focus on the representation of a white-collar *manqué*. Bonifacio's recent earned diploma grants him access to some examinations, the *test psico-attitudinale*, to find a job as a clerical worker. The film opens with the protagonist's reluctance to employ himself and his hedonistic drive to sex expressed through the recollection of a past relationship, and the visualization of his desire to transform his parents' bourgeois living-room into a brothel.

Chi lavora è perduto represents white-collar work without representing it, for it engages with the possibility of such employment without ever fully realizing it. Refusing to commit to a job, Bonifacio foregoes sentimental relationships for he is unable to

provide for a family and in so doing to fulfill societal expectations about his gender and age. During his peregrinations, he recalls his past relationship with Gabriella (Pascale Audret), which he is led to end by the same existential crisis affecting his career choice. By escaping the social imperative of work, Bonifacio opposes a refusal of his past political belief in Communism and of those of the older generation, embodied by his father's Fascist orientation.

Regarded from the point of view of his refusal of work and reproduction, Bonifacio stands as the male counterpart of the Fascist-conceived idea of *donna-crisi*, a negative model of hysteria, infertility, and physical emaciation to oppose to the motherly woman, bearer of numerous offspring, patriotism, and corporeal opulence. Fascist rhetoric is directly engaged and incorporated in the leading sequence through a bracket segment on Bonifacio's childhood. Imperiously delivered by a voiceover, Fascism-drawn commonplaces about mental health and physical vigor ("mens sana in corpore sano"), and shallow precepts on responsible citizenship ("senso civico"), supplement a jump cut sequence of an old man, presumably his own father. A shot depicting a young Bonifacio kissing goodnight a group of people gathered to hear one of the Duce's speeches and leaving them, concludes the digression. Bonifacio's adult voice bridges the bracket segment to the present time, in which to his father's imposition of discipline he opposes his permanent detachment from his family and their ideology—he has instead embraced a "senso qualunque."

Bonifacio's refusal of ideology encompasses a repudiation of his past political militancy, embodied by his group of friends and in particular by Claudio (Tino

Buazzelli). Shot in black and white, *Chi lavora è perduto* features only one color segment: the funeral of Bonifacio's comrade, Carlo. A parade of red flags and carnations escorts the coffin throughout the streets of Venice to a gondola, on the notes of a solemn march. People address one last salute to their comrade while some take pictures thus emphasizing the importance of the ritual. This narrative digression functions as a narrative lapse in a sequence from Bonifacio's present in which a funeral is reduced to the squalid transportation of a tomb from the church to a gondola (on which Bonifacio travels in order to cross the canal), and then to a cemetery.

A nostalgic retrospective account of his political engagement, the two funerals sequence portends Bonifacio's loss of all ideological commitment. As a common imperative shared by both his father's precepts and of his comrade Claudio's advice, work is a central stake in *Chi lavora è perduto's* depiction of private and political anarchism. In the next chapter, I will expand on the ways in which Fascist rhetorical and aesthetic legacy has variously been employed in the representation of clerical workers' insubordination to discipline.

Chapter Three

Free Time and Busy Time: Fascist Legacy in White-Collar Films

Many overt references to Americans' productivity on the workplace underpin the implementation of Inspector Iacobetti's modernization plan for the Roman *Istituto Romano Beni Immobili*, in Puccini's *L'impiegato* (1959). American, state-of-the-art advancements are proposed to reform the obsolete, ineffective work habits, and ill-conceived office design: "My conscience," a new, accurate, Detroit-designed clock, installed to monitor the employees' work schedule, produces a photographic record of their clock-in and clock-out time, thus putting an end to latecomers and absentees' practices; American-led studies dictate the resurfacing of the *Istituto's* frescoed ceilings for they undermine the workers' productivity; classy work attires are encouraged to supplant the sloppy, mediocre looks of the employees. While proposing the Anglo-Saxon model as the ideal to which the workers need to conform, Iacobetti's plan echoes the Milanese discontent with the Roman workers' laziness and ineffectiveness born during the years of the Italian dictatorship of Benito Mussolini. *L'impiegato's* reformation program shares striking similarities with the Fascist reformation plan for the bureaucracy, and more generally, with the Duce's overly ambitious "anthropological revolution"¹³³

¹³³On the topic of the "anthropological revolution" envisioned by Benito Mussolini, refer to Emilio Gentile, "The Fascist Anthropological Revolution," in *Culture, Censorship and the State in Twentieth-*

aimed at the foundation of a new man, and eventually, of a new Italic race. In apparently ideologically contradictory terms, *L'impiegato* appropriates American-inspired theories on productivity smoothly translating them into blatant references to Fascist-oriented work practices, thus underscoring significant continuities between these two models.

In this chapter, I investigate the ways in which white-collar films such as *L'impiegato* have appropriated the rhetorical¹³⁴ underpinnings of the Fascist reformation of the Italian third sector, the so-called *fascistizzazione del pubblico impiego*.¹³⁵ In so doing, I hope to gauge the nature and extent of the Regime's rhetorical legacy in the films' representation of the Italian workers' aversion to their job in the years of the Italian economic miracle (*L'impiegato*), as well as in the post-Fordist phase of capitalistic development, dating to the mid-1970s (*Fantozzi* series). I contend that white-collar films' capitalizing on Fascist rhetoric and aesthetic suggests important continuities between the Regime's and the American-inspired efforts towards modernization and nationalization of the masses—continuities I will bring to light through my examination of the films' depiction of work practices and leisure culture consumption.

Century Italy, ed. Guido Bonsaver and Robert S.C. Gordon (London: Legenda, 2005). In his chapter, Gentile reopens the debate on the centrality of the anthropological revolution implemented through the creation of a “new man” through eugenics and moral rectitude, finally freed from moral decadence and political servitude.

¹³⁴ For the conflictual relationship between the terms “rhetoric,” “ideology,” and “Fascism” see Barbara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities, Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). In the preface to her volume, Spackman engages with the long-standing debate over the use of the term “ideology” in relation to Fascist practices arguing that divergent views stem from divergent definitions of the term itself; with the expression “Fascist rhetoric” I will refer to a “means of articulation,” (ix) and to “the ways in which often ideologically incompatible elements or ideas...are articulated or bound together.”

¹³⁵ Mariuccia Salvati, *Il regime e gli impiegati* (Roma: Laterza, 1992), 69.

For clarity purposes, I organized the content of this chapter in two main sections: first, I propose a reading of Puccini's film in the light of the *ventottesimo*, the 1928's Fascist reformation program for the bureaucracy. My main concern will be to highlight the ways in which this film has appropriated the linguistic and rhetorical paradigm of the Fascist reformation of the public service sector in its representation of white-collar work in the years of Italy's transition from agricultural, to industrial economy. This section aims to demonstrate how leisure time and work time shall ultimately be conceived as means to modernization and to the creation of responsible producers and diligent consumers. In the second section of this chapter, I will more directly engage with the top-down administration of leisure time oriented towards the physical and mental betterment of the workers of the *Megaditta* in *Fantozzi's* films. To this end, I will engage with the Fascist administration of workers' spare time presented as a means to physical and moral betterment; in the attempt to clarify the extent of Fascist cultural legacy in *Fantozzi* films' representation of the employees' dissent from *Megaditta*-sponsored, mandatory, leisure activities I hope to draw some conclusions concerning mass culture and entertainment in the post-Fordist era.

This chapter's film analyses lie on the abundant Italian and English language scholarship on the history of the widely documented leisure time administration under Fascism, while at the same time benefitting from a great wealth of historical criticism available on Fascism's establishment of consensus among the working classes. More specifically, in the first section I will directly engage with a co-authored 1997 work on the administration of spare time in the Roman branch of the Fascist leisure-time

organization by Elisa Bizzarri, Patrizia Luzzatto, and Annalisa Zanuttini, which will prove fundamental in providing in depth descriptions of regime-sponsored initiatives, along with magazine articles from the main *dopolavoro* organizations. Furthermore, I will rely on Mariuccia Salvati's seminal historical account of the treatment and administration of the public service sector under the regime; while only partially interested in the history of the *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro*, the national after-work organization, and of the AGFPI, the *Associazione Generale Fascista per Il Pubblico Impiego*, the general Fascist association for the public service sector, I will account for their birth and development when considering the films' appropriation of the Fascist rhetoric of modernization and public workers' loyalty. Finally, I will draw from Victoria De Grazia's extended analysis of Fascism's attempts to conciliate its working-class averse nature with its need for a large basis of consensus among the workers;¹³⁶ De Grazia's work will prove fundamental in understanding the regime's exploitation of culture in the service of its demand for legitimacy, in that it provides a solid foundation to my examination of the ways in which white-collar films unveil the arbitrary nature of power and its impositions.

For introductory purposes, it will suffice to say that the OND was created in Rome in 1919 as a democratic and apolitical association whose scope was the promotion

¹³⁶ De Grazia's book constitutes a "political study of Italian fascism, with as its central focus, the leisure time organization or *dopolavoro* of the fascist regime. Inevitably it held certain social implications from the outset: I was concerned to understand how a regime that was so fragrantly anti-working class established any broad basis of legitimacy, and whether, in the process of consolidating its power, Mussolini's dictatorship had in any way succeeded in transforming Italian society." Victoria De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge [Eng.]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), Vii.

of a “healthy utilization of spare time after work,”¹³⁷ years before the reduction to eight in the number of working hours.¹³⁸ It was not until 1925, upon Fascism’s ascent to power, that the OND became a perfect tool in the hands of the regime to reach out to the working-class and gain a solid basis of consensus, thus becoming a “hybrid institution,”¹³⁹ which over the course of twenty years, stood as “a technocratic scheme, a fascist trade union recreation hall, a state regulatory agency, and a fascist party auxiliary.”¹⁴⁰

THE END OF THE *TRAVET*: MORAL AND PHYSICAL BETTERMENT IN PUCCINI’S *L’IMPIEGATO*

In *L’impiegato*, the employees of the Roman public housing institute, the *Istituto Romano Beni Immobili*, are the center of a national scandal for their scarce productivity on the workplace; their *polverosi*, “dusty,” that is, obsolete, methods are in fact the target of an ample modernization effort conceived and implemented by the Milanese headquarters of the office. Inspired by techniques born and first experimented in Northern American factories, Iacobetti’s modernization plan aims at measuring the

¹³⁷ Carlo Vallauri, “Società, ceti e singoli nell’esperienza dopolavoristica,” in *Tempo libero e regime: Storia del dopolavoro a Roma negli anni Trenta* (Roma: Editrice Pisani, 1997), 8-9.

¹³⁸ “Il problema dell’organizzazione del tempo libero dei lavoratori viene posto, in Italia, già nel 1919, in anticipo rispetto alla legge che riduceva la giornata lavorativa a otto ore (1923). Elena Vigilante *L’opera nazionale dopolavoro, tempo libero dei lavoratori, assistenza e regime fascista 1925-1943* (Bologna: Il Mulino), 23. “In Italy, the issue of workers’ spare time organization arose in 1919, before the law that reduced to eight the number of working hours.”

¹³⁹ De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy*, 16.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Roman employees' work operations in order to improve quality and maximize production. While openly referring to American-designed technological innovations and studies, several instances in the film appear to openly echo the rhetorical underpinnings of Mussolini's reformation plan of the third sector. In the following paragraphs, I will engage with the film's appropriation of the Regime's rhetoric of modernization as a stylistic device in the service of the comical portrayal of the workers' refusal of discipline, achieved through the ridiculing and mocking of power. The scientific organization of work provided a solid foundation for the Regime's reformation plan of the lazy, numerous, and costly Italian bureaucracy, which they intended to reduce and simplify through the adoption of the same work principles used in the factories: a process the Italian historian Mariuccia Salvati referred to as "taylorismo applicato alla scrivania,"¹⁴¹ aimed at the simplification of the work operations and the numerical reduction of clerks (the Regime's *pochi ma buoni* policy—few, but good).¹⁴²

In Puccini's film, just like during the early regime years, the ill-fated reputation of the Roman employees was put under severe scrutiny. As they read in a newspaper article, Milan central office of the *Istituto Beni Immobili* is posing a serious threat to their

¹⁴¹ "Desk Taylorism" in Salvati, *Il regime e gli impiegati*, 143.

¹⁴² "Il taylorismo applicato alla scrivania" propugnato da "L'Organizzazione scientifica del lavoro" era essenzialmente una forma di semplificazione, deburocratizzazione e ricerca di maggior rendimento degli uffici, ampiamente dibattuta in quegli anni e accompagnata da un generico favore da parte dell'alta dirigenza." Salvati, *Il regime e gli impiegati*, 143. "The desk Taylorism promoted by "L'organizzazione scientifica del lavoro," the scientific management of work, was essentially a form of simplification, de-bureaucratization, and research for increased productivity in the office, greatly debated during those years, and positively seen by the leading elite."

“beloved laziness:”¹⁴³ establishing shots of the chaotic, crowded interiors of the Roman office frame a lethargic group of employees handling the office’s patrons’ impatience with hardened phlegm. Iacobetti’s program contemplates the modernization of both the office space and the employees’ mentality; her plan marks the end of the sloppy clerk cliché arriving late for work, in a poorly assembled and kept attire. As Iacobetti lectures:

E permettetemi di mostrarvi l'immagine dell'impiegato modello: viso aperto, sorridente e vestito con proprietà. Bisogna dimenticare la vecchia immagine dell'impiegato con le mezze maniche. Niente più camice sciatte, capelli arruffati, mangiarsi le unghie. Dovete liberarvi di tutti i vostri tic.¹⁴⁴

Iacobetti’s confidence in lecturing the workers mimics almost literally the Milanese’s dissatisfaction with the Capital’s scarce productivity as expressed in the words of Aldo Lusignoli, secretary general of the AGFPI, the *Associazione Generale Fascista per il Pubblico Impiego*,¹⁴⁵ the General Fascist Association for the Public Service Sector. Founded in order to facilitate and implement the modernization of the Italian bureaucratic machine,¹⁴⁶ the AGFPI’s plan encompassed a series of “purges,” of *epurazioni* of the

¹⁴³ “E sî brutte notizie: Milano mette in serio pericolo la vostra cara pigrizia” comments the head of the *Ufficio Romano Beni Immobili* after having read the article to his co-workers. “Oh yes, bad news: Milan is posing a serious threat to your beloved laziness.”

¹⁴⁴ “Please, allow me to show you the image of the ideal white-collar worker: frank, friendly appearance, well dressed. Forget about the old image of white-collars in short sleeves. No more sloppy shirts, messy hair nor bitten nails. Get rid of all of your tics.”

¹⁴⁵ Salvati, *Il regime e gli impiegati*, 114.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 129.

public service sector, which constitute the most urgent programmatic point Lusignoli discusses on occasion of one of their several meetings. More specifically, Salvati reports, Lusignoli speaks before the Milanese section of the AGFPI highlighting its preeminently “Fascist” character, and against the old: “cliché democratico e socialistoide del burocrate italiano che, vestite le mezze maniche e la papalina, arriva in ufficio con mezz’ora di ritardo.”¹⁴⁷ Lusignoli’s intervention relies, in Salvati’s analysis, on the long-established Milanese antipathy towards the lazy, Roman public service sector.¹⁴⁸ Among the others, one of the most prominent scopes of the association was to imbibe both the structure of workers’ unions, and the workers’ mentality with Fascist “spirit.”¹⁴⁹

In the following paragraphs I will discuss some passages from the magazine of an Italian *dopolavoro* association openly resonating with Puccini’s film: the I.N.A., the *Istituto Nazionale Assicurazioni*, the Italian insurance institute’s after-work organization. Created to address the needs and demands of the affluent, I.N.A. *dopolavoro* was meant for the educated employees of the Italian ministries. I.N.A. *dopolavoro* reached the consciences and the houses of its associates through its monthly magazine, “Famiglia Nostra,” published and gratuitously distributed between 1930 and 1939. The easy access to several issues of the magazine granted scholars an in-depth knowledge of the spirit and scope of this *dopolavoro* association; in her essay from the co-authored 1997 volume, *Tempo libero e Regime: storia del dopolavoro a Roma negli anni trenta*, Patrizia

¹⁴⁷ Lusignoli speaks against the old “democratic, socialistish cliché of the Italian bureaucrat, who shows up for work thirty minutes late in his half-sleeve button shirt and his cap.”

¹⁴⁸ Salvati, *Il regime e gli impiegati*, 129.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

Luzzatto notices how the very title of the magazine infused in the workers a sense of belonging to a large family—that is, the firm—while at the same time, reminding them of their moral obligations towards *both* of their families:

Già il titolo rappresentava di per sé un concentrato di ideologia dopolavoristica, diretto com'era a rammentare al dipendente la sua appartenenza alla grande “famiglia” aziendale, la cui benevolenza si estendeva dalla garanzia del quotidiano sostentamento all'organizzazione del tempo libero fino ad aprirsi all'altra famiglia—quella privata—con la quale il dipendente aveva il dovere morale e sociale di trascorrere le ore di riposo e di svago.¹⁵⁰

Unlike other *dopolavoro* associations, I.N.A. aimed at instilling in the workers a sense of belonging to the wider community of the firm—an idea that would deter them from growing resentment against their employers and from engaging in petty disputes with their colleagues.

And yet, for its addressing more educated and affluent white-collars, the I.N.A. *dopolavoro* could not expect the simple organization of events and past times to suffice in gaining the workers' loyalty and sincere ideological endorsement. Through the pages of “Famiglia nostra,” a genuine awareness of their role in society had to be stirred in the employees, whose duty consisted in playing their role in the “social Taylorism,” envisioned and demanded by the regime:

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 238. “The title itself represented a sum of after-work ideology, aimed as it was, at reminding the worker about his belonging to the large “family” of the firm, whose benevolence spanned from everyday material support, to the organization of spare time, and went as far as to involve the other family—the private one—with which the worker had the moral and social obligation to spend his resting and leisure hours.”

“Nei loro confronti il Dopolavoro non poteva illudersi di riuscire ad esercitare una funzione realmente gratificante, imitandosi a riempire il tempo libero con feste e conferenze; occorreva mettere in atto un’opera più sottile di convincimento che persuadesse il singolo dipendente di ricoprire nella società il “posto giusto,” riconciliandolo col proprio lavoro e col proprio status in nome di quel “taylorismo sociale” che il fascismo tentava di spacciare come la giustificazione “scientifica” dell’ordine costituito. Occorreva, insomma, che ogni lavoratore introiettasse la convinzione che il suo ruolo—brutto o bello che fosse—non costituiva un ripiego cui adattarsi “obtorto collo” né, peggio, una sciagura alla quale tentare di sottrarsi rincorrendo più brillanti prospettive. (242)¹⁵¹

Through their participation to the *dopolavoro*, the employees had to feel part of that widespread climate of change brought by Mussolini’s anthropological revolution aimed at the foundation of a new breed of Italians. “Famiglia nostra” presented the portrayal of the new man, the *uomo nuovo*, and of his impeccable work attire. The magazine announced the “death” of the old *travet*, the low-profile employee:

Delle soprammaniche di satin si sono perse le tracce. Le camicie Oxford sostituiscono i colletti di celluloid. Giacche con martingala e pantaloni alla zuava hanno preso il posto dei vecchi abiti grigio ferro con ginocchiere e fondelli rinacciati, dopo il logorio, dagli stessi proprietari. Vanno al loro Dopolavoro e il passo è svelto, il viso è franco, l’andatura sportiva, il sorriso baldanzoso, l’atmosfera crepitante.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ “The *Dopolavoro* organization could not believe it would have been enough for them [the workers] to be satisfied just to fill their spare time with parties and conferences; it was necessary to truly convince them, to persuade each and one employee that they occupied the “right place” in society; to reconcile their job with their social status in the name of that “social Taylorism” that fascism was attempting to disguise as the very “scientific” reason for the social order. It was necessary indeed, that each and one worker profoundly believed that his own role—no matter how ugly—was not a fallback to embrace against his will, nor, what is worse, a misfortune he had to escape in the pursuit of more appealing options.”

¹⁵² “Come ci vedono” *Famiglia nostra* Maggio (1933): 4-6 in Luzzatto *Tempo libero e Regime, Il dopolavoro a Roma negli anni trenta*, 244. “Satin sleeves have disappeared. Oxford style button shirts have replaced celluloid collars. Half-belt blazers and plus fours pants have supplanted old greyish suits and patched, worn-out bottoms. They [the workers] briskly walk to their *dopolavoro*, their face is frank, their gait is athletic, with a bold smile in a buoyant atmosphere.”

The frank look and a friendly demeanor promoted in the pages of *Famiglia nostra* reverberate in the principles illustrated by Inspector Iacobetti in the Roman office, as she provides the sloppy employees with the *vademecum* of the perfect clerk:

Un buon impiegato deve sapere parlare di calcio, di filatelia e di pesci tropicali. Il suo umore deve essere amabile. La sua voce piacevole. L'umore allegro, né sognatore, né misantropo, deve avere l'estro di un attore, l'intuito di un finanziere, lo slancio di un soldato.¹⁵³

Iacobetti's reformation plan meets the Roman employees' irreverent disdain, for they do not deem their professional status and paycheck commensurate to the demanded effort. Some among the workers try to please the Inspector by displaying a façade of discipline as a result of an *en masse* layoff aimed at a selective re-hiring of complying employees. Among the other selection criteria affecting their successful completion of a trial period, the workers must undergo some *prove psico-attitudinali* in order to evaluate their aptitude and adequacy for the job. Either incapable of even grasping the test's questions,¹⁵⁴ or responding with impudent rebellion to them,¹⁵⁵ Iacobetti's methods

¹⁵³ "A good white-collar worker must be able to engage in conversations about soccer, stamp collecting, and tropical fish. His mood must be lovely, the sound of his voice enjoyable. Of gay mood, he shall not be a dreamer, nor a misanthropist. He must be inspired like an actor, sharp like a policeman, brave like a soldier." Iacobetti's lesson echoes an article from "Famiglia nostra," in which the *slancio*, the vitalistic élan, is promoted as a sign of renewed attitude on the workplace: "La pratica giornaliera... può inaridire l'anima. Per evitare ciò, bisogna rianimarsi continuamente con la viva e palpitante natura delle cose, e poi di nuovo del singolo; così si conserva lo slancio e si può sfuggire alla aridità della burocrazia. Essa è veramente fatta per soffocare lo spirito" *Famiglia nostra* Marzo (1934): 18-19, Ibid., 276. "Daily practice can wither one's soul. In order to avoid it, people have to reanimate themselves with the living, trembling nature of things, and then go back to the self; in this way, one can preserve the élan and avoid the bureaucratic aridity. Bureaucracy is truly made to suffocate the human spirit."

¹⁵⁴ *Esaminatore*: "Quali sono i suoi hobby?"

Impiegato: "I miei che?...quelli di tutti i bambini: ho fatto il morbillo, gli orecchioni..."

appear to be ill-suited to the Roman employees' mentality and lifestyle. As a member of the very examining committee points out to Iacobetti: "Queste macchinette sono veramente miracolose, ma con i raccomandati non funzionano. Perché restano."¹⁵⁶ Tailored to the American office, Inspector's modernization plan finds its great limitation in the employees' derisive attitude and consolidated refusal of discipline. Questioned about his hostility towards the new office rules, Guida dismisses it as a game: No, io non sono affatto contrario, anzi mi diverte: mi sembra di stare a New York!¹⁵⁷

While openly inspired to American-conceived studies on productivity and efficiency on the workplace, Iacobetti's plan and language openly resonates with fascist rhetoric of work and leisure. The overt references to Mussolini's ideas on productive employment of spare time offer several insights on post-war ideas of modernity,

Esaminatore: "Vada, vada pure!"

Impiegato: "Sono andato bene, dottore?"

Esaminatore: "Sì, benissimo!"

Examiner: "What are your hobbies?"

Employee: "My what? ...the same as any other child: I got vaccinated for measles, for mumps..."

Examiner: "Enough. You can go now, that is enough."

Employee: "Did I do well, Inspector?"

Examiner: "Yes, very well indeed!"

¹⁵⁵ Nando Guida (Nino Manfredi) is introduced to the examining committee as hostile to the office modernization. He is tested on the matter:

Esaminatore: "Ha mai avuto casi di malattie mentali in famiglia?"

Guida: "Mio nonno ci ha dato un po' da pensare. Una volta radunò mille persone, partì da Quarto e sbarcò a Marsala. Si chiamava Giuseppe."

Examiner: "Do you have a mental illness history running in your family?"

Guida: "My grandfather worried us a little bit: once he gathered a thousand people, left from Quarto and disembarked in Marsala. His name was Giuseppe."

¹⁵⁶ "These little machines are truly miraculous, but with people who have connections, they don't work. Those people stay."

¹⁵⁷ "No, I am absolutely not against it. Quite the opposite, it's fun! I feel like I'm in New York."

especially with regard to work. In its appropriating the rhetoric and language of the Italian dictatorship, the film constructs a critique of the detrimental effects of modernity on the health of the workers of the *Istituto*. The emphasis is on the constraints of dependent employment, and subsequently, with Iacobetti's arrival, on the attempt to control their very behavior in the office, as well as their hobbies and administration of spare time. The idea that their free time can be productively utilized for practices of self-betterment is original to the Fascist regime and one that is parodied in Puccini's film. Iacobetti's attempts to inspire the workers to collect tropical fishes and stamps as to become better at small talk with the office patrons (and to become better at their job, as a consequence) is a comic exaggeration of the fascist rhetoric of productive employment of spare time.

Iacobetti's holistic modernization program for the Roman office is presented as being entirely inspired by American-conceived studies and state-of-the-art technology, it in fact resonates with the Fascist linguistic and rhetorical appropriation of these modernization principles expressed through the *ventottesimo*, the 1928 reformation plan for the Italian bureaucracy. *Ventottesimo* was part of a larger plan of anthropological revolution envisioned by the Duce, whereby the lazy, old, and apathetic Italic race would have found new élan and vigor in their commitment to their homeland and to the common good. An American study on the most suitable chromatic choices to foster productivity in the office is presented as a justification to the Inspector's idea to "drown" the frescoed female nudes on the ceiling of the *Istituto Romano Beni Immobili*. A warm beige hue would, according to Iacobetti's reasoning, prevent any excitement among the

workers in favor of increased focus and greater effectiveness. In fact, productivity oriented interior design adjustments in the office are a common trait between the Fascist reformation program of the Italian public service sector, and American-conducted studies on productivity:¹⁵⁸ “L’esigenza di raggiungere un ritmo lavorativo continuo e regolare suggeriva, infatti, il ricorso alla meccanizzazione totale o parziale delle operazioni unita ad una scelta oculata degli “arredi” d’ufficio.”¹⁵⁹ A certain interest in effective furniture layout sprang in the years of the Regime, aimed at increasing productivity by minimizing socialization among the employees and facilitating their access to work supplies. In Puccini’s film, the *Istituto*’s frescoed rooms are transformed into a sleek, functional, modern working area whose aligned desk layout reflects Iacobetti’s ideal office’s design.

By studying Mussolini’s reformation plan of the Italian public service sector, it is possible to grasp the ways in which *L’impiegato* has appropriated and translated the fascist rhetoric of purification and renewal in the language of the comedy. The Duce’s overly optimistic anthropological revolution failed¹⁶⁰ and so did the Regime’s reformation plan of the Italian bureaucracy. Puccini’s film capitalizes on this failure as a way to undermine Iacobetti’s authority through the irreverent sarcasm of the employee’s disobedience and their belittlement of power.

¹⁵⁸ See chapter 1, in which I discuss *L’impiegato* from the point of view of office space and organization in relation to the American office prototype.

¹⁵⁹ “The need to achieve a continuity in the working operations suggested mechanization, along with a wise choice of office’s interior design.” Luzzatto, *Tempo libero e Regime, Il dopolavoro a Roma negli anni trenta*, 217.

¹⁶⁰ Emilio Gentile, “The Fascist Anthropological Revolution,” in *Culture, Censorship and the State in Twentieth-Century Italy* ed. Guido Bonsaver and Robert Gordon (New York: Routledge, 2005), 22.

Iacobetti's austere tone and disastrous modernization plan appear all the more derisible for a twofold reason: first and most evidently, for a young woman is to implement it—alone, she has to confront a crowd of scarcely motivated men whose only interest is to perform the bare minimum not to be fired; secondarily, Iacobetti's modernization plan is derisible for the employees not only resist discipline, but fail to engage with it by belittling the new rules. The film appropriates the Regime's rhetoric of State loyalty and personal rectitude only to overturn it; to discipline and control, the employees respond with its opposite—mockery and unruliness. In investigating the shortcomings of Mussolini's reformation plan of the Italian bureaucracy, Salvati points to its failed modernization: "La mancata fascistizzazione della burocrazia va di pari passo con l'insuccesso della sua modernizzazione."¹⁶¹ In the workers' refusal to abide to discipline and actively participate to the imperative of production, Puccini's film underscores a strict continuity between Fascist rhetoric underpinning public service sector's reformation plan, and late 1950s American-inspired cultural and societal practices brought by consumerism and fast-paced industrialization.

The film's appropriation and parody of fascist guidelines on spare time administration and work ethics is functional to the critique of modernity and its effects on the workers. Excessive control and regulation of the workers' lives are comically represented through the parody of a dictatorship, the political regime of control par excellence—a shared, relatively recent memory for the Italian viewership of *L'impiegato*.

¹⁶¹ "The failed modernization of the bureaucracy goes hand in hand with its failed fascistization." Salvati, *Il regime e gli impiegati*, 77.

Precise guidelines orient their taste, their looks, their administration of spare time, and ultimately control their behavior in the office as to shape loyal followers of the regime and subsequently, under capitalism, active consumers and producers of wealth. While openly subversive of Iacobetti's American-conceived productivity-oriented modernization plan, Nando fully embraces the perks of capitalism in his dreaming about American-set narratives featuring Joan, a blonde, sexually liberated woman, an emblem of the new cultural models pervading Italians' desires and ambitions at the time of the economic miracle. Filmic depictions of widespread models of cultural consumption from these years pinpoint the gradual development from the 1950s onward, of a new, homogeneous mass of consumers lured by the mirage of the "American dream," consisting of an improved way of life and access to luxury consumption goods, such as automobiles and domestic appliances. The long process of nationalization of the masses promoted by the Regime found in the development of the new culture of consumption and in the establishment of new forms of collective identity its full actualization.¹⁶² In its seamless transitioning from Fascist-imbued rhetoric to modern work practices, Puccini's film points to modernization as a common denominator between the Italian dictatorship and the film's own contemporary time, the late 1950s.

Nando's oneiric narrative digressions point to his fascination with consumerism and American cultural models by reinforcing his ambivalent response to modernization: while rejecting production and work discipline, he endures his state-funded employment

¹⁶² Francesco Barbagallo, *L'Italia Repubblicana, Dallo sviluppo alle riforme mancate, 1945-2008* (Roma: Carocci editore, 2009), 45.

as to be able to access consumption and leisure. The film's opening scene set in a luxurious villa exemplifies Nando's materialistic ambition to effortless wealth and comfort, while expressing his malaise vis-à-vis the demands and the coercion of dependent employment.

Relying for its comicality on the manifest disjuncture between the workers' ostentation of discipline—mimicked in the presence of Iacobetti—and their genuine disengagement from the practice of productivity, the film references and appropriates the Regime's linguistic and rhetorical legacy, thus underscoring the ineffectiveness of power in the arbitrary establishment of order and obedience. Worn and removed like a mask, the models of the totalitarian regime never affected people's consciences, which are instead deeply muted in both their values and beliefs by a new, real, national unification brought by industrialization, observes Pier Paolo Pasolini in his 1975's retrospective account of these transitional decades of Italian history.¹⁶³ Only superficially mimicking obedience to the new office practices, Nando, as well as his colleagues, are portrayed as profoundly unresponsive towards Iacobetti's call to work and sense of urgency in tackling the crisis of productivity affecting the Roman office; consumption without production is what really occupies them, and the mirage, well represented in Nando's escapist dream, of

¹⁶³ Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Il vuoto di potere," *Corriere della Sera*, February 1st 1975, <http://www.corriere.it/speciali/pasolini/potere.html>, Last accessed March 28th, 2017.

effortless wealth, a common trope of comedy Italian style from *L'impiegato's* concomitant years.¹⁶⁴

SPARE TIME: TOP-DOWN CULTURAL CONSUMPTION IN *FANTOZZI'S* FILMS

Along with the interwar period growth of the Italian waged worker population came an increase in spare time availability, and as a consequence, the need to occupy it.¹⁶⁵ Created in 1925,¹⁶⁶ the OND, the *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro*, the Italian national organization for workers' leisure time, was intended to provide financial and moral support for the working class and their families. By addressing the issue of the administration of workers' spare time, the OND subscribed to the "utilitarian ideology of leisure"¹⁶⁷ whereby non-working time was no longer regarded as a private matter, as much as an occasion to practice self-betterment activities for the benefit of society:

No longer seen as an 'end' in itself, leisure was now constructed as a 'means' of improving the worker in the national interest, curing the defects of proletarian character, teaching workers not to kill time, and instructing them in the virtues of 'self-discipline,' self-control,' and 'fair

¹⁶⁴ In the film, Nando's colleague, the widower Francesco Massa, seduce Luisetta with the promise of imminent matrimony in order to receive financial support for himself and his two children. This reinforces the trope of widespread ambition to consumption without the toil of production.

¹⁶⁵ De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy*, 127.

¹⁶⁶ Vigilante *L'opera nazionale dopolavoro, tempo libero dei lavoratori, assistenza e regime fascista 1925-1943* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2014), 26.

¹⁶⁷ De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy*, 51.

play’—those much mythicized ‘Anglo-Saxon’ qualities seemingly so sorely lacking in the Italian working class.¹⁶⁸

The idea of free time as an occasion to *work* on one’s physical and intellectual abilities was new, and one that the Regime received as a means to the education of the masses to State loyalty and discipline

La fitta, meticolosa programmazione del dopolavoro, in questi primi anni, avrebbe comunque dovuto realizzare (questo il disegno del gruppo dirigente dell’Opera) un miglioramento materiale e morale dei lavoratori indispensabile per il progresso della nazione: “Migliorato materialmente e moralmente il lavoratore diventerà il milite intelligente, pronto all’eroismo muto di ogni giorno; al sacrificio oscuro, continuato ed indefesso, col quale si vincono le grandi battaglie economiche. (32)¹⁶⁹

Like an extension of their work shift, spare time was part of a necessary practice of restoration of the workers’ energies aimed at maximizing their productive potential as well as at providing them with the right spirit of cooperation on the workplace¹⁷⁰—the latter especially achieved through amateur sport tournaments.¹⁷¹ As De Grazia points out:

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 44.

¹⁶⁹ Vigilante, *L’opera nazionale dopolavoro, tempo libero dei lavoratori, assistenza e regime fascista 1925-1943*. “In its first years, the *Dopolavoro*’s dense, detailed, schedule was meant to aim (according to the OND’s leading group) at the workers’ material and moral betterment—a necessary condition to national progress: “Materially and morally improved, the worker will become like a smart soldier, ready for the humble everyday heroism, and for the strenuous, tenacious, and relentless abnegation with which the great economic battles are won.”

¹⁷⁰ De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of leisure in Fascist Italy*, 173.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 44.

The extension of techniques of labor management to social relations would lead, as one proponent enthusiastically claimed, to a veritable “taylorization of leisure.” Even as the work process was timed, measured, and divided into single tasks to maximize output, so now the activities of leisure might be analyzed, taken apart, and reassembled as efficient restorers of the workers’ energies. The *dopolavoro* would be to leisure what scientific management was to work: “the scope.”

In the present section, I analyze selected scenes from the *Fantozzi* series in which leisure activities and sport are proposed and imposed on the workers as a means to moral and physical betterment; while only briefly referring to the history of the OND, and its subsequent, post-war configuration into ENAL (the *Ente Nazionale Assistenza Lavoratori*), I wish to highlight the ways in which parody of Fascist and leftist leisure-time organizations are interchangeably and seamlessly exploited and combined in the construction of a social satire targeting top-down cultural administration in *Fantozzi*’s films. As a privileged site of working class’ education to politically oriented social practices, after-work time offers the ideal ground upon which party-loyalty is negotiated, and consent earned. In their intermingling of Fascist and Communist cultural agendas for the working masses, the films portend some underpinning continuities between two radically opposed ideological stances, which I intend to explore. Three main aspects inspired me to examine *Fantozzi*’s comedies against the backdrop of Fascist and post-war *dopolavoro* culture, which are: the mandatory nature of the workers’ participation to leisure activities; the idea of moral and physical betterment to maximize productivity; and ultimately, the democratization of leisure as a means to upward social mobility.

In *Fantozzi*, the representation of recreational practices occupies great part of the films' narrative; while being the predominant form of leisure, sport, among the other activities, is regarded with ambivalence in the *Megaditta*'s administration of the employees' spare time: fiercely opposed when passively watched on television—especially soccer—is instead encouraged and promoted as a healthy daily practice for moral and physical self-improvement. For the purpose of my film analysis, I have chosen two among the best known and significant sport competitions from the *Fantozzi* saga, which are: the *Coppa Cobram*,¹⁷² the infamous bicycle race from *Fantozzi contro tutti* (1980), and the *Olimpiadi aziendali*, the office Olympics from *Fantozzi subisce ancora* (1983). In presenting this analysis, I hope to highlight the ways in which the films have appropriated and reworked the Regime's rhetoric of sport as a means to self-improvement in the language of the parody.

¹⁷² In her essay "Il dopolavoro dell'Urbe," Elisa Zanuttini discusses the great relevance of sport activities within the Roman branch of the *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro* and the several initiatives undertaken during the years of the Italian regime. The organization of a snow tournament called *Coppa Starace*, from the name of the Fascist Party's secretary, offers a possible inspiration for the *Coppa Cobram* in the film: "Per il maggiore consenso ottenuto e per i minori costi organizzativi il settore sportivo fu uno di quelli maggiormente curati dall'O.N.D., specialmente nei primi anni della gestione Starace...Una veloce rassegna del "Dopolavoro Escursionistico" il periodico quindicinale della Federazione Italiana per l'Escursionismo, offre un panorama molto ricco di appuntamenti e di iniziative: incontri e tornei di volata tra i vari gruppi di quartiere, gare di atletica nello stadio del P.N.F., raduni di grandi folle sulla neve a Roccaraso: nel febbraio del 1934 al Dopolavoro dell'Urbe, presente con 2.371 partecipanti, venne assegnata la "Coppa Starace," destinata al maggior numero di partecipanti al convegno sulla neve." Elisa Zanuttini, *Tempo libero e Regime, Il dopolavoro a Roma negli anni trenta*, 86. "Due to its great popularity and its low cost, sport was particularly relevant within the OND organization, especially during the early years of the Starace leadership...A quick glance at the biweekly magazine of the National Italian Hiking Association, "Dopolavoro Escursionistico," will reveal their calendar, rich with gatherings and events: tennis tournaments involving local small teams, track and field competitions held at the Fascist Party's stadium, large gatherings on the snow, in Roccaraso: in February 1934 the Roman branch of the after-work organization—with its 2,371 participants, was assigned the *Coppa Starace*, awarded to the largest number of people attending the snow gathering."

Hereditary power in the *Megaditta* management is a recurring feature throughout the entire film series; the whim of the several Counts, Viscounts, Dukes, and other nobility variously succeeding in the leadership of the firm subjects Fantozzi and his colleagues to new, preposterous office rules. At the age of 102, Count Vignardelli-Bava from *Fantozzi contro tutti*, falls prey to a fatal attack of rubella; the news of his departure is welcomed with great jubilation among the workers, who had devoutly been gathering for collective death-advocating rosaries in the firm's cafeteria. Vignardelli-Bava's successor is publicly announced on the day of his funeral to all the workers convened around his memorial stone, embellished—as the film's voiceover sarcastically announces—with pure gold decorations obtained from “the melting of the wedding rings spontaneously donated by you, loyal employees.”¹⁷³ While not overtly referenced, the gold wedding ring donations from the employees echoes the Fascist regime's 1938 initiative “Oro alla Patria,” in which Italians convened to the Capital to donate their precious metals in support of the national military effort. The episode's heavy reliance on war sceneries and language confers gravity to the representation of the harshness the employees have to endure while training and participating to the *Coppa Cobram* cycling competition, and more generally, to their condition as subordinate workers; the asperities of the war, the wounded, the deceased, the adverse climatic conditions concur to the hyperbolic portrayal of the devastating effects of physical activities on the ill-suited bodies of the *Megaditta*'s clerks.

¹⁷³ “E di fronte a questo cippo d'oro zecchino forgiato con la fusione delle fedeli nuziali donate spontaneamente da voi fedeli impiegati, qui, secondo la volontà dell'illustre scomparso, annuncio il nome del suo successore.”

A mediocre cyclist in his youth, Viscount Cobram's ascent to power engenders disarray among the workers, who are tested and trained for professional cycling. Cobram's didactic tone in lecturing the workers gathered in his office educates them to the noble practice of cycling as a means to moral and physical betterment:

Il ciclismo è uno sport sano e alla portata di tutti, che conferisce grande lucidità ed efficienza sul lavoro. Mi fanno pena e schifo quegli impiegati che vengono al lavoro in macchina e che la sera corrono a rinchiudersi in quelle scatole di sardine invece di fare una bella sgambata fuori città.¹⁷⁴

As a result of his unfulfilled athletic ambition, Viscount Cobram announces a seventy kilometers mandatory cycling race for all the employees, in preparation of which they have to ride their bicycles to work as part of a larger imperative training program. As a result of their first outdoor practice, the employees converge to the *Megaditta's* cafeteria, mimicking wounded soldiers retiring to a military camp hospital after the battle: "Il giorno dopo, in sala mensa, entrò un plotone di super-mutilati di tutte le guerre"¹⁷⁵— comments Villaggio's voiceover while a parade of disabled, agonizing, variously impaired white-collars lines up for lunch.

Portrayed like soldiers on the war front, the employees have no escape from the uncompromising discipline of the athletic event, for which a stage with a jury has been installed at the race's start line; a squad of black-clad guards on motorcycles, together

¹⁷⁴ "Cycling is a healthy and affordable sport which improves clarity of mind and effectiveness on the workplace. I am repelled and disgusted by those people who drive their cars to work and conclude their day in their suffocating apartments instead of going for a good, healthy bicycle ride away from the city."

¹⁷⁵ "The very next day, a platoon of mutilated from all the wars made its entrance in the cafeteria."

with Viscount Cobram himself on board of a black convertible *Lancia*, escort the cyclists at the start line. An ambulance and a hearse conclude the parade. The episode's mise-en-scène unequivocally echoes the Italian regime's official apparatus on occasion of the Duce's public appearances. Cobram reaches out to the crowd with a loudspeaker, standing straight out of the passenger seat of his convertible black *Lancia* "Astura Presidenziale," the same model and make of a car personally commissioned by the Duce to the Italian manufacture, and produced by *Pininfarina*.¹⁷⁶ The mimicking of a war scenario completes the series of historical references in this episode: soon in the competition—which takes place on July 28th—the workers encounter a snowstorm recreating the harsh climate of a Siberian-like war front:

Sulla salitella di viale De Amicis, nominata poi tragicamente "Cima del diavolo," incontrarono l'immane e terrificante tempesta teatro di ogni gran premio della montagna. Nell'epicentro, 50 gradi sotto zero.¹⁷⁷

Covered in snow and ice, the employees climb the "devil's peak" in storming, hissing wind and howling wolves. Some survive; some others succumb, thus adding new skull-decorated beads to Cobram's abacus—the Viscount's ludic count of the losses.

¹⁷⁶ "In occasione di una visita a Roma di Adolf Hitler nel 1938, Mussolini commissionò alla Lancia una vettura aperta che fu realizzata da Pininfarina, la "Astura Presidenziale"...donata poi al Führer il quale mai la utilizzò, preferendo le Mercedes Benz 770." *Le auto del Duce: da Claretta alla fuga*, <http://www.formulapassion.it/2015/11/le-auto-del-duce-da-claretta-alla-fuga/> accessed on July 7, 2016. "On occasion of Adolf Hitler's visit to Rome in 1938, Mussolini commissioned to *Lancia* the making of a convertible vehicle realized by *Pininfarina*, the *Astura Presidenziale*...that was then offered to the Führer, who always preferred *Mercedes Benz* 770 over it."

¹⁷⁷ "On the little slope of De Amicis boulevard, later tragically re-named "Devil's peak," they encountered the unavoidable, horrifying storm, a staple in every mountain race, whose center was 50°C below zero."

The *Coppa Cobram* episode from *Fantozzi contro tutti* appropriates the Fascist rhetoric of sport as a means to physical and moral betterment in the form of a parody; proposed as a healthy, constructive employment of the workers' spare time, the cycling race is instead planned and enforced for the Viscount's own personal entertainment. A mediocre cyclist in his juvenile years, Cobram intends to establish the supremacy of cycling over other sports, soccer above all. While appearing as a mere divergence of interests, sport preferences are functional to the representation of a cultural divide separating the *Megaditta's* leading class—referred to with affected, derisive nobility titles¹⁷⁸—from lower class employees; in his crusade against soccer, Cobram opposes cycling to the nationally acclaimed, and commodified game of *calcio*, thus provoking disarray among the employees of the *Megaditta*. While valuing sports as a peacetime terrain on which to assert the people's moral and physical vigor, the rise of professional sports and passive spectatorship was a decidedly troubling practice in the eyes of the regime, for it fostered the creation of an inactive mass audience, along with the persistence of consumerism and bourgeois sloth.¹⁷⁹

The enforcement of unpopular athletic competitions suggested by the whim of the *Megaditta* management is presented as a practice of physical and moral betterment aimed at improving productivity on the workplace. The appropriation of the Fascist rhetoric of friendly competition and productive utilization of one's spare time is variously expressed

¹⁷⁸ The plate on Count Vignardelli-Bava's office describes him as: "Gr. Uff. Lup. Mann. Conte Vignardelli-Bava Ladr. di Gr. Croc. Figl. di Putt. Direttore Ereditario."

¹⁷⁹ David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 242.

in several instances in the films. With Viscount Cobram's descendant, Cobram II, an analogous scenario is enacted, for he forces subordinate workers to participate to the firm's Olympics, the *Olimpiadi aziendali*, in *Fantozzi subisce ancora* (1983). From the rank of simple clerk, and through a series of *Famiglia Cristiana* magazine subscriptions and masonic affiliations, from humble subordinate worker, *Ragionier* Fonelli has mysteriously ascended to the rank of lifelong director, holding the title of Cobram II.¹⁸⁰

A mediocre athlete in his youth, Fonelli unsuccessfully attempts to involve his colleagues in a track and field competition, his favorite sport. His resentment against his peers and their profound lack of interest finds in soccer the primary culprit for his tournament's scarce popularity: "Andatevene, andatevene a giocare al pallone che non fa nemmeno bene alla salute. Andate, andate allo stadio voi, a vedere le vostre partite di calcio. Tanto non capite niente: l'atletica è la regina degli sport!"¹⁸¹ Upon his ascent to power, accountant Fonelli, now Cobram II, can freely impose his wish upon his former peers and institute a mandatory track and field competition. The participating teams are formed according to office affiliations in the *Megaditta*, including *Ufficio Bustarelle e raccomandazioni*, *Ufficio furti e ricatti*, and *Ufficio sinistri*;¹⁸² the workers parade in front

¹⁸⁰ "Attraverso una serie di spiate, di ricatti, di adesioni alla mafia, alla camorra, alla 'ndrangheta, alla P2, e con quattro abbonamenti a vita a Famiglia Cristiana, l'inoffensivo e dimesso Ragionier Fonelli era stato improvvisamente nominato Megadirettore naturale del personale e aveva assunto il nome di Cobram II." "Thanks to espionage, black-mailing, mafia, camorra, 'ndrangheta and P2 affiliations, four life long subscriptions to Famiglia Cristiana magazine, the humble and inoffensive *Ragionier* Fonelli had suddenly been nominated Natural super director of the personnel with the title of Cobram II."

¹⁸¹ "Go away, go play soccer, which is also bad for your health! Go! Go to the stadium to watch your soccer games! You don't get it: track and field is the best sport!"

¹⁸² The teams include: the *Ufficio amministrazione*, *Ufficio bustarelle e raccomandazioni*, *Ufficio furti e ricatti*, and the *Ufficio sinistri*, respectively: administrative office, bribing and corruption office, thefts and blackmailing office, and finally, the accident office.

of the Olympic flame decorating a stage where Cobram II, a bishop, and a member of the nobility sit. The teams, represented by different color banners, align before the jury offering their greeting—some of them raise their hands in a Roman salute.

The episode is a parody of formal and aesthetic features of Nazi athletic events, specifically of 1936 Berlin Olympics.¹⁸³ The mandatory character of the employees' participation to the *Olimpiadi aziendali*, the rhetoric of physical and moral self-improvement¹⁸⁴ point to an undeniable correlation between the austere discipline enforced at the *Megaditta* and the (limited) space left to private initiative and dissent inherent to dictatorships. The ideological undertones of the firm's Olympics' pompous ceremonial magnify the comic outcome of the employees' disastrous athletic performance in their accentuating the arbitrary nature of power in its attempt to shape and address the workers' athletic inclinations—or lack thereof.

The clerks' redemption from their ignoble, exclusive adoration for the game of soccer is a central theme in several episodes from the *Fantozzi's* series; attempts to liberate the masses from their "proletarian character"¹⁸⁵ through the democratization of financially demanding and otherwise unavailable athletic practices have an echo in the

¹⁸³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVlaJJVAUq4> Accessed on April 30, 2017.

¹⁸⁴ Cobram II addresses his former peers as follows: "Vedo con piacere, cari sottoposti, che finalmente siete tutti d'accordo con il vostro Fonelli, sulla bellezza dello sport dilettantistico, sulla necessità fisico-psichica di praticarlo, sui dettami del Marchese di Coubertin, perché l'atletica è la regina degli sport." "I notice with pleasure, dear subordinates, that you all agree with your Fonelli about the beauty of recreational sports and about the necessity to practice them, and about the precepts of the Marquis of Coubertin—because track and field is the best sport."

¹⁸⁵ De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy*, 44.

Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro's management of the working class' free time during the years of the Fascist dictatorship. As De Grazia observes in her account of the OND's recreational sport administration:

It was in fact skiing that earned Mussolini's dictatorship much of its ill-deserved reputation for having "democratized" elite sports. Apart from being fashionable and upper class, skiing had a considerable mystique deriving from its association with the daring and prowess of Italy's crack alpine troops during the Great War.¹⁸⁶

De Grazia's comment underpins my third, conclusive argument about leisure consumption as a means to the creation of a homogeneous culture for the masses achieved through the democratization of seemingly highbrow past-times.¹⁸⁷ In granting the workers and their families discounted tickets and facilitated access to otherwise prohibitively expensive leisure,¹⁸⁸ the Regime was securing a large basis of cultural consent,¹⁸⁹ which would divert the workers' attention from any form of class-based political associationism.¹⁹⁰ Far from introducing sport in society, Fascism gave it a central role by redeeming it from its elitist character. As Stephen Gundle and David Forgacs have pointed out, before WWI, sport had been regarded as a well-to-do

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 176.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 151.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 35.

¹⁸⁹ "Ibid., 3.

¹⁹⁰ De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy*, 216.

gentlemen affectation. Mussolini centralized it by sponsoring it as a means to achieve a higher, common ideal of a healthy mind in a healthy body that would promote national identifications while transcending class boundaries.¹⁹¹

For the purpose of this section, I examine instances from the *Fantozzi*'s films in which the *Ragioniere* and his co-workers take part to *Megaditta*-sponsored vacations in exclusive skiing locations. These sequences' relevance stems from the notorious democratization of snow sports operated in the years of the Regime, and from the "mystique"¹⁹² deriving from the mountain's connection with the harshness of the war. To this end, I will analyze some instances from *Fantozzi*, Silvani, and Calboni's trip to Courmayeur from *Fantozzi* (1975), and the *Megaditta*-sponsored vacation in Ortisei, in South Tyrol, from *Fantozzi contro tutti* (1980). With these film analyses, I hope to clarify the ways in which the films appropriate and translate in the language of the parody the idea of working class' effortless adoption of expensive, upper-class leisure and entertainment.

Rivals in love, *Geometra* Calboni and *Ragioniere* Fantozzi leave for Courmayeur with their co-worker, *Signorina* Silvani, whom they try to impress and seduce with their alleged familiarity with the exclusive location (Calboni), and improvised mastery of skiing (Fantozzi). Left to freeze on the backseat of Calboni's convertible car and disoriented by the *Geometra*'s farfetched lies, Fantozzi falls prey of "competitive hallucinations" on their drive to Courmayeur:

¹⁹¹ Forgacs and Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War*, 240.

¹⁹² De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of leisure in Fascist Italy*, 176.

Voice-over: “Calboni sparava balle così mostruose che a quota
1.600 Fantozzi fu colto da allucinazioni competitive.”

Fantozzi: “Io sono stato azzurro di sci.”

Silvani and Calboni: “Eh!?”

Fantozzi: “Io sono stato nella nazionale di sci...veramente saranno
dieci anni che non scio.”

Silvani and Calboni: “Eh!? Come?”

Fantozzi: “Dicevo che saranno vent’anni che non scio.”

Silvani and Calboni: “ Cosa? Parli forte non si capisce!”

Fantozzi: “Sto dicendo che saranno trenta, trentacinque anni che
non vedo un paio di sci.”¹⁹³

Simulating familiarity with the place and the other tourists, Calboni makes his entrance in the ski lounge terrace by warmly greeting strangers and placing a bar order by yelling “Andrea, i miei due soliti!” to which the bartender responds: “Quali soliti?”¹⁹⁴ Among the other upper-class vacationers, Fantozzi recognizes the *Contessa* Serbelloni Mazzanti Viendalmare, with whom he had the occasion to interact in the past: he had to run after her departing train to deliver *L’albicocco al curaro*, a mystery book she had been reading. Unable to reach her wagon and physically deliver the volume, upon the Countess’ request, he had to flip through the pages while chasing the train to satisfy her

¹⁹³ *Voice-over*: “Calboni lies were so blatant that at 1,600 meters of altitude, Fantozzi
fell prey of competitive hallucinations.”
Fantozzi: “I was in the national skiing team.”
Silvani and Calboni: “What?”
Fantozzi: “I used to ski for the Italian national team...as a matter of fact, I haven’t skied in ten
years.”
Silvani and Calboni: “What? What are you saying?”
Fantozzi: “I’m saying it might be twenty years now I haven’t skied.”
Silvani and Calboni: “ What? Speak up we can’t hear you!”
Fantozzi: “I’m saying I haven’t seen a pair of ski in thirty or thirty-five years!”

¹⁹⁴ *Calboni*: “Andrea, two of the usual.”
Bartender: “The usual what?”

curiosity about the murderer's identity. Fantozzi reminds the Countess about their encounter:

Contessa: "Ma lei chi è, scusi?"

Fantozzi: "Fantozzi, il libro giallo!"

Contessa: "Ah, ma certo! Fantozzi: edizioni Fantozzi! Certo! Come sta, caro?"¹⁹⁵

Oblivious of their previous exchange and of Fantozzi's desperate train chase, the *Contessa* feigns acquaintance, recognizing in him the owner of a mystery books publishing house.

While not directly sponsored by the *Megaditta*, the Courmayeur trip episode engages with the socio-cultural gap separating the leading class from their socially and economically inferior counterpart: on the one hand the *Contessa*, presented as one of the main shareholders of the firm, along with her aristocratic entourage of wealthy friends, and on the other, Fantozzi and his co-workers, seeking social uplifting in leisure. An even more blatant depiction of the ways in which skiing resort vacation grant access to upward social mobility is to be found in a similar episode from *Fantozzi contro tutti*. In Neri Parenti's 1980 adaptation of the mountainous vacation setting, Fantozzi and his colleagues, financed by the magnanimous support of the *Megaditta*, travel to South

¹⁹⁵ *Contessa*: "Excuse-me, who are you again?"

Fantozzi: "Fantozzi, the mystery book!"

Contessa: "Of course! Fantozzi: Fantozzi's publishing house! Obviously! How do you do, dear?"

Tyrol. A series of mix-ups arises from the group's lack of familiarity with the location and their unfounded expectations about the trip.¹⁹⁶

Sport as a healthy, non-professional practice was particularly encouraged during the regime years for it trained the workers to discipline while instilling in them a spirit of friendly competition. Among the others, cycling and skiing were by far the most popular sports, for they rewarded participation over success. Snow competitions were particularly promoted for their immediate association with the military travails of the front; as Elisa Bizzarri explains, the Regime especially cared for this sport:

Si trattava di richiamare gli Italiani alla realtà di un problema nazionale e cioè alla necessità di prepararsi ad essere atti a difendere la nostra vasta frontiera alpina, che, se da una parte costituisce un superbo baluardo naturale del nostro Paese, dall'altra richiede soldati che sappiano difenderla affrontando i disagi e i rigori del clima.¹⁹⁷

For their emphasis on skiing and cycling—and sports, in general—as privileged *Megaditta*-sponsored leisure activities, *Fantozzi* films appropriate the Fascist rhetoric of physical effort as a means to self-improvement and social ascent and depict it in the language of parody. The result is a pungent social satire targeting the idea of working-

¹⁹⁶ Traveling to Ortisei in their heavy skiing outfits and carrying obsolete, cumbersome mountain gears, the group misses the snowy season by a long shot, finding upon their arrival in South Tyrol, a verdant, blossoming Spring.

¹⁹⁷ *L'Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro. I primi cinque anni di attività* (Roma, 1930), 41 in Elisa Bizzarri, *Tempo libero e Regime, Il dopolavoro a Roma negli anni trenta*, 115. “The main concern was to remind Italians about a national issue, that is the need to be prepared to defend the large alpine border, which if on the one hand it constitutes an excellent natural bulwark for our Country, on the other, it demands soldiers ready to face the hardship and the difficulties of its climate.”

class ascent achieved through effortless blending into highbrow social and cultural milieu. As Salvati explains:

The Fascist regime's establishment of a base of consent through the creation of a culturally homogeneous social stratum is to be researched in the Italian middle-class: "Il nesso fascismo-ceti medi è talmente stretto in quell'edificio simbolico che il termine stesso di classe media ha conosciuto il suo momento di maggior fortuna proprio in connessione con le prime analisi del fascismo, che a sua volta aveva cercato in questo connubio il fondamento della sua stabilità. Quanto agli impiegati dello Stato, chi meglio di loro simboleggia, anche nel nostro paese, l'immagine di uniformità, diffusione sul territorio nazionale e pervasività di una cultura che, come per la *middle class* anglosassone, è basata sull'imitazione dell'alto, la *distinzione* dal basso e la sostanziale omologazione. (7)¹⁹⁸

For the purpose of my conclusive section, I engage with the films' parody of leftist culture, which I interpret in the light of the PCI's post-war, educational agenda envisioning working class' appropriation of highbrow cultural domain. The films' seamless transitioning from parodies respectively targeting Fascist and Communist top-down cultural administration pinpoints to the continuities among radically antithetical ideological stances: totalitarianism, capitalism, and Marxism. Envisioning in the fall of Fascism the decline of monopoly capitalism, the PCI deemed the time ripe for the establishment of a working class' hegemony to be pursued through the education of the

¹⁹⁸ "On a symbolic ground, the connection between Fascism and the middle-classes is so strict that the expression "middle-class" itself has experienced its best moment of popularity precisely at the time of the Regime, which had sought in it, its basis of consent and the reason for its stability. As far goes for the public civil servants, they are the perfect emblem of uniformity, capillary nation-wide distributed culture based—like the Anglo-Saxon middle-class—on the imitation of higher strata, distance from the lower, and substantial homologation."

people to the precepts of Marxism. However, one of the main fallacies in the Communists' approach, according to Forgacs and Gundle, was to conceive mass culture as the end product of a process of education of the people, rather than as "a sum of working-class values and practices."¹⁹⁹

In their noble aim to forge a unified culture "without adjectives," communist intellectuals were rarely able to bridge the gap between high-level cultural action and the linguistic and educational level of the party's affiliates.²⁰⁰ Also, by underestimating the role of cinema and popular publishing in integrating classes and tastes, they proved to be hostile or at best indifferent to the new avenues to popular consensus.²⁰¹ As a response to the "distracting" effect of Hollywood cinema, television, and mass culture on people, and as a consequence of their failed attempt to democratize ENAL, the post-war configuration of OND,²⁰² in 1957 the PCI founded ARCI, the Italian Recreational and Cultural Association, in order to balance the erosive action of consumerist culture with grassroots initiatives and promote popular music, theater, film shows, and debates.²⁰³ In their strenuous defense of Italian cinema, and neorealism in particular, the PCI

¹⁹⁹ Forgacs and Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War*, 261.

²⁰⁰ Stephen Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow, The Italian Communists and the Challenge of Mass Culture, 1943-1991* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 200), 40.

²⁰¹ Whereas Christian Democratic associations provided their sections with TV sets, the communist *Casa del Popolo* relied on slide shows and projectors for their political propaganda. According to the historian Carlo Galluzzi, it was like "pursuing an aeroplane on horseback."

²⁰² As explained in Gundle, ENAL was committed to an apolitical utilization of leisure. See Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow, The Italian Communists and the Challenge of Mass Culture, 1943-1991*, 101.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 103.

denounced Hollywood's imperialism while attempting to contain its influence through the screening of Mexican and Soviet film in left-wing film clubs (*cineclub* and *circoli del cinema*). Mostly attended by intellectuals rather than workers, these clubs proved it to be difficult to keep the audience engaged, for a lack of American and commercial entertainment: their cinema "was expensive and also difficult to understand, or badly understood...It wasn't the cinema of stars, there was no longer any Tyrone Power or Gary Cooper or Gloria Swanson, it was a cinema of themes, it was *The Battleship Potemkin*."²⁰⁴

In their proposing a parody of leftwing top-down cultural administration, Fantozzi's films construct a social satire of late 1960s and 1970s revival of *cineclub*, where highbrow, Soviet film (Eisenstein) rubbed shoulders with popular cinema from the past (melodrama and Totò), and Hollywood productions (John Ford and Humphrey Bogart).²⁰⁵ In *Il secondo tragico Fantozzi*, the notorious episode of *The Battleship Kiotomkin* exemplifies the attempt of professor Guidobaldo Maria Riccardelli, an *essay* film amateur and manager of the *Megaditta*, to educate the mass of his employees through mandatory shows and debates of obscure, lengthy films. Irrespective of the soccer world cup finale between Italy and England, Riccardelli imposes a last-minute order for the workers to convene to an evening screening of a German subtitled, Czech-Slovakian film.

²⁰⁴ Forgacs and Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War*, 266.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, , 180.

The accidental unavailability of the film reel does not dissuade the professor from keeping the employees occupied, as he concludes to project instead his beloved Russian masterpiece, *The Battleship Kotiomkin*. At the peak of their discontent, the workers refuse to contribute to the usual debate, until Fantozzi stands up, voicing his and his colleagues' deepest feeling towards the film: "Per me, *La corazzata Kotiomkin* è una cagata pazzesca!"²⁰⁶ A 92-minute long applause follows Fantozzi's statement; the *Megaditta* is occupied, the films set on fire, and Riccardelli tied and forced to kneel for two consecutive days and nights to the uninterrupted vision of workers-acclaimed and selected movies: *Giovannona coscialunga*, *L'esorciccio*, and *La polizia si incazza*.²⁰⁷ The firm's occupation—led by Fantozzi, who for the occasion wears his white-collar flat-cap backward as to gain a more leftist appeal—ends with the police break-in and the workers' unconditional surrender. As partial reparation for Riccardelli's loss of the films, Fantozzi and his colleagues are forced to weekly re-enactments of the central sequence of *The Battleship Kotiomkin*:

Per compensare in parte il professor Riccardelli della perdita irreparabile della sua preziosissima pellicola, gli ammutinati furono condannati a una punizione orrenda da girone dantesco. Dovevano far rivivere almeno la sequenza principale del capolavoro distrutto, tutti i sabati pomeriggio, fino all'età pensionabile.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ "For me, *The Battleship Kotiomkin* is senseless crap!"

²⁰⁷ The chosen titles—some of which correspond to existing movies—are evocative of Italian 1970s erotic comedies, *Giovannona coscialunga disonorata con onore* by Sergio Martino from 1973, *L'esorciccio* by Sergio Ingrassia from 1975, and *poliziottesco* genre with *La polizia si incazza*, a non-existing movie.

²⁰⁸ "In order to partially compensate professor Riccardelli for the irreparable loss of his precious film, the mutineers were condemned to an horrendous, infernal, punishment. They had to re-enact at least the main sequence of the lost masterpiece, every Saturday, until retirement."

Officially intended for the workers' uplifting, the weekly screenings are in fact meant for Riccardelli's own enjoyment, who, irrespective of the workers' own culture, schedules a film on the same day as the soccer world cup finale. The workers' uprising against Riccardelli's *essay* film screenings and the spontaneous occupation of the *Megaditta's* locales, offers in the form of parody and paradox a representation of radical left's stances against the PCI's moderate and compromising approach to consumerist culture, embodied by upper middle-class Riccardelli, leftwing capitalist, leading manager of a private petrochemical firm, kidnapped and tortured by mass-culture promoters.

Although marginal to the scope of the present dissertation, a brief mention of the social composition of Italian middle-classes in the post-industrial context will corroborate my conclusive argument and film analyses from the *Fantozzi* film series. As demonstrated through the film segments thus far examined, a seemingly abysmal cultural gap separates Fantozzi and his peers from the leading class of the *Megaditta*. The films' parody of leftwing educational agenda for the working class is a cultural battle played between dependent employees and their managers. Published in 1974, the Italian economist, Paolo Sylos Labini's *Saggio sulle classi sociali*, operate a distinction, within a social class he refers to as *bourgeoisie*, of multiple strata, which are: proper *bourgeoisie* (made of entrepreneurs, and managers); and *petite bourgeoisie*, or middle-class, itself

divided into three sub-classes: white-collars, merchants, and other categories such as soldiers and priests.²⁰⁹

By adopting Labini's terminology in the description of social classes, it is possible to conclude that *Fantozzi's* films propose a parody of leftist cultural agenda for the working class by exaggerating proper *bourgeoisie's* features (the *Megaditta's* management) into the terms of aristocracy. In attributing them pretentious, pompous nobility titles, the films enhance the distance between them and the mass of the employees, exacerbating the cultural and social divide separating these two hierarchically contiguous classes—as per Labini's distribution. In this conclusive film analysis, I will consider a scene from *Il secondo tragico Fantozzi*, in which the parody of leftist cultural policy is put to the service of social satire targeting the firm's paternalistic façade.

On occasion of the inaugural ceremony of the new *Megaditta's turbonave*, an ocean liner, Fantozzi and his co-workers are invited to participate to an exclusive dinner party hosted by the Counts Serbelloni Mazzanti Viendalmare. As the voiceover reveals, an imminent meeting between the firm's management and the workers' labor union motivates the exceptionally extended invitation:

La sera i festeggiamenti proseguirono con una grande festa nella villa in collina dei Conti Serbelloni Mazzanti Viendalmare, i quali, oltre ai soliti principi e ai soliti potenti, estesero l'invito a tutti gli impiegati, anche i più umili, in vista dei prossimi accordi sindacali.²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ Paolo Sylos Labini, *Saggio sulle classi sociali*, 1974.
http://dspace.unitus.it/bitstream/2067/178/1/Saggio_classi_sociali.pdf Last Accessed, April 1, 2017.

²¹⁰ “At night, the party moved to the Counts Serbelloni Mazzanti Viendalmare's villa on the hill. This time, beside the usual princes and several other affluent people, the invitation had been extended to all the employees, even the humblest, in preparation for the imminent labor union meeting.”

Fantozzi and his colleague Filini's unflattering rental evening attire, demeanor, and poor etiquette at the table are central in highlighting the social divide separating the workers from the *Megaditta's* management, shareholders, members of the nobility, and clergymen present at the reception. The two make a spectacle of themselves before the *Contessa* and the other aristocratic commensals, who oblivious of their names, persist in addressing them as *impiegati*.

Stranger to this new aristocratic world and its novelties, Fantozzi and Filini fall prey of the villa's watchdog upon their very arrival, and of the abstruse dining customs, later in the night, at the table. The segment's comicality relies on the hyperbolic estrangement of all things known to the two employees leading to unpredictable fallouts; attacked by the *Contessa's* sleek, black dog, a Brandenburg Great Dane—which Filini, affected by a heavily invalidating myopia, first mistakes for a calf, then for a horse—they get stranded on a tree in the attempt to assuage the beast by guessing his name. The employees' relying on their common sense and knowledge does not work to their rescue for they address the dog with conventional names, such as Fido, Fuffy, and Bobby. The voiceover ominously interjects to clarify the mistake, and in so doing, highlights the distance separating them from the unfathomable world of the nobility:

Si chiamava Ivan il Terribile XXXII, discendente diretto di Ivan il Terribile I, appartenuto allo zar Nicola, leggendario campione di caccia al

mugico nella steppa e fucilato come nemico del popolo durante la rivoluzione d'Ottobre sulla piazza Rossa.²¹¹

Finally rescued by the *Contessa* herself, in reparation for the dog's attack, Fantozzi and Filini are invited to join the *tavolo d'onore*, the main table, were the hosts, together with the most influential guests sit.

Far removed from their habitual milieu, the two maladroit employees crawl their way through the baffling abundance of silverware and glasses laid out on the table for each guest, and the eccentric, unusual foods—which turn a familiar scenario, such as a meal, into a challenge. Served his shoes on a silver tray (he had lost them in the dog accident), Fantozzi grabs fork and knife as to help himself; presented with the actual main course, he incurs into a near-death choking experience. Consisting of a *tordo intero*, a whole, desiccated bird, the food poses a real problem for Fantozzi and his colleague, who, in the attempt to blend in and save the appearances, resort to flamboyant stratagems to rid themselves of the carcass. Filini, who is wearing an excessively oversized suit, with a furtive move, hides the bird in his sleeve; Fantozzi, having failed several attempts at dissecting the animal, and impaired by the slippery plate surface causing the food to repeatedly land on the other end of the table, tragically decides to swallow it uncut; as the voiceover announces: “Alla fine decisione tragica: tordo intero.”²¹² The imprudent decision costs him a high price as he undergoes a respiratory

²¹¹ “His name was Ivan the Terrible XXXIII, direct descendant of Ivan the Terrible I, owned by the Tsar Nicholas, legendary hunting champion of Steppe farmers, executed as the people's enemy during the October revolution on the Red square.”

²¹² “A tragic, final decision: the whole thrush.”

arrest: “Colori di Fantozzi: rosso, rosso pompeiano, arancio aragosta, viola, viola dopo-funebre, blu tenebra. Sul blu tenebra, Fantozzi andò in coma cardio-respiratorio.”²¹³

The Counts Serbelloni Mazzanti’s extended invitation shall be read as a parody of private firms’ benevolent paternalism in organizing uplifting leisure activities for their workers. They are offered access to otherwise unavailable occasions of social interaction with the *Megaditta* management and its shareholders. The scene capitalizes on their unwanted presence and inappropriate behavior in the construction of a parody of the management’s strategic and opportunistic benevolence on occasion of some upcoming labor union negotiations. In their benefitting from the magnanimous disposition of the leading group’s extended invitation,²¹⁴ the workers are confined to an unredeemable place of inferiority, thus participating to the parody of the management’s benign disposition. In the episode, the office director, Count Corrado Maria Lobbiam, unsuccessfully attempts to correct Fantozzi’s behavior by addressing him with ominous, nonverbal clues from the other side of the table. His menacing frowning subscribes to the

²¹³ “Fantozzi’s colors: red, Pompeian red, lobster orange, purple, after-death purple, night blue. On night-blue, Fantozzi got a heart and respiratory arrest.”

²¹⁴ The *Contessa* briefly discusses the extent of her invitation with Silvani and Calboni, at the beginning of the reception.

Silvani: “Ma Filini e Fantozzi, che fine hanno fatto? Io non li ho visti.”

Calboni: “Non saranno stati invitati.”

Contessa: “Ah, no guardi, sono stati invitati tutti, persino i fattorini, persino i passacarte, tutti.”

Silvani: “What on earth happened to Fantozzi and Filini? I have not seen them yet.”

Calboni: “They might not have been invited.”

Contessa: “No, dear, everybody has been invited; even errand men and pencil pushers. Everybody.”

workers' inferior status for it looks upon Fantozzi as an unsophisticated, poorly educated individual in need of guidance.

By seamlessly transitioning from parodies of respectively, Fascist and Communist top-down cultural administration, Fantozzi's films portend a strong continuity in these two radically opposing ideological positions. The centrality of leisure culture in the creation of subjectivities is a common denominator in film representations of Italian office workers—one that brings opposing ideological stances closer together. The administration of the workers' leisure time and its employment for practices of self-betterment that would benefit the firm, the party, or the State, appears a critical aspect in the films' comicality. The parody of the fascist past (in *L'impiegato*) and of leftist highbrow culture (*Fantozzi*) intertwines in the construction of a critique of modernity, and of the irrevocable coinciding of work time with leisure time.

Fascist regime's utilitarian view of spare time and sport in the service of a higher, national end reverberates in the PCI's practice of ideological and political engagement to be perpetrated in recreational clubs, both compromising and negotiating old and new values brought by the advent of capitalism and American-inspired lifestyles.

In the next and conclusive chapter, I will directly engage with Labini's analysis of social classes to observe in more detail Italian cinema's depiction of what he defines *petite bourgeoisie*, the middle-class, paying particular attention to defining features of the private as opposed to the public service sector, to the abnormal expansion of the latter, and to their values and ambitions. By studying the peculiarity of the Italian inversion of

the formula: “the bureaucrat to the service of the state,”²¹⁵ I will investigate the uneven development of the economy vis-à-vis civil society as it emerges from non-comedic film representations of Italian office workers.

²¹⁵ Sylos Labini, *Saggio sulle classi sociali*, 148.

Chapter Four

Beyond Comedy: (In)dispensable Office Workers

A former *partigiano* in Dino Risi's 1961 *Una vita difficile* (A difficult Life), Alberto Sordi's character, Silvio, embodies the unfulfilled expectations of social and civic renewal following the demise of Fascism and the end of the war. Narrating two decades of Italian history, the film follows the declining trajectory of Silvio's ideological commitment to Communism and his gradual capitulation to new values of individualism brought by industrialization. Forced to relinquish his literary ambition as a writer and a journalist, Silvio strives to find a stable employment, a *posto fisso*, thus proving to his wife, Elena, to have adapted to the new social and political climate. From the vantage point of the post-war period, *Una vita difficile* reassesses Fascism and *Resistenza* through its character's personal narrative and ideological trajectory. Almost two decades later, Sordi features again in the role of a former *partigiano*, Giovanni Vivaldi, a despicable bearer of individualistic, parasitic rhetorical stances, in Mario Monicelli's 1977 *Un borghese piccolo piccolo* (An Average Little Man).

Members of the *petite* bourgeoisie, Silvio and Giovanni's progression from supporters of the national cause to narrow-minded pursuers of private interest is emblematic of the disillusioned expectations of social regeneration following the decline of the dictatorship. Andrea Bini's extensive analysis of Alberto Sordi's interpretations in

comedies Italian style from his 2015 *Male Anxiety and Psychopathology in Film* has effectively emphasized the historical relevance of such middle-class roles:

Sordi's genius was to capture and represent a conflict that was ethical, psychological, and potentially schizoid. The urban petit bourgeoisie epitomized by the Roman middle class that worked in the ministry and other public offices was too involved with Fascism and a more modern idea of society where the individual is not satisfied with the limits of familial space. For these men, their jobs and their Fascist uniforms represented a symbolic identity that the postwar years did not guarantee anymore.²¹⁶

Constituting the bulk of the Regime's supporters, and in turn, largely favored by the Regime, the *petite bourgeoisie's* civic backwardness, together with democratic forces' inability to implement social reforms, have to be regarded in the analysis of Italian economist Sylos Labini, as the main culprits for this failed possibility.²¹⁷ However marginal (as it is the case in *Un borghese piccolo piccolo*), the narrative inclusion of the characters' former involvement with the national liberation movement incontrovertibly leads to the measuring of their moral stature against the Fascist past and the subsequent experience of the *Resistenza*. The *petite bourgeoisie* thereby represented is thus savaged or condemned vis-à-vis both their ideological and political investment in the dictatorship, *and* in the aftermath of democratic transition, in their way of responding and adapting to social and cultural changes.

²¹⁶ Andrea Bini, *Male Anxiety and Psychopathology in Film. Comedy Italian Style* (Palgrave MacMillian: New York, 2015), 83.

²¹⁷ Sylos Labini, *Saggio sulle classi sociali*, 89.

In this fourth and concluding chapter, I wish to investigate Italian cinema's depictions of this large social stratum, the *petite* bourgeoisie, composed of public and private office workers, in their struggle to earn or maintain a stable employment, a *posto fisso*, their own sub-class' distinguishing feature. I will begin by analyzing Alberto Lattuada's 1952 *Il cappotto*, whose protagonist's involvement with the Regime is brought to the fore through the film's setting in 1930s Pavia. I will then transition to *Un borghese piccolo piccolo* in relation to two other representations of *petite* bourgeoisie in *Una vita difficile* and in Carlo Lizzani's 1964 *La vita agra* (A Bitter Life), thus dedicating my last section to Ermanno Olmi's 1960 *Il posto*. A few concluding remarks on the hybrid nature of the public/private management of the *Megaditta* will ensue. This chronologically non-linear distribution of the films serves the scope of my chapter in two ways: first, it will allow me to discuss with more clarity continuities and differences between chronologically distant productions, *Il cappotto* and *Un borghese piccolo piccolo*, which share their engagement with the Fascist past; second, it will benefit my contrastive analysis of public versus private sector office workers, respectively depicted in Lattuada and Monicelli's films, and in Olmi's.

Comparatively discussed within the space of this final chapter, these films offer an alternative look on the world of Italian white-collar employment for their use of realism in lieu of the seemingly more popular and privileged language of comedy, satire, and parody thus far examined. By realism I broadly indicate a cinematic style in which everyday events are represented with unobtrusive editing and minimal camera movement. Throughout the course of my examinations, I will attempt to explain in what ways this

cinematic choice affects the films' representations of clerical workers and their office life.

Historically grounded, my films' analyses will highlight some peculiar features separating depictions of bureaucrats (*Il cappotto* and *Un borghese piccolo piccolo*), from work practices proper of what I argue appears to be a private firm (*Il posto*), in the attempt to shed some light on the ways in which cinema has responded to the *ipertrofia del pubblico impiego*,²¹⁸ the pathological expansion of the public service sector and its dispensability, two consequences Labini ascribes to the phenomenon of intellectual unemployment, the surplus availability of educated youth on the job market.²¹⁹ Employed in the public service sector as a result of political pressures and clientelism, some part of Italian (especially southern) bureaucracy was privileged and safeguarded under Fascism for, together with the *bourgeoisie*, it constituted the mass of most strenuous supporters of the Regime.²²⁰

Mainly portraying the dysfunctional aspects of Italian administrative system, these films pinpoint the critical conditions of the Italian democratic system, whose fallacies resides, according to the British historian, Paul Ginsborg, in the unclear separation between the practices proper of a monarchy (unbalanced power structures based on privilege, submission, and loyalty), from the practices proper of a modern

²¹⁸ Ibid., 37.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 56.

²²⁰ Ibid., 77.

state.²²¹ In *Italy and Its Discontents, Family, Civil Society, State*, Ginsborg explains that the separation of the state's rules of conduct from those of the society it has to govern constitutes a formative moment in the progression of any state. The post-war Italian republic, in Ginsborg's opinion, was only in formal terms regulated by the law (the justice-oriented culture), when in fact the regular practice of the bureaucracy was founded on discretionary power, clientelism, and corruption.²²²

In the first section of this chapter, I discuss Alberto Lattuada's 1952 film adaptation of a Russian short story by Nikolai Gogol, from 1842, *The Overcoat*. While produced in the years of the Italian post-war reconstruction, *Il cappotto* is set in 1930s Pavia, at the time of the Fascist regime. The comparative examination of some stylistic similarities between these two texts will help me address the issue of genre in the context of Italian cinema's representations of white-collar workers. Faithfully reproduced on screen by Lattuada, Gogol's largely studied literary style will provide some essential guidelines in the interpretation of the film's ideological stance vis-à-vis petty bourgeoisie at the time of Fascism.

DISPENSABLE WHITE-COLLAR WORKERS: LATTUADA AND GOGOL

²²¹ "In the Italian case it was the structures of the state, and in particular the public administration, that offered the essential underpinning to all other discourses on the weakness of the Italian democracy." Paul Ginsborg, *Italy and Its Discontents, Family, Civil Society, State 1980-2001* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 213.

²²² *Ibid.*, 215-6.

The night he was brought to this world, Akàkiy Akakiévič had his face contorted in a grimace of cry, “as though he had a foreboding that he would become a ninth-class clerk.”²²³ Born on the evening of the 23rd of March from the Bašmačkin family, the protagonist of Nikolai Gogol’s 1842 *Šinel’* (*The Overcoat*) was and had been an official of a voluntarily left unnamed department of the Russian empire since time immemorial.²²⁴ Akàkiy Akakiévič’s dull occupation in the office, along with his unflattering looks would attract the mockery of his irreverent young colleagues, who would maliciously ascribe his unconditional dedication to work²²⁵ to a grotesque birth defect, gossiping that “he had been born in undress uniform, with a bald head.”²²⁶ Oblivious of the world surrounding him, unlike his other colleagues, Akàkiy Akakiévič would conduct his solitary existence in a state of complete absorption towards his employment as a copyist, only to reconnect with reality: “when, out of nowhere, a horse

²²³ Nikolai Gogol, *The Overcoat*, <http://www.classicreader.com/book/2026/1/> Accessed 30 April 2017.

²²⁴ “When and how he entered the department, and who appointed him, no one could remember. However much the directors and chiefs of all kinds were changed, he was always to be seen in the same place, the same attitude, the same occupation.” *Ibid.*

²²⁵ “It would be difficult to find another man who lived so entirely for his duties. It is not enough to say that Akàkiy laboured with zeal: no, he laboured with love. In his copying, he found a varied and agreeable employment. Enjoyment was written on his face: some letters were even favourites with him; and when he encountered these, he smiled, winked, and worked with his lips, till it seemed as though each letter might be read in his face, as his pen traced it. If his pay had been in proportion to his zeal, he would, perhaps, to his great surprise, have been made even a councillor of state. But he worked, as his companions, the wits, put it, like a horse in a mill.” *Ibid.*

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

rested its head on his shoulder and sent a blast of wind down his cheek that he'd realize he was not in the middle of a line but in the middle of a street."²²⁷

With a four hundred rubles a year salary, like other clerks of similar rank, Akàkiy Akakiévič resided in a meager lodging in the cold-swept city of Saint Petersburg, living an uneventful life. Neglectful of his decrepit work attire, he would inspire his co-workers' irreverent jokes, especially targeting his worn-out, gauze-thin overcoat. More motivated by the city's unforgiving weather than by the public shaming taking place in his office, unable to patch any further his old overcoat, Akàkiy Akakiévič resolved to undergo extreme financial restrictions in order to invest in the manufacture of a new one. In Gogol's text, Akàkiy Akakiévič's hardships are sublimated in the form of a revived spirituality, a pseudo-religious abnegation:

He even got used to going hungry in the evenings, but then he was able to feed himself spiritually, carrying within him the eternal idea of his overcoat-to-be. It was as if his existence had become somehow fuller, as if he had married and another human being were there with him, as if he were no longer alone on life's road but walking by the side of a delightful companion. And that companion was none other than the overcoat itself, with its thick padding and strong lining that would last forever. In some way, he became more alive, even stronger-minded, like a man who has determined his ultimate goal in life.²²⁸

The enthusiastic search for the perfect fabric and the overcoat's crafting at Petrovič's tailor workshop occupies the bulk of the narrative, culminating with the jubilation for

²²⁷ Nikolai Gogol, *The Overcoat*.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

Akàkiy Akakiévič's investment, and his invitation to a reception held at a colleague's house.

Akàkiy Akakiévič's discomfort at the party grows greater throughout the night, as, unfamiliar with the environment and its opulence, he "had no idea how to behave, where to put his hands, his feet, or, for that matter, his whole body."²²⁹ Bored and sleepy, well past his usual bedtime, Akàkiy Akakiévič resolves go home. However, soon in his walk, he his robbed of his coat and left unconscious in the street. This theft leads to Akàkiy Akakiévič's futile attempts to recover his overcoat through a "certain important personage," and eventually to his feverish and delirious last days, to his death, and to his wandering, as a ghost, within the city of Saint Petersburg.

Gogol's short story offers the subject for Lattuada's 1952 *Il cappotto*, a faithful filmic adaptation of Akàkiy Akakiévič's vicissitude into the life of a southerner bureaucrat, Carmine de Carmine (Renato Rascel), living in 1930s Pavia.²³⁰ Beside the manifest cultural translatability of the overcoat as a necessary piece of clothing, 1930s fascist Pavia seemingly offers an ideal background for Gogol's representation of imperial

²²⁹ Nikolai Gogol, *The Overcoat*.

²³⁰ Various comparative studies have been dedicated to the identification of similarities and differences between the two works. In his comparative study on Gogol and Lattuada from the volume *Master of Two Arts, Re-Creation of European Literatures in Italian Cinema*, Carlo Testa rightly points out how the Italian city equivalent of Saint Petersburg is left unnamed in Lattuada's rendition; "That town happens to be Pavia, on the banks of the Ticino River; but the film is careful to present it, with no further indication, as a cold location in a snow-clad northern landscape." In this respect, Lattuada's work reflects Gogol's choice to omit any reference to names of people and places from the narrative—in several instances in the text, the author addresses his readers directly, ascribing to caution his preference to leave well-known characters and their affiliations secret. This choice gains Lattuada's work a "supra-temporal hue," which, according to Testa, accounts for the "historical and the perennial" Carlo Testa, *Master of Two Arts, Re-Creation of European Literatures in Italian Cinema*, (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2002), 60.

Russia's corrupt bureaucracy. Stylistically analogous, the literary and the filmic texts find in realism their privileged mode of narration, while not exempting their protagonists from pettiness and a sense of ridiculous achieved through grotesque magnification.

Akàkiy Akakiévič is introduced in the narrative sitting on his stool, as a nearsighted baldheaded little man of haemorrhoidal complexion, blindly and bluntly dedicated to his dull employment as a copyist. Gogol's character is structured around a substantial lack of emotional depth and human-like sentiments; this feature functions as a distancing device in the story, for it hinders the reader's sympathetic response to Akàkiy's miseries. This character is an example of "border psychology," in the extensive stylistic analysis conducted by Driessen: he "stands infinitely far from us in his dead surroundings, from every complete human being, from the most miserable titular councilor...because life has in him been reduced to a smaller spark than in any normal person."²³¹ Gogol's character's scaled-down physical proportions and humanity establish the petty tone of the ensuing overcoat drama he is about to experience. The financial restrictions he endures in order to be able to afford a new coat are sublimed into a metaphysical, quasi-religious dimension, a stark contrast with his petty disposition; presented in the guise of a spiritual guide in the hardship he faces, or as a celestial reward to his material deprivation—he is said to fast or to walk on his heels to preserve his shoes' sole to avoid having to replace it— Akàkiy's longing for a coat becomes instead the target of the short-story's pungent and yet subtle attack.

²³¹ Frederik Christoffel Driessen, *Gogol as a Short Story Writer. A Study of his Technique of Composition* (The Hague: Mouton, 1965), 196.

In *The Overcoat*, Gogol operates the magnification of petty aspects of ordinary existence by transmuting them in deathbed feverish dreams. Akàkiy's monomaniac approach to his employment as a copyist is variously expressed in the narrative through a series of hyperbolic statements concerning his work habits. Uncritically executing whatever task he is assigned, he has never committed a mistake in his job for no outside distraction could even superficially affect him. At the same time incapable of performing any other type of job, Akàkiy is said to having been offered a promotion once, which he promptly rejected, exhausted by the toil of having to engage with a new, more intellectually demanding task. Oblivious of the world around him, Akàkiy's ineptitude is defined by negation: an extended and detailed description of other Saint Petersburg bureaucrats' after-work occupations creates a sharp contrast with two concise, conclusive lines about him. In the evening, when all the bureaucrats have dined, rested and are finally relieved from the necessary fatigue of their job, and engaging in leisure activities, Akàkiy, "having written to his heart's content, he lay down to sleep, smiling at the thought of the coming day—of what God might send him to copy on the morrow."²³²

Akàkiy Akakiévič's short moral and physical stature is the culprit of his distorted vision of the world, claims Driessen: in this story, Gogol presents the world as seen through the eyes of a small man. Far from prompting readers' identification with the character, the Russian novelist depicts what larger objects might look like from a lower perspective; Driessen points out how in the frequent use of the word "even," Gogol finds

²³² Nikolai Gogol, *The Overcoat*, <http://www.classicreader.com/book/2026/1/> Last Accessed April 6th, 2017.

a stylistic aid to express the magnitude (or perceived such) of his character's misfortunes. The result is for the reader to appraise how insignificant things are in reality, and yet how insurmountable they appear to this small man.²³³

Lattuada's choice of Renato Rascel in the role of Akàkiy Akakiévič accurately reflects its literary model. Further emphasized by the actor's reduced height, the film's stylistic features work to magnify Carmine de Carmine's supervisors and surroundings. Robbed of his coat, de Carmine attempts, like his short-story prototype, to retrieve it through the intercession of the city Mayor. Having been denied admittance to his office, he takes advantage of the usher's temporary absence to enter the room unannounced. He timidly approaches the door, rings the bell, and comes in, prompted by the Mayor's "Avanti," a feckless invitation to action pronounced with a jaded, dragging inflection, a result of his indolent, lethargic employment of time. Framed in a medium close-up shot, de Carmine overhears the Mayor's conversation through the door, a regular-sized entrance, in the attempt to gauge the potential consequences of his intrusion. The camera reverses on the Mayor and a colleague sitting inside the office, idly abandoned in their chairs. A close-up of the clerk follows as he enters the room with his head first, and then with the rest of his body; in the very next shot, de Carmine's silhouette appears reduced to a much smaller scale against the backdrop of a visibly and disproportionately enlarged, now imposing door.

Office props, such as a table lamp, a painting, and a penholder are overwhelming presences, framing, and in a way, crushing, Rascel's Lilliputian figure—an ominous

²³³ Driessen, *Gogol as a Short Story Writer. A Study of his Technique of Composition* The Overcoat, 201.

reminder of his inferior rank. De Carmine's intrusion in the room provokes a sudden explosion of outraged disdain in the Mayor, who begins by enlisting the clerk's violations in the face of all bureaucratic conventions: the overcoat loss is dismissed as marginal, for what is really at stake is de Carmine's insolent request for help. Priorities are overturned in *Il cappotto*: what is vital for the clerk—de Carmine will in fact die in delirious despair for his loss—is under no circumstance of the least concern for the Mayor and his entourage. Conversely, what matters to the higher ranks of the bureaucracy and to the Mayor is in no way intended for the common good of the citizens: a 175 million *Lira* budget has been allocated for the main square restoration works on occasion of the upcoming visit of an unnamed “His Excellency.” As we soon learn from someone's faint protest, the city hospital is still lacking blankets, in replacement of those which had been publicly donated to the paupers as an act of philanthropy during the festivities held in honor of the last visit of “His *other* Excellency.” Priorities are distorted and proportions inverted in *Il cappotto*: what should be a priority, the safeguard of the citizens, can wait—de Carmine is kept at the mayor's office door while he is inside, supposedly busy, smoking a cigar and entertaining himself in leisure and aimless conversation with a friend. By the same token, faithful to his literary antecedent, de Carmine is depicted himself as a bearer of a distorted perception of the world. Exclusively concerned with his coat, he makes of it a matter of vital importance, to the point of dying delirious for its loss.

Examined in the larger historical context in which Lattuada's film is set, de Carmine can be regarded as an emblematic type of the social sub-class he represents, the

petite bourgeoisie. From the advantage point of the post-war period, de Carmine's moral and ethical stance is gauged upon his role in participating and although obliviously, supporting the Regime. Utterly dispensable within the context of the office, de Carmine is a superfluous worker contributing with his presence in the public administration to the pathological inflation of the Italian bureaucracy, and whose position is conditional to his endorsement of Fascism. Examined from this perspective, de Carmine's myopia can be interpreted as a metaphor for his political nearsighted view, for he fails to see beyond his own desire to own a coat and to fulfill his social ambition of being no different from the others in the office.

Lattuada's film bears in its title the very significance of de Carmine's utilitarian attitude towards his employment. Distinctive features of *petite* bourgeoisie, his job and his coat are what allow him to feel a legitimate member of this social group. Causing dismay in the Mayor's office, he attracts the latter's fury for having dared to access the room unannounced:

Sindaco: "Silenzio! Uno: siete entrato senza permesso. Due: avete scavalcato l'ordine gerarchico. Tre: avete offeso un organo fondamentale dello stato. Ma dove credete di essere? Chi credete che io sia? Sapete che pratiche di questo genere sono affidate agli uffici competenti, i quali, seguendo la prassi, la fanno pervenire al mio segretario, il quale, solo, può presentarmela?"

De Carmine: "Ma Vostra Eccellenza, io...io...Vostra Eccellenza...ho osato disturbarvi perché i così...i segretari sono gente che non ci si può fidare."

Sindaco: "Che? Che? Che? Io ho segretari di cui non ci si può fidare?"

De Carmine: "Scusi Eccellenza...ho sbagliato. Io manco di prassi: i segretari sono bravissimi, ma io senza cappotto non ci sto."²³⁴

²³⁴ *Mayor*: "Silence! Number one: you entered without permission. Number two: you bypassed the hierarchy. Number three: you outraged a fundamental state member. Where do you think you are? Who do

De Carmine does not question the arbitrary use and abuse of power on the part of the Mayor. His only real concern is to earn a *just* remuneration for his lost coat. As a public employee at the service of the state, de Carmine expects the city authorities to assist him in the hardship he is facing, thus perceiving the Mayor's reaction as an injustice perpetrated to his detriment.

As part of Fascism's civil militia of clerical workers, de Carmine's perception of his employment is imbricated with a sense of the indispensable role he is called to perform as a servant of the state. Expected by the Regime to function as a middle-class, in addition to their regular work duties, white-collars were to serve as the connecting link between political elites and the working classes; and yet, their position was that of relatively high educated employees performing repetitive tasks, while also extremely contingent upon the shape of state finances. Fascism's privileged treatment of this class of social workers shall be explained as an attempt to reconcile this basic contradiction. While trying to instill in them a sense of pride for their important mission, they were also granted large salary increments and privileged contractual arrangements.²³⁵

you think I am? Do you know that cases like this are to be addressed to the appropriate departments, which, following the procedures, then forward them to my secretary, who is the only one who can present them to me?"

De Carmine: "His Excellency...I...I...His Excellency...I dared to bother you because of the what is their name...the secretary, you cannot trust them."

Mayor: "What? What? What? My secretaries are not trustworthy people?"

De Carmine: "I am sorry, His Excellency, I made a mistake. I lack practice. The secretaries are very good, but I cannot live without my coat."

²³⁵ De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent*, 129.

In her extensive study of leisure time organization during Fascism, Victoria de Grazia observes how unlike private office workers, upon whom management exercised a certain “rigid paternalistic authority,” public service sector workers had to be lured into participating into *dopolavoro* initiatives through a high-quality, competitive offer of recreational activities—in this sense, she explains, white-collars remained individuals and consumers with free choice in the market-place. Socially uplifting cultural initiatives were taken to supplant laborers’ organizations banned by the Regime in the creation of service solidarity.²³⁶ Purged of its proletarian connotation, after-work organized leisure granted clerical workers a sense of belonging to a larger social group. By the same token, one could argue that the rhetoric of high-end social service to the nation as a means of redemption of dull office employment from its debilitating nature should be regarded as a critical aspect in the Regime’s attempt to secure loyalty among clerical workers. Legitimized in their scarce commitment to their employment by equally lethargic managers, public service sector clerks were in need of being *lured* into work while gaining a perception of themselves as protagonists of social renovation and progress towards the common good of the nation.

Refusing to help de Carmine in finding his coat, the Mayor stirs in the clerk a sense of injustice, of having been wronged, for he deems the state owing him a compensation for his loss as a result of his service to the state. De Carmine perceives his job as a copyist as essential to proper office administration and deserving of service, in addition to salary, when in fact the surplus in white-collar labor force proves otherwise.

²³⁶ Ibid, 143.

De Grazia reports that between 1929 and 1939, economic planning offices increased their size by thousands of new employees “many of whom were redundant from the outset as the fascists too picked up the much-deplored habit of their ‘demo-liberal’ predecessors of using the state as employer of last resort for out-of-work degree holders and war veterans.”²³⁷

In its setting de Carmine’s story in 1930s Pavia, *Il cappotto* offers a transversal depiction of Italian 1950s state-hired clerical workers and in their role as active participants in the post-war reconstruction effort. In mid-twentieth century, on its way to modernization, Italian economy was preeminently rural, and one in which more than 11% of the active population was unemployed, and over 3 million people (8% of the total population) lived in poverty.²³⁸ The reconstruction effort demanded people to perceive the importance of their role as active participants in the modernization process. With analogous social engineering practices, governmental agencies and private firms attempted to educate people to be productive workers and attentive citizens as to secure growth and social stability. In her examination of sponsored films’ relevance in the post-war reconstruction effort, Paola Bonifazio identifies in the foucaultian concept of “pastoral power” an ideal lens through which to investigate family-modeled governmental practices and rhetoric in the regulation of people’s private lives and beliefs. By re-establishing gender identities, the governmental agencies proved the state’s role in

²³⁷ Ibid., 129.

²³⁸ Barbagallo, *L’Italia Repubblicana*, 44.

securing citizens' happiness and security, while emphasizing the importance of work as a moral imperative and a defining feature of masculinity.²³⁹

Bonifazio's examination of state sponsored and industrial films shows how Italian industries utilized cinema for the same goal of social engineering as governmental agencies, and demonstrates "how private sponsorship competed with governmental information agencies in instructing Italian citizens on appropriate conduct in a capitalist economy and a welfare society."²⁴⁰ Fictional film representations of clerical workers thus far examined indicate the latter's resilient nature in adapting to the demands of modernization. Films such as *L'impiegato* (1959) find in their protagonists' creative attempts to avoid work and witty puns an endless source of gags, while proposing in different forms and through different stylistic choices, their hostility vis-à-vis productivity and responsible citizenship.

While exhibiting a stylistic divergent model from *L'impiegato* and other comedies from the same time period, *Il cappotto* seemingly finds in the representation of *petite bourgeoisie's* individualism a common, predominant trait of continuity with them. Both models of disengaged citizenship, Nando from *L'impiegato* and de Carmine in the above-examined case, emblemize the dusty, obsolete functioning of the bureaucratic machine and of its pathological inflation. Lightly treated through the language of the comedy, or portrayed in the tones of the drama escalating in de Carmine's death, the theme of the superfluous worker constitutes a defining feature in most representations of white-collar

²³⁹ Bonifazio, *Schooling in Modernity, The Politics of Sponsored Films in Postwar Italy*, 31.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

world from those years. In the next section, I will engage with the examination of Monicelli's *Un borghese piccolo piccolo*, (while briefly touching upon *Una vita difficile* and *La vita agra*) to discuss the way in which *petite* bourgeoisie's ambition to state employment, the *posto fisso*, is emblematic of this social group's feeling of entitlement vis-à-vis state-provided services and welfare.

LITTLE AVERAGE BOURGEOISIE: FAMILISM AND THE UNCIVIL SOCIETY IN MONICELLI'S *UN BORGHESE PICCOLO PICCOLO*, DINO RISI'S *UNA VITA DIFFICILE* AND CARLO LIZZANI'S *LA VITA AGRA*

Starring Alberto Sordi, one of the most prominent and exploited protagonists of comedy Italian style,²⁴¹ Mario Monicelli's *Un borghese piccolo piccolo* (*An Average Little Man*, 1977) has been regarded by some critics as the end point of the genre.²⁴² The film's narrative pivots on the Vivaldi family, whose head, Giovanni (Alberto Sordi) has a past as a *partigiano*, a fighter of the Italian liberation from the Nazi occupation, now

²⁴¹ For a list of Alberto Sordi's most significant contributions to the genre, see Fournier Lanzoni, *Comedy Italian Style The Golden Age of Italian Film Comedies*, 200. Lanzoni describes Sordi in the following terms: "Most of the greatest directors involved with the Italian comedy of the post-war era directed him with great success, due mainly to Sordi's charisma on the screen as well as the premeditated success of the actor among popular audiences."

²⁴² "Il futuro italiano medio viene ammazzato, e con lui la possibile commedia all'italiana di domani... Non aveva tutti i torti il regista quando dichiarava a Oreste Del Buono di avere messo con questo film 'una pietra tombale sulla commedia all'italiana.'" Enrico Giacobelli, *La commedia all'italiana, La storia, i luoghi, gli autori, gli attori, i film*, (Roma: Gremese: 1995), 91. "The future average Italian is killed, and with him, the future of tomorrow's comedy Italian style... The director [Monicelli] was right when telling Oreste Del Buono of how he had posed "a gravestone on comedy Italian style." On the same claim, see Fournier Lanzoni: "Many film historians until recently had more or less hastily cataloged *Un borghese piccolo piccolo* as the conclusive chapter of a decade of satirical comedies as well as the final testament of the entire commedia all'italiana experience. To them, the scarcity of prolific comedic subjects was a sign of change. There was no longer material to laugh about, any character to take into derision, and it was time to turn the page of the comedy Italian style." *Ibid.*, 211.

obfuscated by a present as a disillusioned, cynical middle-class man, all confined in his commonplace, individualistic mentality.²⁴³ His and his wife's, Amalia (Shelley Winters), only preoccupation in life is with their son, Mario (Vincenzo Crocitti), and his future as an accountant in the same Ministry where Giovanni has worked for over thirty years. Through his few but memorable imperatives, Vivaldi father prepares his not-so-sharp heir to the outside world, warning him against other people: "Pensa a te, Mario, pensa solo a te. Ricordati che in questo mondo basta fare sì con gli occhi e no con la testa, che c'è sempre uno pronto che ti pugnala nella schiena."²⁴⁴

As also pointed out in Fournier Lanzoni's analysis of the film, the father-son relation between Giovanni and Mario echoes Dino Risi's character in the episode "L'educazione sentimentale," from *I mostri* (1963).²⁴⁵ Ugo Tognazzi warns his seven-year-old boy against the world's evilness when in fact he is a precise embodiment of the human type he is trying to guard his son from. Tognazzi's behavior proves to be a model for the child, who, instructed into not trusting anybody, not even his own father, will end up killing him—as we learn from a newspaper front page shown in the episode's final shot. Mario Vivaldi's character can thus be regarded as a late 1970s realization of the type embodied by Sordi in comedies Italian style from the previous two decades. While

²⁴³ In Andrea Bini's aforementioned analysis of Alberto Sordi's roles, this is configured as a new "breed" of Italians about to take over in society: a new Italian type that is amoral, conformist, and pathetic in his pursuit of mainstream standards of success. See Andrea Bini, pp. 77-85 from *Male Anxiety and Psychopathology in Film*.

²⁴⁴ "Think for yourself, Mario, only for yourself. Remember that in this world if you only say yes with your eyes and no with your head, there are people ready to stab you in the back."

²⁴⁵ Fournier Lanzoni, *Comedy Italian Style*, 212.

marking the definite decline of the genre, *Un borghese piccolo piccolo* showcases in its protagonist comedy Italian style's strong legacy—an aspect that has led to the attribution of the film to the genre of comedy.

Giovanni Vivaldi's former participation in the *Resistenza* finds its antecedents in Sordi's ideological trajectory in *Una vita difficile*, and Ugo Tognazzi's fading political commitment in *La vita agra* by Carlo Lizzani (1964). In the former, the protagonist relinquishes his professional and political inclination for the sake of compromise with the changed social climate of the booming years of economic development. Father and husband, Silvio from *Una vita difficile* adapts to a society in which “the values of solidarity, collective action and the fight against social injustice were counterposed to the individualism and consumerism of ‘neo-capitalism.’”²⁴⁶ Eventually adapting to his wife's demands of providing her and their son with the financial means to live up to *petty* bourgeois standards, he undergoes a series of humiliations and defeats in order to gain a stable employment.

The centrality of bourgeois ambition is also pivotal in the narrative development of Lizzani's *La vita agra* (*The Bitter Life*), a filmic adaptation of Luciano Bianciardi's eponymous novel from 1962. A leftist intellectual employed in the administration of a recreational after-work association for mine workers, Luciano Bianchi (Ugo Tognazzi) quits his job after the explosion of the mine has caused 43 people to die. Determined to blow up the *torracchione*, the imposing tower in which the central offices of his former company are hosted, he leaves his wife and son to move to Milan to infiltrate the building

²⁴⁶ Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 301.

and better plan his attack. However, upon his arrival in the city, he meets Anna (Giovanna Ralli), and begins with her an adulterous relationship and a co-habitation.

La vita agra directly and critically engages with the demise of collective action and ideological commitment. Tognazzi's own voiceover introduces the narrative as a "storia social-psicologica sull'integrazione post-miracolista," a psycho-pathological story of post-economic miracle integration. The characters' political engagement and their abandonment thereof are the pretext for the film to discuss in an unmediated way the trajectory of people like Luciano, a "piccolo borghese rinunciatario," a defeatist *petite* bourgeois who transitions from aspiring to bomb a symbol of capitalist exploitation, to bombard masses of consumers with powerful slogans—he ends up employed in advertisement.

These films' ideological subtexts indicate their protagonists' inclination towards a predominant trait of their contemporary society that is familism. Paul Ginsborg has regarded the phenomenon in relation to the lack of growth of an Italian civil society, describing it as: "a particular form of the *relationship* between family, society (and, if it exists, civil society) and the state; a form in which the values and interests of the family are counterposed to the other principal moments of human associationism,"²⁴⁷ which arises when the family fails to encourage its members to "participate in the activities of civil society as individuals and equals, to become citizens and not just voters."²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷ Ginsborg, *Italy and Its Discontents*, 97.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 99.

Giovanni Vivaldi's precepts summarize the beliefs of an entire class, the Italian *petite* bourgeoisie of the late 1970s. *Un borghese piccolo piccolo* exposes the vices and customary corruption of Giovanni and of his colleagues at the Ministry for it narrates of his efforts to favor his son Mario in passing the entrance examination, and in so doing, to secure him a job. Relying on his lifelong service at the Ministry, Vivaldi father counts on a personal liaison with his supervisor Spaziani (Romolo Valli), and subsequently, on his affiliation to Masonry, to leak the test's question ahead of time. He reassures his apprehensive wife Amalia by reminding her of his long, honored, career of well-groomed relationships and mutual respect in the office:

Amalia: Gianni, tu dici, che ci riesci a Mario, a imbucarlo al ministero?
Giovanni: Eh certo, ma che lo dubiti? Io ho passato tutta la vita in quegli uffici. Mi conoscono tutti, mi stimano, mi apprezzano. E se gli chiedo un favore me lo fanno!²⁴⁹

All seems to proceed as planned except that on their way to the Ministry on the day of the examination, Mario is accidentally shot and killed in a bank robbery. Distrustful of the state and its judicial system, Giovanni seeks vengeance for himself: called to the police station in order to identify his son's murderer, he pretends not to recognize him, only to follow him to his house, hit him unconscious with a wrench, and drive him to his cabin in the outskirts of the city. Giovanni ties the young man to a chair securing his arms, legs, and throat with a metallic string to witness his agony and a few days later, his death. The

²⁴⁹ *Amalia:* Gianni, what do you say? Will you manage to score Mario a job into the Ministry?

Giovanni: Of course, I will. Don't even question it. Everybody knows me, they respect me, they appreciate me. And if I ask them a favor, they will do it!

young murderer dies from suffocation in front of Amalia, who responds to the event with a chilling scream, after a stroke had left her mute and completely paralyzed since Mario's death.

In its representation of violence-shaken Italy, *Un borghese piccolo piccolo* espouses the then audience-acclaimed genre of the poliziottesco films to a revival of fascist rhetoric and language. Beginning as a depiction of ordinary life in a petty bourgeois family, the film narrative escalates into a poliziottesco-like turn, when on their way to the facility where the examination is to take place, Mario gets accidentally shot and killed. A still frame of the young killers' close-up pays an open tribute to the genre, in which this stylistic feature is employed as a means to stress narrative tension on characters that will subsequently become crucial to the plot development. Vivaldi father, distrustful of state judicial system and seeking immediate vengeance, resorts to his own means to make justice for his son. This narrative pattern reflects a current model of some part of the poliziottesco films from those years.

Condemned by the left for their politically reactionary stance,²⁵⁰ poliziottesco films typically portray lawful citizens who undertake violent action to vindicate a wrongdoing they suffered. By promoting an individualistic view of society, they portend a different realization of justice, one that challenges state power by supplanting it. By the same token, Giovanni Vivaldi privileges individualistic interest over civic responsibility in both his execution of his son's murderer, and in his expectancy of favoritism at the

²⁵⁰ Brunetta, *Storia del Cinema Italiano*, 271.

Ministry and subsequently, at the cemetery, where he discloses his affiliation to Masonry in order to obtain a better placement for Mario's coffin. What is at stake is his own very perception of justice for, like in *Il cappotto*, Giovanni feels he has been wronged. A deep sense of entitlement is engrained in Vivaldi father's mentality, legitimized and perpetrated by higher-ranking clerical workers like Spaziani, who lament social justice as a result of the unavoidable progress of time and of societal involution:

Spaziani: Hai capito Giovanni, i concorrenti sono almeno ventimila!
Giovanni: Ma lui è mio figlio, oh! In fondo io dopo tanti anni che cosa chiedo? Non chiedo mica tanto? Avere per lui...ecco, un occhio di riguardo.
Spaziani: Giovanni, oggi per la legge, i nostri figli sono uguali al figlio di un tassinaro, di un muratore...
Giovanni: Eh che non lo so? Ma è ingiusto! Me lo devono prendere. In fondo il Ministero mi deve trent'anni di fatica!²⁵¹

Giovanni's "proprietary attitude"²⁵² towards his employment, variously expressed throughout the film,²⁵³ underpins his entitlement to a secure job for his son Mario: after a

²⁵¹ *Spaziani*: Giovanni, you see, there will be at least 20,000 applicants!

Giovanni: I know, but remember he is my son! After all, what am I asking? Am I asking for much? Just to have for him...a special treatment.

Spaziani: Giovanni, according to the law, nowadays, our kids are the same as the kid of a cab driver, of a construction worker.
un tassinaro, di un muratore...

Giovanni: Don't you think I know already? But it is not fair! They must hire him. After all, the Ministry owes me thirty years of work!

²⁵² The expression is Ginsborg's. See *Italy and Its Discontents*, 218.

²⁵³ Arriving late at work, Giovanni is denied regular access to his office and has to register his lateness. He expresses his entitlement to his non-compliant behavior by arguing that after thirty years of work at the Ministry, he should own it: a hyperbolic claim about the special treatment he expects to naturally follow from his seniority in the work environment.

thirty-year-long career at the Ministry he feels like the state *owes* him this privilege over other participants in the examination (“In fondo il Ministero mi deve trent’anni di fatica”).²⁵⁴ A servant of the state, Giovanni feels instead that the state should be at his service in securing his son a permanent employment.

In the prospect of setting their son up with a position at the Ministry, Giovanni and Amalia envision the end of their parental duty, and even lightheartedly welcome the possibility of a premature death:

D'altronde, oh, io e tua madre siamo soddisfatti, c'abbiamo un figlio ragioniere, e che vogliamo di più? Per noi gli altri non esistono...tu ormai sei sistemato, noi siamo vecchi, non c'abbiamo altre ambizioni, tutto quello che vogliamo è morire in pace, con la coscienza a posto.²⁵⁵

In Giovanni’s line of thought, the state takes up their parental task after his and Amalia’s withdrawal, and in so doing it provides their son with the security and the nurturing that the biological limitations of their lifespans impose on them. In the fashion of a selfless parent, the state is understood as the natural extension of the family, from whom support and care are naturally and gratuitously expected.

Opposing ideological views separate Giovanni from his wife Amalia, however united in their individualistic, politically disengaged perspective. Often appealing to

²⁵⁴ “After all, the Ministry owes me thirty years of work,” He tells Spaziani, the *Caposezione dell’ufficio personale, reparto pensioni*, Head of the human resources office, Office for retirement.

²⁵⁵ “And besides, your mother and I are satisfied. We have a son who is an accountant. What else shall we ask for? To us, nobody matters...you are set up by now, we are old, we do not have any other ambitions in life. All we want is to die in peace with our conscience.”

Fascist rhetoric and language in the expression of his ideas, Giovanni rehearse the Duce's motto "Molti nemici, molto onore" (Many enemies much honor) in warning his son against Amalia's milder advice not to vaunt his skills in the presence of people in order not to attract malevolence. From her part, Amalia offers her support to Mario by providing him with a lucky charm she had dipped in holy water from the church; her spirituality is configured as her personal interpretation of Catholicism for she performs pagan rituals against the evil eye by blending them with standard Christian practices. The result is a superstition-imbued religiosity occasioned by individualism and self-preservation. Skeptical about her husband's agreement with Spaziani, she reminds him that nobody does anything for nothing—thus displaying some skepticism towards the Good Samaritan's teachings.

From his part, by proposing a revival of Fascism, Giovanni endorses an individualistic mentality for he creates a connection between state control and personal financial stability. He instructs Mario to avoid banks in favor of a postal office saving account because "banks go bankrupt, the state doesn't." In his permanent employment at the Ministry Giovanni envisions a safe means to secure privilege, in the face of one's mediocrity and incompetence. Masonry assumes the function of any other ideology he would endorse to benefit of such privileges, thus proving his sympathy for Fascism to be a superficial manifestation of his political apathy and conformism. Amalia questions his choice of joining the Masonry by bringing the example of Toscanini, an incompetent composer in her opinion, who made his fortune because of his affiliation. She is obviously missing the point, Giovanni rebuts: that is precisely why he needs to join them.

Amorality provides a coherent backdrop against which the Vivaldi's miseries unfold. Giovanni's individualistic attitude is reinforced by his colleagues' who do not hesitate to engage in petty disputes over the money they had to invest in flowers for Mario's funeral. A specular, opposing view informs Ermanno Olmi's depiction of corporate life in a seemingly private firm, in which higher-ranking clerical workers welcome with benevolent and yet authoritarian paternalism the arrival of Domenico Cantoni, the new employee in *Il posto*.²⁵⁶

PRIVATE SECTOR OFFICE WORKERS: *IL POSTO* BY ERMANNO OLMI

Domenico (Sandro Panseri) from *Il posto* by Olmi is as a young, newly employed worker in a private firm in Milan. Son of a blue-collar man, Domenico has earned a diploma that allows him to leave his house in the rural periphery to commute to the city and attend to his daily duties. The film narrates his transition from his tranquil life in the countryside to the novelties of urban routine, upon which he is often depicted to gaze with mesmerized surprise. On a grander scale, *Il posto* can be said to closely document, through Domenico's personal experience, the absorption into the service sector of large segments of the new workforce from the factory and the land, domains of the older generation.

Domenico's dispensability in the company is central to the narrative development—a marked distinction from other films thus far examined. He successfully

²⁵⁶ The authoritarian paternalism is a feature some Italian firms share in the years in which Ermanno Olmi's *Il posto* was released. As Karen Pinkus remarks companies such as Edisonvolta, Olivetti, and Michelin seemingly share this same quality: private and public.

passes the examination (the *prove psico-attitudinali*) and is hired; however, he is not needed as an office worker. He is assigned an employment as errand boy while waiting for a more appropriate position to become available. Unlike *Il cappotto* and *Un borghese piccolo piccolo* in which workers' dispensability is a collateral effect and an ordinary attribute of bureaucratic employment, in *Il posto* workers' surplus becomes the premise for Domenico's sense of estrangement and subsequently, the narrative pretext for the representation of the firm's efficiency in promoting full occupation and productivity.

Escorted to the manager's office, he is appointed in the *direzione tecnica*, in the technical department, where he is put to work and mentored by an older errand man, who is mostly depicted instructing him on life rather than on job-related duties. Regarded with benevolent paternalism by his mentor and by older personnel in the firm, Domenico is reassured by the promise that a position will become available and that he will eventually be assigned his own desk to perform the accounting job for which he was initially hired. On his first day of work, a manager welcomes Domenico and encourages him by anticipating that he will like it there, because their firm is like a large family, he claims.

Olmi's personal experience as a clerical worker at Edisonvolta, the Italian electricity company, cannot be disregarded in the investigation of the ways in which *Il posto* documents office life in a private firm. I will limit my account of Olmi's private and professional background to some introductory notes. For the purpose of the present chapter, it will suffice to say that Olmi's parents were both employed at Edison: his father received a job after being fired from his previous employment for having refused to join the Fascist Party; his mother was hired after his father's death in the Second World War.

Olmi himself was offered a job when he was old enough to work.²⁵⁷ His experience at Edison is connected to his own family's story, and to his summer camps, where as a child he was able to witness the firm's involvement in helping not only its employees, but also the Italian population as a whole, through humanitarian intervention in times of crisis, such as earthquakes and floods. In an interview, Olmi declared his filial attachment to the company: "Edison was my whole world...I felt like I was more Edison's son than of my own family."²⁵⁸

Olmi's career as a director started in the cinema division of Edison, the SCE (Sezione Cinema Edisonvolta). Provided by his employers with his first camera, Olmi was involved in the production of short films documenting work at Edison as well as the firm's charitable acts in the form of docu-fictions. As Bonifazio explains in her inquiry on sponsored films, Edison's paternalistic attitude exceeded the limits of the firm to extend to the whole of the Italian population, as testified by the vast production of the SCE.²⁵⁹ A common trend in 1950s entrepreneurship, repression and paternalism can often be found to coexist. At Edison, care for the employees was conveyed among the other things, through an appealing *dopolavoro* schedule and the reinforcement of the idea of the firm as a large family.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁷ See Bonifazio, *Schooling in Modernity: The Politics of Sponsored Films in Postwar Italy*, 68.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Anna Maria Falchero, "Tra manichino ed eroe: Il lavoro nel cinema industriale," in *Filmare il lavoro*, ed. Antonio Medici, AAMOD, 156.

Olmi's father-son relationship to Edison constitutes an ideal lens, although not the only one, through which to interpret *Il posto*'s representation of corporate world. From the contrastive analysis of Olmi's film with others depicting public service sector employees, the condescending approach informing employer/employee relationships in the private sector emerges with clarity. An example will bring this crucial difference to light. A recurring trope in Italian films' representation of clerical workers is punctuality: from *L'impiegato*, to the *Fantozzi* series, and in *Un borghese piccolo piccolo*, employees are depicted in their desperate attempts to make it on time (Fantozzi catches his bus *al volo*, on the go), or as in *L'impiegato*, in which they are publicly shamed for arriving late and corrected through coercive measures (Iacobetti installs a new clock producing a photographic record of their entrance into the office). As a way to exemplify my argument I will consider a homologous scene from *Un borghese piccolo piccolo*, which for its reliance on realism, provides a better term of comparison with *Il posto*.

Delayed by a fight with a storekeeper over a parking spot, in which he motivates his right to park with his alleged superior social status, Giovanni Vivaldi is late for work. An usher located at the base of the staircase holds back a crowd of employees in their run towards the building's upper floor; blocking access to the staircase with his arms, he announces the end of regular time admission. The usher's pedantry provokes the employees' insubordination, who reluctantly and disorderly approach a desk, where a second usher has to register their names, floor and department on a lateness book. Giovanni Vivaldi expresses his dissatisfaction towards the Ministry's ingratitude for his service by targeting the ushers' physical disabilities: after so many years of work they are

treated like schoolboys, prevented access by a one-eyed man (the first usher misses an eye), and reported in the lateness book by a crippled one.

In an equivalent scene from *Il posto* a worker enters the manager's office to present a lateness excuse slip. Relatively long pauses of silence set the tone of the interaction; the worker is only granted to talk when prompted by the engineer, who reprimands her for having been late three times already since the beginning of the month. Standing in front of his desk, she responds with silence and assent to the man, who finds her delay unmotivated—her children are old enough by now, he lectures, they should be able to look after themselves. Discipline is promptly re-established and the worker dismissed.

The engineer's austere tone in correcting the worker exceeds the limits of the workplace to intrude her private life and mothering practices: his address to the worker mimics the widespread familistic attitude of the Italian private sector management. His authority as an employer is all-encompassing, for he uses his best judgment to arrange the workers' private lives: in the fashion of a strict husband, he criticizes the worker's mothering; like a disciplining father, he restrains Domenico from his own alleged indolence by disposing the best employment of his time and energies as an errand boy—as he imparts his wisdom on the new employee, he announces: “Per ora, ci sarebbe un posto come fattorino d'anticamera, se vuole...piuttosto che restare a casa a fare niente...”

As a result of the firm owners' paternalistic benevolence, workers' gratitude and obedience are secured, disciplined internalized. The manager's disappointment towards the employee's violation of the company's code of conduct is central to the enforcement

of order. Unlike in the homologous scene from *Un borghese piccolo piccolo* in which late admission is to be reported in the book, in this case the lateness note, the *giustificazione*, is only a marginal office practice vis-à-vis the management's displeasure with the worker's lack of punctuality. In the former instance, discipline is imposed through external control and supervision (ushers block the workers' access to the staircase), in the latter, it is infused in the workers through a sense of duty and moral obligation towards the benevolent, authoritarian yet forgiving employers.

Chronicled in its ordinary, quotidian occurrence, the film narrative evolves along the normal progression of the days rather than according to a causality nexus. In this respect, *Il posto* diverges from previous examples thus far analyzed for its use of narrative pauses meant to document, rather than to interpret office life. The film opens with Domenico's departure from his house in the periphery and begins with the death of a worker. In both *Il cappotto* and *Il posto*, death is configured as the climatic point of clerical workers' career. Through the analysis of prominent stylistic features affecting the two films' take on death it is possible to shed some light on the ways in which these films have engaged with the representation of the *posto fisso* and of the disposable worker trope.

Faithfully adapted from Gogol's novel, Lattuada's film encompasses a decidedly surrealistic finale to complement its representation of de Carmine's life. The narrative prominence of his struggles to afford an overcoat and subsequently, to retrieve it, builds to his death as the conclusive moment of an individual pursuit. *Il cappotto* transversally narrates the vicissitudes of the *petite* bourgeoisie through de Carmine and his unfulfilled

desire to vaunt the possession of a coat and to be like the other workers in his office. After his death, witnessed by an alarmed crowd of other inhabitants of the *pensione* where de Carmine lives, he makes his comeback to the city as a ghost, in order to haunt the Mayor and scare off passing-by coat owners. De Carmine's afterlife is a continuation of his pursuit of private interest and revenge for what he deemed to be an unjust, unpunished crime. The film's representation of de Carmine's employment as a clerical worker in the city administration is subordinated to his personal preservation as an individual and to the fulfillment of his private ambitions. His *posto fisso* is instrumental to his lifelong demand of financial security. His death is the conclusive moment of a failed personal trajectory, peculiar to his own private experience and yet emblematic of the *petite bourgeoisie* as a whole.

Equally indicative of death as the end point of clerical workers' career, *Il posto's* finale portrays the death of a worker and its consequences for the office. The film's several temporal lapses, interspersed digressions on the workers' private lives, contribute to the humanism and sentimental tone employed in the portrayal of their private struggles and frustrated ambitions.²⁶¹ These parallel micro-narratives earn petty office disputes and

²⁶¹ In his review of Olmi's film, Peter Bondanella provides a survey of the diverse fauna of workers *inhabiting* the firm's offices: "Brief vignettes of Domenico's fellow employees begin to reveal more of the complexity of their private lives. The dead clerk was writing a novel and was forced to hide the use of his electric lamps at night from his avaricious landlady; another clerk frets over an inheritance and does nothing but cut cigarettes in half all day; a man who cleans his desk compulsively during the work period is an amateur opera singer; a woman who is chronically late to work is revealed to have a son who steals money from her purse. As the film progresses, we note that the compulsive mannerism characterizing the employees at their office reflect the alienating effects of the workplace, while their more spontaneous and natural behavior takes place only in their homes with their families. One retired clerk even comes to eat lunch every day at the office because he lacks appetite for his food without the office bell ringing for the lunch break." Peter Bondanella, "Il posto by Ermanno Olmi; I fidanzati by Ermanno Olmi," *Cinéaste*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Winter 2003), 74.

behavior an explanation as well as a sense of empathetic human comprehension towards the sorrows each one of these workers seemingly endures. In one of these side narratives, the worker whose death is at stake in the film's finale, is introduced as a solitary man living, like de Carmine, in a *pensione*'s rental room. Engaged in the fulfillment of his literary ambition, the man is depicted in his attempt to carve spare time to dedicate to the writing of a novel, inhibited in his goal by his employment in the firm and by his stingy host, regularly complaining about his excessive consumption of electricity—forced by his work-shift to write at night, he is reprimanded for keeping the lights on at unusual hours.

A group of employees gather in silence to honor their colleague's loss, while the office's manager, aided by a worker, inspects the dead's belongings to clear his desk in order to sort them. Equally evocative of a family ritual in their review of the clerk's personal belongings the two workers recover, among the other things, the novel manuscript. The finding intensifies the sentimental tone of the scene, for the novel will remain unfinished and the man's property archived. Emptied in all of its parts, the dead man's desk becomes available for contention among the other workers, who, after decades of service in the firm, welcome their colleague's departure as an occasion for professional advancement earned in the form of a better-lit workstation. A position has finally become available for Domenico who can eventually be employed as an accountant in the office. The petty dispute ends the film, whose final shot is a long take close-up of Domenico on whose face the whole scene seemingly finds a moral connotation.

As a testament to workers' dispensability, a new clerk seamlessly earns the position that has just become available. However interchangeable, each worker from *Il posto* has a specific job in the firm and workforce surplus is not allowed. While portraying cynicism in the corporate world, the film shows that a secure place, a stable employment, awaits those who work for the company. Welcomed and guided, Domenico is finally assigned a desk, which, however positioned in the very back of the office, stands as the emblem of the company's kept promise of social emancipation for a proletarian, country boy seeking his place in society.

The nature and purpose of the firm in which Domenico is employed is left unspecified and vague in the film. The management's authoritarian and paternalistic attitude towards the workers, and their subsequent internalization of discipline seemingly point to the company's private ownership. Lateness and the securing of productivity are not handled as a mere implementation of office rules; they become a personal matter between the workers and their managers—as shown in the above-examined scene from *Il posto*.

The hereditary transmission of power in the *Megaditta* from the *Fantozzi* saga also seems to indicate its private ownership. In their ascent to the highest ranks of the firm, variously titled nobility discipline the workers' work and leisure time by submitting them to arbitrary ruling. And yet, a decidedly bureaucratic mentality pervades the workers' office conduct—when compared to 1961 *Il posto*. Fantozzi and his colleagues' lack of engagement and scarce productivity are depicted as a burden to the Italian nation as a whole inasmuch as they are presented as peculiar traits of Italian-ness. For both their

lack of ambition in aspiring to better paid, higher-ranking positions, and their effort spent towards devising work-avoiding strategies, Fantozzi's films workers are closer to Nando Guida's colleagues in *L'impiegato*, or to any other State-funded employee represented in the films I examined. Their failed internalization of discipline reflects on their frantic, creative efforts directed towards what can be defined as "institutionalized unemployment" expressed in the form of a compensated utilization of work time for ulterior purposes.

Through the *Megaditta's* private ownership, the *Fantozzi* film saga highlights with greater prominence some relevant aspects of office life and does so by means of social satire and parody. Aspects such as the arbitrary power structures dictating the course of private interactions among peers, the forced leisure activities, and the subservient demeanor of dependent employees towards their employers and managers are all aspects film representations of both public and private service sector share, and which become more prominent in the latter. The private ownership allows the films to highlight and exacerbate some aspects that are peculiar to both worlds while highlighting the vices and shortcomings of the people working in administrative positions thus represented.

Conclusion

While not new to Italian cinema, Ragionier Ugo Fantozzi conferred to the figure of the impiegato its national prominence. Over forty years after its transmediatic appearance, Fantozzi is regarded as the prototypical office worker, and more broadly, as an emblem of submissive demeanor. Fantozzi's films current and recurrent broadcasting on Italian television testifies to this character's relevance and appeal to a wide, intergenerational audience. Fantozzi's enduring popularity is greatly indebted to its serial structure: a response to the profound changes affecting Italian film industry and viewership practices brought by the mass-scale diffusion of television, and in line with its contemporary cinematic productions. A serial structure that, I argue, is coherent with and a reflection of television viewers' demands and expectations.

While innovative in its insistence on the work of an impiegato *qua* impiegato, Fantozzi's features and gags are profoundly indebted to previous, Italian and international representations of clerical workers. With the analyses proposed in this dissertation, I sought to construct a coherent narrative on cinematic representations of clerical workers by identifying and contextualizing common themes and clichés across the films. At times broadly inspired by slapstick comedy gags and tropes, Fantozzi's films are in other regards openly evocative of former pictures—one example is the wake-up scene from *Fantozzi* (1975), an adaptation of *L'impiegato*'s, in which Pina takes the place of Nando Guida's sister, Luisetta, in expediting her husband's morning routine in preparation for work.

As a defining feature of clerical employment, the representation of office, along with space-related considerations, have been my primary concerns. In the first chapter, I sought to demonstrate how different cinematic depictions of the workplace portend different ways of articulating workers' subjectivity. While sharing their representation of office space as functional to the workers' expression of dissent towards dependent employment, in films such as *L'impiegato* and *Il profeta* resistance to interior design modernization and escape underpin an overt articulation of workers' estrangement. Conversely, in the *Fantozzi* film series, office space's appropriation is functional to the representation of the workers' pursuit of private interest and individualism. The workers are represented to furtively adapt office space and furniture to serve ulterior, leisure, or non-work related practices, while still struggling to preserve appearances and their job. The vertical distribution of the workers in the space of the Megaditta building is also functional to the films' parody of class conflict. In his short-lived and exceptional attempt to openly express dissent, Fantozzi is brought back to discipline and admitted to the top floor of the building to receive absolution. A religious-inspired setting and a God-like figure await Fantozzi, as to signify that rebellion is the equivalent of ingratitude.

Office space's appropriation and insubordination to discipline is also functional to the establishment of masculine subjectivities. In the second chapter, I aimed to emphasize the films' position vis-à-vis new models of reformed masculinity brought by consumer culture and boss-inspired managerial figures as prototypes of success. While mainly focusing on the characters' failure to live up to these standards of success in comedies Italian style, in the *Fantozzi* film series, workers' ambition to success equals undeserved

privileges, and ultimately, exemption from work obligations. Fantozzi's temporary ascent to the high ranks of the Megaditta on occasion of his visit to Montecarlo casino with Duca Conte Semenzara, comes with increasingly more refined office design such as expensive paintings, table, lamp, and a human skin chair. In the establishment of masculinities in the office, romantic pursuits occupy a prominent role. Fantozzi's exposure to the risk of feminization, emasculation, and physical pain are the premises of his attempts' regular failure in seducing Ms. Silvani, his co-worker—who will eventually marry Geometra Calboni, a degraded version and a parody of a Latin lover figure.

Fantozzi's films' characters can in many ways be regarded as a satirical, hence exaggerated representation of several office types and attitudes, codified and popularized by the series' own success. Silvani, former "Miss quarto piano," is in fact portrayed as a debased, secretly depressed cynical figure who exploits her self-styled appeal to obtain money from Fantozzi. Calboni is a sly, cynical figure and a decadent embodiment of a womanizer. Ragionier Filini is the relentless organizer of office initiatives and outings in each film of the series.

As I have discussed in the course of the third chapter, *Fantozzi's* films' reliance on leisure time representation is evocative of after-work initiatives organized and promoted by the OND, the Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro in the years of the fascist regime. In chapter 3, I sought to highlight white-collar films' appropriation of fascist rhetoric and language through a comparative analysis of relevant instances from the films and leisure time administration under fascism. Openly evocative of fascist language, *L'impiegato's* 1959 appropriation of the regime's rhetoric of modernization and

efficiency on the workplace is functional to the representation of the continuities between nationalization of the masses during the dictatorship, and the film's contemporary imperative of production. *L'impiegato's* language is that of the comedy, for a stark contrast is enacted between the austere discipline imposed by the regime's solemn tones aimed at the creation of a fascism-loyal army of civil servants, and the workers' blatant insubordination and lack of compliance. Fantozzi's film series appropriates fascist language and aesthetics to articulate them in the terms of a social satire targeting top-down cultural administration and consumption. Class struggle between employers and employees is played on a cultural ground, in the form of working class' demands and needs in the face of cultural practices gentrification. The Megaditta's attempts to redeem the workers' employment of their spare time from its proletarian character is a satirical depiction of both fascist-inspired cultural administration, and leftwing effort to propose a counter-culture as a response to mass consumption and Americanization.

In the fourth, concluding chapter, I sought to highlight some prominent differences between films respectively representing public and private service sector workers. In this chapter, I considered the ideological and political trajectory of characters from *La vita agra*, *Una vita difficile*, and *Un borghese piccolo piccolo*, from partisans of the Resistenza to petty bourgeois, and their demands of lifelong security in the form of a stable, state-funded employment, *il posto fisso*. From political engagement with the national cause, to promoters of utmost individualism, these films feature this class' gradually more irreversible turn towards the private. Films such as *Il cappotto* and *Un borghese piccolo piccolo* are representative of petty bourgeois expectations towards the

state, stemming from an inherent sense of entitlement and proprietary attitude towards their job. In the attempt to highlight main discontinuities between private and public sectors, I analyzed these films in relation to Olmi's *Il posto*, in which the firm's paternalistic and authoritarian attitude towards its employees expose their dispensability vis-à-vis a functional, and efficient work environment. The *Fantozzi* film series blurs the distinction between private and public service sector in that it combines the setting of a private firm, the *Megaditta*, with the absenteeism and the lack of commitment proper of public service sector workers (as depicted in films such as *L'impiegato*, and *Un borghese piccolo piccolo*). As it emerges from the films thus far analyzed, the private ownership of the *Megaditta* offers the ideal backdrop for arbitrary power and its abuses to occur. Unlike public service sector, in which workers' inefficiency is seemingly "normalized," in the private sector, power hierarchy is held in place and workers' subordination reinforced (*Fantozzi, I complessi, Il giocattolo, Il posto*).

Largely indebted to television for its establishment and popularity, *Fantozzi's* character is emblematic of a transitional phase in Italian cinema. A study of media representations of clerical workers beyond cinema would ideally complement and broaden the scope of a study on Italian white-collar cinema. Representations of impiegati in television, advertisement, magazines, and fotoromanzi would offer a broader understanding of common perceptions of this emblematic figure of these transitional decades from the industrial to post-industrial era. Focusing on interior design and organization, a magazine like "L'ufficio moderno" would provide a valuable source in the investigation of media-proposed models of deskwork efficiency and practices.

Archival research would grant access to such magazines thus allowing a comprehensive examination of the topic.

A divergent, equally valid direction for this research is to be found in a transnational investigation of filmic precursors that might have inspired the character of the Italian accountant—from Jerry Lewis’ personas to Hollywood cinema’s representations of office workers in films such as *Big Business Girl* (1931) by William Seiter, *Baby Face* (1933) by Alfred Green, *Wife VS Secretary* (1936) by Clarence Brown, and *The Apartment* (1960) by Billy Wilder.

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