Early Film Theories in Italy, 1896-1922

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Section 4
Politics, Morality, Education

Silvio Alovisio

Between 1905 and the First World War, Italian cinema underwent a series of decisive transformations. The rapid increase in national film production, the diffusion of movie theatres in urban settings, the gradual participation of middle-class spectators and, after 1912, the popularity of feature-length films, are just a few of the historical processes signalling that cinema had become a mass phenomenon, even in Italy.

Inevitably, these transformations also changed the way cinema presented itself in the public domain and, as a result, the way society dealt with it. In this section, which focuses on political, pedagogical, and religious discussions surrounding the new medium, cinema is increasingly treated like a true social institution. The selected articles were written by people from very different institutions and ideologies: two educators, including one radical (Orano) and one socialist (Fabietti); an expert in pedagogy close to feminism (Buracci); a positivist philosopher (Orestano); a progressive priest (Costetti); a liberal political leader (Orlando); and a conservative lawyer (Avellone). All these authors share the desire to place cinema within a broader project, be it social, political, or moral.

The School of Vice

In the selected articles, as in the wider debate that they reflect, perspectives naturally diverged. The alarming conviction that the new medium represented social danger dominated a series of particularly harsh articles about cinema. A letter sent by a renowned former judge, Giovanni Battista Avellone to Alberto Bergamini, the editor of the most authoritative publication of Italy’s moderate right, the Giornale d’Italia (Newspaper of Italy), perhaps best exemplifies this kind of argument. According to Avellone, cinema was currently ‘a colossal, crowded, very alluring school of immorality and debauchery.’ Although Avellone certainly was not the first to causally link the cinematograph and dishonest and immoral behaviour, he did radically update the accusation, which for centuries had been flung at theatre and, more recently, at stage hypnosis and popular literature. It was a stereotype that remained virtually intact across almost two decades of reflections on cinema, both in Italy and abroad.¹
Similar positions also arose within certain sectors of the Catholic Church. In 1914, the influential Civiltà Cattolica (Catholic Civilization), a journal published by the Jesuits, inaugurated a series of articles about cinema that ran until 1919. These contributions were directed at the community of the faithful—but, above all, to the ecclesiastical authorities—and presented a highly critical view of commercial cinema, defining it as ‘an evil, a source of social malady that must be eradicated’ and as an ‘inexhaustible source of infinite evils for the body and the spirit of cinema-goers.’

Faced with the rapid spread of this social evil, the Jesuits proposed a reduction of the damage, or, more precisely, a disciplined regulation of the cinematographic experience. In terms of the specifics of its operation, the proposal requested the State’s intervention. The Jesuits called for legislation reducing screening schedules and prohibiting children under the age of sixteen. Avellone also requested that the State exercise its responsibility to control public morality through strict surveillance. A number of historians consider his letter the decisive spark that launched broader political debate and eventually led to the introduction of film censorship in Italy. In reality, Avellone’s letter was certainly not the first detailing the ‘abuses’ of cinematography to appear in an important national newspaper. Yet, the question of who called for state vigilance first is fairly irrelevant. More important is the Italian State’s response on 20 February 1913. Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti sent a document to the country’s regional authorities that not only required theatre operators to obtain permits to screen films, but forbade the cinematographic representation of topics that were against ‘morality or public decency [...] decorum, honour, the national reputation,’ or that featured images of ‘distressing crimes or actions or facts that provide an example how to carry out a crime, or that could disturbingly impress spectators, to the detriment primarily of young people and excitable persons.’ The contents of this document, which became law on 25 June 1913 and instituted State-run film censorship in Italy, were similar to the laws already in place in other European countries, including Germany, Sweden, Austria, Spain, and Great Britain.

An analysis of Italy’s first censorship law brings to light two interesting elements contained within Avellone’s letter to the editor. The first regards the conception of what is viewable. To Avellone, cinema’s danger lay, above all, in some of its content, and he drew up a list that he himself admitted was only partial. The State adopted this interpretation its own power to control the films’ contents. If cinema exponentially increased the power of the human eye to see up-close and in an increasingly universal manner, the State authorities did the exact opposite by restricting the potentially
limitless horizons of the filmable (from scenes of hypnotism and opium dens to lusty dances).

The second element regards the conception of morality. In his letter, Avellone defended morality on the grounds of civic virtues such as honesty, heroism, and sacrifice. There is no reference to Catholic morality, but this absence is not surprising: Avellone and Il Giornale d’Italia had a liberal and secular vision of the State and its responsibilities, well-separated from the Church’s role. The legislators who introduced the laws on film censorship shared the same political viewpoint: the regulations bowed to the principles of bourgeois morality but did allow films to contravene against the Catholic faith. The Jesuits not only harshly criticized this lack of deference toward religion, they forcefully—and unsuccessfully—lobbied for priests be members of the censorship commissions.

The School of the Future

In addition to these harsh, anti-film interventions, other, more balanced reflections are well-documented in this section of the book. These essays are interested not just in disciplining the cinematographic experience, but also in requalifying of the new medium’s power in a positive direction. There are at least three characteristic aspects of this more constructive approach: the attention given to concrete, educational practices, the centrality of empirical data, and cinema’s placement within a concept of society, the people, and culture.

The first distinct element shared by all the contributions was the desire to place cinema within a concrete social practice, according to their respective domains in education (Orano, Fabietti), pedagogy (Orestano), and religion (Costetti).

Two of the articles presented in this section are institutionally linked to the educational practices promoted by the Minerva National Institute. Founded in December 1912 under the aegis of the Ministry of Public Education, the Minerva National Institute was very active, at least until the outbreak of the First World War, in promoting educational cinema in very diverse places: schools, public universities, libraries, barracks, hospitals as well as in rural areas that had not yet been reached by commercial film distribution. The first piece is the text of a speech given at one of the Institute’s inaugural ceremonies at the Teatro del Popolo in Milan by Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, the former Minister of Public Education and future prime minister as well as president of the Minerva Institute. The
second text is from a speech given at a conference held at the Roman branch of the Institute on 10 December 1913 by the philosopher and educational reformer Francesco Orestano, who also designed the academic programmes accompanying Orlando’s reform of 1904–1905. Both these contributions were published in La coltura popolare (Popular Education), the journal of the Unione Italiana dell’Educazione Popolare (Italian League for the Education of the Working Classes), an important educational association with socialist leanings that had strong ties to the Minerva National Institute.

The link to concrete educational practices is important in other texts in this section as well. Romano Costetti, a priest and an organizer of the Società Emiliana di Proiezioni (Film Society of the Emilia Region), published his research in the journal Luce et verbo (Light and Verb), the official bulletin of the Turin-based company Unitas. The Society was active in the use of projected images to teach catechism and was involved not only in the production of educational films, but also—and above all—in the distribution of slides and films and the sale of projection equipment to parishes and Catholic schools. Published in La Rivista Pedagogica (The Journal of Pedagogy), the most important publication in the field at that time, Domenico Orano’s paper promoted his work organizing educational and social assistance in Rome’s working-class neighbourhood of Testaccio. Similarly, the article by Ettore Fabietti highlighted the experiences of educational cinema sponsored by the Minerva Institute and the above-mentioned Italian League for the Education of the Working Classes, which he chaired. Therefore, almost all the authors had a relationship with cinema that was not only theoretical, but also entailed a tireless and almost feverish engagement with institutional contacts, logistical support, and educational and promotional conferences.

Naturally, this practical consideration of cinema’s role required that the new medium be ‘subject to a method’. This concept appears in the title of Costetti’s article on the use of projected images to teach catechism and also forms the underlying premise of Francesco Orestano’s article on cinema in the schools, which he published in 1913. In June of that same year, during the parliamentary debates on the film censorship law, Claudio Treves, a reformist leader of the Partito Socialista Italiano (‘The Italian Socialist Party’), used the same expression in reference to the Minerva National Institute: ‘I do not need to mention that thanks to the initiative of enlightened men of every party, a school has been recently formed using cinematography as a method of popular propaganda.’

Obviously, the selected texts do not agree on a single method. On the contrary, sometimes the differences appear immense. For example, Costetti argued that the still images in magic lanterns were more efficient than
cinema to teach religion, because they permitted the intervention of a speaker during the projection. Domenico Orano was of the opposite opinion, being firmly against luminous projections. Nevertheless, above and beyond the differences, a fairly coherent idea of school and cinema emerges from the contributions in this section.

They all agreed that cinematographic images were unquestionably similar to life, and thus to ‘reality’. For this reason, cinema was perfect for updating the pedagogic methods of school, which were burdened by ‘shackles old and new’, based on ‘theories, maxims, definitions, and formulas that are as difficult as they are fruitless.’ According to Orlando, ‘We have to put schools in contact with life, in direct communion with reality.’ Thus, as all the other authors would agree, cinema had to be able to translate notions still confined to pedagogical theory into experience. These affirmations were perfectly in keeping with the widespread theory of the ‘objective method’ (from Pestalozzi to Fröbel and Herbart), which placed the direct experience of things at the centre of learning. Orestano went so far as to say that viewing the cinematograph was more effective than viewing direct reality. He wrote,

By using motion pictures, we are able to concentrate on the particular aspect that we wish to study, and in this way intensify the focus on that aspect alone. But when actual working conditions are observed in all their complexity, attention can be distracted in various directions, provoking associations that do not serve any purpose or can even be harmful, and which in any case make analysis of the subject all the more difficult.

In these writings, the psychological capacity for attention is one of the primary reasons cinema was considered to have didactic value. The young spectator ‘imagined’ by pedagogical reflections on cinema was not a purely passive subject, just as we saw in early theoretical texts such as Maffio Maffii’s ‘Why I Love the Cinematograph’ in Section 1. Viewing a film entailed more perceptive and intellectual engagement than that required by more prevalent didactic methods, such as mnemonic learning. This engagement was highlighted in particular by Orestano and especially by Angelina Buracci. In their reflections on pedagogy, childhood was no longer conceived as an embryonic, imperfect, almost primitive stage of a human being’s life, but rather as a specific phase in the is a natural fact, due to the ‘natural and gradual unfolding of the individual’s psychological energies.’ The child ‘perceives, associates, remembers, synthesizes, analyses, imagines, judges and reasons,’ and in order to produce truly
educational form of cinema, these mental processes had to be understood in depth.9

The second distinctive characteristic of these discussions is that the authors sought to base their opinions on empirical data. For example, Domenico Orano started with careful observation, conducted over ‘three months of experiments’ on the inhabitants of Testaccio outside of Rome. Moreover, Orano decided to open a movie theatre for the children and workers in the well-known working-class neighbourhood of Testaccio, partially on the basis of socio-demographical statistics he collected in 1908. As opposed to other countries like the United States and Germany, Italy was sociologically more open to the new medium, but there were still few qualitative and quantitative investigations of the movie-going public. Orano’s research represented a partial but significant exception. He published data on the role of cinematography in 1912, which revealed that movie-going was taking hold in certain sectors of the working classes during the first decade of the new century. ‘Cinematography has entered popular usage,’ observed Orano. ‘The fascination with film, for both the worker in the noisy workshop and for the illiterate farmer is amazing [...] One family candidly confessed to me that every week they put aside six soldi for the cinema. Another family, more generous in assigning luxury expenditures, had designated two lire per month for the same purpose.’10

Ettore Fabietti’s reflections, too, involved gathering empirical data, in this case regarding the quantitative frequency of Milan’s movie-going public. His reflections on the need for educational cinema that was attractive, interesting, and able to compete with commercial cinema sprang from ‘a sort of personal, direct investigation. I have frequented many popular cinemas. I have seen a number of films of every genre, and I have taken note of the plots that unfolded and the impression they left on me and on viewers of various ages and social groups, especially young workers and kids.’11

The essay by Angelina Buracci, an expert in pedagogic practices, was based on observations that were even more targeted and accurate. First, the author described in detail the exhibition spaces, or what we would now describe as the cinematic ‘apparatus’: the architecture of the facades and the interiors, the posters, and promotional photographs, the waiting room, the barkers advertising the films, the ushers escorting customers, the furnishings, the lighting fixtures, the seats, and the music accompanying the projection. This was followed by a description of the audience, paying close attention to its heterogeneity, and a study of the spectators’ reactions, particularly those of children and adolescents. Like Luca Mazzei, Buracci made ‘annotations that were both analytical and precise [...] her goal [was
to] analyse the psycho-sociological mechanisms activated in that space.’ An interesting aspect of her empirical observations was ‘the rather high number of films cited,’ roughly fifteen. This was something new. In Italy's nascent theory of cinematography was almost always abstract, and the content of images was hardly ever documented methodically in a precise reference to specific films.

The third distinct aspect within the educational discourses on cinema is their almost strategic attempts to articulated a more complex idea of society, education, and culture. Obviously, not all of the authors shared the same ideas: Domenico Orano's secular and anti-clerical Italy, which came out of the masonic tradition, is not the Catholic Italy of Costetti. Similarly, Ettore Fabietti's proletarian and anti-capitalistic Italy bears no resemblance to Vittorio Emanuele Orlando's liberal and bourgeois Italy. Nonetheless, one has the impression that, at least in regards to the social function of cinema, the inevitable ideological differences are less relevant than a number of shared convictions, particularly in regards to the working classes. The Jesuits' position, that 'public cinematography is not appropriate per se for educating the people' was isolated—and temporary. In fact, everyone, including reform-minded liberals and conservatives, socialists, and Catholics, recognized cinema as a key component of popular culture. For this reason, everyone was convinced that the new medium could potentially influence the way the masses were educated. This conviction was based on the ideological premise that the people had to be instructed, and regardless of social and political sensibilities, everyone shared a goal of establishing hegemonic rule over the working classes.

Although the question of the relationship between the elite and the working classes in Italy is too historically complex to elaborate on here, cinema certainly plays a defining role, since it became a social institution at the moment these relationships were being reorganized. Until the early years of the twentieth century, Italy's governing class typically regarded pedagogy in terms of a statist, paternalistic model of dirigisme, which was in significant contradiction with liberalism. Elementary education was delegated to the municipalities, but professional instruction was 'left to the initiative of private citizens, or local secular or religious bodies.' But the picture changed with the political rise of Giolitti, who promoted the democratic involvement of the masses in political life and was open to discussion with Catholics and socialists. Giolitti and his political adversary Sonnino, the leader of a more conservative yet radical form of liberalism, understood that the liberal elite could no longer neglect the issue of education. The country’s economic-industrial transformation called for new
solutions. During this fifteen-year period between 1901 and 1915, legislation was adopted to promote public and professional instruction under both Giolitti and Sonnino. In particular, Vittorio Emanuele Orlando collaborated with Giolitti to raise the age of compulsory education to twelve in 1904.

Obviously, the socialists encouraged the fight against illiteracy (which was still widespread in Italy) as well as the development of popular and professional instruction, and greatly increased the education of the masses, even though their pedagogical vision was largely subordinated under the educational models of the liberal bourgeoisie. Even the Catholics became increasingly active in developing pedagogy directed at the working classes: ‘the Church had always supported the family as a fundamental agent in education, but only as a bulwark against interference by the State: it was not opposed to the idea of occupying an extra-familial and community educational space, it was only against the idea that it would be occupied by others.’

The selected texts, which express the main ideologies of the time, share this widespread belief in the need to create pedagogy aimed at the masses. In these texts, luminous projections and/or cinema were considered decisive instruments in education, not just moral, civil or religious instruction, but aesthetic as well. This conviction was expressed by Vittorio Emanuele Orlando in terms that hint at the idea of a broader political programme: ‘We very much want that the people who have the mallet and the shovel waiting for them will raise up their spirit, that they will cultivate their intellect, and that they will refine their artistic sensibilities in order to descend tomorrow into the grand struggle of economic production, into the enormous conflict of social interests.’

In this section’s texts, the indisputable popularity of cinema seems to have two consequences: communicational and economic. In terms of their immediacy and communicative effectiveness, the images projected on the silver screen are—as Romano Costetti suggested—a powerful and suggestive modern version of the medieval Biblia pauperum, which were images painted on church walls recounting the sacred texts to an illiterate and uncultured populace. On an economic level, cinema, which required low expenditures for its ritual consumption, was ‘the only artistic representation that is given to the people to enjoy today.’

While broad sectors of public opinion and Italy’s nascent theoretical discussions believed that cinema constituted an alarming aesthetic degradation, in part because of its mass dimension, a few contributions in this section challenge these negative evaluations (including Orano, Buracci, Orlando, and Fabietti). Vittorio Emanuele Orlando explained himself most
clearly. According to him, over the course of the centuries, art—originally an experience of humankind in its entirety, without class distinctions—progressively detached itself from the people and assumed an elitist statute. Cinema reduced this rift, offering an extraordinary opportunity ‘for the socialization of aesthetic sensibilities.’

Orlando’s gradual aesthetic development involved not only the lower classes, but children, too, as Angelina Buracci also highlighted in her analogy between the lower classes and children: ‘Just like the ignorant populace, the child is not an aesthete.’ As the historian Antonio Gibelli observed, the paternalistic metaphor of the proletariat-child is, after all, a stereotype that traverses Italian political and cultural discussions of the early twentieth century, regardless of ideological position. He observed, ‘The child is not just a part of the proletariat, but a prototype of it, in the sense that the proletariat is considered to be, and consequently, is treated like a minor to be educated, conquered, deciphered, and, if necessary, deceived.’

Cinema between Elitism, Capitalism, and Morality

In the preceding paragraphs, I have demonstrated the existence of two different political-pedagogical approaches to cinema, the first directed toward censorship and strict regulation and the second toward moral and aesthetic education. We have also pinpointed at least three recurring and distinctive characteristics within this second approach.

However, in analysing the discussions sparked by these two different approaches, at least two simplifications must be avoided. In the first place, the positions in favour of and against cinema did not correspond to specific and distinct ideological positions, but instead crossed the ideological-political panorama of the era. In other words, there were liberals and Catholics who were hostile to cinema (Avellone and the Jesuits, respectively) and others in favour of it (Orlando and Costetti, respectively), just as there were socialists who did not oppose the introduction of censorship, such as Claudio Treves, and others, like Ettore Fabietti, who instead criticized it.

In the second place, a rigid opposition between the two different approaches cannot be established. In fact, even the most measured and constructive contributions sometimes favoured restrictive norms. For example, in 1910, Domenico Orano hoped that censorship would be introduced, while Francesco Orestano proposed that minors be prevented from viewing fantasy films. Moreover, an elitist point of view always came to the fore in all these texts. In almost every case, issue of morality was not directed at
the cultured adult or middle-class spectator, who presumably was able to distinguish between good and evil, reality and illusion. The spectators at moral risk included the proletariat, women, and young people. Whether they were, metaphorically, ‘a vase to fill’ or ‘a fire to ignite,’ to quote the distinction made by Giovanni Rosadi, the Assistant Minister of Public Education, the spectators did not benefit from full, mature autonomy, be it moral or aesthetic. In many of the pedagogical-political discussions of cinema, they were not considered able to consciously absorb what they saw at the cinema. They were regarded as reactive, naive, and excitable spectators. For example, Orano affirmed that in the ‘lower classes, instincts prevail over ideas and noble sentiments.’

What seems to partially elude a few of these authors—and was instead grasped by the first theoretical texts on cinema—is that the movie-going public was increasingly characterized as an ‘impersonal community’, in which consumers were integrating themselves in a perspective that reached across class, generation, and gender divides.

Besides their shared elitism, the debates over cinema present at least three other shared aspects that merit a brief examination. In the first place, the opinion of cinema and its communicative power was always ambivalent. Almost paradoxically, in the ‘anti-cinematographic’ discussions, cinema was also celebrated as an extraordinary medium, while in the more supportive discussions, cinema was considered a dangerous medium. Amongst the often harsh, alarmist tenor of these discussions, Giovanni Battista Avel-lone provided a more reasoned assessment. He defined cinema as a ‘highly ingenious invention,’ a ‘surprising find,’ a ‘marvellous way of revivifying history,’ able to respond ‘to the taste of the new era, more synthetic in condensing and feeling.’ The Jesuits were equally enthusiastic when they declared that ‘no modern invention [more than cinema] [...] functions in a more efficient manner, intensively and extensively, in propagating ideas among the multitudes.

Instead, the supporters of educational cinema initially considered the new medium an influential ‘anti-school’, or as Ettore Fabietti described it, alluring, efficient and modern; its negative power harboured a communicative energy that needed to be converted into a positive school.

Nonetheless, cinema appeared as a sort of super-medium, constantly prevailing over other means of communication, be they books (Orlando; Fabietti), advertising (Orlando), traditional oratory (Orano), illustrations (Fabietti) or the theatre (Orano; Orlando).

It should come as no surprise, then, that efforts to define and socially evaluate cinema contained paradoxical ambivalence. In early twentieth-century discussions about political and social issues, it was common
practice to pinpoint the cause of a problem within a particular phenomenon of modernity—and its possible solution. For example, electricity was perceived not only as a symptom of all the evils of civilization but also—as in the case of electrotherapy—a remedy to combat them.

The same holds true within the political discussions of the new medium. Cinema was always seen as a phenomenon of modernity, a product of the most highly advanced science. Giovanni Battista Avellone placed it among the great modern inventions, alongside the telephone, phonograph, and wireless telegraph. Five years later, Ettore Fabietti, from the opposite political side, wrote that ‘with motion pictures, science has enriched us with a means of representation that is no less important than those that we already had.’ As seen in Section 1, already in the first decade of the twentieth century, the nascent theoretical reflection in Italy had lucidly grasped the link between cinema and the modern experience. But, in the political-pedagogical texts of the following decade, just like in the scientific texts documented in Section 5, the focus of the reflection shifted from a more general reflection on the experience of modernity to a comparison with a number of specific aspects of modernity itself, considered also from the point of view of their social management: the almost traumatic intensification of the gaze, the nervous excitement, the extension and immediate accessibility of its contents, and the rise of a new audience.

The third element shared by all the political-pedagogical discussions of cinema is perhaps the most controversial and calls into question the founding principles of capitalism. What ‘made [the cinematographer] descend from his high and very noble moral concept’ was ‘the greed for profits.’ Vulgar, immoral, and inappropriate, cinema was the product of an intrinsically capitalistic logic of speculation, interested only in ‘titillating low popular tastes,’ according to Giovanni Battista Avellone. On this point, liberals, Catholics and socialists all agreed, even if their analyses and their final diagnoses did not. This centrality of ‘greed’ caused degeneration in the system and could be countered, just like usury had been opposed through a campaign in the newspaper Il Giornale d’Italia, which Avellone praised in the first lines of his letter. The author believed that the excesses in the demands of profit could be governed and harmonized with morality: ‘Capital must [...] remain within the confines and measure of an honest, moral, balanced, proportioned productivity of profits.’ As expected, the evaluation of the Marxist, Ettore Fabietti, who believed in the incompatibility of capitalism with morality, was very different. ‘Capital is by definition an amoral agent. And when it is in search of profits in order to reach its goal, it would be capable of poisoning all of humankind [...] The
capital at play in the cinematographic industry, which is now an enormous amount, behaves no differently.\textsuperscript{28} Regardless of political position, the idea that the laws of profit and even competition posed an ethical and aesthetic danger spanned almost two decades of theoretical reflections on cinema in Italy with undiminished regularity. These anti-industrial concerns were an obvious symptom of the broader contradiction within the debate which drew to a lesser degree on the positions of the socialists, who were in the minority anyway, and to a greater degree, the more influential positions of the liberal middle class.

Conclusions

Before concluding, there is a final and most important question to be resolved regarding the problem of social responsibility, and it dovetails with the contradictions described at the end of the preceding paragraph.

If the middle-class public sphere considered cinematography, in and of itself, a positive medium, then who was to blame for its degeneration? The harmful effects of suggestion produced by the images of commercial cinema were similar to those that the action of a leader could produce on the masses; but, as Eugeni observed, in the case of cinema it was impossible to identify a leader who ‘from the screen looks, shows, tells.’\textsuperscript{29} Cinema appeared to be an expression not so much of an institutionalized and regulating power, but of uncontrollable might.\textsuperscript{30} So, then, who was guilty of the damage produced by cinema? Broad sectors of the bourgeois political elite identified the culprit in the apparatuses of film productions dedicated to profit. However, this was a contradictory response because the very apparatuses of cinema were an expression of the capitalist bourgeoisie itself.

But perhaps, as the political-pedagogical discussions of the period allude, less explicitly, there is also to another ‘guilty party’. Pondering the possibility of a throng without a leader, Freud argued that a desire ‘shared by a great number of people’ may be able to substitute a leader.\textsuperscript{31} The political-pedagogical and the scientific reflections of the era seemed at times to outline the role of a shared, repeated desire for viewing and escapism that, during the 1910s began to be observed (Buracci, d’Abundo, Orestano) and even quantified (Orano, Fabietti), both in Italy and abroad. Ultimately, movie-going audiences were perceived as essentially governed only by their own desires.

Gustave Le Bon equated the art of knowing how to make an impression on the imagination of the masses with the art of governing. Cinema’s challenge
to Italy's political elite was basically analogous. The new medium, so deeply rooted in the experience of immediate suggestion and spontaneous imitation, could be converted into a conscious experience, able to regulate the relationships between feelings and intellect, and able to recognize the visible while also rejecting content that was too destabilizing. Thus, the objective was twofold: to better comprehend the functioning and the power of cinematographic suggestion and to understand how to convert it into consensus and persuasion.

As I have shown in the preceding paragraphs, the attempts to achieve these two final objectives were synthesized into two correlated strategies, which are documented in the following texts: the first—to regulate the contents of the projections, including through censorship—sought preventive control over production. The second—to promote a form of pedagogy based on sensation—was aimed at spectators in the grip of cinema's suggestive power. These objectives were not easy to accomplish, since cinema's avid public was without limits, constantly growing in number, and considered the new medium a vibrant part of its daily experience and its own, autonomous preferences.

Notes

2. ‘Cinematografo e scuola'; ‘Voci dell'arte'.
3. ‘Vigilanza sulle pellicole', p. 47.
6. D’Arcangeli, ‘Verso una scienza'.
7. Orlando, ‘Speech to the People's Theatre', included in this anthology.
8. Orestano, ‘Cinematograph in the Schools', included in this anthology.
10. A soldo is a copper coin equalling one-twentieth of a lira.
13. This tendency towards an abstract critique of cinema, detached from individual films, can also be identified in other national contexts, such as the press campaigns conducted in the United States by Hearst newspapers. See Streible, ‘Children at the Mutoscope'.
17. Orlando, ‘Speech at the People’s Theatre’, included in this anthology.
18. Orano, ‘Motion Pictures and Education’, included in this anthology.
19. Orlando, ‘Speech at the People’s Theatre’, included in this anthology.
23. Orano, ‘The Motion Pictures and Education’, included in this anthology.
24. See in particular, Fossi, ‘The Movie Theatre Audience’, included in Section 1 of this anthology; Low and Manvell, *History*, p. 15.
25. ‘Cinematografo e moralità pubblica’, p. 422.
26. Here, the expression ‘capitalism’ assumes a meaning that is more historical than ideological. As Ligensa observed, already the first production companies had proposed strategies typical of modern capitalism (such as standardization, international competition and advertising). Ligensa, ‘Triangulating a Turn’, p. 2.
27. Avellone, ‘Cinema and Its Influence’, included in this anthology.