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The Next Millennium

1999 Italy supports US military action against Serbia (Yugoslavia) and sends forces to Kosovo

2001 Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia party wins elections and forms coalition government with Gianfranco Fini (National Alliance) and Umberto Bossi (Northern League)

2002 European Union currency Euro replaces the Italian Lira
Lower house of parliament passes controversial criminal reform bill *Legittimo sospetto* (legitimate suspicion) allowing change of venue due to suspicion of judges' political affiliations

2003 Parliament passes laws granting immunity from prosecution to top government officeholders
Italian sends peace keeping troops to Iraq in the aftermath of the US led invasion
Parmalat financial crack

2005 Election of German cardinal Joseph Ratzinger as Pope Benedict XVI

2006 Romano Prodi's Olive coalition defeats Silvio Berlusconi's Liberty coalition in elections decided by absentee ballots
Ammendments increasing federalist nature of Italian constitution rejected in general referendum
Italian national soccer team wins fourth World Cup title

In 2002 Italian government's statistical and census institutes warned that in the last decades of the twentieth century Italy had birth rates among the lowest on Earth.[1] The educational and research level of the country was also at levels lower than other Western nations. Historians of contemporary Italy have even written in almost moralistic tones about the decline of ideological and religious traditions and challenges to the nation's families.[2] The country also faced economic challenges as stalworths of Italian industry such as Fiat, the automaker centered in Turin, experienced increased competition for the Italian market.

In the 1980s and 1990s a symbiosis developed between soccer and politics in a manner recalling the *panem et circenses* (bread and circus) policies of the later Roman Empire as ownership of high-profile soccer teams became a means for the

wealthy to attain renown. The Agnelli family, which owned the Fiat automobile factories, ran the Juventus club of Turin, the major beneficiary of favors revealed in the referee fixing scandal of 2006. Italian premier and media magnate Silvio Berlusconi owned the Milan soccer club. The Moratti family continued its ownership of the Inter soccer team. On occasion, salaries paid to individual soccer players approached the figures for the entire gate revenue earned by the club, a financial situation clubs temporarily masked by exchanging player contracts at ever higher face values. In Rome the Cragnotti family of the Cirio food product company owned the Lazio football team before collapsing in 2002. The Tanzi family controlled the Parma soccer club until their Parmalat milk empire collapsed following a run on junk bonds in 2003. The Florentine film producer Mario Cecchi Gori lost his the Fiorentina soccer team following bankruptcy hearings.

In the opening years of the new millennium, the Italian Republic faced tensions between media magnate turned premier Silvio Berlusconi and the Italian judiciary, which attempted to try Berlusconi on corruption charges dating back to the *tangentopoli* corruption scandal leveled mainly against the Socialist Party of the late 1980s, events alluded to in Daniele Lucchetti's *Il portaborse/The Yes Man* (1991). There was protracted battling between the courts and the parliament controlled by Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* party, and the Liberty coalition passed laws granting high government officials immunity or allowing defendants to change venue because of the political affiliation of particular judges with the *legittimo sospetto* (legitimate suspicion) law. The year 2006 saw the defeat of Berlusconi's Liberty coalition by Romano Prodi's Olive coalition in close elections decided by votes cast by Italian citizens residing abroad. The Liberty coalition's defeat was foreshadowed by Nanni Moretti's bitter film satire on Berlusconi, *Il caimano/The Caiman* (2006), released weeks before the elections and winner of the majority of awards at Italy's Oscar equivalent, the Donatello competition. Berlusconi's Liberty coalition and particularly the Northern League of Umberto Bossi also suffered a referendum defeat when Italian voters rejected amendments to the Italian constitution, which would have purportedly granted more authority to Italy's regional governments.

The Cultural Scene

Important authors of the period include Antonio Tabucchi who wrote psychological studies of moral dilemmas such as *Sostiene Pereira/According to Pereira* (1985) adapted for the cinema by Roberto Faenza starring Marcello Mastroianni as *According to Periera* (1996). Susanna Tamaro wrote a nostalgic memoir *Va' dove ti porta il cuore/Follow Your Heart* (1994), which became a bestseller and was adapted for the cinema by Cristina Comencini in 1996. There was also the unexpected popularity of a serial killer mystery thriller by comedian and singer turned author Giorgio Faletti and the continuing popularity of detective novelist Andrea Camilleri who has taken up the mantle of such Sicilian authors as Leonardo Sciascia and Tomasi de Lampedusi. Andrea Camilleri's Montalbano crime series was adapted into a popular

detective television miniseries. Journalists continued to publish popular and revealing books, for example, Beppe Severgnini's attempts to explain Italian mores or Oriana Fallaci's apocalyptic warnings about the decline of the West in the face of theocratic influences from the Middle East.

The availability of films from cable outlets and satellite dishes brought further competition for traditional cinema houses. By the 1980s the Italian film industry was increasingly dependent on government subsidies and concentrated on themes with reasonable hope of international distribution in what remained of the ever-diminishing art film theater network. These subsidies would be reduced in 2005 leading to a drop in Italian feature film production to levels unseen since the 1930s and 1940s.

In response to the decline of the theatrical system Italian producers such as Titanus or Taodue interested in popular entertainment increasingly moved toward developing television miniseries, known as *fiction* in Italian, instead of venturing into the traditional theatrically released cinema. Some of the Italian *fiction* productions were of high quality, including those on RAI Italian state television. Damiano Damiani's dark and fatalistic mafia drama *La piovra/The Beast* (1985) series had already established a high level of quality for Italian miniseries viewers. In the 1960s and 1970s Italian television had already adapted novels and offered biopics about subjects like Italian unification hero Giuseppe Garibaldi. But with the closing of domestic theaters, the entrance into *fiction* and television became more sustained and reached a higher level of production value. The Titanus production house that had produced popular Italian films such as *Catene/Chains* (1949) or *Il Gattopardo/The Leopard* (1963) developed the successful *Orgoglio* melodrama series set in pre WWI Italy as well as a television remake of the Bolognini film about Fascist Italy, *Il Bell'Antonio*. The goodhearted police officer played by De Sica in the *Pane, amore . . .* series of the 1950s has become the territory of Gigi Parietti and Stefania Sandrelli in the *Il maresciallo Rocca* miniseries. Television also offered Andrea Camilleri's Montalbano detective series starring Luca Zingaretti. Former sexy comedy actress Edwige Fenech has become a television producer offering series such as *La omicidi* starring Massimo Ghini and Luisa Ranieri, a tale written by prolific screenwriter Sandro Petraglia, in which the mystery hinges on uncovering clues form the murder's interpretation of Dante's *Inferno*. Italian television has even ventured into examination of subjects never fully examined by the Italian cinema. The forced deportations and mass executions suffered by Italian resisdents on the Istrian coast in the waning days of WWII are depicted in the compelling miniseries directed by Alberto Negrin, *Il cuore nel pozzo/Heart in the Well* (2005). A dramatization of the efforts of an Italian diplomat who fought the Holocaust is offered by *Perlasca. Un eroe italiano/Perlasca: An Italian Hero* (2002). Italian television has also produced a number of religious miniseries featuring international casts such as the biopic about Pope John Paul II, *Carol, un uomo diventato Papa/Karol, A Man who Became Pope* (2005), the most watched program on Berlusconi's private television stations in that year. Such programs have taken advantage of the Italian tradition for craftsmanship and have been distributed worldwide.

The development of the television *fiction* in Italian media culture may be understood by Marco Tullio Giordana's revocation of the *film impegnato* (political

film) with *La meglio gioventù/The Best of Youth* (2003). This television miniseries for RAI chronicles the struggle for maturity of the baby boom generation between 1966 and 2003 with depictions of the student protests and growth of the Red Brigades in the Turin of the 1970s, and references to the *mani pulite* (clean hands) corruption investigations of the 1990s, all framed by pivotal games of the Italian national soccer team—the defeat at the hands of North Korea in 1966 and the World Cup championship of 1982. The protagonist, Nicola, played by Luigi Lo Cascio, becomes a psychiatrist who eventually achieves familial and emotional stability after the suppression of his Red Brigade terrorist wife, the suicide of his alienated policeman brother Matteo, played by Alessio Boni, and his seeming cure of a mentally ill woman his brother had sought to rescue from a mental ward in 1966. The miniseries is ripe with literary references. The miniseries' title is taken from a Pasolini poem. The two main characters work to salvage rare manuscripts from the 1966 flood of the Arno River in Florence. In the first episode Matteo iconoclastically responds to a university oral exam question about the love poems of Senuccio del Bene (1275–1349) by citing the hedonistic poetry of Cecco Angolieri (1260–1313) before announcing that he intends to abandon his studies. He later checks out Sherwood Anderson's novel *Winesburg Ohio* before committing suicide. The series ends with a call for the appreciation of beauty with images of the midnight sun in Scandinavia and the refurbished Tuscan villa of Nicola's brother-in-law, as a response to generational angst and violence of the 1960s generation and the acceptance of the corruption and disappointments of an Italy still tied to the cultural and political immobility of *trasformismo*.

Roberto Benigni returned to television to reach a mass audience with his nationally televised *L'ultimo del Paradiso/The Last of Paradise* (2002) monologue, in which the Tuscan comedian followed a politically satirical monologue with a brilliant recitation and commentary of Dante's declaration of faith in the last canto of *Paradise* from the *Divine Comedy*. Benigni would appear on television again on Adriano Celentano's television program *Rockpolitic* (2005) in which the Tuscan comic recited the last words of Socrates after reprising the letter-writing scene from *Totò, Peppino e la malafemmina/Totò, Peppino and the Hussy* (1956) with a mocking letter to Berlusconi, a scene Benigni and Troisi had redone in *Non ci rest ache piangere/Nothing Left But Tears* (1994) with a letter to the fundamentalist friar of the Renaissance, Girolamo Savonarola.

Italian Cinema in the New Millennium

Outside of television in recent years several historical genres with a rich tradition in Italian filmmaking have declined. For example, films depicting Roman antiquity had been a constant presence in Italian production since the silent period, from *Cabiria* (1914) and the ensuing Maciste or Hercules series that ran from the 1920s into the 1960s. The Italian western has also all but disappeared. A perhaps final attempt, Giovanni Veronesi's *Il mio West/Gunslinger's Revenge* (1998), starring Leonardo Pieraccioni as a pacifist doctor in conflict with his aging gunfighter father played by Harvey Keitel, was unable to rekindle international public

interest in the Italian-produced western. There have been periodic Italian horror films such as efforts by Dario Argento with *The Phantom of the Opera* (1998), *L'imbalsamatore/The Embalmer* (2002) by Matteo Garrone, or a revival of the zombie film with *Dellamorte dellamore/Cemetery Man* (1994) by Michele Soavi.

Another staple in Italian production, the Renaissance costume drama, has also nearly disappeared. Exceptions include Olmi's *Il mestiere delle armi/Profession of Arms* (2001)—a dramatization of the grueling if unexpected death of Renaissance military leader and knight Giovani dale Bande Nere (1498–1526) from small arms fire. The film has an epic pictorial sweep, evoking imagery from Renaissance painting and conveying the pace, attitudes, and threat to a patriarchal and aristocratic society from the technological change that gave a lowly foot soldier armed with an archbusier an advantage over a mounted knight. Pupi Avati made a film about the history of the holy shroud of Turin: *I cavallieri che fecero l'impresa/The Knights of the Quest* (2001).

Another period of Italian history that has long been a staple of Italian production was the *Risorgimento* Italian unification film. Films in this vein includes Blasetti's *1860* (1933) and important films from the postwar period such as Visconti's *Senso* (1854), *The Leopard* (1963), and Rossellini's *Viva l'Italia/Garibaldi* (1960). But after the 1960s, films on the period of Italian nation building became more infrequent, although there was an current of films depicting the pre-*Risorgimento* period such as Luigi Magni's *Nell'anno del signore . . . /The Conspirators* (1969), Monicelli's *Il marchese del grillo* (1981), *In nome del papa re/In the Name of the Pope King* (1977), and *Fiorile/Wild Flower* (1993).

An attempt at a resuscitation of the Italian operatic biopic was Monicelli's box office disappointment, *Rossini! Rossini!* (1991). Other films in this vein include *Stradivari* (1989), *Artemesia* (1997), a French coproduction about Cremonese artist Artemesia Gentileschi (1593–1652), as well as a biopic about a castrato opera singer *Farinelli* (1994), and Zeffirelli's *Callas Forever* (2002). Despite mixed reception for these films, there have been incredibly vibrant Italian musicals that have more regional than national cultural focus such as Roberta Torre's grotesque Sicilian-set mafia satire with a soundtrack of Nino D'Angelo songs, *Tano da morire/To Die for Tano* (1997), which may be one of the most undervalued films in modern Italian cinema history. Torre treats the topic of the mafia with an irreverence and irony worthy of Fellini or Wertmüller. Torre returned to the musical with an immigration update of the Broadway musical *West Side Story* (1961) (and Shakespeare tragedy) *Sud Side Story* (2000) and the mafia drama *Angela* (2002).

The Italian *retro* film has remained a steady presence with Emanuele Crialese's *Respiro/Grazia's Island* (2002) starring Valeria Golino in an update of Rossellini's *Stromboli* (1949). Guido Chiesa offered an adaptation of a Beppe Fenoglio resistance novel, *Il partigiano Johnny/Johnny the Partisan* (2000). Giuseppe Tornatore evoked the *maggiorata fisica* period with *Malena* (2000) starring Monica Bellucci. Ferzan Ozpetek's *La finestra di fronte/Facing Windows* (2003) features Massimo Girotti as Holocaust survivor whose memory loss brings him into contact with a troubled Roman family. Enzo Monteleone reexamined the story of defeated Italian armies in North Africa in WWII in *El Alamein the Line of Fire* (2002), themes seen previously in Giuliano Montaldo's *Tempo di uccidere/A Time to Kill* (1990) or even Alessandrini's *Giarabub* (1942).

The Italian *retro* film no longer relied exclusively on the WWII period to evoke a sense of nostalgia for Italian cultural identity. Davide Ferrario's *Dopo mezzanotte/After Midnight* (2004) is about the night watchman in Turin's landmark building, the Mole Antonielliana, which houses the city's cinema museum. Ferrario presents montages of stills from turn-of-the-century Turin juxtaposed with images through the decades to the present in which the vibrant shots of old Turin have a ghostly hold over the modern, empty cityscape of the present day. There is a love triangle between a fast food employee, a car thief, and a night watchman, a change from Turin's reputation as an industrial city.

The Italian *retro* film has extended its reach beyond the WWII period to the 1970s with Renato De Maria's grotesque *Paz* (2002), an adaptation of the comic strip by Andrea Pazienza about stoners at a dysfunctional university of Bologna humanities department in the 1970s. There were also 1970s radio movies—Mario Tullio Giordana's *I cento passi/One Hundred Steps* (2000) about an anti-mafia radio station in Sicily, which retains the essence and vitality of Italian culture in scenes such as the protagonist's radio address, which puts his criticism of the mafia in the poetic meter of the opening verses of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Guido Chiesa made *Lavorare con lentezza* (2004) about 1970s Bologna radio, and rock singer Luciano Ligabue ventured into filmmaking with *Radio Freccia/Radio Arrow* starring Stefano Accorsi in a film about 1970s drug addiction and radio broadcasts in the lower Po valley.

Gabriele Salvatore's critically acclaimed film *Io non ho paura/I'm not Scared* (2003) is an adaptation of a Niccolò Ammaniti novel set in 1978 about a ten-year-old boy who discovers that his father is part of a gang that has kidnapped another ten-year-old boy and chained him in a hole in the field of rural southern Italy. Nostalgia elements of the 1970s creep in with stills of Italian footballer Paolo Rossi or the solo dance of one of the kidnappers to Mina singing *Parole, parole, parole* (Words, words, words). The northern Italian leader of the kidnapping gang played by Diego Abbantuono, a frequent actor in Savatores's film, has a whose brutal and selfish worldview that complements the impatient dissatisfaction of the bewildered boy's father. There is a parallel between the numb and mindless cruelty that the children display in their games and the bumbling efforts of the adults to collect a ransom. Yet the children are glorified riding their bicycles through lush long-shot cinematography of grain fields by Italo Petriccione and a score by perennial master Ennio Morricone. The idea of demasking the hypocrisy of the adult world and the loving depiction of bicycles harkens back to the greatest moments of the Italian cinema as the film's young protagonist achieves a moral victory, saving the kidnapped boy from the murderous intentions of his father and his gang.

Hollywood productions portraying Italian themes have continued to rely on the cultural stereotypes of Italy as the country of the mafia and Latin lovers not only in films such as *The Godfather* (1972) or *Moonstruck* (1987) but also in the sense of Nordic romanticism about Italy, which pervades films such as *A Room with a View* (1985), Franco Zeffirelli's autobiographical *Tea with Mussolini* (1999), or the dramatization of the massacre of Italian army units at Cefalonia in *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* (2001) and the American tourist fantasy *Under the Tuscan Sun* (2003).

The tradition of Italian art cinema continued in the work of the diminishing cadre of established directors who have often made their films in English at times with little reference to Italy. After the international success of *The Last Emperor*

Figure 10.1 Roberto Benigni (Atillio) in *La tigre e la neve.*

(1987), which won the Oscar for best film, Bernardo Bertolucci continued to make films in English geared toward an international market such as his adaptation of the Paul Bowles's novel *The Sheltering Sky/Tè nel deserto* (1990) starring John Malkovich, *Little Buddha* (1993) with Keanu Reeves, or *Stealing Beauty* (1996) with Jeremy Irons and Liv Tyler. In *Besieged* (1998), Bertolucci returned to an Italian setting with a long-shot examination of an African woman wooed by an English pianist in Rome. *The Dreamers* (2003) could be read as a baby boomer's elogy to the excesses of his generation. The film is set during the student revolts in 1968 Paris and features incestuous, privileged, mixed twins who live a hermetic fortnight of fornication and neglect of household chores with a naïve American student in their posh apartment. The American eventually reveals the hypocrisy of the siblings' glorification of Maoist communist rhetoric by citing the ideals of nonviolence. *The Dreamers* is in the tradition of Tornatore's *Cinema Paradiso* with incessant cameos of the films lionized in the critical opinions of the French New Wave.

Other Italian directors making films in English include Visconti's disciple Franco Zeffirelli (1923–) who had specialized in Shakespeare adaptations in the 1960s and 1970s. Giuseppe Tornatore ventured into the English-language film with *The Legend of the Pianist on the Ocean* (1998). The panel for Italy's 2005 Oscar candidate, which eventually chose Cristina Comencini's child abuse drama *La bestia nel cuore/Don't Tell* (2005), considered selecting *Private* (2005) by Saverio Costanzo, a film in English depicting the Israeli—Palestinian conflict.

With his latest feature film, *La tigre e la neve/The Tiger and the Snow* (2005) Roberto Benigni leaves behind the examination of his Tuscan roots in *Pinocchio*

(2003). His clown persona takes the role of Atillio De Giovanni, a university professor/poet in Rome estranged from his wife Vittoria, after his affair with an English colleague. Atillio ventures to Iraq at the beginning of the American invasion to rescue Vittoria played expectedly by Nicoletta Braschi as she lay near death in an Iraqi hospital.

If Benigni's previous efforts contained references to the films of Fellini and Chaplin, in *The Tiger and the Snow* the point of departure is Sergio Leone's western, *Il buono, il brutto e il cattivo/The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966), whose last sequences are featured in a cameo. In Leone's film, three competing gunslingers enter the treacherous no-man's land between Union and Confederate armies in the American Civil War. The Good/Blondie (Clint Eastwood) and the Ugly/Tuco (Eli Wallach) take risks to help the common soldier on both sides of the conflict, although the film defers any real comment on the larger issues of the Civil War or its backdrops such as slavery. In Benigni's film the connection to the common suffering in the war is not expressed through the sort of anonymous but powerfully emblematic figures as in Leone's western. Instead the insurmountable issues of war and ethnic conflict are expressed through the character of an elite Iraqi poet, Fuad, a friend of Atillio who is recognized and celebrated in the West. Fuad, played by French actor Jean Reno, is an enigmatic figure who enters a mosque for prayers before his suicide, perhaps Benigni and screenwriter Vincenzo Cerami's attempt to express the contradictions and attraction between (self) destruction and religion in certain Islamic cultures. The film ends with the oft-repeated refrain of the Tom Waits's graveley song, "You can never Hold back Spring," as if the power of love and goodwill were sufficient to overcome the tragedy of the Iraqi War and its backdrops of Baathist authoritarianism, American invasion, and Islamic terrorism.

Leone commented that the narratives of his westerns recalled Carlo Goldoni's *commedia dell'arte* plays, which placed the clown Harlequin in predicaments between opposing masters. In Benigni's previous films comedic situations were created when his character was a victim of mistaken identity and insane societal assumptions. In *The Tiger and the Snow* the efficacy of carnivalesque reversals and oppositions changes as Atillio is not a victim as much as a *furbo*, a crafty opportunist, whose ingenuity helps him save Vittoria. Atillio improvises Harlinquin-like solutions: impersonating an Italian Red Cross doctor, looting a Bagdad bazaar, and running medical supplies through an American army checkpoint. Like Leone's characters in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, Atillio overcomes the chaos of the conflict to reach his goal without taking sides. Whenever he is cornered, Atillio repeats the line, "I am Italian," in English, as if a declaration of Italian identity were a protective charm and an excuse for his escapdes at the expense of Arabic straightmen. Yet Atillio's feeble claim for preferential treatment as an Italian is ignored. He gains release from a prisoner-of-war camp only when he is recognized as a innocuous poet. Ironically, when Atillio finally returns to Italy and presents himself as an Italian to an Italian customs agent, he is taken directly to jail, a consequence of his long-standing troubles within the Italian legal system, a setting where his comic persona has more relevance.

Literary adaptations constitute a trend that has continued to the present in the Italian cinema. Francesca Archibugi offered *Con gli occhi chiusi/With Closed Eyes* (1994) based upon the Federico Tozzi novel. Francesca Comencini directed an adaptation of a Italo Svevo novel *The Confessions of Zeno* with *Le parole di mio padre* (2002) as well as adaptations of her own novels including the Oscar candidate *La bestia nel cuore/Don't Tell* (2005). Mario Martone adapted an Elena Ferrante novel *L'amore molesto/Nasty Love* (1995). Perhaps the most important recent literary adaptation is Roberto Andò's *Il manoscritto del Principe/The Prince's Manuscript* (2000), a brilliant film in the best tradition of serious art cinema, which examines the backdrops of the composition of Tomasi de Lampedusa's novel *The Leopard*. Marco Risi adapted a Niccola Ammaniti novel with the apocalyptic film *L'ultmo capodanno/Humanity's Last New Years* (1998) starring Monica Bellucci. Gabriele Salvatores made an attempt to revive the *poliziesco* with an adaptation of Grazia Verasani's crime novel *Quo Vadis Baby?* (2005).

The *film politico* also remained a vibrant genre with the overlooked mafia film *La vita degli altri* (2002) by Nicola de Rinaldo or Roberto Faenza's *Alla luce del sole* (2005) about the efforts of the anti-mafia priest Don Giuseppe Puglisi starring Luca Zingaretti. Renzo Martinelli's *Vajont* (2001) deals with the political corruption leading to a tragic damburst in 1963. Michele Placido offered a story about a criminal gang in Rome with political undertones, *Romanzo Criminale/Crime Novel* (2005). Tulio Giordana turned to issues of immigration *Quando sei nato non puoi più nasconderti/Once You're Born You Can No Longer Hide* (2005). Marco Bellocchio resuscitated the seemingly defunct Catholic conspiracy movie of decades past such as Rosi's *Todo modo*, with *L'ora di religione Il sorriso di mia madre/The Religion Hour* (2002) starring Sergio Castellitto.

Perhaps the most compelling recent political film is Bellocchio's *Buon giorno notte/Good Morning Night* (2003), a paradoxical dramatization of the 1978 Aldo Moro kidnapping from the point of view of a female Red Brigade terrorist. After participating in the minute planning for the kidnapping, the female terrorist indulges herself in the moral dilemma regarding Moro's inevitable murder. Yet she chooses to suppress her doubts, pervert her conscience, ignore the objections of coworkers in her day job and help murder the lucid and ghostly Aldo Moro despite editing his plaintive letters to his family, political leaders, and the pope. Rather than putting a human face on the terrorist, the film becomes a metaphor for the power of an ideology, in this case the hyperbolic quest of the Red Brigades to foment a class-based civil war, to trap the human spirit. Similar themes are examined in *Attacco allo stato/Attack Against the State* (2006), a television miniseries starring Raul Bova in the tradition of the Italian political film. The miniseries convincingly examines the assassinations organized by a Red Brigade terrorist cell in late 1990s from the points of view of both the tenacious terrorists and the hardpressed police unit trying to stop them.

The Italian cinema evidenced a surprisingly vitality of directors working in the tradition of the *commedia all'italiana*. The slapstick comedy trio, Aldo Baglio, Giovanni Storti, and Giacomo Poretti, known as Aldo, Giovanni an Giacomo made the box office hit: *Tre uomini e una gamba/Three Men and A Leg* (1997). The film is a road movie that treats Italian society with due irreverence even spoofing

the neorealist tradition with a ridiculous black and white retro sequence about the struggle between a man who does not want to pay his tram fare and the ticket collector. In the film the narrative aura of neorealist films about common man stories is transferred to a trio of brothers whose status as *mantenuti* (freeloaders) is an ironic homage to neorealist aspirations about social justice. The film also pokes fun at elite culture. The "Leg" in the title refers to a modernist sculpture of a mannequin leg that the trio must transport to their uncouth but extremely wealthy father-in-law. The comic trio followed the success of *Three Man and a Leg* with further box office hits *Chiedimi se sono felice/Ask Me if I'm Happy* (2000), *La leggenda di Al, John and Jack/The Legend of Al, John and Jack* (2002) and *Tu conosci la Claudia?/Do you Know Claudia?* (2005). These films offer a grotesque slapstick ride through contemporary Italy as did Antonio Albanese's *L'uomo di acqua dolce* and Carlo Mazzacurati's *La lingua del santo/Holy Tongue* (2000).

Veteran comedian and director Carlo Verdone's (1950–) consistently made well-received films such as *Sono pazzo di Iris Blond/I'm Crazy about Iris Blond* (1996), *C'era un cinese in coma/A Chinese in a Coma* (2000), or *L'amore è eterno finche dura/Love Is Eternal while It Lasts* (2004), which have reached a level of social satire that compares favorably with the golden years of the *commedia all'italiana* in the 1960s. Verdone also acted in Giovanni Veronesi's resuscitation of the Italian episodic film with the box office hit *Manuale d'amore/Love Manual* (2005) from a Vincenzo Cerami story. These comedies and their warm reception by Italian audiences point to the vitality of the comedy genre in the Italian cinema.

Some directors, for example, Gabriele Muccino, Marco Ponti, and Paolo Virzì, and Fausto Brizzi with the box office hit *La notte prima degli esami/The Night Before the Exams* (2006) have offered coming of age stories in the tradition of the *commedia all'italiana* treating themes relevant to contemporary Italy with heavy irony. The extra peninsular validation of the Italian nostalgia or *retro* film has not helped these Italian directors to find an international audience for their films depicting a contemporary Italy. The film style of new directors evidences apprenticeships or technical influences from the style of television commercials with rapid tracking shots and frenetic handheld montages familiar from quick paced advertising spots. The themes of their films seem to confirm Pasolini's warnings (with a debt to McLuhan), about the power of mass media and consumer culture to envelope Italian cultural identity. The work of these directors reveals the level of cultural homogenization in turn-of-the-millennium Italy as if the country has ironically achieved a national culture based upon the shared media experience derived from television watching, a goal of cultural identity that had been seemingly unachievable despite attempts by nationalist, Communist, and Catholic cultural and political forces in generations past. Yet the style of these films is so reminiscent of advertising spots that the ultimate result is a cheapening of both characters and themes as just other examples of the mundane alienation produced in a society where the populations' primary concern is not survival, but entertainment. Some of the films by the latest generation of Italian directors combine great technical ability with deep concentration on themes of personal reality in particular in coming of age stories that have constituted a current in turn-of-the-millennium Italian cinema. Coming of age stories, even for adults, have been a steady theme in the

Italian cinema from Risi's *Il sorpasso/The Easy Life* (1962), Fellini's *La dolce vita* (1960), or *I vitelloni/The Young and the Passionate* (1953) and many, many others. But given the statistical data regarding Italy's extremely low birth rate and the continuing trend for Italians to delay parenthood, the coming of age stories in the tradition of the *commedia all'italiana* so frequent among the works of the latest generation of Italian directors take on added importance as a reflection for a country whose inhabitants struggle to match emotional with physical maturity.[3]

Gabriele Muccino (1967–) has made films with a regional focus, set in contemporary Rome. His brother Silvio Muccino stars in *Come te nessuno mai/But Forever in My Mind* (1999), a juvenile love story in the setting of political protests in a Roman high school. Muccino's concentration on Roman settings makes him an example of the regional aspect of the latest Italian cinema. His seeming remake of Fellini's *The Young and the Passionate* with the wealthy, affected Roman youth struggling with adulthood of the turn of the millennium in *Ultimo bacio/The Last Kiss* (2001) would apply coming of age issues not just to adolescents but to most of the characters in the film. There are the marital tensions of the main character's future mother-in-law played by Stefaina Sandrelli and her ex-lover played by Sergio Castellitto or the desire of the protagonist played by Stefano Accorsi and his friends to delay marriage and fatherhood in favor of high school sex, road trips, and dope smoking.

Muccino would repeat the coming of age theme in *Ricordati di me/Remember Me My Love* (2003), where again the difficulty in accepting maturity extends to an entire Roman nuclear family. The desire to be relevant to the media culture world threatens familial unity. In scenes that offer an update of Visconti's *Bellissima*, the sixteen-year-old daughter is callowly eager to trade sex for a short-run stint as a television dancing girl. The commodity of a young actor is not innocence or unaffected photogenic emotivity but a willingness to be sexually available to television producers. The father (Fabrizio Bentivoglio) is tormented by encounters with a former girlfriend (Monica Bellucci) who encourages his youthful aspirations to become a novelist. The mother (Laura Morante) regrets giving up an acting career for her family. The son (Silvio Muccino) is so desperate to make friends among his peers that he bribes his classmates with drugs so they will attend his birthday party. When the daughter achieves her goal and becomes a *velina* dancing girl on a television game show, her family and friends watch her fleeting appearances on television with solemn reverence. To break into the world of television is the achievement of ultimate status in contemporary culture. These characters from Muccino's film could exist in any developed nation. Their desires and identities are common to any society where mass media consumer culture has heavily influenced earlier ethnic identities not only in terms of religion and mores but also in language and even culture.

The Livornese director Paolo Virzì (1964–) teamed up with his brother the composer, Carlo, and coauthor Francesco Bruni to make a number of films with a regional focus set in contemporary Tuscany. *La bella vita/Living It Up* (1994) features Sabrina Ferilli, an actress with *maggiorata fisica* appeal, in the milieu of the decline of large industry in Italy in the late 1980s. The protagonist loses his job in a steel mill and then his wife to a television emcee before starting over by running

Figure 10.2 Sergio Castellitto (Giancarlo Iacovoni) and Alice Teghil (Caterina Iacovoni) in Paolo Virzì's *Caterina va in città.*

a campground on the Tuscan coast. With *Ferie d'agosto* (1996), Virzi again featured Sabrina Ferilli, in a vacation/beach movie featuring two families from opposite ends of the political/class spectrum who find themselves living in close quarters during a summer vacation. With *Ovosodo/Hardboiled Egg* (1997), Virzì repeated themes of class and political strife with another story set in Tuscany about a talented high school boy whose encounter with the spoiled son of an industrialist leads him to abandon hopes of social climbing through education. The ironic result is that his rebellious friend returns to his privileges of his class leaving the boy to work in a factory.

Virzì seemed to hit his stride as a director with *Caterina va in città/Caterina in the Big City* (2003), a film about an adolescent girl from the provinces who moves to Rome (figure 10.1). The film is in the tradition of Italian films that present the reactions of children or adolescents in order to criticize the assumptions and hypocrisies of the adult world. Caterina finds herself in a school attended by the children of the country's political and cultural elite where she is courted by two opposing gangs in a school—the leftist 1960s nostalgics and rightist fashion conscious girls. Each faction is led by the daughter of a rich and powerful father. One father (Claudio Amendola) is a Gianfranco Fini-like right-wing member of parliament, who enjoys his status in the political mainstream and seeks to distance himself from the Fascist nostalgics in his party. The other father is played by Flavio Bucci, a face familiar from the political films of the 1970s such as Elio Petri's *La classe operaia va in paradise/The Working Class Goes to Heaven* (1971) and *La proprietà non è un furto/Property is no longer Theft* (1973), as a revered leftist cultural figure

who in the film is enthralled by the excrement produced by his infant son. Caterina's father (Sergio Castellitto) yearns to enter the cultural and political elite and attempts to use his daughter's friendships to gain favor among their parents whom he recognizes from television talk shows. When Caterina's father finally gets a chance to appear on television, he embarrasses himself on the long-running nationally televised talk show, the *Maurizio Costanzo Show*. Caterina's father realizes that the cultural and political elite is beyond his reach and falls into debilitating depression. Ironically Caterina also has a television cameo at a party for the city's in-crowd. Her mundane answer to the celebrity reporter's question of whether she has anything to say, "Ciao," reveals the ubiquity and inanity of the world dominated by the mass media, a point driven home by cameos of Michele Placido, Roberto Benigni, and Maurizio Costanzo, and a passing scene of a Berlusconi-like figure hounded by reporters. Like Muccino's films, Virzì's *Caterina in the Big City* seems to confirm the struggle between indigenous cultural identity in the face of the power of consumer and mass media driven culture. Virzì also has a film style influenced by the television commercials. Some scenes in *Caterina in the Big City* were shot with two cameras to capture the improvisations of a roomful of nonprofessional actors, a technique now common in television commercials and reality television. Yet Virzì adds an improvisational verve and thematic depth that ironically recalls the ability of the neorealist period to create a documentary essence. The film also imparts a lesson, repeated from *Hard Boiled Egg* and *August Vacation*, about the importance of economic class in a Rome that is both Italy's cultural and political capital. When Caterina encounters the studious son of a wealthy family with whom she shares a passion for classical music, his patrician mother forces the son to reject Caterina after she mentions her lower-middle-class status. Although the fathers of Caterina's friends are seemingly from diametrically opposite ends of the political spectrum, upon meeting they demonstrate an elitist solidarity that deepens Caterina's father's alienation and depression. In a central scene, Caterina's teacher asks a student to describe the difference between those on the political Left and Right. He ironically answers in an almost carnival-like reversal of traditional political identity that the rich and privileged are of the Left and the common working people are of the Right.

To escape this media driven society, Caterina's mother played by Margherita Buy seeks to recreate in Rome the same sort of microcosm of local friendships and relations that she enjoyed in the provinces. She has an affair with a neighbor who is connected to life in their apartment block. Caterina dreams of escaping her Italian identity by dating an Australian boy next door who seems unencumbered by the ambitions of Caterina's father. In one of the last scenes a game of charades at the beach results in the answer *La dolce vita*, Fellini's film about 1960s Rome, in which Marcello Mastroianni played a reporter whose aspirations for literary recognition are ironically shared by Caterina's defeated father. In *Caterina in the Big City*, Caterina and her father retrace the steps of Matroianni's character in turn-of-the-millennium Rome, although Virzì's film, unlike Fellini's, avoids much reference to the city's underclasses. The film ends with a cameo of a popular television show about missing persons, *Chi l'ha visto*/*Who's Seen Him*, where

Caterina's father's disappearance on his motorcycle becomes more relevant as a media moment than to his own family, who no longer miss him.

In 1948, Vittorio De Sica's *Ladri di biciclette/The Bicycle Thief* had chronicled a protagonist's struggle to reclaim his stolen bicycle as a symbol reaffirming his position as the head of a humble reconstruction-era Roman family after the humiliations of the war. Antonio's goals were stable employment and the health and sustenance of his family. In *Caterina in the Big City*, Caterina's father lovingly restores a flashy Moto Guzzi motorcycle in turn-of-the-millennium Rome. Caterina's father does not face the same basic threat for survival as the protagonist in *The Bicycle Thief*. The Moto Guzzi motorcycle is irrelevant to his ability to earn a living as a teacher. Yet the motorcycle is important for his self-image of independence and vitality, traits vaunted by the mass media consumer culture. The goal of Caterina's father is not simple sustenance, health, family, and work but the additional charge of media-driven fame.

The centrality of coming of age issues examined in the films of Muccino and Virzì in turn-of-the-millennium Italy was not lost on Roberto Benigni whose *Pinocchio* (2002) anticipated many of the themes in Muccino's and Virzì's films by offering a faithful adaptation of Collodi's foundational coming of age fable. The film was heavily influenced by the participation of the former staff of Federico Fellini, which gave the film its cinematic and stylistic imprint. It was also a top domestic box office film, relatively well received by Italian audiences who brought their children to the theater. The ability of Italian audiences to accept Benigni (1952–) in the leading role as a boy puppet is a telling indication of the nationwide attitudes about delaying adulthood. However, the film also created controversy, receiving criticism that included a political undertone whereby critics sought to distance themselves from the Mazzinian, republican precepts of Collodi's cautionary tale. The film elicits comparison with an earlier adaptation of Collodi's fable for Italian television by Luigi Comencini, *Le avventure di Pinocchio/The Adventures of Pinocchio* (1972), starring Nino Manfredi as Geppetto and featuring a brilliant musical score by Fiorenzo Carpi. Comencini's adaptation ably communicates the misery and poverty of nineteenth-century Italy. The struggle for survival depicted in Comencini's film at the heart of Collodi's fable and perhaps still in the collective memory of spectators in the 1970s, but was problematic for Benigni to evoke and represent for an Italian audience in the 2000s.

Gianni Amelio also made a film about trouble accepting maturity with *Le chiavi di casa/The Keys to the Houose* (2004) in which Kim Rossi Stuart (who appeared as Lucignolo—Lampwick in Benigni's *Pinocchio*) portrays a man who abandoned his mentally retarded son at birth and tries to reenter his life 15 years later. The film recalls Rossi Stuart's earlier role as a mentally disturbed young man in Alessandro D'Alatri's *Senza pelle/No Skin* (1994). Coming of age issues were also relevant to Nanni Moretti who continued to work in a personal microcosm in such films as *Aprile* (1998) about baby boomer angst due to the birth of his son, an event arguably singular enough for a member of Moretti's generation in an Italy with historically low birth rates to be considered material for a feature film. In the critically successful *La stanza del figlio/The Son's Room* (2001), Moretti offers a look at a family that must grieve the accidental death of their teenage son, gaining the

maturity to deal with the inevitable tragedies of life. Asia Argento, daughter of Italian horror film director Dario Argento, followed acting roles in Hollywood with the direction of the autobiographical *Scarlet Diva* (2000), yet another film about a protagonist attempting to achieve maturity and even parenthood, in which Argento seems to play an aged version of one of Caterina's priviledged and debauched adolescent friends in *Caterina in the Big City*. Marco Ponti's (1967–) *Santa Maradona* (2001), filmed in the frenetic tracking shot and handheld camera style familiar from television commercials, chronicles the struggle of a college graduate played by Stefano Accorsi to find employment that will allow him to remain in the middle class. Pupi Avati offered two films on a similar theme: *Il cuore altrove/The Heart is Elsewhere* (2003) about a 35-year-old virginal Latin teacher's struggle to establish independence and *Ma quando arrivano le ragazze* (2005) about a young man's flirtation with a career as a jazz musician, a passion inspired by his father. The preponderance of coming of age stories in the Italian cinema, which not only examine the course to maturity for youths but also for adults, demonstrated how cinema has the ability to reflect larger issues over a specific time period; in the case of Italian cinema, the Italian population's demographic challenges at the turn of the millennium.

Despite often warm domestic and critical reception, most of the works above did not attract wide international distribution in the increasingly fierce competition for foreign-language and art house cinemas. An effort like Giuseppe Piccioni's (1953–) *Luce dei miei occhi/Light of My Eyes* (2001), mixes a tale of a single mother and an underachieving limousine driver with the underworld of organized crime and illegal immigration, recalls the long-shot style of art cinema of decades past, and offers an unsettlingly vibrant vision of contemporary Italy. Piccioni's follow-up, *La vita che vorrei/The Life I Would Like* (2005) cast the same romantic pair, Sandra Ceccarelli and Luigi Lo Cascio, as self-absorbed actors in a remake of William Wellman's *A Star Is Born* (1937), which concludes with actors' acceptance of parenthood rather than Fredric March's suicide as in Wellman's original.

Perhaps more than any other director Silvio Soldini's (1958–) career exemplifies the difficulties faced by directors interested in contemporary Italian themes. Soldini's efforts—*L'aria serena dell'ovest/The Peaceful Air of the West* (1990)—featured a concentration on the microcosm of Italian interpersonal relationships despite the changes in global culture and history. In the case of *The Peaceful Air of the West*, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the change to the Italian and world political landscape did not seem to have a direct effect on the lives of the protagonists. Soldini has also cast his eye on the actual cultural transformations in Italy and Europe with films that deal specifically with immigration with a unlikely but tender love story between a Gypsy girl and an Italian man in *Un anima divisa in due/Brucio nel vento/Burning in the Wind* (2002).

With *Pane e tulipani/Bread and Tulips* (2000), Soldini made a film that plays on the limitations of contemporary Italian cultural identity with an echo to the film *retro*. The film tapped into the sense of Nordic romanticism about southern Europe, which appears in the work of the Finnish Kaurismaki brothers like *Arvottomat/The Worthless* (1982) or in Danish director Lone Scherfig's *Italian for Beginners* (2000). Soldini's film was rewarded with international distribution and

recognition. *Bread and Tulips* is the tale of a contemporary Italian housewife who goes to Venice after she is forgotten at a truck stop by the tour group after a visit to the archeological site at Paestum. Instead of returning straight home to Pescara, she hitchhikes to Venice and meets an Icelander actually in touch with the beauty of Italian culture in contrast to her husband and son so immersed in the banalities of contemporary life. The Icelander delights in the delicacies of traditional Venetian cuisine and is able to recite Italian poetry including Ludivico Ariosto's verses describing the unlikely love story between the humble servant Medoro and Lady Angelica from *Orlando furioso* that leads the knight Orlando to madness. The housewife finds an accordion, the traditional instrument of popular culture, in the Icelander's closet and becomes reacquainted with her own cultural identity.[4]

Italy, like other European countries, relied upon government subsidies in order to maintain a film industry in an era of declining distribution possibilities, a situation that would reverse in 2005 with the reduction of these state subsidies. The irony with the dependence on government funding is that Italian cinema has long been a popular cinema. At the high points of film production in the early 1960s, the works of critically lauded directors were also popular with the Italian public such as the top three box office films of 1960: Fellini's *La dolce vita*, De Sica's *La ciociara/Two Women* (1960), Visconti's *Rocco e I suoi fratelli/Rocco and His Brothers* (1960). There was a similar public interest in the 1970s in Bertolucci's *Novecento/1900* (1976) and Pasolini's *Decameron* (1971), Scola's *C'eravamo tanto amati/We Loved Each Other So Much* (1974) and Wertmüller's *Pasquallino Settebellezze/Seven Beauties* (1975). Massimo Troisi and Roberto Benigni continued the connection between popular and critically recognized cinema into the 1980s 1990s with *Nothig Left But Tears, Il postino/The Postman* (1994), and *La vita è bella/Life is Beautiful* (1997).

If considered objectively in terms of box office production and market share, the Italian cinema is not in a situation that is dramatically different from previous periods of difficulty in the 1920s, 1940s, or 1980s. What has changed for the Italian cinema is the level of continued international recognition and sustained distribution for its products abroad. The films from the Italian cinema in 2003 that finished in the domestic top ten—Ferzan Ozpetek's *Facing windows*, Gabriele Muccino's *Remember Me, My Love*, Carlo Verdone's *Ma che colpa abbiamo noi/What Fault is it of Ours*, Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Dreamers*, Gabriele Salvatores's *I'm not Scared*, Paolo Virzì's *Caterina in the Big City*, and Marco Bellocchio's *Good Morning, Night*—compare well with the Italian canon and received a commercial consensus from the Italian public. Yet these latest efforts by Italian directors did not break out of domestic distribution to attain the sort of international recognition and awards historically vital to the Italian cinema. Despite the quality of its products, the lack of possibility for international distributiuon and the structural changes to the domestic film distribution theatrical network have challenged the Italian cinema's ability to remain a vital force in the nation's culture, a prospect shared by many national cinemas.

The cinema was introduced in Italy, as in much of the world, by the early 1900s. Television arrived in Italy, again as in much of the world, in the mid-1950s, an event that brought dramatic changes to the Hollywood film industry and later to

the Italian film industry. Some 100 years after the introduction of cinema and 50 years after the introduction of television, there is further competition from new forms of entertainment media such as video games, the Internet, satellite and cable television, even television and film broadcasts via cellular telephone. Maverick directors Barbara Seghezzi and Marcello Mencarini shot a 93-minute film *Nuovi comizi d'amore* (2006) entirely on a Nokia N90 cell phone. The title is a homage to Pasolini's documentary *Comizi d'amore/Assembly of Love* (1963) about the sexual attitudes of Italians. Such new formats will undoubtedly have further impact on the number of theaters available for the traditional market release of a film, and will continue to contribute to changes in the Italian cinema and the distribution of visual entertainment media in the future.