

**Daniela Manetti**, *La settima arte. Storia e personaggi dall'industria cinematografica italiana*, prefazione di Franco Amatori, Marsilio, Venezia, 2020

This volume fills a gap on the history of the film industry – seen as a key element of Italian development – and on the relationship between art and market seen from the perspective of the history of communication. The book focuses its attention on the history of the film industry, as stated by Franco Amatori in the introduction and I will underline some of its novelties. The first interesting aspect is the film industry development model after WWI following the entrance of banks, at a time when cinema was becoming a mass phenomenon, and Hollywood talking films were putting into crisis the Italian film industry, before the Recession. The way out of the crisis took the shape of the control measures imposed by the Fascist State aimed at creating a propaganda film industry.

Actually, as the book demonstrates through the analysis of different sources and literature, the measures introduced actually stimulated the renewal of the industry which was consolidated in the Post War period. Political intervention allowed the industry to participate in the great transformation of contemporary Italy thus belying the thesis that the film industry was protected more than other more dynamic and innovative undertakings. The author had already proposed this thesis in a previous essay where he contradicted the liberal criticism by Ernesto Rossi against protectionism and “lo Stato cinematografaro” (aka Film-maker State).<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, this point of view on the industry also provides a contribution to cultural history by linking commercial ends to cultural products. I will go back to this second aspect in my conclusions.

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<sup>1</sup> E. Rossi, *Lo stato cinematografaro*, Florence, Parenti, 1959

## BOOK REVIEWS

In particular, in this volume the author analyses the case of Gustavo Lombardo's film studios: founded in Naples in 1905 with the name SIGLA operating only as a distribution and rental company, it later became the film production company Titanus with headquarters in Rome (1928). Titanus prospered in the post War period under the guidance of Goffredo Lombardo, the son of Gustavo. The research carried out in the book has obtained two important results because the book is not only a study of the market but it is also an analysis of the film language transformation, with cinema allowing filmmakers to criticise modernity through "neo-realism" and "comedy". In this context the role of intellectuals changed deeply, thanks to the technical innovations and the reproducibility of art as an object of consumption. After WWII, Titanus worked with the great European and American filmmakers but didn't succeed in overcoming the economic crisis of the 60's following the production of "Sodoma e Gomorra" and "Il Gattopardo" by Luchino Visconti. As explained by Daniela Manetti, bankruptcy was avoided only by giving up production; Titanus continued to operate only in the distribution sector and benefitted from its entrance in the TV sector, adapting to the taste of the TV viewers. To make a long story short, this book confirms the thesis of the culture historians Forgac and Grondle, according to which film industry played a key role in shaping Italian identity and in preparing the consumer society.<sup>2</sup>

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