

CARTOGRAPHY OF FILM GENRES IN THE ITALIAN CINEMA

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Research on film genres, especially in the Italian tradition, has often been characterized as particular: single genres (for example the inquiry on the Italian comedy) or single trends (the exemplar case is the spaghetti western) have been investigated, at times with great specificity, without considering the overall frame, which treats the development of the history of national cinema, or the cultural context in which they were placed. There certainly exist studies of the field as a whole. However, it seems that the analysis which will highlight the permanence of certain genres (one can think of melodrama which takes different forms in the twenties, thirties, and between the forties and fifties, yet maintains very similar narrative structures) or will highlight the relation between film genres and narrative trends in other media (television, for example; one can think of movies from the fifties based on literature or on TV scenarios) has yet to be developed. Today there is a revival of interest in film genres, especially evident in the international domain. The key to this revival seems to be the idea that these genres are dynamic phenomena, capable of mutation and reorganization, and consequently phenomena that elude the classificatory approach characteristic of traditional research on film genre. Nevertheless, Italian cinema has not significantly positioned genres in the articulate and dynamic communicative processes nor it has promoted any relationships between film and other cultural and artistic series. In addition, research on Italian film genres lacks an articulate mapping of overall phenomena from the historical and philological points of view (a start in this direction was made Quaresima, Raengo, Vichi in *La nascita dei generi cinematografici*,¹ even if this work is not exclusively dedicated to Italian cinema) as well as from the points of view of fruition and consumption.

The proposal of the Cartography of Italian Film Genres aims to give a comprehensive view of the inquired area. In particular, the research will aim at recognizing the recurrence of some structures of genre, over years, in different types of cinematic production, by individuating constant and variant in styles and narratives. In addition, the research attempts to reconstruct the characteristics of different genres and trends of Italian motion pictures: those well-known, as Italian comedy, as well as those less known such as fantasy, by tracing the appearance, the development and the decline of every genre. Furthermore, the research will compare every genre with analogue genres in the other national cinematographies, or with analogue genres in other types of symbolic production (literature, television, etc.). In the end, the research will aim at the reconstruction of the production as well as cultural context which marks the appearance of every genre and the main patterns of genres consumption. In the background, there will be two other points of interest. In the first place, a reflection on the role of genre in mass culture will be developed (as it is well known, according to one of the current hypothesis in the mass-mediology what is

consumed are genres, not texts). In this regard, the problem of authorship and similar problems will be examined. In the second place, the relationship between the structure of the genre and broader narrative structures will be investigated, connecting the genre with the symbolic productions specific for every society. The problem of forms and proper functions of narration (for example, the capacity of the story to give a “model of reality” and, at the same time, to activate an “entertainment”) will be treated in this context with significance. The methodological research will be focused on relations between genre and serial production. The research aims to trace the map of Italian film genres by significantly advancing the knowledge of the field through publications and conferences as well as by using specific tools (bibliographies, filmographies, base data) which will favor further inquiries. The research aims to achieve the following objectives:

a) Filmic and bibliographic reconnaissance of materials inherent to the research will be carried out in film archives, libraries, and at national and foreign foundations. Publication of the filmographies and bibliographies of general as well as specific character, concerning the single genre and on the inquiry of every unit of research. Realization of a computerized data base will make all the gathered materials available locally as well as via Internet.

b) Realization of the editorial series specifically dedicated to the scientific contributions produced by the units of research, publication of monographic international journals and the organization of international conferences. Publication of essays in the already existing editorial series.

c) Realization of the computerized data base, accessible locally as well as via Internet, constructed by the indexes of consumption (takings and attendance) and by the testimonials of the spectator experiences (in the form of the testimony as well as in form of memory of consumption).

d) Establishment of a digital archive of shots of situations, places, characters and gestures and the individuation of the isotopies and variants from a thesaurus of key words which allows access to images and the formal and narratological individuation of the underground connections between the genres.

e) Editing of contributions and results of research oriented and destined to converge in the editorial project of the History of Italian cinema promoted by the National School of Cinema (Scuola Nazionale di Cinema).

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1 L. Quaresima, A. Raengo, L. Vichi (a cura di), *La nascita dei generi cinematografici/ The Birth of Film Genres* (Udine: Forum, 1999). Atti del VI Convegno internazionale di studi sul cinema. Università degli Studi di Udine 1998.