



# Multipolarity in the Post-War Film Industries: An Introduction

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In this article, based on the evidence brought by TRAFFIC - Tracing American and Foreign Funds in Italian Cinema (1945-1962), a research project we were involved in the last few years and focused on the Italian case, we advance a set of methodological and operational hypotheses for the study of international relations in post-war cinema, developed in dialogue with the contributions collected in this issue. Our central claim is that a multipolar model of productive, distributive, and cultural relations was in place, in the years surrounding the Second World War, with timelines and durations that varied across geographical contexts and in relation to the specific challenges faced by different film industries. This model places under strain a fixed conception of centre-periphery relations, already questioned in transnational approaches to European cinema, as well as a monolithic understanding of the cultural and industrial dominance of American cinema, which nevertheless remained the key reference point in the global system.

After having summarized the scientific discussion on transnational cinemas to determine which elements can be retained and what new tools are needed to outline and study what we consider a multipolar system, in the following section we delve into the Italian case, focusing particularly on the trade association ANICA. During the post-war period, ANICA was structured as an interface between different systems, managing current practices such as export and co-production instructions and film credit guarantees, as well as strategic actions such as defining agreements and conducting periodic revisions. Two specific examples relating to the definition of exchange and co-production agreements with the film industries of Mexico and Yugoslavia illustrate ANICA's concrete functioning in relation to other national and foreign entities, including public and private stakeholders. Finally, we reflect on the concept of borders as a key element in the relationship between film systems and infrastructures.

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Until only a couple of years ago, any discussion of international film distribution and circulation (or any other aspect of the entertainment industry) centred on keywords such as tariffs, customs obligations, production quotas, and currency barriers would have seemed purely archaeological, if not surreal. Yet recent political events have altered the industry landscape, as well as the perceived relevance—and even the very visibility—of such issues.

In this article, based on the evidence produced by a research project we were involved in over the last few years, which focused on the Italian case, we advance a set of methodological and operational hypotheses for the study of international relations in post-war cinema, developed in dialogue with the contributions collected in this issue. Our central claim is that a multipolar model of productive, distributive, and cultural relations was in place, in the years surrounding the Second World War, with timelines and durations that varied across geographical contexts and in response to the specific challenges faced by different film industries. This model casts doubt on a fixed notion of centre-periphery relations, already questioned in transnational approaches to European cinema (Bergfelder 2005), as well as a monolithic understanding of the cultural and industrial dominance of American cinema, which nevertheless remained the key reference point in the global system (Steinhart 2019). In short, particularly when observed from the perspective of the infrastructures and intermediary bodies that facilitate and regulate exchanges, this period reveals the emergence of eccentric trajectories of circulation: trajectories in which the system's alleged peripheries communicate directly with one another; regional production and regulation hubs (as exemplified by the gradual rise of Europe); and small national industries connected to the global industry without necessarily occupying an ancillary position vis-à-vis major players.

The need to activate bilateral and multilateral connections, the 'diplomatic' circulation of films and creative or technical staff, as well as the symbolic and industrial dominance of American cinema, are certainly not phenomena exclusive to the post-war era (Locatelli 2010). They do, however, develop within a framework of conditions that differs from previous decades, owing to factors such as the impact of domestic policies that established protective and incentive mechanisms in many countries (Di Chiara 2025); the antitrust measures imposed on the American industry; the growing culturalization of cinema on a global scale (Grieverson and Wasson 2008); the division into spheres of influence during the Cold War and the instrumentalization of film culture within that context (Lee 2020); the emergence of 'new cinemas' indebted to the neorealist experience (Giovacchini and Sklar 2012); and currency restrictions that limited—at least until 1958 in Europe—the circulation of goods and services (Carli 1988; Dezseri 2000). It could be argued (and the following articles definitely suggest) that, for various reasons besides those already mentioned, including the Soviet Union's relatively limited influence as a cinematic power, substantial traces of inter-war multipolarism remained in the global film industry after the Second World War, while the overall geopolitical system moved towards its new and effective bipolar order (Gaddis 1986).

Taking these considerations into account, we would like to propose two hypotheses. According to John Gaddis, multipolarity requires "sophisticated leadership" (Gaddis 1986, 108), and therefore extremely high-quality human resources as well as complex, interdependent structures in a system that is particularly difficult, and sometimes cumbersome, to operate. Hence, the first methodological hypothesis is that, from an industrial history perspective, priority attention should be granted to intermediary bodies, internal nodes within networks of relationships (Mehta and Mukherjee 2021), and those actors capable of connecting otherwise distant realities. Such connecting functions may be performed by sectors of the state bureaucracy, trade associations, workers' organizations, as well as particularly skilled individuals such as managers, functionaries, and sales agents, to name a few examples. The quality of the people involved is reflected in the situations in which they interact, such as festivals, official meetings, and institutional committees. The second, and mostly working, hypothesis is that the activities of such intermediary bodies display a certain degree of functional equivalence (Luhmann 1982; van Deth 1998; Di Chiara 2025), to the extent that they may adopt similar solutions to tackle equivalent problems and develop comparable—in some instances interoperable—structures, according to a criterion of institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

Even focusing on international connections, the national dimension of the film industry is impossible to ignore; rather, it must be understood against the backdrop of the transnational relations that characterized the post-war period. In the following paragraph, we will summarize the scientific discussion on transnational cinemas to determine which elements can be retained and what new tools are needed to outline and study what we consider a multipolar system. Below, we examine the Italian case, focusing particularly on the trade association ANICA, the Italian National Association of Film Industries. During the post-war period, ANICA was structured as an interface between different systems; it managed current practices such as export and co-production instructions and film credit guarantees, as well as strategic actions such as drawing up agreements and conducting periodic revisions. Two specific examples relating to the formalization of exchange and co-production agreements with the Mexican and Yugoslavian film industries illustrate how ANICA operated in relation to other national and foreign entities, including public and private stakeholders. Finally, we reflect on the concept of borders as a key element in the relationship between film systems and infrastructures.

## SCALES, FLOWS, AND INTERDEPENDENCIES

The gradual questioning of the *national cinema* paradigm has generated a broad, multi-layered body of scholarship aimed at revealing the interdependencies that have historically characterized film industries and film cultures. Within this framework, categories such as co-production, *transnational cinema*, and *world cinema* have been deployed—often in overlapping and intersecting ways—

to move beyond a conception of film systems as self-contained entities, and to reshape the vocabulary through which production, distribution, and circulation are analysed. While grounded in different premises and analytical priorities, these bodies of work share an interest in processes that cross national borders; at the same time, they raise questions of scale (i.e. national, supranational and regional) and, more broadly, of which analytical approaches prove effective when the object of inquiry is the industrial and economic dimension of cinema.

Since Steve Neale's groundbreaking work on European art cinema (1981), studies in industrial and cultural film history have shown how a film's 'nationality' is often the outcome of administrative and industrial negotiations, rather than the expression of a particular cultural or aesthetic identity. This insight has been taken up in different ways within research on collaborations among film industries, most notably in the literature on co-productions, which has often approached cinema as a regulated economic activity by focusing on agreements, legal frameworks, state incentives and certification procedures (Baltruschat 2010; Hammett-Jamart, Mitric and Redvall 2018; Parc 2020; Stubbs 2021). Research conducted in this vein has highlighted the role of states and public policies in structuring film production, as well as the ways in which private industry interacts with fiscal and financial arrangements. At the same time, an emphasis on the co-production framework tends to privilege a predominantly bilateral logic centred on contractual relationships between pairs of national actors, overlooking more complex configurations in which production is embedded within multi-level networks. In particular, co-production studies do not always fully account for the role of distribution and exhibition—that is, those industrial arrangements that regulate access to markets and which often operate according to different logics to those of the production. In many contexts, market access is determined by actors, infrastructures, and alliances operating across different scales, revealing differentiated positions and negotiated hierarchies that exceed the framework of the co-production agreement.

The notion of *transnational cinema* has frequently functioned as an umbrella term within this field of research, encompassing assorted approaches and objects, including a substantial portion of the scholarship on co-productions and industry partnerships. As Higbee and Lim (2010) have noted, the term 'transnational' has been employed in highly diverse ways, to the point of risking a loss of analytical precision. They distinguish between uses focused on the one hand on industrial dynamics, regional or supranational frameworks, and on the other on diasporic or postcolonial perspectives. This plurality of meanings points both to the productivity of the concept and to its intrinsic ambiguity, which derives in part from its capacity to hold together different scales, objects, and methodological orientations rather than from any single, fixed definition.

Questions of scale thus emerge as a central and recurring issue. As it has often been observed, the 'national' does not disappear with the adoption of transnational perspectives, but continues to operate as a regulatory, fiscal, and symbolic infrastructure, shaping the conditions under which films are produced and circulated (Hjort 2010; Hjort and Mackenzie 2000; Christie 2013). In this sense,

the transnational does not replace the national, but overlaps with it, producing hybrid configurations in which local, national, regional, and supranational levels coexist and interact. In many cases, these levels are further split by sub-national instances—local administrations, fiscal authorities, territorial bodies—that intervene directly in production and distribution processes, contributing to a multi-layered, uneven set of perspectives. Bergfelder has consistently stressed this point, warning that the adoption of overly broad or weakly specified scales risks obscuring the concrete workings of industrial and regulatory arrangements (Bergfelder 2005). Recent scholarship has also responded to these issues by shifting attention from scale to relation, foregrounding networks as an analytical framework for understanding industrial interconnections. As argued by Mehta and Mukherjee (2021), a network perspective makes it possible to account for transregional configurations of capital, labour, technologies, and practices that cut across national and supranational boundaries without stabilizing them into a single level of analysis. And, although they do not always deal strictly with the issue of transnationalism, many studies in the field of new cinema history have investigated micro-histories and highly localized contexts relating to production, distribution, film exhibition and, above all, moviegoing, with a view to the transnational comparability of such phenomena (Sedgwick 2022; Treveri Gennari, van de Vijver, Ercole 2024).

A significant portion of the scholarship associated with transnational cinema has sought to apply this category to the analysis of industrial processes, focusing on the mobility of capital, professionals, and production models. These studies have productively challenged static ideas of film systems and highlighted the relational character of film industries. Their analytical value lies in demonstrating that circulation is never automatic or unmediated. In fact, the movement of films across borders is structured by infrastructures, territorial rights, distribution alliances, and regulatory regimes that actively select, channel, and delimit access to markets (Jones 2016 and 2024; Higson 2018; Holdaway and Scaglioni 2018). From this perspective, circulation appears less as a neutral flow than as the outcome of negotiated arrangements embedded in specific industrial and institutional contexts. A similar point has been made in more recent scholarship on digital distribution. As Lobato (2019) has shown, even ostensibly deterritorialized forms of digital audiovisual circulation remain structured by territorial rights, regulatory regimes, infrastructural constraints, and platform-specific geographies, underscoring the persistence of local frictions within global distribution systems.

In the European context, transnational perspectives have often been deployed to question consolidated national narratives and to address processes of regional integration, highlighting the long-standing circulation of films, professionals, and capital across national boundaries. At the same time, this literature has also drawn attention to the risk that 'Europe' may function as an identity-based frame rather than as an analytical tool, substituting the scrutiny of industrial and institutional arrangements with a culturally inflected notion of European-ness. Issues of scale therefore remain central: while the national framework

may appear restrictive, supranational perspectives can prove too broad or insufficiently effective to account for how production, distribution, and regulation are organized in concrete terms. Elsaesser's analysis of the relationship between European cinema and Hollywood is a recurring point of reference in this debate. He conceptualizes this relationship not as a simple polar opposition but as a field of interdependencies, negotiations, and forms of resistance articulated through economies of scale, distribution infrastructures and differentiated production arrangements (Elsaesser 2005). Work in the industrial history of American cinema has further shown how Hollywood's dominance operates through intermediaries and specific market configurations rather than direct or uniform control (Guback 1985; Govil 2015), allowing power relations to remain central to the analysis without collapsing them into a rigid centre–periphery model.

Alongside these approaches, transnational perspectives that spotlight questions of representation, identity, and cultural positioning have also focused on issues of circulation, often examined through case studies and specific circuits of visibility (Higbee and Lim 2010). This strand of research has been crucial in illuminating how cinematic forms, styles, and narratives participate in broader processes of cultural negotiation across borders. At the same time, when circulation is approached primarily in terms of symbolic visibility and recognition, there is a risk of treating movement as self-evident. In such accounts, the conditions under which films, styles, or narratives circulate—institutional frameworks, regulatory constraints, economic negotiations, and differentiated access to distribution circuits—may recede into the background, while the fact of circulation is emphasized over the arrangements and frictions that shape and delimit it.

Attention to the circulation of stylistic forms further complicates this picture. Transnational scholarship has shown how aesthetic models—such as modes of realism, genre conventions, or narrative formats—travel across borders and acquire new meanings as they are embedded in distinct industrial, institutional, and cultural contexts. Approached in this way, style itself emerges as a mobile resource whose circulation cannot be separated from the professional networks, production practices and regulatory environments that enable or constrain its movement (see e.g. Pitassio 2019; Giovacchini and Sklar 2012).

This emphasis on representational and symbolic circulation has been amplified in debates on the notion of *world cinema*, which developed as a project aimed at decentring the canon and challenging Eurocentrism. Rather than positing a homogeneous global horizon, Ďurovičová and Newman (2010) stress the constructed, relational and contested nature of scale; their approach looks at cinemas operating “above the level of the national but below the level of the global” (Ďurovičová 2010, ix). This perspective presents cinema as a set of contact zones, shaped by historically situated interactions between geopolitical imaginaries, institutional frameworks, and aesthetic practices, without resolving these tensions into an all-encompassing global view. Other strands within the world cinema debate have advanced more explicitly programmatic models, seeking to redefine the global field through categories such as plurality, het-

erogeneity and multiple modernities (Nagib, Perriam and Dudrah 2011). These approaches have been crucial in shifting the focus away from established canons; however, they have also often been influenced by a broader interest in a global perspective presented in progressive terms as an open and inclusive space that challenges established national hierarchies. Within this framework, the emphasis on minor, marginal, or alternative cinematic practices has productively reoriented critical perspectives; at times, however, it has also contributed to shifting attention away from the economic, industrial, and institutional conditions of production and circulation. In such cases, close attention to texts and representational dynamics can tend to be overstated, when not systematically linked with the industrial arrangements and economic conditions that shape their production, circulation, and visibility.

Taken together, these strands of research have significantly reshaped the field of film studies, bringing to light interdependencies and processes long relegated to the margins. That being said, recurrent limitations emerge when attention turns to the industrial and economic dimensions of cinema. These include difficulties in moving between different levels of analysis without collapsing them into one another or separating them too rigidly; a tendency to prioritize circulation over the analysis of enabling conditions; and an insufficient focus on the infrastructures and arrangements that regulate market access. Therefore, a careful examination of the formation of national industrial hubs and the connections created between them must necessarily begin with the established structures that oversaw these processes. Greater accessibility to information and archival data relating to the Italian case, and in particular to ANICA—whose archives we have studied in the sections concerning international relations—makes it easier for us to reconstruct this organization and observe how it functioned in significant situations involving the building of relationships with other countries.

## **A SMALL STATE DEPARTMENT: ANICA AS AN EXAMPLE OF A TRANSNATIONAL, MULTIPOLAR ACTIVITY**

ANICA (the Italian film producers' and distributors' trade association) provides an interesting example of the dynamics that gave rise to multipolar infrastructures during the early internationalization of the European film industry in the 1950s. As a major stakeholder in one of Europe's leading film industries, ANICA was able to expand its networking activities within the inner workings of the Italian neo-corporatist system, in which the state incorporates various stakeholders' activities into the policymaking process (Noto 2023). At the same time, ANICA established an external infrastructure comprising agents who acted as nodes in a transnational lobbying and distribution network. When we take ANICA as a point of reference, we are not suggesting that its networking activity was unique in post-war Europe. There is evidence that other associations of a comparable size were involved in similar activities. A notable example is the

French Syndicat Français des Producteurs et Exportateurs de Films (SFPEF), with which the Italian association has a long history of both collaboration and competition. Our observations can be generalized to a certain extent, insofar as ANICA represented one of the leading film industries in post-war Europe. In this section, therefore, we will focus on ANICA, for which comprehensive documentation is available. We will use ANICA as an example of a major international player acting on a global scale in relation to other international partners.

ANICA, founded in 1944, is a complex association that includes representatives from competing sectors, namely film production and distribution. Producers wanted to limit American film imports to protect themselves from what they perceived as unfair competition. Conversely, distributors benefited from importing Hollywood products. This seemingly contradictory membership was further exacerbated in 1951, when lengthy negotiations resulted in the major American studios joining ANICA (di Chio 2022, 104). This marked a shift from an initial phase of protectionist opposition between the Italian film industry and Hollywood studios, to an era of growing interdependence between them (Steinhart 2019). The complex nature and diverse composition of ANICA was further complicated by the establishment of several subsidiary organizations performing various activities on its behalf. These activities ranged from film financing and holdings (SOFINAC and ACI) to international distribution networks (IFE, UNIEF and ANICA Export) and real estate (Galeno Immobiliare). Together, these form a constellation of interests and ancillary companies that can perhaps best be conceived as a "cinematic universe", a term that was ironically coined in a comprehensive article on the association's archive (Comand and Venturini 2021). However, it is only by reading the documents regarding ANICA's international relations that one can grasp how the infrastructure and network of Italian cinema—and arguably by extension Europe's leading film industries—operated throughout the Cold War years, with all its players moving towards the internationalization of the national product. Of particular interest is Unitalia, an ANICA-affiliated society dedicated to promoting Italian cinema worldwide. Founded in 1950 by the Italo-French critic Joseph-Marie Lo Duca, who modelled it on Unifrance (established in 1949), the association's most visible activity was organizing international screenings of Italian films, known as Italian Cinema Week. However, the ANICA archive reveals that Unitalia's activities were more diverse. Unitalia agents acted as lobbyists and diplomats, establishing connections with local trade associations and state institutions to negotiate potential frameworks for bilateral film exchange and co-production agreements. These were subsequently formalized and signed by representatives of the respective national authorities. Interestingly, in addition to being ANICA's international network, Unitalia interacted directly with local Italian embassies and the Italian national authority responsible for implementing film policies: the Directorate-General for Entertainment (Direzione Generale dello Spettacolo, DGS). In the next section, we will examine some of Unitalia's initiatives, such as those designed to foster collaboration with the Mexican film industry. However, institutional archives also provide examples of lobbying activities aimed at preventing protectionist

measures from being applied to Italian films. These activities involved negotiations finalized by state authorities, with ANICA and Unitalia essentially acting as a small state department by initiating negotiations that would eventually be taken over by Italian state bureaucracy.

Documents from the ANICA archive reflect the complex ramifications of the association's export architecture, comprising entities such as UNIEF and ANICA Export. Furthermore, these documents suggest how this architecture developed in relation to, and in competition with, the French system—particularly the foreign distribution branch of the French producers' association, COFRAM—which appeared to be more successful than ANICA in non-European regions such as Latin America.

As well as setting up film export infrastructures around the world, ANICA had a complex relationship with Hollywood studios, famously negotiating a bilateral agreement with MPEA (Motion Pictures Export Association) in 1951. Ratified by the Italian government, this agreement superseded the previous regulations relating to international exports and the reinvestment of proceeds from the Italian distribution of major American films into Italian businesses, both in and outside the film industry. A subsequent version of the agreement, signed in 1955, entrusted ANICA with managing these funds. ANICA used the funds as guarantees to secure alternative financing channels from private Italian credit institutions rather than those provided by the state (Tassinari 2025). In some cases, these assets were used to finance the foreign distribution of Italian films. ANICA thus operated within a complex network of interests, developing relationships simultaneously in competition with and in partnership with Hollywood.

A final example of ANICA's networking activities is its involvement in the various attempts to create a European common market for film, which began in the early 1950s. While it is not possible to provide a full reconstruction of the complex history of these attempts here, we will focus on certain aspects, related to the attempt to establish a network of European film industries to counter Hollywood's domination, and to harmonize European film policies. This process largely preceded subsequent European integration, which gained definitive momentum with the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957. In particular, we will consider two specific moments that have been examined elsewhere. Firstly, the attempt to establish a "European Union of Film" ("Union Européenne du Film") from late 1954 to late 1955 (Di Chiara 2025). Secondly, we will consider a later attempt to govern, and to a certain extent resist, the process of adapting the film industry to the European Common Market, as required under the Treaty of Rome (Citirini 2025). In both cases, ANICA and SFPEF led the push for a common market that would align with their aspirations for the defiscalization of film products, all the while preserving existing forms of national film funding. Furthermore, both organizations viewed the common market as the next logical step following the bilateral film exchange and co-production agreements that the two industries had initiated in the late 1940s and expanded throughout the 1950s. From their perspective, the common market project was a means of transforming a series of direct relationships into a widespread network. Not

coincidentally, one of the proposed measures was the creation of multilateral co-productions. However, the establishment of the supranational network was hindered by both external intervention and internal differences. The main obstacle to the joint efforts of Italy and France was, in both cases, West Germany. The German producers' association, the Verband Deutscher Filmproduzenten e.V., participated somewhat reluctantly in establishing the Union Européenne du Film, but subsequently withdrew under pressure from the American studios, on which the West German industry was highly dependent in the decade following the end of the war. Following the signing of the Treaty of Rome, Germany's purely protectionist model—devoid of any active film support programme until the mid-1960s—made harmonization with the highly state-dependent Italian and French systems challenging.

As we have attempted to demonstrate, ANICA—and, by extension, other major national trade associations such as the SFPEF—was thus a sort of interface between domestic systems, aiming to create a transnational networking infrastructure with film industries in other countries. In the next section, we will consider a few examples of interaction.

## BILATERAL CONNECTIONS IN A MULTIPOLAR CONTEXT: ANICA, MEXICO AND YUGOSLAVIA

The key aspect of ANICA's activity as an entity capable of managing, facilitating and sometimes designing interactions between the Italian and foreign film industries is the flexibility of its functions, and its proven ability to support, assist, or replace public bodies in managing international relations. This characteristic is particularly pertinent in the complex, multipolar post-war film industry, where the presence of a dominant global player—namely the United States of America—does not prevent the formation of bilateral relations between different countries concerning film production and distribution. These relations take the form of exchange or co-production agreements, which can significantly impact the development of each domestic industry involved. Take, for example, the case of two completely different attempts undertaken by ANICA (and the Italian film industry as a whole) to expand its international presence: the agreements with Yugoslavia and Mexico. Both took place in the mid-1950s, but they had very different aims and outcomes. In the case of Italy's relationship with Yugoslavia, the Italian film industry's fundamental objective was to leverage the favourable conditions offered by the Yugoslav industry, to reduce the production costs of films in genres that require extensive use of natural and human resources, such as costume dramas. Conversely, Yugoslavia benefited not only from an influx of hard currency, but also from professional and technological upgrades, as well as the transfer of film exploitation rights, all of which were guaranteed by their partnership with Italy. The negotiations resulted in an agreement signed in 1957 which, while destined to remain mostly unimplemented, paved the way for less

formalized and more fruitful forms of cooperation (Di Chiara and Noto 2023). The objectives of the attempted agreements with the Mexican industry (which was in the final phase of its *época de oro* and could count on a huge domestic market) are not entirely clear, and various draft agreements did not result in a fully-fledged collaboration (Noto 2025).

By applying Lasswell's policy cycle framework (Lasswell 1971)—a conceptual tool which envisions the decision-making process as a sequence of discrete stages, moving from a first stage of problem recognition and agenda setting, through a second stage of policy formulation, followed by implementation, and finally to evaluation of the policy outcomes—we can see how ANICA's interventions spanned the entire spectrum of governance, from agenda setting and formulation to implementation and evaluation. This systematic engagement allowed the association to act as a crucial hinge between national interests and the emerging realities of the international film industry, often supplementing or even assuming functions delegated by the Directorate-General for Entertainment and other governmental bodies.

In the phase of agenda setting, ANICA managed to establish international connections that frequently preceded or operated alongside official diplomatic channels. In the case of Yugoslavia, contacts between ANICA and the Udruženje Filmskih Proizvođača Jugoslavije (UFPJ), the Association of Yugoslav Film Producers, were initiated even before the territorial dispute over Trieste reached its provisional settlement in 1954. Early correspondence between officials from the two associations (Babić 1953) suggests that the film industry was moving toward structural cooperation while formal intergovernmental relations were still strained. This partnership was further cemented by high-profile projects such as *War and Peace* (King Vidor, 1956). The collaboration between Italian producers, US companies like Paramount, and Belgrade's Avala Film served as a catalyst for broader industrial agreements (Ružić 1955), eventually leading to the official Italo-Yugoslav accord signed in 1957 (Valignani 1955a).

The relationship with Mexico further highlights the complexities of managing a system where national interests and divergent economic rules require constant mediation skills that public and private officials do not always demonstrate. Once again, the signing of an intergovernmental agreement was preceded by a research and information-gathering phase on the Mexican film industry. ANICA produced reports on theatre facilities, specialised lending, and audience numbers (ANICA [1954a]) and monitored the distribution of Italian films through its connections with local distributors working with Italian companies (ANICA 1953).

As the process moved into formulation and implementation, the lines between private industry representation and public administration became increasingly blurred. ANICA representatives were not merely consultants but active participants in drafting the regulatory framework for international agreements. This is evident in the Italo-Yugoslav negotiations, where private entities were delegated the task of drafting protocols for governmental approval (ANICA 1955a; ANICA 1955b).

During the implementation phase, the association transitioned into what can be described as 'street-level bureaucracy' (Lipsky 1980), providing the professional consulting and operational assistance necessary to keep policies functioning. In the Yugoslav context, ANICA Export became the sole channel for obtaining temporary export permits, a monopoly effectively encouraged by the Italian state to interface with the centralized Yugoslav import model overseen by Jugoslavija Film (De Pirro 1955; Valignani 1956).

This substitution of bureaucratic functions was so pervasive that following ANICA's procedures became an indispensable, albeit technically informal, requirement for private companies, to the extent that prominent production houses such as Excelsa-Minerva and Documento Film found their export requests to Yugoslavia delayed when they failed to navigate this quasi-governmental channel (Valignani 1955b; Hecht Lucari 1956). Furthermore, the association began to adopt functions resembling those of a commercial agency, charging fees on contracts as reimbursement for its administrative expenses (Valignani 1959). This development, while questioned by some producers who interpreted it as an agency commission (Gurgo Salice 1959), underscores the extent to which ANICA had integrated itself into the commercial and administrative heart of the industry.

In the case of Mexico, ANICA kept playing a role in maintaining relationships with the partners, but the outcome was unfavourable. Despite extensive negotiations involving ANICA and Unitalia, a 1954 draft agreement—modelled on the Italo-French treaty—was discussed and drawn up during the Venice Film Festival in 1954, but never implemented (Lo Duca 1954; ANICA 1954b). Failure stemmed from Mexican public opposition and structural disparities: Italy's import policies and currency restrictions clashed with Mexico's nominally free market. This regulatory mismatch caused a blockade of Italian imports, necessitating a 1957 private pact between ANICA and Cinematográfica Mexicana Exportadora (CIMEX). This trade agreement established a 24-to-8 film exchange ratio and coordinated governmental lobbying for censorship clearance (ANICA 1957). Here again, the exchange pact placed the responsibility for signing import permits in the hands of the ANICA delegate, a shift that even the delegate himself found somewhat unexpected (Campilli 1957).

Finally, in the evaluation phase, ANICA's involvement in joint commissions allowed it to propose revisions to policy. When the Italo-Yugoslav co-production agreement reached a standstill due to the impossibility of maintaining strict reciprocity, it was the trade associations' representatives who proposed a total overhaul of the criteria for revenue sharing and production ratios (ANICA 1961). These proposals were not merely operational adjustments but strategic reorientations of the bilateral relationship. This reliance on a private body to manage state-level diplomatic and economic tasks confirms the multifaceted nature of ANICA's activity during this period. Furthermore, it suggests that the association acted not solely as a lobby; it was a sophisticated institutional actor that managed the complexities of the international film industry by integrating itself into the very fabric of state bureaucracy and diplomacy.

# A MULTIPOLAR HISTORY OF MEMBRANES AND VALVULAR PIPELINES

The examples of interaction that we have explored thus far lead us to reconsider how the transnational studies framework envisions the circulation of products, technologies, and professionals, as well as networking between national film industries. To address this, we will draw on two concepts from media infrastructure studies and political science. The first is the concept of the "border as method", formulated by Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson (2013). Rather than viewing borders as barriers between geographical entities such as nation-states, continents, regions, or areas, these authors consider borders to be an "epistemic angle [that recognizes the] tensions and conflicts that blur the line between inclusion and exclusion" (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, viii-ix). From this perspective, borders are not obstacles, but rather devices that regulate the movement of people, money, and goods. They are social institutions that simultaneously unite and divide geographical entities by filtering and selecting inbound and outbound movements. The border is intended not only in its material form—as a line on a map, for example, or as people working in customs or border control offices—but also as a "cognitive border", allowing for reciprocal distinctions. This concept enables Mezzadra and Neilson to analyse various phenomena relating to identity formation through border creation or displacement from a historical perspective. For instance, they discuss how the notions of an enlightened West and an indolent, mysterious East were co-constituted in Gerard Mercator's sixteenth-century atlas, and how forms of 'reflexive nationalism', defined in opposition to neighbouring countries, arose as a result of the postcolonial division of South Asia (Samaddar 1999). "Taking the border as a methodological point of view, as well as investigating concrete borders and borderscapes", as suggested by Mezzadra and Neilson (2013, 51), has several implications for our work. Secondly, the aforementioned Italo-Mexican agreements demonstrate that the needs and logic behind borders can differ depending on which side of the border is being considered. This means that borders can function differently in both directions. For example, Italy was concerned about currency movement and censorship management, whereas Mexico was not, which could lead to misunderstandings. Thirdly, borders change as a result of the creation of new networks and hubs, which involves redesigning areas and borders. The aforementioned attempts to create a European common market inevitably involve shifting borders: the proposing nations aim to create a tax-free, quota-free area for the circulation of films from member countries. As a result, the border would be moved outside those nations' markets, creating supranational areas that would include and exclude other partners and set new rules for countries within such borders. Thus, the incompatibility of Italian and French policy systems with respect to the German system would have to be addressed. Focusing on borders means understanding the communication interfaces between countries and how they function, as well as the underlying logic behind their actions. It also means being aware of the institutional efforts and costs involved in border-crossing activities.

This brings us to the second concept, which we borrow from media infrastructure studies. Over the past decade, a number of studies have challenged the notion of the intangibility and pervasiveness of digital circulation by focusing on the physical infrastructure that enables content delivery. Blum (2013) exposes this material quality in the title of his book *Tubes*, which focuses on the complex architecture and geography of data centres, broadband pipelines, and communication hubs that allow data traffic on the internet. Lobato (2019) attributes the ubiquitousness of Netflix's seemingly intangible streaming activity not only to its ability to penetrate different geographical markets, but also to its complex global content delivery network. Finally, Parks and Starosielski (2015) reflect on the materiality of audiovisual infrastructures and their effect on distribution processes, and public involvement in their development, regulation, and use, emphasizing how "infrastructure refers not only to tubes and pipes but includes 'soft' systems of organization and knowledge, ranging from professional societies to classificatory procedures" (Parks and Starosielski 2015, 9).

From this perspective, what material and relational infrastructures (i.e. diplomatic and/or institutional) facilitate transnational connections between film industries? Previous sections analysed a selection of case studies, highlighting the roles of actors working at macro (state institutions, ministries, and supranational associations), meso (embassies and trade associations), and micro (cultural mediators) levels. These actors have played a pioneering role in establishing bilateral transnational relationships, formulating agreements, and constructing international networks. This has enabled and managed the cross-border circulation of capital, audiovisual products, materials, technologies, and labour. This infrastructure comprises negotiations, agreements, and regulations that act as a pipeline to regulate the flow between the poles of the system. However, this pipeline has nodes that act as valves, since many communications are asymmetrical, if not one-directional. As we have seen in our examples, one country may provide film financing or finished products, while the other provides labour and raw materials. This asymmetry is generally reflected in exchange agreements, whereby larger producing nations export three times more films than they import from their partners. The delocalization of film production followed established patterns, such as Hollywood studios financing Italian producers to shoot films in Yugoslavia. However, the direction of such flow through this relational pipeline could be influenced by many other factors related to currency policies or the soft power of the countries involved. These factors do not always reflect the weight of those countries in the geopolitical scenario, as demonstrated by the failed Italo-Mexican co-production agreements and the Italian government's success in controlling the export of Hollywood film revenues.

Adopting a multipolar approach to the history of film industries requires us to reconstruct the infrastructures, hubs, and configurations of valves and membranes that enable exchanges and highlight hierarchies. It also requires us to identify the conflicts of interest that shape the geography and flows of multipolar networks.

# TOWARDS MULTIPOLAR HISTORIES

This special issue is one of the main outputs of the PRIN 2022 project *TRAF-FIC – Tracing American and Foreign Funds in Italian Cinema (1945–1962)*. The project provided a shared empirical and archival framework for investigating the industrial, economic, and institutional dimensions of cinema in the post-war period, with particular attention to historically situated processes and to relationships unfolding across multiple, interacting scales. The contributions collected here extend this perspective beyond a single national context, addressing different film industries and regulatory environments while maintaining a common focus on the concrete arrangements, frameworks, and mechanisms shaping film production and circulation.

The essays are intentionally arranged in neither chronological or geographical order. Instead, they range across different nodes of the film value chain—production, distribution, and regulation—while acknowledging the inevitably approximate and blurred nature of these categories. This progression is intended to show how these levels operate as partially overlapping and non-coincident arenas in which industrial practices, institutional arrangements, and power relations are continuously negotiated.

The first two essays focus primarily on production. In *Between the National and the Transnational*, María Paz Peirano and Alejandro Kelly-Hopfenblatt examine forms of industrial collaboration between Argentina and Chile in the 1940s, focusing on production agreements, professional exchanges, and market strategies within a regional Latin American framework. The analysis reconstructs a system of commercial and industrial relations that developed largely independently of direct US intervention, while remaining embedded in an international market strongly shaped by Hollywood's presence. By foregrounding intra-regional dynamics, the article highlights shifting hierarchies, national modernization projects, and negotiated forms of cooperation among neighbouring film industries, challenging both centre-periphery models and established periodizations of international film collaboration. In *In compartecipazione*, Luca Peretti analyses a set of Italian-Algerian film collaborations in the second half of the 1960s, focusing on production practices that developed in the absence of formal co-production agreements between the two countries. Through a close reading of Italian archival sources alongside Algerian documentation and film-historical accounts, the article reconstructs a range of informal arrangements—*compartecipazioni*, technical cooperation, and location-based collaborations—that complicate rigid definitions of national production. By shedding light on the partiality of Italian records and the different ways in which these films have been retrospectively incorporated into Algerian film history, the article situates these collaborations within the material and symbolic formation of early post-independence Algerian cinema, while they remain outside the framework of treaty-based co-production.

The next two articles shift the focus to distribution, approached as a structuring infrastructure rather than as a neutral extension of production. In *From*

*Moscow to Mainstream*, Claudia Fiorito examines Soviet attempts to distribute and promote national cinema in the United States through the activities of Amkino and its successor Artkino, from the inter-war period through the early Cold War. Focusing on distribution as a regulated segment of the film industry, the article reconstructs how Soviet institutions and intermediaries adapted film selection and exhibition practices in response to the constraints of the US market, relying on specialist distributors and networks of independent theatres. By examining import practices, exhibition circuits, and institutional mediation, Fiorito reveals forms of exchange and influence that moved in more than one direction within a constrained and politically charged market environment. In *The Russians Are Coming!*, Fernando Ramos Arenas analyses the circulation of Soviet cinema in Spain between the late Franco period and the post-Transition years (1969–1993), focusing on the activities of the distributor Alta Films. The author shows how Soviet films entered and were positioned within the Spanish market through negotiations with Soviet export bodies and within shifting regulatory frameworks, foregrounding the role of distributors, cultural intermediaries, and exhibition strategies in shaping concrete trajectories of circulation. By situating these practices within specific institutional and political contexts, the article highlights distribution as a historically contingent process assembled through negotiated arrangements rather than as a stable or automatic channel of access.

The final two essays address regulation, concentrating on the active role of state and sub-state institutions in structuring film industries. In *Cinema on the Eve of the Cold War*, Aydın Çam and Çiğdem Aksu Çam examine the emergence of Turkish national cinema in the late 1940s through the lens of film regulation and fiscal policy. Focusing on the 1948 Municipal Revenues Law, the article shows how differentiated admission taxes on domestic and foreign films—administered at the municipal level—reshaped production incentives and exhibition practices, affecting in particular the circulation of American and Egyptian films. By tracing the interaction between local fiscal regimes, national policies, and foreign economic interests, the essay reveals a layered regulatory environment in which municipal authorities retained significant leverage within broader international dynamics. Finally, in *Two Modernizations*, I-Lin Liu examines the Taiwanese film industry of the 1950s through the U.S. AID film program, focusing on how technological assistance and the circulation of film knowledge interacted in uneven and sometimes contradictory ways. Concentrating on party-state studios in Taiwan, the article reconstructs negotiations between local bureaucracies and US agencies around infrastructure, training, and studio organization, while also tracing how imported film theories and aesthetic models—particularly in debates on widescreen cinema—were appropriated, contested, and reworked within a specific institutional context. The contribution highlights how processes of industrial modernization and the transnational circulation of film styles unfolded through multi-layered configurations rather than through linear transfer or top-down control.

Taken together, these historically grounded case studies propose a way of looking at film industries that emphasizes concrete practices, institutional arrangements, and negotiated relations across multiple levels. By shifting attention away from abstract models of influence and towards situated configurations of production, distribution, and regulation, the articles collected in this issue open up alternative perspectives on how film industries were organized, connected, and transformed across the second half of the twentieth century.

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# Between the National and the Transnational: Commercial and Industrial Links Between Chile and Argentina's Leading Film Companies over the Second World War

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Center-periphery perspectives have been challenged recently by transnational studies that provided more nuanced perspectives beyond Hollywood's predominance in the international market. Shifting the focus to the transnational interactions within other regions opens up a multipolar and decentralized story of Latin American cinema, a region that was distant from the WWII scenario, with its internal dynamics and exchanges, and where the Cold War's impact was delayed. This article looks into one of these cases by examining the commercial and industrial ties between Argentina and Chile in the 1940s and 1950s, focusing on the relations between their leading studios, Argentina Sono Film and Chile Films. It examines the commercial and industrial links between Chilean and Argentine cinemas, not just economically but as a space where modernization and nationalism ideologies conditioned the emergence and sustainability of their film industries. The article shows how film production in Latin America's Southern Cone generated its center-periphery dynamics, beyond Hollywood's undisputed dominance, challenging standardized periodizations and calling for a multiperspective that acknowledges global asynchronicities.

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In 1936, Uruguayan cinema produced its first sound film, *Dos destinos*, directed by Juan Etchebehere. The initial credits presented a plaque that read, "This film is the initiation of the film industry in Uruguay. It is up to the public to make the country proud to see the triumphant opening of a new expression of the Uruguayan soul." Behind this legend, the national flag was proudly flying.

This initial image condenses some of the main features of the studio era in most Latin American countries. Although many of them produced movies during the silent period, with different levels of development, the irruption of sound meant a turning point for Latin American cinemas. Local audiences, fascinated