

The Ideology of Film  
Festivals:  
A Psychoanalysis of  
European A Festivals'  
Representation of Italian  
Cinema, 2000-2017

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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## Abstract

This thesis aims to answer the question: is there an ideology conditioning European A festivals’ awarding and representation of Italian cinema in the years 2000-2017 and, if so, how does it function? The project presents a systematic analysis of the ideological underpinnings of such awarding and representation, examining a corpus of Italian films that have won Best Picture at a European A festival in the years 2000-2017. Its methodology is grounded in Slavoj Žižek’s theory of ideology, which it maps on to three aspects of European A festivals: the A circuit apparatus – its histories, organisational structures and practices; festival paratexts – film synopses in festivals’ official programmes; and film texts – aspects of films that confound their institutional representation. Comparing each level, the thesis identifies and critiques the explicit ways in which European A festivals represent Italian cinema, and the implicit laws that govern such representation.

The Introduction discusses the importance of research into ideology in relation to both film festivals and Italian cinema, and presents the thesis’s methodology. Subsequent chapters analyse: the auteur as a *sinthome* of artistic freedom in Cannes’ representation of *The Son’s Room* (*La stanza del figlio*,

Nanni Moretti, 2001); the social other and fantasy of the sexual relationship in Karlovy Vary's representation of *Facing Window* (*La finestra di fronte*, Ferzan Özpetek, 2003); the masculinity of the artist in Cannes' and Tallinn's representations of *The Great Beauty* (*La grande bellezza*, Paolo Sorrentino, 2013); brutal humanism in the Berlinale's representation of *Fire at Sea* (*Fuocoammare*, Gianfranco Rosi, 2016); and capitalist orientalism in Cannes's representation of *Gomorra* (*Gomorra*, Matteo Garrone, 2008). I conclude that capital constitutes the primary unwritten law that generates and regulates European A festivals' ideological representation of Italian cinema. In so doing, I aim to highlight and challenge the ideological coordinates which govern these institutions.

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# Abbreviations of European A Festival Names

*Berlinale* - Berlin International Film Festival

*Cannes* - Festival de Cannes

*Karlovy Vary* - Karlovy Vary International Film Festival

*Locarno* - Festival del Film Locarno

*San Sebastián* - San Sebastián International Film Festival

*Tallinn* - Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival

*Venice* - Venice International Film Festival

*Warsaw* - Warsaw Film Festival

## I

# Introduction

Film festivals are ‘the driving force behind the global film industry’ (Iordanova and Rhyne, 2009, 1). However, the question of what drives them remains open. There has not yet been a systematic analysis of the ideology that may govern these institutions and, in turn, their construction of film. Using the case of Italian cinema in the new millennium, this thesis develops a methodology for studying the ideological functioning of European A festivals – that is, European film festivals that run an international competition and are accredited as ‘A-list’ by the International Federation of Film Producers Associations (FIAPF). In the process, it identifies several forms and hidden values that underpin ideology. Moreover, through the Italian case, I provide specific insights into the ideological construction of Italian cinema by European A festivals in the years 2000-2017. The thesis answers the primary research question: is there an ideology conditioning the awarding and representation of Italian cinema in the years 2000-2017 and, if so, how does it function? Meanwhile the thesis suggests answers to a series of secondary research questions pertaining to film festivals and/or Italian cinema: can European A festivals be demonstrated to function in an ideological manner and, if so, what are the key procedures involved in, and values that underpin, this ideology? How is ‘Italian cinema’ constructed by European A film festivals in their programme synopses? How can we analyse and critique this ideology, opening up space for critical awareness and, perhaps, change? In answering such questions, this thesis

aspires to contribute to several fields of study. It aims to provide insights into the global circulation and ideological construction of Italian cinema, a burgeoning area of inquiry in Italian film studies.<sup>1</sup> Through its analysis of film festivals and ideology, it also seeks to respond to scholars' calls for a systematic analysis of film festival circuits and their ideological functioning.<sup>2</sup> Finally, in its development of a method of ideology critique, the thesis provides a model for the analysis of ideology as it is mediated through institutions and the cultural industries.

This introduction begins with discussions of the two areas of study that the thesis brings together: film festivals and Italian cinema. I will show how scholarship in each area has given rise to this project's research questions, tracing an increasing concern with the processes of ideology and its effects on each field's primary object of study. I argue that film festival studies has repeatedly demonstrated the importance of major film festivals to the construction of a certain kind of cinema - so-called 'art cinema' - and suggest the need for a systematic analysis of the structures that condition this process. I discuss the studies that imply that film festivals function ideologically and highlight the call made for an investigation into such ideological functioning. However, I observe that research in the field thus far has focused on either a limited number of festivals or specific ideologies. I conclude that there remains a need for a systematic analysis and critique of film festivals' ideological functioning, above all in relationship to their economic functioning and reproduction of certain values as a

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1 See recent interventions in the field varying from published works such as Hipkins and Renga (2016), ongoing research projects such as '*CinCit: The International Circulation of Italian Cinema*' (Scaglioni et al., 2018a), and recent conferences such as 'Italian Cinema(s) Abroad' (Ohio State University, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2019).

2 On the need for a systematic analysis of the entire festival circuit, or network, see Iordanova and Rhyne (2009, 1). On the need for an analysis of ideology and film festivals, see Brown (2009, 216).

result of this. I then review developments in Italian film studies, and note that it appears marked by a drive to investigate the institutional construction of 'Italian cinema,' and interrogate the dominant values that underpin it. I show that, while much research has been done into the academy's role as one institution involved in this process, scholars have only recently come to acknowledge and study the role of film festivals. I conclude that this thesis also responds to Italian film studies' emergent concern with film festivals, offering a detailed analysis of their place in an institutional network engaged in the construction of Italian cinema in line with specific - and ideological - values.

The next section of the introduction describes the methodology that I have developed as a means of answering the project's research questions. The section on methodology will outline the theoretical framework that I use throughout the thesis, discussing and defining the key concepts that underpin it: ideology, the extended film, the festival paratext, and the cinematic Real. In defining ideology, this section also explicates the primary theoretical framework that underpins this thesis's methodology: a theory of Lacanian ideology critique developed, above all, by Slavoj Žižek. Discussing the remaining three concepts, I describe the ways in which they have informed the project's aim of mapping the ideology of European A festivals on three levels: (1) European A festivals' explicit functioning - the festival 'apparatus' made up of texts and rituals; (2) festivals' paratextual representation of the films they award - the synopses of the films that appear in the festivals' official programmes; (3) the texts of the award-winning films themselves - in particular, the ways in which the film texts confound their institutional representation. I relate this method to the re-conceptions of films and festivals in recent scholarship on cinema, which emphasise the importance

of written materials in constructing the meanings of film texts and festivals, but also the possibility that the film text may offer a point of contradiction to the meanings ascribed to it. In the final sections of the Introduction, I discuss the project's corpus and scope - its focus on Italian films that have won Best Picture or equivalent at a European A festival in the years 2000-2017. I highlight the importance of treating European A festivals as a festival 'circuit', of analysing Best Picture winners, and of using Italian cinema as a case study. I also explicate my selection of five primary case studies: *The Son's Room* (*La stanza del figlio*, Nanni Moretti, 2001); *Facing Window* (*La finestra di fronte*, Ferzan Özpetek, 2003); *The Great Beauty* (*La grande bellezza*, Paolo Sorrentino, 2013); *Fire at Sea* (*Fuocoammare*, Gianfranco Rosi, 2016); and, finally, *Gomorra* (*Gomorra*, Matteo Garrone, 2008). The introduction finishes with a summary of each of the thesis's chapters and its conclusion.

## **1. FILM FESTIVALS**

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In the first *Film Festival Yearbook*, editors Dina Iordanova and Ragan Rhyne (2009, 1) argue that film festivals are 'the driving force behind the global circulation of cinema.' As such, studying film festivals is 'central to understanding the socio-cultural dynamics of global cinema and international cultural exchanges at large' (2009, 1). Indeed, film festivals have long been considered crucial to the exhibition, distribution and ideological construction of a certain kind of cinema, most often termed 'art cinema'. The heterogeneity of films grouped under such a category - art cinema's 'mongrel identity' - has long inspired scholars to investigate the way in which art cinema's meaning has been generated and developed (Galt and Schoonover, 2010, 3). Seminal articles on national and art cinema, such as Andrew Higson's (1989) 'The Concept of National Cinema' and Steve Neale's (1981) 'Art Cinema as an

Institution', acknowledge the role of structures of production, exhibition, distribution and representation in constituting art cinema as, precisely, a 'cinema' or institutional paradigm. They also underline the importance of film festivals in defining art cinema and facilitating the circulation of the seemingly disparate films grouped under this term. In a brief note on the paradox of art cinema often being considered in terms of national cinemas, Higson (1989, 41) describes the 'network of film festivals and reviewing practices' as the 'means of achieving a critical reputation and both a national and an international cultural space for such films' (that is, art films). Taking art cinema as a construct rather than defined term, Higson highlights the importance of film festivals as an international network through which a certain kind of national film production can achieve critical reputation - a reputation that secures their legitimation as art cinema. Although writing before Higson, Neale clarifies this process. He describes international film festivals as the sites where

international distribution is sought for these films ['art' films], and where their status as 'Art' is confirmed and re-stated through the existence of prizes and awards, themselves neatly balancing the criteria of artistic merit and commercial potential (Neale, 1981, 35).

The construction of art cinema as, in Neale's terms, an institution, depends upon international film festivals' confirmation of certain films' 'status as "Art"' (and therefore art cinema) through their many practices, such as prize giving.

In more recent years, the centrality of film festivals to the construction of art cinema has been re-iterated, and analyses of their practices have developed. David Andrews' (2010) 'Art Cinema as an Institution: Redux' explicitly builds on Neale's argument. Andrews (2010, 1-3) argues that, while art cinema as a 'grand narrative paradigm' appears untenable when

applied to studies of films' styles or forms, the instability of such a paradigm renders investigations into its institutional construction all the more necessary. Historicising the development of art cinema's institutional identity, Andrews (2010, 9) posits that film festivals have overtaken the arthouse circuit to become 'art cinema's central institution'. The institution of film festivals generates the institution of art cinema. Film festivals not only have a role in maintaining the category of art cinema and supporting the circulation of art films (as the arthouse circuit does); they also have a 'generative function,' producing the key terms and tropes through which art cinema comes to be defined (Andrews, 2010, 6). In short:

the institutional significance of this system [i.e. that of film festivals] within art cinema cannot be overstated, we should look at it as a primary mechanism through which art cinema has sustained through time the ideas of high-art value that have bound it together (Andrews, 2010, 7).

Other scholars, too, have analysed and emphasised the role of film festivals in defining art cinema. Marijke De Valck (2014, 77; 79) underlines the status of film festivals as 'sites of cultural legitimization' for art cinema, key agents in the creation of a 'new brand of global art cinema' since the 1990s. Significantly, De Valck (2014, 78-9) identifies several practices through which film festivals contribute towards the creation of this 'brand'. Cultural legitimisation for films and filmmakers is achieved above all through the practices of selection, exhibition and prize giving (De Valck, 2014, 78). Film festivals are therefore 'brokers of symbolic capital' - non-financial rewards such as the prestige afforded by prizes (De Valck, 2014, 78). Moreover, they also influence the construction and circulation of art cinema on a material level. For example, Stephen Mezias et al. (2008; 2011) have empirically

demonstrated that major, competitive film festivals influence the circulation of global art cinema through their central ritual of prize giving. Focusing on the film festivals that they identify as being the most influential worldwide – Cannes, Venice and Berlin – Mezias et al. (2011) have shown that winning Best Picture or equivalent at one of these events significantly affects the number of countries a film is distributed in. It seems, therefore, that film festivals, and above all the major competitive ones, play an important role in both the symbolic construction and international circulation of art cinema.

Given their significance, it is fundamental to understand the processes by which film festivals construct art cinema. Many of the studies cited above frame these processes of construction in a way that indicate the influence of different factors – the two main ones being notions of artistic worth and the commercial nature of cinema (including the festivals themselves) – which then culminate to potentially homogenise a heterogeneous body of films. Put differently, several studies, including those cited above, imply that film festivals construct art cinema in a way that can be understood in relation to notions of ideology. While I specify this thesis's working definition of ideology later, for the purposes of this discussion, I refer to the term in its broad sense: any attempt to fix the meaning of an object in accordance with certain implicit values or interests. The conclusion that Neale draws about the construction of art cinema as an institution indicates the ideological process that I have just described. Neale (1981, 15) identifies the thrust towards a homogenisation of meaning in the institutional construction of art cinema, in this case via auteurist conceptions of film:

Even where the marks of enunciation themselves are heterogeneous, they tend to be unified and stabilised within the space of an institution which

reads and locates them in a homogeneous way (each mark serving equally as the sign of the author) and which mobilises that meaning in accordance with commodity-based practices of production, distribution and exhibition (the mark of the author is used as a kind of brand name, to mark and to sell the filmic product).

This does not only occur through festivals' pre-occupation with the figure of the auteur (which I analyse at length in chapter one, and in relation to gender in chapter three). At their most fundamental level, film festivals should be understood as unifying and stabilising the heterogeneous production of art cinema: their construction of films entails reading 'marks of enunciation' - in this case, the aspects of a film text - in 'a homogeneous way' and, crucially, the mobilisation of their meaning 'in accordance with commodity-based practices of production, distribution and exhibition'.

In fact, several scholars have emphasised that film festivals are one such commodity-based practice of production, distribution and exhibition, and highlighted the way in which this may affect their construction of art cinema. Most useful in this respect is Rhyne's (2009, 20) theorisation of film festivals as 'a new cultural industry administered through the institutional model of the non-profit organisation and an economy of public and private subsidy.' This model means that film festivals are required to present themselves under a common identity as a 'discrete cultural sector' while, at the same time, operating to minimally differentiate themselves from each other in order to attract investment from public and private organisation (Rhyne, 2009, 9-10). Rhyne's (2009, 19) study underlines the relationship between film festivals and their economic functioning, arguing that, while they may appear 'discursively independent', they are 'financially dependent' on state, public and corporate sectors. This requires them to develop models for managing diverse stakeholders and, crucially, 'channelling

their diverse interests towards the goals of national-states and global capital' (Rhyne, 2009, 10). Rhyne's (2009) study raises important questions regarding the effects that this economic model has on film festivals' practices, including their construction of art cinema. While Rhyne could be read as drawing a hard line between festivals' discursive independence and financial dependence, we would do well to consider the relationship between the two. To what extent might film festivals' construction of art cinema be conditioned by their need to cultivate a common yet minimally 'discrete' identity, to manage diverse stakeholder interests and, above all, to channel these interests towards the priorities of nation states and global capital?

Scholars such as Andrews (2010) and De Valck (2014) have broached the question of the relationship between festivals' economic and, to use Rhyne's term, discursive aspects.<sup>3</sup> While De Valck (2014, 78) describes the practices of selection and prize giving as part of film festivals' role as 'brokers of symbolic capital' she also underlines the influence of commercial factors (i.e the promise of profit, financial capital) in festivals' decision-making. Due to the increasing commercialisation of film festivals in the new millennium, cultural legitimisation also appears contingent upon selection committees' and juries' perceptions of not only the artistic worth but the commercial viability of a film. De Valck (2014, 76) concludes that global art cinema has moved on from being a 'loser takes all game' in which financial success is detrimental to a film's symbolic success as a piece of art. Rather, a film's chances of selection at a film festival are determined as much by its expected viability in the global market place as its perceived artistic integrity (De Valck, 2014,

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3 I discuss terms such as discourse and ideology in sub-section 3a. 'Ideology'.

81). However, she goes on to assert that the very value of artistic integrity is one of the features that makes a festival film viable on the global market: she argues for the exceptional status of the cultural industries as those which put a premium on artistic autonomy, and whose legitimacy depends on such a premium (De Valck, 2014, 86). Developing De Valck's argument further, I aim to interrogate the value of artistic integrity itself. In a context in which film festivals' legitimisation of certain films as 'art' is conditioned by their commercial potential, it seems possible that the meaning of the term 'art' is, too, conditioned in the process. Again, there appears to be a need to investigate the relationship between film festivals in their commercial aspect and the way in which they construct art cinema through practices such as prize giving and representation.

Several scholars have suggested that film festivals' power to legitimise certain films and 'art cinema' can give rise to a quasi-religious or tyrannical atmosphere in which festival directors' and juries' pronouncements on a film, and cinema more broadly, are treated as absolute. The conclusions drawn and language used by these scholars indicates that film festivals may operate in an ideological fashion. For example, at an early conference on film festivals, programmer and critic B. Ruby Rich (2003) has argued that film festivals operate according to 'the worship of taste' that also has a seemingly transcendental meaning. Rich (2003) observes that any suggestion that film festival programming might follow an agenda is 'seen as interfering with the magical and utterly unsubstantiated notion of quality'. Responding to Rich's comments, Thomas Elsaesser (2005, 99) argues that she 'underestimates the ritual, religious and quasi-magical elements necessary to make a festival into an "event".' Such elements are, rather, written into the very fabric of film

festivals' functioning as institutions capable of legitimising film: the festival 'requires an atmosphere where an almost Eucharistic transubstantiation can take place; a Spirit has to hover that can canonize a masterpiece or consecrate an auteur, which is why the notions of "quality" or "talent" have to be impervious to rational criteria or secondary elaborations' (Elsaesser, 2005, 99). Andrews (2010) continues Elsaesser's theistic metaphor, but this time in a more critical vein: film festivals 'have increasingly adopted an air of bogus religiosity' in which the 'objects of reverence' that they consecrate appear 'absolute'. Rather than written into the notion of the festival as such, their 'bogus religiosity' appears to be a result of film festivals' need to legitimise themselves as crucial nodes in the film industry (Andrews, 2010, 9). In this way, the requirement to attract funding that Rhyne (2008) identifies as an essential feature of film festivals appears to result in these events' cultivation of a deific authority regarding the consecration of certain films and, in turn, the construction of art cinema. As we will see below, the reliance on a series of unwritten, even irrational, yet absolute rules is the ideological structure *par excellence*: ideology functions not through the explicit representations of (for example) films, but, rather, a set of implicit laws that govern such representations, and function only to the extent they remain unarticulated, 'unsubstantiated'. For now, suffice it to note that, if ideology can broadly be thought of as the attempt to designate a fixed meaning to an unstable object of representation, film festivals' apparent drive to fix art cinema's meaning so firmly that it takes on a quasi-religious absolutism pushes this definition to its extreme.

Perhaps then it is no surprise that, in one of the first international workshops for film festival studies, scholars highlighted research into these institutions' ideological functioning as a crucial area for development. Iordanova (cited

in Brown, 2009, 217), for example, outlined a number of aspects of film festivals yet to be studied, and among these was the way in which ‘the choice of films at a festival reflects a certain ideological standpoint, be that entirely coherent or otherwise’. Another, which, as I have argued above, intersects with the first, was the situation of ‘film festivals as part of an enormous global culture industry’ (Iordanova cited in Brown, 2009, 217). Indeed, in the workshop report, one of the most discussed points appeared to be film festivals’ self-mythologisation, which scholars such as Saer Maty Ba and David Slocum (cited in Brown, 2009, 218-19) discussed in relation to ideology and economics:

Film festivals always (seek to) represent something or someone (consciously or not, they reflect an ideology), and they always serve political (and economic) interests, especially for the place in which they take place.

Although several scholars have examined the practices and, in some cases, values commonly espoused by film festivals, there has not yet been a systematic study of the ‘ideological standpoint’ that film festivals ‘reflect’ either in general or through the films they exhibit. Scholarship has tended towards analyses of a few specific festivals or singular values. For example, while De Valck’s (2007) study of geopolitics and film festivals remains a foundational text on the topic, and engages with several festivals, it does not attempt to identify a common ideology across them.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, Lindiwe Dovey’s (2015) analysis of the reproduction of neo-colonial ideologies in film festivals’ treatment of African cinema provides a welcome critique of film festival ideology in its broad sense, but focuses on a particular (even if crucial) ideological standpoint rather than the system of ideology as such. Where research has

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<sup>4</sup> The festivals De Valck (2007) engages extensively with are: the Berlinale, Cannes, Rotterdam, Sundance, Toronto, and Venice.

examined the festivals' reproduction of certain values more broadly, rarely has it been approached through the notion of ideology and, in some cases, appears more celebratory than critical. For example, Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong (2011, 18) analyses film festivals' reproduction of 'cinematic taste, power, industry, and post-colonial global relations' yet, overall, treats this as part of their significance to the film industry rather than engaging with these issues in a systematically critical way.

Developments in film festival studies indicate the importance of examining film festivals' ideological functioning if we are to understand the construction and circulation of art cinema. However, scholarship has tended toward either analyses of a limited number of festivals or of specific ideologies (such as colonialism), or broad accounts of film festivals without a focus on or critique of their ideological aspect. There is a lacuna in the field: a systematic analysis and critique of film festivals' ideological functioning, its relationship to their embeddedness in global capitalism, and the various ideological values that they may (re)produce as a result of this. I aim to respond to that absence. Using European A film festivals' awarding and representation of Italian cinema in the new millennium, this thesis proposes and demonstrates a method for analysing the ideology that structures their functioning and, in turn, their construction of cinema. The dissertation theorises this on both a structural level - ideology as such - and identifies, analyses and critiques several of the ideological underpinnings that condition European A festivals' representation of Italian cinema in the years 2000-2017.

## **2. ITALIAN CINEMA**

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In the field of Italian film studies, and particularly in the Anglophone academy, Italian cinema has recently come to be

treated as an ideological or discursive construction, spurring a re-evaluation of both the concept itself and institutions' roles in its creation and maintenance. Italian film scholars have often focused on Italian neorealism and, in particular, the circulation of dominant notions of what constitutes neorealism as a mode, genre or even institution.<sup>5</sup> This is in part due to the centrality of neorealism to institutional and ideological notions of Italian cinema, also demonstrated by Italian film scholars.<sup>6</sup> Vito Zagarrío (2012, 95-96) has argued that, in the new millennium, the 'Neorealismo dei Grandi Maestri' (Neorealism of the 'Great Masters') serves as a common source of legitimation for Italian films. The centrality of neorealism to conceptions of Italian cinema has spurred scholars to re-evaluate this cinematic paradigm as a means of re-evaluating and contesting dominant or normative notions of Italian film more broadly. Charles Leavitt, Catherine O'Rawe & Dana Renga (2015, 174) identify one of the 'broader trends in Italian screen studies' as being the 'efforts in the last few years to reevaluate that contested and most enduring filmic form,' neorealism. Often, this re-evaluation has begun from the position that 'neorealism' can be understood in relation to ideology in one way or another - be it Lorenzo Fabbri's (2015, 182) explicit formulation, 'neorealism as ideology,' or allusive descriptions of neorealism (and the notions of an ethical, humanist realism that accompany it) as 'insidious common sense' (O'Leary and O'Rawe, 2011, 109). Working through this perspective, several studies have interrogated unacknowledged aspects of neorealism's legacy in relation to gender, sexuality, post-colonialism, and notions of

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5 There remains a lack of consensus as to which term best describes neorealism, paired with competing ideas of which films constitute the neorealist canon.

6 In fact, the role of Italian neorealism as an evaluative paradigm for not just Italian, but European and even global art cinema cannot be underestimated. The strength of this legacy of Italian cinema constitutes one of the motivations for this thesis's analysis of the Italian case - see '4. Corpus and Scope' below.

‘worthy’ cinema.<sup>7</sup> Italian film studies is therefore currently engaged in a reconsideration of one of its ‘core units of academic study,’ neorealism, treating it as an ideological construction bound up with the promotion of certain values and a certain image of Italian cinema (Bayman and Rigoletto, 2013, 1).

Here, the question of not only *how* Italian cinema is constructed, but by *which institutions*, becomes imperative. The institutional construction of Italian cinema has long been a theme in Italian film studies, although it has become a central focus only recently.<sup>8</sup> With the ‘Thinking Italian Film’ project (launched in 2006), Italian film studies have begun to concentrate on the institution of the academy, manifesting an explicitly meta-critical turn. The project and its broader concerns were described in Alan O’Leary’s and O’Rawe’s (2008, 171) preface to the *Italian Studies*’ special issue, ‘Thinking Italian Film’, as the ‘attempt to identify the problems and absences that have arrested the coming of age of Italian film studies.’ A crucial aspect of this turn is also the treatment of certain concepts in Italian film studies as ideological or discursive constructions, and the interrogation of their production, repetition and dominance. This issue features O’Rawe’s (2008, 179) “‘*I padri e i maestri*’”: Genre, Auteurs, and Absences in Italian Film Studies’, which asks ‘what ideological and cultural values are masked in the promotion of certain directors as auteurs and in the elision of others?’ In another article, Derek Duncan (2008, 195) asks ‘What difference might a consideration of race and colonial history make to an understanding of Italian cinema?’ Finally, Danielle Hipkins’s (2008, 214) piece aims to ‘explore the failure to

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7 See Hipkins (2008); Rigoletto (2014); O’Rawe (2008); Schoonover (2012); and O’Leary (2017) respectively.

8 See, for example, Spinazzola (1985); Sorlin (1996); Wood (2005); and Wagstaff (2007).

address the concerns of feminism in mainstream [Italian] film history and criticism.' Whether implicitly or explicitly, they each scholar's treatment of their material raises the important question of which implicit values have influenced the construction of Italian cinema, be they auteurist, colonial, or patriarchal.

More recently, scholarship has turned towards institutions other than the academy, although this line of research still appears to be in its early stages. We might note an early example in O'Rawe's (2008) use of Italian newspapers to interrogate notions of neorealism, which she reads in tandem with scholarly accounts, considering the 'critic' in both the journalistic and scholarly sense of the word. Since then, there has been a nascent drive towards considering institutions outside that of film criticism. Hipkins and Renga (2016) have researched the question of the 'canon' of Italian cinema as it is (re)produced through pedagogy - the teaching of Italian film in higher education institutions. While they focus on one area, they list several other institutions that are engaged in the process of canon-making, including MiBACT (Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali/ Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities), universities, and film festivals (Hipkins and Renga, 2016, 388). Considering all of these as part of a network out of which 'new canon' of contemporary Italian film emerges, Hipkins and Renga's (2016, 388) study points towards the importance of taking a holistic approach to the construction of Italian film and, in these early stages, the need to begin researching each of the institutions involved in such a process. This need is beginning to be addressed through the research project '*CinCit: The International Circulation of Italian Cinema*' (launched in 2015). This project

aims to map out the forms of distribution and circulation of Italian cinema abroad, investigating

the methods of its exportation and the operations that [...] help to shape and model an idea of Italian cinema and, more broadly, of Italian culture and 'made in Italy' (Scaglioni et al., 2018b).

In doing so, it responds to an ongoing concern with the construction of Italian cinema, while identifying and analysing the main institutions and mechanisms that influence such a process. The project investigates many of these mechanisms, one being film festivals. The scholars consider film festivals within the project thread of 'the strategies used for their [Italian films'] development and exploitation, distribution methods and best practices' (Scaglioni et al., 2018b). Since the project is ongoing at the time of writing, we do not yet know the results of this line of investigation. Needless to say the analysis of festivals' practices in the development, exploitation and distribution of Italian cinema will be useful for further research into these institutions' constructions of an idea of Italian cinema and Italian culture in future.

However, we can get a sense of the work being done, and of the continuing need for an analysis of the ideological functioning of film festivals in relation to cinema, from Damiano Garofalo's (2018) discussion of Italian cinema's presence at international film festivals on the project's website. Garofalo (2018) highlights the importance of Italian cinema to film festivals, observing the 'notably high presence' of Italian films at ten major international film festivals in the years 2008-2017.<sup>9</sup> While this indicates the continuing relevance of Italian cinema to film festivals, Garofalo (2018) also shows that film festivals maintain some influence over the circulation of Italian cinema. Many of the Italian films selected at these events secured international distribution, and all of the prize winners

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9 The festivals are: Cannes, Venice, Berlin, Toronto, Locarno, San Sebastian, Sundance, Turin, Rome and London. Garofalo (2018) describes these as 'ten of the most important international film festivals,' although the criteria for this selection are not defined within the piece.

were distributed in at least ten countries (excluding Italy). Garofalo (2018) identifies a decline in the presence of Italian cinema at these film festivals between 2011 and 2017, and insinuates that the festivals themselves are beginning to wane in influence. However, we should be wary of drawing conclusions about the importance of these institutions to the construction of Italian cinema from this data alone. While it may appear that Italian filmmakers are choosing to distribute their films through other channels, this may only indicate a risk that film festivals will be supplanted as one of the key institutions for the circulation Italian cinema in future. Although the emergence of digital platforms such as Mubi and Netflix raise significant questions about the channels through which Italian films come to be distributed, and the way these platforms may come to influence the kind of Italian cinema that international audiences become familiar with, we should be careful to note that this is still a relatively recent phenomenon. As things stand, Garofalo's piece indicates a shift in power in the last six years. Nonetheless, film festivals have been consolidating the notions of both art cinema and Italian cinema for almost a century. Therefore, it appears necessary to examine the ways in which such concepts have been constructed and reinforced, as well as the way in which they are presently expressed, in a moment just before film festivals might give way to other institutions. Doing so will provide insights into such festivals' historical role in the construction of Italian cinema, and, above all, will offer a basis and point of comparison from which to analyse the future developments that Garofalo has identified.

Overall, Italian cinema has come to be considered, like art cinema, an unstable construction, whose meaning is produced and reproduced by the institutions that engage with it. While much work has been done on the academy's role in this

process, other institutions such as film festivals have only come to be acknowledged as another area of study in recent years. Even then, the work on film festivals that currently exists in published form appears to focus on questions of their future crisis, while the need to understand film festivals' influence on existing notions of Italian cinema remains. To reverse my formulation above, this thesis uses European A festivals' awarding and representation of Italian cinema in 2000-2017 as a case study in order to respond to Italian film studies' growing concern with the ideological construction of Italian cinema. I provide a method for the analysis of Italian cinema's ideological construction by one of the key institutions for its international circulation, as well as offering insights into the specific values and tropes that characterise this construction. In doing so, I aim to address both film festival studies' concern with ideology and film festivals, and Italian film studies' concern with ideology and Italian cinema. The primary research question that this project identifies and answers is therefore: 'is there an ideology conditioning European A festivals' awarding and representation of Italian cinema in the years 2000-2017 and, if so, how does it function?' The secondary research questions are: can European A festivals be demonstrated to function in an ideological manner and, if so, what are the key procedures involved in, and values that underpin, this ideology? How is 'Italian cinema' constructed by European A film festivals in their programme synopses? How can we analyse and critique this ideology, opening up space for critical awareness and, perhaps, change?

### **3. KEY CONCEPTS AND METHODOLOGY**

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To respond to such questions, this thesis develops a three-tiered method of ideology critique which analyses: (1) European A festivals' explicit functioning - the festival

'apparatus' made up of its history, organisational and economic structures, pronouncements and practices; (2) festivals' paratextual representation of the films they award - the synopses of films that appear in the festivals' official programmes; (3) the texts of the award-winning films themselves - in particular, the ways in which the film texts confound their institutional representation. This section will contain a discussion of the key concepts that have informed this method, and will explain how each one is deployed in the context of the thesis. The first concept is 'ideology'. I will begin by outlining the theory of ideology that I use throughout the project: a Lacanian theory of ideology primarily based on the work of Žižek. This understanding of ideology underpins the methodology of the thesis overall, although the specific application of it to film festivals and film is informed by three further concepts. The next sub-sections outline these: the extended film, the festival paratext, and the cinematic Real. Putting all four concepts into dialogue, this section delineates the way in which the thesis attempts to map the ideological coordinates of film festivals and their representation of films, thus developing a methodology for answering the research questions stated above.

### **3.A IDEOLOGY**

One of the aims of the thesis is to explicate and develop Lacanian theories of ideology through an analysis of film festivals and films, with the insights and contributions to theory emerging through an engagement with the objects of analysis. Therefore, this section will only outline the fundamental tenets of the theoretical framework I am using, offering the definitions of film and ideology that have formed the basis of the methodology that I have developed. Discussions of specific aspects of the theory can be found in

each chapter of the main body of the thesis. This project locates itself in a tradition of the psychoanalysis most commonly associated with the 1970s '*Screen* theorists' such as Jean-Louis Baudry, Jean-Louis Comolli, Laura Mulvey and Christian Metz. However, it seeks to respond to re-evaluations and developments of such theorists' work. Joan Copjec (1994, 39-40) locates the crucial point of difference between both Foucauldian and Lacanian theories, as well as earlier and later Lacanian theories, in the latter's mobilisation of the concept of 'the Real' - the point of ideology's inherent, and constitutive, failure. Todd McGowan and Sheila Kunkle, likewise, discuss the 'mistaken use of Lacan' in the work of scholars such as Metz and Mulvey, which they argue focused solely on the 'imaginary' and 'symbolic' registers of meaning, resulting in 'a near-total exclusion of the Real'. To elucidate this difference, and the theoretical framework that underpins this thesis's deployment of a certain kind of Lacanian theory, I turn now to define the three registers, and the relationship between them, before explaining their place in the theory of film and ideology that I use throughout the project.

Rooted in Lacan's (2004 [1949]) theory of the mirror stage, conceptions of the imaginary tend to describe it as the register of experience in which a person identifies with an image of their likeness. The imaginary refers to our relationship with a figure of 'imaginary resemblance' such as our mirror image or a character on screen (Žižek, 2001b, 61). This gives rise to notions of films as operating in the register of the imaginary - collections of images that the spectator is ideologically 'duped' into believing represent their likeness (McGowan, 2007, 2-3). This identification with the image is facilitated by the symbolic: 'the structure supporting our experience, providing not only the words we use to describe ourselves and our world, but also the very identities we take up as our own' (McGowan, 2007, 3).

Therefore, together, the registers of the imaginary and symbolic make up the order of *explicit* meanings – the ‘network of signifiers’ used to describe our experience (Lacan, 2004 [1964], 43). Throughout this thesis, I will refer to this order of meaning with the term ‘representation’. Therefore, when I say that European A festivals *represent* Italian cinema in a certain way, I refer to the explicit statements that they make about it.

This network of signifiers is not dissimilar to the notion of ‘discourse’ as it is commonly used by theorists such as Michel Foucault (2012 [1975]) and Edward Said (2003 [1979]). According to this framework, reality is constructed through a network of explicit meanings with observable effects (Vighi and Feldner, 2007, 153). In contrast, recent Lacanian theories argue that ideology operates at the point at which this network of explicit meanings breaks down. This point of breakdown is designated the ‘Real’. The Real is ‘the inherent failure of symbolization’ (Žižek, 1997, 217). While this could be taken to mean simply that discourse is never absolute – it is but ‘a series of floating signifiers’ that, in a certain ideological formation, ‘is totalized [...] through the intervention of certain nodal points,’ Žižek argues that ideology functions, rather, *at this point of non-totality*. Thus, the Real is considered the ‘generative principle’ of ideology – its explicit and implicit meanings (Vighi and Feldner, 2007, 142). In this way, ideology pertains not solely to that which is visible or signifiable – i.e. discourse – but, rather, can be found in the ‘generative matrix that regulates the relationship between visible and non-visible’ (Žižek, 2012, 1). Theorists such as Žižek (1989, 45) argue that ideology regulates this relationship between representation and the Real, the visible and non-visible, through ‘fantasy’. Fantasy is an umbrella term for a whole series of ideological forms that compensate for the inherent failure of

representation.<sup>10</sup> In its fundamental structure, fantasy is the hidden ‘support for our “reality” [i.e. discourse] itself’ (Žižek, 1989, 45). As the ideological support for reality, fantasy functions as ‘an “illusion” which structures our effective, real social relations and thereby masks some insupportable, [R]eal, impossible kernel’ (Žižek, 1989, 45). ‘Fantasy’ designates the attempt to ‘mask’ the Real, to secure signification, and, as such, ‘structures our [...] social relations’. In short, ideology operates not at the level of discourse, but rather at a pre-discursive level – through hidden structures that compensate for the non-totality (the Real) of a discursive formation. Therefore, this thesis’s aim to identify and analyse the ideology that conditions European A festivals’ awarding and representation of Italian cinema can be reformulated thus: it aims to identify and analyse *the fantasies that structure* European A festivals’ awarding and representation of Italian cinema – the precise means through which such festivals compensate for the inherent inability to, in fact, represent that which they claim to.

To comprehend ideology in this way, a further level of precision is needed. In the context of institutions (such as film festivals) ideological fantasy can be understood as the hidden, *implicit* ‘laws’ that support the *explicit* laws that such institutions claim to be governed by – that is, the hidden compensatory mechanisms (fantasies) that regulate the way

<sup>10</sup> The different forms that fantasy can take are described by a sub-set of terms: ‘superego,’ ‘suture,’ ‘the sexual relationship,’ the ‘institutional unconscious,’ and, in certain usages, ‘hegemony’. Each term in this sub-set brings with it a different nuance; they are different forms that the fundamental fantasy structure can take. For now, I aim to define the overarching structure of fantasy, and engage with the notions of fantasy as ‘superego’ or ‘institutional unconscious,’ since these are most pertinent to the framework through which I define and analyse European A festivals. The forms I identify and analyse throughout this thesis are those of hegemony, suture, and the sexual relationship. Chapters one and two are dedicated to defining these forms while the thesis as a whole demonstrates the way in which they function in the ideology that structures European A festivals’ awarding and representation of Italian cinema between 2000 and 2017.

institutions represent themselves and their objects. These implicit laws are sometimes referred to as 'superego' or the 'institutional unconscious'. Both operate at the level of fantasy. Here the 'public law' is supplemented by an 'obscene "nightly" law' - the superego. In other words, 'Superego emerges where the Law - the public Law, the Law articulated in the public discourse, fails' (Žižek, 2005, 54). The inherent 'non-all' nature of representation - the Real limit to the public law - requires that it be supplemented by the superego law (Žižek, 2005, 55). While representation constructs meaning on an explicit level, the superego law 'serves as the unacknowledged support of that meaning' (Žižek, 2005, 56-57). This unacknowledged support, the superego law, is 'the set of unwritten rules that effectively regulate our speech and acts' (Žižek, 2000c, 657). For example, the ways in which film festivals construct Italian cinema are regulated by one such 'set of unwritten rules'. Interpellation, subjection to ideology, functions at the level of identification not with the public law, but with the 'obscene "nightly" law' that functions as its unacknowledged support (Žižek, 2005, 55). This identification is defined as 'enjoyment' or *jouissance*: identification with the senselessness of the public law - the enjoyment of its obscene, unwritten rules. Suggesting the applicability of this model for an ideology critique of institutions, Žižek (2008, 142) states that the superego law can also be considered the 'institutional unconscious' - the 'obscene underside that, precisely as disavowed, sustains the public institution.' The 'obscene underside' of representation constitutes institutions' ideological dimension. While an institution may explicitly represent itself and its constituency in one way, its effective functioning depends upon the set of implicit rules that provide its ideological support. To take an example from this thesis: while European A festivals represent themselves and the films

they award as being committed to integrating the social other (queer, feminine or racialised), these claims are implicitly underpinned by a staging and enjoyment of such figures' otherness - an exclusion of the other that, in actual fact, makes their integration impossible. The exclusion of the social other would thus constitute one of the unwritten rules that make up European A festivals' 'institutional unconscious'.

Žižek (2008, 145) argues that the critique of ideology must centre on identifying and intervening in this implicit level - 'not directly changing the explicit text of the law, but, rather, intervening in its obscene virtual supplement'. The reason for this lies in the superego law's character as *compensatory*; its very attempt to counteract the failure inherent to symbolisation in fact registers such a failure. Indeed, ideology only functions to the extent that 'the obscene superego qua basis and support of the public Law [...] remains unacknowledged, hidden from the public eye' (Žižek, 2005, 71). Therefore, in identifying these unwritten rules, ideology critique aims to disrupt this functioning and highlight the specific - and, I repeat, inadmissible - aspects of it that secure our enjoyment. Importantly, however, to do so is not to posit an *exit* from ideology. Rather, it is to provide a position from which dominant ideologies can be refigured. This distinction is summarised by Fabio Vighi and Heiko Feldner (2007, 156):

If fully endorsed, in other words, attachment eventually turns into disattachment, producing a rift in the seemingly unbreakable consistency of ideological formations from which the radical rearticulation of the very ideological framework suddenly appears possible.

Moving the implicit laws that support ideology onto an explicit level removes their power: by 'fully endors[ing]' these laws, one's 'attachment' - enjoyment of an ideology - 'turns into disattachment'. This provides not an exit from ideology as such, but the possibility of 'the radical rearticulation of the [...]

ideological framework.' Ideology critique aims to provide an (albeit limited) agency over precisely which rules and representations govern our existence. An ideology critique of European A festivals' representation of Italian cinema would aim, therefore, to identify and challenge the implicit rules that govern such representations. It would do so as a means of offering the potential to refigure these laws, to reformulate the ideology that conditions the meanings that European A festivals (re)produce.

Before discussing in more detail how this conception of ideology informs my definition of films and film festivals, I will summarise the coordinates that I have outlined above. Representation is the explicit construction of meaning - for example, the texts that European A festivals use to represent the films they exhibit and award. The Real is the inherent failure of representation - for example, the gap between the festival text and its object of representation (e.g. a film). Fantasy, the level at which ideology functions, is the hidden structure that compensates for the Real. It is comprised of the unwritten rules that regulate representation. It is these rules (rather than the explicit or public ones) that secure our subjection to, our enjoyment of, ideology. Institutions are therefore sustained by their institutional unconscious - the fantasy beneath their explicit representations of themselves or other objects. The aim of this thesis is to analyse the way in which the institutional unconscious of European A festivals functions, to highlight and critique the unwritten rules that regulate such festivals' representation of Italian cinema in the years 2000-2017.

I map the coordinates that I have just described on to different aspects of film festivals: the festival apparatus, festivals' synopses of the films they award, and the films themselves.

Broadly speaking, I analyse the festival apparatus and synopses as discourse and representation, while using films as a means of highlighting the Real of such representation. Bringing the two together, I aim to identify and critique the fantasy formations that underpin European A festivals' explicit construction of meaning. My definition of the relationship between European A festivals' representation of films, the films themselves, and ideology is grounded in the concepts of the extended film, festival paratext, and cinematic Real, which I now turn to discuss and define.

### **3.B THE EXTENDED FILM**

I build on approaches in film studies that treat a film in its broadest sense, its production of meaning extending beyond the film text itself. As such, I distinguish between: cinema - the institution of film; film - the production of meaning generated through the relationship between cinema and the film text; and the film text - the structure and audio-visual content within a 'film' in the traditional sense of the word, i.e. the collection of sounds and images that the viewer sees when watching a 'film' (here taken distinctly from the structures mediating such sounds and images' interpretation). This approach allows me to theorise in relation to ideology the observations that film scholars have made of film more generally: that a film's meaning is not fixed within the film text itself, but comprised of extra- and para-textual elements such as festival awards, the effects of production and distribution decisions, or the rhetoric contained in the texts that accompany a film's exhibition and release. The idea of cinema as an institution comprised of systems of production, exhibition, distribution and criticism is reasonably commonplace, and can be found in such works as Neale's (1981) 'Art Cinema as an Institution,' Higson's (1989) 'The Concept of National Cinema,' and, Pierre Sorlin's (1996)

*Italian National Cinema 1896-1996*.<sup>11</sup> This has been taken up more recently by film festival and Italian film scholars as a means facilitating analyses of the particular institutional structures that condition a film's meaning. Asking 'che cosa è un film?' ('what is a film?') Marco Cucco (2014, 101), encourages a consideration of film beyond the unit of the film text, extending the meaning of 'film' to include its production, distribution and reception. All of these can be thought of as parts of the meaning-making process either on a more obviously material level (production, the creation of the film) or a symbolic level (distribution, promotion and reception, either by audiences or critics). Cucco's (2014) essay considers production - funding deals that both secure a film's creation, but also affect some of the aspects of the film text itself, such as the locations in which it is shot or iconography that appears in it (the giant Martini sign in *The Great Beauty*, for example). While Cucco concentrates on production, Dominic Holdaway (2014) offers a complementary approach, analysing the construction of meaning in a film's paratextual materials. He argues that *Gomorrah's* rhetorical strategy as a purportedly realist film is achieved not only in the film text, but through paratextual materials such as the press packs that accompanied its exhibition at Cannes (Holdaway, 2014, 202). Such materials, it appears, mediate between the institution of cinema and the film text to produce a meaning for the film overall.<sup>12</sup>

Significantly, Cucco's and Holdaway's studies centre on the two *causes célèbres* of Italian cinema in the new millennium - *The Great Beauty* and *Gomorrah* - indicating the importance of the various aspects of a film not only to the

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11 In the field of Italian film studies, see also Wood (2005) and Wagstaff (2007).

12 Overall, but not totally. As I discuss below, the film text itself contains the potential to disrupt this process of meaning making.

construction of the film's own meaning but, perhaps, the construction of the meaning of Italian cinema as it is represented on the international stage. For example, the paratexts that Holdaway analyses are those which accompanied the film's presentation at Cannes, and therefore appear to contribute to the film's construction in the specific context of film festivals, with the specific aim of securing critical attention as well as perhaps awards and distribution deals at the festival. Indeed, moving the focus towards this component of the cinematic institution, Wong (2011, 100) has demonstrated the importance of 'extratextual' materials to film festivals' construction of films, auteurs and global art cinema.<sup>13</sup> She highlights the role of film festivals' 'critical discourses' about films, comprised of: reviews by critics attending the festivals, festival catalogues, retrospectives and press conferences (Wong, 2011, 112; 122-25). Each of these, she argues, contributes significantly to the canonisation of certain films and auteurs, influencing notions of the kind of cinema that film festivals promote more broadly. Combining these approaches, I identify the paratexts produced by and at film festivals as crucial components of a film's meaning. Film, in its extended sense, is partially constituted by film festivals' textual representations of it (and, as I argue later, the implicit rules that govern such representation), as well as the meanings generated within the film text itself.

### **3.C THE FESTIVAL PARATEXT**

Wong's analysis also highlights an important relationship between film festivals and the films they exhibit. Not only do

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<sup>13</sup> In contrast with Wong (2011), and on the basis of other scholars' emphasis on the textuality of festival programmes, I use the term 'paratext' rather than 'extratextual material' for clarity. The notion of the extratextual emphasises an external relationship to the film at the expense of a source's own textuality: it is 'extra', outside, while the film is conceived of as textual. The notion of paratext also implies a relationship of externality to the film text, but maintains the connotation of the material's own textuality.

festivals represent films through these extratextual materials, but they also 'represent themselves' (Wong, 2011, 122). In this reciprocal relation, 'the myth of films and filmmakers are reformed into the myths of festivals as well' (Wong, 2011, 123). The key materials that she identifies in this respect are festival programmes and websites. The relevance of such written sources has been confirmed by various scholars. For example, Rich (1998, 31-32) asserts that 'for an instant replay of the festival mind-set, there's no quicker access than the catalogues published to accompany the screenings.' Likewise, Daniel Dayan (2000, 52) underscores the relevance of written matter to the study of film festivals, describing them as 'a Niagara of printed paper [...] spelling out meanings, offering captions, telling and retelling daily events until they reached a stable, paradigmatic form.' This telling and retelling in festival print culminates in that which Julian Stringer (2008, 53) terms the 'festival image'.<sup>14</sup> Stringer's (2008) study provides a useful model for analysis, as he examines the rhetorical procedures through which a film festival (Nottingham) constructs its institutional identity through its printed materials. Putting the insights from these studies together, I observe that film festivals' written materials, and above all the information contained in their programmes and websites, appear to be a pertinent source of data for this thesis's investigation. In these materials, film festivals appear to represent themselves through representations of the films they exhibit. In doing so, festival programmes and websites constitute a key source when analysing the axis between film festivals' institutional identity and their construction of cinema. As Rhyne (2009, 9-10) argues, this creation of an institutional identity is a product of film festivals' embeddedness within structures of competition within the capitalist third sector. As such, festival

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<sup>14</sup> He also uses the term in an earlier piece on film festivals - see Stringer (2001).

texts are a key source of information: they register and condense the effects of film festivals' economic structure, their need to present themselves via a singular 'image' or 'myth,' on their representation of films and art cinema.

The synopsis, I argue, appears at the zenith of this relationship; it is the festival paratext *par excellence*. The synopsis is, formally, the most concise representation of a film produced by a film festival. Due to its brevity, this paratext must condense and distil the meaning of a film more so than, for example, a long review. As distillations, these texts are therefore particularly rich with meaning. Moreover, as the festival's 'official' representation of a film – that which symbolises the film in the festival programme – the synopsis is embedded within the festival apparatus, the text most directly conditioned by, and constitutive of, a festival's self-representation and representation of films in line with certain values. While, for example, reviews in the festival press are also a part of the film festival as an institution, and thus likely to be governed by a similar institutional unconscious, the synopses that appear in a festival's official programme are, in a sense, the more direct expressions of this unconscious. They exist precisely at the axis of a film festival's self-representation and representation of the films they award. Paired with the condensation of meaning required by their form, this fact makes synopses the most significant paratexts for an analysis of the way in which European A festivals' representation of films is conditioned by the ideology of the festivals' themselves.

I also aim to foreground the differences between the synopsis and the film text as a means of interpreting the ideology condensed in the former. The scholars I cite above tend to consider the paratextual materials as, overall, co-extensive with the film text or festival image, contributing to

the production of a coherent meaning. For example, while Wong (2011, 100; 128) argues that the paratextual processes involved in the meaning of the films involve a struggle between different groups such as filmmakers, programmers and critics, she concludes that, ultimately, ‘they all work together [...] toward making the films the kinds of works they want, as art, as commodities, and both’. Wong’s conclusion gives the impression of overall coherence: the film (in its broad sense) is not inherently split but achieves a fullness of meaning through the successful negotiation of different interests. Holdaway’s (2014) analysis of the rhetoric involved in the construction of *Gomorra* as a realist film focuses largely on the production of a coherent meaning, as well. However, he implies that the film text might offer a site of resistance to this meaning, framing this rhetoric as part of a broader strategy that emphasises the realist elements of an essentially ‘hybrid’ text. My approach affords a point of distinction from such observations. In contrast with the sense of continuity between the paratext and film text, I accentuate the points of antagonism between the two as a means of intervening in the ideology governing festivals’ representations of films. I do so using the concept of the cinematic Real, which I now turn to define.

### **3.D THE CINEMATIC REAL**

In contrasting the paratext and film text, I do not aim to imply that synopses are simply partial representations, while film texts (or, more to the point, my interpretations of them) offer a complete or stable meaning. It is at this point that the third conceptual understanding of film that this thesis applies becomes crucial. Indeed, the critical aspect of this project lies in its foregrounding of the way in which films can make manifest the Real failure of representation and, thus, highlight the functioning of ideology. My approach to the film text

follows the underpinning tenet of recent Lacanian film theory: film texts as sites of the Real.<sup>15</sup> Recent Lacanian film studies emphasises films' potential to make manifest the inherent failure of ideology: 'rather than seducing us into accepting our symbolic prison, film tends to show us the [R]eal openings within that prison' (McGowan, 2007, 171). I understand the 'symbolic prison' that McGowan refers to as ideological interpellation through both the implicit and explicit levels of the symbolic. Meanwhile, I conceive of the '[R]eal openings' as moments which can make manifest the Real - the limit to signification that lies between the two levels of the symbolic. In this sense, when focusing on the Real one pauses on a moment of failure - precisely the moment of failure that at once constitutes and challenges ideology. To the extent that the superego supplement to representation is a *compensatory* procedure, in the very moment that it secures ideology's effective functioning it also registers its failure. It is for this reason that ideology critique is possible: meaning is not trapped in a 'symbolic prison' but rather cut through by the Real. In contrast with the ideological procedure of compensating for the Real through an identification with the superego supplement to representation, ideology critique fixates on the Real. The difference between the two positions is summarised well by McGowan and Kunkle's (2004, xviii) description of film's relationship to ideology:

the ideological dimension of film lies in its ability to offer a fantasy scenario that delivers us from a traumatic Real. At the same time, film's radicality

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15 Although not pertinent to the discussion at hand, film texts can make manifest the Real of not only their institutional construction, but also *their own* representation, for example, containing techniques that highlight the partiality of the perspective that the film text itself might offer (McGowan, 2007, 6). I discuss and mobilise this aspect of the film text in chapters one through four via the concepts of: metacinematic hysteria - a film text's use of metacinematic techniques to question its own status as a film; interface - the uncanny redoubling of an image on screen; and the Gaze - the manifestation of the Real in the field of vision.

lies in its ability to involve us in an encounter with this Real. Thus the ideological and radical dimensions of film overlap; both involve a relationship to the traumatic Real.

The scholars define film in relation to the Real, highlighting its potential to either reinforce ideology through a compensatory 'fantasy scenario' or radically challenge it by 'involving us in an encounter with this Real.' I apply and develop their conception of film to facilitate an ideology critique of a specific institution, and, moreover, the institution proper to films' ideological construction, film festivals. If film festivals ideologically construct films, the difference between the film itself and its representation makes manifest the Real - the point at which the festival's symbolisation of the film fails. In the context of my analysis, the encounter with the Real that film affords is, therefore, the encounter with the Real of European A festivals' representations of films. As discussed above, this Real is the point at which signification fails and ideology emerges in the form of fantasy or superego law. By highlighting the specific differences between the film text and a festival's representation of it, I identify the points at which the ideological fantasy is likely to emerge, and which forms it might take. This allows me to better identify and critique specific unwritten rules that compensate for the Real and, thus analyse the ideology conditioning European A festivals' awarding and representation of Italian cinema. To continue my example above: while European A festivals explicitly claim to be committed to integrating the other, *Fire at Sea's* portrayal of an implied European spectator's ideological investment in images of the other's suffering highlights the way in which European A festivals' claims are underwritten by an ideological investment in the othering of such figures.

### **3.E OUTLINE OF METHODOLOGY**

Based on the concepts just discussed, this thesis offers a three-tiered method for analysing the ideology conditioning European A festivals' awarding and construction of Italian cinema in the years 2000-2017. Each chapter begins with an analysis of the European A festival apparatus, attempting to identify, overall, the explicit rules through which they claim to function, and using a Lacanian theory of ideology to hypothesise how such rules might be underpinned by a hidden, fantasmatic supplement. I follow Wong's (2011) use of the term 'apparatus' to refer to the overall architecture and practices that constitute a film festival, including: their histories; models of funding; processes of selection; organisation of different sections such as the main competition and various fringe events; the roles Festival Directors and other stakeholders play; rituals of prize giving; their cultivation of media attention; the statements that they make about themselves or that filmmakers make about them; and their politics of location. I also profit from the association of apparatus with Louis Althusser's (2001 [1971]) theory of ideological state apparatuses. Using the theory of ideology described above, I treat the apparatus as but one aspect of ideology - ideology as it is manifest at the level of representation. However, I do so as a means of identifying the points at which such representations may fail and thus of generating hypotheses about the fantasmatic structures that may underpin European A festivals overall. I use this analysis as a means of grounding the interpretations of paratexts and film texts that follow.

Each chapter then tests these hypotheses through an examination of a specific case study. First, I concentrate on the synopsis through which a festival represents an Italian film that it has awarded top prize to. This constitutes the second tier of the thesis' method. I ground this analysis in a review of

scholarly interpretations of the film in question, which I treat not only as a means of gathering information about the film (as one would in a literature review), but as another institutional discourse symptomatic of the ideology conditioning the construction of a certain kind of Italian cinema internationally. (I do so on the basis of Italian film studies' treatment of itself as ideological, discussed above.) I then undertake a psychoanalytically-inflected discourse analysis of European A festivals' synopses of the films that they award top prize to. This is implicitly informed by Ian Parker's (2005, 167-78) model of discourse analysis and focuses on the key elements that Parker identifies as central to a text's construction of meaning: rhetorical constructions, rhetorical conclusions, repeated words which anchor representation, the implicit norms or 'rules' that the text refers to, and points of contradiction. In a manner complementary to its analysis of the European A festival apparatus, each chapter's interpretation of the synopses identifies the explicit ways in which such festivals represent Italian cinema. Meanwhile, employing Parker's focus on the points of contradiction in the text, I identify the manner in which such representations may fall short. I do so initially by using the information gathered from existing information on film festivals and scholarly interpretations of the film. However, I seek to confirm my hypotheses about the ideological functioning of European A festivals above all through an analysis of the film texts that such festivals attempt to represent.

The third tier of this thesis's methodology is therefore an analysis of the ways in which films can make manifest the Real points of failure in festivals' representations of them. To demonstrate and clarify the ideological procedures that regulate European A festivals' representation of Italian cinema, I mobilise a reading of film texts that emphasises the way in

which they escape the meanings ascribed to them. While this reading highlights the functioning of ideology, as well as the specific values that this ideology attempts to highlight or repress, it does not aim at an interpretation of the truth of the film. It does not imply that there exists a synopsis or even critical interpretation that could totally represent the film being studied. Rather, I offer a deliberately partial interpretation which acknowledges the film's status as an ambivalent text, and uses that status as a means of critiquing the film's ideological representation by European A festivals. Thus, each chapter culminates in an analysis that uses the film text as a means of 'looking awry' at the festival apparatus and the synopsis - attempting to identify the hidden laws structuring the festivals' paratextual representation of films by analysing their 'hidden inconsistencies' (Žižek, 1992, 3). Combining all three tiers of analysis, I aim to identify and critique the ideological fantasy that structures their awarding and representation of Italian cinema in the years 2000-2017.

#### **4. CORPUS AND SCOPE**

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In order to permit the level of detail required by this thesis's method of ideology critique, the project works with a corpus of five primary case studies, which it supplements with a discussion of secondary case studies in the conclusion. These cases have been selected as the most representative within a corpus defined as: Italian films that have won Best Picture or equivalent at a European A festival in the years 2000-2017. In some respects, this thesis takes European A festivals' symbolic representation of cinema at its word, and does so precisely as a means of critiquing them.<sup>16</sup> The corpus generated in this

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<sup>16</sup> This approach is, in part, informed by Žižek's (2005, 71) contestation that the most effective critique of ideology entails 'over-identification' with it - precisely, taking it at its word as a means of bringing its obscene, implicit laws into view.

project reproduces the hegemony of the Northern hemisphere by focusing on European A festivals, and it reproduces the assumptions regarding art cinema by focusing on Italian films that have won top prize at such festivals. It also reproduces, on a basic level, European A festivals' definition of Italian cinema – it treats films as 'Italian' if they are defined as such by the European A festival that has awarded it top prize. This corpus reproduces, in short, the dominant ideas of art cinema and the geopolitical power structures in which such ideas are embedded, and does so as a means of critiquing them. However, due to its grounding in Lacanian theories of ideology, this thesis does not take such notions as fixed: it treats concepts such as the global North and Europe, art cinema and Italian cinema as inherently unstable and thus open to critique. Basing its corpus in these ideological constructions allows me to destabilise such terms at their basis. While the whole thesis constitutes an ideological critique of the idea of 'Italian cinema,' chapters one and three critique notions of art cinema as festivals define it, and chapters two, four and five critique European A festivals' construction of a global North/South divide and, as such, reproduction of Northern hegemony. In the section below I discuss the ways in which this I have ensured I analyse case studies with the greatest significance to the critique of dominant ideological constructions of art cinema in the new millennium that this thesis aims at.

#### **4.A THE EUROPEAN A CIRCUIT AND ITS PRIZE WINNERS**

Film festival studies has often manifested a certain suspicion towards the notion of the 'circuit'. Skadi Loist (2016, 49) notes that, although very commonly used by both industry professionals and scholars, the word is 'a contingent and volatile term.' In general, issues arise when the word 'circuit' is used in a manner that seems to refer to all film festivals while

implicitly referring only to a select few, often the ‘top-tier’ of international competitive film festivals.<sup>17</sup> This has led scholars such as Elsaesser (2005) and De Valck (2007) to deploy the term ‘network’ as a means of capturing the sense of interconnectedness across film festivals worldwide. Iordanova (2009) and Rhyne (2009) also warn against the use of the term circuit for its implication of cohesion across a enormous number of disparate film festivals. As discussed above, Rhyne (2009) argues that film festivals are defined by a common economic model, and are thus best thought of as a culture industry rather than a circuit. Meanwhile, Iordanova (2009) conceives of festivals in terms of distribution and supply chains. These important caveats do not, however, exclude the possibility of a sub-section within the film festival network, industry or chain from being considered a circuit. Iordanova (2009, 31), for example, ultimately defends the notion of the circuit but clarifies that it should be used precisely, referring to specific groupings of festivals rather than as a catch-all term for the whole network. She describes these groupings as ‘parallel circuits’ - circuits that interact but do not overlap significantly in their sources of funding, intended audience or objectives (Iordanova, 2009, 30-31).

One such parallel circuit she identifies is that of major, competitive festivals - those which run an international competition and whose priority is film industry attendance and development. It is also known as the ‘A-list’. The so-called ‘A-list’ refers to festivals that have been accredited by FIAPF as ‘competitive feature film festivals’ - annual, non-specialised festivals that hold an international competition, such as Cannes or the Berlinale (FIAPF, 2016a).<sup>18</sup> We find justification for treating this group of festivals as a circuit and, moreover, the

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17 Loist (2016, 50) approximates that there are six thousand film festivals worldwide.

18 A full list of A festivals can be found in appendix 1.

most influential one with regards to the construction of art cinema worldwide, in several of its features. First, the A-list is exemplary of a festival circuit both in its organisation and its status in the imaginary of the film industry. This circuit is, in fact, the one that many scholars and industry professionals implicitly refer to when they speak of the film festival circuit in general: “‘circuit’ is often used synonymous [sic] with the elite A-list’ (Loist, 2016, 60). A festivals are also exemplary of the notion of the circuit: ‘as soon as FIAPF started to regulate the festivals and create the “A-list” festivals, the idea of a circuit became visible’ (Loist, 2016, 55). Finally, in a very practical sense, A festivals can be distinguished and grouped together due to their common subscription to the regulations that FIAPF imposes on them.

The common features that secure such festivals A accreditation make them not only exemplary of the festival circuit, but renders them particularly relevant to a study of the dominant ideological notions of art and Italian cinema that film festivals produce, and the way in which their embeddedness within global capitalism influences this. A festivals are at once particularly commercialised and particularly influential in the film industry. In part, this is a result of FIAPF’s role in managing festivals, since accreditation as ‘A’ is influenced by the association’s mediation of industrial and commercial interests. FIAPF (2016b) is a regulation body whose aim is to ‘facilitate the job of the producers, sales agents and distributors in the management of their relationships with the festivals.’ Moreover, its accreditation and regulations ‘constitute a trust contract between those festivals and the film industry at large. Accredited festivals are expected to implement quality and reliability standards that meet industry expectations’ (FIAPF, 2016b). In other words, FIAPF functions as a mediator between festivals and the film industry, with its

accreditation guaranteeing certain standards for film professionals. An accredited film festival must meet certain requirements in order to attract the sales agents, distributors and producers that, in turn, give the festival its position of influence in the film industry. Indeed, due to the strong commercial presence at A festivals, they have been dubbed 'business festivals' - events aimed primarily at facilitating the business of the film industry (Peranson, 2008, 38).

When we consider more closely A festivals' importance as a node in the film industry, the question of programming becomes pertinent to our understanding of how notions of art cinema are constructed. De Valck (2014, 78) describes these events as both exhibition sites and marketplaces: while festival judges function as arbiters of taste, the decisions they make also have an increasingly influential role within the global market. This works on a direct level due to the role that A festivals have in bringing together sales agents looking to sell films and distribution companies looking to acquire them. Film markets, networking events and pitching sessions complement film exhibition to facilitate the sale and circulation of film (Iordanova, 2015, 8). On a more indirect level, the effects of awards and programming also play a role in this process. Being exhibited in at an A festival offers an important source of exposure and prestige for a film. Kenneth Turan (2002, 8) highlights the way in which this is used by distributors of Hollywood and non-Hollywood films alike, functioning as an 'inexpensive marketing tool'. Indeed, the role of festivals for a film's marketing is confirmed by industry professionals, both in word and in practice. In a *New York Times* article on distribution practices and film festivals, Ex-Vice President for Acquisitions at Twentieth Century Fox, Rosanne Korenberg (cited in Kennedy, 1999, 2), describes the industry's common strategy 'to take a movie from festival to festival,' concluding

that 'they've become one big cheap marketing device.' The same article cites an early case of an Italian award-winning film, Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful* (*La vita è bella*, 1997), as an example of this strategy. The film's exhibition and winning of the Grand Prize at Cannes in 1997 was part of Miramax's 'vigorous promotion of the film' via 'an increasingly popular and effective marketing tool: film festivals' (Kennedy, 1999, 2). *Life Is Beautiful* was screened at forty festivals winning the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film the following March (Kennedy, 1999, 2).

While exhibition appears to be valued in itself by film promoters and distributors, it is the winning of awards at A festivals that has a demonstrable impact on the circulation of films. As discussed above, Mezias et al (2008; 2011) have empirically shown that winning top prize at A festivals such as Cannes, Venice or Berlin significantly increases the number of countries that a film is distributed in, making entering and winning the main competition at such festivals an attractive strategy for sales agents and distributors. It appears therefore that Best Picture winners are among the most significant cases of films that come to represent a cinema worldwide, achieving the widest global distribution. While this may not always be the case, it appears to be on the majority of occasions, given Mezias et al's findings. Therefore, in the absence of data to the contrary, it seems reasonable to assume that analysing Italian films that have won Best Picture at an A festival will afford the most significant information regarding film festivals' representation and construction of Italian cinema.

Joseph Lampel et al (2013) have demonstrated the importance of a festival's reputation on the effects that screenings and awards at that festival has on a film's success. They showed that films that won an award at a festival with experienced

directors on the jury tended to be released in more countries. This creates a cycle of 'symbolic capital' in which prestigious festivals capable of attracting experienced directors confer more prestige onto the films they award, which, in turn, results in greater success of their award-winning films, and thus confirms the festival's own status as a central node in the film industry (Lampel et al., 2013, 12-13). This means that it is most productive not only to consider films awarded by A festivals - these being among the most valued by the industry - but those films awarded by the most influential of the A festivals, too. Doing so affords a limited but highly representative body of films and thus a corpus appropriate to this thesis's aim at both depth and significance of analysis. It is notable in this regard that the festivals Mezias et al (2008; 2011) use for their analysis of the impact of awards on film distribution are European A festivals. The A festival phenomenon and, indeed, the film festival phenomenon, emerged in Europe, and in many respects this history continues to affect the economy of influence within the circuit itself. Indeed, Stringer (2001, 137) argues the organisation of the circuit is 'a metaphor for the geographically uneven development that characterises the world of international film culture.' This entails the reproduction of the 'core' via larger, more successful festivals (for example, the concentration of A festivals in Europe - see appendix 1) and the 'periphery' to which smaller festivals are relegated (Stringer, 2001, 138). Stringer (2001, 135) identifies 'the apex of international media power, the center of which is located, by implication, at Western film festivals.' Loist (2016, 55) also places the most influential festivals in the 'West' (or, more accurately, the northern hemisphere); she identifies the 'hierarchical' nature of the A circuit in which FIAPF manifests a preference for North American and European festivals. Since the aim of this thesis is to analyse and critique the most

dominant representations of film by film festivals, I have chosen to focus on films that have won top prize at an A festival within the European sub-section of the A circuit. This has been narrowed down to European A festivals due to their historical and contemporary dominance in the A circuit, and as a means of limiting this thesis's corpus to a manageable size.

#### **4.B ITALIAN CINEMA IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM**

Furthermore, to achieve this study's aims of researching the ideology across the European A circuit in the necessary depth, I focus on a particular case within the circuit's construction of art cinema more broadly: Italian cinema. While the concept of national cinema can be problematised down to its most basic meaning, signifiers of national identity still carry weight in the institutional construction of film. As Mark Betz (2001, 9) has argued:

European art films have been left free to carry on as signifiers of stable national cinemas and identities or as gleaming expressions of their auteur's vision, somehow not blurred by the quite specific determinants of cross-national cooperation that leave their marks everywhere on the film, from its budget to its shooting locations to its cast to its soundtrack.

Indeed, European A festivals appear to still invest in such terms, continuing to highlight films' supposed nationalities on their websites and in their programmes. Since my primary concern is the way in which these festivals construct Italian cinema, I have therefore used the festivals' own designations of a film's nationality when selecting Italian films for the corpus. Although I acknowledge the risk of homogenising the idea of global art cinema by attempting to view it through one case of a national cinema, an investigation of European A festivals' construction of the representative case of Italian cinema can offer a starting point for future investigation into A festivals'

ideological construction of cinema more broadly. I treat Italian cinema as a significant case study due to Italy's historical centrality to the film festival phenomenon, as well as Italian neorealism's role in contributing to dominant notions of art cinema. I also consider it to be a representative example of a film industry whose films depend on exposure at film festivals for access to the international film market.

Italy and Italian cinema have, historically, been crucial to both the development of the film festival phenomenon and the construction of global art cinema (both in general and by festivals). The first international film festival was, in fact, an Italian festival: Venice, then known as the *Esposizione internazionale d'arte cinematografica* (Venice International Film Festival, 2018). This festival, founded in 1932, exhibited films from around the world and held an international competition in which, in principle, films from across the world could win awards. (I say in principle because, in practice, the festival only awarded films from Fascist states - Italian and German films.) After the fall of Fascism and the end of World War II, Venice continued to be one of the hegemonic centres of cinema and the film festival network, constituting one half of the 'Venice-Cannes duopoly' that dominated the network in the post-war period (Pisu, 2018, 110). Along with Cannes, it was also one of the first festivals to receive A accreditation from FIAPF, and Italian film industry members wielded considerable influence over the federation in its early years. FIAPF was based in Rome between 1950 and 1956 and led by Italian President Renato Gualino.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, at the federation's first congress in 1950, the only festival director invited to the event was Antonio Petrucci of the Venice film festival. Re-enforcing its influence over the European festival circuit, Venice also

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<sup>19</sup> The historical data used here and throughout the rest of this paragraph is taken from Pisu (2018, 111).

established the first film market in 1950. Cannes quickly emulated Venice, holding its own film market in 1951. Historically, Italy and, in particular, the Venice film festival is the origin of many of the features that characterise the European A circuit: the existence of an international competition and A accreditation by FIAPF, as well as the close links to international trade prioritised by such festivals and exemplified by the presence of film markets at some of them. This influence continues to the present day, with Venice featuring alongside Cannes and, now, the Berlinale as one of the three most influential (and arguably most studied) film festivals worldwide.

Venice festival is an influential component of the Italian film industry, receiving state funding from the Fascist era to the present as a means of supporting the industry more broadly (Wood, 2005, 111). In some respects, the prominence of Venice on the European, and even world, stage, secures a measure of influence for the Italian film industry as well. Historically, this was particularly the case in film festivals' 'nationalist' phase, in which each festival aimed primarily at showcasing the cinema of its host nation (De Valck, 2007, 58). While scholars such as De Valck (2007, 68) and Andrews (2010, 10) argue that festivals have moved into a globalised or post-national phase, as signalled by their installation of international juries, these events still manifest a commitment to national cinema through their selection and awarding of domestic films in the main competition and their inclusion of sections dedicated to domestic films alongside the competition.<sup>20</sup> Film festivals such as Venice, therefore, continue to be important tools in the development of national film industries, as evidenced by their continuing state support, justified on precisely such grounds. It is no coincidence, then, that the three national cinemas

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<sup>20</sup> For a further discussion of this, see chapter five.

historically associated with notions of 'art cinema' often correspond to the three biggest film festivals' countries of origin: Italy (Venice), France (Cannes), and Berlin (German). (We might also add Spanish cinema, which the San Sebastián film festival has done much to promote alongside Spanish-language and Lusophone cinema more generally).

Indeed, alongside the importance of Venice to the development of the European A circuit, we can also observe the importance of Italian cinema to the development of the concept of art cinema as promoted by film festivals and scholars alike. The notions of art cinema propounded in both scholarship and at film festivals have traditionally been grounded in a European cinema defined largely in relation to the Italian neorealism and the French *nouvelle vague* or New Wave. For example, the initial examples of art cinema that Neale (1981) gives are not only European, but Italian - neorealism and the auteur cinema represented by Michelangelo Antonioni and Federico Fellini. Neale then moves on to case studies of three European national cinemas - French, German and Italian. Indeed, Italian neorealism has often been treated as a foundational mode of filmmaking to not only European, but also global art cinema. Historicising the development of art cinema as a concept, Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (2010, 15) argue that 'art cinema's cohesion as a category first emerges with the popularity of Italian neorealism, and it retains a close association with the thematic and aesthetic impulses of that post-war tradition.' Its global influence continues as

Neorealism [...] sets the standard for European new wave cinemas, post-colonial cinemas, cinemas of social change and political liberation, the American 'new independents' of the 1970s and late twentieth-century explorations of realism by Italian, Danish, Romanian, and Chinese cinemas (Schoonover, 2012, 218).

In fact, we can observe that one of the founding moments of the film festival phenomenon after the World War II - Cannes' first edition in 1946 - marks, at the same time, the founding moment of Italian neorealism's international success. This moment culminated in the Cannes jury awarding Italian neorealist film, *Rome, Open City* (*Roma città aperta*, Rossellini, 1945) its highest accolade. De Valck (2007, 49) underlines the importance of *this* film to the festival's first edition: 'the revelation of the 1946 festival was the anti-fascist *Roma, Città Aperta*'. This moment highlights the importance of the relationship between Italian cinema and film festivals: in a reciprocal relation, *Rome, Open City's* presentation at Cannes helped to generate the mythology surrounding the festival and, later, the European A circuit that has come to emulate it. Meanwhile, the festival contributed to the mythology surrounding Italian neorealism and, later, the notions of global art cinema set against its standard.<sup>21</sup>

Continuing this reciprocity, film festivals have also been crucial to the development of a certain kind of exportable Italian cinema, from Italian neorealism to auteur cinema (1950s and '60s cinema associated with prestigious directors such as Fellini and Antonioni). Indeed, these two pillars of exportable Italian cinema - neorealism and auteur cinema - recur in this thesis' analysis of the ideology of European A festivals. Such an analysis has required me to repeatedly grapple with notions of the auteur and the kind of political vision associated with neorealism (which I refer to as 'brutal vision' in chapter four), both of which continue to appear in contemporary representations of Italian cinema by these festivals. Moreover, the development of this cinema by film festivals also appears to have influenced these institutions' construction of both their

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21 I discuss the implications of this mythology, and what it might mean for European A festivals' construction of both cinema and Europe, in chapter four.

'image', and that of cinema in general. Reading Mary Wood's (2005) industrial analysis of Italian auteur cinema alongside Wong's (2011) examination of film festivals' construction of art cinema renders this comparison clear. Writing from the perspective of Italian cinema's development, Wood (2005, 135) argues that competing for recognition on the festival circuit has been a crucial strategy for Italian directors from the heyday of auteur cinema to the present. She observes that contemporary auteurs such as Nanni Moretti 'follow the regular pattern of authorial stylistic flourishes and serious themes, playing the festival circuits in order to gain recognition, which will lead to international distribution' (Wood, 2005, 135). If 'playing the festival circuits' in this way is typical of Italian auteurs' strategies to access recognition and international distribution, so cultivating auteurs (including Italian ones) appears to be part of film festivals' attempts at self-definition and their construction of certain ideas of art cinema. It is perhaps telling that the case study Wong uses to analyse film festivals' creation of ideas about film is that of the archetypal Italian auteur I have already had recourse to mention twice in this introduction, Antonioni. Wong (2011) argues that Cannes' cultivation of Antonioni is typical of the way in which film festivals use paratextual elements to define the kind of cinema that they value and on which they stake their prestige. From neorealism to auteur cinema, Italian film appears to be a key example of a national cinema that depends upon film festivals for its international prestige and circulation and, moreover, one that instantiates and provides the origins for many of the tropes through which European A festivals construct art cinema more generally. A particular Italian cinematic tradition constitutes not only the yardstick against which much contemporary Italian film is measured, but, through European A festivals' investment in the same tradition

and its key terms, global art cinema may be measured also. As such, Italian cinema constitutes a particularly representative case of the kind of film valued by European A festivals and through which the circuit both defines itself and the cinema it seeks to construct.

In the process of analysing European A festivals' ideological construction of art cinema through the Italian case, this thesis also demonstrates the continuation of the reciprocal relationship between European film festivals and Italian cinema in the new millennium. In doing so, I respond to a lacuna in both film festival and Italian film studies - a lack of research into the role of Italian cinema in European A festivals' construction of global art cinema more broadly, and the role of European A festivals in the construction of Italian cinema. Beyond the historical grounding for this research, a recent anecdote about contemporary Italian cinema and its relationship to film festivals - in this case, Cannes - suggests the possibility that the phenomenon I have been discussing continues to the present day. In the year 2000 Cannes controversially did not include any Italian films in its main competition. A striking example of Italian filmmakers' concern with film festivals was the reactions of producer Dino DeLaurentiis as well as directors Christian De Sica and Ricky Tognazzi. DeLaurentiis was quoted as saying 'In an international festival, it's ridiculous to exclude our cinema' (quoted in Turan, 2002, 27). His description of this state of affairs as 'ridiculous' evokes (albeit negatively) the usually symbiotic relationship between Italian films and international film festivals. Meanwhile, Tognazzi expressed his frustration at Italian cinema's being 'shut out' of Cannes by threatening to avoid eating French goat cheese for a year (quoted in Turan, 2002, 27). At this moment, Cannes appeared at risk of alienating the Italian film industry by failing to represent its

films in the main competition. While one cannot prove a direct relationship, it appears convenient that, in the following year, Cannes awarded Moretti's *The Son's Room*, the festival's top prize, the Palme d'Or. As Iordanova (2009, 26) has shown, film festivals depend upon loyalty from film directors, and programmers work hard to nurture relationships with auteurs as a means of ensuring the much-needed supply of films for the main competition. The risks involved in alienating not only a director, but an entire national cinema surely outweigh the cost of ensuring certain films pride of place in a festival's international competition. This, paired with Garofalo's (2018) observations regarding the 'notable presence' and influence of Italian cinema in major international film festivals up until at least 2011, suggests the relevance of the Italian case study from both a historical and contemporary perspective. As such, this thesis focuses on the contemporary period, the years 2000-2017, sandwiched between the Cannes incident and what may be, if we are to follow Garofalo's (2018) data, the beginning of the end of European A festivals' considerable influence over the circulation of Italian cinema worldwide. In doing so, I treat this period as a peak of sorts: the most recent and possibly the last period of European A festivals' influence over the construction and circulation of Italian cinema, one which condenses the histories of their engagement with and construction of Italian film.

#### **4.C PRIMARY AND SECONDARY CASE STUDIES**

I have chosen to analyse the films that are most representative of the ideological procedures and effects that I have found when examining the corpus as a whole. Moreover, in order to avoid duplication, I have not included in-depth analyses of films that present similar information. The thesis is therefore structured around five analyses of five Italian films that I have

assessed to be the most representative case studies. The specific reasons for their inclusion are discussed in each chapter. I also discuss other Best Picture winners in the conclusion, using them to support the thesis's closing observations. The primary case studies I analyse are: *The Son's Room*; *Facing Window*; *The Great Beauty*; *Fire at Sea*; and, finally, *Gomorrah*. The secondary case studies in the corpus are: *A Children's Story* (*Certi bambini*, Andrea and Antonio Frazzi, 2004); *Private* (Saverio Costanzo, 2004); *Cesare Must Die* (*Cesare deve morire*, Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, 2011; and *Sacro GRA* (Gianfranco Rosi, 2013).

I have selected *Gomorrah* in the place of *A Children's Story* since both were represented in a similar way by the festivals that awarded them Best Picture (the Cannes Grand Prix for *Gomorrah*, and Karlovy Vary Crystal Globe for *A Children's Story*). As I discuss in chapter five and the conclusion, the festival synopses of both films instantiate ideas of southern Italy as a distant, violent - in short, orientalised - place on the peripheries of global capitalism, and represented the films as realistic depictions of the 'truth' of that place. Given that both case studies afford access to the same ideological trope - that which I designate the displacement of global capitalism's excesses onto the orientalised other in chapter five - I chose to privilege the most successful of the two, since it can be seen as a stronger representative of the image of Italian cinema worldwide. *Gomorrah* has had exceptional critical and financial success in the new millennium, becoming a *cause célèbre* of Italian cinema. This can be observed through the film's box office takings and the number of countries it was distributed in: overall it has made \$33,282,383 worldwide, and achieved theatrical distribution in thirty-three countries (Box Office Mojo, 2018a). I have also chosen to exclude *Private* from the analysis. On the one hand, the film is anomalous: it is the only

one set outside of Italy, in Palestine. On the other hand, the way in which the film is represented by Locarno reproduces the same notions of the global South as a strange, other place characterised by instability and violence. The synopsis also emphasises the film's realist depiction of this place - its being 'based on a true story' and the director's time spent auditioning Israeli and Palestinian actors, which the text implies is symbolic of the really-existing Israel-Palestine conflict, and attempts to unite the two nations. Finally, I discuss *Caesar Must Die* and *Sacro GRA* in the conclusion chapter rather than treating them as separate case studies because they appear to bring together several of the tropes that I identify throughout the thesis and therefore function best as a means of summarising the project's findings rather than as individual case studies in themselves. For example, *Caesar Must Die* brings together questions of artistic universality - via the film's representation in relation to Shakespeare as a universal but also a male artist/author - that I analyse in chapters one and three, as well as questions of the fantasy of integrating the social other - via the film synopsis' depiction of the film's cast (criminals in a maximum security prison) in a way that deindividualises them while attempting to appeal to ideas of a shared humanity (their 'hopes and fears') - that I analyse in chapters two and four.

## **5. SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS**

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As well as dedicating one chapter to each of the five case studies, the thesis is also organised into two sections. The first identifies and analyses three forms that European A festivals' ideological fantasy takes: hegemony - the disavowal of the contingency of the terms through which festivals represent themselves and the films they award; the sexual relationship - the construction of a *complementary* figure of the other, whose

integration into the symbolic order gives it the appearance of totality; suture – the construction of an *oppositional* figure of the other, whose exclusion also gives the symbolic order the appearance of totality. I consider all three of these as variations on the overall structure of fantasy – the attempt to compensate for the inherent failure of signification, the Real. However, analysing these specific forms allows me identify and analyse European A festival ideology more precisely. In particular, this section identifies two key values through which European A festivals represent themselves and the films they award: art and politics. It also identifies two corresponding figures that festivals mobilise in line with these values: the auteur and the social other. Finally, it identifies two obscene, unwritten laws that regulate European A festivals' representations of themselves and Italian cinema through these values and figures: the commercial contingency on which festivals' construction of 'art' or art cinema is founded, and the ideological investment in the exclusion of the social other that implicitly underpins their claims to integrate such figures. Section two builds on these findings, analysing in greater depth these fantasies and the unwritten laws that constitute them. In this section the ideological structure of suture becomes paramount, and I analyse the exclusions on which European A festival ideology is predicated. Each of these exclusions corresponds to a previous structure identified in section one. The fantasy of hegemony over the term 'art' – or artistic universality – corresponds with the fantasmatic exclusion of the feminine via the figure of the *masculine* auteur. The fantasy of the sexual relationship, the integration of the social other – or achievement of a humanist political universality – corresponds with the fantasmatic exclusion of the social other, for example via the figure of the African or Southerner as the other of film festivals' Eurocentric humanism. A consideration of the role of

European A festivals' embeddedness in global capitalism runs across both sections, but I have aimed to foreground this aspect of festivals most in the first and last chapters (with the exception of the conclusion). I do so as a means of demonstrating the crucial role of capital in European A festivals' construction of both artistic universality (chapter one) and political universality (chapter five). I conclude that the primary superego law, *the* unwritten rule, that regulates European A festivals' awarding and representation of Italian cinema between 2000 and 2017, and the exclusions on which such representations rest, is the law of capital.

In chapter one, I analyse the fantasy underpinning European A festivals' claims to artistic universality, predicated on the disavowal of the commercial constraints that condition festivals' organisation and the very notions of 'art' that they construct. I theorise this through the concept of hegemony - the fantasy structure that attempts to ascribe a fixed and universal meaning to a particular and contingent term. I argue that European A festivals attempt to ascribe 'the art of film' a universal meaning that implicitly suggests their 'anti-commercial purity' (Andrews, 2010, 9). I demonstrate that festivals do so by mobilising the figure of the auteur as a signifier of artistic freedom. I theorise the auteur as the *sinthome* of this ideological process - that which Žižek (1999, 176) defines as the key signifier, the 'point at which all the lines of the predominant ideological argumentation [...] meet'. I posit that the fundamental paradox of the auteur as *sinthome* is that the figure's status as a signifier of film's ideal universality - its freedom from constraint - nonetheless constrains the meaning of film - it delimits its meaning to an auteurist interpretation. I analyse the role of the auteur, and contradictions it raises, through the case of Cannes' representation of *The Son's Room*. I argue that Cannes'

synopsis of the film operates according to an implicit law of auteurism while, on an explicit level, representing the film as a free artwork – an artwork whose meaning, or indeed exhibition at the festival, is conditioned by some intrinsic artistic merit rather than its having been directed by Moretti. Developing a theory of ‘performative contradiction’ – the staging of the contradiction between a claim and the means used to make it – and ‘metacinematic hysteria’ – a film’s capacity to radically question its own status as an artwork – I interpret *The Son’s Room* as a film text that makes manifest the contradictions in its own status as an ‘a-Morettian Moretti film’ – an artwork whose meaning is at once unstable – free – and constrained by its relation to its auteur. In doing so, I demonstrate the ways in which *The Son’s Room* shows the antagonism inherent to European A festivals’ fantasy of artistic universality. I conclude that European A festivals’ awarding and representation of Italian cinema appears to be conditioned by the Real of their commercial contingency, compensated for through the fantasy of artistic universality and the *sinthome* of the auteur.

In chapter two, I analyse the fantasy structures that support European A festivals’ claim to political-humanist universality, predicated on the fantasy of integrating the social other and of a constitutive opposition to Hollywood. I theorise the first as the fantasy of the sexual relationship – the fantasy that the symbolic order can integrate all elements, that its lack can be filled by a complementary other, thus achieving a ‘harmonious totality’ (Žižek, 1989, 193). From this perspective, I show that European A festivals are structured according to the fantasy that, in integrating that which is other – above all, the social other – into their symbolic order, they can achieve totality. I theorise the second procedure as a form of suture – suture as symbolic opposition to a ‘constitutive Outside’ (Žižek, 2004, 102). I demonstrate that European A festivals’ constitutive

outside is Hollywood, the 'bad object' onto which they displace their inherent failure to represent the other (Elsaesser, 2005, 100). I also show the way in which both procedures entail a contradiction which is, precisely the contradiction of suture: a symbolic order cannot be total, enclosed, if there is something outside it. I focus on the question of the social other since European A festivals appear to paradoxically claim to be able to integrate this other while reproducing the very structure of otherness that would make such integration impossible. I demonstrate the way in which this disavowal of the other's radical status as inherently outside the symbolic order is disavowed by European A festivals, through an analysis of the case of *Facing Window's* representation at Karlovy Vary. I interpret the festivals' synopsis of the film, demonstrating that it portrays two examples of the sexual relationship - one romantic, associated with Hollywood cinema, and one socially-oriented, associated with art cinema - but privileges only one (the latter). I argue that the paratext's displacement of the failure of the sexual relationship onto *Facing Window's* romance narrative and insistence on the success of the sexual relationship within the film's narrative of the protagonist's relationship with a strange, othered figure combines the two fantasmatic forms described above. In contrast, I mobilise a reading of the film that shows its potential to depict the failure of the fantasy of the sexual relationship as such, and does so as much through its 'Hollywood' romance narrative as its 'progressive' narrative of the social other. I conclude that European A festivals' claim to political-humanist universality is predicated on the fantasy of the sexual relationship and disavowal of the fundamental antagonism that the other is, in its ideological construction, a symptom of.

These analyses will prepare the way for section two, in which I move from a consideration of the fundamental structures that

appear to underpin European A festivals' ideological self-representation and representation of Italian cinema in the new millennium, and examine the more specific forms that these structures take, as well as the specific unwritten rules they generate. I interrogate the two figures that I have identified in section one, showing how the auteur and the other are both implicitly defined in ways that reproduce dominant power structures: masculinity and patriarchy; European humanism and Eurocentrism; orientalism and Northern-dominated global capitalism. The section culminates in an analysis of European A festivals' relationship to global capitalism and reproduction of an orientalist ideology that displaces the antagonisms of the capitalist North onto the image of the global South. I emphasise the problematic aspects of European A festivals' ideological procedures of suture, arguing that it functions not only to give the circuit itself an appearance of consistency, but to maintain such an appearance for the economic system of global capitalism in which it is embedded, on which it depends, and which it reproduces - an economic system characterised by uneven distribution of resources and power, as well as the production of an excess (both material and symbolic), which is displaced onto territories and people that it renders other.

Chapter three will consider one of the unwritten laws that regulates European A festivals' disavowal of contingency through the figure of the auteur: the universality of cinematic art being constructed in line with a typically masculine figure, the male auteur. I will build on the notion of the auteur and the contradictions it raises to suggest that the particularity of European A festivals' ideological universal, 'the art of film', does not only disavow the commercial constraints that condition European A festivals' representation of themselves and the films they award, but also colours this notion of 'art' with a particular, and gendered, content. This chapter

addresses a lacuna in scholarship regarding the gender politics of European A festivals, offering data regarding the awarding of Best Picture to Italian films directed by women. It demonstrates that no Italian film directed by a woman has won Best Picture at a European A festival, resulting in a process of legitimisation of films predicated on the near-total exclusion of the feminine. I build on this information regarding festivals' construction of film through their central ritual of prize giving to analyse the way in which festival paratexts may also represent films in a manner that is underpinned by an idea of art as masculine, with the feminine being positioned as outside this symbolic order. Analysing the synopses through which both Cannes and Tallinn represent *The Great Beauty*, I demonstrate that both construct the film in line with notions of a masculine look ascribed to either the protagonist or even the auteur himself. I show that, while the Tallinn synopsis represents this masculine look as universal, the Cannes synopsis suggests that it may be partial, but invites us to enjoy this partiality. Interpreting *The Great Beauty*, I demonstrate the ways in which the film text also highlights the partiality of its male protagonist's artistic perspective, showing that it is organised around a melancholic attachment to a feminine figure. However, I argue that, crucially, the film locates antagonism not between the masculine and feminine as the Cannes synopsis does, but through irruptions of the Gaze (the Real in the visual field), depicts antagonism as being internal to masculinity itself. I conclude that, in doing so, the film text makes manifest the fantasy of sexual difference - the antagonistic split between male and female - on which European A festivals' construction of both the auteur and 'the art of film' is predicated.

Chapter four analyses the underpinnings of European A festivals' fantasy of the sexual relationship and the

construction of a figure of the other on which this fantasy depends. Using Schoonover's (2012) theory of 'brutal humanism', which I develop via Lacanian gaze theory, I argue that European A festivals' representation of Italian cinema is founded on the values of Western liberal, or 'brutal', humanism that aims to encourage compassion by screening the 'imperilled body' of the other for 'the pitying spectator' to witness (Schoonover, 2012, xx; xv). Just as the previous chapter responded to the absence of research into European A festivals and gender, this one addresses the lack of research into European A festivals' claims to humanism. It traces the history of European A festivals' development via Schoonover's analysis of the emergence of brutal humanism as the dominant value through which canonical films - in this case Italian neorealism - were constructed by institutions such as film criticism and film festivals. Bringing this into dialogue with scholarship on neo-colonialism and film festivals, I posit that European A festivals may continue to be conditioned by a brutally humanist conception of the other - this time the colonised other - in the present day. I test this hypothesis through an analysis of the Berlinale's representation of *Fire at Sea* during an edition of the festival that engaged explicitly with the so-called 'refugee crisis'. I demonstrate that the Berlinale's synopsis of the film instantiates a brutal vision towards the figure of the refugee, positioning the European as subject-witness and African refugee as object-victim. I contrast this with the moments in *Fire at Sea* that undermine the sense of a powerful, agency-endowed and European subjectivity, and the film's capacity to make manifest the Real of the Gaze - the European spectator's ideological investment in images of imperilled refugee figures. I conclude that another of the unwritten laws regulating European A festivals' awarding and representation of Italian

cinema is the law of a specifically *brutal* humanism that reproduces European, neo-colonial regimes of power.

Chapter five approaches the question of European A festivals' relationship to capitalism and the disavowal of both festivals' and capitalism's antagonisms directly. Using the concept of suture as symbolic opposition, it argues that European A festivals displace the excess (the Real) produced by global capitalism onto their representations of the global South. I argue that not only do European A festivals appear to disavow their reproduction of oppressive power structures through their claims to artistic universality and humanitarian politics, but also by displacing the excesses of global capitalism onto the other constructed by that system - in this case, the orientalised, Southern other. I demonstrate this through an analysis of the way in which European A festivals construct space through their programming and textual representations of places in the global North and South, which I theorise through Said's (2003 [1979]) concept of orientalism. I put orientalism in dialogue with Žižekian theories of capitalism as an economic system that produces an inadmissible excess that must be displaced onto an other. I use this to argue that such cases of orientalism can be understood as a displacement of capitalism's excess onto the South as other. I demonstrate this through the case of *Gomorra*'s presentation at Cannes in 2008. I contrast the synopsis's construction of southern Italy as a violent, exceptional place, outside the system of the global North, with the film text's representation of the interconnectedness of North and South in global capitalism. Through the themes of waste management - the exportation of capitalism's material excess to the South - and the Made in Italy brand - the construction of an image which disavows the exploitative production of commodities - I argue that *Gomorra* makes manifest the procedures of displacing excess

onto the global South and the centrality of such procedures to the North's reproduction of its hegemony. Reading *Gomorra* in contradiction to Cannes's synopsis of it suggests the presence of an orientalist logic on the European A circuit: while the Cannes synopsis constructs the South as other, displacing its inadmissible excesses onto this territory, the South depicted in *Gomorra* holds up a mirror to the North, revealing precisely these excesses as its own.

This thesis will conclude that European A festivals' awarding and representation of Italian films follows the fundamental ideological structure of fantasy: the attempt to compensate for the Real limit to signification through fantasmatic formations which, in turn, generate a series of unwritten superego laws. These fantasy structures and unwritten laws constitute the institutional unconscious of European A festivals. Beyond summarising the findings of the previous chapters, the conclusion will offer a description of the primary superego law structuring European A festivals' awarding and representation of Italian film in the years 2000-2017, which it proposes may be the superego law governing European A festivals more generally. On the basis of the findings that the main value that conditions and is repeatedly disavowed by the symbolic order of European A festivals is their commercial functioning - their dependence on and reproduction of global capitalism. Therefore, responding to Žižek's (2000b, 223) claim that 'today's Real which sets a limit to resignification is capital,' I conclude that European A festivals also appear to be regulated by capital as the 'Real [...] limit' conditioning that which they represent and how they represent it. I finish with a brief discussion of areas for future research that may develop from the methodology and findings of the thesis, for example: applications of this methodology to other institutions' constructions of artworks; applications of this methodology to

analyse film festivals' representation of other cinemas and/or art cinema in general; investigations into the prevalence of similar unwritten laws across the A festival circuit; extensions of this project to a wider corpus as a means of further demonstrating and/or finding other ideological structures and values operational in the construction of cinema.

For reference, lists of A festivals and the Italian films that have won Best Picture or equivalent at a European A festival since 1946 can be found in appendices. I include this first of all to help clarify some of the general points I make in the thesis, including those above. I also hope that this data will facilitate future work on European film festivals and Italian cinema, as well as functioning as a reference point for some of the broad trends in Italian cinema's awarding and representation by European A festivals more generally. (The trends are necessarily superficial but offer a spur for more detailed analyses of the phenomenon). I also include the synopses of the secondary case studies (appendix 3) for reference while reading the conclusion.

# Section I

## II

## *The Son's Room at Cannes: Enjoy Your Auteurism!*

A close family in a small northern Italy city. The father, Giovanni, the mother, Paola and their two teenage children: Irene the elder and Andrea, the younger.

Giovanni is a psychoanalyst. In his consulting-room next to his flat, his patients confide their neurosis to him, which contrasts strongly with his own quiet existence.

One Sunday morning, Giovanni is called by a patient for an emergency. He is not able to go jogging with his son, like he had told him. Andrea leaves to go scuba diving with friends and he never comes back from it...

*- Synopsis of The Son's Room in the Cannes 2001 print and online programme*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

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It has been well documented that European A festivals, and perhaps film festivals in general, differentiate themselves from other cinematic institutions through their 'professed commitment to artistic excellence and nothing else' (Elsaesser, 2005, 95). This was demonstrated recently in a contradictory and politicised edition of Cannes. The 2018 edition took place in the context of the 'Me Too' and 'Times Up' movements, both of which called for an end to discrimination against women in,

above all, the film industry. Cannes' main competition was judged by a female-majority jury led by Cate Blanchett, and the festival was marked by several protests for gender equality – some appearing orchestrated, such as a women's march on the red carpet before the premiere of *Girls of the Sun* (Eva Hussan, 2018), and others spontaneous, such as juror Kristen Stewart refusing to wear high heels on the same red carpet (it has been a controversial unwritten rule that women must wear heels on this strip of fabric).<sup>22</sup> All of these circumstances contributed to a sense that this edition of the festival was to be a politicised one (albeit politicised in a particular way). However, even in such a context, both the Festival Director, Thierry Frémaux, and Blanchett, insisted that films should be selected and judged on the basis of artistic merit above all (Mumford, 2018). Such statements enact a demarcation of art and politics, appearing to depoliticise one of European A festivals' central rituals, prize giving. In doing so, they obscure the political nature of the very construction of 'art' as an evaluative notion, and 'art cinema' as a contested term. Here, I mean political both in the broad sense as subject to contestation and in a somewhat more specific sense as subject to political interests – both of which I elaborate on later. This thesis is committed to interpreting and critiquing competitive European film festivals' construction of certain films as 'art', highlighting the contingent and (thus) political dimension of this procedure. As such, I have chosen to begin with a chapter that engages with, theorises, and analyses the relationship between 'the art of film' as a universal value, and its actual contingency.

First, I review the way in which European A festivals have been shown to function by scholars, and theorise this in relation to

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22 The various controversies around Cannes' unofficial policing of women's footwear, including at the 2018 edition, have been reported festival publications such as *Screen Daily* and *Variety*. See Wiseman (2015); Wiseman (2016); and Saperstein (2018).

the fantasmatic structure of hegemony - the disavowal of the contingency of the explicit meanings a group or institution ascribes to certain signifiers. European A festivals define and differentiate themselves through their commitment to the showcasing and development of the cinematic art above all else (Elsaesser, 2005, 95). However, European A festivals are also sites of struggle, constrained by the demands of the market as well as commercial and public investment. Rhyne (2009, 20) argues that such festivals are 'materially and discursively constituted through the negotiation of varied, and sometimes conflicting, motivations of stakeholders.' It is therefore practically impossible that festivals actually take into account art and nothing else, since the struggle between a variety of different interests is written into their very being. In order to provide a framework for understanding this discrepancy in film festivals' self-representation and their actual conditions of existence, I posit that the notion of 'the art of film' mobilised by European A festivals functions as a universal - an abstract concept with no positive content of its own, an 'empty signifier' whose meaning is contingent and created through struggle (Žižek, 1999, 175). From this perspective, I show that the empty universal of 'art' is both constitutive of and constituted by film festival ideology. On an explicit level, the notion of artistic universality is crucial to the ways European A festivals represent themselves and the films they award. On an implicit level, such a notion is crucial to film festivals' ideological procedure of disavowing contingency and thus claiming hegemony. Although, in practice, film festivals and the values they reproduce are sites of contestation and political struggle, I show that European A festivals deploy the universal of 'art' as a means of obscuring that struggle, and thus their political dimension. I aim to draw several insights into the ideology of European A festivals from these observations. First, such

festivals' mobilisation of the notion of 'art' as a universal functions to disavow their contingency as commercially constrained sites of struggle. Second, that this, in turn, disavows the contingency of the very term 'art' - its status as an empty signifier whose meaning is only determined through, again, contestation and political struggle - struggle that takes place not only through the festival's official competition, but as a result of festivals' need to negotiate stakeholder interests. And finally: the inadmissible term that appears to be erased through this procedure is, above all, European A festivals' dependence on capital. Such festivals' mobilisation of 'art' as universal functions to disavow, in particular, the effects of their character as 'a component of capitalism' on their functioning (Rhyne, 2009, 14).

Having theorised this aspect of European A festivals ideology, I then consider a specific manifestation of it: such festivals' reproduction of, and dependence on, the category of the auteur. I argue that the auteur can be understood as a '*sinthome*', a crucial signifier that stands in for the universal. The *sinthome* is 'not a "mere symptom" [i.e. not just any signifier], but that which holds together the "thing itself," [...] the efficiency of [the] entire ideological edifice' (Žižek, 1999, 176). The *sinthome* secures ideology's effectiveness by condensing 'all the lines of the ideological argumentation' into a single point (Žižek, 1999, 176). It is critical to the functioning of fantasy as theorised in the introduction to this thesis: if fantasy is the means by which ideology achieves interpellation via enjoyment (identification with the implicit laws of ideology), the *sinthome* is ideology's 'kernel of idiotic enjoyment' - the signifier that secures our enjoyment of ideology (Žižek, 1992, 128). While I do not argue that the auteur is the *sinthome* of the entire ideological edifice that underpins European A festivals, I do contend that it is the key signifier of the

ideological universal of 'art' that such festivals mobilise. I also show that, as the stand-in for the universal, the auteur is contradictory in two ways. First, on a purely structural level: the auteur as *sinthome* is split between its status as universal and particular, as an impossible signifier of universality represented through a particular case. Second, in relation to the functioning of a specific ideology: as a point at which all the lines of an ideological argumentation meet, it carries with it the contradictions of that ideology - in this case, the tension between artistic purity and commercial constraint that characterises European A festivals. I argue that the fundamental paradox of the auteur is that the figure's status as a signifier of film's ideal universality - i.e. its freedom from constraint - nonetheless constrains the meaning of film - i.e. delimiting its meaning to an auteurist interpretation. I argue that this paradox is, in fact, the means by which a critique of European A festivals' fantasy of artistic universality becomes possible. I elaborate on this process of critique through a theory of 'performative contradiction' elaborated by Judith Butler (2000), developed by Žižek (2000a), and suggested by Elsaesser (2016) in relation to the figure of the auteur.

This chapter analyses a case study that demonstrates the potential for a film's performance of contradiction to 'untie' the 'knot' of the *sinthome* and, with it, the fantasy underpinning European A festivals' ideology of 'the art of film' (Žižek, 1999, 176). Following my analysis of the European A festival apparatus, I review scholarly interpretations of *The Son's Room* (*La stanza del figlio*, Nanni Moretti, 2001) that interpret the film in relation to Moretti's status as an auteur. This will demonstrate the relevance of the case study and provide the context and grounding necessary for the psychoanalysis of Cannes' synopsis of the film that follows. I argue that the film is a pertinent case study for engaging with the contradictions

of the *sinthome* of the auteur due to Moretti's exceptionally strong authorial persona (in part cultivated by Cannes). Moreover, I suggest that Moretti's status as auteur is a crucial component of the film's own contradictory quality as at once Morettian and a-Morettian, reflected in perceptions of the film as both a continuation and break from Moretti's previous work (Mazierska and Rascaroli, 2004, 112). I coin the expression 'a-Morettian Moretti film' as a means of designating the contradiction of *The Son's Room* being read as different from the auteur's *oeuvre* while nonetheless depending on the notion of the auteur to facilitate such a reading.

To further elaborate on and analyse this contradiction, I put scholarship on the role of hysteria in *The Son's Room* into dialogue with Roberto De Gaetano's (1999) analysis of Moretti's acting style, and construct a theory of the way in which *The Son's Room* might be read as performing the contradiction of auteurism - its contradictory status as an a-Morettian Moretti film. In particular, I develop Vighi's (2005) reading of the film as one that performs a radical hystericisation of the subject, manifesting a split *internal* to Giovanni's identity rather than displacing this split onto an external trauma (such as the death of the son, Andrea). I build on this concept to argue that the film may also be interpreted as manifesting that which I designate 'metacinematic hysteria': the performance of a contradiction internal to the film itself. I combine this with De Gaetano's (1999, 117) analysis of Moretti's acting style as one which also confounds identity (albeit in a slightly different way) by undermining any kind of smooth characterisation by foregrounding Moretti's 'presenza d'attore' (presence as actor). I argue that, given Moretti's overwhelming authorial persona, this 'presenza d'attore' can also be considered as a manifestation of Moretti's 'presenza d'autore' (authorial presence) and thus constitutes a key

technique through which *The Son's Room* may express its contradiction as an a-Morettian film marked, nonetheless, by the indelible stain of the auteur. I conclude that *The Son's Room* appears to be a film that performs and hystericises auteurism, containing the potential to make manifest the contradiction of the auteur as the *sinthome* of the ideological universal 'the art of film' mobilised by European A festivals.

This provides important context for the first textual analysis that the chapter undertakes, a psychoanalysis of the synopsis of *The Son's Room* presented in Cannes' print and online programme for the 2001 edition of the festival. I offer a somewhat abnormal method of interpretation which depends upon analysing that which is not there – that which the text omits. It follows the procedure of ideology critique as 'looking awry' – attempting to identify the symbolic laws structuring ideological representation by analysing the 'hidden inconsistencies' in the text (Žižek, 1992, 3). To achieve this, I continually refer back to scholarly interpretations of *The Son's Room* and other information as a base from which to suggest that the Cannes synopsis obscures elements that we can assume will be prevalent in the film. Bringing together the findings from the previous sections, I show the way in which European A festivals' mobilisation of the figure of the auteur is mediated through the Cannes synopsis and thus conditions the text's representation of the film. I argue that the synopsis is structured around the law of auteurism, the constraint of a film's meaning via the figure of the auteur, but renders this law implicit. Moretti as auteur functions as the implicit legitimator of the text – the 'obscene unwritten law' that does not appear in the text itself but around which it is, nonetheless, structured (Žižek, 2005, 54). Rather, Cannes represents *The Son's Room* as an artwork free of constraint, even the constraint of meaning resulting from the festival apparatus's auteurism, by

repressing the aspects that draw attention to the film's metacinematic hystericisation of this auteurism. I argue that the Cannes synopsis appears to disavow the contingency of the film's selection and awarding - the probability that *The Son's Room* was selected and awarded, at least in part, due to the relationship between Cannes and Moretti, and the festivals' consecration of Moretti as an auteur.

Developing this procedure of looking awry at the Cannes synopsis, and the ideology it instantiates, I use an analysis of *The Son's Room* to demonstrate the way in which it performs contradiction, arguing that the film can indeed be read as hystericising Moretti's status as auteur, showing its own internal split as an artwork - as both a work of 'free' artistic expression, and a film whose meaning (and perhaps conditions of existence) is constrained by Moretti's auteur persona and reputation. As such, the synopsis analysis and film analysis should be read together as an overall interpretation of the case of *The Son's Room* at Cannes - rather than as two separate analyses which independently grasp some ultimate 'truth' of each text. The truth lies, rather, in the contradiction, the gap between the synopsis and the film. I therefore deploy an interpretation of the film that highlights both the difference between the synopsis text and film text - and thus the synopsis's ideological procedure of constraining the film's meaning as such - and the ways in which these specific differences highlight the particular ideology, and its contradictions, manifested in the synopsis. I focus on two aspects of *The Son's Room* that demonstrate these contradictions. The first is the way in which it initially presents Moretti/Giovanni as a wholly ambivalent, unnamed figure which occupies several identities at once - auteur, actor and protagonist/alter-ego (hence his designation as Moretti/Giovanni). I engage with these to propose a framework

for considering the contradictions of the auteur which should prove useful for analyses of *The Son's Room* and films in which the director also plays the role of lead actor. I conclude that the auteur's effigy represents the authorial signature *par excellence*, the indelible stain of the auteur on his work, rendering manifest the contradiction of the relationship between films and film festivals: 'free' artworks whose meaning is nonetheless delimited by an auteurist apparatus on whom they (in part) depend upon for their circulation. The second aspect of the film I analyse is the theme of hysteria. I show the way in which this appears on both a diegetic and non-diegetic, metacinematic level, imbuing the film with a hysterical quality that goes beyond its primary narrative of familial relations and grief. This aspect of the analysis will raise the potential for interpreting films via the framework of hysteria, or rather, that of a metacinematic hysteria in which a film foregrounds its own internal split as an ambivalent artwork.

I conclude European A festivals operate under the claim to operate under the universal notion of 'the art of film', all the while constraining this notion to a particular representation, a *sinthome* - the auteur. While the auteur signifies artistic freedom, the term itself limits artistic freedom. First, it delimits the meaning of a film by ensuring it is always interpreted in relation to the auteur. Second, as a commercial construct, the auteur can be considered to be a role that directors must play in order to secure legitimation from institutions such as film festivals. As Elsaesser (2016, 25) observes, auteurs are constrained by film festivals to play the role of free, autonomous artist. Moving away from Elsaesser's focus on the persona of the auteur, I argue that films, too, are constrained to 'play the role' of free, autonomous artworks - as is manifest in Cannes' synopsis of *The Son's Room*, and the film's performance of the contradiction that this entails. This is the

fundamental paradox that I discuss in this chapter, linking it to the Real of European A festivals' dependence upon capital – the actual contingency that they attempt to repress under the sign of 'art' as their universal value.

## **2. EUROPEAN A FESTIVALS' CONSTRUCTION OF THE UNIVERSAL 'THE ART OF FILM' AND DISAVOWAL OF COMMERCIAL CONTINGENCY**

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### **2.A FILM FESTIVALS AND THE UNIVERSALITY OF 'THE ART OF FILM'**

Both scholars and organisers of film festivals often assert that the events' ideal function is to showcase and develop film as an art form. Film festivals are legitimated in relation to this value; they both construct and are constructed in relation to the notion of the artistic worth of films. Elsaesser (2005, 98) summarises this process of legitimation, as festival organisers (and thus the festivals they organise) are given 'faith' on the basis of their 'adamant insistence that the sole criterion applied is that of quality and artistic excellence'. Elsaesser (2005, 98) cites Gilles Jacob, who was President of one of the most influential European A festivals, Cannes, from 2000-2014:

For the rest [our aim is] always to place film at the centre of our acts. Generally, to take nothing into account other than the art of film and the pre-eminence of artistic talent.

The claim to 'take nothing into account other than the art of the film' implies a certain purity – no other concern but that of 'the art of film' conditions the organisation of the film festival. The image and success of festivals such as Cannes is intimately bound up with their claim to promote cinema as an art form above all else. It appears that film festivals are legitimated, and legitimate films through the notion of a kind of artistic purity

culminating in the notion of ‘the art of film’. This was the spur of Mark Cousins’ (2009) critique of A festivals, in which he argues that such festivals had been failing to meet the ideal of showcasing a variety of cinematic art. Even if the execution is seen as flawed, the ideal of film festivals as platforms for filmic artworks persists – as Cousins’ implicit reproduction of it shows. Similarly, Mezias et al (2011, 179) state that:

The central value created at these [European A] festivals is *appreciative or aesthetic value*, particularly related to the certification of *artistic status* that accrues to all films invited for exhibition (italics added).

It appears that ‘aesthetic value’ and ‘artistic status’ is the ‘central value’ that circulates through film festivals. Moreover, in Mezias et al’s account, this value does not pre-exist such festivals, but is ‘created’ at them. Therefore, this pristine notion of ‘the art of film’ appears to disavow the highly contingent nature of such a term. If ‘one of the key functions of the international festival [...] to categorize, classify, sort and sift the world’s annual film-production,’ then it follows that they are engaged in a continual process of delimiting and (re)defining which films count as ‘art’ (Elsaesser, 2005, 96). Moreover, this process of redefinition is itself contingent upon film festivals’ need to negotiate a variety of stakeholder interests. The negotiation of stakeholder interests is a defining feature of film festivals (Rhyne, 2009, 20). The relationship between this and festivals’ position in the ‘global third sector’ as ‘a component of capitalism’ cannot be ignored (Rhyne, 2009, 14). Far from being committed to art and nothing else, film festivals and their organisers must make decisions that will satisfy a variety of stakeholders, and do so from a specific economic position. Several of these are investors and sponsors from outside the film industry. For example, Cannes lists

several corporations, such as L'Oréal Paris, Hewlett-Packard and Nestlé, as their official partners - a title buyable for a price, that is, financial sponsorship for and the gifting of products to the festival (Festival de Cannes., 2019a). The precise effects of such stakeholder interests are relatively undocumented, but their presence is difficult to deny. Crucially, however, the economic viability of film festivals depends upon their ability to differentiate and define themselves under a unitary sign (such as 'the art of film') in which the diverse stakeholder interests that constitute them are sublimated. Rhyne (2009, 9-10) has argued that film festivals' self-definition and differentiation as a 'discrete and new cultural industry' is 'a strategy for managing the often conflicting motivations of its stakeholders and channelling their diverse interests towards the goals of nation-states and global capital.' This structure should be viewed in relation to European A festivals' 'professed commitment to artistic excellence and nothing else' (Elsaesser, 2005, 95). Such a commitment appears, in fact, to be central to the process of self-definition - of organising the meaning of film festivals under one value, or sign - which facilitates the management of stakeholder interests and, crucially, channels their interests 'towards the goals of [...] global capital'. Film festivals, particularly A festivals, paradoxically achieve economic power (or at least viability) by defining themselves in relation to a singular, pristine value - 'the art of film' - and thus disavowing their fractured identity, their being sites of contestation between (often corporate) stakeholders.

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, it is well documented that films also depend on this process of distinction, the value added by being selected and/or awarded

by a film festival, for their prestige and success.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, this process of value addition is conditioned by, and conditions, the commercial success of films. European A festivals are required, by definition, to serve the interests of the film industry, being ‘expected to implement quality and reliability standards that meet industry expectations’ (FIAPF, 2016b). This has been particularly the case since the 1990s and was exacerbated by the financial crises of 2007-2008, with European A festivals being affected by an increasing commercialisation (De Valck, 2014, 77). Industry expectations and economic pressures condition A festivals’ certification of some films as ‘art’. De Valck (2007, 219) has argued that, in this context, the ‘most important’ development in the film festival circuit in the 1990s was ‘the discovery that “art cinema” could be economically viable as well’. Developing this observation in a more recent study, she has also shown a film’s chances of selection at a film festival are determined as much by its expected viability in the global market place as its perceived artistic integrity (De Valck, 2014, 81). The definition of ‘the art of film’ is itself contingent upon considerations regarding both films’ and film festivals’ commercial viability.

Using the concepts of universality, contingency and hegemony, we can theorise this process of sublimating contestation into a unitary sign. First, we might consider ‘the art of film’ to be film festivals’ proclaimed universal value. A universal can be theorised as an ‘empty signifier’, an ‘ideal’ sign under which an ideology operates.<sup>24</sup> ‘The art of film’ can be considered to have

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23 See *inter alia* Elsaesser (2005); De Valck (2014); Mezias et al. (2008; 2011).

24 See the theories of Ernesto Laclau, Judith Butler and Žižek. All three theorists’ work has been brought into dialogue in the collection of essays and responses *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* (2000). The notion of universal as empty signifier is the basic agreed concept for the interventions made by all three scholars (although the arguments they make from this starting point differ). I use Žižek’s theory of the universal predominantly for its compatibility with the overarching theoretical framework of this thesis.

such a status as the empty signifier of film festival ideology since it appears to be posited as a pristine signifier through which film festivals define themselves. Universals are, however, always split by an inherent tension - the split between their empty ideality and the particular meaning they are circumscribed by at any given time (Žižek, 1999, 176). Moreover, the relationship between the universal and its particular manifestation is a contingent one, and it is through contestation that a particular meaning for a universal is temporarily secured (Žižek, 1999, 176). The struggle to give a particular meaning to a universal is the struggle of ideology, the 'level of which [...] ideological battles are won or lost' (Žižek, 1999, 175). In the case of European A festivals, the universal notion of 'the art of film' is marked by a tension with its specific construction by festivals: their legitimation of certain films as 'art' and not others retroactively conditions, delimits, the meaning of the universal. This delimitation of the universal's meaning is the product of contestation - not only in the obvious sense of festival juries' debates over which films should be selected and awarded, but also in the sense that these processes are conditioned by a film festival's need to appease diverse stakeholders. In order for ideology to function effectively, however, contingency must be disavowed: 'a minimum of "naturalization" is a condition of effectiveness of the hegemonic operation' (Žižek, 2004, 96). Therefore the notion of 'the art of film' must be presented as universal - as not having a contingent meaning in order for film festival ideology to be effective. We have seen this on a practical level, with film festivals appearing to brand themselves through the notion of art as a means of disavowing the contestation between stakeholders through which they and their construction of art cinema are constituted.

## **2.B THE *SINTHOME* OF THE IDEOLOGICAL UNIVERSAL: ENJOYING AUTEURISM**

Theorising the effectiveness of a universal notion in ideology – the means through which contingency is disavowed – Žižek (1999, 175) argues that ‘each apparently universal ideological notion is always homogenized by some particular content which colours its very universality and accounts for its efficiency.’ Ideology structurally requires the delimitation of a universal’s meaning (its emptiness as a signifier being ‘coloured’ in some way). Meanwhile, its *effective* functioning depends on this meaning being crystallised in ‘some particular content’ which represents the ideological universal. This particular content is known in Žižek’s theory of hegemony as the *sinthome*. Žižek (1999, 175) gives the example of ‘single Black mother’ as the *sinthome* of the ideological rejection of the welfare system in the United States. To elaborate on Žižek’s example: while the welfare system could mean many different things, the effective construction of its meaning in relation to the idea that it erodes family values and racial superiority is secured by the ‘typical case’ of the ‘single Black mother’. The effectiveness of this ideology resides in the delimitation of its meaning through the particular case of the ‘single Black mother’, provided that the case’s status as ‘typical’ disavows the contingency of the relation between the universal and particular. The *sinthome* is not just any example of the universal idea, but the crucial example – the ‘point at which all the lines of the predominant ideological argumentation meet’ (Žižek, 1999, 176). In other words, all of the assumptions and values implicit in an ideological universal are condensed into this singular case – this *sinthome*.

At the same time, the *sinthome* is a contradictory signifier: it is both highly particular (e.g. the single Black mother) while representing a universal notion. Before I continue to discuss

the *sinthome*, I would like to clarify the three levels of the universal-particular relation that Žižek's theory supposes: (1) the universal as empty signifier; (2) the ideological universal – the delimited meaning of the universal, or empty signifier coloured by content; (3) the *sinthome* – the 'typical case' that represents the ideological universal. Ideology entails the construction of a chain of meaning in which the *sinthome* (3) represents the ideological universal (2), which represents (or colours) the empty universal (1) (Žižek, 1999, 175). The relationship between each level – the 'links' of the chain – is one of contingency (the *sinthome* does not *necessarily* represent the ideological or empty universal). It is this contingency that is disavowed in the effective operation of ideology. The *sinthome*, then, allows us to enjoy ideology in the Lacanian sense of *jouissance*: it is an ultimately senseless signifier which secures our (never total) subjection to, or enjoyment of, ideology.<sup>25</sup> The *sinthome* is, in this sense 'the kernel of idiotic enjoyment' that secures the efficacy of an ideology: it represents the ideological universal in the form a highly contingent, senseless signifier that we nonetheless enjoy as though it were full of meaning (Žižek, 1992, 128).

The auteur is, in this way, a *sinthome*, a 'kernel of idiotic enjoyment' that secures the ideological efficacy of film festivals' construction of the 'art of film'. This was summarised by one film critic's description of Cannes' motto as 'Live by the Auteur, Die by the Auteur' – a phrase that exemplifies the senseless subjection of *jouissance* (McCarthy, 1999). The auteur can be considered the *sinthome* also in the sense of being the 'typical case' through which efficiency of the 'apparently universal ideological notion' ('the art of film') is

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25 In fact, it is the senselessness that the subject 'enjoys', since it is experienced as the 'secret', the greater knowledge of the big Other, of ideology, to which the subject, quite literally, subjects themselves. See, for example, Žižek (1989; 1992) and McGowan (2007). I discuss this further in relation to hysteria and authority in *The Son's Room* below.

secured. Although itself contested, the concept of the auteur has, since its inception been a marker of artistic freedom in contrast with commercial constraint (Buscombe, 2008 [1973], 76). The auteur is, to use one of the formulations from the journal that disseminated the term, 'always subject to himself,' producing artworks which transcend their industrial 'conditions of existence' (Bazin, 2008 [1957], 25). The auteur is a signifier of artistic freedom - art in its ideal sense - but this process of signification also entails the restriction of that freedom, since films' meanings are thus bound to the figure of the auteur. Central to this tension is, too, another contradiction: the auteur delimits cinema's meaning for commercial purposes. The concept of the auteur is a product of the structures of capitalism and commodity exchange that it, as *sinthome*, also serves to disavow. This tension is characteristic of the notion of the auteur, its function having been, historically, to delimit the meaning of art cinema in such a way as to make it sellable. Neale (1981) discusses the importance of the figure of the auteur to the institutional construction of art cinema, identifying film festivals as an important example of the institutions engaged in such a process. Although raising the possibility of art cinema being subject to contested and fluid definitions, Neale (1981, 36) argues that the institutional nature of the genre means that this possibility is foreclosed - is subject to auteurism: 'an ideology of art as individual expression'. This underpins his description of the way in which the institutionalisation of art cinema entails its homogenisation for commercial purposes; the institution 'mobilises [art cinema's] meaning in accordance with commodity-based practices of production, distribution and exhibition' (Neale, 1981, 15). Paradoxically, while signifying transcendence from commercial constraints, the auteur is also 'used as a kind of brand name, to mark and to sell the filmic product' (Neale,

1981, 15). The empty universal of art cinema - its fluid definitions - is ideologically constructed through a particular, typical content - a *sinthome*. That *sinthome* is, in the institutional context, the *auteur*.

Andrews (2010) argues that, in a similar fashion, the *auteur* has become an indispensable sign under which film festivals organise the diversity of films that they show. As festivals moved to a 'post-national' system in 1972, international selection committees became prevalent and a greater variety of films were selected for exhibition and competition.<sup>26</sup> With this greater diversity came a greater need for a sign under which festivals could organise themselves as both purveyors of art cinema and nodes in the film industry. Andrews (2010, 10) and Elsaesser (2005) argue that this sign became the figure of the *auteur*: 'By stressing "the *auteur*" and other signs of universalism, film festivals could better facilitate the international flow of cultural and economic capital on which they depended.' Elsaesser (2005, 90) suggests that the centrality of the *auteur* originated at Cannes, the festival which 'set the template for festivals the world over'. Thus, 'the gold standard of the European festivals under the rule of Cannes became the *auteur* director' (Elsaesser, 2005, 91). Being mobilised for its connotations of artistic freedom, the *auteur* has become a central figure in film festivals' 'rituals of anti-commercial purity', through which they attempt to define both themselves and the films they award (Andrews, 2010, 9). This *sinthome* thus functions to both delimit the meaning of art cinema and disavow festivals' status as sites of contestation conditioned by commercial interests, positing their 'anti-commercial purity'. To put this in relation to the chain of ideology I have theorised above: the *auteur*, as *sinthome*, is the

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<sup>26</sup> I engage with and interrogate film festivals' supposed post-nationalism in chapter five.

representative of film festivals' ideological universal notion of 'the art of film'. Moreover, as such, the auteur assists the disavowal of the contingent relationship between the ideological universal and the empty universal – the actual films that festivals exhibit and award, in contrast with the ideal of 'the art of film'. The applicability of this framework to the relationship between film festivals and the auteur figure of the auteur will become clearer as we examine its contingencies below.

The tension between the universal and its *sinthome* is ever-present in film festival ideology, as the effectiveness of their relation depends on a fragile disavowal of particularity of the auteur and the universal it is mobilised to represent. Furthermore, as *sinthome*, the auteur instantiates the contradictions of ideology not only on a structural level – the tension between universal and particular as such – but also the specific contradictions of the specific ideology it is symptomatic (or *sintho-matic*) of. The auteur condenses the same paradox I have described in relation to film festivals above: the commercial success of festivals and the films they exhibit and award is dependent on their semblance of anti-commerciality, their organisation around the notion of artistic purity. Once again, there is an overlap between commerciality and contingency which appears to cut through ideological construction of 'the art of film' or, in this case, art cinema. As a *sinthome*, the auteur embodies the contradictions that this universal entails: the auteur is, paradoxically, a signifier of artistic freedom that nonetheless delimits films' meanings for commercial purposes. This paradox becomes more apparent when we come to examine the role of the auteur at film festivals, as a representative of freedom who is nonetheless constrained by the film festival apparatus. It is from this perspective that we will be able to not only understand the

ideological functioning of film festivals in relation to universality, ideology and 'art', but begin to critique this ideology as we interpret the *sinthome* of the auteur and the contradictions it instantiates. Although promoted as the signifier of film as an expression of artistic freedom (rather than commercial constraint), auteurs depend on film festivals for their consecration, and film festivals, in turn, depend on the success of auteurs for their legitimation as tastemakers (Elsaesser, 2005, 97). As I argue above, film festivals construct the very notions of 'art' that they present as universal, and do so in order to, paradoxically, market themselves and the films they award on the basis of their anti-commerciality. Likewise, festivals construct the category of the auteur, determine who belongs to it, and do so as a means of securing both symbolic and financial capital. In doing so, they delimit the meanings of the films they award, constraining their universality as 'art' through the particularity of auteurism. The auteur in fact embodies this contradiction, with directors being constrained by festivals to perform the role of free artist whose works are not subject to institutional or commercial limitations:

a dynamic of reciprocal dependencies is implicit in this relationship between auteur and festival, chief among these being that the festival, in order to fulfil its mission, has to encourage and even *constrain* the filmmaker to behave as if he/she was indeed a *free agent and an autonomous artist*, dedicated solely to expressing a uniquely personal vision, and thus to *disavow* the very pressures the festival has to impose (Elsaesser, 2016, 25, italics added).

In other words, a paradox is condensed in the figure of the auteur that film festivals mobilise (depend on, even), since these filmmakers are 'constrained' to behave as though they were 'autonomous artist[s]'. The circulation of symbolic and financial capital through film festivals depends upon their (contradictory) constraint of the auteur to act as a *free agent*.

While Elsaesser does not theorise this relationship in terms of ideology, much less a psychoanalytical theory of it, his use of the term 'disavowal' alludes to the ideological procedure at work in this 'dynamic of reciprocal tendencies' that structures film festivals' relation to the auteur. By exploring this relationship, therefore, I aim to clarify and further theorise the ideology and its contradictions.

Therefore, just as the ideological universal, 'the art of film,' entails the disavowal of film festivals' contingent construction of such a term's meaning, so the figure of the auteur entails a disavowal of film festivals' encouraging and constraining of certain filmmakers. This contradiction can be summarised as such: film festivals are engaged in the business of creating new auteurs, and in order to receive such consecration, directors are constrained to behave as though they were 'a free agent and autonomous artist' (Elsaesser, 2016, 25). The very category of the auteur is contingent upon film festivals' consecrating function, which entails auteurs' performances of freedom from contingency. It is through this paradox that we can approach the *sinthome* of the auteur as a contradictory signifier of artistic freedom and universality over commercial constraint and contingency. The auteur must act as though their films are free expressions, universal artworks, but, in doing so, their freedom is limited with: (1) the director's identity being delimited by their construction as an auteur (a role they must perform) and (2) the film's 'free' meaning being delimited by its construction in relation to the auteur (we could say that the film, too, is made to 'perform' a contingent, auteurist, meaning). The contradiction that the *sinthome* represents - its internal split as particular and universal, ideal and contingent - can be made manifest through a procedure of performative contradiction. This procedure will be central to the rest of this chapter, which aims to 'untie' the 'knot' of the

*sinthome* by simultaneously demonstrating and critiquing the ideological functioning of film festivals' disavowal of contingency. Žižek (2000a, 102) uses this notion of performative contradiction to theorise a model for ideological critique:

the proper critique of 'false universality' does not call it into question from the standpoint of pre-universal particularism, it mobilises the tension inherent to universality itself [...] if the ruling ideology performatively 'cheats' by undermining - in its actual discursive practice and the set of exclusions on which this practice relies - its own officially asserted universality, progressive politics should precisely openly practice performative contradiction, asserting on behalf of a given universality the very content this universality (in its hegemonic form) excludes.

Therefore, if film festivals 'cheat' by undermining their officially asserted universality of 'art' through their construction and dependence on the *sinthome* of the auteur, the auteur can undermine it through performative contradiction: they can assert on behalf of 'art', the constraint through on which this notion of art depends - for example the constraint of their identity as that of auteur. Although not explicitly drawing on Žižek's work, Elsaesser's (2016, 25) consideration of the means by which the auteur may perform self-contradiction assists an understanding of how the auteur as *sinthome* may highlight the contradictory universality mobilised by film festivals. Elsaesser (2016, 37) gives the example of Lars von Trier attending the Berlinale while wearing a 'persona non grata' t-shirt bearing the Cannes logo - a response to his having been banned from the French festival. Elsaesser defines this as a case of 'performative contradiction' in which the claim (von Trier's autonomy - his freedom to wear polemical t-shirts) is contradicted by the means used to make it (his appearance at a film festival, and thus dependence on it for

the publicity required to make such a claim). This case demonstrates one way in which directors can at once perform and resist the 'auteur' label applied to them by film festivals. Although having cultivated a 'personal genre identity' and 'brand name' for strategic gain (that is, an auteur persona or brand), von Trier performs the contradiction of this identity: he uses his dependence on festivals such as Cannes and Berlin to, paradoxically, assert his autonomy (Elsaesser, 2016, 36-37). Von Trier's performance dramatises the contradictions in the *sinthome* of the auteur as a signifier of artistic freedom constrained by the film festival apparatus.

Below I analyse another case of this, focusing on the auteur's status as *sinthomatic* of festivals' ideological construction of themselves and the films they award in relation to art. I analyse the claim to artistic freedom made by the notion of *The Son's Room* as an artwork, a product of free creative expression, which is contradicted by the means used to make it - its legitimation and meaning being dependent upon Moretti's status as an auteur. This contradiction is not performed but rather *appears hidden* in Cannes' synopsis of the film. While on an explicit level, the text seems to present *The Son's Room* as an artwork unconstrained by Moretti's authorial persona, it can only do so on the basis of the unwritten law of auteurism - thanks to the strength of Moretti's authorial persona, in this case. Reading the synopsis against the film - and vice versa - I aim to highlight this contradiction and analyse some of the ways in which the film does too. In doing so, I demonstrate the contradiction around which film festival ideology is, in part, structured: the universal of 'the art of film' being delimited by the very *sinthome* that supposedly represents it, the 'auteur'.

### **3. *THE SON'S ROOM: NANNI MORETTI'S HYSTERICAL PRESENZA D'AUTORE***

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Moretti has been cultivated by a film festival described as one that 'overwhelmingly favours films by critically respectable auteurs who've been there before' (Turan, 2001, 28). Although being awarded his first major festival prize at the Berlin International Film Festival (the Berlinale), he has been a regular presence at Cannes since the late Seventies - first as an actor in Palme d'Or winning *Father and Master (Padre Padrone)*, Taviani and Taviani, 1977) and then as director-actor-screenwriter of *Ecce bombo* (Moretti, 1978), both times in the main competition. At the time of writing, the Italian filmmaker is credited in fourteen films screened at Cannes, and has won two of the festival's most prestigious awards - the Award for Best Director, for *Dear Diary (Caro diario)*, Moretti, 1994) and the Palme d'Or for *The Son's Room*. He has also sat on the festival jury twice.<sup>27</sup> It therefore appears that the festival is not so much invested in Moretti's films per se, but in the figure of Moretti as a prestigious filmmaker. This would also appear to confirm the well-established notion that film festivals are 'in the business of making new authors,' relying on such discoveries for their own prestige (Elsaesser, 2005, 99). This context makes *The Son's Room* a particularly pertinent case study through which to interrogate the ideology of European A festivals' *sinthome* of the auteur. Indeed, the evidence suggests that *The Son's Room* winning the Palme d'Or was at least partially influenced by Moretti's status as one of Cannes' privileged auteurs.

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27 Much of this information is taken from the biography of Moretti on Cannes' website (Festival de Cannes, 2019b). This text appears to flaunt Moretti's auteurist credentials, as well as the festival's long-standing relationship with him. Moreover, the festival's production of biographies for the auteurs they promote (a common feature of European A festivals' websites) attests to the centrality of the figure of the auteur to its apparatus.

To further consider the way in which *The Son's Room* can be useful for analysing the contradictions of film festival ideology - above all those inherent to the auteur as a *sinthome* of festivals' claim to artistic universality - I now turn to review scholarly interpretations of *The Son's Room* which interpret it in relation to Moretti's authorial persona. I consider the prevalence of Moretti's authorial persona in his cinema, as well as the way in which it is through the performance of such a persona that films like *The Son's Room* may actually challenge its authority. Both Moretti and the film that won him the Palme d'Or have a special capacity to highlight the contradictions of the *sinthome*. Moretti's extremely successful cultivation of an authorial persona through not only his role as director, but (among other things) lead actor and, often, protagonist has resulted in a scenario in which every film directed by Moretti is marked by his 'overwhelming authorial presence' (Vighi, 2005, 80). This initially appears to confirm, even extend, the power of the notion of the auteur as the sole creator of a film (thus legitimating it as 'art' free from structural constraint). However, in light of scholars' interpretations of *The Son's Room*, we will see that Moretti may both perform and hystericise his identity as auteur, highlighting its constructed dimension. This, in turn, underlines the contradiction that he should be constrained to play the role of the auteur - that he should 'behave as if he was indeed a free agent and an autonomous artist, dedicated solely to expressing a uniquely personal vision' (Elsaesser, 2016, 25). This raises the possibility that *The Son's Room* can be interpreted in a way that highlights the idea of auteur as construct, thus making manifest the contradictions of the auteur as *sinthome* of film festivals' ideological construction of cinema. I conclude that *The Son's Room* is perhaps best analysed as a contradiction, as an 'a-Morettian Moretti' film. In this way, *The Son's Room* is

not only a crucial case study for demonstrating the importance of the figure of the auteur to European A festivals' ideological functioning, but also for demonstrating the contradictions in this ideology - above all the contradiction of a signifier of artistic freedom (the auteur) being itself constructed and constrained, while, in turn, constructing and constraining film's meaning.

As we have seen above, Moretti can be considered a typical auteur whose career has been cultivated by Cannes. Alongside this cultivation by the festival, Moretti appears to have developed a particularly strong authorial persona through his extensive involvement in filmmaking, often as not only in his role as director but also as screenwriter, producer, lead actor and, through his films' use of the autobiographical mode, protagonist (Brook, 2005). Indeed, Ewa Mazierska & Laura Rascaroli (2004, 44) argue that Moretti's biggest achievement is to have created a fictional persona whose autobiography runs across his films:

since his debut he created and played a critical and intractable character presenting strong autobiographical traits, called in turn Michele Apicella (from his mother's maiden name), Don Giulio, Nanni and Giovanni (the name on his birth certificate), which put himself at the forefront of his cinematic discourse (Mazierska and Rascaroli, 2004, 8)

The use of autobiography in Moretti's films - above all, the sense of continuity across his autobiographical characters - places the auteur 'at the forefront of his cinematic discourse.' This is particularly pertinent to the contradictory status of *The Son's Room*, which is most commonly conceived of as a departure from Moretti's autobiographical *oeuvre*. Indeed, Mazierska and Rascaroli write against critics who have seen Giovanni as 'the first "real" and non-autobiographical

protagonist that the film-maker has created' (Mazierska and Rascaroli, 2004, 112). Although Moretti's character, Giovanni, is fictional, the scholars highlight that he shares Moretti's birth name. Beyond this continuity, they also identify the common thread of irony running through *The Son's Room* and Moretti's other films. This irony develops from negative irony in films such as *Aprile* and *Caro diario* into a positive irony which allows Giovanni and his wife, Paola, to learn to laugh at the absurdity of life (Mazierska and Rascaroli, 2004, 113). They conclude that Giovanni is 'best seen as the mature and more successful version of the old character [Apicella]' (Mazierska and Rascaroli, 2004, 112). Their analysis points to one of the ways in which *The Son's Room* both is and is not a typical Moretti film. Above all, Mazierska & Rascaroli locate the film within Moretti's *oeuvre* in such a way that places Moretti's persona at the centre. Whether considered a break from or development of the Moretti figure, the meanings ascribed to *The Son's Room* depend upon its relation to Moretti's *oeuvre* – this body of work being taken as the yardstick against which to compare or contrast the film. Crucially, however, Mazierska and Rascaroli's reading foregrounds the constructed nature of Moretti's persona – the performance of a cinematic ego that conditions, even forms a fundamental part of the films' representational strategies. This aspect will become crucial to analysing *The Son's Room* as a self-consciously a-Morettian Moretti film.

Other scholars, too, have interpreted *The Son's Room* in relation to Moretti and the trope of irony or, in some cases, the questioning of identities that appears to run across his body of work. Vighi (2005) also positions *The Son's Room* as different yet related to Moretti's *oeuvre* in important ways. He interrogates the claim that *The Son's Room* can be considered a departure from Moretti's other films. Vighi (2005, 105) comes

to the conclusion that the film does inaugurate a 'new' Moretti (but a Moretti, nonetheless) as it 'radicalizes the implicit achievement of his previous filmography'. Specifically, Vighi (2005, 84) argues that, until *The Son's Room*, the ironic self-questioning common to Moretti's films was not that of the radical hysteric, but the Beautiful Soul: 'the subject who laments the shortcomings of the world around him and, at the same time, keeps at a safe distance from it through an ironic relativistic gaze that inhibits active participation.' In contrast, *The Son's Room* 'carries out the full hystericization of the postmodern subject by forcing him to confront his own foundational lack' (Vighi, 2005, 92). Vighi locates this process of hystericisation on the diegetic level of the film. Here, Andrea's death provokes Giovanni to confront the lack that had already plagued him - the impossibility of a full relationship with, and of fully knowing, his son. In Vighi's interpretation, it is when Giovanni appears to realise that this lack pertains to his fundamental condition as a subject - his identity is forever unstable, incomplete - that he takes on the position of the radical hysteric. Vighi's notion of hysteria, of confronting a fundamental lack, relates well to the notion of untying the *sinthome* - of highlighting the contingency of the relation between the *sinthome* and the ideological universal. Just as the subject is constituted by the lack between their being and identity, so the *sinthome* is constituted by the lack between its 'being' as a particular signifier and 'identity' as a stand-in for the universal. When one shifts focus from the subject in *The Son's Room's* diegesis to the *sinthomatic* auteur in the film's metacinematic discourse, it appears that this radical questioning might also entail the performance of a contradiction inherent to the notion of *The Son's Room* as a Morettian film itself. We might therefore interpret *The Son's Room* as performing a confrontation with the fundamental lack

*inherent to itself* as an Italian film valorised and constructed by a European A festival. In this way, the Palme d'Or -winner has the potential to effect a 'full hystericization' of not only the postmodern subject, but the auteurist festival film (Vighi, 2005, 92).

While writing primarily about the hystericisation of masculinity in *Aprile*, Paul Sutton (2014) also raises the question of the undermining of identity in *The Son's Room* and relates this to Moretti's constructed or 'public' persona. Sutton's analysis of both of these films shows the way in which they may simultaneously perform and undermine Moretti's identity as a masculine figure and an auteur.<sup>28</sup> Sutton (2004, 151) argues that Moretti's status as a father is a central part of his public persona: he appears as both a 'cinematic father' and, since the release of *April*, a father in the banal sense of the term. Sutton (2014, 152) argues that the model of fatherhood in both cases is 'represented as fragmented and open' while *April* can be read as a film marked by 'the splintering of Moretti's already precarious identity'. Sutton's (2014, 153) interpretation leads him to reinforce the notion of Moretti's authorial power, however, concluding that '[t]he plural, problematic and cinematic Nanni Moretti is offered in place of the singular and dangerously alluring Silvio Berlusconi.' Sutton thus takes the representation of a fragmented identity to be an authorial signature and political statement which culminates in his films' opposition to the singular, 'fascistic' masculinity represented by Italy's ex-Prime Minister (Sutton, 2014, 153). Read together with Vighi's analysis, we might note that such an interpretation defines Moretti's persona, and *The Son's Room*, as splitting 'Moretti' into a multiplicity of identities rather than performing the split inherent to identity as such (for example, the split inherent to an identity, such as 'auteur'). Since I aim to treat

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28 On the masculinity of the auteur, see chapter three.

the auteur as an internally split *sinthome*, and Italian festival films as internally split by their relation to this *sinthome*, it is necessary to refigure Sutton's analysis of Moretti's fragmented fatherhood. Sutton's discussion of the relationship between Moretti's status as cinematic father (auteur) and his characters' statuses as on-screen fathers provides an important frame through which to interpret *The Son's Room* as a film simultaneously about paternal grief and Moretti's authorial persona. However, it is necessary to consider the extent to which the film's representation of both can be interpreted as performing not only a splitting between the two identities (character-father/auteur-father) but the split internal to each one (and in particular, the auteur). This, in turn, will facilitate an analysis of *The Son's Room's* potential to perform its ontological contradiction as an a-Morettian Moretti film - the split internal to the film itself.

In order to provide a framework for understanding how this might function, I would like to discuss and develop De Gaetano's (1999, 116) theory of Moretti's satirical and exaggerated acting style. This theory highlights the centrality of Moretti's performance of a multiplicity of identities on-screen, which makes manifest a rupture between them.<sup>29</sup> De Gaetano's (1999) demonstrates the way in which Moretti's performance style constructs a 'gap in the mask' which destabilises the identities that appear on screen. When Moretti plays a character, such as Michele Apicella, he never fully mimics his character but reveals their face as a mask (De Gaetano, 1999, 116-17). De Geatano shows how this functions on both a diegetic and a metacinematic level. On the diegetic level, Moretti's grotesque, over-exaggerated acting style effects an over-identification between the character and their

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29 Again, it will be necessary to reformulate this to consider the extent to which Moretti's acting style also manifests a rupture internal to each identity.

identity – for example, Apicella as the over-zealous Communist (De Gaetano, 1999, 115-16). Through exaggeration, this identity is ridiculed, revealed in its contingent, constructed dimension (De Gaetano, 1999, 115). On a metacinematic level, Moretti allows his mask as actor to slip, usually by momentarily breaking character (De Gaetano, 1999, 117). In this case, Moretti's sudden appearance *as Moretti*, his 'presenza d'attore' ('presence as actor'), constructs a distance between the character and the actor (De Gaetano, 1999, 117). In this way, Moretti's acting style contributes towards the destabilisation of identity that Sutton (2014) has argued is central to both Moretti's persona and *The Son's Room*. When we add to this the dimension of Moretti as not only actor and character, but *auteur*, we may be able to perceive a third level of hystericisation. Moretti's identity as both actor and character is, as we have seen, overdetermined by his status as *auteur*; his acting and autobiography contribute, ultimately, to the construction of his authorial persona. When Moretti appears on screen, all three identities appear, but culminate in and are overdetermined by his persona as *auteur*. Using De Gaetano's (1999) concept of the construction of gaps in the actor's mask, or rather actor-*auteur*'s mask, we might analyse the way in which Moretti's on-screen performance highlights the constructed dimension of his authorial status. In other words, we can now approach the question of the way in which, in *The Son's Room*, Moretti's 'presenza d'autore' in fact constructs a distance between the character, actor and the *auteur*, which, in turn, reveals a tension inherent to the latter.

When we take these interpretations of *The Son's Room* together, the pertinence of the film as a case study for interrogating the *sinthome* of the *auteur* becomes clear. The film's director, Moretti, is not only an *auteur* who has been consecrated by Cannes, but one whose films are characterised

by the construction and performance of an authorial persona. While at first glance it would appear that Moretti plays the role of auteur designated in European A festivals' ideology, the fact that he does so in a way that highlights its performative dimension reveals the contradiction that this entails. Bearing this in mind, it becomes possible to consider the extent to which Moretti performs the role of the auteur in *The Son's Room*. Bringing this in relation to film festival ideology, and the status of auteur as *sinthome*, raises the possibility of interpreting *The Son's Room* as a film that performs the contradiction of film festivals' ideological construction of both the auteur and the ideological universal 'the art of film': rather than an impossibly 'free' artistic expression, *The Son's Room* is constrained by the necessity that it be a 'Moretti film' - that it bear the traces of its auteur - and reading Moretti's performance and questioning of this aspect of the film can make manifest such a contradiction. This understanding of the film provides a basis from which to analyse Cannes' construction of it: to what extent is *The Son's Room* represented in its ideality as artwork, while in fact being constrained by its status as a 'Moretti film'? In accordance with the methodology of this thesis, I turn to the festival's synopsis of *The Son's Room* in order to analyse and clarify the extent to which its construction is mediated by, and instantiates, European A festivals' auteurist apparatus and the ideological procedures that underpin it.

#### **4. SYNOPSIS ANALYSIS**

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The synopsis of *The Son's Room* that represents the film in Cannes' 2001 programme and online archive appears to omit any detail that would indicate either Moretti's presence in the film - as auteur, lead actor or protagonist - or the festival's investment in Moretti's auteur persona as well as auteurism

more generally. One could argue that this is simply because Cannes' synopses tend to contain less detail about films than synopses at other festivals. They are often shorter and more narrative-focused (this will become clear throughout the thesis, as we encounter synopses from a range of European A festivals). However, this in itself testifies to the nature of Cannes as a festival aimed at those already initiated into the order of European A festivals and art cinema. It is the only festival in this study that is not wholly open to the public, the majority of screenings being accessible only to industry figures. As such, Cannes is considered a particularly influential 'field configuring event' for the film industry - an event which reproduces and reinforces dominant norms among professionals (Mezias et al, 2008; Rüling, 2009, 51). Such norms make up the symbolic order of film that festivals reproduce; they are the implicit 'rules of the game', or 'symbolic laws,' to which festivals subscribe (Žižek, 2000c, 669). Therefore, each edition of Cannes, and its representations of films, is directed first towards those who already know 'the rules of the game'. The festival presents itself and its films in such a way that assumes knowledge of certain symbolic laws - chief among these being auteurism. Given the festival's long-standing relationship with Moretti, we can assume that one of the laws governing Cannes' representation of *The Son's Room* is that it is a worthy film precisely because it was directed by a man whom the festival has cultivated and consecrated from his first appearance in the Seventies to his Best Director award in 1991. Moretti's status as an auteur, and the worth conferred on *The Son's Room* by this status, would therefore appear to constitute the unwritten symbolic order of the 2001 edition of Cannes and its representation of the film.

What ideological effect is produced by the synopsis' rendering the law of auteurism implicit? We can answer this question through an analysis of the text's explicit representation of the film. As stated earlier my interpretation will be a somewhat abnormal one, as it depends upon analysing that which is not there - that which the text omits, following the procedure of ideology critique as 'looking awry' (Žižek, 1992, 3). To achieve this, I will continually refer back to scholarly interpretations of *The Son's Room* and other information above as a base from which to suggest that the Cannes synopsis obscures elements that we can assume will be prevalent in the film. The analysis of the film that follows will test and demonstrate the accuracy of these assumptions. As such, the synopsis analysis and film analysis should be read together as an overall interpretation of the case of *The Son's Room* at Cannes - rather than as two separate analyses which independently grasp some ultimate 'truth' of each text. The truth lies, rather, in the contradiction, the gap between the synopsis and the film.

The 'establishing shot' of the synopsis - i.e. the opening sentence - places a 'close family' in 'a small, northern Italy city [sic]'. The first thing to note is the description of film's setting: we are initially confronted with a setting other than the well-known one of Moretti's home city, Rome. We can see the significance of this when we recall that Clodagh Brook (2005) identifies a setting based on the director's home city as a key feature of autobiographical cinema, and Eleanor Andrews (2014) defines this setting as Rome in Moretti's films. The synopsis initially posits both a thematic and geographical distance between Giovanni and Moretti's persona. The text also opens on a 'close family', rather than the image of the individual, even narcissistic father that constitutes another trope of Moretti's films (or at least the auteurist relation between *Aprile* and *The Son's Room* highlighted in Sutton

(2004) and MacDonald Carolan (2013)). This foregrounding of the family unit at the expense of the protagonist sets the scene for a description of *The Son's Room* that disperses our attention across the cast of characters, directing it away from Moretti's persona. Although highlighting the protagonist's identity as father, the following sentence, 'The father, Giovanni, the mother, Paola and their two teenage children: Irene the elder and Andrea, the younger', directs attention away from this figure. He appears, albeit first, as one character in a list of others. In this context, the opening of the synopsis frames *The Son's Room* less as a film about Moretti and fatherhood, but rather as one about a fictional family. Our attention is directed away from the singular male figure and is initially dispersed among the entire family unit.

The importance of this becomes clearer when we analyse the synopsis's representation of hysteria (or the less specific 'neurosis') in *The Son's Room*. Even as the text eventually settles on Giovanni as protagonist, it elides aspects which would indicate that he may be an alter-ego of Moretti, and does so through another dispersal. Rather than a hysterical questioning of Moretti's identity as both diegetic and cinematic father (a key trope associated with Moretti's persona and filmmaking) the synopsis disperses neurosis among Giovanni's patients.<sup>30</sup> However, in the synopsis, it is the patients who 'confide their neurosis' to Giovanni, while Giovanni (for a time, at least) has a 'quiet existence.' In a reversal of the trope of Moretti as hysteric, it is the patients who bear the neurosis and Moretti's character, Giovanni, who is associated with tranquillity. Here, also, rather than a radical questioning of identity (hysteria) that Vighi (2005) argues constitutes *The Son's Room's* status as a development of Moretti's previous

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30 Along with the work of Mazierska & Rascaroli (2004), Sutton (2004) and Vighi (2005; 2003), see also Antonello & Barotsi (2009) and Bonsaver (2001).

work, we have the impression of generic mental instability (neurosis). Moreover, this neurosis does not pertain to Moretti, as one would expect in an auteurist representation of *The Son's Room*, but rather is dispersed among Giovanni's patients. Given that scholars' interpretations of *The Son's Room* and Moretti's authorial persona have raised the possibility of interpreting the film as one in which Giovanni and Moretti's identities might be radically questioned, we can read the synopsis's dispersal of neurosis away from Giovanni as producing the effect of precluding this possibility. *The Son's Room* appears here as a film unimbued by any kind of radical hysteria, much less one that permeates the metacinematic dimension of its status as a Moretti film.

In fact, the only interruption to Giovanni's 'quiet existence' is represented as originating from outside of his psyche. It presents Giovanni's trauma as being, rather than a foundational lack confronted through hysteria, caused by a singular event - the disappearance of Andrea. This is effected through the text's continuing, albeit subtle, focus on events external to the protagonist's subjectivity, in contrast with the subjective, even 'narcissistic' gaze associated with Moretti's autarkic and autobiographical style (Mazierska and Rascaroli, 2004, 89).<sup>31</sup> A series of external events causes the only conflict that the synopsis depicts. First, 'Giovanni is called by a patient'. The use of the passive tense ('is called') places the focus on the patient - the bearer of neurosis, as we saw before - rather than Giovanni. Then, when Giovanni 'is not able to go

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31 We might further understand this point, and its significance, by contrasting Cannes' synopses of *The Son's Room* and *Dear Diary*. In the latter, the film that won Moretti Best Director is represented as autobiographical and inward-gazing. The latter contains a certain amount of playfulness around auteur theory, referring to 'the author' and 'his most hidden thoughts and ideas'. Although the synopsis of *Dear Diary* does not explicitly acknowledge that the author of the film's diary is Moretti, or the Moretti persona, this playfulness alludes to auteurism, invites us to enjoy auteurism in a more explicit way than the synopsis of *The Son's Room* does.

jogging with his son', the son 'goes scuba diving' and climactically 'never comes back from it...' Taken together, these sentences create the impression of external events culminating in tragedy - the loss of the son. How this might contrast with *The Son's Room*, as well as tropes associated with Moretti's persona becomes clearest in relation to Vighi's (2005) analysis of the film and Moretti's hysterical discourse. As we have seen, Vighi argues that *The Son's Room* can be interpreted as a continuation and radicalisation of Moretti's authorial signature of self-questioning (Vighi, 2005, 105). While hysteria is triggered by the death of Andrea, its radicality depends upon a recognition that the symbolic loss of Andrea pre-existed his death - it involves a confrontation with a lack foundational to, internal to, Giovanni's subjectivity (Vighi, 2005, 92). As such, and in contrast with the synopsis, conflict is shown to begin within Giovanni's psyche, and then is made manifest through external events in the narrative. The reversal of causality should be clear: in the synopsis an external event causes conflict; in Vighi's reading of the film the conflict pre-exists the external event. The Cannes synopsis, then, appears to elide a hysterical aspect of *The Son's Room* - re-instituting the idea of the lack as external rather than internal, foundational to the subject. This directs our focus away from Giovanni/Moretti's hysterically split subjectivity - be it that of the character or the auteur.

Overall, we can observe an intriguing effect: seen in the context of European A festivals' ideological investment in the auteur, the synopsis appears underwritten by this same investment, and yet the text explicitly presents *The Son's Room* in a way that obscures its implicit, auteurist underpinnings. The synopsis presents *The Son's Room* as existing in a sort of vacuum - free even of the authorial signatures that would constrain it to the definition of a 'Moretti film'. This appears to

disavow the contingency of *The Son's Room's* presentation at Cannes - the centrality of Moretti's authorial status to the significance that the festival ascribes it. Rather, the guarantee afforded by Moretti being the film's auteur constitutes the 'obscene unwritten law' that does not appear in the text itself but around which it is, nonetheless, structured (Žižek, 2005, 54). The Cannes synopsis can therefore be read as representing *The Son's Room* as an a-Morettian film, as manifesting the claim that the film is a neutral artwork, all the while depending on the hidden law of auteurism for the legitimation of that artwork.

The synopsis' omission of any reference to Moretti or the meta-cinematic, or the hysterical aspects of the film results in a further repression of *The Son's Room's* potential to perform its contradiction as an a-Morettian Moretti film. Thus, in a crucial twist, the synopsis also represents *The Son's Room* in a way that undermines the film's potential as a radical hystericisation of Moretti's auteur persona. It does this by depicting the film as a plot-driven narrative of familial grief, rather than a film marked by a hysterical self-questioning. This can be read as an omission of an aspect of the film that might highlight both the split Moretti's persona as auteur and the split in the film as an a-Morettian Moretti film. We are now in a position to approach the question of the effect produced by the synopsis's omission of any reference to *The Son's Room's* status as a 'Moretti film'. The unwritten law of a symbolic order emerges out of - and functions to support - the 'non-all character' of that law (Žižek, 2005, 55). As discussed above, the *sinthome* is, like the ideological universal it represents, marked by the impossibility of fully standing in for the universal; it is 'non-all'. Obscuring *The Son's Room's* (and the festival's) auteurist dimension, the Cannes synopsis therefore produces the effect of supporting the non-all character of the *sinthome* and the ideology it

represents. Hiding the *sinthome* of the auteur can, in turn, hide the contradictions that constitute, and can be made manifest by, the *sinthome*. The Cannes synopsis can thus be read as a text which not only refuses to perform contradiction itself, but conceals the potential for *The Son's Room* to perform contradiction as well. It instantiates the ideological procedure of presenting film as unconstrained art - in line with a universal notion - all the while being underwritten by a contingent particular law, that of auteurism. It is on this basis that I proceed with an interpretation of *The Son's Room* which highlights the moments in which the film performs a contradictory aspect of itself as an a-Morettian Moretti film, as a means of untying the knot of auteurism and highlighting the inherent split in film festivals' ideological promotion of the universal of 'the art of film' represented by the particular case of the auteur.

## 5. FILM ANALYSIS

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In order to investigate the discrepancy between the synopsis of *The Son's Room* and the context in which the film was shown and awarded - that is, the context of an auteurism characteristic of both the film festival circuit and the persona cultivated by Moretti - I now turn to the film itself. I have described above the way in which European A festivals ideologically represent films such as *The Son's Room* as though they are free, ideal artworks (as art and nothing else) while simultaneously constraining their meaning through the *sinthome* of the auteur. While my analysis of *The Son's Room* aims to interpret this contradiction, it is, in a sense, marked by a similar one. Since it is a fundamental assumption of this thesis that film texts are unstable, with no fixed meaning, it is necessary to acknowledge that any interpretation I give of a film text is itself partial - contingent and constrained. I argue

that this is a productive constraint, however, since it is grounded in the aims of my analysis. The reading of *The Son's Room* that I give below are contingent upon the findings of my work above, and delimited by my aim to further investigate and interpret the *sinthome* that I have identified (and, with it, the ideology at work at European A festivals). Therefore, I do not aim to give a definitive interpretation of the film text itself but, rather, mobilise a reading of it that highlights the contradictions in European A festivals' awarding and representation of Italian cinema, thus 'untying the knot' of the auteur as *sinthome*. Below, I offer an interpretation of the ways in which *The Son's Room* performs the contradiction of its status as an a-Morettian Moretti film and presentation at Cannes according to this paradoxical logic. In this way, I use the aspects of *The Son's Room* that could be read as performing contradiction to aim at the 'truth' of the contradiction in its ideological construction by Cannes, rather than the truth of the film itself.

I begin by analysing the film's presentation of Moretti's body on screen: the way in which this body is presented in relation to the various identities that might confer meaning upon it - Moretti the auteur, Moretti the actor, and Giovanni the protagonist. I argue that these identities are ultimately overdetermined by Moretti's authorial persona, which can be interpreted as a 'stain' on the film's diegesis. This part of the analysis will focus on Moretti/Giovanni's initial appearance in the film - a moment of particular ambivalence in the figure's identity. This opening scene alludes to Moretti's presence as auteur (via the body), but also features elements that would imply the figure's identity as a diegetic character, which is later confirmed as he is ascribed a name, Giovanni Sermonti. However, I will argue that trace of the auteur remains due to the continuing appearance of his body, confounding the

character's symbolic identity. In making manifest the inescapable stain of the auteur on the film, *The Son's Room* film can thus be read as hysterical, as staging a confrontation with a split constitutive of film as such – the fundamental split between its diegetic and metacinematic levels.

I also analyse the film's representation of hysteria, both in and 'above' (as in 'meta') the narrative. I contend that the psychoanalytical clinic takes precedence as the site for an exploration of hysteria, including Giovanni's own semi-hysterical breakdown following Andrea's death. I argue that this takes the form of hysteria (as opposed to neurosis) in a striking scene following Andrea's death, in which Moretti/Giovanni fully breaks character, and the fourth wall, to address the audience directly as, it appears, Moretti. This scene thus creates a rupture in the diegetic world, questioning the very relation between the narrative and its metacinematic level: the a-Morettian narrative of grief and the Morettian dimension, the *presenza d'autore*, that infuses this narrative with a particular meaning. Viewed in the context of *The Son's Room's* awarding and representation at Cannes, we can use such a reading to interpret the film's status as an unstable artwork whose meaning is ideologically symbolised and constrained by the festival paratext. This lays the foundation for the rest of the thesis, in which I explore the ways in which Italian films' meanings are constrained by European A festivals' representations of them, culminating in the ideological construction of Italian cinema between 2000 and 2017.

## 5.A THE BODY OF THE AUTEUR AND THE NAME OF THE CHARACTER

Building on De Geatano's (1999) theory of Moretti's grotesque acting style, I argue that one of the most inescapable, and contradictory, aspects of Moretti's films is the actor-auteur's physical embodiment on screen. Furthermore, the auteur's effigy represents the authorial signature *par excellence*, the indelible stain of the auteur on his work. The first shot of *The*



Figure 1. The body of the auteur: Morettian figure runs along the port of Ancona in the opening of *The Son's Room*

*Son's Room* is marked by precisely such a stain, as the film opens on the figure of Moretti jogging along a port:

In this shot we are presented with no contextual information, such as the figure's name or history (with the exception of the setting, which I will discuss shortly). The only signifier we are given is the body - a body that can signify a character or an actor, but which is, due to Moretti's strong authorial persona and the autobiographical style of his previous films, overdetermined by its association with the auteur. With no context to establish these other identities, it appears that Moretti the auteur has run out of the past - perhaps his previous film, *April* - and into the first frame of *The Son's*

*Room*. This sense of the auteur's appearance on screen is reinforced as the figure finishes the jog, and begins enacting two tropes associated with his films and persona, singing and dancing.<sup>32</sup> In this instance, he dances with *hare krishnas* and sings to himself in the hallway as he returns home. The opening of the film appears to establish the presence of the auteur through the appearance of his body and tropes that would characterise him as Moretti. In contrast with the opening of the Cannes synopsis, which places a 'close family' at the centre, here the film appears to open on Moretti, framing *The Son's Room* as a Moretti film before establishing its other, diegetic features such as the characterisation of Giovanni and the exposition of the plot. From the very beginning, *The Son's Room* performs the law of auteurism that the Cannes synopsis obscures.

The scene is, however, also ambiguous due to the setting - the port of Ancona, which differs from the autobiographical setting of Rome that Brook (2005) and Eleanor Andrews (2014) have identified as crucial to Moretti's autobiographical style. The film's setting, again highlights a split in the film text: the port setting appears to signify that the figure on screen is a character, and that *The Son's Room* may eschew the usual autobiographical representation of the auteur that marked Moretti's previous works. This is in tension with the effect produced by Moretti's appearance on screen. This tension, perhaps, is also conferred onto the figure - the setting implies that he is a character, while the image of the figure himself implies that he is the auteur, Moretti. The contradiction between the body and its context in this shot thus reinforces and externalises the internal contradiction of Moretti's body representing both the character and the auteur. In this way, the film seems to allude to the radical instability of identity as

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32 On Moretti's dancing and singing, see De Gaetano (1999, 118-20).

such – this figure appearing split from its first appearance on screen. The unfamiliar setting might direct the viewer to perceive this figure as a character, while the brute fact of the body itself – and the lack of a name which confers any specific identity onto this body – encourages a perception of this figure as Moretti the actor-auteur. We can see the way in which this also makes manifest a split in the film text itself when we analyse the composition of the establishing shot. Most of the frame is taken up by an enormous red ship which signals the port setting and, given its size and brightness, draws the eye away from Moretti. While Moretti's figure stands out against the background, the diegetic space dwarfs him. Signifying the film's setting as Ancona (rather than Rome), the ship alludes to the film's narrative dimension, and thus its status as 'a-Morettian', which, as we have seen, is the explicit law governing the Cannes synopsis's representation of the film (the idea of the film as an artwork in its own right). However, Moretti's body indicates the hidden law of the film's structural constraint as a 'Moretti film'. In this shot, the auteur appears as a small but immovable stain – the grain of sand highlighting a split in the large diegetic space of the film itself, and its status as both 'free' artwork and constrained festival film.

Scenes of jogging recur at key narrative junctures throughout the film. In contrast with the first one, the later scenes can be interpreted as rearticulating Moretti's body, re-signifying its meaning within the diegetic space of the film. Subsequently, the body is ascribed another signifier, a name, Giovanni Sermonti. In Lacanian theory, naming marks the subject's entry into the symbolic (Ragland and Bracher, 2014, 9).<sup>33</sup> It is, in a sense, one of the explicit laws of the symbolic order – that subjects should have names. However, this process is also constitutive of the alienated subjectivity that Jacques Lacan

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33 This is explicated in Lacan's early seminars – see Lacan (2004 [1949]).

(2004 [1964], 205) argues defines all humans - the split in identity which hysteria forces the subject to confront. This is because the symbolic signifier - the name - does not totally correspond with the being it names.<sup>34</sup> This is a similar structure to the relation between universal and particular, and the 'non-all character of the public law' (Žižek, 2005, 55). The name, as a particular signifier of identity produces the same split between ideality (here a person's transcendental being) and signification (the name). Following this line of reasoning, we can think of Moretti's body, his *presenza d'autore*, in relation to the film's metacinematic level - the unwritten symbolic law that the film disrupts by making it explicit. Meanwhile, Giovanni as character relates to the explicit symbolic order of the film's diegetic level. The antagonism of the film's contradictory status as an a-Morettian Moretti film emerges in the gap between them. Moretti's transformation into Giovanni via naming effects his entry into the explicit symbolic order of the film, and this requires the alienation of his embodied being as auteur - an alienation which nonetheless leaves a stain, his continuing physical presence. The subsequent repetitions of the first jogging scene can be seen to function on an explicit symbolic level in which the figure becomes re-articulated as character. This depends upon, to an extent, a repression of the figure's identity as auteur. Moretti as auteur thus becomes the repressed implicit law as the explicit law of diegesis and characterisation takes precedence.

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34 Lacan pursues this line of reasoning in several of his seminars. The one I refer to in this paragraph is 'The Subject and the Other: Alienation', from *Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (Lacan, 2004 [1964]). In this seminar, Lacan refers to two lacks that define the subject, one primary and one secondary. The primary one is 'the real, earlier lack, to be situated at the advent of the living being' (Lacan, 2004 [1964], 205). The subject loses this lack upon entry into the symbolic - through being named. This produces, however, a second lack - that which we might understand as a symbolic lack, the lack which defines the (split) subject (\$) most commonly referred to in Lacanian theory.

### **5.B BREAKING THE FOURTH WALL OF THE CLINIC: *THE SON'S ROOM'S* META-CINEMATIC HYSTERIA**

Lacan designated the clinic as the space proper to hysteria, with the psychoanalyst's role being to hystericise the analysand in a controlled setting (Fink, 1995, 135). It should therefore be unsurprising that we find much of *The Son's Room's* representation of hysteria actually taking place in Giovanni's practice, and that scholars such as Sergio Benvenuto (2001) and Mignon Nixon (2005) have discussed the film's representation of psychoanalysis at length. However, the representation of the patients' treatment shows them not as fully, radically hysterical, but still in a state of transference – a stage of psychoanalysis in which 'the subject is still looking for his certainty' in the analyst, and is continually frustrated in this search (Lacan, 2004, 129). In this stage, the patient has not yet radically confronted the lack in the big Other – the reality that the analyst (as big Other, authority figure) does not 'know', and so cannot provide certainty (Lacan, 2004, 129-30). This frustration, in the case of negative transference, results in suspicion (Lacan, 2004, 124). *The Son's Room's* representation of Giovanni's patients can be understood through this notion of negative transference rather than radical hysteria. They appear to be caught in a cycle of questioning but also to still, ultimately, believe in the authority of the analyst. The film depicts the majority of Giovanni's patients complaining about the ineffectiveness of his treatment, but returning to him nonetheless. The first patient is shown saying that she does not think Giovanni understands her, and implies that the only real therapy she receives is her trip to buy a new dress after every session. The film also shows a patient who, we discover, threatens to leave Giovanni's practice during every appointment since she thinks the treatment is little more than a means of extorting money from her. That the patients

repeatedly return and address their questioning to Giovanni implies a continuing belief in the analyst's authority. This cycle of questioning and return recalls, and complicates, another Morettian trope: Moretti's distrust of the medical profession, which rose to prominence in the 'Medici' section of *Dear Diary*. Through Moretti's character, *Dear Diary* seems to comment on the ineffectiveness of medical treatment, and yet, like the patients in *The Son's Room*, Moretti continues to undergo a variety of therapies. In this way, the characterisation of the patients in the latter film appears to effect a displacement of one of the tropes of Moretti's persona onto a series of characters. The film is, again, split. On the one hand, it can be read as a Moretti film since it contains the trope of cynical questioning and, more specifically, the mistrust of the medical profession that was a key theme in the film that won Moretti the Best Director award at Cannes. On the other hand, the displacement of this mistrust from Moretti's character onto a series of other characters signifies the film's difference from Moretti's *oeuvre* - its status as an a-Morettian film.

This sense is reinforced, at least initially, through the position of Giovanni - no longer the mistrustful patient, but the clinician being questioned. Within this context, the film also characterises Giovanni in a way that distinguishes him from Moretti's previous alter-egos, appearing to privilege the film's fictional narrative over its metacinematic, auteurist dimension. During the analytical sessions, the camera frequently rests on Giovanni's tranquil expression, and sometimes slowly zooms in to emphasise and give weight to the advice he gives his clients. This aspect of the film appears to support the synopsis's description of Giovanni's 'quiet existence' its contrast with the neuroses of his patients. However, the synopsis omits the moment in the film when Giovanni, too, exhibits a Morettian distrust of the medical profession following the death of

Andrea. Giovanni is shown to lose his ability to perform as a psychoanalyst due to his grief, and both his authority as analyst and tranquillity begins to be undermined. At the climax of this, Giovanni rants at Oscar, one of his patients who has been diagnosed with cancer (which, again, recalls Moretti's own situation in *Dear Diary*). This can be read as part of the narrative's overall hysterical quality. Depicting the lack in an authority figure, such as a psychoanalyst, appears as a reference to the trope of cynical questioning associated with Moretti's *oeuvre*. However, in previous films such as *Dear Diary*, and in the initial stages of *The Son's Room*, the questioning character(s) and authority figure were presented as separate: rather than addressing the subject's inherent lack, this lack is repeatedly displaced onto a separate authority figure. In contrast, Giovanni/Moretti's questioning of his own authority (as psychoanalyst) creates an overlap between the lack in the big Other (authority) and the lack in the subject (questioning character). This scene therefore breaks down the distance required for the cynicism of cynical questioning. In occupying both positions as hysteric and authority figure (subject and big Other), Giovanni/Moretti is shown to confront the lack in himself.

The hystericisation afforded by the clinical setting also takes the form of metacinematic hysteria in an unusual scene during one of Giovanni's sessions with a client. In this scene, Giovanni is shown to be agitated and bored while his client speaks to him of her neurosis (a form of obsessive-compulsive disorder). Suggesting the lack in Giovanni's authority as analyst that the film shows later, the camera cuts in to the familiar sight of Moretti playing a frustrated, self-critical and impatient character that echoes his previous alter-egos (Mazierska and Rascaroli, 2004, 107). As Moretti/Giovanni gets up from his chair, he appears to step out of the diegetic reality into what we discover afterwards is a day dream. In this dream, Moretti/Giovanni occupies his previous personae, expressing



Figure 2. Metacinematic hysteria in *The Son's Room*: Moretti/Giovanni shows his sports shoes to a patient exasperation with the patient, insulting her and himself at the same time ('I'm just as boring as you'). He also shows the patient and audience his collection of sports shoes, alluding to another Morettian trope – an obsession with footwear:<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Marcus (1996, 239) lists Moretti's 'fascination with shoes' among his 'usual obsessions' catalogued in *Dear Diary* and elsewhere. See also Sutton (2004, 150) on the resurfacing of this trope in *Aprile*.

The figure who steps out of the film's immediate narrative to address the patient is, it appears, Moretti rather than Giovanni. The figure essentially leaves the film's diegetic space and enters an interstitial space - a space between the narrative world Giovanni inhabits and the metacinematic world Moretti inhabits. As such, we glimpse a gap in Moretti's mask (the gap between actor-auteur and character) which, in turn, opens up a gap between the metacinematic (auteurist) and diegetic (narrative) dimensions of the film. The image of Giovanni daydreaming that he is Moretti recalls Zhuang Zhi's dream that he is a butterfly, which Žižek (1989, 45) argues is exemplary of the split subject's predicament.<sup>36</sup> The predicament can be articulated as: 'now I do not know whether I am a man dreaming he is a butterfly or if I am a butterfly dreaming he is a man.' In *The Son's Room*, the formulation becomes 'now I do not know whether I am a character dreaming he is an auteur or an auteur dreaming he is a character.' In this moment, it becomes unclear what is the dream: Giovanni's daydream, or the diegesis of the film itself. From an auteurist perspective, the diegesis is in fact the dream - a dream which covers over the traumatic reality of the film's contingency on Moretti's auteur persona. The repressed trauma can be thought of as the film's ultimate, repressed meaning being a senseless manifestation of the *sinthomatic* auteurism that conditions European A festivals' construction of art cinema. As such, this scene pushes the contradiction of *The Son's Room* as an a-Morettian Moretti film to its hysterical limit. *The Son's Room* does not resolve the contradictions in its meaning, but performs them, highlighting the inherent tension between the notion of the 'art of film' and the *sinthomatic* auteurism through which this notion is constituted by film festivals. It at once gestures towards the instability of meaning

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36 The original passage can be found in Lacan (2004 [1964], 76).

proper to art as a universal notion (its emptiness), and highlights the constraint of this meaning through the very signifier of art's universality, the auteur as the metacinematic stain on the text.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

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This chapter has laid the foundation for the rest of this thesis's analysis of the ideology of European A festival's representation and awarding of Italian cinema in between 2000 and 2017. It has identified the ideological procedure at the base of this operation: the construction of films in accordance with an ideological universal, and the disavowal of the contingency of said construction. European A festivals, as I show above, are fundamentally engaged in constraining the meaning of the films they award through certain notions - for example, 'the art of film', on one level, and auteurism, on another. However, these notions are presented as universal rather than contingent - for example, European A festivals construction of ideas of the auteur as symbolic of unconstrained artistic universality, obscuring their actual subjection to commercial constraints. This entails a disavowal of European A festivals' character as sites of struggle, or rather, a particular kind of struggle which takes place within the limits of the economic structure in which they are embedded (that is, their place within the third sector of global capitalism). Indeed, it has been important to highlight the overlapping of the contingency that film festival ideology disavows with the notion of commerciality - contingency as commercial constraint - since this begins a crucial line of reasoning that this thesis undertakes. The disavowal of economic contingency suggests that the ultimate repressed content, the Real around which European A festivals ideology is structure, may be their dependence on and reproduction of capital. I develop this theory in the following chapter, in which

I analyse film festivals' self-definition in opposition to Hollywood (along with an interesting effect that this generates - their reproduction of the category of the social other). However, this idea will, like the Real, surface repeatedly throughout the thesis, with capital returning as the crucial repressed signifier around which film festival ideology is structured.

### III

## *Facing Window* at Karlovy Vary: There is No Sexual Relationship

Giovanna has not yet reached thirty but she already has several years of a somewhat 'tired' marriage with Filippo behind her. She divides her time between a tedious job, two small children and extra work as a baker for a local café. The only way for her to relieve her stress is the occasional night-time observation of an attractive young man living in the flat opposite and the fabrication of dreams. Giovanna's stereotypical life is disturbed by an old man Filippo brings home one evening. Her initial mistrust turns to increasing fascination with a person swathed in mystery whose layers she gradually begins to peel away. The strange life of the eighty-year-old Davide influences Giovanna's life more than she is prepared to admit. Özpetek's new film, depicting the force of an unusual encounter which offers hope for a new and happier life, won five Davids at the Italian National Film Awards, including one for Best Film, Best Actress (Giovanna Mezzogiorno) and Best Actor (Italian film legend Massimo Girotti, who died in January 2003).

- *Synopsis of Facing Window in the Karlovy Vary 2003 print  
and online programme*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

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In the previous chapter I demonstrated the way in which European A festivals' self-representation, and representation of the Italian films they award, follows the ideological procedure of disavowing contingency, with the figure of the auteur

functioning as the *sinthome* of such festivals' claim to operate under the universal of art. One could also argue that the case study I treat here, *Facing Window* (*La finestra di fronte*, Özpetek, 2003), won the Crystal Globe at Karlovy Vary in 2003 due to its director's, Ferzan Özpetek's, own auteur status. Rebecca Bauman (2015, 391) confirms his prestige:

Özpetek's steady career makes him one of the most durable of Italian filmmakers, with ten directing credits and a retrospective series at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 2008 that confirmed his status as an internationally-known *auteur*.

However, while the majority of case studies in this thesis can be understood as having been awarded and represented in accordance with the logic of auteurism, we must also consider the kinds of films that such auteurs are making (or have to make) in order to gain such a status. Writing specifically on the Italian context, O'Leary (2011, 210) has argued that the perception of a filmmaker's critical engagement with politics is central to their elevation to the status of auteur and/or public intellectual. Applying this observation to European A festivals, it appears that the construction of the auteur may be yet more political than it appeared in the previous chapter, with the status of auteur requiring the performance of not only artistic autonomy, but political autonomy as well. O'Leary (2011, 211) also notes 'the narrow definition of commitment' that underpins the 'discourse' of *impegno* (political commitment) through which the auteur, as a category, is generated in Italian intellectual life. Here, *impegno* has a 'strictly leftist character', and 'committed' comes to stand in for '*progressista*' (progressive, for want of a better term) (O'Leary, 2011, 211). I aim to show that the definition of politics through which European A festivals represent themselves and the films they award is, too, a narrow one, although of a slightly different character. Keeping the focus on the auteur for the moment, I

observe that Özpetek's persona as an auteur of marginalised identity – he is gay and a Turkish migrant – may highlight another aspect of the legitimisation of the auteur and their films. If auteurs become such in part through a discourse of political engagement, we might note that, in the case of Özpetek, this political engagement may be articulated through perceptions of his identity as other. This, in turn, may translate into a construction of his films as being committed to exploring themes of otherness. Film festivals may legitimise films directed by Özpetek due to his status as 'the acceptable face of queer Italy,' such films being valued on the basis of their promise to represent an othered identity (Hipkins and Renga, 2016, 378). Özpetek's particular status as a gay, migrant auteur thus raises the question of festivals' performance of an engagement with the other, and the definition of political commitment that might underpin this. In the new millennium, and particularly in the context of European A festivals, the politics to which auteurs must appear committed is, I argue, one that reproduces notions of a universal humanism capable of integrating the other, in contrast with the 'strictly leftist' notion of politics mobilised in the Italian context (O'Leary, 2011, 211).<sup>37</sup>

I further define and interrogate such notions of humanism in chapter four. For now, however, I aim to identify the presence of an ideological structure governing European A festivals' (re)production of certain ideas of the political through their representation of themselves and the films they award: such festivals' construction of, and representations of themselves via

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37 This is likely due to the differences between the two contexts. Italy and its intellectual *milieus* have strong historical links to communism due to the prevalence of the Italian Communist Party (Partito Comunista Italiano, PCI) in national politics. See Barański and Lumley (1990) and Forgacs (1990). Meanwhile, European A festivals were often founded and instrumentalised in efforts to resist the spread of communism on the continent. I discuss this, and its relationship with the kind of humanism reproduced by European A festivals in chapter four.

the figure of the other. This focus allows me to theorise another form that European A festivals' fundamental fantasy might take: the attempt to produce the appearance of a closed, complete order of meaning capable of integrating all elements. In this chapter, I investigate the extent to which such festivals' self-representation and representation of the Italian cinema in the new millennium is structured according to a claim to be able to integrate the social other which, in turn, produces an image of a self-enclosed order of representation. This fantasy compensates for the Real limit to signification, constructing an image of European A festivals as self-enclosed, total, orders of meaning. Furthermore, I analyse the way in which such festivals paradoxically claim to be able to integrate the other while foregrounding and reproducing the very structure of otherness that would make such integration impossible. I analyse the procedures and displacements that structure and are produced by this paradox.

The chapter follows three stages. First, I review the way in which European A festivals have been shown to function - in particular their self-promotion as platforms for that which is other, and their rhetorical opposition to Hollywood. I take insights from film festival studies and use them to produce a theory of the apparatus of European A festivals. I demonstrate that film festivals' representation of themselves and the films they award is structured in a way that follows the logic of two interrelated ideological processes: the fantasy of the sexual relationship, the imaginary identification with the other, producing the illusion of totality; and the logic of suture, the symbolic opposition to an external figure (another kind of other), which likewise aims at producing the illusion of totality - or rather 'the effect of self-enclosure' (Žižek, 2001b, 55). The fantasy of the sexual relationship compensates for the Real through the notion of the possibility of integrating all elements

- for example, integrating the other to form a 'harmonious totality' (Žižek, 1989, 193). This ideological formation takes the form of the fantasy of positioning the other *inside* an order of representation (the social order, cinematic order, the order of film festivals etc.), thus filling in that order's fundamental lack. Meanwhile, in the fantasy of suture via symbolic opposition, the other takes the place of the 'constitutive Outside': the lack is displaced onto an other that is designated as some external opponent (Žižek, 2004, 102).<sup>38</sup> I aim to theorise the overarching logic through which European A festivals construct themselves and the films they award in relation to the social other. I argue that such festivals' claim to integrate the other to form a harmonious totality is undermined by the investment in dominant categories of otherness that such a claim implies. This, in turn, is compensated for by the festivals' performative opposition to Hollywood, the constitutive outside onto which the antagonism inherent to European A festivals' claim to integrate the other is displaced. I conclude that European A festivals' ideological investment in the axis of self-other follows the typical structure of an ideological fantasy of social totality: the antagonism inherent to the socio-symbolic order - in this case the antagonism between film festivals' symbolic order and that which they claim to represent, the other - is displaced onto an external element - European A festivals' constitutive outside, Hollywood.

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38 Strictly speaking, the fantasy of the sexual relationship also follows the logic of suture - the displacement of the social order's inherent lack onto an external element which it then claims to be able to integrate. However, in the interests of clarity, in this chapter I use the term suture to refer only to the specific form of suture as symbolic opposition. I do so to clarify the distinction between European A festivals' construction of the other and opposition to Hollywood that this chapter is focused on analysing. I do, however, further discuss the ways in which the fantasy of the sexual relationship is underpinned by the logic of suture in chapter four, and use this formulation to demonstrate the ways in which this fantasy is always undercut by a staging of the other's difference.

In the second part of the chapter I analyse the manifestation of this logic in a particular case study: Karlovy Vary's representation of *Facing Window*, which won the festival's top prize, the Crystal Globe, in 2003. I begin by reviewing scholars' interpretations of the film, identifying the key tropes and points of contradiction that feature in both the film and scholarly discussions of it. I show the relevance of *Facing Window* as a case study due to its having been repeatedly framed as a film about otherness. I also discuss the extent to which the film is perceived to enact an integration of the other or a refusal of that integration, depicting the other's radical potential to destabilise the apparent smooth functioning of the social order. I focus on Millicent Marcus's (2007) interpretation of the film, which, I argue, highlights a particularly salient aspect of its ideological construction by the academy: the privileging of the film's engagement with the other and either denigration or omission of its romance narrative. This, in turn, will inform my analysis of the Karlovy Vary synopsis's construction of the film. Following the first stage of ideology critique that Žižek (1989, 140) describes in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* - the 'discursive procedure' or 'symptomal reading' - I further demonstrate the functioning of ideology, and highlight some of its lineaments, by demonstrating the symptomatic re-appearance of the same ideological structures in the festival text. I analyse Karlovy Vary's synopsis of the film, and argue that it displaces the notion of romantic fulfilment (associated with Hollywood) onto one of fulfilment through a successful relationship with a marginalised other. I argue that the synopsis's representation of the protagonist, Giovanna's, fulfilling relationship with a figure of the other, Davide, follows the logic of the fantasy of the sexual relationship and thus implies that European A festivals and the films they award are also sites in which a fulfilling relationship with the other may

be possible. I conclude that, while the synopsis's representation of *Facing Window* renounces romance as a mere 'fabrication of dreams' it reproduces this same structure of fulfilment via an other in its representation of Giovanna's encounter with Davide. In this way, the text displaces the failure of the sexual relationship onto a constitutive outside - in this case, the trope of the happy couple, associated with Hollywood. As such, it constructs *Facing Window* in a way that is conditioned European A festivals' ideological claim to integrate the other and compensation of the inherent failure of this integration via opposition to Hollywood.

Finally, I develop my analysis of Karlovy Vary's representation of *Facing Window* through an interpretation of the film itself. First, I attempt to rebalance both scholarship's and the synopsis's construction of the film, centring the first part of my analysis on *Facing Window's* romance narrative. I show that, through this plot-line, the film emphasises the fantasmatic dimension of the sexual relationship as such, using the failure of Giovanna's relationship with Lorenzo to allude to the failure of this fantasy more broadly. I use this to inform the second part of the film analysis, which shows the ways in which *Facing Window* can be read as radicalising the other, depicting the impossibility of their integration into the social order. In highlighting the aspects of the film that suggest an unresolvable antagonism between the socio-symbolic order and the other, I aim to further demonstrate and disrupt the ideology that implicitly governs the synopsis's representation of *Facing Window*. I use this analysis of the film to 'look awry' at the synopsis - to better identify its ideological functioning - critiquing the logic of suture and, in particular, the fantasy of the sexual relationship that structures this paratext (Žižek, 1992, 3). I conclude that European A festivals construct themselves and the films they award in a way that affords them

political legitimacy via their claim to be able to integrate the other, while doing so in a way that disavows such festivals ideological investment in the same categories of difference and otherness that they profess to transcend.

## **2. EUROPEAN A FESTIVALS' IMAGINARY IDENTIFICATION WITH THE OTHER AND SYMBOLIC OPPOSITION TO HOLLYWOOD**

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This section reviews the way in which film festivals, and particularly European A festivals, have been shown to function by scholars. I take three key insights from film festival studies, and develop these into a framework through which one can analyse the ideological processes at work on the European A festival circuit. First, I discuss film festivals' implicit claim that they are capable of representing that which is other, and argue that this appears to be structured according to the fantasy of the sexual relationship - the fantasy of a relationship in which 'each fills out the lack in the other' (Žižek, 1989, 193). Second, I relate scholars' observations that festivals foreground otherness and difference for their self-promotion, and the promotion of the films they exhibit, to the fundamental failure of the sexual relationship: the impossibility of integrating that which is other into a symbolic order. I show the paradox inherent in festivals' self-representation as a symbolic order capable of integrating the other, since the other is, by definition outside the symbolic order. I theorise this as the fundamental antagonism that rends the symbolic order of film festivals - the impossibility of total representation, of a closed symbolic order. Finally, I consider film festivals' rhetorical opposition to Hollywood and show that it can be understood as a means of displacing this fundamental antagonism onto a seemingly external figure. I argue that this follows the logic of suture as symbolic opposition in which an ideology displaces its

inherent lack (its failure to form a totality) onto an opposing element, its 'constitutive Outside' (Žižek, 2004, 102). I argue that film festivals' failure to represent the other and achieve totality - the failure of the sexual relationship - is displaced onto an external figure, Hollywood.

Wong (2011, 1) observes that festivals commonly court controversy, 'catalyzing debates over issues ranging from technical achievements to human rights and sexual identities'. Wong gives several examples of occasions in which European A festivals could be seen to court political controversies: Cannes awarded the Palme d'Or to anti-war film, *Fahrenheit 9/11* (Michael Moore, 2004) during a period in which George Bush faced widespread condemnation for his pursuit of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Berlinale has selected films that engage with German-Turkish immigration and the war in Bosnia. (Another example of this, discussed in chapter four, is the Berlinale's engagement with the so-called 'refugee crisis' at the 2016 edition, manifested by its representation of *Fire at Sea*). Venice has showcased a film depicting China's controversial Three Gorges Dam, *Still Life (San xia hao ren)*, Jia Zhangke, 2006), and, I add, repeatedly involves exiled Chinese artist Ai WeiWei as part of the festival's broader remit as the Venice Biennale.<sup>39</sup> In each case, the festival appears to represent itself as an institution that offers a platform for filmmakers to make interventions against a dominant political power - be it the Bush administration, the Chinese government, or politics of anti-migration. Moreover, they appear to do so, in some cases, through engagement with the other - for example, the Eastern European other, German-

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39 The relationship between Venice and political dissident Jia Zhangke has recently been cemented by the Festival Director's, Marco Müller's, collaboration with him on another film festival. Zhangke and Müller launched the Pingyao Film Festival in October 2017, apparently one of the only major film events in China not controlled by the government (Frater, 2018).

Turkish migrants, and political dissenters. As the examples above show, film festivals present themselves as institutions capable of representing that which is other, as an alternative symbolic order in which the other can be included. The notion of film festivals as alternative, and as capable of representing that which is other – as, perhaps, the ‘real’ universal symbolic order that can include all elements – is encapsulated in the Director of Venice, Marco Müller’s assertion that film festivals function to ‘reveal what the markets hide’ (Müller, cited in Cousins, 2009, 156). This statement, from the Director of one of the most significant film festivals on the A circuit, encompasses the anti-commercial and revelatory rhetoric through which film festivals represent themselves and the films they award. It can be taken quite literally to mean that festivals show films that would not otherwise be shown due to their lack of competitiveness on the international film market. However, (and particularly in the context of Wong’s observations), Müller’s comments can also be read as implying that such festivals and the films they exhibit are engaged in promoting narratives of otherness, of othered identities. The ‘market’ is described as a dominant, even oppressive, force which ‘hide[s]’ certain narratives, while film festivals are, in contrast, implicitly described as a symbolic order capable of showing everything, of revealing that which remains hidden – such as narratives and identity groups that have been othered due to commercial interests.

In a manner that complements their claims to operate under the sign of artistic universality, these festivals posit themselves as being able to construct a political-humanist universality – a coherent whole in which the other can be integrated. In this way, European A festivals’ self-promotion as sites capable of representing the other appears to follow the logic of the sexual relationship:

In the imaginary relation, the two poles of opposition are complementary; together they build a harmonious totality; each gives the other what the other lacks - each fills out the lack in the other (the fantasy of the fully realized sexual relationship, for example, where a man and a woman form a harmonious whole) (Žižek, 1989, 193).

Here, the 'two poles of opposition' are film festivals and the other. The two are conceived of as complementary. European A festivals appear to represent themselves as complemented by the figure of the other and vice versa. The order of European A festivals is made complete by the other; in representing the other, such festivals form 'a harmonious totality'. The festivals' identity is secured through their claim to offer self-enclosed orders of meaning able to represent that which is other. Here, the 'harmonious totality' promised by film festivals is one in which all elements can be integrated: the relationship between society and/or cinema and its others achieves full realisation to 'form a harmonious whole'. Relating this to politics, I note that in the social sphere, the fantasy of the successful sexual relationship takes the form of a fantasy of a harmonious social order; one without any excluded others. This produces the fantasy of 'a fully realized Society, the impossible fullness in which every dislocation would have been cancelled' (Žižek, 2004, 102). Similarly, European A festivals appear to be underpinned by such a fantasy of social totality, aiming at an illusory cancellation of difference (or dislocation) and achievement of a 'fully realized Society'.

This theme is taken up by Randal Halle (2010, 303), who discusses art cinema, and institutional constructions of it, as having its origins in European 'cinema of the other', which again refers to both difference in style and themes of social otherness. These origins, he argues, continue to have relevance in the representation of non-European films through figurations of the other. Representing, and indeed foregrounding, films'

and cultures' otherness, cinematic institutions such as film festivals maintain their image as sites where one can discover and 'learn' about the other:

The point is that something happens in films and in the institutions of promotion and criticism to establish a (cultural) distance between the viewer and viewed, to establish a differential on one side of which the story is about another culture through which I learn (Halle, 2010, 316).

We might view film festivals as one such institution that seeks to establish a 'cultural distance between viewer and viewed', that represents the films they award as 'about another culture' and thus having a pedagogical function, helping the audience 'learn'. This cultural distance might also be referred to as 'cultural difference', which Mike Wayne (2002, 1) has identified as the master signifier of European cinema's adherence to 'post-Enlightenment liberalism'. On the one hand, it appears that European A festivals are engaged in setting up two poles: on one side, themselves, cast as representatives of a universal order of meaning; and on the other side, the figure of the social (or cultural) other, cast as marginalised or outside the social order. And yet, in the same move, the festivals seek to represent this relationship as complementary. For example, the viewer or, say, film festival attendee, can 'learn' from the other culture - that culture can fill in their lack.<sup>40</sup> It therefore appears that European A festivals' self-representation as capable of integrating the other involves a disavowal of the antagonism that this claim implies. The imaginary totality of

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40 Elsaesser (2016, 25) critiques film festivals' performance of an engagement with the other as reproducing colonial relations of power: 'it is the old trap of the colonial ethnographer, of the eager multi-culturalist who welcomes the stranger and is open to otherness, but preferably on one's own terms and within one's own comfort zone.' While this chapter is dedicated above all to analysing the structures of the sexual relationship and suture in European A festivals construction of themselves and the films they award, I elaborate on the ideological exclusions and power dynamics (re)produced as a result of these structures in chapters four and five.

the sexual relationship disavows the fundamental difference between the order of representation and its other – the impossibility of a coincidence between the ‘inside’ and its ‘outside’, the other. The notion of a ‘harmonious totality’ disavows the fact that ‘society is always traversed by an antagonistic split which cannot be integrated into symbolic order’ (Žižek, 1989, 126). Since the other is, by definition, positioned outside of the symbolic order, it cannot be integrated, thus making the ‘harmonious totality’ fantasised in the sexual relationship impossible. This indicates once more the Real limit structuring European A festivals’ representation of themselves and the films they award – in this case, the fundamental paradox that they cannot, by definition, integrate that which is other, and therefore cannot achieve totality. European A festivals are traversed by an antagonistic split, the impossibility of integrating that which is other.

While we have seen one fantasmatic strategy through which European A festivals compensate for the Real, the failure of *this* fantasy (i.e. that of the sexual relationship) in fact appears to generate a secondary ideological procedure. At this point, it becomes necessary to consider a corollary procedure to the imaginary relation – the symbolic relation of opposition:

The symbolic relation is, on the contrary, differential [...] A given element does not fill the lack in the other, it is not complementary to the other but, on the contrary, takes the place of the lack in the other, embodies what is lacking in the other: its positive presence is nothing but an objectification of a lack in its opposite elements (Žižek, 1989, 193-94).

In contrast with the imaginary relation, the ‘element’ (i.e. signifier, or figure) is not shown as complementary, but rather as oppositional. This element is a symbolisation, ‘an objectification of a lack’ through opposition. The symbolic

order's fundamental antagonism - its 'lack' - is displaced onto an 'opposite element'. Žižek (1989, 142) argues that this element is, most often, a figure that the symbolic order constructs as being external, opposed to it. Similarly to the fantasy of sexual relationship, this figure functions as a displacement of the inherent lack in representation, the Real, giving the impression that everything can be symbolised - totality is possible. The symbolic relation follows the logic of suture, the 'fundamental ideological operation' of covering up the symbolic order's inherent lack by displacing it onto another element (Žižek, 2001, 33). In its oppositional form, suture is the process by which a social order's failure to integrate all elements - for example, the other - is, paradoxically 'inscribed *within* this order' through its creation of a figure of opposition - a 'constitutive Outside' (Žižek, 2001b, 32; 2004, 102). This figure is the 'excessive element which "sutures" it precisely insofar as it does not belong to the series' and, through its position as outside the symbolic order, 'produce[s] the effect of self-enclosure' in that order (Žižek, 2004, 102). From this perspective we can approach the question of suture as a means through which ideology 'takes its own failure into account in advance' by displacing that failure onto an external, oppositional figure (Žižek, 1989, 142).

Elsaesser (2005, 100) has noted that film festivals are in fact founded on opposition:

Most film festivals, as we saw, began as counter-festivals, with a real or imagined opponent: Cannes had Venice, Berlin had the Communist East, Moscow and Karlovy-Vary the Capitalist West. All have Hollywood, and (since the 1970s) the commercial film industry, as both their 'significant other' and their 'bad object'.

European A festivals can be considered as mobilising an oppositional status since their inception - a status as 'counter-

festivals'. They have, in a sense, come into being through a procedure of suture. Moreover, since the 1970s, the A circuit appears to have become homogenous in its opposition to one particular 'significant other' and 'bad object' - 'Hollywood' and 'the commercial film industry'.<sup>41</sup> It appears that the European A festival circuit is characterised by a self-image produced according to the logic of symbolic opposition, with Hollywood taking the place of the external element. European A festivals may suture themselves through a constitutive opposition to Hollywood as their 'bad object'.<sup>42</sup> While such festivals are not, in practice, independent from Hollywood, they do mobilise a rhetorical distinction from Hollywood in order to give the impression of a coherent identity (both for themselves and the films they exhibit). De Valck (2007, 58) has argued that 'the success of the international film festivals has benefitted from its [sic] ambiguous relationship to Hollywood, as it [sic] both counters and emulates its practices'. For example, competitive film festivals depend on 'Hollywood stars, products, and glamour,' and the appearance of any of these affords a festival 'immediate endorsement and attention' (Wong, 2011, 5). Film festivals' potential to offer 'an "alternative distribution network" for world cinema beyond Hollywood' depends, in fact, on Hollywood - its star power, its funding and even its films being used to secure attention and endorsement for cinema made outside of such a system (Iordanova, 2009, 23). For example, Turan (2002, 13) describes Cannes as being in a 'love-hate' relationship with Hollywood. The festival, a model for the A circuit, emulates Hollywood's glamour and depends on Hollywood productions for prestigious premières (Turan,

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41 The festivals Elsaesser names in the above citation, and those which he takes as his object of study in the chapter from which this citation is taken, are, broadly speaking, European A festivals.

42 This also appears to explain the dynamic I described in the previous chapter - the auteur being the crucial signifier of film festivals' constructed difference from Hollywood and (again, constructed) freedom from commercial constraint.

2002, 13). However, the festival consistently excludes not only Hollywood productions, but films perceived as overly commercial from its official selection – as do all of the festivals on the European A circuit (Turan, 2002, 13). We can observe here that Hollywood’s presence is compensated for in the main competition, which privileges films on the basis of their differentiation from Hollywood. If the main competition is an A festival’s most significant event, the exclusion of films perceived to be commercial from it enacts a powerful rhetorical rejection of Hollywood. European A festivals differentiate themselves through the rhetoric produced by their practices of film selection and prize giving. De Valck (2007, 206-07) highlights the contrast between rhetoric and practice, again using Cannes as an example:

Cannes will continue to use anti-Hollywood rhetoric and foster anti-American sentiments to cultivate its self-image as an independent, politically correct, and leading center for ‘alternative’ film culture, while, at the same time, knowing better than to damage the relation and risk a lethal exsanguination of the festival network’s coronary artery.

While Hollywood in fact constitutes ‘the festival network’s coronary artery’, festivals such as Cannes mobilise a rhetorical opposition to both American commercial film industry in order to forge their ‘self-image’. In short, European A festivals, despite their practical reliance on Hollywood, suture their identity (as in brand identity) through a symbolic opposition to it.

We can further elaborate on De Valck’s description of festivals’ rhetoric and practice by considering it in relation to the structure of suture. We have seen already that suture is secured through a symbolic opposition – in this case, the opposition between film festivals and Hollywood. This

opposition also generates the appearance of a positive identity for festivals. As De Valck (2007, 205-06) argues above, the 'anti-Hollywood rhetoric' deployed by festivals also serves to produce a positive identity, such as Cannes' 'self-image as an independent, politically correct, and leading center for "alternative" film culture.' Given Cannes' status as the premier A festival on the circuit, film festivals on this circuit likely emulate its rhetoric and may define themselves, therefore, as not only 'not-Hollywood' but also as 'independent' and 'alternative'. Here, a negative identification (opposition) complements a positive one, designating a set of features constructed out of such opposition. Elsaesser (2005, 100) describes the same process in a continuation of the passage I have cited above:

The ritualized appeals are to originality, daring, experiment, diversity, defiance, critique, opposition - terms that imply as their negative foil the established order, the status quo, censorship, oppression, a world divided into 'them' and 'us'.

Thus we can identify a cyclic process in which festivals' performance of a certain identity - as daring, experimental, diverse and so on - is caught a cyclic relation between 'them' and 'us'. Each implies the other; 'defiance' implies 'oppression', for example. This follows precisely the logic of symbolic differentiation: each element is symbolised through its difference to the other. Here we come full circle: European A festivals construct themselves through an oppositional relation to a 'constitutive Outside', Hollywood, which in turn generates their image as alternative and able to integrate that which is other (in particular, that which is considered to have been rendered other by Hollywood). In short, the festivals present themselves as a harmonious totality in opposition to the 'oppressive', exclusionary order of Hollywood; they disavow their status as ideological, subject to an exclusionary logic

precisely by displacing this status onto Hollywood. To delineate the cyclic ideological structure I have just discussed: through their self-representation as capable of integrating that which is other, European A festivals' appears to be structured according to the logic of the sexual relationship - the fantasy of an 'harmonious totality' (Žižek, 1989, 193). However, this procedure is marked by a fundamental antagonism: the inherent impossibility of representing every element (the limit to signification, the Real). In this case, such a split is made manifest by European A festivals' foregrounding of the otherness of the other while claiming to integrate them. One of the ways in which such festivals disavow this antagonism is to displace it onto an external figure, Hollywood. These festivals are engaged, therefore, in constructing a symbolic antagonism between themselves and Hollywood as a means of displacing the fundamental antagonism between themselves and the others they claim to represent. This follows the typical structure of fantasy: If 'the stake of the social-ideological fantasy is to construct a vision of society [...] in which the relation between its parts is organic, complementary', this 'antagonistic fissure' must be 'masked' in some way (Žižek, 1989, 126). As we have seen European A festivals attempt to mask this fissure, the Real, through their construction of and claim to represent the other, and displacement of their intrinsic failure to do so onto Hollywood.

### **3. *FACING WINDOW*: A FILM CAPABLE OF INTEGRATING THE OTHER?**

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I now turn to consider the case of *Facing Window's* representation in the Karlovy Vary 2003 official programme. I begin by reviewing scholarly interpretations of the film which demonstrate the pertinence of this case study as a means of further analysing the theory I have expounded above. I also

engage with scholarship on the film in its two dimensions, each useful for the analysis I undertake below. First, following the standard approach of a literature review, I mine these sources for useful information about *Facing Window*, which provide tools for my later interpretation of the paratext and the film. Second, I treat scholarly interpretations as, themselves, texts that may bear traces of the ideological construction of Italian cinema, and thus highlight the signifiers through which *Facing Window* has been represented.<sup>43</sup> This will be especially the case when I come to Marcus's (2007) analysis, which will assist me in demonstrating the pertinence of studying *Facing Window* as a film that has been constructed a logic similar to the one I have identified in the European A festival apparatus.

Scholars have most frequently analysed *Facing Window* in relation to the question of otherness, its being part 'an idiom of filmmaking acutely attuned to the multiculturalism, identity politics and aesthetics of postmodern contemporaneity' (Gordon, 2012, 106). Indeed, the film's representation of marginalised identities - from migrant to queer - appears to be one of its defining features, although scholars disagree on the extent to which these identities are shown to be assimilable into various social orders. Wood (2005, 80) highlights the centrality of othered identities to *Facing Window's* representation of history, arguing that the film is above all 'quest narrative that uncovers a lost 1940s history of racial and sexual persecution in the Jewish ghetto of Rome'. *Facing Window* is considered to represent that which is other - a 'lost' history in which social - 'racial and sexual' - others were persecuted. Wood (2005, 80) argues that, beyond representation of the past, the film also posits a 'multicultural

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43 As noted in the introduction to this thesis, scholarship can be considered part of the institutional construction of Italian cinema - the academy being, somewhat like film festivals, an institution that produces and reproduces the values according to which Italian cinema is defined and evaluated (see, for example, Hipkins and Renga (2016)).

present'. This is part of a broader attempt to integrate others in the past and present: 'excavating the past results in acceptance of diversity and an alternative "family" that represents the nation' (Wood, 2005, 80). Wood's reading of the film raises the possibility of its being mobilised in line with a fantasy of the successful integration of the other into the social order. In Wood's account, this order is that of the nation. We might consider how this applies to European A festivals' self-representation as another such order capable of integrating the other.<sup>44</sup>

Alberto Zambenedetti (2006, 110) uses *Facing Window* as an example of Özpetek's 'other's cinema,' but, unlike the scholars above, posits that a radical otherness is suggested in the film's treatment of the migrant other. Reading the film through the idea of Özpetek as an 'exilic director', he highlights *Facing Window's* narrative of migrants Eminè and Giambo. Notably, this reading reproduces the auteurist logic I discuss above – the legitimisation of *Facing Window* through its director's status as other. However, of more interest here is where this logic leads Zambenedetti's argument. Although his analysis is brief, Zambenedetti (2006, 112) indicates that the film represents the predicament of the non-white migrant in Italy, forced to assimilate in a way that involves 'the suppression of the influence of the cultures of origin of their own parents on their new, hyphenated identity, and the distancing from their heritage'. This suggests that there is a part of the non-white migrant other that cannot be integrated into the social order – for example, their heritage. Considered in relation to the fantasy of social totality this would, signal a point of failure in

44 The parallel between the nation as symbolic order and European A festivals as symbolic orders has further implications precisely due to the 'European' aspect of these festivals. We might ask to what extent European A festivals mobilise a rhetoric in line with that of a supranational, European identity, and what effect this has on the construction of both Italian cinema and the figure of the other. For a further discussion of this, see chapter four.

the symbolic order - an element which the social order cannot integrate, which must be 'suppressed'. We might consider, therefore, the extent to which *Facing Window* suggests a radical otherness that contradicts the notion of social totality, and thus European A festivals' self-representation as capable of integrating the other.

Interpretations of *Facing Window* as an example of commercially successful Italian queer cinema also investigate the film's capacity to integrate the social other - this time the queer other. These analyses also foreground the complex relationship between representations of the other and the mainstream - for example Hollywood. Duncan (2013, 258-59) identifies the criticism that the 'relatively unchallenging narrative and aesthetic structures' mean that films directed by Özpetek 'do little of the work that queer as a contestational category aspires to carry out'. However, he argues that the films can challenge heteronormativity on both a textual level and an industrial one. First, they 'can be read in ways that challenge the heteronormative bias of commercial cinema' (Duncan, 2013, 259). Secondly, the casting of major Italian stars, such as Riccardo Scamarcio and (I add) Raoul Bova, 'suggests a very different economy of male stardom to that dominant in Hollywood' (Duncan, 2013, 259). In this reading, both the film texts and the alternative economy of male stardom suggested by the casting of Italian 'heartthrobs' offer the potential to queer 'commercial cinema' and/or Hollywood (to queer that which is taken to be dominant). Bauman (2015) develops this line of reasoning with her analysis of male stardom in Özpetek's *oeuvre*. She argues that films such as *His Secret Life (Le fate ignoranti, Özpetek, 2001)* and *Facing Window* mobilise a queer gaze towards heterosexual male stars, placing them in the feminised position as 'bearers of the gaze', sexualised objects whose primary function is to be

looked at (Bauman, 2015, 389). She concludes that, while these films are 'by no means radical', since they reproduce structures of masculine beauty typical to Italian male stardom, the queering of these stars opens up a space for the contradictions between 'mainstream' virile masculinity and 'alternative' queer identity to emerge (Bauman, 2015, 401). Taking Duncan's and Bauman's interpretations together, it appears that *Facing Window* is typically considered in relation ideas of an alternative cinematic order that engages with the other. Again, this appears to be secured through the films' legitimation via the figure of Özpetek as a queer auteur, perhaps appearing as a counterpoint to stars such as Scamarcio. (Indeed, Bauman implies that such stars are queered owing to the auteur's queer gaze.) We might consider, then, the extent to which *Facing Window's* differentiation from Hollywood is predicated on its privileging of othered identities (including the auteur), and the extent to which queerness is shown to be either assimilable into or disruptive of dominant cinematic and/or social orders.

Marcus's (2007, 143) analysis of *Facing Window* brings together the threads of Holocaust memory, the relationship with the other and the implication of a 'moral' opposition to the 'mainstream'. She raises the latter question unwittingly. Rather, it seems to form an assumption on which her interpretation of the film rests. I intend to engage with this text in more depth both here and throughout the chapter, since it will prove most relevant to my analysis of the synopsis and, later, the film. Marcus's piece is not only useful as a means of identifying aspects of the film to analyse, but is particularly valuable when taken as an instantiation of the ideology that structures the institutional construction of Italian cinema. Marcus's interpretation of *Facing Window* is structured around an opposition between two relationships: Giovanna's with Lorenzo, and Giovanna's with Davide. She places the first on

the level of 'narcissis[m]' and 'romantic escape', and the second on the level of 'conscious and morally responsible choices' (Marcus, 2007, 152; 143). Marcus (2007, 149) demonstrates that *Facing Window* depicts Giovanna's desire for Lorenzo as a narcissistic fantasy, in which 'the lover's idealized self-image is mirrored in the eyes of the beloved'. In contrast, the scholar claims that Giovanna's refusal of this relationship in favour of a non-romantic relationship with Davide provides a model for Italian cinema and memory to work through the traumatic past of the Holocaust (Marcus, 2007, 143). Marcus (2007, 143) claims that the 'bond' between the two characters facilitates 'Davide's success in coming to terms with his past' as a queer Holocaust survivor as well as 'Giovanna's internalization of Davide's example and decision to live out the lesson of his suffering'. This fulfilling relationship between the two provides hope for both 'Italian cinema' and 'the current generation [...] to acknowledge and mourn a traumatic past' (2007, 143). Notably, this interpretation follows a reading of Freud's 'Mourning and Melancholia' that implies that mourning's success is marked by the integration of the other into a symbolic order (either the subject's psyche or the symbolic order of memory, as in the collective mourning posited by memory studies). This success is represented, Marcus (2007, 152) argues, by Giovanna's ability to 'appropriate the perspective of Davide, [...] to entertain a perspective that was truly other.'

When we view this interpretation from the perspective of European A festivals' representation of themselves and the films they award, understood through the theory of the sexual relationship, a contradiction emerges. Marcus's reading highlights the fantasmatic aspect of the sexual relationship through her analysis of the film's less 'worthy', romantic narrative (she compares it to a *telenovela*), associating it with

narcissistic desire – the desire to fill in one’s lack through a relationship with the (romantic) other. However, we might also note that Marcus’s account of the film’s narrative of a supposedly more morally acceptable relationship with the social other implies that it is structured according to the logic of the same fantasy. The notion of Giovanna’s ability to ‘entertain a perspective that was truly other’ implies, in fact, that the integration of the other is possible. As in the fantasy of the sexual relationship, the other is fully ‘appropriated’, integrated. Marcus’s interpretation unwittingly implies that the film’s depiction of mourning through Davide and Giovanna follows the logic of the successful sexual relationship in which ‘each fills out the lack in the other’ (Žižek, 1989, 193). It follows the same logic that appears refuted in the romance narrative. Significantly for this chapter’s analysis of European A festivals’ ideological representation of cinema, it appears that the queer, Jewish other is integrated into the order of the film’s narrative and the larger orders of meaning that it engages with, such as Italian cinema and Holocaust memory. Looking somewhat awry at Marcus’s interpretation, then, it appears that her reading reproduces the structure of that I have identified: the fantasy of the successful integration of the other supported by an opposition to mainstream forms (if not Hollywood then the *telenovela*). What remains to be seen is whether this ideology is also at work in Karlovy Vary’s representation of the film, and the extent to which the *Facing Window* follows this logic or, rather, contains elements that disrupt it.

In the studies above, the *Facing Window*’s representation, and perhaps integration, of the other is a central concern. While there appears to be a consensus that *Facing Window* represents the other in some way, scholars disagree on the extent to which this other is shown to be assimilable into the

symbolic order. Moreover, they disagree on the role of commercial or mainstream structures in the film, with Duncan (2013) and Bauman (2015) arguing for the film's simultaneous appropriation and queering of such structures (such as the Hollywood star system and romantic desire). Meanwhile, Marcus (2007) argues for the film's ultimate refusal, even critique, of mainstream forms (such as the *telenovela* and, again, romantic desire). It is clear that *Facing Window* is an exemplary case study for the analysis of the fantasy of the other and opposition to Hollywood that appears to structure European A festivals' representation of themselves and the films they award. The lack of consensus among scholars already indicates the film's instability as a text open to several interpretations, its fundamental ambivalence, above all with regards to the questions of otherness and mainstream structures. It will be crucial to remain attentive to the ways in which the film's meaning is temporarily fixed by the Karlovy Vary synopsis, and how it does so in relation to these questions of otherness and Hollywood. As such, I will consider the extent to which the festival synopsis is structured according to the same fantasy of the sexual relationship that I have identified in European A festivals' ideological functioning. I will then use *Facing Window's* ambivalent dimension to foreground the moments in which it escapes the meaning ascribed to it in the synopsis, and to further demonstrate the extent to which Karlovy Vary's awarding and representation of the film is conditioned by and ideological investment in the category of the other.

#### **4. SYNOPSIS ANALYSIS**

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Based on my theory of European A festivals' ideological functioning and my review of interpretations of *Facing Window* above, the analysis below will have two aims. First, it considers

the extent to which the Karlovy Vary synopsis is structured around the notion of integrating the other. Second, it investigates the way in which this might be supported by some performance of an opposition to Hollywood: it considers whether the synopsis articulates such an opposition, and which aims this might serve. Throughout the analysis, it will become clear that the Karlovy Vary synopsis represents the film in relation to otherness, albeit a vaguely defined otherness, while positing the film's romance narrative as one of escapism. The synopsis also alludes to narrative resolution, closure, rather than openness. Significantly, it does so in relation to Giovanna's relationship to the figure of the other, Davide. As I will show, and investigate further, below, this appears to signal a crucial aspect of the synopsis' representation of *Facing Window*: the displacement of closure from a narrative of a romantic relationship onto one of a relationship to an other. Therefore, I will argue that the synopsis differentiates *Facing Window* from Hollywood by privileging Giovanna and Davide's non-romantic relationship over Giovanna and Lorenzo's romantic one. In doing so, I aim to show that the synopsis appears to be structured around a fantasy of a successful relationship between the subject and the other and thus a fantasy of social closure: the successful integration of the other into the social order.

Uncannily similar to Marcus's interpretation of the film, the Karlovy Vary synopsis constructs *Facing Window* through the opposition between the escapist illusion of a romantic relationship and the emancipatory potential of a relationship with the other.<sup>45</sup> The synopsis implies that the non-romantic relationship between Giovanna and Davide can not only can render the other (Davide) legible, but afford 'hope for a happier

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45 I mean uncanny here in the sense of the resurfacing of a symptom - a stain of the Real of ideology. See *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Lacan Through Popular Culture* (Žižek, 1992).

life' for the subject (Giovanna). To understand this, and the paradox it reproduces, I begin by investigating the synopsis' depiction of Davide as other, and the ways in which its representation of this otherness can be seen to instantiate the fantasy of the sexual relationship. The text manifests the logic of the sexual relationship as a fantasy in which the other can be integrated into the symbolic order as it simultaneously describes and enacts Davide's gradually being rendered legible. In contrast with Giovanna, whose name constitutes the first word of the text, Davide is initially anonymous, depicted as 'an old man'. If naming marks one's entry into the symbolic order, Davide's initial namelessness is significant (Ragland and Bracher, 2014, 9).<sup>46</sup> Davide's otherness and gradual integration into the symbolic order is most clearly suggested through the text's representation of his relation to Giovanna. He is an object of 'fascination' and, initially, 'mistrust' for her. His appearance in her life 'disturbs' it, and is described as 'an unusual encounter'. In contrast, Giovanna's life is 'stereotypical'. While her life is presented as the status quo Davide's is defined in opposition to it - a fascinating, unusual disturbance. Although subtle, this presentation of *Facing Window* produces an opposition between the norm and that which is other. Moreover, Giovanna's fascination is shown to stem from to Davide's being 'swathed in mystery'. The idea that he is swathed in mystery further evokes notions of illegibility - a veil which swathes, covers, the truth of the character. This is reinforced, particularly in its normative dimension, by the notion of Davide's having had a 'strange life'. Overall, notions of illegibility and non-normativity overlap: Davide is represented as abnormal and (thus) illegible. Then, as Giovanna is said to 'gradually begin to peel away' Davide's 'layers,' so too the synopsis reveals more about his identity -

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46 This is explicated in Lacan's early seminars - see Lacan (2004 [1949]).

describing him no longer as an 'old man,' but 'eighty-year-old Davide'. This shift suggests Davide's entry into the symbolic: although still 'strange', he is gradually integrated into the symbolic order of both the synopsis, as it reveals more about him, and, by implication, the film as Giovanna 'peels away' Davide's layers. The paratext structurally instantiates the fantasy of gradually integrating the other and rendering them legible on both the level of the text itself and its representation of *Facing Window*. As such, the synopsis condenses European A festivals' construction of themselves and the films they award as promising to represent that which is other – above all, other from a (constructed) status quo.

The paratext also presents the idea that Giovanna's relationship with Davide is fulfilling – that each can 'fill out the lack in the other' – while displacing the notion of the failure of the sexual relationship onto the film's romance narrative (Žižek, 1989, 193). The 'fabrication of dreams' that describes the film's representation of Giovanna's romantic attachment to Lorenzo is opposed by the 'force of an unusual encounter that brings hope for a happier life'. This phrase, occurring at the end of the synopsis' description of the film's plot, retroactively conditions the meaning of the film; its location at the conclusion of the description implies its importance as a summary of the film's significance overall. Giovanna's relationship with Davide is powerful, emancipatory – a 'force' that gives 'hope' – resulting from an 'encounter' with the other (implied by the word 'unusual'). In contrast, Giovanna's romantic attachment to Lorenzo is depicted not as leading to a transformative relationship, but as a form of escapism. She observes him to 'relieve stress' and as part of 'the fabrication of dreams'. The synopsis depicts her attraction to Lorenzo as something contrived. Not only does this align with Marcus's (2007) association of romantic closure with mainstream forms

that limit moral agency, such as the *telenovela*, it also appears to subtly reinforce the stereotype of Hollywood cinema as a cinema of escapist fantasies emblematised through the trope of the 'happy couple' (MacDowell, 2013, 1). Moreover, Lorenzo remains nameless in the text, implying the failure of the sexual relationship between him and Giovanna. While in the case of Davide, this namelessness combines with the repetition of terms that emphasise his strangeness to render him other, Lorenzo is described as 'an attractive young man' - not a social other so much as a good-looking yet unknown man. Therefore, the relationship that would have been between him and Giovanna is depicted as the coming together of two representatives of the status quo - the 'stereotypical' woman and 'attractive' man. In omitting any reference to the development of Giovanna and Lorenzo's affair, and leaving Lorenzo nameless, the synopsis appears to disregard *Facing Window's* romance narrative and refuse the possibility of the successful sexual relationship in its erotic form. The synopsis implies that closure is afforded by a more apparently progressive relationship between the protagonist and the other, while the romantic one is implicitly depicted as fantasmatic and doomed to failure. In this way, the synopsis refuses to render the attractive, romantic 'other' legible, and legitimises *Facing Window* in relation to the notion of rendering the social other legible instead. The fact of this occurring in the context of an institution which has been demonstrated to promote films on the basis of their constructed difference from Hollywood indicates that this is likely to be part of an ideological procedure in which a cynical rejection of romantic closure becomes a marker of distinction. The refusal of romance as a means for closure, and displacement of this closure onto the representation of narratives about the other appears to be crucial to the

synopsis's and thus Karlovy Vary's constructed opposition to Hollywood.

In short, the synopsis privileges the notion of a fulfilling encounter with the other over that of a fulfilling romantic encounter. The text appears to enact a refusal of a narrative structure associated with the mainstream - the successful romance narrative - as a means of differentiating *Facing Window* and, in turn, the festival exhibiting it. However, in doing so it maintains the logic of the fantasy of the sexual relationship - the harmonious totality promised by the integration of the other. It subtly displaces this fantasy onto Giovanna's and Davide's relationship, privileging this narrative while casting the one between Giovanna and Lorenzo as the sole site of an illusory fantasy. The synopsis gives the impression that *Facing Window* refuses fantasy, that it is *not* ideological, by displacing notions of fantasy onto the film's romance narrative. This appears to cover the synopsis's representation of the film being structured according to the same logic of the sexual relationship through opposition to Hollywood - here signified by the film's supposed refusal of the trope of the happy couple. This constructs *Facing Window* in a way that symptomatically manifests ideas of European A festivals' opposition to Hollywood, and reproduces the underlying ideological structure of the fantasy of totality - the integration of the other. The impossibility of this closure, and thus the ideological procedure instantiated by the synopsis, becomes yet clearer when contrasted with the film text itself.

## 5. FILM ANALYSIS

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### 5.A 'THERE IS NO SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP': GIOVANNA AND LORENZO

While the synopsis positions *Facing Window's* romance narrative as secondary - barely giving it the status of a narrative line - the plot of Giovanna's pursuit of a romantic relationship with Lorenzo is central to the film's plot, and, moreover, its potential to make manifest and challenge the fantasy of the sexual relationship. The film explores this fantasy through the would-be affair between the neighbours, raising the possibility of Giovanna achieving self-fulfilment by attaining her love object. However, it ultimately rejects resolution in this narrative line, suggesting the impossibility of closure. At first glance, the film appears to portray romance in a similar manner to the one described in the Karlovy Vary synopsis, seeming to refuse it as a dream fantasy, and thus perhaps performing its own difference from tropes and narrative structures associated with Hollywood cinema. However, examining the form that this refusal takes opens up another interpretation that will assist us in analysing the ideology instantiated in the Karlovy Vary synopsis. *Facing Window's* potential to signal the sexual relationship's fantasmatic, and even narcissistic, dimension will become clear through the film's use of the technique of interface - the uncanny doubling of a character's image on screen (Žižek, 2001b, 39). This technique, I will argue, is not only used when Giovanna is shown to voyeuristically observe Lorenzo, thus signalling that her desire for him is a fantasy; rather, the logic of narcissistic desire culminates when Giovanna rejects Lorenzo for, it appears, a desire for her own image and the impossible fullness that it represents - highlighted in its fantasmatic dimension again through interface. In contrast

with the notion that Giovanna somehow transcends the narcissistic logic of the sexual relationship, rejecting Lorenzo and pursuing an implicitly more 'moral' relationship with the other, the film appears to signal the continuation of this logic (Marcus, 2007, 143). This has important implications for an alternative reading of *Facing Window* which can highlight the film's potential to disrupt the fantasy of the sexual relationship as such. In particular, the film's representation of this logic beyond its governing of solely romantic pursuits informs my interpretation of *Facing Window's* portrayal of the other in the second half of the film analysis.

Initially, *Facing Window* appears to depict Giovanna's desire for Lorenzo in a way that supports both the synopsis's and Marcus's description of it. Indeed, as Marcus (2007, 148-49) argues, the casting of Bova, an Italian 'heartthrob' known for his roles in romantic comedies, not only characterises Lorenzo as a love object for Giovanna, but also indicates the metacinematic dimension of the film's illustration of the protagonist's, and audience's, desire. The film's emphasis on voyeurism and technique of 'screening' Lorenzo through



Figure 3. Screening desire for Lorenzo in *Facing Window*: Eminè watches him getting undressed through the window/screen



Figure 4. Screening desire for Lorenzo in *Facing Window*: Giovanna watches him getting dressed through the window/screen

windows adds to this metacinematic effect, and we might begin to perceive the presence of a romantic fantasy in scenes such as this one:

Working within the framework of Mulvey's (1975) gaze theory, Marcus (2007, 149) compares the facing window to the (cinema) 'screen for the projection of romantic desire'. She also positions Giovanna as spectator-voyeur, who 'is given to displacing all of her unrealized desires onto the imagined world so tantalizingly glimpsed through the *finestra di fronte*' (Marcus, 2007, 147). Read symptomatically, Marcus's use of the word 'imagined' appears significant, as it can signal the presence of the 'imaginary relation' that structures the fantasy of the sexual relationship (Žižek, 1989, 193). In this case, the relation between the two does not initially appear as reciprocal, but rather implies that Giovanna's fantasy is one in which Lorenzo can give her what she lacks - fulfilling her 'unrealized desires'.

This suggests the 'narcissistic' dimension of sexual desire that Marcus (2007, 149) describes. However, I add a consideration of another aspect of the film's depictions of Giovanna's desire for, and eventual refusal of, Lorenzo: its potential to expose the failure of the sexual relationship in its social, as well as romantic, manifestation. To do so, we must re-introduce the notion of fantasy as pertaining not only to the romantic relationship, but the sexual relationship in its social form: as a fundamental structure in which the fundamental lack in the social order is imagined to be filled by an other, creating a 'harmonious totality' (Žižek, 1989, 193). This idea (though not always in its Lacanian delineation) is quite common in film scholars' interpretations of the ideological function of on-screen romance. James MacDowell (2013, 3) identifies the illusion of social closure produced by a film's portrayal of romantic closure as a common trope in criticisms of mainstream romance narratives' perceived 'ideological conservatism'. Such criticisms, he argues, tend to be based on the notion that the 'happy couple' stands in for the resolution

of social antagonism, with such resolution, in turn, being considered a marker of conservatism (MacDowell, 2013, 3).<sup>47</sup> From a Lacanian standpoint, McGowan (2007, 203-05) has theorised this kind of resolution, but also its reverse: a film's depiction of the impossibility of the romantic relationship having the potential to signal the impossibility of resolving social antagonism. Taking a second look at *Facing Window* from the perspective of the fantasy of the sexual relationship, we might form an interpretation that highlights the way in which the film's depiction of the failure of Giovanna's and Lorenzo's affair indicates the failure of the sexual relationship more broadly. This, in turn, can be used to disrupt the logic of the Karlov Vary synopsis, further demonstrating the ideological process at work in both the paratext and European A festivals more generally.

When we recall that the sexual relationship is precisely a



Figure 5. First case of interface in *Facing Window*: Giovanna's image superimposed onto Lorenzo's window

fantasy in which the subject aims (and fails) to fill their own

<sup>47</sup> The association between resolving social antagonism and conservatism is one that this thesis also invests in to an extent. However, it aims to complicate ideas of the forms that this might take - for example, it aspires to challenge the notion that this is to be found exclusively in Hollywood (as an institution) and the film texts produced by the Hollywood film industry, or even that such resolution is ever straightforwardly achieved in films, however they may be produced.

inherent lack, we can interpret the window that frames Lorenzo as a screen onto which Giovanna projects her desire for her self – an unattainable fullness of self promised only on the level of fantasy. A crucial technique for *Facing Window's* depiction of fantasy in this way is its use of interface – the redoubling of a character's image on screen (Žižek, 2001b, 39). Žižek (2001b, 39) has theorised interface as a cinematic technique which disrupts suture (the closing of some order of representation) in the sense of cinematic continuity (for example, the experience of a continuous perspective afforded by the shot reverse shot). The disruptive aspect of interface lies in its potential to represent the object-cause of desire – the inherent lack in an order of representation (in this case, the order of the film) (Žižek, 2001b, 54).<sup>48</sup> While Žižek has theorised this only in relation to metadiegesis (a film's own representational logic), I argue that interface can also disrupt the fantasy of the sexual relationship within a film's diegesis. I demonstrate this through the reading of *Facing Window* that follows. Shots of Giovanna watching Lorenzo through his window often feature a ghostly reflection of the protagonist herself:

Through the notion of interface, this reflection can be interpreted as the uncanny appearance of Giovanna's object-cause of desire – that is, the inherent lack that she fantasises will be filled by Lorenzo. The use of this technique alludes to the fantasy of the sexual relationship: while Giovanna appears to desire Lorenzo, the appearance of her image in the frame indicates the presence of the unattainable object-cause of desire – the lack that defines the subject and that the subject continually attempts to fill by pursuing objects of desire (Žižek,

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48 This is in contrast with the object of desire: the object of desire is the material figure onto which this lack is displaced. In fantasy, therefore, it appears possible to fill one's inherent lack – one simply needs to attain the object of desire, e.g. a lover (Žižek, 1992, 6).

1992, 6). In this way, *Facing Window* can be interpreted as manifesting the logic of the sexual relationship through Giovanna's desire for Lorenzo: he signifies the attainable object of desire, an other, onto which the impossible object-cause of desire is displaced. The image reflected back to Giovanna, the true object (object-cause) of her desire appears to be herself or, more precisely, the impossible fullness of self signified by her own ghostly image.

Such scenes foreshadow the breakdown of Giovanna's desire for Lorenzo, the failure of their sexual relationship, suggesting the fundamental lack on which it is premised. This logic is brought to its culmination in the way that *Facing Window* depicts Giovanna's eventual rejection of her lover, and her motivations for it. Viewed through the notion of interface, we can interpret the film as showing Giovanna's refusal of romance not as a traversal of fantasy, the full acceptance of the lack on which fantasy is predicated, but rather a further delineation of it – the continuing displacement of that lack (Žižek, 2002, 17-18). This begins when Giovanna breaks away from Lorenzo to go to the window through he used to spy on her. Looking from this vantage point, her own apartment and her own life become the sites of fantasy – she views them



Figure 6. Second case of interface in *Facing Window*: Giovanna sees herself in her own window

through the window-screen, projecting her desire onto them. Giovanna sees her husband, her children, Eminè, and then, finally, an apparition of herself:

The film emphasises the appearance of Giovanna's own image, the music heightening, the camera pausing on her apparition, and then cutting back to show her reaction to it. At this juncture, it appears that Giovanna ceases to desire Lorenzo, and begins desiring herself - or, rather, the fullness that her spectral image represents. If interface signifies the 'purely fantasmatic dimension' of a scene, the continuing use of interface, the doubling of Giovanna's image, suggests the continuing presence of a structuring fantasy (Žižek, 2001b, 39). We can understand this better through the theory that the mirror stage produces the prototypical structure of fantasy (Lacan, 2004 [1949], 6). Here, the subject looks at their mirror image, which displays a fullness that they cannot experience otherwise (Lacan, 2004 [1949], 4). This creates a narcissistic desire for the apparition of completeness that their reflection represents (Lacan, 2004 [1949], 4). This is the first instantiation of fantasy of the sexual relationship: the attempt to fill one's constitutive lack as represented by one's 'ego-ideal', the imaginary image of a full self, the first instance of which is one's own reflection in the mirror (2004 [1949], 6). (It is later displaced onto other objects of desire, other figures, such as lovers.) The breakdown of Giovanna's fantasy of fulfilment with Lorenzo can be interpreted through the film's depiction of her object-cause of desire. As she sees herself through the window-screen of fantasy, she appears to reject Lorenzo in pursuit of the fullness that her spectral image represents. In contrast to the realisation that the object-cause of desire is a lack, the film shows Giovanna continue to desire an illusory fullness; she displaces her fantasy onto another screen. *Facing Window* thus continues to narrate Giovanna's

pursuit of the object-cause of desire beyond her tryst with Lorenzo while, through the romantic narrative, highlighting the impossible, fantasmatic dimension of such an undertaking.

Therefore, the doubling of Giovanna's image in this scene can be interpreted as signalling not the traversal, but the continuation of the fantasy of the sexual relationship. In this way, the film can be interpreted as making manifest the fantasy of the sexual relationship beyond the romantic level, showing Giovanna to be motivated by the impossible desire to fill her constitutive lack. Giovanna's other desires in the film may also be interpreted as following this logic: she is not shown to have traversed fantasy and accepted her inherent lack as a subject, but to continue to displace this lack onto other objects and/or images. This will have implications for the question of *Facing Window's* depiction of closure more broadly, and above all of whether the film depicts the possibility or impossibility of integrating the other into the social order. Moreover, the way in which *Facing Window* seems to make manifest the logic of the sexual relationship per se can also assist an interpretation of the Karlovy Vary synopsis. *Facing Window* helps us to view the synopsis' displacement of the fantasy of closure from romance onto another object. Analysing *Facing Window* as an ambivalent artwork that can make manifest the Real that at once conditions and confounds its ideological construction by Karlovy Vary, we can begin to see how the film text's depiction of fantasy also highlights the fantasmatic dimension of the Karlovy Vary synopsis. Looking awry at the synopsis, interpreting it through the film it represents, we can see that the paratext's displacement of closure from the romantic relationship onto a relationship with the other in fact covers up the Real object of desire in the synopsis. Following the same structure of desire that *Facing Window* shows to motivate Giovanna, the festival's representation of the film, and above

all the figure of the other in the film, appears motivated the same desire to fill its inherent lack. While Giovanna as a character appears motivated to fill in her lack as a subject, the film's exposition of this highlights the synopsis's, and European A festivals', similar attempt to fill in *their* lack as orders of representation: both are structured in the same way and aim at the disavowal of some fundamental antagonism - the Real split inherent to each. The romantic plot in *Facing Window* can be interpreted as making manifest this logic of fantasy in a way that renders apparent the presence of the same logic structuring the synopsis and, in turn, European A festivals' ideological construction of Italian cinema.

### **5.B THE FUNDAMENTAL ANTAGONISM BETWEEN THE SOCIAL ORDER AND ITS OTHER: DAVIDE**

To further analyse this structure, I now turn to the second point of intersection between *Facing Window* and the Karlovy Vary synopsis: the figure of the other. I examine the way in which *Facing Window* represents Davide as other, considering the extent to which this otherness is shown to be assimilable into the symbolic order (be it of the film, memory or society more broadly). While it could be argued that *Facing Window* follows the logic of the successful sexual relationship in its depiction of Giovanna and Davide's friendship, an alternative reading appears when we view the film from the perspective of its prior depiction of the failure of the sexual relationship and the lack on which it is predicated. From this viewpoint, Giovanna's desire for Davide seems to be subtly represented in its narcissistic dimension. For example, Davide is shown to fill out the lack in Giovanna by teaching her, first, how to become a *pasticciere* (pastry chef). The two characters are mirrored through their vocation for baking, with Davide, as a renowned pastry chef, standing in as the ego-ideal for Giovanna. This culminates in Giovanna's words to Davide at the end of the

film: 'I still feel your gestures in mine, your voice in mine,' appearing to signal her successful incorporation of him. To what extent, then, does *Facing Window* contrast Giovanna's subjective incorporation of Davide with its representation of the other's place in other orders of meaning, such as Holocaust memory or present-day Italy?

In keeping with the methodology of this thesis, I highlight the aspects of *Facing Window* that might suggest an unresolvable antagonism between the other and the social order, thus further demonstrating and disrupting the ideology condensed in the Karlovy Vary synopsis. Overall, when read through the notion of otherness, *Facing Window* appears to portray a social order predicated on exclusion: the present as irreconcilable with the past, Holocaust memory as exclusive of the queer other, and contemporary Italian society as exclusive of the migrant other. This side of the film's representation of otherness counterbalances the sense of wholeness that we could read in the narrative of Giovanna's pursuit of happiness, acting as the 'bone in the throat' - the traumatic Real - that permeates and confounds the film's, and the synopsis's, evocation of closure (Žižek, 2003, 63). Reading the film in this way highlights the impossibility of a successful relationship with the other: the designation of the other as other means it remains irredeemably open, incomplete, since it can never integrate this element. It is with the aim of demonstrating this that my analysis of *Facing Window* will focus entirely on the film's depiction of a traumatic otherness at the heart of the present, Holocaust memory and contemporary society.

Davide's first appearance in the film signals his status as other. At first, the camera follows Giovanna and Filippo during a relatively banal exchange as they walk through Rome, the typical trope of the arguing married couple alluding to the



Figure 7. First appearance of Davide in Facing Window: a stranger on a busy Roman street status quo (for example, Giovanna's 'tired marriage' described in the synopsis). It continues to follow Giovanna as Filippo slips out of view, then, when she realises he is no longer beside her, it cuts to him speaking to an old man. Mystery ensues: the old man is 'confused' and cannot remember his name. Filippo's concern and Giovanna's bemused frustration already signal Davide's otherness as a stranger to the pair. This sense is visually reinforced and extended to Davide's place in present-day Rome when he is shot on his own after the two have attempted to leave him behind:

He appears, confused and distressed, on a busy street. His actions contrast with those of the other pedestrians – they walk briskly in a defined direction, while he looks around, stationary. He is shown in shallow focus, which emphasises his wrinkled, pallid skin while placing the colourful buildings and younger Romans out of focus. The film's use of focus here differentiates the two planes, as though Davide and contemporary Rome exist in slightly different dimensions. This visual representation of the character begins his

characterisation as someone unable to integrate into the temporality of the present. As the film progresses, we discover that Davide suffers from a kind of psychological disorder, most likely global transient amnesia - a form of temporary memory loss which can cause the sufferer to hallucinate that they are in the past. Davide's depiction as out of joint with the present is reinforced through this condition.

At the beginning of the film, he has no name, and thus no symbolic identity. When he eventually gives his name, he gives the wrong one. The name he does give is that of his lover, Simone, who died during the Holocaust. The past that Davide appears to occupy is thus not only a particularly traumatic one not only for him as a character, but also on the level of collective memory. Indeed, this forms the basis of interpretations of the film as one which ‘works through’



Figure 8. Davide’s hallucinations in *Facing Window*: a Shoah girl in present-day Rome



Figure 9. Davide’s hallucinations in *Facing Window*: a Nazi raid in present-day Rome

Holocaust memory, discussed above (Marcus, 2007, 143).<sup>49</sup>

Davide’s being out of place in the present does not only produce a sense of rupture in the social order as such – the

<sup>49</sup> See also Dupré (2015); Gordon (2012, 106-08); and Wood (2005, 80-81). Scholars do not necessarily agree on whether or not the film achieves this working through, but all conclude that it at least gestures towards such a possibility.

appearance of the past in the present – but does so in a way that foregrounds its traumatic dimension through its evocation of the Holocaust. The film often depicts Davide occupying the traumatic temporality of the Forties, in contrast with the other characters. This is illustrated most clearly in uncanny scenes in which episodes from Davide’s memory are superimposed on the present-day Roman setting:

This produces, overall, a sense of the irreconcilability of the past in the present, which results in a kind of haunting of contemporary Rome in the film. Davide’s status as other – here signified by his occupying another temporal reality – appears to make manifest the presence of a point of trauma – in this case the memory of the Holocaust – in the present.

Arguably, the film provides a gradual integration of the past in the present, mirroring Davide and Simone’s relationship with that of Giovanna and Lorenzo, and offering a narrative in which Davide’s history is eventually explicated. However, by the end of the film it is not clear if Davide’s trauma is resolved, and the last image of him depicts him as tired, slumped and somewhat defeated. Indeed, in explicating the reasons for his trauma, the cause of his inability to integrate with the present, the film gestures towards an unresolvable antagonism, this time within the past itself, within the order of Holocaust memory. This antagonism lies in *Facing Window’s* queer dimension, and potential to foreground queerness as a kind of otherness that resists assimilation into the symbolic order – a ‘contestational category’ as Duncan (2013, 259) describes it. As discussed above, scholars have posited that Özpetek’s films, including *Facing Window*, are valued for their representation a ‘mainstream’ or ‘acceptable’ queerness (Duncan, 2013, 258; Hipkins and Renga, 2016, 378). In this respect, *Facing Window* could evidence a broader trend in which the presentation of an

acceptable rather than radical otherness contributes to films' commercial success. However, in contrast with this institutional legitimation, I argue that the film's presentation of a tension between Davide's identity as queer with his identity as a Holocaust survivor suggests a kind of radical otherness that contradicts the notion of an acceptable, assimilable queerness. In particular, *Facing Window* suggests that the order of Holocaust memory had hitherto been predicated on an exclusion of the queer other. In its complication of Holocaust memory, the film raises a radical antagonism between Davide's identities as queer and Jewish – one which it does not appear to resolve within the narrative. Through the depiction of Davide's past, Holocaust memory is consistently renegotiated and antagonised through figure of the queer other. All of Davide's flashbacks and hallucinations revolve around both the Nazi raids in 1943 and his memories of Simone, and we discover that the crucial moment in this sub-plot is Davide's forced choice between his secret lover and his fellow Shoah during one such raid. The trauma of such a choice is epitomised in Davide's love letter to Simone, written after the raid. In this letter, Davide expresses the sense of loss that appears to have provoked his hallucinations of this particular set of memories. Referring to a world liberated from Nazism, but in which Simone is dead, Davide expresses regret: 'How can I say that this is a better world. How can that be without you?' Bringing antagonism to the fore, Davide's words imply a kind of heresy: how can a world without Nazism be no better? The film does not appear to suggest that this should be the case – it is not apologetic of the Holocaust. Rather, the film's staging of a choice between Davide's queer and Jewish identities, and his expression of regret at this choice, presents an unresolved antagonism between the orders of Holocaust memory and queer memory. This is signified by Davide and Simone's

relationship being presented as traumatic – even the root cause of Davide’s inability to integrate with the symbolic order of present-day Rome. *Facing Window* queers Holocaust memory in a way that does not so much depict the happy integration of the queer other into the social order, but rather presents the queer other, and queer memory, as a radically antagonistic element.

This reading takes on greater force in relation to the film’s representation of exclusion of social others not only in the past, but in contemporary Italy, too. Although a minor aspect of *Facing Window*’s narrative overall (and, as such, one I intend only to engage with briefly), we can read the film’s sub-plot of present-day racial exclusion alongside its depiction of historical sexual and racial persecution. Viewing these together, *Facing Window* can be interpreted as a film not about an ideal, closed social order, but one predicated on exclusion. In other words, when read alongside the film’s main plot of a past predicated on the exclusion of the queer other, *Facing Window*’s depiction of a present social order predicated on the exclusion of the migrant other supports a larger operation in which the radical antagonism between the social order and the other is left unresolved. The film depicts migration and racism through the figures of Turkish migrant, Eminè, her family, and an undocumented Chinese worker in the abattoir where Giovanna and Eminè work. In fact, by focusing on Giovanna’s relationship with Davide, the festival synopsis elides an important friendship in the film – one which concerns marginalisation in the contemporary social order, the friendship between Giovanna and Eminè. Eminè, arguably, supports Giovanna more than Davide in *Facing Window*: she is a constant presence in the young woman’s life, acts as her confidante with regards to Lorenzo, and provides a moral compass when Giovanna is about to report another migrant

(the Chinese worker in the abattoir). Furthermore, racist attitudes are often represented in the contemporary society depicted in the film via scenes which allude to Eminè's struggle with them. *Facing Window* features several moments in which Eminè's marginalisation is foregrounded: when she is called a 'dirty immigrant' and threatened with deportation, when she says that the abusive couple in her apartment building were silently calling Giambo a 'nigger', and when Giovanna's own daughter says that non-white children have to behave better than white children. This sub-plot highlights the contradiction of Karlovy Vary's representation of *Facing Window* in line with the fantasy of integrating the other to achieve a harmonious totality.

In the synopsis, the romantic sexual relationship is substituted for a relationship with the excluded other, and thus romantic desire is replaced with a seemingly more 'progressive' desire for the other. This seems to enact a fantasy of closure through individual fulfilment which, as we have seen from the film's representation of Giovanna's desire above, is shown in its narcissistic dimension. This develops through *Facing Window's* depiction of the lack in the social order, which takes the form of its structural exclusion of the other. The order of the present is antagonised by the past, while that of Holocaust memory is antagonised by Davide's queer identity. Meanwhile the social order of contemporary Italian society is antagonised by various characters', but above all Eminè's, racial identities. Far from depicting a fantasy in which these orders of meaning are capable of integrating their constitutive others, on the diegetic level, *Facing Window* leaves antagonism unresolved, traumatic. This highlights the fundamental antagonism that the synopsis disavows in its representation of the film and, by extension, the festival. While the synopsis presents Davide as other only to imply that he can be integrated, *Facing Window* makes

manifest the paradox in this implication, underlining the radical otherness that precludes such figures' integration and, as such, precludes the possibility of a closed symbolic order.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

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In this chapter I have theorised two fundamental ideological procedures that structure European A festivals representations of themselves and the films they award. I have argued that such festivals' self-representation as capable of integrating that which is other follows the logic of the fantasy of the sexual relationship which posits a harmonious totality. I have also demonstrated the disavowal on which this fantasy rests. European A festivals' implicit investment in the category of the other indicates the impossibility of totality, the impossibility of a closed order of meaning: the other is, by definition, outside it. This highlights an antagonism fundamental to European A festivals' ideological functioning: their inability to totally represent, to render legible, that which they claim they can expose the limit inherent to European A festivals' attempts at signification. I have also shown the means through which this lack may be compensated for, such festivals constructing Hollywood as their constitutive outside. European A festivals can thus be understood as displacing their fundamental antagonism onto an 'external' figure, which they claim to oppose. I have theorised this in terms of suture: the construction of an external element onto which a symbolic order displaces its inherent lack.

We find further evidence for this in its textual instantiation, Karlov Vary's synopsis of *Facing Window*, particularly when we read it through the film itself. I have used the film as a means of accessing the Real of the paratext - as a means of interpreting the synopsis and highlighting the contradictions

and ideological procedures that structure it. On one level, the differences between *Facing Window* and the Karlovy Vary synopsis highlight the fundamental ideological procedure of the synopsis as a representation of the film: the synopsis itself attempts to enclose the film's meaning through a chain of signifiers, while *Facing Window*, as an unstable text, exceeds the meaning ascribed to it. The synopsis, in itself, is not a closed order of meaning, since its object (the film) continually escapes it. Moving beyond this, I have worked from the theory that the particular signifiers with which the synopsis attempts to 'fix' the meaning of the film are symptomatic of the ideology conditioning the festival's awarding and representation of the film. I have demonstrated the functioning of ideology, and identified some of its lineaments, by considering the particular ways in which the film escapes the meaning that the synopsis ascribes to it. Reading the paratext through *Facing Window*, I have been able to observe more fully the way in which the former appears to be structured according to the fantasy of the sexual relationship. The film, particularly through the technique of interface, can be interpreted as making manifest this fantasmatic logic: the desire for another being motivated by the more fundamental desire to fill in one's constitutive lack. *Facing Window* appears to show that this logic structures Giovanna's subjectivity, guiding her pursuits in the film even after she has refused Lorenzo. Through this lens we can better perceive the ideological procedure of the synopsis. The text omits the aspects of *Facing Window* that highlight the impossibility of the sexual relationship, and constructs the film in a way that privileges a sense of fulfilment. If the fantasy of closure - particularly romantic closure - is something associated with Hollywood cinema, it appears that the synopsis subtly fixes *Facing Window's* meaning in a way that at once renounces and reproduces this structure. It renounces

romance as 'the fabrication of dreams' while nonetheless reproducing the logic of the sexual relationship through its representation of Giovanna's relationship with the other, Davide. I conclude that the enjoyment of fantasy is paid for by the elements that attempt to differentiate *Facing Window* from Hollywood productions (and, in turn, European A festivals from Hollywood).

Above all, this entails a paradoxical representation of the other that foregrounds their difference, while positioning them as the second half of the 'harmonious totality' fantasised in the sexual relationship. While the synopsis implies that Davide is gradually made legible, assimilable and representable, there are several aspects of *Facing Window* that indicate a radical dimension to otherness - the antagonism between the other and the social order. The film represents the past, queer identities and migrant identities as caught in an unresolved antagonistic relationship with the various orders of the present, Holocaust memory, and contemporary society. Interpreting the synopsis through the film, the former's disavowal of this antagonism becomes clearer. It appears that, in the paratext, otherness is emphasised and yet its antagonistic dimension is disavowed. This provides further evidence that European A festivals present themselves as capable of integrating that which is other while disavowing their reproduction of the very category of otherness. In summation, *Facing Window* is constructed in a way that reproduces a fundamental ideological structure that I have shown to be at work in European A film festivals in general: the fantasy of a closed symbolic order, constructed according to the fantasies of the sexual relationship and suture. As this chapter has demonstrated, these fantasmatic structures appear to support European A festivals' claims to a political-humanist universality organised around the figure of the other. Now, in

section two, I aim to provide further evidence for this, and an analysis of the specific forms that such fantasies and their corollary figures take.

## Section II

## IV

# Gendering the Artist: *The Great Beauty* at Cannes and Tallinn

In a giant loft apartment in central Rome, a wild party rages on all night long - it's Jep Gambardella's (Toni Servillo) 65th birthday. Jep is the symbol of Roman decadence. In the foot-steps of the Jesuits and the Medicis, he knows more about people's lives than he should and enjoys his influence in the marble gardens of the capital like some autocrat of old. Yet this birthday constitutes a symbolic confrontation with mortality that sends Jep (and us, along with him) on a dream-like tour of Rome's past and present through Jep's memories, passions and crumbled dreams.

'Great Beauty' is too aristocratic to deign to adhere to any kind of narrative structure. Instead it offers us a whirlwind adventure that cuts through time and space gallantly, as if through a fine Parma ham. Anyone familiar with Fellini knows how sometimes one must simply surrender to the filmmaker's whims. Whereas Fellini wrote love letters to Rome, Paolo Sorrentino is preoccupied with the decay of the ages that have been deposited under the gilded superficialities. This film is at once an ode and an elegy to Rome.

Paolo Sorrentino turned 43 this year and he has now given us his finest film. Is he also gripped by thought of mortality, like Jep? Perhaps it is a valuable thing for anyone of us to be reminded of our time and place by the rustle of the reaper?

- *Synopsis of The Great Beauty in the Tallinn 2013 print and online programme*

Aristocratic ladies, social climbers, politicians, high-flying criminals, journalists, actors, decadent

nobles, prelates, artists and intellectuals - whether authentic or presumed - form the tissue of these flaky relationships, all engulfed in a desperate Babylon which plays out in the antique palaces, immense villas and most beautiful terraces in the city. They are all there, and they are not seen in a good light. Jep Gambardella, 65, indolent and disenchanted, his eyes permanently imbued with gin and tonic, watches this parade of hollow, doomed, powerful yet depressed humanity. A moral lifelessness enough to make one's head spin. And in the background, Rome in summer. Splendid and indifferent, like a dead diva.

- *Synopsis of The Great Beauty in the Cannes 2013 print and online programme*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

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In this chapter, and indeed this section, I build on the previous chapters' analyses of the fundamental ideological structures that govern European A festivals' awarding and representation of Italian cinema in the years 2000-2017. In particular, I elaborate on the universals that such festivals attempt to construct and the figures generated in the process, examining in more detail the particular forms that these universals and their figurative representatives may take. In doing so, I aim to identify with greater precision the 'set of unwritten rules' that regulate European A festivals' representation of Italian cinema (Žižek, 2000c, 657). This chapter and chapter four correspond directly with chapters one and two respectively. Below, I develop an analysis of European A festivals' mobilisation of notions of artistic universality predicated on the *sinthomatic* figure of the auteur, to consider the way in which such a procedure gives rise to not only a universality predicated on a signifier of freedom from commercial constraint, but a signifier of *masculinity*. I demonstrate that the universal 'the art of film', secured through the figure of the auteur, is not only conditioned by the festival circuit's disavowal of its

dependence on capital, but its investment in, and reproduction of structures of sexual difference (the fantasy of a stable gender binary which opposes male/masculine to female/feminine) and patriarchal dominance. European A festivals' implicit privileging of masculine power is, as I show, evidenced by their repeated construction of the auteur as male and, with it, 'the art of film' as masculine. Chapter four develops chapter two's analysis of European A festivals' attempt to claim political universality through the figure of the other, and the fantasy of that other's integration, to investigate the particular way in which the other is represented and, in turn, the kind of political universality such festivals construct. I demonstrate that the fantasy of the sexual relationship that governs European A festivals' self-representation and representation of the films they award takes the form of a Eurocentric humanism that is, in fact, predicated on an enjoyment (as in *jouissance*) of the other's suffering. Across chapters four and five I observe that this other is, most often, a racialised other associated with the global South and whose construction can be traced through European A festivals' entrenchment in structures of neo-colonialism and a global capitalist system that depends upon the production of the other for their sustenance. Indeed, chapter five is intended as both a culmination of the findings of previous chapters and a mirror of chapter one. While chapter one related European A festivals' construction of the auteur to the disavowal of their dependence upon capital, chapter five shows the way in which their construction of the other is a crucial component of their reproduction of capitalism as both an economic and ideological system, constructing the other as a figure onto which to displace global capitalism's excesses.

In moving from an analysis of the structural to the particular – that is, in emphasising the particularity of the universals that

European A festivals mobilise in their construction of Italian cinema – this section has two aims. First, it seeks to make clear the stakes of a critique of the values perpetuated through such festivals’ ideological construction of film. Not only is it significant in itself that European A festivals manifest an ideological construction of Italian cinema on a structural level, but it is also significant that this ideological functioning appears to be underpinned by existing and unequal power structures. Second, the section aims to develop its critique of European A festivals’ ideological functioning by further demonstrating the ‘tension inherent to the universal itself’, and examining the ways in which European A festivals disavow this tension (Žižek, 2000a, 102). By demonstrating that, for example, the artistic universality mobilised by European A festivals is a masculine and thus particular universality, I do not aim to suggest that if the feminine were to be integrated into the notions of art such festivals produce, universality would be achieved. In fact, this is precisely the ideological structure identified in the previous chapter: the fantasy of achieving a total, and thus universal, order of representation, by integrating that which is other (in this case, the feminine other).<sup>50</sup> Rather, my analyses of this inherent tension assists the thesis’s overall investigation of European A festivals’ ideological functioning by both undermining their claims to universality, showing the partiality and dominant power structures on which they are predicated, and further examining the displacements and disavowals generated by this tension.

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50 Moreover, I do not claim that gender is identical to itself. Although in describing the actual functioning of European A festivals here, I appear to reproduce the gender binary male/female – a binary on which the festivals and to an extent, gender-based critiques of them depend – it is important to maintain that such an analysis needs to go further. The very notions of a ‘female’ director, as well as the importance given to the director (instead of other creative inputs into a film, for example) are highly contestable and problematic. It is not the place here to elaborate further on these issues, although further elaboration elsewhere is certainly necessary.

Moreover, in bringing to light the hidden values that regulate European A festivals' functioning, I aim to disrupt their ideological underpinnings. To return to the formula used in the introduction to this thesis: if ideology operates on the level of attachment to a hidden, implicit set of laws, by bringing these laws to the explicit level, I aim to 'produc[e] a rift in the seemingly unbreakable consistency of ideological formations from which the radical rearticulation of the very ideological framework suddenly appears possible' (Vighi and Feldner, 2007, 156).

While important work has been done regarding women's festivals, as well as the gender politics of film festivals and the film industry more generally, there has not been, to my knowledge, a systematic analysis of gender, ideology and the European A circuit's construction of art cinema.<sup>51</sup> While an investigation of these issues may take many forms - from an empirical analysis of the numbers of films directed by women exhibited and/or awarded at European A festivals (which I do, in part, utilise here), to analyses of festivals' representation of women in other sections, such as director retrospectives - I employ a method based on the framework of psychoanalytical theories of film and ideology, and on the findings of previous chapters. Based on my findings in chapter one, it appears that a useful way of approaching the question of European A festivals' gendered construction of art cinema is through an examination of their structural dependence on the figure of the auteur as *sinthome*, the particular representative of such festivals' promotion of the ideological universal 'the art of film'. One of the paradoxes of the auteur is that they are at once a figure and real human - a symbol of artistic freedom and a film professional who depends on the festival apparatus for their

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51 See Rich (1998) and Maule (2014). I discuss Maule's insights into the relationship between women's festivals and the A circuit below.

income, as Elsaesser (2016, 29) notes. The auteur, as a human figure, is caught in the symbolic network of identities that constitute all subjects. However, and importantly, as a figure mobilised by European A festivals, the auteur is ascribed signifiers such as a name, a race, a sexuality, and a gender not only automatically (as is the case with any subject) but, in part, *by the festival apparatus itself*.<sup>52</sup> Regardless of the actual relationship between their sex and their gender (which this thesis assumes is inherently unstable, as is the case with any subject position), in their figurative dimension, the auteur is ascribed a gender, and film festivals reproduce this ascription. It is a point of common sense (and, indeed, a normative one) that the auteur tends to be gendered either male or female, or rather, as I show below, usually male. Given their status as *sinthome*, gendering the auteur may also, in turn, influence the notion of art that this figure represents. This is especially the case given the focus on the subjectivity of the auteur in auteurist constructions of cinema – the common notion of a film as being the product of the auteur’s artistic vision. In other words, through the *sinthome* of the male auteur, ‘the art of film’ may be constructed as the expression of a masculine creative vision – art made by men and from their perspective.<sup>53</sup> The universality of art is not only partial on a purely structural level, as I show in chapter one, but may also be partial in a specific way: ‘art’ as masculine. Therefore, in this chapter, I will build on the notion of auteur as *sinthome* and the

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52 This was apparent in the case of Özpetek being perceived as a queer, migrant auteur – see previous chapter.

53 The question of the relationship between a director’s gender and the gender perspective of a film is a contentious one, and not one I seek to resolve here. For a basic summary of the debates regarding women’s cinema on the levels of production, distribution, textual practices and reception, see the entry ‘Feminist Film Criticism’ in Hayward (2002. pp. 137-48). See also B. Ruby Rich’s (1998) contention that the women’s film movement must concern itself with all of the aspects of cinema just listed. Rich’s implication that there is not an intrinsic relationship between the gender of the director and a film’s strategies of representation works both ways, although we might posit a correlation.

contradictions it raises to suggest that the particularity of European A festivals' ideological universal, 'the art of film', does not only disavow the contingency of European A festivals' construction of art cinema, but also colours the notion of 'art' with a particular, and gendered content.

Given the lack of research into gender and European A festivals, my review of film festival scholarship will be necessarily limited. Instead, I will put forward some preliminary data regarding European A festivals' awarding of Italian films since 1946, highlighting the festivals' continuous privileging of films directed by men and exclusion of those directed by women, as enacted by their awarding of top prizes only to the former. I demonstrate the prevalence of this gendering of Italian cinema by highlighting the total exclusion of Italian films directed by women, including those identified by scholars as significant, among the ranks of top prize winners. I suggest that this trend is too consistent to be coincidental. I return to the observations I made at the beginning of chapter one to highlight a tension between the concepts of art and gender mobilised at European A festivals, hypothesising that the notion of a 'universal' artistic merit which festivals claim to promote has been, and continues to be, constructed in line with a masculine canon. As I discussed in previous chapters, such festivals' symbolic (and, to an extent, economic) capital depends upon their reputation as gatekeepers of non-Hollywood cinema. Thus, each 'discovery' - from an auteur to a new wave - is not only consecrated with an initial award but retroactively justified as the festivals continue to give recognition to the similar films and the same auteurs (Elsaesser, 2005, 99). While I traced this on an individual level with Cannes' discovery and consecration of Moretti, in this chapter I aim to analyse the process more broadly, positing that European A festivals' consecration of solely male Italian

auteurs results in the reproduction of a masculine Italian film canon. European A festivals' construction of, and of themselves in relation to, a canon of 'greats' such as Federico Fellini is retroactively validated by their continuing representation of the films they award in relation to this canon - for example, the case study I analyse here, *The Great Beauty* (*La grande bellezza*, Sorrentino, 2013).

Suggesting, perhaps, the dominance of this paradigm, *The Great Beauty* is one of the most successful cases that I analyse in this thesis - one of highest grossing films and the only Academy Award-winner. Furthermore, it was directed by an Italian auteur whose renown extends beyond the European A circuit, Paolo Sorrentino. (See, for example, Sorrentino's television series, *The Young Pope* (2016) - which premiered in the United States first, appearing on Sky Atlantic). Having premiered in competition at Cannes in May 2013, the film proceeded to win a series of prestigious awards, including: top prize at another European A festival, Tallinn; the Golden Globe, Academy Award and BAFTA for Best Foreign Language Film; as well as European Film Awards for Best Film, Best Director, Best Actor (Toni Servillo) and Best Editor (Cristiano Travaglioli). The film grossed \$24.6 million worldwide between 2013 and 2014 (Box Office Mojo, 2018b). In this respect, it might be seen as the pinnacle of new millennium Italian cinema, and a prime example of the way the festival circuit interacts with other institutions, such as the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Oscars), to construct Italian cinema in a particular way. The following analysis of *The Great Beauty* and its representation in film festival programmes has clear implications for any consideration of the success of a certain kind of Italian cinema more broadly.<sup>54</sup> *The Great*

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54 As I have argued previously, there is a strong correlation between a certain kind of film's success at a film festival and on the global market - from distribution in more countries, to winning other accolades such as

*Beauty* has, moreover, been repeatedly evaluated in relation to Italian auteur cinema – most notably in its comparisons to *La Dolce Vita* (*La dolce vita*, Fellini, 1960).<sup>55</sup> Reinforcing the construction of Italian cinema through the figure of the (male) auteur, Sorrentino, along with two other auteurs that have directed films in this thesis’s main corpus, has become one of the main representatives of Italian cinema on the European A circuit. He, along with Nanni Moretti and Matteo Garrone, has had films repeatedly exhibited in the main competition at Cannes, such as Special Jury Prize winner *Il Divo* (*Il divo: La vita spettacolare di Giulio Andreotti*, 2008) and, more recently, *Youth* (2015). The latter film premiered alongside Moretti’s *Mia madre* (2015) and Garrone’s *Tale of Tales* (*Il racconto dei racconti*, 2015), cementing the trio’s image as the three faces of Italian cinema in the new millennium. (They were, in fact, described as such in online trade publication, Cineuropa’s, article on the event (De Marco, 2015)). As I review both scholarship on the gendered canon of Italian cinema and analyses of the gender politics of *The Great Beauty*, it will become clear that the film’s success may have been influenced by interpretations of it that place it within a gendered film canon, reinforcing the notion of ‘the art of film’ within a framework of a masculine artistic universality.

I begin to approach the case of *The Great Beauty* by reviewing scholarship on the construction of Italian cinema in line with a

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Academy and European Film Awards. See Mezias et al. (2008; 2011). While this applies to the other cases I analyse, it holds especially for *The Great Beauty*. I refer to only ‘a certain kind of Italian cinema’, not all Italian cinema, to avoid collapsing the distinction between a film like *The Great Beauty* and its far more commercially (if not critically) successful counterpart, *Quo Vado?* (Zalone, 2016). *Quo Vado?* was released in the same year and earned over two and a half times as much in box offices worldwide – a taking of \$65.3 million that made it the highest grossing Italian film of all time. See O’Leary (2017) and Cucco (2014).

55 See Donadio (2013); Martini (2015); and Mori (2016). Also see critical discussions of evaluations of *The Great Beauty* in Balicco (2013); Gordon (2015); Minuz (2013); and La Porta (2013).

masculine film canon by other institutions. I then complement this with a review of analyses of the gender politics of *The Great Beauty* itself. This review demonstrates the prevalence of a masculine bias in representations of Italian film in institutions such as film criticism and academia, both of which manifest an investment in the figure of the male auteur and, moreover, notions of Italian cinema as expressing a masculine vision. The slippage between the auteur and the vision supposedly expressed in these films will underline the importance of theories of the 'male gaze' to the analysis I aim to undertake, while demonstrating the centrality of questions of gender to any investigation into the ideological construction of Italian cinema. Meanwhile, reviewing interpretations of *The Great Beauty* in relation to gender, I identify an impasse in scholarship on the film on two levels. First, scholars' insistence on a male/female gender binary, which fails to analyse the film's potential to destabilise notions of masculinity and perspective as such. Second, their focus on only the film text as a site of the ideological reproduction of gender norms results in two opposing interpretations of it. I argue that the means of overcoming such impasses is to acknowledge the film text's fundamental ambivalence and to analyse the film's institutional representation as a site of ideological construction. Instead of attempting to find the 'truth' of the film text, I argue, one should consider the ways in which its ambivalence might be mobilised to undercut its institutional construction and the ideological tenets on which it rests. Then, using the information and tropes that I identify in scholarship on Italian cinema and *The Great Beauty* in relation to gender, I analyse the paratextual construction of the film in the programmes of not one, but two European A festivals: Cannes, at which the film premiered, and Tallinn, which awarded the film its top prize. Although *The Great Beauty* only won top prize at Tallinn,

analysing the two synopses together provides more information regarding the way in which the film and, in turn, Italian cinema, is constructed across the European A circuit. Therefore, my analysis, while remaining attentive to the differences that might emerge between the two, highlights an important continuity: both synopses represent the *Great Beauty* as a film that expresses a masculine vision through which its status as 'art' is secured in one way or another. I show that each synopsis presents *The Great Beauty* as a film whose protagonist's, Jep Gambardella's, viewpoint offers us a privileged insight into contemporary Rome. In the case of Tallinn, this perspective merges with that of the film's director, and the text invites us to 'surrender to the [...] whims' of a genius auteur. This auteur is constructed in relation to a masculine canon of Italian cinema, as the synopsis represents Sorrentino as a new version of Fellini. Meanwhile, the Cannes synopsis describes Jep as the one who 'watches' a 'parade of [...] depressed humanity' in the 'desperate Babylon' that is Rome. I argue that Jep is positioned as the 'bearer of the look' in both synopses, as each attempts to 'suture' the film's perspective to a masculine figure - that is, to represent the film's meaning in relation to the masculine figure and his perspective (Mulvey, 1975, 11). The Cannes' text also culminates in the striking image of Rome as a 'splendid and indifferent [...] dead diva'. This explicitly represents the structure of male looker and female to-be-looked-at, underlining its investment in not only the binary of sexual difference (male/female) but the privileging of the masculine within that binary (man as bearer of the look). Tallinn, on the other hand, presents Jep's conflict as that with mortality *per se* - not a gendered confrontation with the feminine as a site of trauma and loss. Therefore, while both reproduce notions of 'art' as expressing a masculine look, the Cannes synopsis can

be read as inviting us to enjoy this look's partiality and the gender binary on which it is predicated, while Tallinn conceals it, casting it as universal. I will use this, as well as the position of *The Great Beauty* within a gendered film canon (often defined in relation to male auteurs), as a spur to consider the extent to which both Tallinn and Cannes represent the relationship between masculinity, femininity and perspective in *The Great Beauty*. I will do so with a view to uncover the role of gender, and above all masculinity, in the ideology of European A festivals' awarding and representation of Italian cinema in the years 2000-2017.

I use the film text as a point of antagonism, foregrounding its similarities to but, above all, differences from the festivals' constructions of it. In particular, I revisit notions of the male gaze and the synopses' attempt to represent *The Great Beauty* (and, with it, Italian cinema) through a masculine perspective, and argue that the inherent failure of this operation is to be found mostly clearly in the film itself. As in previous chapters, the reading mobilised here aims at further evidencing, and critiquing, the ideology conditioning Cannes and Tallinn's representation of the film. First, I analyse the ways in which the film first appears to characterise Jep as an artist in such a way that plays with the questions of his artistic vision being a universal or particular, masculine one. I use this analysis to demonstrate and challenge the Tallinn synopsis's representation of the film's central narrative as being one of a universal confrontation with death, showing that this confrontation is rather, depicted as one between an aging man and his memories of an idealised female figure, Elisa. I then consider in more detail the way in which the film represents and undermines the look of the artist, Jep. Developing the notions of the male gaze that I identified through scholarship on masculinity and Italian cinema, I contrast the notion of the

male artist's powerful look with moments in *The Great Beauty* that appear to challenge its potency - irruptions of the Gaze, the lack around which this look is inherently structured. I show that *The Great Beauty* features techniques that suggest the impotence of vision itself - for example, including shots of traumatic objects which destabilise the relation between Jep and that which he looks at. I argue that this culminates in the film's final scenes, in which the appearance of an uncanny object - the lighthouse - indicates the fantasmatic dimension of Jep's epiphany. I argue that the film thus casts not the feminine figure as traumatic, but highlights a point of trauma within the masculine perspective itself - in this case in, in the form of the lighthouse as a manifestation of the Real. What will emerge from this chapter's analysis of both the synopsis and the film itself is that the notions of 'the art of film' - in particular, the artistic worth of Italian cinema - is represented in relation to the figure of the *male* artist or auteur, and constructed as expressing a dominant masculine look. I conclude that this manner of representing Italian cinema is underpinned by a fantasy of sexual difference, and thus disavows both the inherent non-totality of masculinity and, moreover, the notions of art that European A festivals reproduce.

## **2. EUROPEAN A FESTIVALS' GENDERED UNIVERSALITY**

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In chapter one I identified a contradiction that emerged from Cannes' 2018 edition appearing to promote a politics based on gender (via its selection of several films directed by women, and a female-majority jury), while claiming to, nonetheless, judge films solely on the basis of their artistic merit. This subtly provided the justification for the jury's decision to award the Palme d'Or to *Shoplifters* (*Manbiki kazoku*, Koreeda, 2018) - a Japanese film directed by a consecrated male auteur.

Meanwhile, films directed by women, whose selection contributed towards the image of Cannes as politically engaged either did not win prizes or won lesser prizes. Thus it was an ambivalent moment when, for example, an Italian film directed by Alice Rohrwacher, *Happy as Lazzaro* (*Lazzaro felice*, 2018) won the Prize for Best Screenplay. The contradiction in Cannes' performance of an attempt to integrate the feminine into its construction of cinema and actual exclusion of women from the ranks of directors whose films have won the Palme d'Or could be seen as banal if it were not for three things.<sup>56</sup> First, as I have shown, the notion of 'art' against which festivals claim to measure films is in itself contested, the product of an antagonistic struggle in which European A festivals themselves are engaged through their central ritual of prize giving. Second, European A festivals' disavowal of the politics of their construction of art can be contrasted with other festivals' insistence on it. These other festivals' explicit politicisation of their criteria for selecting and awarding films often highlights that which is excluded from the supposedly neutral construction of art cinema by the A circuit. A key example is the women's festival. While there is a lacuna in film festival scholarship concerning European A festivals and gender, we can find a basis for our inquiry into the masculine universality constructed by these festivals by looking at scholarship on women's festivals. In contrast with European A festivals' disavowal or strict limitation of their political agendas, women's festivals explicitly promote a feminist politics through programming and, where applicable, awards. Such festivals are decidedly separate from, and even oppose, the 'mainstream' of the A circuit. Rosanna Maule (2014, 368) describes recent women's festivals as having 'consolidat[ed] a niche position in film culture, separate from mainstream or

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<sup>56</sup> To date, the only female director in these ranks is Jane Campion, whose *The Piano* (1993) won the award in 1993.

traditional channels of film promotion and distribution, as well as from the big film festivals' circuit.' She takes this as being at once their weakness and their strength. On the one hand, they benefit from having 'a discrete profile' (Maule, 2014, 368). On the other, this distinctiveness may be related to the fact that 'mainstream media and even specialised publications (including contributions within the emerging area of film festival studies) tend to disregard women's film festivals' (Maule, 2014, 369). Such comments highlight, perhaps, the positioning of woman, and women's cinema, as other - as excluded from the hegemonic universality of European A festivals' construction of the cinematic art. (Her latter comments also suggest the reproduction of this in academia, which may explain the lacuna I mention above).

Thirdly, and suggested by my previous point, there is a marked trend for European A festivals' top prizes to elude films by female directors, as I will demonstrate below through the case of Italian cinema. In consideration of this information, we might ask at what point the claim to consider only artistic merit conceals a gender bias; at what point is 'artistic merit' a signifier whose meaning slips towards 'masculinity'? Below, I aim to demonstrate the presence such a slippage between the notion of art mobilised at European A festivals and the masculinity of both the auteur and his 'vision' (more accurately, the film's vision) in relation to which it is defined. In line with this thesis's methodology, I focus on Italian films that have won top prize at a European A festival, while acknowledging that this may be considered one component (albeit a significant one) in the festivals' broader representation of Italian cinema.<sup>57</sup> As a basis for this

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57 Another component might be European A festivals' director retrospectives, for example. A cursory look at the festivals' archives indicates that Italian female directors are, too, unrepresented in these festival sections, although non-Italians appear to have had more success (see, for example, the 'German Women Filmmakers' retrospective at the

investigation, I offer some preliminary data that demonstrates such festivals' consistent exclusion of female directors from the canon of Italian films that they implicitly construct through their central ritual of prize giving, before moving onto consider the ways in which this aspect of the festival apparatus is manifest in its ideological construction of Italian cinema in its programmes and paratexts. I have collected information regarding the top prizes awarded to Italian films by European A festivals since the first festival edition after the Second World War - since Cannes' 1946 edition, hailed as a foundational moment for cinema both artistically, politically and institutionally. (The full list of prize winners can be found in appendix. I discuss the legacy of the Cannes 1946 edition in the next chapter.) I have extended my investigation in this area to include prize giving in years prior to the new millennium in order to comprehend the precedents set by the historical awarding, and thus construction, of Italian cinema on the European A festival circuit as it has developed over the past seven decades. Taking a long view, I am able to identify more clearly the trends in this area. I focus here on gender, observing that no Italian film directed by a woman has won top prize at any of these festivals since 1946. The films being awarded, the canon and, with it, the international conception of Italian cinema constructed by European A festivals from the post-war period to the present appears to be largely founded on a series of films directed by male auteurs.

One could argue that this is simply due to a lack of Italian female directors - festivals cannot give awards to films directed by women who do not exist (although this would be an interesting experiment). However, a study of the Italian female directors who a) do exist and b) have films exhibited at European A festivals indicates the presence of a 'glass ceiling'

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2019 edition of the Berlinale).

that inhibits such films' access to the top prizes and, until recently, the most significant festivals (in particular, Cannes). I have investigated this on the basis of a list of neglected Italian female directors proposed first by Áine O'Healy (2000) and developed by Hipkins (2008). I have also added a handful of Italian female directors who have gained a measure of recognition on the European A circuit since Hipkins's article was published. This investigation is by no means exhaustive, but aims to be indicative. Hipkins (2008, 217) contrasts O'Healy's observation that there is a record number of female directors in Italy today with the number of such directors who receive international recognition. Hipkins (2008, 217) numbers this at two: Liliana Cavani and Lina Wertmüller. I have found that films directed by Wertmüller were screened in competition at Cannes and the Berlinale on several occasions, while those by Cavani have been screened in competition at Cannes and Venice. In contrast with the films directed by Sorrentino and the other male directors in this thesis, neither have won the festivals' top prizes. As well as Wertmüller and Cavani, most of the female directors that O'Healy and Hipkins list have competed in European A festivals, and none have won Best Picture or equivalent: Francesca Archibugi competed in Venice with *Shooting the Moon (L'albero delle pere, 1998)*; Cristina Comencini competed at Venice twice with *Don't Tell (La bestia nel cuore, 2005)* and *When the Night (Quando la notte, 2011)*; Giovanna Gagliardo competed at the Berlinale with *Via degli specchi (1983)*; Antonietta de Lillo competed at Locarno and Venice with *Non è giusto (2001)* and her segment of *The Vesuvians (I vesuviani, 1997)* respectively; Roberta Torre competed at Locarno with *The Dark Sea (Mare nero, 2006)*. None have competed at Cannes.

There appears to be a trend of more films directed by Italian women being screened in competition at European A festivals

in the new millennium. This is, I think, complemented by an increase in awards, although Best Picture and Best Director still remain inaccessible to these films and filmmakers. Most recently, Alice Rohrwacher's *The Wonders* (*Le meraviglie*, 2014) was awarded the Grand Prix at Cannes, while Valeria Golino's *Honey* (*Miele*, 2013) featured in the Un Certain Regard programme at and received a Mention of the Ecumenical Jury. Films by both female directors were exhibited in the 2018 edition of the same festival and, as mentioned above, Rohrwacher's *Happy as Lazzaro* won the Prize for Best Screenplay. Meanwhile, Laura Bispurri's *Daughter of Mine* (*Figlia mia*, 2018) featured in the main competition at the Berlinale and was met with critical acclaim, although it did not win a prize.<sup>58</sup> While 2018 generally saw an increase in awareness around questions of gender in the film industry (in part due to the 'Me Too' and 'Time's Up' movements), it remains to be seen if this will produce long-lasting effects on the place of women in film festivals and the industry in general - or if this will result in an Italian female director winning the elusive prize for Best Picture. One also needs to consider what such films and their directors must do to gain recognition - for example, critics' praise for *Happy as Lazzaro* placed it in relation to a canon of great male directors, in particular the works of Fellini and Pier Paolo Pasolini (Bianchi, 2018; Romney, 2018). This may produce the effect of European A festivals continuing to construct film through the *sinthome* of

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58 A different film directed by a woman won the Golden Bear that year - Romanian *Touch Me Not* (Pintilie, 2018). This highlights the fact that, although there is a general trend for films directed by women not to win Best Picture, there are examples of non-Italian films directed by women winning such awards. This leads one to wonder if notions of Italian cinema constructed by festivals have a more strongly masculine slant, thus making it more difficult for Italian films directed by women to receive this prestigious accolade. My review of scholarship on masculinity and the canon of Italian cinema below adds further credence to this claim, although it is one which requires further investigation involving, most likely, a transnational, comparative analysis of festival cinema.

the male auteur while applying this notion as an implicit evaluative criterion for films directed by women. Finally, even if this risk were to be avoided, the more pertinent risk inherent to the figuration of the auteur as *sinthome* remains: the fetishisation of identities such as male or female as a means of 'branding' the auteur and, with it, art cinema. As I argue above, the inclusion of the excluded, such as the feminine, does not resolve the contradiction inherent to the universality mobilised by European A festivals. Moreover, it would not resolve the contradiction of the auteur's status a signifier of artistic freedom that nonetheless delimits films' meanings for commercial purposes. Rather, the female auteur may come to stand for both artistic universality in her status as auteur, and political universality in her status as other, without resolving the contradictions that this would entail.

To return to the present predicament, however: while this data alone is indicative, in order to theorise European A festivals' ideological, and gendered, construction of Italian cinema, we must revisit the notions of auteurism and the cycle of symbolic capital that the figure of the auteur facilitates at such festivals. As demonstrated in chapter one, the auteur is the *sinthome* of the supposedly universal notion of 'the art of film' mobilised by European A festivals. The empty universal 'the art of film' is filled with a specific content, becoming the ideological universal - the actual canon of art cinema constructed by European A festivals. However, this specificity and ideological character of the universal - in short, its actual particularity - is disavowed through a 'typical case': auteur as *sinthome*. The auteur is paradoxical: one who is extremely particular while, at the same time, being mobilised in such a way as to signify universality. As *sinthome*, the auteur is particular on a structural level - a signifier cannot but be particular, cannot truly be universal. Likewise, the notion of 'the art of film' is

structurally particular – it is, as I have argued previously, a specific construct created through antagonistic struggle. In the case of European A festivals, this entails the struggle not only between the juries tasked with deciding which films will win Best Picture, and thus become representative of ‘the art of film’, but also between the festivals’ various stakeholders, many of which are commercial. In other words, the ‘art’ promoted by European A festivals is not as pristine as it might first appear. Moreover, the auteur as *sinthome* of ‘art’ bears the traces of the contradiction between the claim to universality and the necessary particularity of its articulation. This takes on a new dimension when we consider the fact that the *sinthome* appears gendered male. If the *sinthome* is ‘the point at which all the lines of the predominant ideological argumentation meet’, and is gendered male, then we can suppose that at least one of these lines of ideological argumentation is that artistically worthy film is masculine in some way – at the very least, is directed by a male (Žižek, 1999, 176). If such films are presented as the products of the auteur’s artistic vision, and this vision is, in fact, that of a male, we should question the extent to which award-winning films are represented in relation to a masculine vision – or, more specifically, a ‘male gaze’ which designates the masculine as subject, and the feminine as other (Mulvey, 1975).<sup>59</sup> This appears to be the case given the findings above. The centrality of the male as subject – bearer of the universal as well as the gaze – is also testified to by the supposed neutrality (rather, performed universality) of the European A circuit in contrast with the women’s festival ‘circuit’, as discussed above. The A

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59 Note: I use the word ‘gaze’ (lower-case) to refer to its meaning in the Mulvian sense – a dominant look or perspective over a scene (and, often a feminised object). I discuss the relationship between this theory of the gaze and more recent Lacanian notions of the ‘Gaze’ (upper-case, as in the appearance of the Real in the field of vision) in the film analysis below.

circuit, with its promotion of male auteurs, is positioned at the centre, while a separate circuit promoting female auteurs is positioned at the periphery – again, as other. This is confirmed by the data regarding the construction of Italian cinema through European A festivals’ top prizes, which showed that the symbolic order these festivals reproduce excludes the feminine and privileges the masculine. The European A festival apparatus appears to ideologically gender of ‘the art of film’ through its investment in the figure of the auteur and its central ritual of prize giving, the two having a cyclic relationship as the auteurs consecrated with awards condition the festivals’ dominant notions of art cinema, that, in turn, influence which films and filmmakers win awards. I aim to test this hypothesis further through an analysis of its textual distillation: the vision of art expressed in Cannes’ and Tallinn’s representations of *The Great Beauty*.

### **3. *THE GREAT BEAUTY* AND THE MASCULINE CANON**

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#### **3.A MASCULINITY AND CANONICITY IN ITALIAN CINEMA**

We find further motivation for an investigation into European A festivals’ gendered construction of Italian cinema in the work of several scholars, each of whom take similarly critical approaches to the construction of Italian cinema by institutions, focusing on the relationship between auteur cinema, the Italian film canon, and masculinity. One study that considers this explicitly is O’Rawe’s (2008) “‘I padri e i maestri’: Genre, Auteurs, and Absences in Italian Film Studies’. Throughout, O’Rawe (2008, 174-5) argues that both public discourses (such as film criticism in newspapers) and scholarship around Italian cinema are founded on the tropes of: ‘permanent crisis’, ‘the relation of cinema to national history’,

‘an obsession with great auteurs’, ‘authorial art cinema’ and, ‘a nostalgia for neorealism, seen as the founding moment of Italian cinema.’ Of particular interest here are O’Rawe’s comments on the Italian film canon’s construction in relation to ‘authorial art cinema’ and the ‘obsession with great auteurs’, since she highlights the gendered implications of this circumstance. O’Rawe’s work therefore appears helpful in connecting the questions of auteurism and masculinity that this chapter argues are central to European A festivals’ promotion of a certain kind of Italian cinema as ‘art’. Discussing Gian Piero Brunetta’s (2007) and then Marcus’s (2002) writing on Italian film history, O’Rawe (2008, 175-76) demonstrates that both focus on the event of Fellini’s death, taken as a symbolic death for an Italian authorial art cinema. She concludes: ‘For both Marcus and Brunetta it is the traumatized body of the male auteur which is read as universal, and which speaks of and for the nation and national cinema’ (O’Rawe, 2008, 175-76).<sup>60</sup> The status of the male auteur as a universal subject has significant implications for the canon of Italian cinema: the ‘traumatized body of the male auteur’, in this case Fellini, is positioned as a ‘universal subject’ – perhaps *sinthome* – of both Italy and Italian cinema. Although O’Rawe (2008) focuses on journalistic and academic writing, we might also question the extent to which other institutional representations, such as those of European A festivals, reproduce a similar structure – to what extent might Fellini and/or the male auteur more generally stand in as the *sinthome* of Italian film?<sup>61</sup>

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60 In fact, Marcus (1996) also suggests that Moretti, both as auteur and on-screen persona, embodies the Italian nation, highlighting the prevalence of this trope within the ideological construction of Italian films and auteurs treated in this thesis.

61 A tangential consideration may also centre on the ideas of death and trauma that O’Rawe highlights – might we consider institutional representations as haunted by the death of Fellini, symbolic as the death of Italian auteur cinema? Although not vital to this chapter’s inquiry into masculinity and auteurism in general, these ideas will resurface in its analysis of the specific case of *The Great Beauty* and its representation at Cannes and Tallinn, suggesting that the death of this auteur (and with

Hipkins (2008) also analyses the relationship between canonicity, auteur cinema and exclusion of the feminine, adding a consideration of the structures of heterosexual male desire and Mulvey's (1975) gaze theory. This study suggests a connection between the celebration of the male auteur and the notion of cinema as expressing a masculine vision. Arguing that Italian film studies 'needs a second take on gender', Hipkins (2008, 213) draws a connection between the canonisation of male auteurs and the prevalence of films that tend to narrate straight male desire in such a canon:

I would point to the dominance of popular Italian contemporary films that insistently continue to suture Italian history and the male gaze, whilst female protagonists (often contested by two men in a classical Oedipal structure) remain firmly entrenched within the private sphere, and the critical acceptance of this tendency.

These films' 'dominance', and the 'critical acceptance' of those which 'suture Italian history and the male gaze' further underscores the relationship between patriarchal structures and canonicity - a relationship we can productively analyse in relation to European A festivals. Such films thus appear constitutive of, and constituted by, an 'auteurist canon' that neglects both female directors and films about female desire (heterosexual or otherwise). Bringing this in relation to the question of film texts themselves, Hipkins (2008, 214-15) distinguishes between 'images of women' and 'images for women'. She posits the latter as a remedy to the former, the former being caught up in patriarchal structures that consider women only in relation to the ways they are looked at (their 'looked-at-ness', to continue Hipkins's citation of Mulvey (1975,

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it Italian auteur cinema) results rather in an extension of his symbolic authority via a the consecration of a new Fellini-esque auteur, Sorrentino. Festivals' (particularly Tallinn's) response to the death of Fellini could thus be read as extending such power, responding with the cry 'The auteur is dead! Long live the auteur!'

11)). Films that make it into the canon are, generally speaking, preoccupied with images *of* women. As I suggest above, this indicates that a canon of Italian cinema founded on films directed by male auteurs may also reproduce a notion of artistically worthy film in relation to a masculine vision. This vision would be characterised by male figures gazing over 'images of women'. It would also be addressed to a male viewer – 'images for men' instead of 'images for women,' perhaps. Below I consider this in relation to the Tallinn synopsis' foregrounding of Jep's and Sorrentino's perspectives, and the Cannes synopsis's image of a 'dead diva' on display for the film's, and viewer's, look. Just as Hipkins challenges Italian film scholarship's commitment to an auteurist canon made up of images of women, we can add that European A festivals may be subject to a similar one. This is borne out by the contention discussed above: despite the record number of Italian female directors now working in the film industry, only two (Wertmüller and Cavani) have received international recognition. While Hipkins's study aims to demonstrate the gender bias of the scholarly canon of Italian cinema, we can put this in relation to the data regarding Italian female directors' success (or lack of) at European A festivals, and the awarding of Best Picture to films by male auteurs. From the information above, it appears that European A festivals are another institution that reinforces the canon Hipkins describes.<sup>62</sup>

Developing these themes, O'Rawe (2014) provides an in-depth investigation into the relationship between masculinity and

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62 In a later project, Hipkins and Renga (2016) gesture towards film festivals as one of the many institutions involved in the construction of a masculine, auteurist, and neorealist-inflected canon. Although they continue to focus on the academic context – in this case the teaching of Italian cinema in Higher Education Institutions – their mention of film festivals also alludes to the possibility that such notions of Italian film, and the ideology conditioning them, circulates through various institutions, including the one studied here.

Italian cinema, canonical and denigrated. Like Hipkins, O’Rawe (2014, 1) underscores the relationship between male filmmakers and masculine representations privileged in the construction of Italian cinema, including in the new millennium:

The male dominance of Italian cinema is not just restricted to its personnel, but also encompasses a representational economy dominated by the concerns of masculinity. In fact, Italian cinema since the new millennium has been marked by strong performances by charismatic male stars, often working together, and by representations of troubled masculinity across a surprisingly wide range of genres.

The confluence of auteur and star is interesting, and relevant to both the cases of *The Son’s Room*, in which the auteur is also the star, and *The Great Beauty*, which is part of a series of celebrated collaborations between Sorrentino and actor, Toni Servillo. Putting O’Rawe’s comments in relation to those of Hipkins, and my own regarding the logic of European A festivals, we might investigate the extent to which Italian cinema’s awarding and representation is conditioned by an evaluation of films based on the triad of: consecrated male auteur, ‘charismatic male star’, and ‘representation of troubled masculinity’.<sup>63</sup> Although O’Rawe considers this trend across Italian films in general, it appears pertinent to consider whether the notion of ‘art’ that conditions European A festivals’ awarding and representation of Italian cinema in between the years 2000 and 2017 might be definable as: films by men, and about masculinity. To what extent does the universal ‘the art of film’ mean, in actuality, ‘film as masculine’?

Along with her overall argument that the canon of Italian cinema is constructed around a masculine logic, O’Rawe (2014,

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63 For example, the trope of the male star is absent in Cannes’ and Tallinn’s construction of *The Great Beauty*, but appears in Karlovy Vary’s exaltation of Massimo Girotti in its synopsis of *Facing Window*.

5-6; 154; 164) discusses several issues that we might trace through the relationship between *The Great Beauty* and European A festivals' representation of it, such as: the degradation of society represented via ideas of feminisation; the (constructed) difference between 'serious' actors such as Servillo and 'teen heartthrobs' such as Scamarcio; and 'male melancholy' as the overarching structure of (canonical) Italian cinema. Notions of 'seriousness' and 'male melancholy' are somewhat co-dependent. Male melancholy, O'Rawe (2014, 164) seems to suggest, often becomes a signifier for seriousness, a conflation which also attests to the positioning of male subject as universal in various representations of Italian cinema. We can read this through O'Rawe's (2014) brief analysis of *The Great Beauty*. She states that, while the film's success appears to be articulated in terms of its engagement with the 'big, serious themes of existence', a closer examination reveals that *The Great Beauty* 'is, however, primarily a male melodrama' structured around Jep's 'quest to remember his great youthful love', Elisa, who functions only as 'a structuring absence or loss' (O'Rawe, 2014, 163). The claim to universal appeal - engaging with 'big, serious themes of existence' - covers over the particularity of the film's narrative, the gendered dimension of these themes. Rather than tackling existence *per se*, we might read *The Great Beauty* as a film about a specifically masculine trauma that centres on the loss of the feminine. As with previous scholarly interventions, it will be important to examine the extent to which the same can be said of Tallinn's and Cannes' representation of the film. Do they articulate *The Great Beauty*, and thus 'the art of film,' through a structure of male melancholy? Do they attempt to represent it as a film that deals with 'big, serious themes', omitting the gendered particularity of such themes' articulation?

### 3.B THE GREAT BEAUTY AND GENDER

Despite O’Rawe’s (2014) identification of *The Great Beauty* as a case study for the analysis of Italian cinema and masculinity, the film has only been interpreted in relation to gender twice in depth, to my knowledge. Along with O’Rawe’s (2014) comments, this lack of material indicates a need for further investigation, particularly since the two in-depth studies reach contrasting conclusions about the film. Moreover, both depend on an analysis of the film text itself, without considering the implications that a gendered institutional and ideological context might have for *The Great Beauty* and its success or canonisation. Annachiara Mariani (2017, 171-72) advances the theory that ‘in Sorrentino’s films, the female becomes “the other,” an object whose existence is defined and legitimised by men who clearly hold the dominant gaze in his cinematic creation.’ Mariani bases this on Mulvey’s (1975, 11-13) theory that women are fetishised, defined by their to-be-looked-at-ness, in order to neutralise the threat they present to male subjectivity. Across Sorrentino’s *oeuvre*, Mariani (2017, 175) argues, the threat that the feminine might subvert masculinity and its dominant position is overcome through female characters’ lack of psychological development. Characters such as Ramona, Elisa and Suor Maria either die, remain fixed in a nostalgic dream-memory space, or are depicted as asexual or hermaphrodite (Mariani, 2017, 175). Mariani (2017, 176) reads *The Great Beauty* as a film centred on Jep’s struggle towards an epiphany – a revelation of the ‘great beauty’ that will release him from his writer’s block. She shows the various ways in which female characters are used to as touchpoints on the journey to this epiphany, either blocking or facilitating the male protagonist’s progress but never fundamentally challenging the quest itself (Mariani, 2017, 179). While Mariani (2017, 177) acknowledges the threatening nature of the

feminine, even when fetishised, she demonstrates the way in which *The Great Beauty* contains this threat by locating the feminine in a 'heterotopic non-space'. That is, the potential for a female character to throw both Jep and the film's diegesis off course is limited by the various ways in which female figure are represented, culminating in Jep's epiphanic memory of Elisa, his first love:

Ultimately, the great beauty is an indefinite oneiric trace that woman, or women, may leave in the man's conscious reminiscence where she continues to live and to inspire the author, while she is still trapped in a heterotopic, Platonic and metaphysical dimension (Mariani, 2017, 179)

There is one aspect of Mariani's reading of Sorrentino's films, including *The Great Beauty*, which is of particular interest to us here. Mariani brings together – some might say conflates – Sorrentino's male perspective and that of his films' characters. She concludes that misogyny is a kind of authorial signature which runs across Sorrentino's oeuvre. Leaving Mariani's own implicit investment in the category of the auteur aside, her study highlights useful questions regarding the way in which *The Great Beauty* has been constructed by European A festivals as, likewise, an auteur film, and the implications this has for the gender politics of such a construction. We might ask, then, whether *The Great Beauty* is presented as the product of a genius male auteur, and how the feminine is represented in relation to this. Is the film shown to be the product of, and to contain, a powerful masculine look that fetishises the feminine? Are Sorrentino's and Jep's perspectives conflated in the festival synopses as well? In what ways does the film confirm or undermine this representation? And, finally, what does this mean for the notion of 'art' as defined through the figure of a male auteur's gaze over the feminine?

The second study that focuses on gender in *The Great Beauty* draws an opposing conclusion, arguing that it is a film about masculine weakness in relation to women, and thus free from the patriarchal structures that other scholars identify in it. Eszter Simor and David Sorfa (2017, 207) criticise scholars such as Hipkins for neglecting the comic element of Sorrentino's films. They argue that films such as *The Great Beauty* in fact parody male desire by representing it as excessive and absurd. Sorrentino's 'accentuated style creates room for an ironic interpretation and this permits them to undermine their own representation of sexism' (Simor and Sorfa, 2017, 212). The authors take the ending of *The Great Beauty* as their key example of this procedure, although they appear to interpret it in a diametrically opposite way to Mariani (2017). In their interpretation, this scene is so over-stylised as to render Jep's obsession with Elisa 'ridiculously absurd' (Simor and Sorfa, 2017, 210). They draw the following conclusion: 'The cause of the protagonist's writing block is revealed as being overwhelmed by the physical attractiveness of an idealised woman. It becomes a parody of men's obsession with female beauty.' While there is room for debate about the relationship between style and content in this scene, this conclusion appears to mistake the place of the scene in the film's narrative: the final scene represents Jep's release from writer's block, not the culmination of it; he is set free *by* this idealised woman. Secondly, the authors fail to recognise that this representation maintains the same structure of desire that Mariani (2017) and other scholars have critiqued: the female figure is still positioned in relation to the male protagonist's quest, only this time as an obstacle. *The Great Beauty* may ironise male desire, but it remains entrenched within the structures of sexual difference - the opposition of the masculine and feminine. Psychoanalytically inflected feminist

film theory already highlights the necessity of remaining attentive to films reproduction of such binaries. For example, Teresa De Lauretis (1984) argues that as long as the categories of masculine and feminine continue to be ideologically invested in – whether they are shown as weak or powerful – the tyranny of sexual difference will continue to rein.<sup>64</sup> This also explains the contradiction between the two interpretations of *The Great Beauty* above: since both appear still to invest in the gender binary, even though both may aim to critique it (or rather, one half of it, masculine dominance), they leave its overall structure intact. It might be more productive, therefore, to analyse the ways in which Jep's perspective itself may be undercut, rather than focusing solely on this perspective's relation to the feminine. I refer to an analysis that identifies manifestations of the Real that destabilise the illusion of internal consistency within the masculine viewpoint and, thus may destabilise institutions' investments in the categories of masculine/feminine as such.

#### **4. SYNOPSIS ANALYSES**

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It should be clear that in order to extricate ourselves from the impasse produced by the conflicting readings of *The Great Beauty* above, it is necessary to take a different approach. Its relationship to gender, a gendered film canon, and its potential to disrupt these needs to be grounded in the context of its place within certain institutions. If European A festivals are central to the construction of Italian cinema internationally, then it is important to consider how *The Great Beauty's* relation to gender functions in this context. This may shed light on the gendered aspects of the canon of Italian film, but, above all, it will help us to interpret the ideology conditioning European A festivals' awarding and representation of Italian

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<sup>64</sup> See, in particular, the essay 'Snow on the Oedipal Stage', pp. 70-83.

cinema in the years 2000-2017. By analysing the most salient points of both Tallinn's and Cannes' synopses of *The Great Beauty*, and then putting them in relation to each other, a picture of the festivals' (and, to an extent, the circuit's) representation of a film such as *The Great Beauty* will emerge. With a focus on gender, I show that the image of both Italian cinema and 'the art of film' constructed by these texts is one that attempts to constrain this meaning through notions of the artist as male (particularly in the Tallinn synopsis) and of the film as mobilising a masculine look towards a traumatic, feminine other (particularly in the Cannes synopsis). This, in turn, will highlight the masculinity that colours the particular content of European A festivals' ideological universal of 'the art of film,' produced, in part, through the construction of the auteur or artist as a *male sinthome*. Although it will be clear from both texts that *The Great Beauty* is also constructed in line with ideas of national cinema - the film is represented as providing insights into Italy, such as its lineage (the Medicis and Fellini) and its capital (Rome), I do not inquire deeply into the role of this in the synopses. Rather, in line with this chapter's focus on gender, I briefly observe that the nation, and national cinema, also appear to be characterised as masculine.

#### **4.A CANNES: A MALE GAZE OVER A FEMINISED ROME**

As I suggested in chapter one, Cannes synopses tend to be more condensed than those used by other film festivals. They rarely contain information regarding a film's style, although such information may be interpretable in the style of the text. They also rarely mention the auteur, who is, instead, treated as an implicit symbolic law around which the synopses are structured. The festival's representation of *The Great Beauty* is no exception in this regard, being a short and stylised summary

of the film's content. Nonetheless, overall the synopsis does give the impression of the film presenting a male look towards a degraded, feminised, and traumatic Rome. This most apparent in the paratext's slippage between a seemingly neutral perspective and the subjective viewpoint of the film's protagonist, Jep. Initially, the Cannes synopsis does not ascribe a particular point of view to *The Great Beauty*. At first, the perspective it presents is a neutral one - best understood as representing both that of the synopsis and of the film. The synopsis, in its seemingly direct description of the characters and images that appear in the film, assumes the position of the film itself, as though it were screening these same images for our look. It achieves this at first by not referring to a perspective at all - that is, simply presenting a series figures: 'Aristocratic ladies, social climbers, politicians, high-flying criminals, journalists, actors, decadent nobles, prelates, artists and intellectuals...' When the synopsis indicates a relation of looking to these character-types, it first uses a passive construction, implying an objective viewpoint - for example that of the film itself: these frivolous character-types 'are not seen in a good light'. In addition, we might say that the text's sole focus on the film's content - its lacking any meta-description such as we will find in the Tallinn synopsis - contributes to the sense of a neutral perspective both in and over the film.

However, the text reaches a turning point when it describes Jep. Significantly, he is the only character that the synopsis depicts as having the power of vision - he is, we might say, the privileged 'bearer of the look' (Mulvey, 1975, 11). The text focuses on his 'eyes, permanently imbued with gin and tonic', through which he 'watches the parade of [...] depressed humanity'. This parade is, in fact, the one just described - the long list of character types with which the text opens. This

produces a slippage between what had initially seemed to be a neutral depiction of the film's perspective and its articulation through the viewpoint of the protagonist. It now appears that the point of view we were presented with initially is not objective, but rather the subjective perspective of *The Great Beauty's* male protagonist. In an intriguing slippage, then, the synopsis's and film's perspectives are retroactively refigured as being Jep's. As reader (and therefore viewer or viewer-to-be) we are encouraged to align our point of view with this character. The text thus appear to address the reader/viewer as male: it represents the film and its content from a masculine perspective, thus reinforcing the notion of art as being constituted by images for men.

If the gendered dimension of this look were not apparent only from the initial point of slippage, we can analyse that which follows its explication. Once the synopsis presents Jep's as the primary perspective in both the film and the text, the sentences that follow can be read as reflecting his point of view. It is ambiguous whether '[a] moral lifelessness to make one's head spin' are the words of the synopsis or those of the protagonist, though, given the above, I would argue that they can be interpreted as Jep's. This leads to the synopsis's reproduction of a gender binary as the male perspective encounters a feminine figure: 'Rome, splendid and indifferent, like a dead *diva*.' This dead diva could at once be the feminised image of social degradation that O'Rawe (2014, 5-6) identifies as a common trope in media representations of Italy, or it could be a subtle reference to the death of Ramona, played by the real-life diva, Sabrina Ferilli, in the film.<sup>65</sup> In either case, the synopsis presents a gendered relation of looking, and

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65 Although not a concern here, the extent to which Ramona, her name semantically similar to 'Roma' or 'Rome', in fact symbolises the degradation and loss of Rome - its golden age, its innocence - is relevant to interpretations of *The Great Beauty* in its textual dimension.

reproduces the typical structure of male looker and female to-be-looked-at (Mulvey, 1975, 11-13). This is accentuated by the fact that text's imagery functions through a metaphor of the Italian figure of spectacular femininity *par excellence* - the diva.<sup>66</sup> In contrast with the male star and male protagonist as active bearers of the look, the female star is, by dint of both her structural relation to him and her role as a fetishised female character, a passive figure to-be-looked-at. In relation to Italian cinema, Hipkins (2008, 225) highlights the need for a diva to be passive, and thus take the position Mulvey describes, in order to be integrated into Italian film history. We witness the same structural relation in the Cannes synopsis: the diva is not only dead - and thus passive - but 'splendid and indifferent'. Reference to her beauty (splendour) and her indifference (another passive concept) cements the position of the diva as a lifeless fetish object, an image of beauty rather than an active subject. In terms of the synopsis's representation of both the film's, and to an extent its own, perspective, the presentation of Jep as the one who looks, followed by the image of Rome as dead diva to-be-looked-at is crucial. The position of these words, which conclude the text, indicates their importance. Moreover, I would argue that, particularly through the image of the diva as dead, they imply the feminine as a site of trauma - the impossible, structural loss that O'Rawe (2014) identifies as a key element in the privileging mode of male melodrama that constitutes the Italian film canon. This final technique enacts a masculine-feminine relationship, and presents it as the culmination of the synopsis. This move therefore retroactively determines the meaning of *The Great Beauty* through the figuration of a male looking at a feminine figure who signifies loss. The traumatic dead diva occupies the place of the structural absence around

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66 See Gundle (2007).

which the protagonist's, and implicitly, the film's, melancholic perspective is structured. As such, the Cannes synopsis presents *The Great Beauty* in line with typical notions of canonical Italian cinema in which a melancholic male look surveys a feminised and degraded Italy.<sup>67</sup>

#### **4.B TALLINN: MASCULINITY, MORTALITY, UNIVERSALITY**

While the Tallinn synopsis contains nothing so obvious as a verb in the semantic field of 'to look', it also appears to privilege a masculine perspective, citing only male figures in the text, all of whom it represents as authoritative figures through whose points of view Italian and Roman history are figured. *The Great Beauty* is described as a film which views Rome through the perspective of a male protagonist, and draws attention to this character's portrayal by the 'charismatic male star' O'Rawe (2014, 1) identifies as a signifier of artistic worth in evaluations of Italian films in the new millennium. Opening on 'Jep Gambardella's (Toni Servillo) birthday,' the film takes us 'on a dream-like tour of Rome's past and present through Jep's memories, passions and crumbled dreams.' On the one hand, the subjectivity and thus partiality of this perspective is highlighted by words such as dream-like, memories and passions. On the other, however, the synopsis seems to imply that this perspective also provides insights to Rome - that, even in its oneiric partiality, Jep's viewpoint might reveal to us the authentic Rome. Not only is this subtly implied by the word 'tour' - placing us in the position of tourists and

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67 This may have its roots in the notion of Italian neorealism as the mirror of the Italian nation, but also the product of a series of canonised male auteurs such as Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio De Sica and Luchino Visconti. Rather than a seemingly neutral mirror, then, it is rather the image seen through a masculine look. On the discourse of neorealism as mirror of the nation see O'Rawe (2012) and, in the context of Italian film studies in America, Brunetta (2009). On the relationship between Italian cinema, masculinity and the nation - e.g. masculine, homosocial relationships as constructing the nation/national history - see O'Rawe (2014).

Jep as our guide, but also through the way in which Jep is described, being attributed with a certain amount of authority over the city. The protagonist is presented as an archetypal Roman, if not Italian, subject; the 'symbol of Roman decadence'. His authority comes, moreover, from his place in a lineage of powerful Italian males who, too, are cast as representatives of the nation. Jep walks 'In the footsteps of the Jesuits and the Medicis'. Jep is, in other words, the male bearer of Italianness - one in a long line of male figures of power.

This line of Italian forefathers includes, most importantly, male auteurs. The Tallinn synopsis extends Jep's privileged perspective to that of the male auteur, slipping between Jep, Sorrentino, and Fellini. The latter is a canonical director, perhaps the best known Italian auteur in history, and both the film's and Sorrentino's authority appears to be secured by his presence in the text. We are given a privileged view of Rome through not only Jep's vision, but that of Sorrentino who, in turn, appears to be channelling Fellini. In doing so, the synopsis reinforces the ideological canon of Italian cinema constructed in relation to the male auteur that O'Rawe (2008) identifies. Moreover, we, the passive tourists, are encouraged to give ourselves over to these powerful auteurs and the vision they present. The synopsis states that 'Anyone familiar with Fellini knows how sometimes one must simply surrender to the film-maker's whims.' The implication here is that we must do the same when watching *The Great Beauty*. The auteur, then, appears to hold the ultimate authority over the filmic text. Almost explicitly patriarchal in this respect, the synopsis foregrounds the dominance of the male auteur, emphasising his power over both us and the film. This participates, moreover, in the trope of Italian canonical cinema as a narration of male desire, as well as that of the Romantic male artist on which common tropes of auteur theory are founded

(Baumann, 2007, 59). The presence of such auteurs, their placement in a lineage of powerful Italian men, and the suggestion of their authoritative vision over Rome evokes the 'dominance of popular Italian contemporary films that insistently continue to suture Italian history and the male gaze' (Hipkins, 2008, 213). Finally, the slippage between the gender-neutral 'film-maker' and its gendered manifestation - Sorrentino and Fellini - should make it clear that the artistic vision presented in the synopsis is a masculine one.

The paratext's insistence on a masculine auteurism culminates when it conflates Jep and Sorrentino: 'Paolo Sorrentino turned 43 this year and he has now given us his finest film. Is he also gripped by thought of mortality, like Jep?' In a vulgarisation of auteur theory, the Tallinn synopsis depicts Jep as a manifestation of the director's psyche. With this rhetorical question, Jep becomes the bearer of Sorrentino's masculine vision. The two figures collapse into one, whose look, as we have seen, is privileged. Furthermore, this subjectivity is represented as the vehicles for a seemingly universal confrontation with mortality: both Jep and Sorrentino appear to occupy the position of universal subjects. Regarding Jep/Sorrentino's apparent struggle with death, the synopsis concludes 'Perhaps it is a valuable thing for anyone of us to be reminded of our time and place by the rustle of the reaper.' The theme of death, as well as the reference to 'anyone of us', positions Jep/Sorrentino as representatives of a universal human struggle. The gendered melancholy of an ageing auteur and filmic character is cast as neutral - as part of the film's engagement with 'the big, serious themes of existence,' to borrow O'Rawe's expression. In fact, this invites a reading in line with O'Rawe's (2008, 175-76) description of canonical Italian cinema as being founded on 'the traumatized body of the male auteur which is read as universal' - only now the

baton has been passed from a dead Fellini to an ageing Sorrentino. Indeed, that this encounter appears to inspire Sorrentino to deliver 'his best work yet' raises the idea of a relationship between creativity and mortality: the film is shown to depict a universal confrontation giving rise to a universal artwork - yet, implicitly, one achieved via the male, *sinthomatic*, auteur.

Both synopses present *The Great Beauty* as a film told from Jep's perspective. We see Rome through Jep's his memories or gin-soaked eyes. The Cannes synopsis seems to present a subtle and relatively untroubled relationship between its own implied perspective, that of the film, and that of Jep. Through its slippage between passive verbal constructions and the depiction of Jep's acts of looking, the protagonist is shown to bear the look of *The Great Beauty* and, to an extent, that of the implied reader/viewer. Meanwhile, Tallinn's representation of the film conflates Jep's viewpoint with that of the film's director, Sorrentino, who in turn is constructed in relation the paradigmatic Italian auteur, Fellini. In this way, the film is presented as providing an artistic view of Rome, a tour through the eyes of both an archetypal Roman, Jep, and an auteur, Sorrentino. Tallinn, therefore, can be seen to not only privilege Jep's perspective, but to highlight the figure of the male artist, the presence of a male artistic look onto Rome - something which will become pertinent when we consider *The Great Beauty's* characterisation of Jep.

A greater difference between the two synopses lies in the extent to which they either highlight or leave implicit the gendered dimension of their constructions of the film. In some respects, the Cannes text could be read as highlighting its own partiality. It makes a gendered relation of looking explicit: *The Great Beauty* is represented in line with notions of a

melancholic male looking over a feminised site of loss and trauma - Jep confronting the image of Rome as dead diva. It is ambiguous whether or not the splendid indifference of the dead diva presents a challenge to Jep's, the film's, and the text's perspective. (Lacan (2004, 95) describes the indifference of the object to the subject's look as radically destabilising.) However, given the context of European A festivals' repeated construction of 'the art of film' through the *sinthome* of the male auteur, and the masculinity of the Italian film canon mobilised across institutions, it seems more likely that the text in fact invites us to enjoy this partiality. The synopsis represents the paradoxical gendered universality of its construction of *The Great Beauty* not to critique it, but as part of the senseless 'idiotic enjoyment' of ideology (Žižek, 1992, 128). It is the partiality, the senselessness of the connection between the particular and the empty universal, that we enjoy, that secures our (never total) subjection to ideology - in this case the ideologically gendered construction of 'the art of film'.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, the precise partiality that we are invited to enjoy is grounded in the same structure of sexual difference that governs both Mariani's (2017) and Simor and Sorfa's (2017) interpretations of the film. A crucial law that appears to govern institutional representations of *The Great Beauty*, and, with it, Italian cinema, therefore appears to be the law of sexual difference - the construction of a gender binary which opposes masculine and feminine, while affording the male/masculine superiority. While the Cannes synopsis may

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<sup>68</sup> I have discussed this process in more detail in chapter one: 'The *sinthome*, then, allows us to enjoy ideology in the Lacanian sense of *jouissance*: it is an ultimately senseless signifier which secures our (never total) subjection to, or enjoyment of, ideology. The *sinthome* is, in this sense the kernel of idiotic enjoyment' that secures the efficacy of an ideology: it represents the ideological universal in the form a highly contingent, senseless signifier that we nonetheless enjoy as though it were full of meaning (Žižek, 1992, 128). In this chapter, it should be clear that the senseless *sinthome* is not only the auteur, but the male auteur - here exemplified through the synopsis's representation of a melancholic masculine vision as the vision of *The Great Beauty*.

invite the reader to enjoy the partiality of the masculine perspective through its opposition to the feminine, the Tallinn synopsis renders this gender relation implicit – a hidden symbolic law rather than explicit manifestation of idiotic enjoyment. The Tallinn synopsis downplays its gendered dimension, excluding the feminine completely and presenting Jep/Sorrentino's confrontation with death as universal. The text positions the male figure as universal through its mobilisation of a lineage of male Italian 'greats' – Medicis, Jesuits, Fellini, and Sorrentino and Jep. The relationship implied between the latter three figures produces the sense of an untroubled relationship between the male auteur and a cinematic vision of Rome. The text also represents the male's confrontation with death as a traumatic encounter with not a feminised, dead figure, but the apparently universal notion of mortality itself. The synopsis universalises the viewpoint of the protagonist and auteur further, as their confrontation with mortality can be related to 'anyone'. The masculine gaze of the artist – be he Jep, Fellini or Sorrentino – is cast as universal and, with it 'art' is sutured, given the appearance of a coherent meaning, though a structure of gender difference which privileges the masculine and excludes the feminine.

## **5. FILM ANALYSIS**

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### **5.A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A MELANCHOLIC MAN**

*The Great Beauty* contains several depictions of the 'Roman decadence' and Jep's status as the 'symbol' of it that the Tallinn and Cannes synopses foreground. Likewise, a central facet of Jep's character is his status as an artist – something implied in a meta-cinematic way through Tallinn's auteurist slippage between the protagonist and Sorrentino. The way in which *The Great Beauty* establishes Jep's status as an artist

and, moreover, a melancholic male artist, has an important bearing on the film's potential to depict and challenge notions of the universality of the masculine artistic vision mobilised in both festival synopses. Jep is characterised as a writer – the predecessor of the auteur, the author, in fact – in the film's opening scenes. Moreover, the technique that effects this characterisation distinguishes the protagonist from his peers, affording him a privileged position in the film – even, perhaps, an auteur-like access to a meta-cinematic space in between the diegesis and the audience. In the party scenes that open the film, Jep initially appears to be one among the many degraded Roman partygoers, the camera moving through the crowd and cutting between a multitude of anonymous faces. Then, as the aging showgirl Lorena (Serena Grande) announces 'Auguri Jep! Auguri Roma!' we discover the identity of the patron of this bacchanalia, the 'symbol of Roman decadence' described by Tallinn.<sup>69</sup> The camera cuts to the back of a man, who slowly turns to reveal himself: another aging figure with dark eyes, yellow teeth, and a debauched smile. This slow reveal demonstrates Jep's special status in the film – no other character receives such treatment – but otherwise does not yet differentiate him particularly from the other partygoers. Rather, he seems the mirror image of the 'disfacimento psico-fisico totale' ('total psychological and physical degradation') used to describe Lorena:

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69 The casting of Grande in this role is itself significant: like her character, Grande is a denigrated ex-showgirl who thus may represent the same ideas of feminine degradation.



Figure 10. Distinguishing Jep as an artist in *The Great Beauty*: slow reveal of Jep's debauched smile

However, while Lorena could be said to remain a symbol of feminised degradation, Jep is elevated to the status of artist.<sup>70</sup> While the rest of the partygoers are dancing 'La Colita', the film slows down, the music becomes muted, and Jep steps out from the crowd to address the audience. The figure we just saw is suspended and a distinct one emerges. Not only is he physically separated from the others, he appears to occupy another plane, temporally different - he moves in normal time while the others are frozen - he is also given a different

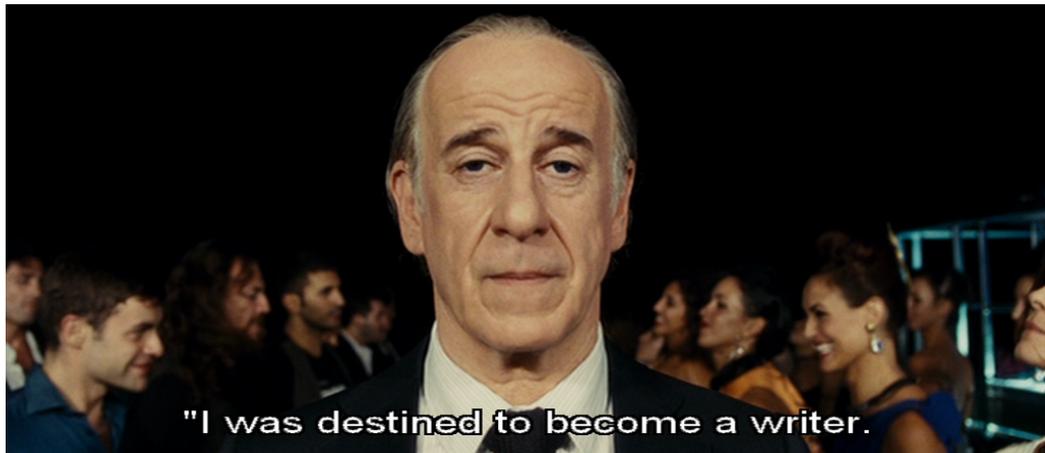


Figure 11. Distinguishing Jep as an artist in *The Great Beauty*: Jep presented in interstitial space relationship with the viewer. Unlike other characters, he

<sup>70</sup> The last time we see Lorena, she is clutching her bloody nose, having taken too much cocaine. While Jep is also shown to be unravelling in this scene, his narrative continues to culminate in the fantasmatic epiphany discussed below.

addresses the audience directly, seemingly one level above the diegetic reality that the others occupy:

We might compare this with Moretti/Giovanni's stepping out into a meta-diegetic space in *The Son's Room* (see chapter one). Seen from this perspective, Jep steps into an extra-diegetic space, possibly being represented as a mouthpiece for the auteur - a special figure who is shown as articulating the auteur's and the film's artistic vision. When we consider that Jep, too, is cast as an artist, this slippage becomes more credible. The monologue with which Jep addresses the audience, and the seriousness of his expression as he does so, functions to demonstrate his creative sensibility. In an extension of the film's visual distinction of Jep from his peers, the protagonist recounts precisely that which makes him different: his love of the smell of old people's houses. This, he continues, made him realise that he was destined for 'sensibility' - to become a writer. The combination of the cinematic techniques already separating Jep from the others, and the absence of any competing perspective encourages the viewer to believe this narrative, to distinguish Jep on the basis of his creative sentiments. In short, this scene casts Jep as privileged protagonist - the vehicle of the film's narrative and thus (in an auteurist reading) the auteur's vision. Crucially, the scene predicates his special status on his characterisation as an artist: Jep's representation as protagonist and artist, occurring at the same time, intertwines the two. We are led to assume that the narrative (and, with it, Rome) will be seen through the eyes of the male author.

Jep's characterisation has important implications for the kind of perspective that *The Great Beauty* can be seen to foreground. Thus far, the film appears to reinforce, even

perform, the notions of art as the expression of a masculine vision through its privileging of the figure of a male writer. Indeed, the primary narrative of *The Great Beauty* is one of Jep's struggle to write due to, we discover, his inability to confront the loss of his first love, Elisa. The film plays with the commonplace notion of art as an expression of male desire for the impossible, unattainable feminine figure - or rather, its being structured around male melancholy in which the feminine is positioned as the site of traumatic lack, a site of loss.<sup>71</sup> The film moves between staging the partiality, the gendered dimension of Jep's narrative and showing Jep's description of his pursuit for art in universal terms. Jep's struggle with writer's block - an obstacle in his identity as an artist - is, he tells Suor Maria, because he has not yet found 'the great beauty'. In this moment, he appears to be engaged in a typical, universal search for beauty befitting his artistic sensibility. Yet, in contrast with the seeming universality of this claim, the ending of the film reveals that the 'great beauty' Jep has been searching for was, rather, his own memory of Elisa, his first love. The film closes on a shot of her looking into the camera (aligned with Jep's point of view) which fades to a black screen with the words *la grande bellezza* (the great beauty) inscribed on it. While it is unclear how ironic this ending is intended to be, the resolution could be interpreted as retroactively determining the film's narrative as a Dantesque quest of the male artist toward the impossible, sacred, woman. Therefore, while the Tallinn synopsis presents *The Great Beauty* in terms of a creative confrontation with mortality, we

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71 As well as the cinematic trend O'Rawe (2014) highlights, the tradition I refer to is that of courtly love. Its associations with Italian art - even as Italian culture's foundations - could be said to have its roots in ideas of Dante Alighieri as the 'Father' of Italian art, culture and language, and the centrality of his *Divine Comedy*, a work in which Dante pursues an idealised lover, Beatrice, from Hell, through Purgatory, to Paradise. (This is a common trope in discussions of Dante and/or courtly love. See, for example, Boase (1977)).

might question its omission of the gendered aspect of such a confrontation as it is depicted in the film. Its discourse of a male artist's seemingly universal confrontation with death seems to conceal a particular narrative of male melancholy. The extent to which the film can be interpreted as troubling this universalisation depends on the way in which Jep's look – both over Rome and at Elisa – is represented. To what extent is this artist's gaze shown in its partiality – in, we might say, its fantasmatic dimension?

### **5.B THE IRRUPTION OF MALE FANTASY: JEP'S LOOK, THE OBJECT'S GAZE**

In order to investigate the film's representation of Jep's perspective and, with it, the notion of melancholic, masculine artistic vision in the film, I now turn to analyse *The Great Beauty's* depiction of perspective as such. Throughout the discussions and analyses of the way in which European A festivals might represent 'the art of film' through not only notions of an auteur's creative vision, but those of a *male* auteur's vision, the question of perspective has been paramount. It is therefore not surprising that I have had recourse to make several references to Mulvey's theory of the male gaze, albeit mostly in passing. It appears from both the data on European A festivals' awarding Best Picture only to Italian films directed by men, as well as the Cannes and Tallinn synopses' representation of a highly successful Italian prize winner, that such festivals could be said to privilege the male gaze in a typical, Mulvian sense. Indeed, they seem to position the active male as auteur and subject. It might also be argued, albeit more tentatively, that such festivals' celebration of female stars, or divas, reinforces the sense of women as passive, spectacular, objects. From the brief analysis of *The Great Beauty's* representation of Jep as a melancholic male artist above, it appears that the film performs and participates

in this process. However, in order to understand how this might appear and be disrupted in the film, we must delve more deeply into the structures of the male gaze, the process of 'suturing' perspective via a male figure, and the intrusion of the Real of the gaze (the capitalised Gaze) which makes manifest the ultimate failure of this suturing operation. I will argue that, although *The Great Beauty* initially appears to suture its narrative perspective to Jep, and thus privilege and universalise the 'male gaze' in its meta-discourse on art, it also contains techniques that represent the disruption of suture. Such techniques highlight the intrinsic non-totality and, thus, non-universality of Jep's perspective as such. Identifying and interpreting them are thus essential to an analysis of the film that aims to disrupt the ideological workings of the festival synopses which either stage this universality or invite us to enjoy its gendered partiality.

For the sake of brevity, I will not rehearse Mulvey's well-known theory of male gaze here, but move straight to the theoretical developments that take it as their spur. In a critical re-evaluation of gaze theory, Copjec (1994) responds to criticisms that Mulvey's notions of the gaze are too totalising - that films might totally suture a film's meaning to the male's perspective. She argues, instead, for the inherent failure of suture. Copjec (1994, 174) underlines that the suturing of a field (e.g. the field of (on-screen) perception) through a supplementary element (e.g. a character's perspective) always bears the trace of this process:

Suture, in brief, supplies the logic of a paradoxical function whereby a supplementary element is added to the series of signifiers in order to mark the lack of a signifier that could close the set. The endless slide of signifiers (hence deferral of sense) is brought to a halt and allowed to function 'as if' it were a closed set through the inclusion of an

element that acknowledges the impossibility of closure.

For example, if a spectator is encouraged to interpret the events on screen via the perspective of a male character, thus halting the 'deferral of sense' (i.e. allowing the spectator to make sense of the film), they can respond at best 'as if' they fully share character's perspective - the character remaining nonetheless a 'supplementary element' that bears the trace of the impossibility of a full interpretation of the film. Moreover, 'the impossibility of closure' also determines the impossibility of the male character's totalising perspective on a scene - and thus his mastery over the image and its contents (e.g. the objectified woman).

The manifestation of such impossibility of closure is what Lacanian film theory discusses as intrusions of the Real or, in relation to perspective, the Gaze. For example, Žižek (2001b) reinterprets the process of cinematic suture, theorising it through this notion of the Gaze. Initially, he describes the typical process of suture which follows the shot-reverse shot structure (a process we will see at work in *The Great Beauty's* representation of Jep's perspective). First, the viewer is presented with a shot of a scene in which the point of view of the shot is not registered. The origin of the image is not shown, producing a traumatic 'decentering gap' or 'absent cause' (Žižek, 2001b, 33). The lack of a cause means that sense is deferred once more; suture's power to secure meaning is disrupted. This is remedied by a reverse shot that shows the point of origin of the previous image; often, it shows a character looking at the image just seen. The move from shot to reverse shot can be thought of as 'suturing' the image into a perspective - usually, following Mulvey, that of the male. This would provide the dominant perspective on the film - male as master of the image. The second shot 'represents (within the

diegetic space of representation) the absent subject for/of the first shot', apparently closing the diegetic field, enclosing it within a character's perspective (Žižek, 2001b, 32). If that character is male, the diegesis would thus be sutured, enclosed, within a masculine perspective. However, if suture simultaneously 'acknowledges the impossibility of closure', such a 'stitching up' of meaning is not possible (Copjec, 1994, 174). (This is what I have been referring to in general as film's potential to make manifest the Real of ideology, and thus its radical potential). In his discussion of the typical process of suture, Žižek identifies several techniques that can be seen to make this impossibility manifest, re-inscribing the Real in the filmic text. Particularly relevant to the film analysis that follows below is Žižek's (2001b, 36) argument that films which show images from an impossible perspective - for example, the 'point of view' of an object - disrupt the suturing operation. In such moments, the Real appears in the form of 'the Gaze of an impossible subjectivity which cannot be located within the diegetic space' (Žižek, 2001b, 34). This not only disrupts the presentation of events on screen as being from a character's point of view, but represents the impossibility of the character's total perspective on a scene - it shows, through the object's impossible perspective - the 'blind spot' in the character's vision, occupying a position inaccessible to the character (Žižek, 2001b, 34).

McGowan (2007, 205) also analyses the intrusion of an object out of place in the film world as another means by which the Real can be made manifest. Taking the example of David Lynch's films, he argues that, at the moment a sexual union appears possible, a strange ('uncanny') object appears to throw the characters' worlds 'out of joint' (2007, 205). This object alludes to the impossibility of the sexual relationship in both the romantic sense and in the psychoanalytical sense of the

fantasy that the subject can fill in their own lack if they attain the object of their desire (2007, 205).<sup>72</sup> This is usually a strange, traumatic thing underscoring some fundamental otherness at the heart of reality. An example from an Italian film would be the sea monster that appears at the end of *La Dolce Vita*. In both the techniques discussed by Žižek and McGowan, the split between some kind of surface reality (a character's perspective, or the sexual relationship) and its ultimate impossibility - its status as fantasy - is signified in some way. Combining Žižek's and McGowan's theories about the ways in which the Gaze can be made manifest in film then, we can posit two techniques through which *The Great Beauty* may disrupt the synopsis' suturing of the film to Jep's (and, in the Tallinn synopsis, Sorrentino's) masculine viewpoint: the inclusion of scenes shot from an impossible perspective, disrupting the very notion of the point of view shot (can an object have a point of view?); and the appearance of strange, traumatic objects that resist meaning. Both make manifest the Real of the film - the impossibility of the closure of the diegetic space and, perhaps with it, the film's meaning. In doing so, they may also challenge the suturing of meaning of not only through a masculine perspective, but the possibility of a suturing perspective as such, highlighting its inherent partiality.

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72 On fantasy and the sexual relationship, see chapter two.

A series of scenes in *The Great Beauty* appear to depict and privilege Jep's vision of Rome, following him and his look through the city. It would seem that the film does in fact take us on 'a dream-like tour of Rome's past and present through Jep's memories, passions and crumbled dreams.' The scenes that achieve this are structured around a series of shot reverse shots which alternate between Jep's point of view and shots showing his reaction to the things he sees, reproducing the structure of cinematic suture described above. In this way, the film's meaning is sutured through Jep's perspective both visually and affectively: the images of Rome are, on a basic level, shown to emanate from Jep's point of view; and their meaning is suggested by the presentation of his emotional



Figure 12. Suturing Rome through Jep's perspective in *The Great Beauty*: first shot of convent garden



Figure 13. Suturing Rome through Jep's perspective in *The Great Beauty*: first cut back to Jep

responses to them. His first walk through the city opens on a shot of young children dressed in white, playing in a convent. The film then cuts to Jep's face, his eyes (we are led to assume) fixed on the scene we have just been shown, and his face moulding to a smile. This structure continues throughout Jep's walk, culminating in a sequence of: a moving long shot of a nun picking oranges in a convent garden (fig. 12); a mid-shot of Jep seen through the bars of the garden, slowing to a stop, his face beginning to register awe at the scene in front of him (fig. 13); a long shot of the garden once again, now static and framed not only from Jep's perspective, but also in an artistic, stylised fashion (fig. 14); and a close-mid-shot of Jep's appreciative expression (fig. 15).



Figure 14. Suturing Rome through Jep's perspective in *The Great Beauty*: second shot of convent garden, artistically composed



Figure 15. Suturing Rome through Jep's perspective in *The Great Beauty*: cutting back to Jep's appreciative look  
 In the first shot, the camera is mobile, matching the speed of Jep's walk (presented seconds before). It thus already gives a sense that the scene is being viewed from the protagonist's perspective. This is then confirmed when the camera cuts back to Jep (fig. 13). At this point, the camera moves in to register Jep's look of awe, and then cuts back to an artistically framed shot of the scene (fig. 14). In this shot, the image is symmetrical, there is an aesthetically-pleasing interplay of colours - the orange and green, combined with an intriguing image of a truncated nun. The content of the shot itself suggests that Jep might be its origin within the diegesis, since its stylisation suggests an artistic vision over the scene (a

vision that would be interpreted as a signature of the auteur, perhaps, but can also be seen in the context of Jep's characterisation as a cultivated artist constantly in search of beauty). This is confirmed once more as the film cuts back to Jep, shown appreciating the aesthetically pleasing scene just shown. *The Great Beauty* repeats this procedure, frequently cutting between a scene and Jep looking upon it, his reaction potentially providing an affective model for the viewer to follow. From the reading I have just given, it initially appears that the film, like the synopses, sutures the film's meaning through Jep's perspective. Combined with the appearance of an artistic sensibility influencing the representation of the images, this produces the overall impression that we are being shown Rome through the point of view of the male artist.

This procedure is, however, disrupted by intrusions of the Gaze



Figure 16. First cases of uncanny object and impossible POV shot in *The Great Beauty*: the grotesque fountain

through the film's use of the two techniques I have described above: the presence of a senseless traumatic object and shots that appear to emanate from an impossible perspective. I highlight these moments in the film in order to antagonise the Cannes and Tallinn synopses' representation of *The Great Beauty* as a film narrated through Jep's masculine look. While scenes such as the one I have described above are overall structured around Jep's perspective, they also frequently

include out-of-place shots which undermine this structure. For example, the interplay of shots of children playing in a convent and Jep's look is disrupted by images that appear to be from no diegetic perspective – such as this close-up of a grotesque fountain:

We first see the fountain to the right-hand side of Jep as he is walking away from it. Furthermore, the scene's cinematography highlights the shot's disconnection from Jep's perspective, as the camera moves in on a low arc, finishing impossibly (and uncomfortably) close to the fountain. The framing and camera movement in this shot thus establishes that it cannot be from Jep's or any other character's perspective. Such shots thus appear to disrupt the flow of the suturing procedure I have described above, since the image cannot be incorporated into a perspective that has been represented on screen. Moreover, they appear to be senseless. Both are examples of the strange objects that McGowan (2007, 205) argues disrupts the surface of reality in some films – interruptions of the Real. Not only does this image momentarily disrupt the film's representation of Rome via Jep's perspective, but it also confounds the film's sense. The fountain is out of place with the images of playing children, nuns, and Jep's sentimental appreciation of such scenes. It also does not fit into any of the interpretations contained in the paratexts. A fountain has little to do with the Tallinn synopsis' evocation of Jep's confrontation with death, for example. One might argue that the shot of the fountain shows Rome stare back in a manner similar to Cannes' representation of *The Great Beauty*. However, this interpretation also does not quite fit, since it does not resemble the synopsis' image of a 'dead diva' through which Rome is symbolised. The image of the fountain is closer to the grotesque – neither splendid nor, perhaps, indifferent. One could therefore read shots such as this one as retaining the senseless quality that McGowan describes.

Such disruptions, these momentary appearances of the Real, ultimately contribute to the film's climax: Jep's 'epiphany' that makes up the final moments of the film. As discussed above

scholars have commented on the film's ending, sometimes reaching opposed conclusions about its significance. While Simor and Sorfa (2017, 210) assert that the accentuated style and overblown symbolism of Jep's memory of Elisa ridicule masculine attachment to an idealised female, Mariani (2017, 177) contests that Elisa's existence only in the heterotopic space of Jep's memory neutralises her potential to undermine Jep's perspective (she is a function of that perspective). It is not my intention to resolve this impasse through an interpretation of the film here - to suggest that my interpretation might access the 'truth' of the film in its textual dimension. However, I do aim to mobilise a reading of this scene that will clarify and challenge the ideological dominance of a masculine perspective reproduced in the Cannes and Tallinn synopses. I offer a partial reading produced with a specific aim. I begin with the relatively incontestable fact that Jep's epiphanic moment centres on the revelation of Elisa's breasts.<sup>73</sup> In some respects, this is a typically sexist move, entrenched in the norms of courtly love and the objectification of women: a man's epiphany lies in a sexual fantasy of woman. As in the Cannes synopsis, *The Great Beauty* appears to culminate in a gendered encounter between a man and a woman in which the man looks and the woman is looked at. However, two aspects of this scene can be interpreted as challenging this binarised relation of looking and, with it, the dominance of the masculine perspective. First, if we consider that the breast is, according to Lacanian theory, a sublime object - precisely the kind of Real object (or object cause of desire) that gazes back and disrupts the subject - the nature of *The Great Beauty's* revelation would appear to register its own impossibility - its status as fantasy, an illusion which seeks to displace the *objet petit a* (Real object cause of desire) onto an object of desire (Lacan, 2004, 168). In this case, the overlapping between Elisa's breasts as both object of and object cause of desire produces an uncanny destabilisation of fantasy, highlighting the displacement of the latter onto the former that defines fantasy as such.

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73 Also noted in O'Rawe (2014, 163).

We need not rely on the presence of breasts alone, however; at this crucial moment, the film disrupts the shot reverse shot sequence through which it had shown the exchange, inserting a shot of Jep and Elisa untied to any figure's perspective:

The camera is positioned slightly up the path towards the lighthouse, appearing to capture the scene from the perspective of the rocks on which the lighthouse is built. As well as disrupting the shot reverse shot sequence with the

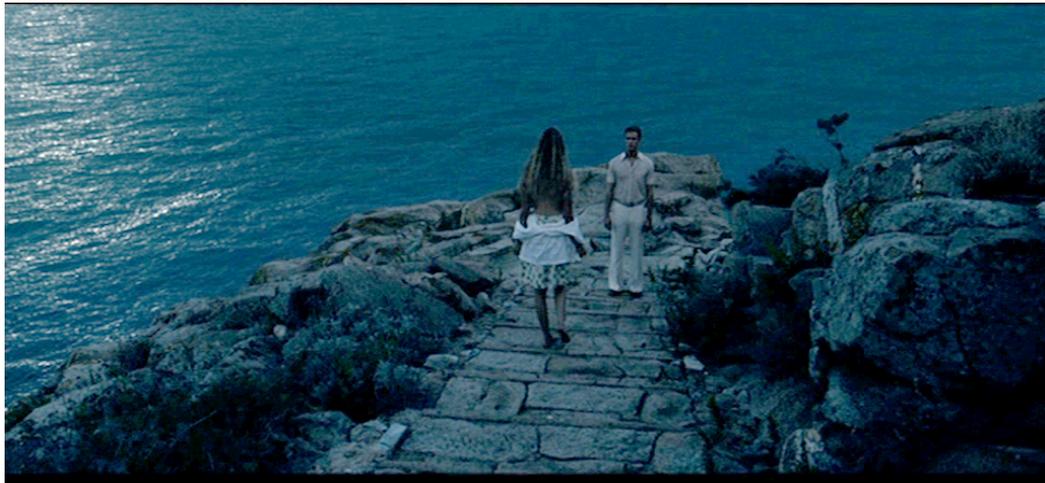


Figure 17. Second case of impossible POV shot in *The Great Beauty*: disrupting Jep and Elisa's romantic union

intrusion of an impossible POV shot, the film alludes to the Gaze with the intrusion of an uncanny object: the lighthouse. The lighthouse is shown before and after the exchange between Jep and Elisa, framing the sequence and highlighting its fantasmatic dimension. It appears first as Jep travels to the cliff, looking towards it uneasily, and then again after Elisa has shown (young) Jep her breasts. Moreover, during the exchange itself, the lighthouse produces a curious effect of lighting in which the characters' faces are lit up and then plunged into darkness as the lamp of the lighthouse rotates around. This interplay of light and dark gives the scene a dream-like quality and, perhaps, visually registers the interplay of seeing and not seeing - of illumination and darkness, the image and the void, the object of desire and the Real absence underlying it. Finally, the lighthouse itself appears strange - it is a large, out-of-place object that appears to lurk in the background of the scene:



Figure 18. Second case of uncanny object in *The Great Beauty*: a lighthouse looms over Jep, Elisa, and the denouement

As such, the film appears to not only to manifest the gaze through the use of the impossible POV shot described by Žižek (2001, 33-36), but also by presenting the intrusion of a traumatic object at the moment of sexual union, precisely as described by McGowan (2007, 205). These techniques, along with the lighting effects used in the scene (also emanating from the lighthouse), underscore its fantasmatic dimension. In doing so, the film's ending can be read as showing the ideological partiality of Jep's perspective, its being a product of fantasy. While one might question whether or not *The Great Beauty* itself invites us to enjoy this partiality, a crucial difference between the Cannes synopsis and the film is the presence of a traumatic *third* element which disrupts the binary relation of looking that the paratext presents. Rather than depicting a masculine look over a traumatic feminine figure, the film alludes to the site of trauma being internal to Jep's fantasy (and, with it, the notion of art that Jep, as a character, represents) - the Gaze, or blind spot, that his perspective cannot take into account. The disruption appears not through the appearance of some traumatic feminine, but rather the Real of Jep's perspective itself. The film text can be seen to disrupt the gender binary as it locates antagonism *within* a gendered subject position - e.g. within Jep's masculine point of view. As such, I would argue that the film alludes to the destabilising, Real absent cause - the void at the centre of *The Great Beauty's* masculine fantasy (shown via the lighthouse) -

which, in its radical and threatening nature, can thwart even a cynical enjoyment of ideology.

## 6. CONCLUSION

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The analysis of *The Great Beauty* that I have given above provides several insights into the ideological functioning of European A festivals' representations of it which, in turn, may be suggestive of the ideology conditioning such festivals' representation and awarding of Italian cinema more generally. The Tallinn synopsis conflates Jep with Sorrentino, presenting the latter as the film's auteur, and signals that both artists might have a productive confrontation with mortality. While this fits with *The Great Beauty's* characterisation of Jep as a writer in the throes of some kind of confrontation with death, Tallinn's representation of the film disavows the gendered aspect of this narrative. The synopsis attempts to construct an artistic universality centred, implicitly, on the male artist (be it the auteur or the protagonist), whose inspiration comes from the seemingly gender-neutral question of death per se. However, *The Great Beauty's* focus on Jep's struggle not so much with death itself, but with the death of Elisa, highlights the gendered dimension of this universality. While the film text may articulate the seemingly universal message of creativity and mortality that Tallinn ascribes to it, *The Great Beauty* also appears to self-consciously underline that it should do so through the figure of a melancholic male artist pursuing an idealised, lost female lover. This imagery is central also to the Cannes synopsis, which describes *The Great Beauty* as an encounter between Jep's melancholic perspective and the figure of the dead diva. The synopsis presents the image of Rome as a feminised one - and one seen through a masculine look. In contrast, *The Great Beauty* depicts points of antagonism to Jep's look itself, and as such has the potential to disrupt the masculine/feminine binary according to which Cannes synopsis of the film is structured. The appearance of traumatic, senseless objects (the fountain and the lighthouse), and shots from an impossible 'objective' (as in pertaining to the

object) point of view, can be understood as irruptions of the Gaze, antagonistic elements in the film text which destabilise the process of suture and any illusion of perspectival mastery. In doing so, the film text locates antagonism *within* the masculine perspective, rather than as external to it (as in an antagonism between the masculine and feminine). These aspects of the film text highlight the way in which the Cannes synopsis locates antagonism, in contrast, between the two genders - between the male looker and dead diva - rather than as internal to gender itself. In doing so, it reproduces a fantasy of sexual difference - the fantasy that there should be a stable gender on each side of the binary, which disavows the antagonism internal to gender as such. Therefore, while the Tallinn synopsis disavows the partiality of its gendered construction of *The Great Beauty* (masculinity functioning on the level of implicit symbolic law), the Cannes synopsis presents and invites us to enjoy this partiality without undermining the structure on which such enjoyment is predicated. The synopses evidence two interrelated approaches to the construction of the ideological universal 'the art of film'. First, Tallinn conceals the gendered particularity of the ideological universal 'the art of film' by moving it to the implicit level and presenting masculine artistic vision as universal. Second, Cannes encourages a cynical enjoyment of this particularity that, while highlighting it, does not fundamentally undermine it. In either case, both Cannes and Tallinn construct *The Great Beauty's* artistic merit, its status as exemplary of 'the art of film' (evidenced by its award at Tallinn), through notions of art as the product of male artists and expressing a masculine vision over their subject matter. Italian cinema appears to be constructed by European A festivals on the basis of a false universality which disavows its fixation on specifically gendered creativity.

## V

## Brutal Humanism: *Fire at Sea* at the Berlinale

Samuele is twelve and lives on an island in the Mediterranean, far away from the mainland. Like all boys of his age he does not always enjoy going to school. He would much rather climb the rocks by the shore, play with his slingshot or mooch about the port. But his home is not like other islands. For years, it has been the destination of men, women and children trying to make the crossing from Africa in boats that are far too small and decrepit. The island is Lampedusa which has become a metaphor for the flight of refugees to Europe, the hopes, hardship and fate of hundreds of thousands of emigrants. These people long for peace, freedom and happiness and yet so often only their dead bodies are pulled out of the water. Thus, every day the inhabitants of Lampedusa are bearing witness to the greatest humanitarian tragedy of our times.

Gianfranco Rosi's observations of everyday life bring us closer to this place that is as real as it is symbolic, and to the emotional world of some of its inhabitants who are exposed to a permanent state of emergency. At the same time his film, which is commentary-free, describes how, even in the smallest of places, two worlds barely touch.

- *Synopsis of Fire at Sea in the Berlinale 2016 print and online programme*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

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Having analysed the geopolitical histories of Cannes, Venice and the Berlinale, De Valck (2007, 74) describes film festival programming as 'a political act'. The previous chapters in this thesis showed that the political dimension of European A

festivals and their representations of films can take two directions. Their political dimension can be concealed under the sign of 'the art of film', which entails a disavowal of the fundamentally political and contested nature of the term itself. Alternatively, it can be emphasised, provided it operates within certain limits. As was clear from the case study of *Facing Window*, a politics of the other functioned as a marker of distinction from commercial and Hollywood cinema (festivals' constitutive outside), while reproducing the ideological coordinates of otherness, as well as the power relations that such coordinates entail. Festivals therefore achieve the differentiation necessary for their success (i.e. securing financial and symbolic capital) from a claim to integrate the other, while in fact reproducing the power structures that they claim to challenge. In this chapter, I investigate European A festivals' construction of the figure of the other further, bringing it into relation with the geopolitical dimension of the festival circuit. The geopolitics I focus on are European A festivals' histories of post-war European reconstruction through American patrimony, and European colonialism. Using this context to frame an analysis of European A festivals' contemporary representations of 'Europe' and 'Africa', I suggest that these histories continue to condition the way that such festivals award and represent Italian cinema in the new millennium. While the previous chapter considered the effect of auteurism on the notion of 'art' that film festivals reproduce, this chapter investigates further how European A festivals' political dimension being structured according to the fantasy of the sexual relationship, arguing that its actual expression via a politics of liberal humanism may lead to their reproduction of colonial power relations - in particular, a Eurocentric symbolic order that designates Africa as its other.

While the artistic universality constructed by European A festivals centres on notions of freedom from commercial constraint, epitomised by the figure of the auteur, the political universality constructed by these festivals is best understood as centring on notions of humanism. Here I conceive of humanism in its ideological dimension as a fantasy in which all humans can be integrated into the symbolic order – arguably the fantasy of integrating the other *par excellence*. Although rarely theorised in this way, the inherent failure of humanism – its attempt to present a particular symbolic order as universal – has become almost an obligatory point of reference in discussions of the concept. Rather than universal, it is well-documented that humanism ‘functions within and conditions a predominantly Eurocentric, patriarchal, white, heteronormative, male-dominated global economy and networked society’ (Kellner and Lewis, 2007, 421). Indeed, that which emerges from many of the findings of previous chapters is that European A festivals appear to operate on a similar basis, as evidenced by the othering of queerness in Karlovy Vary’s synopsis of *Facing Window*, and the feminine in Cannes’ and Tallinn’s synopses of *The Great Beauty*. In this chapter I both approach the question of European A festivals’ claim to humanist universality and demonstrate its actual partiality from another perspective: that of their investment in a ‘Eurocentric’ and ‘white’ humanism that designates the figure of the African as other.

In the absence of any study of film festivals’ politics of a ‘universal’ humanism, historical or contemporary, I take a necessarily indirect approach to demonstrating and critiquing the prevalence of this politics on the European A circuit. I examine the geopolitical context in which European film festivals either emerged or developed, identifying the centrality of American patrimony to the funding and founding

of many festivals now categorised as A-list. I also investigate the ideological project that appeared to accompany these festivals' development, discussing the way in which festivals such as Cannes and the Berlinale participated in the broader dissemination of 'Western values' and 'a mid-century politics of liberal humanism' (Fehrenbach, 1995, 234-36; Schoonover, 2012, 10). In order to connect this to the construction of a relation between the symbolic order and the other, particularly in its cinematic expression, I engage extensively with Schoonover's (2012) analysis of the emergence of a visual politics of 'brutal humanism' promoted by festivals such as Cannes and prominent film critics such as André Bazin via their construction of Italian neorealism as a canonical and ethical cinema. Beyond considering the importance of both Italian neorealism and Cannes as models for European A festivals and their construction of art cinema, I demonstrate the relevance of brutal humanism to European A festivals' past and present functioning on the basis of its being a kind of humanism 'more reconciled with than resistant to the geopolitical affinities of large-scale capitalism and its multiple battle zones' (Schoonover, 2012, xix). I also highlight its use in conceptualising representations of the other, since brutal humanism is expressed through a 'brutal vision' that aims to encourage compassion by screening the suffering of the 'imperilled body' of the other for 'the pitying spectator', while keeping the spectator at a safe distance (Schoonover, 2012, xx; xv). I argue that, while the aim of encouraging compassion expresses an explicit will to integrate the other, the dehumanisation of the other implied by their representation as a spectacularised, imperilled body, and the distance produced between the other and the spectator, functions in a manner best understood as suture.<sup>74</sup> The staged otherness of the other

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74 As discussed in chapter two, suture is the displacement of the fundamental antagonism of the symbolic order onto an external figure.

constructs a gap between the implied viewer and other, positioning the other as the ‘constitutive Outside’ of the symbolic order in which the implied viewer is situated (Žižek, 2004, 102). Finally, using scholars’ analyses of contemporary depictions of the African other both in and out of the film festival context, I underline the ways in which brutal humanism’s underpinning in images of the suffering other may continue to condition the way in which European A festivals represent themselves and the films they award as ‘humanist’ today.

I suggest that European A festivals continue to reproduce a politics of brutal humanism not only through a consideration of the historical context of the founding of the circuit, but through an analysis of a contemporary case study: the presentation of *Fire at Sea* (*Fuocoammare*, Rosi, 2016) at the Berlinale. The Berlinale awarded the Golden Bear to *Fire at Sea* during the so-called ‘refugee crisis,’ and during an edition of the festival that explicitly engaged with this context.<sup>75</sup> The film itself is, in many respects, about the same ‘crisis’, being set on Lampedusa and depicting refugees travelling to the island. Whatever other aspects of the film might be worthy of analysis, it is *Fire at Sea*’s status as a film about the ‘refugee crisis’ and as an example of the Italian cinema of migration that remains privileged by not only the Berlinale, but film critics and

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The fantasy of integrating the other is structured according to this process of suture and therefore marked by a fundamental impossibility: the symbolic order cannot integrate that which it defines as outside.

<sup>75</sup> I use the expressions ‘refugee’ and ‘refugee crisis’ following the United Nations report, ‘The sea route to Europe: The Mediterranean passage in the age of refugees’ (Anon., 2015), and the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention. A refugee is ‘any person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country’ (Anon., 1951). I do, however, retain some critical distance from the expression ‘refugee crisis’, as the notion of a *crisis* continues to be problematised by scholars and commentators (see, for example, Rajaram (2016). I discuss this briefly below). As such, all instances will be kept in quotation marks.

scholars alike.<sup>76</sup> This chapter therefore focuses on *Fire at Sea's* presentation at the Berlinale as a means of further analysing the ideological structures and power relations structuring the European A festival circuit's engagement with politics under the sign of a universal humanism. I will argue that the Berlinale's representation of the film, manifest in various aspects of the festival apparatus that year and, above all, the programme synopsis, demonstrates an abiding brutally humanist and neo-colonial representation of the other. My analysis of the festival's paratextual construction of *Fire at Sea* shows that it consistently depicts the refugee characters as passive, suffering and deindividualised, while casting Italian and European figures (including Rosi himself) as ethical witnesses to a 'humanitarian tragedy'. To highlight this point further, and provide a means to challenge the ideological, uneven relations of power and agency that I identify in the synopsis, I analyse *Fire at Sea* itself. I focus on the film's portrayal of each side of the European/African binary that the synopsis constructs, analysing its representation of, first, European characters and, second, refugee characters. My interpretation of *Fire at Sea's* characterisation of Europe and Europeans concludes that the film, while highlighting an antagonism internal to Europe and thus the synopsis's displacement of this antagonism on to an external opposition to the other, appears to nonetheless encourage a politics of liberal compassion that, too, risks falling into brutal humanism. However, I then meet Schoonover's theory of brutal vision with Lacanian theories of the Gaze to demonstrate the ways in which *Fire at Sea* can be seen to make manifest the Gaze, highlighting the ideological partiality of its own, and the viewer's perspective on the 'refugee crisis'. I conclude that, in its representation of (or, indeed, its representation of its *own*

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76 See Debruge (2016); Ponzanesi (2016a); Pulver (2016); Scott (2016); and Wilson (2018).

*representation of*) refugee characters, *Fire at Sea* can be interpreted as making manifest the inherent inconsistency and partiality of the brutally humanist vision of the Berlinale synopsis. In doing so the film may destabilise the very fantasy of European agency and superiority over the other on which brutal humanism is predicated.

Analysing European A festivals' responses to the 'refugee crisis' through film will shed new light on the politics mobilised in their awarding and representation of Italian cinema in a variety of ways. First, it provides insights into the politics involved in representations of 'Europe' and the (typically African) other: the 'refugee crisis' itself can be understood as a phenomenon which has exacerbated the contradictions of a Northern, and specifically European, identity - expressed in part through a renewed articulation of the same liberal, brutally humanist values that I discuss throughout this chapter.<sup>77</sup> Second, it demonstrates the pertinence of the Italian case to an investigation of these issues in film: the ideology of brutal humanism that I will argue remains prevalent on the European A circuit (and beyond) was first instantiated through internationally successful Italian neorealist cinema, which has set the standard for art cinema, particularly as it is constructed by institutions such as film festivals (Hipkins and Renga, 2016, 388; Zagarrío, 2012, 95-96). Furthermore, we can observe a privileged relationship between European A festivals and representations of migration in Italian cinema. There appears to be a trend emerging in the new millennium in which Italian films of migration do increasingly well at A festivals - including, but not only, European ones. O'Healy (2019, 2) argues that there has been 'an increased attention paid to immigration as a thematic focus,' observing that over ten

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<sup>77</sup> See *inter alia* Lombardi-Diop and Romeo (2015b); Rajaram (2016); Ponzanesi (2016a; 2016c); and Žižek (2016), discussed below.

Italian films depicting stories of migration were featured at Venice in 2011. This culminated in *Terraferma* (Crialesi, 2011) winning the Pasinetti Award, Special Jury Prize and UNICEF Award at the festival. Similarly, *Mediterranea* (Carpignano, 2015) was screened during Cannes' Critics' Week and met with much critical acclaim. It then won top prize at Cairo International Film Festival in 2015. A year later, *Fire at Sea* won the Golden Bear at an edition of the Berlinale that offered free tickets to refugees. Italian cinema and A festivals' engagement with the 'crisis' appear to complement one another, with *Fire at Sea* appearing to be at the pinnacle of this relationship. It remains to be seen whether this trend will continue. Nonetheless, we can reasonably posit the importance of the 'refugee crisis' as one of the 'issues' with which European A festivals engage in order to distinguish themselves as politically relevant institutions (Wong, 2011, 1). I will use the exemplary case of *Fire at Sea's* presentation at the Berlinale to consider the extent to which European A festivals ideologically promote a delimited idea of politics founded on a humanist fantasy of the sexual relationship - one which, crucially, disavows the relations of power, in this case colonial power, that such a fantasy entails.

## **2. EUROPEAN A FESTIVALS' BRUTAL HUMANISM**

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It would be overstepping the bounds of my argument to attempt to definitively identify a specific and homogenous political agenda across the entire European A festival circuit. Scholars such as Janet Harbord (2002, 40) highlight the variations between festivals, dictated in part by the locations in which they take place: a film festival's 'meaning is inseparable from its particular location.' Nonetheless, I have made European A festivals' broad amenability to, even constitution

on the basis of, global capitalism clear throughout this thesis. Crucially, I have argued that their organisation according to a common economic model also produces common ideological effects and contradictions. Central to these was European A festivals' self-branding as politically engaged through a claim to represent that which is other, yet nonetheless reproducing (and profiting from) the relations of power that the designation of a figure as other entails (see chapter two). In order to develop this argument further, I employ Schoonover's (2012) study of 'brutal humanism' as both an ideology and mode of representation emerging from post-war geopolitical and economic alignments. Schoonover's analysis provides a framework through which to understand the development of the European A circuit - its economic foundations, its claim to universal humanism, and its representation of the other - from post-war European reconstruction to neo-colonial regimes of aid and representation today. I argue that this kind of humanism, which emphasises the agency of the Euro-American subject by depicting images of an imperilled other, may still permeate the ideology of European A festivals - one that remains amenable to both capitalism and neo-colonialism.

While Schoonover's (2012) focus is on post-war Italian neorealism, the geopolitical context he identifies is equally applicable to the development of European A festivals. The key geopolitical situation that he brings to the fore is that of post-war relations between Europe and the United States, in which many European countries depended upon American patrimony for their reconstruction after World War II (a large part of which was the European Recovery Programme, or Marshall Plan). This relationship was also fundamental to the development of the European A festival circuit, since many festivals that gained A accreditation were founded and/or funded by American organisations in that period. For example,

Cannes, although rhetorically claiming to act as a bastion against both Fascism and 'America's burgeoning cultural imperialism', was primarily funded by American organisations (Rhyne , 2009, 11). Likewise, the festival I study in this chapter, the Berlinale, was initiated by American film officer Oscar Martay, and conceived primarily as 'an American instrument in the Cold War' (De Valck, 2007, 52). As Heidi Fehrenbach (1995, 234-6) argues, the festival was founded as 'a celebration of Western values' and 'proof of Western economic superiority and cultural dynamism.' In the post-war period, European film festivals were created and supported by American organisations and, as such, were part of geopolitical manoeuvring undertaken with the aim of disseminating Western values across the continent. This situation leads Dovey (2015, 37) to argue that American influence was so strong in both Europe and on the festival circuit that it was accompanied by 'a sense of "colonization" [...] at the hands of the North Americans'.<sup>78</sup>

Importantly for our study, Schoonover (2012, xix) considers the ideological implications of this uneven transatlantic partnership, identifying, through the case of neorealism, the emergence of a kind of humanism 'more reconciled with than resistant to the geopolitical affinities of large-scale capitalism and its multiple battle zones'. While Schoonover's study pertains exclusively to the development of Italian neorealism as international, exportable cinema, it can be redeployed to consider the development of film (or rather, certain ideas of film) more broadly. This is not least due to neorealism's status as one of two perceived cornerstones of European (if not

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78 Dovey (2015, 37) also relates this to the intensification of European countries' 'domination of their own colonies' as a displacement of Europeans' sense of victimisation onto the colonial other. I engage with this further below.

global) art cinema, the other being the French *nouvelle vague*.<sup>79</sup> As Schoonover (2012, 218) states:

Neorealism [...] sets the standard for European new wave cinemas, post-colonial cinemas, cinemas of social change and political liberation, the American 'new independents' of the 1970s and late twentieth-century explorations of realism by Italian, Danish, Romanian, and Chinese cinemas.

We can observe that one of the founding moments of the European festival circuit - Cannes' first edition in 1946 - marks, at the same time, the founding moment of Italian neorealism's international success, with both appearing to participate in the post-war reconstitution of a liberal, anti-fascist Europe. This moment culminated in the Cannes jury awarding Italian neorealist film, *Rome, Open City* its highest accolade. Summarising the political nature of the award, De Valck (2007, 49) concludes 'it is not surprising that, in the midst of vehement post-war sentiments, the revelation of the 1946 festival was the anti-fascist *Roma, Città Aperta*'. The importance of this moment for both the European film festival circuit and European cinema, and its effects on the enduring idea of each, cannot be underestimated. Elsaesser (2005, 90) describes it as the festival which 'set the template for festivals the world over'<sup>80</sup> Indeed, constituting one half of the 'Venice-Cannes duopoly' that dominated the film festival network in the post-war period, Cannes was one of the first to gain A accreditation and wielded considerable influence over which festivals would later join its ranks (Pisu, 2018, 110). Just as

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79 See *inter alia* Galt and Schoonover (2010); Maule (2008); and Ruberto and Wilson (2007). As discussed in the introduction, this has been one of the justifications for this thesis's treatment of Italian cinema as a significant case study for the ideology of European A festivals' awarding and representation of film more generally.

80 Also see, for example, Iordanova's (2006) discussion of Karlovy Vary's need to emulate Cannes to gain A accreditation or, from another perspective, De Valck's account of the Berlinale's (2007) need to differentiate itself minimally from Cannes (ironically, to prove its political credentials) for the same accreditation.

Italian neorealism has come to be considered a crucial cinematic model, a watershed in film worldwide, so too does Cannes continue to be the most influential festival globally. All of this, moreover, took place through the cyclic structure proper to the ideology of European A festivals' construction of cinema: a festival constructs a film through its practices of awarding and representation, which in turn establishes the image of the festival, which then contributes to the enduring reputation of the film and the festival (and so on). The first successful outcome of this cycle, it appears, was the construction of both Cannes and Italian neorealism in line with a politics of European anti-fascism and liberal humanism.

## **2.A BRUTAL VISION: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE EURO-AMERICAN SUBJECT AND THE OTHER**

Schoonover demonstrates the relevance of this moment, and its place in a geopolitical re-alignment of power and values through an analysis of Bazin's writings - above all his essay surveying Cannes' 1946 edition. These writings were inspired by the films shown at the 1946 edition of Cannes, and thus the ideas that they contain reflect a conception of cinema that goes well beyond the individual critic. They were part of 'a transatlantic refashioning of cinema's medium specificity' affecting and effected by not only film critics, but, I argue, cinematic institutions such as the film festivals that inspired such critics (Schoonover, 2012, 10). Schoonover (2012, 10) describes Bazin's writings as 'overt attempts to aestheticize a mid-century politics of liberal humanism, to find humanism's aesthetic equivalent in filmic terms, in a popular visual vernacular'. This was part of a perception of Italian neorealism as an ethical cinematic movement, viewed as the vehicle of 'a new visual politics of liberal compassion' (Schoonover, 2012, xiv). This visual politics was, Schoonover argues, mobilised as part of a transatlantic project in which the United States

intervened in the economic and ideological reconstruction of European countries - part of which, as I have shown, included its patrimony of European film festivals.

Central to the project of cinematic and geopolitical refashioning was, Schoonover (2012, 12) argues, the power ascribed to images of brutalised, imperilled bodies. Such images were thought to trigger concern and transnational sympathy, but also a sense of agency in the spectator - to encourage a kind of transnationally-inflected humanism (Schoonover, 2012, 11). Inspired by Cannes' exhibition of films such as *Rome, Open City*, Bazin posits "a phenomenology of death in contemporary cinema" as a framework for evaluating a film's capacity to 'enable experience on a transnational register' (Schoonover, 2012, 11-12). Bazin posited that films which depict death or torture could achieve this aim - could involve the spectator in a transnational, ethical and humanist praxis in which the act of witnessing violence is itself considered an act of ethical agency (Schoonover, 2012, 12-13). In particular, this relationship entails a 'politics of pity' that 'involves isolating the sufferers as to be seen or to be looked at' and 'distancing them from the pitying subject or spectator' (Schoonover, 2012, xiv-xv). Central to the 'brutal vision' that instantiates these politics is the relationship between the witness and the figure being looked at. Schoonover (2012, xx) argues that a key aspect of neorealist films' address is the way in which 'an imperilled body is offered to a bystander's look as an opportunity to exercise ethical judgement.' Moreover, while the witness may 'exercise ethical judgement', the sufferer is represented as passive, as 'offered', and 'to be seen or to be looked at.' We might say then, that the witness - either on-screen figure or implied spectator - is positioned as active subject, while the sufferer is positioned as passive object.

Importantly for the relations of power and agency that this entails, the politics of cinematic representation is, Schoonover (2012, 10-11) argues, part of a reconceptualisation of cinema 'that emphasizes its capacity to broaden the parameters of the Euro-American subject's engagement in the world and authority over it'. The relationship between witness and sufferer is not geopolitically neutral, but rather asserts a specifically 'Euro-American' agency which grants 'authority' over 'the world'. This impression of agency appears to depend on the fact that sufferers are viewed from a distance, and, in particular, from 'a liberal humanist present' (Schoonover, 2012, 148). The 'brutal vision' that characterises this post-war regime of representation implies a reciprocal but uneven relation between 'liberal humanist' witness and sufferer, in which the elaboration of the former's agency depends upon the subtraction of that of the latter - as well as the performance of a particular kind of distance between the two. Schoonover (2012, 66) calls this the 'proxied engagement' that defines the spectator's relationship to the imperilled figure. It produces a distance between the sufferer and the witness and situates the powerful witness in the position of liberal, Euro-American subject, implicitly placing the sufferer as other - 'isolated' and lacking agency. A crucial manifestation - the 'visual vernacular'- of the values of liberal humanism that characterised post-war geopolitics and conceptions of cinema is the representation of a figure in peril as a means of granting the Euro-American subject (a sense of) ethical agency. This is achieved through the act of looking - the mobilisation of a powerful gaze which the Euro-American subject directs towards the passive, imperilled other. In short, brutal humanism, and its cinematic instantiation, 'brutal vision', can be defined as a liberal, compassionate stance towards the spectacle of the imperilled figure - a figure defined not only by

their suffering but their distance (geographical and temporal but, above all, symbolic) from the Western liberal witness to whom such images are addressed.

To conceptualise these relations of looking and their pertinence to the question of ideology, it is necessary to supplement Schoonover's theory of brutal vision with another theory of perspective. Lacanian theories of the gaze/Gaze helps us to understand this uneven relation in which the notion of the Euro-American, humanist witness' agency is dependent upon the subtraction of that of the imperilled other.<sup>81</sup> Recent work on the Gaze also offers a means of both theorising and challenging the ideological procedures involved in brutal vision insofar as it has the capacity to highlight the disavowals and displacements on which any notion of Euro-American agency may rest. In fact, Schoonover's (2012, 183) study contains an undercurrent of gaze theory as elaborated by Metz (1982), Mulvey (1975) and others. This is most apparent in its emphasis on the to-be-looked-at-ness of imperilled bodies: images of suffering 'others' are 'offered to a bystander's look' in a way that foregrounds the activity of the witness and passivity of the sufferer (Schoonover, 2012, xx). This kind of representation functions in a geopolitical fashion, to bolster the illusion of 'the foreign spectator's sovereign gaze' (Schoonover, 2012, 183). We might interpret this through Mulvey's (1975) notion of the male gaze as a dominating look which emphasises male agency and female passivity. This gaze, in its dominant masculine address, provides an illusion of mastery over the image, including the female figure(s) in it. While Mulvey describes the objectification of the female other, we can extend

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81 As in the previous chapter, I use the lower-case 'gaze' to refer to the gaze in its Mulvian sense (the imaginary gaze, usually designated by the word 'look' in recent Lacanian theory). This is in distinction with the capitalised 'Gaze', which refers to the manifestation of the partiality of the subject's perspective (the Real of the gaze, as theorised by scholars such as Copjec (1994), McGowan (2007) and Žižek (2001b)).

these insights to consider the colonial gaze, and ‘othering’ more generally (see, for example, Butler (2002), hooks (1992), and Young (1996)). In particular, we might consider the way in which films address an implied liberal, Western spectator as having a ‘sovereign gaze’, providing the illusion of mastery over the images they look at and the figures in it, thus (re)producing a sense of ‘the Euro-American subject’s engagement in the world and authority over it’ (Schoonover, 2012, 183; 11).

Suture helps us explain the ideological procedures involved in the illusion of a ‘sovereign gaze’, since the relationship of authoritative onlooker and images of an objectified figure – that is, the objects of their look – is structured in a similar fashion. As discussed in chapters two and three, suture involves displacing the split inherent to the subject – its internal inconsistency or non-totality, which in turn undermines the possibility of total agency – onto an opposition between the subject and an other.<sup>82</sup> This other becomes the subject’s ‘constitutive Outside’, whose exclusion from the symbolic affords it the impression of consistency (Žižek, 2004, 102). The sense of the ‘Euro-American subject’s [...] authority’ can thus be conceptualised as depending upon the displacement of their inherent split onto a relation of difference with the images of suffering they witness – for example the relation implied by witnessing imperilled bodies from the distanced perspective of a ‘liberal humanist present’ (Schoonover, 2012, 11; 148). However, the other posited through suture necessarily ‘gives body to an impossibility’ (Žižek, 2001a, 202). This figure is, in fact, the manifestation of ‘the impossibility of closure,’ and

82 I consider the ‘Euro-American subject’ Schoonover refers to in the sense of the subject implied by a symbolic order of Euro-American identity and its humanist underpinnings. The subject Schoonover appears to describe is an implied spectator and, as such, best conceived of as a part of the symbolic text, rather than a really existing person. Therefore the inherent split in the subject, in both senses, refers to the inherent split in the symbolic order itself.

bears traces of the ideological operation involved (Copjec, 1994, 174). Theorising brutal vision in this way suggests that, while it may attempt to address spectators as though they have a sovereign gaze and authority over the world, such efforts are marked by a fundamental impossibility. This is precisely fundamental impossibility that I have argued films can make manifest through their potential to depict the Gaze - a potential that I demonstrate further through the analysis of *Fire at Sea* below.

## **2.B BRUTAL HUMANISM, NEO-COLONIALISM AND EUROPEAN A FESTIVALS**

These relations of power, their manifestation, and the means through which they might be challenged become crucial to questions of contemporary European A festivals' representations of the other owing to the implications that the ideology of brutal humanism has for representations of post-colonial subjects today. It is important to recognise that the brutal vision directed toward post-war Italians may also regard non-European, colonial and post-colonial others. Schoonover (2012, xxiv) repeatedly underlines the potential for brutal humanism's ideological persistence in a neo-colonial contemporary period, as suggested by his claim that 'European reconstruction was used as a template for the later large-scale humanitarian aid structures of neo-colonialism'. Indeed, staging a figure's helplessness as a means of inciting a sense of ethical agency in the spectator has become a well-known, and much critiqued, trope of representations of post-colonial subjects. For example, Japhy Wilson (2016) has analysed the extent to which advertisements for charitable commodities foreground the suffering and helplessness of their beneficiaries, inviting the consumer/donor to enjoy their

relative power and agency.<sup>83</sup> Observing a process highly similar to that involved in brutal vision, Wilson (2016, 9) concludes that ‘the imagined proximity of the helpless and grateful beneficiary is only a prop to sustain his [the consumer’s] enjoyment of inequality’.<sup>84</sup> The structures of humanitarian aid, as well as the textual structures coextensive with it, developed through the reconstruction of post-war Europe and continue in neo-colonialist projects such as aid towards African states. If the European A circuit developed in line with the liberal ideology and affective structures that Schoonover (2012, xxiv) identifies, we might wonder the extent to which they reproduce these structures today – above all in relation to the ‘structures of neo-colonialism’ that, he argues, have emerged out of the template set out in the post-war period. In consideration of these points, then, I now turn to develop Schoonover’s analysis of brutal humanism in the post-war period, and investigate the possibility of its ideological persistence in European A festival’s awarding and representation of Italian cinema in the new millennium.

The question of colonialism and film festivals has been raised by several scholars, and some also raise similar questions of European agency and the displacement of a conflict internal to Europe onto a conflict with the colonised other. Wong (2011, 4) takes Euro-centrism and colonial perspectives towards non-European others to be a common feature of European film festivals and their study. Writing of A festivals specifically, Abé Markus Nornes (2013, 151) argues that the A circuit is in fact a ‘short circuit’ which privileges only those festivals that ‘grant Europe the status of subject’. When we consider this in relation to the power relations involved in both brutal vision and the gaze, it appears that we can productively consider the way in

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83 Wilson uses the term ‘enjoy’ in the Lacanian sense of ideological enjoyment or *jouissance*.

84 See also *inter alia* Bell (2013); Kessy (2014); and Rumph (2011).

which the A circuit – and certainly the European A circuit – may reproduce a symbolic order centred around notions of ‘Europe’ as coherent and endowed with agency – in short, a ‘subject’ to be contrasted with the non-European ‘object’.<sup>85</sup> Dovey’s (2015) full-length study of film festivals’ representation of African cinema builds on the research of these scholars, and brings the question of post-war American patrimony and European colonialism to the fore. She argues that:

All of the early ‘A-list’ European film festivals [...] were created on a European continent that was not only at war with itself, but that felt the need (partly as a result of these wars, and the sense of threat the US posed) to assert its superiority over other parts of the world, particularly its colonies in ‘darkest’ Africa (Dovey, 2015, 37).

This understanding of the A circuit demonstrates the process of displacing internal conflict onto an external one as a means of regaining a sense of agency. This can be understood precisely as part of an ideological project which bolsters a sense of European authority at a time when this authority may have been perceived as under threat. While Schoonover appears to claim that brutal humanism and its norms of representation took on a neo-colonial character later, Dovey’s analysis of the development of A festivals indicates that it may have not only been concurrent with, but in fact an extension of, the geopolitical situation in Europe and its accompanying ideology at the time. In Dovey’s account, A festivals’ reproduction of colonial power relations not only continue today, but were present in the period Schoonover identifies as crucial for the development of brutal vision. Brutal vision’s emphasis on the agency of the Euro-American subject at the expense of that of the other pertains to not only impoverished post-war Italians

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85 To suggest that Europe is ‘subject’ is not to personify the continent, but rather highlight its status as the dominant symbolic order. (See, for example, the treatment of male/masculine as subject and female/feminine as object, explicated in the previous chapter.)

but, and perhaps more pertinently, the colonised other. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to investigate the extent to which a colonialist brutal humanism was central to European film festivals' representation of the other in the post-war period, the premises of both Schoonover's and Dovey's research provide a useful basis from which to interrogate the confluence of brutal humanism and neo-colonialism in contemporary European A festivals' representations of the other.

### **3. *FIRE AT SEA*: REPRESENTING THE 'REFUGEE CRISIS'**

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The questions of a European or Western identity defined via the claim to liberal humanist compassion – itself supported by neo-colonial depictions of the imperilled body of the other – find their epitome in the various responses to the 'refugee crisis'. I focus on one response in particular: the 2016 edition of the Berlinale and its awarding and representation of *Fire at Sea*. I argue that this case provides a particularly useful example to the extent that it signals an enduring 'brutal humanism' deployed in the context of the 'crisis', and is also symptomatic of the neo-colonial relations of power that may be reproduced by European A festivals in general. Although it would not be possible to prove the persistence of this ideology across the European A festival circuit through one case study, I hope that the analysis of this significant example below will set the foundations for further inquiry. To my knowledge, there has been no research into European film festivals' representation of migration and/or the 'refugee crisis'. Moreover, at the time of writing, just three years after *Fire at Sea*'s premiere at the Berlinale, there are few scholarly interpretations of the film and none examining its institutional

reception.<sup>86</sup> Therefore, I aim to supplement my review of existing scholarship on the film with other studies into cinema of migration more broadly - particularly in relation to Italian cinema and European identity. I will use this research to highlight the relevance of the case study of *Fire at Sea* at the Berlinale to the issues I have raised above. The scholarship on European and Italian cinema of migration, as well as the points it raises about Europe's identity and borders will show that films depicting migration are particularly significant when studying the way in which Europe represents itself and its others. Meanwhile, the chapter itself seeks to address the lack of research into *Fire at Sea*, its institutional reception, and European A festivals' representation of migration; thus it provides a basis for future research into these areas.

Representations of the 'refugee crisis,' including by European A festivals, may be symptomatic of a broader struggle for a coherent humanist and European identity. We find motivation for such a claim in critics' analyses of the 'crisis' and artworks relating to it. As Prem Kumar Rajaram (2016, 2) has argued, the 'crisis' is often considered less one for refugees, and more one for European countries. Giving credence to this claim, Cristina Lombardi-Diop & Caterina Romeo (2015a, 338) identify 'what is Europe?' as one of the most pressing questions today due to both the negotiation Schengen Agreement and increased migration to the continent. They take this as a spur to consider Europe's identity in relation to its other - those whom European countries have subjected to colonial oppression. Their study suggests once more the dialectical relationship between European identity and its other - the way in which, perhaps, the notion of 'Europe' depends upon the displacement of its inherent split onto the figure of the other,

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86 I address this latter absence in my article 'A brutal humanism for the new millennium? The legacy of Neorealism in contemporary cinema of migration' (Johnson, 2020, [Forthcoming]).

and above all the post-colonial other. It is therefore likely that European A festivals, as cinematic institutions that participate in both the attempt to disseminate a European identity and engage with the other, would reproduce similar ideological coordinates in their representations of the 'refugee crisis' and films that depict it.

O'Healy's analysis of Italian cinema of migration and abjection raises similar questions about the depiction of migration and migrants in Italian film, in a way that clarifies the displacement of a split inherent to Italy - and Europe - onto the figure of the other. She argues that Italian representations of migration can be interpreted as expressing an anxiety about Italy's European identity. O'Healy's (2010, 7-8) summary of this bears quoting at length:

The figure of the unwanted immigrant or asylum seeker is deployed in similarly oppositional terms in several other countries of 'Fortress Europe' at present [...] In Italy, however, the national subject or imagined 'way of life' is already shot through with the tensions of an internal, Southern 'otherness.' For generations, the cultural construction of Southern Italy as the 'territorial watershed between Italy as Europeanized (or Americanized) and Italy as African' (Pandolfi 1998, 287) undermined any attempt to imagine Italy as a unified political subject.

O'Healy (2010, 8) shows that the figure of the 'immigrant' was constructed and deployed as part of Italy's more recent 'ambition[s] to forge a strong image as a modern, efficient, and progressive European nation'. However, this should be read as a displacement: the Italian subject and nation's 'tensions of an internal, Southern "otherness"' - the split between its Southern and European identity - is displaced onto that of the non-Italian (Albanian or African, in O'Healy's account).<sup>87</sup> She presents Italian films as counter-narratives, showing that they can

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<sup>87</sup> On the racialisation of southern Italy see the following chapter.

[problematise] the image of contemporary Italy as a uniformly progressive, affluent nation, with a standard language spoken by all and the shared aspiration of “European” belonging’ (O’Healy, 2010, 9). O’Healy’s analysis raises several questions that demonstrate the importance of Italian films of migration to the notions of European identity and representations of the other: to what extent is Italy and Italian film represented as ‘European’, and on what grounds? To what extent does this ‘Europeanness’ depend upon the displacement of difference onto the figure of the migrant or refugee? And to what extent can films themselves challenge these procedures, undermining the very notion of a coherent Italo-European identity? Through the case of *Fire at Sea* and its presentation at the Berlinale, I suggest some answers to such questions, and do so in a way that demonstrates the ideological procedures and relations of power on which European (cinematic) identity, and its brutal gaze, might be constituted.

Although scholarship on *Fire at Sea* is currently limited, owing to the recency of the film’s release, a common theme can be traced through that which has been published. Studies of the film consider it in relation to the politics of migration and the tension between a relatively privileged European subject position and that of the refugee. Moreover, most analyses of the film itself regard it as a text that registers this conflict. The degree to which this is taken to indicate a spilt internal to Europe, rather than one between Europe and Africa varies. It appears that more work needs to be done regarding the way in which *Fire at Sea* and/or its institutional reception and presentation foregrounds a ‘European’ gaze and the contradictions therein. Sandra Ponzanesi (2016) compares two films of migration that were recently recognised by European A festivals: *Fire at Sea* and *On the Bride’s Side* (*Io sto con la sposa*, 2014, Augugliaro, Del Grande, Al Nassiry). Ultimately

Ponzanesi (2016a, 165) argues for the progressive potential of *Fire at Sea* as a film text, asserting its capacity to 'resignify Europe from a location of marginality and hope' (that is, Lampedusa, an island on the periphery between Europe and Africa). In her reading, the film has the potential to produce 'new imaginaries for Europe, where a space of solidarity and cosmopolitanism can be regained from new subject positions' (Ponzanesi, 2016a, 151-52). However, she also considers some of the complexities of the film's reception and portrayal of migrants. Although she interprets the film as 'counter[ing] the EU politics of borders and patrolling', she also acknowledges that *Fire at Sea's* being shown in the European Parliament may signal the possibility of its being utilised as 'an easy way to acquit bad consciences by taking part in a drama that is sagely portrayed at a distance' (Ponzanesi, 2016a, 152). In this analysis, the political potential of *Fire at Sea* risks being undermined precisely by its potential to place the European spectator - the members of the European Parliament, no less - at a distance from the crisis. Given the predication of brutal humanism on a relation of distance between the suffering other and implied spectator, it appears that the film's ability to reinforce or undermine this relation of power will be paramount to its relevance to European - and European A festivals' - politics towards to refugee other. Before analysing the film and its construction by the Berlinale, suffice it to note that Ponzanesi's account highlights a tension that runs through *Fire at Sea's* status as a film text and its institutionalisation.

Emma Wilson (2018) emphasises a sense of splitting and tension in *Fire at Sea*, and does so in a lexicon that might suggest the film's potential to challenge the notion of European agency. She argues that the film powerfully represents a 'schism' between the Lampedusan and refugee characters and, with it, between Europe and its others (Wilson, 2018, 18). She

concludes that the depiction of this schism is part of the film's strategy to make manifest

the global insanity, the madness of contemporary Europe, where everyday life co-exists, obviously, with the deathly horror of forced migration, people-trafficking, and flight from war zones. *Fire at Sea* challenges that obliviousness, that disavowal and disconnect (Wilson, 2018, 12).

Although not part of a psychoanalytical interpretation of *Fire at Sea*, we can build on the language of pathology that Wilson deploys. Note that 'madness' pertains to Europe, and that the contemporary European condition Wilson claims that the film shows is one of 'disavowal and disconnect'. This is a disavowal that occurs *within* Europe - within its borders, in the 'everyday life' taking place on Lampedusa in the film. That which is disavowed, in fact, is the European interiority of the 'crisis', of the 'horror[s]' both Wilson and *Fire at Sea* describe. The film, Wilson (2018, 12) argues, challenges notions of a split between Europe and its others, critiquing the 'disconnect' that suggests 'horror' is something which takes place 'out there' - in the region of Europe's constitutive outside, Africa. We might question therefore the extent to which the Berlinale's representation of the film reproduces 'the madness of contemporary Europe' or underlines *Fire at Sea's* critique of it, highlighting the disavowal of the interiority of the other on which such madness (or rather, ideology) is predicated.

Moreover, Wilson (2018, 12) states that '*Fire at Sea* is not a film that claims to know, feel, or speak of the experiences of the people traveling in boats to Europe'. Just as madness and disavowal might imply a loss of agency, so the film's refusal of a claim to be able to speak for, to 'know' its refugee characters denies the kind of power and agency that I have argued underpins European A festivals' claim to represent the other (see above, and chapter two). Wilson (2018, 17) notes that the

film's lack of a refugee voice or perspective has been contentious among film critics. I add that these critics' contention is not solely 'unjust,' but symptomatic of a desire to know the other, founded on the assumption that, upon hearing the other speak, they become knowable and assimilable into the Western symbolic order (Wilson, 2018, 17). This structure is similar to the fantasy of the sexual relationship, and its paradoxical fetishisation of the other as other, that structures European A festivals' construction of such figures. Again, it seems necessary to investigate the extent to which this desire is present in other institutional representations of *Fire at Sea* - for example those of the Berlinale - and the ways in which the film itself may undermine them.

These analyses of *Fire at Sea* indicate its potential to be assimilated by but also contest the politics promoted by institutions such as European Parliament or the Berlinale. Read in the way that Ponzanesi (2016a, 151-52) does, it is ambiguous whether *Fire at Sea's* contestation of an idea of 'Europe' from 'new subject positions' has the capacity to fundamentally challenge a sense of European worthiness or agency. Viewed through the lens of brutal humanism, we might argue instead that the film's reception as allowing European viewers to participate in 'a drama that is sagely portrayed at a distance' is an important part of its potential to 'acquit bad consciences' (Ponzanesi, 2016a, 152). However, this is not to say that *Fire at Sea* is without the ability to challenge the ideology of liberal humanism and its attendant power relations. Wilson's (2018) emphasis on the film's representation of the unknowability of the other, and the pathology underpinning European responses to the 'crisis' provides a ground from which we might analyse *Fire at Sea* in contrast with its institutional construction and the politics that may underpin it. Taking Ponzanesi's and Wilson's interpretations together

allows me to identify a productive line of inquiry: an investigation into the ways in which *Fire at Sea* might undermine or challenge a European perspective *per se* – including a compassionate, humanist stance towards the refugee other.

#### 4. SYNOPSIS ANALYSIS

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The 2016 edition of the Berlinale took place in the context of the ‘refugee crisis’, and appeared to make explicit political choices as a result of this. Media attention was most focused on the ‘refugee crisis’ in the years 2014-17, spurred by the war in Syria and the worst reported sinking of a migrant boat off the coast of Lampedusa in 2014. Importantly for both Berlin and Europe (above all, the EU), in September 2015 Angela Merkel announced Germany’s so-called ‘open-door policy’ toward refugees. She committed to settling 800,000 and encouraged other EU countries to make similar pledges. The Berlinale, taking place approximately six months later, in February 2016, seemed to express similar values. In parallel with Merkel’s policy of admitting refugees to Germany, the Berlinale offered them free admission to its film screenings. In many respects, this set the tone for the festival jury’s decision to award the Golden Bear to *Fire at Sea*, a film perceived as being primarily about the ‘refugee crisis’. Moreover, when presenting Rosi with the award, Jury President Meryl Streep called *Fire at Sea* ‘urgent, imaginative and necessary filmmaking’ (quoted in BBC News, 2016). Streep’s comments allude to the artistic worth of the film, but, above all, foreground its political importance – its urgency and necessity.<sup>88</sup> At the award ceremony, Rosi contributed to this

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<sup>88</sup> Bringing together the two ‘halves’ of this thesis’s argument about the ideology of European A festivals’ awarding and representation of Italian cinema, I note that ideas of *Fire at Sea*’s artistic worth were, in fact, conditioned by a sense of its political importance. For a further discussion, see the Conclusion.

impression by stating that: 'I hope to bring awareness. It's not acceptable that people die crossing the sea to escape from tragedies' (quoted in BBC News, 2016). Rosi then dedicated the Golden Bear to the people of Lampedusa, praising their openness to receiving refugees.<sup>89</sup> Complementing these aspects of the Berlinale's construction of *Fire at Sea*, the festival synopsis of the film makes the politics of the Berlinale's engagement with the 'crisis' yet more apparent. The text's construction of the film appears to instantiate a brutal vision directed toward the figure of the refugee by: (1) affording only Lampedusan characters the power of looking, defining them as European 'witnesses' to a 'humanitarian crisis'; (2) characterising the refugee figures as, in contrast, African, and objects of observation and pity; (3) evoking an ethics based on abstract humanism which allows for the European subject's 'proxied engagement' with the other (Schoonover, 2012, 66).<sup>90</sup>

As discussed above, an important ideological procedure that structures representations of the other is that of suture: suture displaces the subject's inherent split onto a split between their 'inside' and that which appears 'outside', that is, its other. For example, the tension inherent to 'Europe' (i.e. the impossibility

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89 I do not take this as Rosi's ultimate statement on the film. Rather, his comments are themselves conditioned by the context in which he made them - the award ceremony of the Berlinale. The director is as much 'spoken by' the festival as they speak at the festival. The contrast between Rosi's speech at the Berlinale and the largely stylistic account of this film he gave in an interview with *No Film School* underlines this point (Nord, 2016).

90 Another aspect that I could analyse would be the notion of a common European cinematic legacy, distilled in the synopsis' evocation of neorealism in its description of the film. Indeed, tropes associated with neorealism recur throughout the case studies in this thesis - the figure of the male auteur (see previous chapter), brutal humanism (this chapter), and the ethical charge associated with realism (see the following chapter). However, to focus exclusively on neorealism as the touchpoint of film festivals' representations of Italian (and perhaps other) cinema would limit my analysis of the broader ideological procedures involved. It would be possible elsewhere, nonetheless, to investigate the possibility that neorealism, or rather a certain ideologically-inflected version of neorealism, continues to be a crucial signifier conditioning European A festivals' awarding and representation of Italian cinema in the new millennium.

of a coherent 'European' ideology or identity) is displaced onto a tension between Europe and Africa; Africa becomes Europe's 'constitutive Outside' (Žižek, 2004, 102). This procedure can be observed in the Berlinale's synopsis of *Fire at Sea*, which posits a coherent European identity and contrasts it with figures of African refugees. The synopsis continually differentiates between European and African figures, establishing a sense of distance between them. This binary is highlighted most clearly in the synopsis' closing reference to 'two worlds [that] barely touch.' The notion of 'two worlds' assumes two relatively coherent entities which are then contrasted, separated - they 'barely touch.' The Berlinale's synopsis of *Fire at Sea* already presents a division between Lampedusa and its other, the refugee. Indeed, through its characterisation of the islanders and the director, the paratext appears to present a coherent European identity which it associates with agency and the status of witness. While the refugee characters remain nameless throughout the text, the first paragraph introduces the film's protagonist as islander Samuele. As the only named Lampedusan, he appears to be positioned as a representative of the inhabitants of the island in general. The appearance of a named representative implies the status of subject, granted only to the Lampedusans, while the namelessness of the refugees deindividualises them, thus excluding them from the symbolic order posited in the text.<sup>91</sup> The islanders are the sole characters afforded the power of looking: they 'bear witness' to the refugee crisis. The second paragraph describes the film as being comprised of 'Gianfranco Rosi's observations of everyday life' which 'bring us closer' to Lampedusa. This enacts a double-perspective: the perspective of the Italian director who 'observes' Lampedusa, and the inhabitants who, in turn, 'bear

91 Recall that naming marks the subject's entry into the symbolic, and therefore their constitution as a (split) subject. The lack of a refugee character equivalent to Samuele in the film itself has been criticised by Thomas Austin (2017).

witness' to the 'refugee crisis'.<sup>92</sup> Both perspectives are subsumed into a European identity as the text slips between Lampedusa and Europe: 'The island [...] has become a metaphor for the flight of refugees to Europe'. This implies that, in its depiction of Lampedusa, the film also stages such a metaphor: that it is primarily about Lampedusa's status as a European island to which refugees flee. In doing so, the text appears to elide the potential for a division between, for example, a Lampedusan and European identity - as suggested by Ponzanesi's (2016a, 159) description of Lampedusa as liminal to Europe, or O'Healy's (2010) discussion of the tension between Italy's southern and European identities. Rather, the synopsis downplays these differences and depicts *Fire at Sea* as being about a European tragedy seen, by extension, through a European look.

This sense of a relatively coherent European subjectivity afforded the power of looking underpins the synopsis's distinction between Europe and Africa, and is reaffirmed through the text's depiction of the refugee characters. In contrast with the islander witnesses, the text 'isolat[es] the [African] sufferers as to be seen or to be looked at [...] distancing them from the pitying subject or spectator' (Schoonover, 2012, xiv-xv). The refugees are positioned as objects of a brutal humanist look which distinguishes the witness from the sufferer, granting only the former the powers of agency and access to truth. The African characters are depicted primarily through notions of lack - as having limited means, limited agency and as being in peril. In contrast with

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92 Rosi's status as an Italian director can be questioned - he was raised in Eritrea and moved to New York at the age of nineteen, for example. This gives further credence to European A festivals' ideological positioning of 'Europe as subject'. The festivals ascribe Rosi an Italo-European rather than Eritrean-African, or in fact American, identity. It appears that his status as auteur is bound up with not only the perception of his masculinity (his being male, designated as a man by festivals), but also that of his supposed European identity.

Samuele's carefree meanderings, his desire to 'mooch about the port' of Lampedusa, the refugees are trapped in boats that are 'far too small and decrepit,' experiencing only 'hopes, hardship and fate'. Already they appear to be in peril because of their limited means compared to the islanders. Furthermore, rather than having the ability to bear witness, the refugees' only activities in the text are 'longing for peace' and 'trying to make the crossing from Africa'. Words such as 'longing' and 'trying' designate incomplete actions and desire rather than wholeness and agency. This positions Africa as a place of unsatisfied needs - a place from which refugees flee to Europe, a land in which they supposedly might find the 'peace, freedom and happiness' they 'long' for. Again, a sense of completeness and power is ascribed to Europe, its lack displaced onto Africa. This is epitomised by the synopsis's final reference to the African characters: 'only their dead bodies are pulled out of the water.' The representation of dead bodies is, Schoonover (2012, xvi) argues, the technique *par excellence* of brutal vision. Indeed, in this case, the image combines notions of the refugees' peril, lack and passivity. In contrast, agency lies only with the invisible hands pulling the characters' bodies out of the water. The refugees are, ultimately, depicted as passive objects to be handled or witnessed by the European subject. This again stages the 'politics of pity' which underpins brutal vision: the refugees are shown as passive bodies in crisis, lacking subjectivity or agency, while the European subject engages with their suffering from a distance.

The first paragraph of the synopsis concludes: 'Thus, every day the inhabitants of Lampedusa are bearing witness to the greatest humanitarian tragedy of our times.' As the culmination of this paragraph, this sentence summarises the film's meaning through notions of the islanders' pitying look towards the imperilled bodies of the refugees, and frames the

scenario as a 'humanitarian tragedy'. Following the notion of humanitarianism, the representation of the islanders and the refugees is also anchored by the idea of a common humanity, a bridge between the 'two worlds' appearing to heal the distance between them. Samuele is 'like all boys of his age.' Meanwhile, the refugees are ascribed universal features such as 'hopes, hardship and fate' as well as the 'long[ing] for peace, freedom and happiness.' This evocation of abstract commonality between the two groups provides the connection that allows for any witnessing of one group's suffering to take on an ethical dimension - it provides the 'humanism' in brutal humanism. Nonetheless, the relationship between the two groups remains an abstract one. In being such, it may offer a sense of proximity while maintaining the distance between 'two worlds' evoked at the end of the text. This is, perhaps, the interplay of closeness and distance that sustains the brutal sufferer-witness relationship, marked by 'proxied engagement whose outreaching hand is assured that it will never actually touch that which it reaches for' (Schoonover, 2012, 66). The synopsis thus appears to construct 'Europe' as a coherent entity founded on its humanist and humanitarian ethics: a crucial feature of the film's gaze, as described by the synopsis, is its humanitarianism and the abstract relationship of proximity and distance that it entails. In short, the synopsis depicts *Fire at Sea* as being a European film that mobilises a European, humanitarian gaze towards an imperilled, African other appearing at its borders.

## **5. FILM ANALYSIS**

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In order to demonstrate the ideological procedures at work in the synopsis' representation of *Fire at Sea*, this section focuses on two aspects of both the film and the text. First, I analyse the film's representation of its European characters, and the way

in which this may present a split internal to Europe similar to the one identified by Ponzanesi (2016a) – that is, a split between an official European politics of border policing and a compassionate response to the ‘crisis’. I focus on those characters absent from the synopsis – the island doctor, Dr. Bartolo, and the official rescuers (it is unclear if they are Frontex, the border control agency contracted by the EU, or belong to another organisation). I argue that the film’s depiction of these characters manifests a conflict internal to European identity, but may attempt to resolve it through the promotion of a politics of compassion that risks reproducing the ideological coordinates of a Eurocentric brutal humanism. Nonetheless, the film’s contrasting representations of Dr. Bartolo and the officials serves to underline the synopsis’ displacement of an internal division onto an external one between the islanders and the refugees. Finally, I engage with the issues of perspective identified above in my analysis of the synopsis, and which I posit as central to the politics of brutal humanism and European agency over the other. This final section will contrast *Fire at Sea’s* representation of its own perspective towards refugee characters with the appearance of the neutral, European viewpoint offered by the paratext. I use the Lacanian theories of the Gaze for this part of the analysis, since it brings together questions of perspective with those of identity and its disruption by images of an other. Considering these issues in relation to brutal humanism, neo-coloniality and European identity will suggest that the politics deployed by European A festivals is inflected by an ideology of brutal humanism, sustaining unequal power relations with the other – above all when that other is viewed through a ‘compassionate’ yet distanced gaze.

### **5.A THE FUNDAMENTAL ANTAGONISM IN EUROPEAN IDENTITY: THE RESCUERS AND THE DOCTOR**

This section examines *Fire at Sea's* representation of the inhabitants of Lampedusa, focusing specifically on those whom the synopsis omits from its description of the film. The paratext refers only to Samuele, who in turn becomes a representative of all the islanders. In so doing, it elides the other island characters. Most significantly, the synopsis evokes the rescue effort taking place on Lampedusa (which Wilson (2018, 14) identifies as one of the main narratives of the film) only with the reference to refugees being 'pulled out of the water.' Here it seems that an invisible hand is intervening in the crisis, which the islanders merely witness. This omission of *who* is pulling the dead out of the Mediterranean Sea effectively obfuscates one of the primary sites of conflict in both *Fire at Sea* and, more broadly, Europe's struggle for identity in the wake of the 'refugee crisis'. In contrast, the film depicts two approaches to engaging with refugees: the official rescue effort, presented as impersonal and dehumanising, and a more personal, compassionate response to the crisis that Dr. Bartolo represents. While both are shown to be working towards the same end (rescuing refugees), the way in which they are depicted produces the impression of a conflict within Europe. As discussed above, Ponzanesi (2016a, 152) argues that *Fire at Sea* appears to intervene in this conflict, critiquing the official rescuers (and thus the EU's politics of borders) and celebrating the doctor (and thus a humanist, compassionate response to the crisis). Initially, it may appear that, in its celebration of the doctor, *Fire at Sea* reproduces a brutally humanist approach to the 'crisis': Dr Bartolo is a liberal, compassionate witness whose characterisation appears to implicitly encourage transnational sympathy for the refugee characters. To evaluate this possibility further, I analyse the relations of power and

distance that representations of both the doctor and the rescuers raise, concentrating on the theme of tactility. I argue that, although the film's depiction of two differing responses to the 'crisis' demonstrates a clearer critique of the official EU response to the crisis that the synopsis suggests, it appears to do so within a framework of European identity and compassion. (I will, however, analyse the way in which the film complicates this framework in the following section).

In contrast with the notion that the film shows just '*two* worlds that barely touch' (emphasis added) – the worlds of the islanders and the refugees – *Fire at Sea* portrays fractures in the island community itself. Significantly, it suggests that it is not the refugees, but the officials running the rescue effort who can be seen as foreign intruders on the island. Indeed, throughout the film, the world of the officials has as little contact with the lives of the islanders; the rescuers and Lampedusans are, rather, never shown together in the same scene. Already this points to a fracture internal to Europe, which contrasts with the synopsis's depiction of a binary between a coherent Europe and its 'outside'. One of the ways we can perceive such a split is by focusing on the similarities and differences between the film's representation of the doctor and the rescuers. *Fire at Sea* seems to characterise the official rescuers in a way that critiques their dehumanising approach to refugees – one that emphasises the importance of a strong border in order to keep the contagious other out. Ponzanesi (2016a, 162) has noted that the contrast between the rescuers' contagion suits and the migrants' barely clothed bodies registers 'an encounter that cannot possibly be on an equal footing.' Building on this, we can examine the particular way in which this inequality is represented: the rescuers' treatment of refugees as bodies of contagion, a threat from outside that must be repelled with a strong outer layer. This recalls Roberto



Figure 19. Humanity and tactility in *Fire at Sea*: official rescuers shown in contagion suits

Esposito's (2011) concept of *immunitas*: the other is a foreign agent who can make the (social) body sick. This is made most apparent by the fact that we only see the rescuers in contagion suits and masks:

Never shown bearing skin, they are characterised as strange, almost inhuman, and dedicated entirely to the containment of disease – that is, the dirt and disease typically associated with the non-white other in racist discourses.<sup>93</sup> The extra layer of the contagion suits functions as a border between the healthy rescuer's body and that of the apparently dirty, contagious, threatening African. In the context of the continent-wide debate regarding Europe's borders and the EU's deployment of officials (such as Frontex guards) on such borders, this representation of the rescuers seems to visually register and intervene in an EU politics based on strong borders and keeping 'foreigners' out.

<sup>93</sup> See Ahmed (2000) and Nicolson et al. (2015). I discuss this in the next chapter, and in a forthcoming book chapter, 'Flow' (Johnson and O'Leary, 2020, [Forthcoming]).

As well as appearing faceless, the rescuers also have very little dialogue in the film. Unlike the doctor, none of the officials are shown reflecting on their personal responses to the 'crisis'. When they do speak, they are usually limited to words that imply a cold pragmatism or even disdain towards their mission. Two examples of this stand out. First, a rescuer is heard telling a refugee to 'calm down' over the radio. Her pleading for help is met with a coldly pragmatic explanation of the need to remain calm and provide specific information about the boat and its position. This could be taken as nothing more than a sign of efficiency - or perhaps a 'small [act] of compassion or practicality' - if it weren't complemented by the second instance of the rescuers' speech (Wilson, 2018, 13). The officials in the detention centre are shown complaining about the refugees' smell, again casting them as dirty, contagious bodies. The lack of empathy suggested by the film's dehumanising representation of the rescuers appears to be justified by their dehumanising and unempathetic response to the refugees. This begins to indicate the way in which *Fire at Sea* may be seen to further complicate the relationship between the inhabitants of the island. In opposition to the representation of the refugees that we read in the synopsis - as deindividualised objects - *Fire at Sea* in fact presents the officials as a deindividualised group. This contrasts with representations of refugees a contagious mass typical to the media and official discourse in Europe at the time - an official discourse that we have seen is also represented by the rescuers in the film.<sup>94</sup> This could be a part of an ironic othering of the officials. Instead of refugees, these functionaries and the insular, protectionist politics they represent are shown as

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94 Take, for example, David Cameron's (Prime Minister of the UK between 2010 and 2016) description of migrants as a 'swarm' (Elgot and Taylor, 2015).

strange, faceless – the true inhuman threat to Europe.<sup>95</sup> This portrayal of EU officials seems to be part of a critique of the official European discourse – one downplayed in the Berlinale synopsis.

The everyday clothing of the doctor contrasts with the strangeness of the officials' contagion suits. When shown treating a pregnant and recently rescued refugee, Dr. Bartolo's costume appears to represent an alternative politics of compassion and contact:

Aside from his lab coat, which he is shown to wear whomever he is treating, the doctor wears nothing that would limit contact between himself and the woman. While it might have been absurd to show a doctor wearing a contagion suit in his practice, Dr. Bartolo appears not to wear even items of protective clothing one might expect, such as a mask or latex gloves. The doctor's bearing of his skin – the tactile and vulnerable border between a subject and the outside –



Figure 20. Humanity and tactility in *Fire at Sea*: Dr. Bartolo shown treating pregnant refugee

<sup>95</sup> It is beyond the scope of this chapter to evaluate the political worth of a human or inhuman response to the 'crisis'. On this debate, see Žižek's (2016) *Against the Double Blackmail: Refugees, Terror and Other Troubles with the Neighbours*. Various responses to this book have been published, mostly online, though none to my knowledge engage with the question of Lacanian theory's insistence on the inhuman (i.e. Real) as a ground for political action and allegiances.

contrasts with any official protective, insular stance.<sup>96</sup> The doctor's openness correlates with a stance of openness towards the other. This seems to represent the humanist response to migration: rather than treating them as a contagious threat, Dr. Bartolo is shown attempting to bridge the border between himself and the refugee.

Dr. Bartolo seems to be rewarded for his compassionate response with, likewise, a humanising representation in the film. A sense of the doctor as both human and humanist is complemented by a long interview with him. Unlike the rescuers, the doctor's character is developed: his face is shown and his voice is heard. Such scenes appear to develop him as a character and thus provide a stronger basis for empathy with him than there would be for the faceless officials. Moreover, Dr. Bartolo's emotional response to the 'crisis', registered in the interview, humanises him further, and we might interpret this as part a cinematic strategy to encourage a humanist politics of compassion. During the interview, he explicitly compares himself with his peers:

So I to witness awful things: dead bodies, children... On those occasions I'm forced to do that thing I hate most: examining cadavers [...] Many of my colleagues say, 'You've seen so many... You're used to it.' It's not true. How can you get used to seeing dead children, pregnant women, women who've given birth on sinking boats, umbilical cords still attached? [...] But it has to be done, so I do it.

Here the doctor's sense of duty is presented as the stoicism of a man deeply affected by the 'refugee crisis', in contrast with the cold pragmatism of the official rescuers. The film's depiction of the doctor's inner life – his emotions, his sense of

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<sup>96</sup> For more on the concept of the politics of the skin as border, see Ahmed (2000).

duty - encourages identification with this character and, as such, perhaps also the humanist stance that he represents.

However, the doctor's words could also be interpreted as aligning with a politics of brutal humanism. They foreground the refugees' status as suffering victims, and his own role as their beneficiary. (The film, too, appears to emphasise this role, foregrounding the doctor-patient relationship, which some might argue is itself a relation of power). As well as shown treating or helping, Dr. Bartolo also appears to be valued for his actions *seeing* refugees - as a witness to their suffering. His

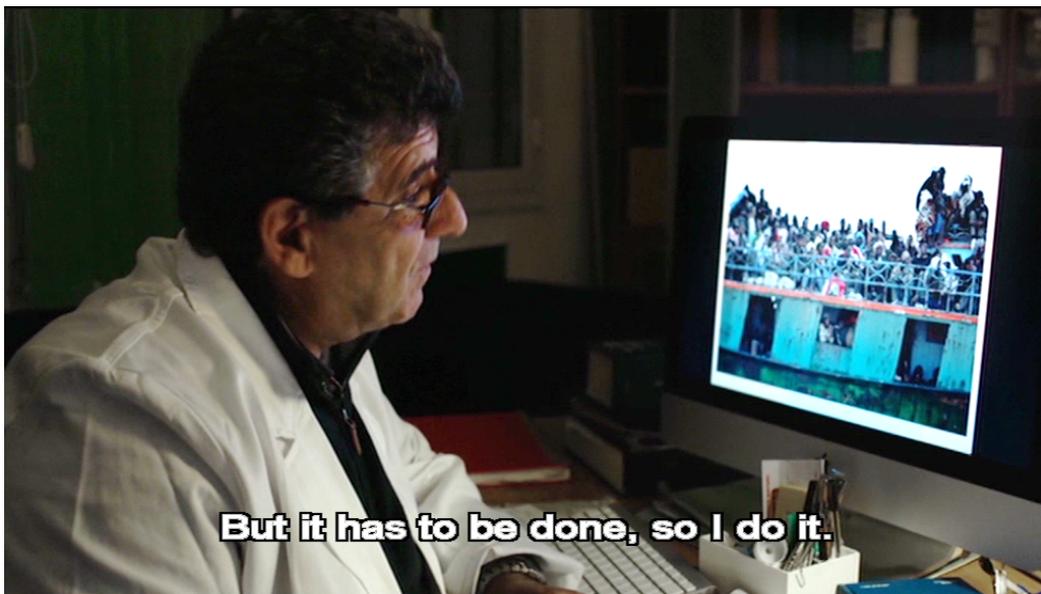


Figure 21. The ethical duty of the witness in *Fire at Sea*: Dr. Bartolo interviewed in front of images of refugees' peril

description of their suffering is graphic, evoking the images of 'corporeal violence' Schoonover (2012, 12-13) argues are central to the 'brutal' aspect of brutal humanism. Moreover, it is compounded with a sense of ethical imperative - 'It has to be done, so I do it'. While the doctor also discusses his activities examining cadavers, the interview is framed by his description of himself as a witness, and the *mise-en-scène* also alludes to a politics of witnessing, and even a meta-cinematic witnessing:

Here, Dr. Bartolo is sat in a dark room, illuminated by a screen showing images of refugees and boats - usually in situations of peril. The lighting in this scene draws the eye to the screen and the pictures on it. In this way, he appears as a shadow - a kind of intermediary between the camera (and spectator) and the images of suffering on screen. The doctor can thus be interpreted as an audience surrogate - a witness whose proximity to the 'crisis' stands in for that of the viewer. Paired with his monologue, the scene seems to encourage a 'proxied engagement' in which the compassionate spectator is positioned, not unlike the doctor, as an important witness to the 'crisis'. The viewer is encouraged, likewise, to bear witness to the images of peril on screen.<sup>97</sup> Dr. Bartolo therefore has an ambiguous role in the film when viewed through the framework of brutal humanism. His physical contact with refugee characters implies a challenge to the 'culture of transatlantic aid whose outreaching hand is assured that it will never actually touch that which it reaches for' (Schoonover, 2012, 66). However, the emphasis on his status as ethical witness, a role that the film appears to encourage the spectator to similarly assume, also seems to suggest that witnessing the 'crisis' is the most urgent imperative.

A crucial difference between the film and the synopsis thus appears to lie in their representations of different responses to migration. In the synopsis, the official rescue effort is not critiqued but rather elided: it appears to function as an invisible hand, pulling dead bodies out of the water. Meanwhile, the island of Lampedusa, used as a signifier for Europe, appears united under one identity as humanist

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97 In light of this, we can better understand the off-screen celebration of Bartolo, who continues to be cast as an ethical witness to the 'refugee crisis'. The doctor has published a memoir of his experiences, *Lampedusa: Gateway to Europe* (2017). Although actively engaged in treating refugees, Bartolo is valued both on and off -screen as a compassionate witness.

witness. In *Fire at Sea*, both the island and Europe are shown to be divided between different constituencies and different politics. The official response to the 'crisis' is represented as a dehumanising containment of disease, and contrasted with the island doctor's politics of contact and compassion. Similarly, Ponzanesi (2016a, 153; 162) claims that *Fire at Sea* depicts 'a form of solidarity and compassion that Europe has forgotten about', yet acknowledges that, in the film, 'we stand on the side of Europe' and that the certain scenes register 'an encounter that cannot be on an equal footing.' However, the values of compassion, or 'the principle of a common humanity', through which the film articulates a critique of border politics are, as I have argued above, tenets of a European - or rather broadly Western - ideology of liberal, even brutal, humanism. In other words, the impression of the film's compassion and humanism may also fortify European hegemony, inadvertently positing the centrality of a specifically European ideology and perspective. Thus, I would argue that the main difference between the synopsis and the film's representation of a 'European' response to the 'crisis' is one of emphasis. Both the film and the paratext in some way, appear to be engaged in the struggle for political hegemony - to determine the empty universal 'Europe' in line with a politics of liberal (and perhaps brutal) compassion. In the synopsis, the antagonistic nature of this struggle is omitted - it is either already assumed, or simply not highlighted. In either case, the synopsis downplays *Fire at Sea's* potential to offer a direct critique of an EU politics of border control, undertaken on liberal humanist grounds. In contrast, the film itself can be interpreted as taking a clearer stance, even suggesting that the official rescuers are, rather than the refugees, strange invaders on the island. Meanwhile, *Fire at Sea's* celebration of Dr. Bartolo, casting him as an important witness to the 'crisis' may represent a politics of compassion

that aligns with a Euro-American legacy of brutal humanism. While the film depicts a division internal to Europe, its critique of the official politics of the EU seems to function on the grounds that it has lost its legacy of liberal, humanist compassion – a position which we might consider to neglect the neo-colonial relations of power on which this legacy is founded.

### **5.B THE IRRUPTION OF THE GAZE IN BRUTAL VISION**

Nonetheless, this is not to say that *Fire at Sea* uncritically conforms to these values. Not only does the film represent a fracture *within* Europe, therefore partially signalling the displacement of difference onto the figure of the other, it also challenges our view of the other in itself. The film does not necessarily resolve the conflict between the European constituencies that it stages, positing a wholly uncomplicated celebration of a European, compassionate response to migration. Rather, it also features moments that appear to signal some of the issues and ideological investments involved in its own representation of refugees. It is in this respect that the film can be interpreted as challenging the politics of brutal compassion most significantly. As we saw above, the Berlinale synopsis deindividualises and objectifies refugees. The paratext suggests that the film depicts them as solely ‘dead bodies’ or as having abstract, human traits such as ‘hope’ rather than being fully-fledged subjects which cannot be fully known or mastered by a European look. The brutal vision through which the synopsis portrays those who ‘make the crossing from Africa’ becomes particularly apparent when we consider the ways in which the film, in contrast, depicts these characters. Several aspects of the *Fire at Sea*’s representation of refugees – or rather its representation of its representation of refugees – demonstrate the risks of objectification involved in screening their suffering, and highlights the partiality of the camera’s,

the director's, and the viewer's perspectives. In doing so, the film can be interpreted as challenging a sense of mastery over images of refugees (and, more broadly, the other), thus also contesting the agency of the European and/or Western witness that constitutes and is constituted by 'brutal vision'.

I have argued that the synopsis's representation of an African other follows the logic of suture: it positions them as an 'external' element that may compensate for the split inherent to European identity. As I also discuss above, this procedure is similar to the one theorised by Mulvian gaze theory: looking at an image of an objectified figure reproduces notions of distance and difference from that figure. I have argued that this look can be compared to the 'foreign spectator's sovereign gaze' mobilised by brutal vision, since the sovereignty of the spectator suggests a coherent identity, as well as difference from, and mastery over, that which is looked at - i.e. images of the other (Schoonover, 2012, 183). However, using recent Lacanian theories of the Gaze, I aim to consider the ways in which the process of displacement is registered by the image being looked at. While I discussed the Gaze in the previous chapter, I would now like to elaborate on the (different) aspects of this structure and its employment in film that are most relevant to the case at hand. The Gaze in this sense is 'on the side of the object' and 'gives body to an impossibility'; it can make manifest the ideological and compensatory process of suture that structures the subject's relation to the images they view (Žižek, 2001, 201-02). Images of the other, when presented in a certain way, can register the lack inherent to the implied subject-onlooker, and thus the partiality of their perspective. It is from this basis that the authority of the subject, and the illusion of their dominant viewpoint, can be challenged. When the process of suture is made manifest, the partiality - the ideological nature - of the subject's perspective

also appears. The 'sovereign gaze' can thus be undermined in moments which allude to the impossibility of a totalising perspective on a scene - moments that signal 'the gap within the subject's seemingly omnipotent look' (McGowan, 2007, 6). As such, the manifestation of the Gaze in this way 'marks a disturbance in the functioning of ideology' (McGowan, 2007, 7). This impossibility of self-enclosure that at once constitutes and thwarts suture can be given body through the image being looked at - in this case, an image of the suffering other - particularly when the artificiality of their representation is emphasised (McGowan, 2007, 8). In this way, images of the suffering other can make manifest the Gaze, showing the ideological relationship between the implied Euro-American spectator and the images being screened for their look. This process occurs in film through the use of meta-cinematic elements which reveal that the images on screen are produced for our witnessing. These irruptions of the Gaze can highlight the viewer's implication and ideological investment in the images being screened:

the existence of the [G]aze as a disruption (or stain) in the picture - an objective [G]aze - means spectators never look on from a safe distance; they are in the picture in the form of this stain, implicated in the text itself (McGowan, 2007, 7).

The image, framed in a meta-cinematic way, can dismantle the safe distance between spectator and both the picture by highlighting that the images being screened are projections of the viewer's desires. (I mean this in the sense of the viewer being addressed, implied by the text, rather than any actually existing viewer - the viewer-as-subject). Rather than being at a 'safe distance' that might allow for some illusion of neutrality or mastery required for ethical witnessing, then, the spectator is shown to be 'implicated in the text'. The partiality of the witness's point of view is thus highlighted. In the case of brutal

humanism, the distance underpinning structures of 'proxied engagement' and the power of the witness meets a direct challenge in the form of the 'objective gaze' of the suffering other (Schoonover, 2012, 66).

*Fire at Sea* contains several moments in which the refugee is explicitly shown to gaze back, and the cinematic apparatus registering this figure is alluded to. Together, these manifest the Real of the gaze; they highlight the ways in which 'the spectator is accounted for within the film itself' (McGowan, 2007, 8). I would like to focus on three shots which epitomise the film's attempt to register and complicate the politics of brutal vision which may condition representations of refugees (including the film's own). The first two demonstrate a transition from neutral observation to the representation of the camera's, and viewer's, partial and privileged perspective. The third builds on this interplay of perspectives, highlighting the refugee's subjectivity and our attempt to de-radicalise - to objectify or tame - it:



Figure 22. Screening the Gaze in Fire at Sea: suffering refugee on boat



Figure 23. Screening the Gaze in Fire at Sea: window frame around refugee suffering on boat



Figure 24. Screening the Gaze in Fire at Sea: number clashes with refugee's face as he is photographed

In contrast with the synopsis, in the shots above the refugees look back – they are alive and endowed with the power of vision. Moreover, the second and third images show moments when the film overtly registers the camera’s perspective, highlighting its partiality as an artificial representation rather than neutral observation. The first shot (fig. 22) is of a man who has just been rescued and placed under a blanket on the rescue boat. It is part of a scene in which several such figures are filmed in a similar way. The camera usually remains fixed on each person, giving the initial impression of a neutral observer registering the responses of imperilled refugees on film.<sup>98</sup> This seems to confirm the synopsis’s description of the film as enacting a ‘commentary-free’ ‘observation’ of refugees with no identity other than as imperilled victims. In the first image, the refugee is looking into the camera, his facial expression is one of suffering. Again, this would appear to confirm the synopsis’ representation of these characters as victims that are seen from a European perspective – passive objects of a one-way, humanist look. Initially, it appears that potential for the Gaze to appear is undermined by the specific content of the shot, which seems to elide its own perspective, providing a clear image of the refugee as suffering other.

This changes when the boat rocks momentarily, revealing the screen between the camera and the figure (fig. 23). The outline of the window between them functions as a frame, revealing the artificiality of the film’s perspective. This meta-cinematic aspect highlights that the refugee (and his suffering) is being screened for our look. As discussed in relation to *Facing Window*, the presence of a window/screen can, in this way, be interpreted as making manifest the projection of the viewer’s desires onto the image in front of them. If Giovanna projected

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98 Note that this is an *impression* of neutrality – itself is an artistic and cinematic choice. I engage with this in the following chapter on realism and orientalism.

her desire to find subjective fulfilment onto the screen between her and Lorenzo, we might interpret this window as registering the projection of the (implied) viewer's desire for some kind of fulfilment onto the screen between them and the refugee character. Instead of a neutral observation, we are presented with a partial, situated view that is permeated by desire. In the context of brutal humanism, this would be the desire for a coherent, European or Euro-American identity which affords the subject 'moral agency' and 'authority' over both the world and, in particular, the other (Schoonover, 2012, 151; 10-11). Moreover, this mediation appears predicated on a relation of distance and relative safety, registered by the screen's function as border between the camera/viewer and the refugee. The window manifests the 'surrogate proximities' structuring brutal compassion - a relation of imaginary closeness predicated nonetheless on distance (Schoonover, 2012, 34). The viewer projects their desires from a distance, from the relative safety across the border of the screen. For a moment, the film appears to demonstrate its - and the viewer's - own implication in the border politics of the official rescuers that I discussed earlier. Through the use of the meta-cinematic presentation of a screen, *Fire at Sea* suggests that this separation is implied in the relationship of sufferer-witness, problematising its own politics of representation.

Fig. 24 is part of a scene that makes these relations more explicit. In this shot, a recently rescued refugee is being photographed next to a number. The number is the only signifier of his individual identity in the frame. This once again foregrounds the dehumanising procedures at work in the way refugees are treated, and represented, by officials. The depiction of photography adds a meta-cinematic dimension, which continues to signal *Fire at Sea's* (and, by extension, its audience's) implication in the same procedure of

dehumanisation. This becomes especially apparent since the point of view of the shot is the same as that of the photographer. We, as the audience, are placed in the position of the official photographer, who appears to see the refugee as only a face and a number. There is a palpable tension between the subjectivity of the refugee and the attempt to objectify this subjectivity, signified by the number beside him. This tension takes on a subtle violence as the number repeatedly clashes with the character's face. The tension between the attempt to objectify this figure and his resistant subjectivity - literally, the impermeability of his body - breaks out on screen. This is not a corpse to be pulled out of the water, nor an object to be photographed and numbered, but another subject whose power to look back undermines the processes of objectification implicit in the brutal vision of the camera - both the photographer's and Rosi's.

The manifestations of the Gaze throughout *Fire at Sea* contradict the brutal depiction of refugees that the synopsis provides. This further highlights the procedures of suture and displacement at work in the Berlinale text. The synopsis appears to construct a coherent European identity through the objectification of the refugee, and the subtraction of their agency reinforcing a sense of the European witness's sovereignty over the world. As I have explained above, the liberal, and brutal, humanist responses to the 'refugee crisis' involve the objectification of the refugee as an external element onto which the split internal to Europe, and European A festivals, is displaced. In the case of the compassionate, humanist response that the synopsis attributes to *Fire at Sea*, the film and the festival's identity as European requires the figure of the refugee to be constructed as a deindividualised object on whom we can exercise our compassion. In the Berlinale synopsis, the refugee is offered to the gaze of the

islanders, the director and the implied 'foreign spectator'. The paratext aligns the film's perspective with, and ascribes agency to, seemingly European characters, while rendering the refugee characters as passive and to-be-looked at. This produces a relation of power in which the spectator is implicitly positioned as master of the image - both of the scenes witnessed, and the refugees depicted. However, throughout *Fire at Sea*, this relation is challenged in moments when the Gaze is made manifest. Through moments which underline the partiality of the camera's perspective, the film destabilises any notion of a 'neutral' or total view of the 'crisis'. Instead, associating the cinematic apparatus with fantasmatic screens, distancing borders, and objectifying numbers, *Fire at Sea* highlights the contradictions of a 'proxied engagement' that the staging of their suffering entails (Schoonover, 2012, 66). In short, these manifestations of the Gaze contain the potential to challenge Europe's liberal compassionate response to the 'refugee crisis'.

## 6. CONCLUSION

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I have argued that this compassion is founded on viewing images of imperilled 'others' from a privileged 'liberal humanist present' that characterises brutal vision and its uneven relations of power. Given the ideological persistence of brutal vision in European A festivals' representation of both Italian cinema and the other, Dovey's (2015) contention that European A festivals are engaged in a procedure of 'curating Africa' appears to hold true not only for African films and filmmakers, but for festivals' broader politics of representing the colonised other. Both Dovey (2015) and Schoonover (2012) identify the immediate post-war period - the era in which the A circuit had its origins - as the crucial context in which cinematic institutions (from neorealism to film festivals)

mobilised a European, or rather broadly North-western, identity founded on liberal humanism. In both accounts, moreover, the coherence of this identity, and the impression of agency or mastery, depended upon that which I have theorised as a process of suture – the representation of an imperilled other as a means of displacing the tension internal to a ‘European’ symbolic order founded on humanism. The case of *Fire at Sea*’s presentation at the Berlinale suggests that this process may continue in the present day, reaching a point of acuity in the context of the ‘refugee crisis,’ which has renewed the impression of European identity in crisis.

In contrast to the synopsis, *Fire at Sea* contains several features which challenge the notion of a coherent European politics. I argue that the film’s critique of Europe’s response to the ‘refugee crisis’ goes further than the synopsis allows. *Fire at Sea* locates conflict on the island of Lampedusa itself – for example, officials from the EU appear more alien to the islanders than the refugees do. This highlights the ideological process at work in the synopsis as it displaces a crisis of European identity onto the ‘refugee crisis,’ and de-emphasises the film’s critique of EU official discourse. As we have seen, the Berlinale synopsis encourages a focus only on the film’s brutally humanist address – arguably an attempt to mobilise it in line with the institutional values of the Berlinale and the context of the 2016 ‘refugee crisis’. This can be interpreted as constructing a ‘European’ identity founded on brutal compassion, while downplaying the political – as in antagonistic – nature of this construction. While *Fire at Sea* appears to show Europe as a site of struggle, even challenging the ideological implications of a compassionate response to the ‘crisis’, the synopsis presents a more unified image. In eliding the struggle for Europe, the text replicates the fantasy of hegemony by presenting a partial, antagonistic element – e.g.

brutally humanist compassion – as universal. European A festivals, therefore, may not only ideologically delimit the meaning of ‘art’ (as demonstrated in chapters one and three) but also that of ‘politics’ and, in turn, ‘Europe’. The construction of ‘art’ appears to entail a disavowal of the commerciality of European A festivals – their imbrication in the global third sector as a key component of postmodern capitalism. Meanwhile, the construction of ‘politics’ seems to entail a disavowal of the neo-colonialism underpinning European A festivals’ claim to a humanist politics: the ‘obscene virtual supplement’ to their explicit symbolic functioning being their investment in European, or broadly Western, relations of power constituted by the oppression and othering of non-white or non-European subjects (Žižek, 2008, 145). Therefore, the case of *Fire at Sea* highlights a possible connection between the performance of political engagement and European festivals’ representation of the other, both of which reproduce the uneven relations of power that such festivals explicitly claim to intervene in. More specifically, it underlines the way in which European A festivals appear to function according to an unacknowledged, implicit brutal humanism that does not challenge geopolitical regimes of power. This suggests that the European A festivals construct Italian cinema as political, at times even critical, but not in a way that would undermine European hegemony or, perhaps, Western capitalist values. In the next chapter I bring these two aspects of European A festival ideology together, analysing the confluence of orientalism and capitalism through the case of Cannes’ representation of *Gomorra* (Gomorra, Garrone, 2008).

## VI

# Capitalism and Orientalism: *Gomorrah* at Cannes

Power, money and blood: these are the 'values' that the residents of the Province of Naples and Caserta, have to face every day. They hardly ever have a choice, and are almost always forced to obey the rules of the 'system', the Camorra. Only a lucky few can even think of leading a 'normal' life.

Five stories are woven together in this violent scenario, set in a cruel and apparently imaginary world, but one which is deeply rooted in reality.

- *Synopsis of Gomorrah in the Cannes 2008 print and online programme*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

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In this thesis I have analysed the ideological effects of European A festivals' position within, dependence upon, and reproduction of global capitalism. I have considered the way in which the figure of the auteur, as a *sinthome* of 'universal' cinematic art, both conceals and reveals the contradictions of art cinema as a commodity and European A festivals as commercially-constrained institutions. Building on this, I have analysed the gendered dimension of this figure to show that the festivals' ideological dependence on the auteur entails the reproduction of masculine dominance or patriarchy. I have also considered the way in which European A festivals' claim to represent the other functions to differentiate them and the films they award from their constitutive outside, Hollywood,

while nonetheless reproducing the coordinates of subject-other that makes the totality of representation that festivals lay claim to structurally impossible. From this perspective, I have argued that the specific way in which European A festivals represent the other is, when shown as a subject of humanitarian aid, characterised by a 'brutal humanism' that is 'more reconciled with than resistant to the geopolitical affinities of large-scale capitalism and its multiple battle zones' (Schoonover, 2012, xix). In each case, the ideological operation and its effects appear to have a basis in European A festivals' commercial aspect - their need to perform within and ultimately maintain the power structures of a dominant, globalised, capitalist economic system. Moreover, the effects of this ideological structure - an othering of the queer, the feminine, the non-European - highlight some of the inadmissible or excessive consequences of this economic system, festivals' adherence to it, and the ideological operations required for its upkeep. Such consequences are not solely inadmissible from, say, my perspective as a critic, but appear to be inadmissible to European A festivals themselves. Indeed, the last two chapters have demonstrated some of the contortions that these festivals perform in order to both maintain and disavow these excesses: sublimating the masculine auteur as a universal figure of 'art' rather than a gendered signifier of patriarchal oppression; or framing the other as a beneficiary of humanitarian aid while disavowing their collusion in the structures that created (for example) refugees' need for aid. In this chapter I approach the question of European A festivals' relationship to capitalism and its excesses directly. I aim to show one of the ways in which European A festivals might disavow this excess precisely as a necessary consequence of the global dominance of capitalism and the uneven power relations that it entails. Not only do

European A festivals appear to disavow their reproduction of oppressive power structures through their claims to artistic universality and humanitarian politics, but also through a displacement of the excesses of global capitalism onto the other constructed by that system - in this case, the global South.

One method of tracing this structure is to analyse the way in which European A festivals construct space - for example, the way they represent certain territories within a global capitalist system. First, I consider the place of European A festivals in a global capitalist economy and their contradictory delimitation of territories as a means of securing transnational flows of products and capital. I will develop a wide range of scholarship on film festivals to consider: [1] European A festivals' status as transnational spaces; [2] their continuing and contradictory reproduction of symbolic borders between, if not nations, then large areas of the globe such as the North and South; and [3] their attendant reproduction of uneven relations of power. I use the term 'territory' to designate these large, delimited areas of the globe, profiting from the fluidity of the term as well as its connotations of sovereignty and power (to be territorial is to defend one's territory). I theorise European A festivals' construction of territories through Said's (2003 [1978]) theory of orientalism, which I put into dialogue with Iain Chambers' (2015) discussion of orientalism as a constitutive part of Northern, capitalist hegemony. I follow both Chambers and Said in their use of the Gramscian term 'hegemony' to designate the intersection between material and symbolic or ideological dominance. Furthermore, on the basis of Chambers' argument, I use the terms 'South' or 'global South' over Said's 'Orient' as this seems to more accurately reflect the contemporary geopolitical situation, including the well-established 'orientalisation' of Southern Italy - a pertinent

consideration for this chapter.<sup>99</sup> Using Žižek's (1993, 208) theory of capitalism as an economic system marked by an 'inherent structural imbalance' and 'permanent production of an excess' which is ideologically displaced onto the figure of the other, I characterise orientalism as an ideological process of displacement of the system's constitutive excess onto an other as a means of securing Northern, capitalist hegemony. This leads me to categorise European A festivals' differentiation between North and South as orientalist, as effecting a displacement of global capitalism's antagonisms onto the South as other. Finally, after demonstrating that film festival studies generally tends towards analyses of festivals' construction of territories as sites of a film's production, I underline the need for a complementary analysis of their construction of the territories in which films are set, most readily present in their representations of films via the programme synopsis. As a means of addressing this, I focus on the latter.

Beyond suggesting how an orientalist displacement of capitalism's excesses on to the South appears to be reproduced by the European A festival apparatus, I investigate the orientalist dimension of such festivals' ideology through the case of *Gomorra's* (*Gomorra*, Garrone, 2008) presentation at Cannes, where it won the Grand Prix in 2008. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, Best Picture prizes and second prizes such as the Silver Lion, Silver Bear and Grand Prix all significantly increase the number of countries that a film is distributed in (Mezias et al., 2011, 179). However, as also discussed, it is not possible to study Italian festival cinema with the necessary depth of engagement and include every film which won first and second prizes. I have chosen *Gomorra*

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99 See Chambers (2008; 2015); Schneider (1998); and Verdicchio (1997), discussed below. The state of the field regarding orientalism and southern Italy is usefully summarised in Ponzanesi (2016b).

above some of the other prize winners for several reasons.<sup>100</sup> First, it is, alongside *The Great Beauty*, an Italian film that has had exceptional critical and financial success in the new millennium, becoming a *cause célèbre* of Italian cinema. This can be observed through the film's box office takings and the number of countries it was distributed in: overall it has made \$33,282,383 worldwide, and achieved theatrical distribution in 33 countries (Box Office Mojo, 2018a). The film's box office takings are even greater than those of *The Great Beauty* (\$24.6m worldwide between 2013 and 2014) (Box Office Mojo, 2018b). Indeed, having secured international attention for Garrone and consecrated him as an auteur, *Gomorra*'s Grand Prix has contributed to an institutional and auteurist construction of Italian cinema through three figures: Moretti, Sorrentino, and Garrone. Since 2008, the discourse of a 'rebirth' promoted by critics, scholars and festivals has been focused on Garrone and Sorrentino, and, at times, Moretti (Zagarrio, 2016, 7).<sup>101</sup> Cannes in particular has contributed strongly to this, for example by selecting films directed by the three directors for its main competition in 2015 – an unusually strong presence of Italian cinema at the festival.<sup>102</sup> Aside from the significance, in itself, of films directed by all three being included in the same Cannes programme, the way in which the auteurs' inclusion was framed by key cinema and festival publications also points towards their centrality in constructions of Italian film. CineEuropa photographed Sorrentino, Garrone and Moretti and reported that they were 'in it together for Italian film' (De Marco, 2015). The piece

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100 For a discussion of the other case studies, see Conclusion.

101 Moretti's influence remains present, but increasingly seems to be outdated in comparison with this 'new generation' of directors, epitomised by the younger two (Zagarrio, 2016, 7).

102 We might note that level of participation by Italian films was also reproduced in 2018, now with two female directors: Garrone's *Dogman* and Alice Rohrwacher's *Happy as Lazzaro* were both screened in competition and won awards, while Valeria Golino's *Euphoria* was screened as part of the Un Certain Regard programme.

promoted the trio as emblematic of the Italian film industry, as embodying Italian cinema (see chapters one and three). Indeed, from his breakthrough with *Gomorrah* to the time of writing, as well as winning a further two Grand Prixes – one for *Reality* (2012) and another for his latest film, *Dogman* (2018) – Garrone has become a crucial figure in the international construction of Italian cinema. Since this thesis is concerned with the films that best exemplify European A festivals' construction of Italian cinema, this *cause célèbre* is a crucial case study.

Moreover, this case study exemplifies the intersection between global capitalism and the North's construction of the other. I demonstrate the pertinence of *Gomorrah* to the issues at hand through a review of scholarship on the film and, fortuitously, of some of the other paratexts that accompanied its presentation at Cannes. I show that an idea of *Gomorrah* as a realist depiction of a violent, distant locality of southern Italy permeates both kinds of textual construction of the film, indicating the prevalence of an orientalist 'radical realism' that structures representations of othered cultures – representations that 'can create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe' (Said, 2003 [1978], 72). Then, through an analysis of Cannes' synopsis of *Gomorrah*, and of the film's representation of organised crime as the constitutive underside of global capitalism, I aim to highlight the uneven flow of products and power that maintains the economic system in which European A festivals are embedded. The Cannes synopsis instantiates the delineation of a North/South divide, in which the South is cast as the North's excessive other. The text casts Naples and Caserta as distant, violent, and inhabited by a strange, deindividuated mass. Through the theoretical framework of orientalism, I argue that this, too, participates in a displacement of the excessive

aspects of a Northern, hegemonic capitalism onto the image of the South. I demonstrate and critique the ideological process at work in the synopsis through an analysis of *Gomorra* itself, focusing on the scenes and narratives that are not only omitted by the Cannes text, but directly contradict its depiction of the film as being set in a distant territory characterised by otherness and excess. Interpreting two key narratives in the film - the eco-mafia and fashion narratives - I argue that *Gomorra* can be read as making manifest the North's exportation and displacement of its most inadmissible aspects onto an exploited, orientalist South. The eco-mafia narrative shows this on a material level - through the poisoning of Southern Italy via the North's exportation of its material excess, toxic waste, there. Meanwhile, the fashion narrative shows both the material and mediated levels by depicting the criminal and impoverished underside at once hidden beneath and deeply implicated within the construction of Italy's image abroad, not only in fashion but film. I posit that this latter narrative, in its metacinematic dimension (it shows real footage from the Venice film festival on a television screen within the film), implicates itself, the viewer, and the European A festival apparatus in this process of displacing and disavowing the othering of the South - a process that underpins the uneven circulation of products and power in the global capitalist system.

## **2. EUROPEAN A FESTIVALS' ORIENTALIST TRANSNATIONALISM**

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### **2.A EUROPEAN A FESTIVALS: TRANSNATIONAL OR TERRITORIAL?**

European A festivals' transnationality paradoxically requires an ideological investment in notions of national or territorial difference. These festivals can be thought to construct a world

- and one that largely reproduces existing power relations. This involves not only the performance of European hegemony, but the representation of certain areas as being 'outside' that hegemony, often through the characterisation of them as homogenous, distant or inferior - as other. The world which European A festivals construct aligns with the interests of a global capitalism that requires the unfettered transnational flow of goods and services, and non-(re)distribution of power.<sup>103</sup> Several studies of film festivals demonstrate or, at least suggest, a contradiction between these institutions' relationship to the transnational and territorial. On the one hand, film festivals are the 'driving force of the global circulation of cinema' and 'international flow of culture and capital' (Iordanova and Rhyne, 2009, 1; Andrews, 2010, 10). They are 'transnational spaces,' or 'post-national,' and even embedded in a global economic system which emphasises 'deterritorialisation' (Mazdon, 2006, 23; De Valck, 2007, 69). On the other hand, their promotion of the transnational and facilitation of global trade depends on, to an extent, their differentiation of films and cultures along national and territorial lines. This entails a symbolic reconstruction of those very borders that would limit the transnational flow of goods. De Valck (2007, 68) argues that major film festivals (including, but not only, European A festivals) are embedded within a global system invested in the reproduction of difference - that which she designates the 'postmodern' capitalist system. She

<sup>103</sup> I analyse this with a focus on orientalism as a constituent feature of global capitalism across several eras, but noting its exacerbation, perhaps, in the postmodern phase (see footnote below). One might also focus on the intersection between capitalist 'liquid modernity' - defined by Zygmunt Bauman (2000) in terms of the flow of certain things (e.g. commodities, the 'cosmopolitan elite') and fixity of others (i.e. the expectation that the oppressed majority remain settled in one place) - and postcoloniality (see Jabri (2013)). I favour orientalism here owing to its applicability both across eras (allowing it to be deployed in studies of film festivals and ideology in various periods) and its demonstrated usefulness in relation to the construction of the Italian South as well as other areas more commonly studied as part of the global North/South divide.

describes the 'new power relations on the international film festival circuit' through Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's (2000) theory of 'Empire' in postmodernity (defined as the 1980s and '90s, although De Valck implies that it extends to the present):

the ideology of the world market comes into full bloom when matched with postmodern and post-colonial convictions, because postmodernity's pet subjects such as circulation, mobility, diversity, and mixture are profitable to global trade. The world market embraces the deconstruction of nation-states and promotes open global markets and product differentiation. The differences between people, in their turn, are seen as market opportunities (De Valck, 2007, 69-70).

In the postmodern period film festivals are embedded in the 'ideology of the world market' which requires them to sell difference, in turn reproducing neo-colonial power relations. De Valck thus argues that, despite major festivals' claims to post-nationalism, the national reappears on the festival agenda in a way that reproduces the uneven development and power relations that characterise the film industry in the current global economic system. Indeed, although since the 1970s festivals appeared to promote a focus on artistic merit above all, this was accompanied by 'a passionate interest in unfamiliar cinematic cultures, especially the ones sprouting from the revolutions in Third World countries' (De Valck, 2007, 70). A post-national focus on artistry characterised festivals' construction of films produced in the so-called First World, while notions of unfamiliarity and upheaval (e.g. revolution) characterised their construction of films from the so-called Third World.<sup>104</sup> Significantly, De Valck's (2007, 71) summary of this predicament implies its relationship to the competitive and commercial nature of major film festivals:

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<sup>104</sup> This, too, reproduces the interplay between 'art' and 'politics' - the ideological universals that appear to condition European A festivals' awarding and representation of Italian cinema in the years 2000-2017.

On the one hand, the interest in Third World cinema genuinely coincided with the concern for socio-political power struggles in the countries where the films were produced, but, on the other hand, films could be (and were) claimed as 'discoveries' and 'national cinemas' by the festival programmers (competing with other festivals on the circuit).

The reproduction of tropes of otherness and difference are an effect of film festivals' need to compete with each other. By framing certain films as 'discoveries' and 'national cinemas', these legitimate their status as gateways to unique cinematic experiences and gatekeepers of film. This echoes Elsaesser's (2005, 100) analysis of the circulation of symbolic and economic capital generated by European festivals' consecration of auteurs and new waves which, in turn, consecrates the festivals' function as both sites of discovery and authority - the 'self-affirmation' of their 'claim to embody an essential, but annually renewable mystery.' In a global postmodern capitalist system, European A festivals' competitiveness is secured by their claim to discover new cinemas which are, due to the realities of uneven economic development, most often from 'Third World' territories.

De Valck's assessment implies that festivals' means of securing economic and symbolic capital through a process which differentiates cinemas on the basis of where they were produced may also entail the reproduction of colonial power structures. Likewise, writing on the spatial and power dynamics of film festivals, Stringer (2001, 137) argues that festivals' construction of space across the network is 'a metaphor for the geographically uneven development that characterises the world of international film culture.' This entails the reproduction of the 'core' via larger, more successful festivals (for example, the concentration of A festivals in Europe) and the 'periphery' to which smaller

festivals are relegated (social interest festivals, major un-accredited festivals outside Europe) (Stringer, 2001, 138).<sup>105</sup> Moreover, this results in an uneven distribution of power over which films, from which territories, receive legitimation: Stringer (2001, 135) identifies the assumption across institutional representations of film that 'non-Western cinemas do not count historically until they have been recognized by the apex of international media power, the center of which is located, by implication, at Western film festivals.' Such an analysis epitomises the relationship between the spatial politics and economic system in which European A festivals reproduce. Uneven development, the economic impoverishment of some territories and not others, is reflected through cultural unevenness, for example the ghettoisation of films from some territories and legitimation of those from others.

While De Valck (2007, 71) argues that film festivals tend to construct cinemas from the so-called 'Third World' through the frameworks of national cinema and discovery, other scholars have highlighted the way in which the national tends to be mobilised as a means of differentiating and marketing cinemas from across the world. While neither position is wrong per se, a further level of nuance is required to resolve the seeming contradiction between the two. While the differentiation of films on the basis of their main country of production may still occur in film festivals' representations of all sorts of films, the power relations implied vary depending on how that site of production is framed. Here we might productively consider the distinction between production fetishism - defining a product through its relation to its perceived site of production - and cultural essentialism - defining a location or territory in a way that

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<sup>105</sup> One might also theorise the peripheral status of 'women's festivals' in this way - see chapter three.

ascribes it an intrinsic truth or homogenous meaning.<sup>106</sup> When the two intersect, a product is defined in relation to an essentialised culture, as an artefact representing the 'truth' of that culture. While cultural essentialism and production fetishism are not mutually exclusive, identifying when and how each is deployed assists an understanding of the power dynamics involved in European A festivals' construction of certain territories.

This distinction is most apparent in the way that A festivals construct geopolitically-inflected borders through their programming – the most obvious case of their symbolic reconstruction of space within the event. Using the examples of the Toronto International Film Festival's 'Planet Africa' or 'Discover Canada' sections, Liz Czach (2004, 83) argues that the differentiation between films shown in these territorially-defined fringes and those that enter the main competition constructs a 'hierarchy,' with fringe sections being 'perceived as ghettos for underperforming work.' However, in taking both 'Planet Africa' and 'Discover Canada' as examples of the same kind of differentiation or ghettoisation of filmmaking from countries not yet perceived as canonical in world cinema, she misses a crucial distinction between the two sections. Toronto's 'Discover Canada' fringe affords Canada national specificity and can best be understood as a typical example of a festival promoting the cinema of the country in which it takes place. On the European A circuit, for example, the Berlinale has its 'Perspektive Deutsches Kino' section, Karlovy Vary, its 'Czech Films' section, and so on. This is part of a process of production fetishism in which a festival differentiates and therefore markets itself and its host country's films on the

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106 For an extended discussion of production fetishism and its role in obscuring the contradictions of global capitalism see Appadurai (1990). I take cultural essentialism in its basic sense for now, but develop it later through the theory of orientalism.

basis of their association with a particular national culture. This contrasts with the homogenisation of Africa implied by Toronto's 'Planet Africa' section. This section groups together filmmaking from an entire continent, and one other than the continent on which the film festival takes place. This should be read as an example of coincidence of production fetishism and cultural essentialism, of the differentiation, homogenisation and, potentially, neo-colonial fetishisation of that territory. While various European A festivals feature similar events, marketed in similar ways, for the sake of brevity, I will highlight one example: Karlovy Vary's (2019) 'East of the West,' which groups together films from 'Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans, Greece, the countries of the former Soviet Union and the Middle East'. These areas of the world are differentiated and defined by their status as 'Eastern', positioning West as centre and East as homogenous other. The contrast between A festivals' sections indicates one way in which they might construct filmmaking from outside the United States, Canada and Western Europe (i.e. the global North) solely on the basis of its difference from the hegemonic centre. In such cases the film product is fetishised as being not from a nation but a uniform, distant territory. This appears symptomatic of the intersection between cultural essentialism and production fetishism in the case of cinemas associated with territories outside of the global North. Film festival programming overall appears to reproduce the spatial dynamics that characterise global uneven development and geopolitical regimes of power which afford the global North the status of subject and the South that of 'other' (thus extending the dynamic I discuss in the previous chapter).

Moving the discussion towards how films and filmmakers are represented within the main competition, Elsaesser (2016, 27) has considered the way in which films and auteurs from all

territories are caught up in the process of ‘performing nationalism’ required by the film festival apparatus. Appearing to apply a post-colonial framework to the construction of films from both colonial and colonising countries, he highlights the centrality of this power dynamic at work in film festivals’ apparent internationalism: ‘this openness can be a trap: it is an open invitation to self-conscious ethnicity and re-tribalization, it quickly shows its affinity or even collusion [...] with a post-colonial [or neo-colonial] and subaltern sign-economy’ (2016, 25). This produces ‘a tendency of films within the festival circuit - whether from Asia, Africa, or Europe - to respond and to comply, by gestures that amount to a kind of “self-exoticizing” or “auto-orientalism”’ (Elsaesser, 2016, 26). Here, Elsaesser identifies a power dynamic similar to the one I have discussed above. Moreover, this leads to a performance of identity that leads to ‘self-exoticizing’ or ‘auto-orientalism’. Elsaesser applies this dynamic to European cinema, including Italian cinema. *Gomorra*, for example, ‘performatively enacts’ a ‘national cinematic lineage’ of ‘neorealism, spaghetti Western, and Pasolini’ (Elsaesser, 2016, 27). Again, while Elsaesser’s assessment is not incorrect, it misses the distinction between the performance of nationalism that assists the production fetishism required to market films from any part of the world and the auto-orientalism that assists the cultural essentialisation of films and territories in the global South. There is an important qualitative difference here: performing a national heritage, if that heritage is not discursively defined as ‘oriental’ or other, is distinct from orientalism. Therefore, one must analyse the way in which films associated with the global North are represented in an aspect that may be nationalist but still maintains their place within the dominant centre, while those associated with the global South are positioned as outside this centre, as other in some way.

Building on Elsaesser's assessment, I would like to pose these counter-questions: [1] beyond a cinematic lineage, what other kinds of territorial or national identity are films required to perform? [2] in particular, how does this relate not only to where a film is made, but where it is set? and finally [3] how and when does this take on a specifically orientalist character – in relation to which spaces? I would like to begin answering these questions by picking up Elsaesser's reference to orientalism, and showing its relevance as a framework for understanding both the ways in which cinematic institutions such as European A festivals construct the global South, and the way in which this is, in fact, a procedure intimately bound up with such festivals' dependence on and maintenance of global capitalism. I argue that not only does the festivals' embeddedness in a postmodern capitalist system require their marketing of difference, but it also necessitates that this difference take on an orientalist dimension in representations of the global South. In the latter case, this is because the global capitalist system in which festivals are embedded also depends upon the construction of a subordinate other which it can exploit economically and onto which it can displace its internal antagonisms.

## **2.B ORIENTALISM AND CAPITALISM**

Halle (2010) approaches the questions I have asked above using the lens of orientalism to analyse film catalogues' representations of transnational co-productions. The crucial feature of orientalism, he argues, is 'an elaborate set of textual references [that] had developed in Europe by which that which was fundamentally proximate is kept distant' (Halle, 2010, 314). This arises 'through the intervention and mediation of a set of cultural texts that speak the truth of the other on behalf of that other' (Halle, 2010, 314). Halle demonstrates the

prevalence of these tropes of distance and of cultural texts that speak the truth for the other in a way that intervenes in the intersection between production fetishism and cultural essentialism. Using the case study of the German Federal Agency for Civic Education's educational pamphlets about films, he argues that co-productions funded through the EUROMED programme (an EU programme which offers financial support for co-productions involving countries along 'Mediterranean trade routes') are institutionally framed in a way that essentialises both their supposed country of origin and their setting (Halle, 2010, 305). First, the pamphlets present these films as national productions, focusing on the non-European production partner. Developing Halle's claim, we can note that this is a particular case of production fetishism that lays the foundation for cultural essentialism: the catalogues present these films as originating solely in a conceptually distant and other culture. The texts also describe the films as 'revealing a truth' about the culture they depict, a tendency unseen in respective representations of films wholly produced by and set in European countries (Halle, 2010, 316). This, Halle argues, reproduces a cultural essentialisation of the global South in which films made and set there are constructed as intrinsically culturally distant from Europe. In short,

something happens in films and in the institutions of promotion and criticism to establish a (cultural) distance between the viewer and viewed, to establish a differential on one side of which the story is about another culture through which I learn (Halle, 2010, 315).

Central to this is the idea that such films can 'offer insight into a type of person, if not an entire people', which, in turn, implies that these people have an essential quality which can be represented, pinned down for the European viewer to learn about (Halle, 2010, 304). Production fetishism is

complemented by cultural essentialism in which a film is framed as being both from and about a non-European culture in such a way that distances and essentialises this culture.

To specify further how the global South might be represented, and which interests this might serve, I turn to the source underpinning Halle's analysis: Said's (2003 [1978]) *Orientalism*. For the purposes of this chapter, the most useful definition of orientalism that Said (2003 [1978], 3) offers is his third 'more historically and materially defined' one, as it concerns the institutional construction of the 'Orient' (taken as fluid, its borders changing over history) as a means of consolidating European, capitalist hegemony since the Enlightenment. Orientalism is, in this sense:

the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient - dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (Said, 2003 [1978], 3).

Said's definition here aims at orientalism in its corporate, institutional manifestation in which certain authorised ways of representing the 'Orient' (or global South) assist in its domination. This domination is economic, but also reproduced 'politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively' - meaning that it pertains also to texts such as European A festivals' representations of the territory in their ideological and imaginative aspects (Said, 2003 [1978], 3). In relation to European A festival apparatus that I have outlined above, this form of orientalism is best understood, therefore, as being at the intersection of economic, political and ideological-cultural reproduction of the North's hegemony.

Indeed, in its corporate-institutional aspect, orientalism is tightly bound up with capitalist expansion. Orientalism in this

sense originated and continues to be mobilised as a means of reinforcing a particular definition of ‘civilisation’ which would later benefit Northern Atlantic states’ pursuit of capitalist economic development (from industrial to post-industrial), colonial expansion (including neo-colonialist interventions in the Middle East) and a liberal democracy suited to supporting these values.<sup>107</sup> Building on Said’s work, Chambers (2015, 20) has noted the way in which the differentiation of the global South is crucial for the maintenance of a capitalist hegemony that originated in and still favours European and American territories. The South is a constitutive aspect of the economic policies and discourses of the modern, metropolitan North. Viewed from metropolitan centres such as Los Angeles, Berlin or Paris (and perhaps Cannes), the South is symbolically framed as ‘inadequate’; it is ‘rendered subordinate and subaltern to other forces, and [...] exploited, not only economically, but also politically and culturally, in order for that subalternity to be reproduced and reinforced’ (Chambers, 2015, 13). In fact, the North’s hegemony depends upon its construction of a subaltern other:

the South, of Italy, of Europe, of the Mediterranean, of the world, is rendered both marginal but paradoxically central to the reproduction of that [northern, capitalist] economy. If the whole world were equally modern, then modernity as we know it would collapse (Chambers, 2015, 13).

Global capitalism depends upon ‘subordinate’ places for its economic sustenance (for example, cheap labour) as well as its symbolic authority (exemplified by the relation of power implied in terms such as ‘subordinate’ and ‘inadequate’). Taking Chambers’ analysis together with the scholarship on film festivals reviewed above, we can hypothesise that the

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<sup>107</sup> This is also a latent argument in *Orientalism*, which Said develops later in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993).

global South continues to fulfil the role of constitutive other not only in literary and academic texts, but also in those produced by European A film festivals.

As we saw from Chambers' (2015) description of the metropolitan North's construction of the South, orientalism is central to an economic and ideological order which relies upon the construction of subordinate places - on the reproduction of inequality. To delve more deeply into the ideological aspect of this, I return to Said's (2003 [1978], 8) original theory:

the imaginative examination of things Oriental was based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality the Oriental world emerged [...] according to a detailed logic governed not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of *desires, repressions, investments and projections*. (Italics added).

Such 'projections' and 'repressions' can be best understood in relation to psychoanalytical theory, since this is where the terms originated. Here, I move towards proposing a theorisation of orientalism in relation to the ideological displacement of social antagonism onto the other. Crucially, the character of the South emanates from its designation as Europe's other. It is represented as Europe's 'contrasting image, idea, personality, experience' and, more pointedly, its 'surrogate or underground self' (Said, 2003 [1978], 3). This culminates in a catalogue of stereotypes, according to which 'European superiority' - as rational, modern and humanist - depends upon its construction of ideas of 'Oriental backwardness' - as irrational, uncivilised and autocratic (Said, 2003 [1978], 7; Macfie, 2000, 8). Since the foundation of Said's theory is the claim that the tropes through which orientalist discourses characterise the South are generated in the North, these stereotypes can generally be understood as the

excessive, obscene underside of the colonisers' community, each being the binary opposite, the 'underground' version, of Europe's self-image (Said, 2003 [1978], 3). These discourses involve the displacement of the North's negative, inadmissible aspects onto an other. Developing the implicit psychoanalytical reasoning in Said's theory (which, perhaps contradictorily, functions alongside its Foucauldian foundations), Homi K Bhabha (1983, 31) summarises the way this works concisely: the colonised figure is an 'alienating other, (or mirror) which crucially returns its image to the subject'. Understanding orientalism through the framework of psychoanalysis, therefore, we can describe it as the process by which the hegemonic system constructs its own positive image by displacing its excessive aspects onto an other.

We can elucidate this process's ideological character and its function within global capitalism further using Žižek's theory of capitalism as excess, and fantasy as a means of managing this excess (a sort of waste management, as we will see later). Žižek argues that capitalism is defined by 'inherent structural imbalance' - the 'permanent production of an excess' (Žižek, 1993, 208). This excess is, however, not only economic (as in the classical Marxist notion of surplus value) but also symbolic (as in the Lacanian notion of the Real - the unrepresentable 'excess' of the symbolic order). The only way to manage such imbalance, to give the impression of capitalism as a coherent, viable economic system, is to displace it onto an 'alienating other' (Bhabha, 1983, 31). This is observable in that which Žižek designates the 'fascist dream [...] to have capitalism without its "excess", without its structural imbalance' (Žižek, 1993, 210). This 'fascist dream' requires the figure of an 'alien intruder' who is constructed as the 'cause [of] the antagonistic imbalance' (Žižek, 1993, 210). This results in a typical procedure of othering, with its corollary stereotypes of dirt,

irrationality and greed (Žižek, 1993, 210). As such, this ideological process appears to be operative beyond fascist ideology per se, understandable in relation to orientalism – as we have seen above, orientalism requires the figure of a Southern other who embodies the excessive aspects of the system of Northern hegemonic capitalism. Indeed, Žižek (1993, 206) uses Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage in a similar way to Bhabha (1983), concluding that ‘the fascinating image of the Other gives a body to our own innermost split [...] The hatred of the Other is the hatred of our own excess of enjoyment’. Through this displacement, the Southern other becomes representative of the ‘excessive’ aspects of capitalism – violence, corruption, poverty and filth. In short, the ideological construction of capitalism as a viable economic system depends on the displacement of its antagonism onto an other, who embodies the inadmissible underside of this system. As I have argued throughout this thesis, a Lacanian framework allows us to understand the other as a destabilising, rather than securing, figure. Their image can be mobilised to critique the social order, revealing the excess and antagonism internal to it. Beyond the structural level – the social order’s inherent split – a psychoanalytical reading of orientalism allows us to consider the way in which the particular characteristics of the other make manifest the inadmissible characteristics of the social order – global capitalism, as well as European A festival ideology (itself embedded within global capitalism). The violence and corruption associated with the global South can be interpreted as the global North’s own, displaced violence and corruption. To interrogate the excessive other in this way (as I will argue *Gomorrah* does), opens the possibility for a radical critique of the hegemonic social order from which this excess originates.

Overall, European A festivals appear to invest in a territorial distinction between a hegemonic North and an othered South that can be understood as orientalism in its corporate-institutional form. I have shown this, in part, through a discussion of film festivals' construction of space in a way that produces the global South as a homogenous and culturally distant territory, defined in opposition to the North. Film festivals' perceived status as 'the driving force of the global circulation of cinema' and their ability to 'facilitate international flows of culture and capital' via the main competition may depend on their categorisation of cinema in terms of territories, with part of their prestige coming from their claim to offer 'encounters with unfamiliar cultures' (De Valck, 2007, 71). Therefore, European A festivals appear to invest in an ideological differentiation between the global South and the global North, with the former being ascribed particularity and the latter universality - and this is crucial to the festivals' status as institutions which facilitate (and depend on) the circulation of financial and symbolic capital. However, there is still much work to be done to examine the extent to which European A festivals' construction of the South may also translate into a representation of this territory as not only distant, but other in the sense of corrupted, excessive - a figure representing, in short, the inadmissible 'underground' aspects of the North (Said, 2003 [1978], 3). Moreover, there has not yet, to my knowledge, been a study of the way in which these festivals represent culture and territory *within* their descriptions of certain films. Film festivals' depiction of films as being about, and perhaps set solely within, a certain territory is an important aspect of their overall construction of that territory that goes beyond their promotion of certain 'new' cinemas (or new waves) via, for example, fringe sections or competition selections and awards. The remainder of this

chapter will therefore focus on the way in which European A festivals construct not only the countries or territories a film is framed as being *produced* in, but *set* in. To provide a foundation for the analysis of European A festivals' orientalist representation of the South not only as an effect of, but also as a means of reinforcing, a system of global capitalism that favours the North while exploiting the South, I turn now to the case study of *Gomorra*'s presentation at Cannes.

### **3. GOMORRAH: AN ORIENTALIST REALISM?**

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The categorisation of South as other also recurs in both scholarly and various paratextual interpretations of the film. These use notions of realism to imply that *Gomorra* represents the 'truth' of Naples as a violent, Southern - orientalist - place. Indeed, *Gomorra*'s setting in southern Italy appears to have been the basis for the reproduction of orientalist representations of the film by critics, scholars and, as we will see later, Cannes. I ground this interpretation of institutional representations of *Gomorra* and its setting in theories of Southern Italy's 'post-colonial condition,' often interpreted through theories of orientalism. This tradition of thought begins with Antonio Gramsci's (1994 [1926]) analysis of the 'Southern Question' and has since been developed by scholars such as Paolo Verdicchio (1997), who raises the question of internal colonisation in Italy, and Jane Schneider, whose introduction to (and indeed editing of) a collection of essays entitled *Italy's 'Southern Question': Orientalism in One Country* moves from a framework of internal colonisation to internal orientalisation. Schneider (1998, 1) observes that the 'Southern question' evokes an opposition between provinces South of Rome and those in the North (Italian and European). Moreover, it generates a 'tenacious catalogue of stereotypes'

which casts southerners as 'unable to build the rational, orderly, civic cultures that, in the North, underwrote the emergence of industrial capitalist society' (Schneider, 1998, 1). Regions south of Rome are continuously opposed to an image of the North as rational, democratic, prosperous and orderly through tropes of southerners as 'passionate, undisciplined, [and] rebellious' (Schneider, 1998, 1). Similarly, the South is cast as a site solely of 'poverty and underdevelopment [...] a clientalistic style of politics [...] patriarchal gender relations and for various manifestations of organised crime' (Schneider, 1998, 1). These stereotypes, too, appear to be imbricated with the material subordination of the Italian South. Scholars have repeatedly shown that the area's continuing 'economic underdevelopment' (for want of a less loaded term) was caused by successive, Northern-based Italian governments' forceful integration of the South into its economy and political structure then treatment of the South as 'a *terra dimissione*' (Tarrow, 1996, 394). This process has resulted in regions such as Sicily occupying a subordinate position in relation not only to Italy, but global capitalism. Being both within and outside this system, the South occupies a liminal space between European modernity and global Southern post-coloniality, and appears most clearly as the site of both Italy's and Europe's projected anxieties - again, its inadmissible underside (O'Healy, 2010, 7). Indeed, building on Chambers' (2008, 32) analysis of the Mediterranean as 'an intricate site of encounters and currents' between North and South, which reveals the former's 'repressed rhythms and reasons', Ponzanesi (2016b, 152) argues that 'the Italian South can be a place from where a critique of Western developmental teleologies can be sustained [...] from within, demonstrating modernity's incompleteness and interruptions.' Viewing Southern Italy through theories of orientalism not only corresponds with its symbolic and material

construction as European capitalist modernity's 'other', but shows its important position as a liminal space from which a critique of this centre can be mounted.

Critical constructions of *Gomorrah* often appear to reproduce orientalism in their characterisation of the film as operating in the realist mode. Such descriptions of the film manifest a latent investment in an orientalist 'radical realism' that affords access to the 'truth' of the South from the vantage point of the relationally superior North (Said, 2003 [1978], 72). Significantly, this permeates reviews of *Gomorrah* in the festival press. The *Screen Daily* review that accompanied the film's presentation at Cannes described it as 'Probably the most authentic and unsentimental mafia movie ever to come out of Italy' (Marshall, 2008). Likewise, the *Variety* review praises the film's blending of fiction with a 'dispassionate docu style' to 'show how the Camorra's vice-like grip on the region infects everyone, creating a permanent miasma of fear that terrorizes some while proving impossibly seductive to others' (Weissberg, 2008). *Gomorrah* may be fictional in some respects, but Weissberg ascribes its style and content a revelatory function. The article implies that the film offers audiences access to the truth about a despotically controlled region whose inhabitants are either subjects of violence or seduction. The focus on the film's Southern Italian setting is accompanied by the same orientalist stereotypes of autocracy (as opposed to humanism and democracy) and irrationality (violent or sexual impulses, as opposed to rationality) discussed above. Already, key articles in the festival press indicate the festival apparatus's potential to construct the film as a realist depiction of a distant, Southern territory defined by its oriental character - a character determined by its opposition to the supposed norms of the democratic, rational North.

Indeed, ideas of *Gomorra*'s objective representation of southern Italy are ubiquitous in discussions of the film, including scholarly ones. Realism and objectivity appear as obligatory points of reference, even when challenged by scholars' more nuanced readings. They might be considered, therefore, in relation to orientalism as a discourse engaged in 'authorizing views', producing norms for 'describing' or 'teaching' about the South (Said, 2003 [1978], 3). In the institutions of film criticism and scholarship, realism and objectivity seem to constitute the authorised views of *Gomorra* as a film about southern Italy. For example, Flavia Cavaliere (2010, 176) argues that:

In contrast to Hollywood's appropriation and glamorization of the gang culture of Italy, '*Gomorra(h)*' stands in the Italian neorealist tradition, preferring actual locations to elaborate film sets and ordinary people to movie stars in order to expose the rest of the world to the actuality of the contemporary violence of the Camorra and the extent to which its tentacles reach.

This assessment reproduces several of the tropes discussed in previous chapters, pertaining to the ideological construction of Italian cinema: opposition to Hollywood, a neorealist, perhaps brutal address, and representation of the other. Such tropes, as with the other case studies I have analysed, may be key to *Gomorra*'s success at Cannes. However, Cavaliere's evaluation of *Gomorra* alerts us to another important value: the representation of othered cultures in relation to a film's claim to realism and ethics. She asserts that *Gomorra*'s

bleak portrayal of what is represented to be present reality can be compared to a film such as Fernando Meirelles's *City of God* (2002), the Brazilian movie which portrayed ferocious teenage drug gangs in one of Rio de Janeiro's slums (Cavaliere, 2010, 176).

This comparison implies a shared project of realistically depicting and critiquing the violence of a place in the global South, and on the peripheries of global capitalism (gang-controlled slums in Brazil or suburbs in Naples). Given the comparable success of *City of God* and *Gomorra*, they might be productively understood in relation to a global ideology of cinema in which films are valued for their depiction of othered places in a realist mode (*City of God* earned \$30,641,770 in box office takings worldwide, a similar figure to *Gomorra* (Box Office Mojo, 2019)). Notably, however, realism appears to be more a claim than inherent aspect of a film. *Gomorra's*, like *City of God's* realism lies in the tautology, 'what is represented to be present reality' (Cavaliere, 2010, 176). Therefore, one ought to be vigilant when this claim is made, and consider which ideology it may serve. Such questions will become crucial to understanding of the orientalist-capitalist ideology condensed in Cannes' representation of *Gomorra* as a realist, critical and territorially-circumscribed film.

The relationship between realism, critique and othered places continues, but is complicated, in Fabrizio Ciliento's (2011) analysis of the film.<sup>108</sup> Ciliento (2011) argues that *Gomorra* can be read within the heritage of Roberto Rossellini's war trilogy, *Rome, Open City, Paisan* (*Paisà*, 1948), and *Germany Year Zero* (*Germania anno zero*, 1949), and Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* (*La battaglia di Algeri*, 1966) - above all through the film's use of techniques such as long takes, natural lighting, use of dialogue in dialect or local languages, and its cast being composed of a mixture of professional and non-professional actors. For Ciliento (2011), the film's engagement with that which he describes as an Italian neorealist heritage is integral for the film's representation of *Le Vele* as 'the

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108 The article referenced here is published solely online, without page numbers. As such, all in-text citations will refer to the text as a whole.

Neapolitan junkspace [...] a symbol of the country's different economic synchronies and of the permanence of the Third World within the First World'. This realist depiction of Naples is crucial to the film's critique, which re-inserts the imagined space of the 'Third World' back into that of the 'First World'. This association of Naples with the 'Third World', and celebration of a realist aesthetic as that which is best suited to represent it, echoes Cavaliere's (2010) comparison of *Gomorra* with *City of God*. Again, the notion of a realist depiction of an othered place (i.e. the 'Third World') contains orientalist overtones, implying as it does an essential reality which *Gomorra* is able to 'realistically' represent. It appears that the celebration of *Gomorra* and its realist style, while taken as a marker of its national heritage, at once obscures and reproduces the power dynamics involved in these notions of the film's representation of Southern Italy.<sup>109</sup>

Cilento (2011) does not restrict the film to an Italian political and/or realist tradition, however, arguing that '*Gomorra* is an ambitious film that overcomes the present impasses of Italian neorealist heritage by blending it with noir moral ambiguity and visual culture'. Cilento (2011) argues that *noir* is crucial to *Gomorra*'s political commentary insofar as it cites *noir* and science fiction films such as *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder, 1944) and *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982), and invokes a similar critique of global capitalism to the aforementioned. This he continues, complements *Gomorra*'s depiction of Nigerian and Chinese Mafia, and the superimposed text that appears at the end of the film (which states that the Camorra has invested in the rebuilding of the Twin Towers site) to facilitate the film's critique of global capitalism. Thus, style and content give *Gomorra* a transnational dimension adapted to depicting the

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109 On the relationship between post-colonial representation and neorealism in particular, see the previous chapter.

‘unlocalizable power’ that characterises relations in and beyond Naples (Ciliento, 2011). It is significant here that Ciliento (2011) associates the film’s Italian and realist dimension with its representation of a locality – Naples as ‘Third World’ – in contrast to its transnational and generic dimension (*noir*, science fiction), here associated with the film’s critique of global power structures. This is not to say that Ciliento creates a stable binary – his article overall can be read as a synthesis which, perhaps like the film, complicates binary notions of local/global or realist/generic. However, the piece also appears to respond to, and thus highlight, a trope we should be aware of when we approach Cannes’ representation of *Gomorrah* – the association of realism with the critical depiction of localised themes, in contrast with that of supposedly more transnational styles (such as science-fiction) with the critical depiction of global themes and ‘unlocalizable power’. Therefore, it appears pertinent to evaluate the extent to which Cannes’ representation of the film foregrounds the film’s local or global location, and the relations of power condensed in such a representation.

We can begin to find a basis for the answer to these questions not only in reviews in the festival press, but other paratexts accompanying its presentation at Cannes. Focusing on interviews and press packs, Holdaway (2014, 202) analyses a ‘retorica di tipo realistico’ (realist rhetoric) that he argues is not only present in the film but, above all, in its paratexts. Echoing the implications of Ciliento’s account, Holdaway (2014, 199) describes *Gomorrah* as a film whose construction by critics and scholars has been immersed in a ‘rinnovata fiducia nei confronti dello stile “realista”, nonostante sembrano allo stesso tempo fortemente caratterizzati da una spiccata creatività e (in alcuni momenti) da un’estetica di tipo surrealista’ (‘new faith in a “realist” style’ despite seeming, at

the same time, strongly characterised by a pronounced creativity and (in certain moments) a surrealist aesthetic'). Thus, 'i giudizi critici tendano a minimizzare o misconoscere il secondo a favore del primo - quello realista, considerato come esempio stilistico per un'estetica impegnata eticamente' ('very often critical judgements on the film tend to minimalise or misrecognise the second in favour of the first - the realist style, considered to be one of the examples of an ethically committed type of aesthetic') (Holdaway, 2014, 199). Again, the film's hybridity is elided in favour of notions of its realism. Holdaway (2014) contextualises this phenomenon in an analysis of the way the film has been presented as realist, objective and ethically engaged by those involved in its production and distribution. Most significant for our purposes is Holdaway's analyses of Roberto Saviano's and Garrone's descriptions of the films in the press pack and at interviews at Cannes. He takes these descriptions as rhetorical - not objective statements of the filmmakers' intentions (Saviano is credited as a scriptwriter for *Gomorra*), but part of a highly mediated strategy. Garrone's and Saviano's representations of the film *perform* realism, are 'symptoms' of a critical discourse about realism and its ethical import (Holdaway, 2014, 203). In this way, the paratexts and epitexts Holdaway analyses can, should, be read alongside the synopsis of the film in the Cannes programme, here taken as symptomatic in the same sense. Both are surface-level indications of a similar overarching 'rhetoric' or, more pointedly, ideology. As stated in the introduction to this thesis, my approach differs from Holdaway's in that it focuses on a different paratext: the synopsis, which I take as the condensation of the film festival's institutional construction of a film. Doing so allows me to analyse the ideology of European A festivals' construction of Italian cinema in the new millennium using the paratext closest

to the 'source' (the festival). Our approaches should be therefore be taken as complementary, and a project much larger than this one would analyse the paratexts together, either placed on the same level or in a suitable hierarchy.

The texts Holdaway highlights merit reproduction here, since they are pertinent to the Cannes synopsis' representation of *Gomorra* analysed below:

The events you are about to witness are inspired by real events and ones that continue to occur in areas of Naples such as Scampia and Caserta. There, as in other places, the lives of thousands of men and women, many youths among them, are conditioned by the power and violence of criminals (Saviano, 2008, 6; Cited in Holdaway, 2014, 201).<sup>110</sup>

Holdaway (2014, 201) reads Saviano's introduction to the film, written to accompany its Cannes premiere, as an appeal, addressed to the audience (the Cannes accredited film critics and professionals), to take the film as a 'testimonianza della Scampia reale' ('testimony of the real Scampia'). Saviano frames the film as a realist depiction of a specific place - Scampia, the suburbs of Naples. Indeed, the writer invokes the trope of a film 'inspired by real events', which he locates first in Naples, but also in 'altri luoghi' ('other places'). This term, 'other', is overdetermined; it has a variety of meanings, some of which may appear more pertinent in certain contexts. If we consider the limitations to meaning effected by the European A festival apparatus - its actual construction of the other and of territory - Saviano's reference to other places can, and is likely to, be interpreted signifying as a generalised notion of the global South, of which Naples is a signifier. These 'other places' likely refer to, in this context, the othered places of the global South, homogenised and associated with 'criminal

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<sup>110</sup> Due to spatial constraints, I include only the translated paratexts here. All translations are my own, unless otherwise stated.

power and violence', represented through a realist lens that claims to speak the truth of these places on their behalf.

A rhetoric of realism continues in Garrone's 'director's note' included in the Cannes press pack:

The material that I started from when filming *Gomorra* was so visually powerful that I limited myself to shooting it in an extremely simple manner, as though I were a spectator who had happened upon the place by chance. This seemed to me to be the most effective way of reproducing the emotional experience that I'd had during the course of working on the film (Garrone, 2008, 4; Cited in Holdaway, 2014, 203).

The comments, Holdaway (2014, 204) argues, imply that *Gomorra* should be understood as 'objective, like a form of video surveillance' - attested to by the expression 'an extremely simple manner, as though I were a spectator who had happened upon the place by chance'. Holdaway (2014, 204) continues that Garrone has also emphasised 'verisimilitude' and his use of 'war reportage' techniques in interviews held at Cannes. Garrone's comments promote a reading of *Gomorra* as a film whose political status is bound up with its documentary value, its 'ability to be informative and objective' (Holdaway, 2014, 204). Again, we find the tropes of realism as objectivity - an objectivity with an ethical charge, informing viewers of the violence (war) taking place in Naples. We might intuit another dimension in terms such as 'surveillance' and 'informative and objective' - a kind of surveillance which claims objectivity and produces knowledge about its subjects. This again resonates with Said's (2003 [1979], 72) concept of orientalism as a 'form of radical realism' which assumes that certain artefacts can offer the Northern viewer access to the authentic reality of the South. This realism, when framed as providing an objective depiction of a

place associated with violence and corruption – as surveilling this place, no less – takes on a powerfully orientalist dimension.

#### **4. SYNOPSIS ANALYSIS**

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It appears that *Gomorra*'s institutional construction – from scholarship to festival paratexts such as press packs and interviews – is underpinned by several orientalist characteristics: producing a cultural distance between the South and the site of its construction and reception; claiming to represent the South on its behalf, revealing an essential truth about it; and constructing this truth in line with a catalogue of stereotypes such as irrationality, despotism and backwardness. To provide further evidence for this, I now turn to the central construction of the film in the European A festival context: Cannes' representation of *Gomorra* in its official programme. Indeed, the synopsis accompanying the film's exhibition at the festival condenses many of the tropes I have identified above, suggesting the institution's ideological investment in the construction and differentiation of the South underpinned by an orientalist framework. Moreover, as will become clear when I analyse the film against the synopsis, the text not only produces the South as 'other', but appears to do so in a way that suppresses *Gomorra*'s potential to critique the structures of global capitalism from the perspective of the South. Overall, the synopsis appears to effect a displacement of the excesses of global capitalism onto its other – in this case, the image of a strange, distant and irrationally violent Southern Italy.

As with Cannes synopses in general, this text contains little explicit description of the film's style or genre. However, the synopsis of *Gomorra* does represent the film as fictional but realistic, and strongly emphasises its authentic character. According to the text, *Gomorra* contains several imaginative

elements: 'stories' and a 'scenario,' both of which imply a fictional narrative. However, the imaginary nature of this construction is brought into question in the synopsis' conclusion - a rhetorical construction which retroactively determines the meaning of the text. In fact, the stories that the film depicts are only 'apparently imaginary,' being, rather, 'deeply rooted in reality'. Words such as 'deeply' and 'rooted' imply a profound grounding in the 'reality' of that which the film depicts. We might contrast this with Cilento's (2011) and Holdaway's (2014, 199) arguments that the film's aesthetics are surreal, stylish or spectacular, related to science fiction or Hollywood gangster movies. Following Holdaway's argument in particular, we can interpret the synopsis as a paratext that also participates in the film's rhetoric of realism, emphasising objectivity and eliding style or artifice. Already from the review of critical and scholarly interpretations above, we can hypothesise that this might contribute towards a representation of *Gomorra* that is structured around the orientalist logic of European artworks' supposed capacity to reveal some essential reality of the global South. Indeed, when we examine the 'scenario' that *Gomorra* is described as depicting, the presence of the orientalist trope of a realist text objectively showing a strange and irrational - an other - place becomes apparent.

The 'world' of *Gomorra* is 'cruel,' 'violent,' and 'rooted in reality'. It appears marked by an inadmissible excess, implied by notions of cruelty and violence. But to what extent is this 'world' global or circumscribed to a particular territory? The opening words of the synopsis, 'Power, money and blood' - organised into a rhetorical triad of nouns, and given emphasis by the brevity of the clause - provide a powerful frame for the world of *Gomorra*. They describe the 'values that the people of Naples and Caserta have to face every day'. Power and

money are implicitly shown in their negative, excessive aspect. That such values have to be faced or struggled with implies an unregulated, excessive, control of power and money. While this could be thought of in global terms, the text both implicitly and explicitly locates this struggle in the South. The effect is initially produced by the presence of the word 'blood' as the final term in the triad. Blood, here, creates a subtle distance between the circulation of money and power in the world and its excessive 'mis'-use in the global South. It retroactively frames the excess of the first two terms in relation to a word heavy with connotations of 'backwards' political practices (as in nepotism), irrationality (as in passion), violence (as in the spilling of blood through war), and contagion (as in the unregulated flow of infected blood). Together, the first three of these connotations evoke the orientalist stereotype of Southern Italy as 'unable to build the rational, orderly, civic cultures that, in the North, underwrote the emergence of industrial capitalist society' due to the 'passionate, undisciplined, rebellious' character of its inhabitants' (Schneider, 1998, 1). In contrast with the humanist, democratic North, where power and money supposedly circulate freely, the South's subjection to blood values cause it to be constrained to a despotic 'underdeveloped' political life and thus a concentration of power and money in the wrong hands. On the subtler level of the fourth connotation - that of contagion - the presence of the word 'blood' may also reproduce ideas of the other as excessive, dirty, and threatening. Blood, as a potential carrier of infection is a threatening substance - its flow must be regulated as a means of protecting the social body. This is imagery most commonly used in racist discourses that cast the non-white other as a threatening presence who must be kept out of the 'clean' Northern social body - the most famous

example being Enoch Powell's (1968) 'Rivers of Blood' speech.<sup>111</sup>

The Cannes synopsis itself *contains* this fluid and the excesses it is perceived to carry: the social body of the South may be contaminated but, by localising contagion there, the text could be read as preserving a sense of the Northern social body as clean.<sup>112</sup> The synopsis is fixated on Naples and Caserta, circumscribing the 'world' of *Gomorra* to this region. The text refers solely to Naples and Caserta as the setting of the film, eliding any sense of its place within a world system. It distinguishes this place further by constructing an impression of distance between the region and the place from which the text speaks (and the implied viewer/reader looks). It establishes 'a (cultural) distance between the viewer and viewed' that follows an orientalist logic (Halle, 2010, 315). This distance is achieved primarily through that which we might describe, following Said (1993, 198), as 'narrating [...] strangeness'. The synopsis explicitly underlines the abnormality of life in the South, in the short sentence used to conclude the first paragraph: 'Only a lucky few can even think of leading a "normal" life.' In this region, normality is a distant concept, barely conceivable to its residents. From this concluding sentence - rhetorically powerful for its position at the end of the section - a hierarchy is produced between the abnormal, other, and the implicit 'normal' condition. As we saw in chapters two and four, another technique which renders a figure strange is that of deindividualisation. Here, in contrast with the full identity of the (Northern) subject, the (Southern) figure is depicted as identity-less, almost as an object, and

111 On the relationship between blood imagery, the trope of 'flow', and the relationship between Northern, capitalist modernity and its construction of the racial 'other' (including in Powell's speech), see O'Leary & Johnson (2020, [Forthcoming]).

112 As such, it appears to enact the same politics of containment and border control that I have discussed in relation to *Fire at Sea* in the previous chapter.

certainly as an other. Descriptions of these figures refer to them in generic terms - 'people,' 'inhabitants', or the impersonal pronoun 'they'. As discussed both in the previous chapter in relation to brutal humanism and above in relation to festivals' homogenisation of cultures outside the global North, this participates in a hierarchy of power in which the hegemonic North is afforded specificity and the South is constructed as an indistinct mass, defined only by its difference.

Overall, the text's portrayal of the characters recalls many orientalist descriptions of Southern Italy - for example, Pasquale Villari's *Southern Letter on the Camorra* (1885, in Ridda, 2017, 471), in which

both the bodies of the city and of its inhabitants become a homogenous and undistinguished mass of dirt and 'filth'. The insalubrious slums reflect the amorality of the 'brutes', the Neapolitan masses coerced to live in poverty and become criminals.

The Cannes synopsis of *Gomorra* appears to reproduce centuries-old tropes which cast Neapolitans as a homogenous, criminal and/or impoverished mass - tropes commonly mobilised in the frameworks of orientalism and othering. When the Cannes synopsis claims that *Gomorra* will represent a reality located specifically in Naples and Caserta, a region associated with the global South, it reproduces the orientalist creation of knowledge about, and fetishisation of, that place. Moreover, if the orientalist stereotype registers an attempt to displace the inadmissible underside of the hegemonic North onto an other, the Cannes synopsis can be read as constructing the South (via *Gomorra*) in a way that instantiates this process. Focusing on the film - using it to 'speak back' to the synopsis - I aim to further demonstrate and intervene in this procedure. I use *Gomorra* to consider Naples as that

'alienating other, (or mirror) which crucially returns its image to the subject' and, in turn, reveal 'the hatred of the Other' as the European A festival apparatus's, and global capitalism's 'hatred of [its] own enjoyment' (Bhabha, 1983, 31; Žižek, 1993, 203). In the next section, then, I offer an interpretation of *Gomorrah* that focuses on the way in which its depiction of the South might return the image of the 'North,' offering a critique of Northern capitalist hegemony by framing its excesses as constituent of the system, rather than features of an unregulated outside, the orientalised South. This will both demonstrate and critique the Cannes synopsis' ideological displacement of the inadmissible excesses of the hegemonic capitalist system in which it is embedded onto a fetishised 'outside', thereby ultimately serving the maintenance of power within that system.

## **5. FILM ANALYSIS**

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Much has been written about *Gomorrah* in relation to realism, and I do not wish to add to an already saturated debate. Therefore, what concerns me below is not so much the extent to which *Gomorrah* is or is not 'deeply rooted in reality', but the nature of the 'reality' it depicts. We have seen that the Cannes synopsis describes this reality as violent and hopeless, and locates it in a precise locality, the South, fetishised as other. According to the synopsis, Naples and Caserta are part of a region outside of normality and the global order of things – sites of excess, antagonism inassimilable to the symbolic order of the capitalist, hegemonic North. However, *Gomorrah* contains elements which destabilise the binary between the North and its other that structures the Cannes synopsis. There are several moments in the film in which corruption, pollution and violence are shown as irruptions of an excess constitutive of global capitalism rather than features of its 'outside'. This

appears most clearly in the three narrative threads with an explicitly global aspect: (1) the *Scarface* (De Palma, 1983) narrative, which focuses on two young men, Ciro and Marco, whose idealisation of Hollywood mobsters eventually results in their assassination by the local Camorra bosses; (2) the eco-Mafia narrative, which centres on Franco and Roberto, two businessmen in the Camorra-run waste disposal business; (3) and the high fashion narrative about a *camorrista* tailor, Pasquale, who makes 'designer' dresses which appear on the red carpet at glamorous film events. These three narratives can be understood in relation to three corresponding themes: (1) Hollywood and the impossibility of unmediated identity under globalisation; (2) abjection and waste, the unassimilable excess of capitalism; (3) exploitation: the hidden underside of fashion and film (associated with the Made in Italy brand).<sup>113</sup>

As with the question of realism and *Gomorra*, scholarship on the *Scarface* narrative in relation to the Mafia movie, Hollywood, and mediation is abundant. This is perhaps due to its implications for the debate on realism: as Pierpaolo Antonello (2011, 381) points out, traditional notions of realism are complicated by the way in which *Gomorra* shows the mediation of today's 'reality'. Both Antonello (2011, 382) and Renga (2013, 146) analyse the striking mise-en-abymes in the film that contribute to this impression – for example, the scenes in which Marco and Ciro act out *Scarface*, shot on location in Camorra boss, Walter Schiavone's mansion. This mansion was modelled on the same film. Thus *Gomorra*'s on-location shooting actually, in some respects, takes place on a set – a simulacrum of Tony Montana's house in *Scarface*. Any authentic, even Italian, realism (on-location shooting is a much-

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113 Made in Italy is a brand used to sell goods on the basis of their Italian origin and connotations of quality and luxury. It is traditionally thought of as being comprised of three types of product: fashion, furniture and food.

celebrated trope of Italian neorealism) that could be ascribed to the film is complicated by contemporary Italian reality's mediation through Hollywood movies. Both realism and nationality collapse in such moments. Again, as I would not like to rehearse work already done on the film, I will not undertake a detailed analysis of this same narrative and its relation to the themes of transnational cinema and mediation. I would like to note, however, its significance for my argument. The cyclic relationship between the really-existing and fictional Mafia depicted on screen, as well as the relationship between Southern Italy, the United States and Hollywood, destabilises the boundary between centre and periphery, North and South. If the Mafia once provided inspiration for highly lucrative Hollywood gangster movies such as *Scarface* (see Renga (2014)), and these now provide inspiration for the really-existing Mafia in Italy and around the world, one might question precisely how Southern the 'reality' *Gomorra* supposedly depicts is. It appears that *Gomorra* not only cannot be realist in the sense of unmediated, but also cannot be set solely in Southern Italy, given the permeation of North American culture in the region and vice versa. Therefore, the Cannes synopsis' attempt to designate *Gomorra* as a Mafia movie about just Naples and Caserta obscures the impossibility of any Mafia movie - in the new millennium, at least - to be set in just one place. While this narrative appears to function solely on a cultural level, being about the image of the Mafia, we can find representations of continuities between the South and North on both cultural and economic levels in the other two narratives I have identified above: the eco-Mafia and high fashion narratives.

## 5.A ECO-MAFIA, DISPOSING OF CAPITALISM'S ABJECT EXCESS

Renga (2013, 136) argues that *Gomorrah's* eco-mafia narrative 'shed[s] light onto the eco-Mafia and its ties to international politics and big business'. This big business is that of transnational waste management - the import and export of companies' excess. Indeed, building on Saviano's (2007, 310) description of dumping sites as 'the most concrete emblem of every economic cycle', Simona Bondavalli (2011, 1) analyses the way in which *Gomorrah* depicts the centrality of waste management to global capitalism in a way that 'renders all viewers complicit in the criminal acts performed on the screen'. Rather than simply abject - repugnant matter to be expelled from the system or (social) body - waste has become assimilated into the structures of capitalism, since the waste management industry now makes money from waste; waste produces value (Bondavalli, 2011, 8). Although Bondavalli does not make this connection explicit, we might notice a corollary procedure in *Gomorrah's* depiction of Camorra-controlled waste management, which also shows an 'excessive' element (the Mafia) as a constitutive part of the structures of value production and circulation. Indeed, '[w]hile a socially defined, localized and dirty-handed *camorra* would relate to most viewers [...] - familiar as a cinematic image, but substantially alien - a network of businessmen circumventing the ever increasing EU regulations to realize a profit may situate most viewers differently' (Bondavalli, 2011, 9). When we read this analysis alongside the Cannes synopsis, its significance becomes clear. The Camorra are typically represented as 'socially defined' (other), 'localized' (southern), and 'dirty-handed' (abject) - tropes which are reproduced in the Cannes text. However, the film's portrayal of a network of businessmen working with (or around) EU regulations and producing profit

undermines the demarcation between crime and capitalism, abjection and value. In this way, *Gomorra* appears to move the excesses associated with the other – waste, crime – back from the periphery to the centre, encouraging a re-assessment of common assumptions about the EU and capitalism.

Although Bondavalli's argument posits that the notion of the abject no longer applies to waste and waste management in global capitalism, elements of *Gomorra* suggest Naples' status as itself abject – a site of material excess; the dumping ground for the excremental remainder caused by capitalist production. While the management of waste may be productive in the sense of creating value (profit) from waste, the waste itself remains – a stumbling block to the total assimilation and eradication of excess that Bondavalli's argument implies. Indeed, psychoanalytical (and above all Žižekian) theorisations of the cycle of capital highlight the way in which production always leaves a remainder, the Real of surplus value that cannot be integrated into the system.<sup>114</sup> On the one hand, this is profit itself – the surplus value at once constitutes and threatens the smooth functioning of capitalism, since it requires constant re-absorption for the system to maintain its apparent balance. On the other hand, this excess is also the excess of the production of commodities – waste and pollution (Žižek in Taylor, 2008). Viewing the cycle of production and this pollutant excess through *Gomorra's* depiction of waste dumping in Southern Italy, it becomes clear that this excess can also be thought of as both the environmentally-destructive toxic waste as a side-effect of production and, following Chamber's (2015) argument, the othered and exploited global South. *Gomorra's* eco-mafia narrative brings these two kinds of abjection together, depicting the exploitation and poisoning

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114 For a summary and development of this theoretical framework, see Vighi (2010).



Figure 25. Gomorrah screens the abjection of the South: poisoned man lays dying in bed

of the South as an effect of global capitalism's displacement of its excesses onto the region. *Gomorrah* shows the manifestation of these effects through the figure of a dying father whose family, having had their land and their bodies contaminated by toxic waste, plead for yet more to be dumped near them. If the abject can be understood as 'death infecting life', the man's poisoned body makes the abject waste visible – capitalism's toxic excess, death, infecting the Neapolitan people's lives (Kristeva, 1982, 4).

Naples' economic situation is presented in microcosm here: the contaminated body (the land); the desperate family that one would expect to care for both the land and the father, but instead is coerced by poverty into contaminating them further; the opportunistic businessman who mediates between the land, its people, and the uneven circulation of capital. The father's status as sacrificial 'other' is made apparent by religious symbolism that characterises the scene. He is shot, centre-frame, lying beneath a crucifix with no shirt on and one arm out-stretched, in an almost Christ-like position. However, this figure is being sacrificed for a different religious order, as implied by his ritualistic repetition of the word 'Euro'.

Clarification from his son reveals the mechanism by which this sacrifice is to take place: despite having just described the refuse being dumped on their land as 'poison', the family bargain with Franco, pleading for more, since 'everything costs double in Euro'. The affective power of this scene, in providing an embodiment of the polluted Neapolitan land - and thus making visible an otherwise invisible excess - marks a departure from the 'cold gaze' and 'brutality' usually ascribed to *Gomorra* by film critics' reviews in the festival press (Marshall, 2008; Weissberg, 2008). This is one of several moments in the film where its supposed 'objectivity' contrasts with emotional direction employed to symbolise, dramatise, and condemn the pollution of Naples and Caserta - a pollution on which global capital (signified here by the Euro) depends. The periphery becomes a wasteland, the site of capitalism's excremental excess, filtered away from the centre in order to maintain the façade of efficiency and cleanliness. Naples' status as a site of the abject, an 'other' place - embodied by the sick man, the sick land - is dramatised, and the origin of this abjection, its necessitation by the metropolitan centre's production of a polluting excess (literally, toxic waste), is made explicit.

In fact, this is one of the few scenes followed by some kind of consequence and comment. In a rare moment in which the film could be described as approaching the didactic, the apprentice waste manager Roberto resigns from his position, initiating a dialogue which confronts the relationship between poverty in the region and the politics of the Eurozone. The relationship between the two scenes is reinforced by the contaminated peaches that are carried over from the former to the latter. These objects, further manifestations of the polluted land, appears to provoke Roberto's resignation from his role and the following exchange:

F: Think this job sucks? You know that guys like me put this shit country in Europe? Know how many workers I've helped by saving their companies money? Stop and look! What do you see? What do you see? Debts! All these people have been saved only thanks to us.

R: I saw how you helped them live. You save a worker in Mestre and kill a family in Mondragone.

F: That's how it works, but I didn't decide it. We solved problems created by others. I didn't create chromium and asbestos I didn't dig up the mountain. That's how it works.

Throughout this scene, the handheld camera moves around the faces of the two men, uncomfortably close to each's face at any given time. As Franco asks 'what do you see?' the camera follows his gesture, panning across the Neapolitan countryside:

The camerawork immerses the viewer in the exchange, placing us in line with Roberto's perspective as he looks at the field that Franco has indicated. The shot of the countryside invites us to contemplate the Real of the region and its place in global capitalism. Nothing particularly out of the ordinary is visible, even if the low saturation might contrast with the luscious greens usually featured in films' and advertisements'



Figure 26. Gomorrah screens the abjection of the South: debt beneath the contaminated countryside

depictions of the Italian countryside. However, the image in front of us is then defined through a bizarre signifier: 'Debts!' The image's immediate visual (imaginary) meaning is confronted with its 'symbolic real' meaning - its abstract underpinning in a system of global capitalism and debt (Žižek in Wright, 2004). Franco's position throughout this dialogue manifests a cynical acceptance of the symbolic real: rather than an obstacle, or something traumatic, Franco accepts the land's transformation into debt as a sign of capitalism's proper functioning: 'That's how it works.' His cynical description, and Roberto's response to it, outline the global nature of capitalism's production of excess and displacement of it onto exploited Southern territories. Franco's attempt to designate these economic processes as capitalism's proper, even successful, functioning is repeatedly met by negation from Roberto. Franco argues that businessmen like him 'put this shit country in Europe,' securing its place as part of a Northern territory and saving workers. His characterisation of his work in this way simultaneously reproduces and disavows the anxieties caused by Italy's duality as at once Northern and Southern: Italy was once a 'shit' country, perennially 'backwards' in comparison with Northern Europe, but this has been overcome thanks to its successful assimilation into both Europe and the capitalist system. However, his attempt to disavow the North/South divide - both within Italy and between Europe and its 'outside' - is countered by Roberto's reinstatement of it: 'you save a worker in Mestre and kill a family in Mondragone.' This exchange emphasises that Italy's status as European depends upon the reinforcement of the North's hegemony - saving workers in Northern Italy, in Venice - through the exploitation of the South - killing families in Southern Italy, in Caserta. Moreover, Roberto's evocation of death highlights the cost of this assimilation, recalling the

scene of the dying father and thus re-evoking its potential to affectively critique an economic system which depends upon the exploitation of the South as a means of securing the relative wealth and health of the North. Through its depiction of the exportation of capitalism's excesses – waste and debt – into Southern Italy, *Gomorra* can therefore be interpreted as positioning the South as constitutive part of global capitalism. Rather than a distant site of irrational, criminal violence, Naples and Caserta are depicted as the sites onto which Northern hegemonic capitalism displaces its inadmissible excess, its abjection carefully managed by the regulation of the flow of abjection towards the South.

### **5.B CAMORRA COUTURE: MEDIATING MADE IN ITALY**

The place of the South in global capitalism, and the need for such a system to export its excesses away from the North also appears in *Gomorra*'s narrative of a Camorra tailor who produces high fashion dresses to be sold on the global market. This narrative implies that Naples, the Camorra, and even Chinese underground workers in the region, are the criminal centre of Italy's fashion industry and, by extension, Italy's image abroad. The centrality of Italian fashion to the Made in Italy brand is well known: it comprises one of the three 'f's of Made in Italy, 'fashion, food, and furniture,' (Porta, 2013, 213).<sup>115</sup> *Gomorra* moves Italian fashion from its imagined centre – Milan – and shows the industry's underground – its 'underground self' – in Naples (Said, 2003 [1978], 3). The narrative opens with an auction, set in what appears to be a school gym. A designer dress fills the opening shot, obscuring

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115 Made in Italy is a brand pertaining to more 'obviously' material, artisanal goods such as food or furniture. However, it has been discussed in relation to cinema on many occasions. See the *Allegoria* special edition on Made in Italy (Balicco, 2013). Also see the ongoing research project, 'The Circulation of Italian Cinema,' which treats Italian film in relation to a brand image co-extensive with the Made in Italy brand (Scaglioni et al., 2018a).

the contrastingly run-down setting. This moment quickly passes as the camera moves round the dress to reveal Pasquale's bald head and, behind him, a basketball hoop, all shot in low saturation, emphasising the unglamorous surroundings that contradict typical representations of Italian high fashion. The camera continues moving, showing more couture dresses alongside props that highlight the school gym setting. Thus we are presented with a contrast between the products and the site of their production - a locality starkly at odds with the usual image used to market them. This contrast is the basis of a disconnect that rends the fashion narrative throughout the film. The luxurious appearance of the dresses and the connotations of quality that underpin the Made in Italy brand are confronted with the film's portrayal of their site of their production. While the Southern, unglamorous setting may reproduce Cannes' depiction of Naples and Caserta as an othered place - far from the 'modernity being triumphantly pursued elsewhere' - the production of these designer goods shown in this same setting places an entire system of capitalist production in a far more continuous relationship with the global South than the synopsis implies (Chambers, 2015, 13). *Gomorra* defamiliarises the common image of Italian high fashion by placing it in a run-down, criminal setting. In doing so, it reproduces the traumatic materiality beneath the symbolic brand of Made in Italy.

Maria Tulante (2013, 256) analyses this as a part of *Gomorrah's* 'revelatory' function - the manifestation of Garrone's 'consistent interest in finding the truth of a matter,' even when deploying a 'liberal interpretation of realism.' Although the analysis I have given above would certainly support such a reading, Tulante's argument misses the importance of mediation in both the construction of the Made in Italy brand and the film itself. *Gomorrah* complicates the idea of film as straightforwardly revelatory, and perhaps signals its own complicity in the system it purports to critique, through the theme of mediation - a theme mentioned above in relation to Marco and Ciro, the *Scarface* inspired would-be *mafiosi*. *Gomorrah* screens the disconnect between Italian designer dresses' conditions of production and their brand image in a way that explicitly implicates the film industry (especially film festivals) in this contradictory reality. The fashion narrative ends with Pasquale having, like Roberto, quit the Mafia-controlled industry he works in and become a truck driver. On the television screen in a rest stop, Pasquale sees one of his creations worn by Scarlett Johansson on the red carpet at Venice:



Figure 27. Interface in *Gomorrah*: footage of Scarlett Johansson on the red carpet at Venice

This is the cream dress that featured in the opening scenes of this narrative arc, and that the film shows on several occasions subsequently, making it a central prop within this plotline. Pasquale draws attention to the dress: in the first scenes he remarks on its complexity, he is shown working on the dress throughout, and in a later scene he caresses the dress's fabric as it hangs on a dummy. In this arresting mise-en-abyme, the dress from the film is transported into 'real' life through the employment of footage of the Venice film festival. Fashion meets film, offering a glimpse into the interconnectedness of different industries - above all in a globalised, capitalist economy. It is telling that this moment combines two industries related to the Made in Italy brand: designer clothing and cinema (specifically, the kind of cinema associated with European A festivals such as Venice). As such, *Gomorrah* can be interpreted as alluding to the mediation of Italy's image abroad, including through the film festival apparatus. The film's use of interface - the redoubling of an image on screen - is crucial here. In projecting the dress onto a television screen, *Gomorrah* highlights the mediation of Italy's image and, in some respects, the film's own complicity with this process. Here, 'the interface-screen field enters as the direct stand-in for the "absent one": Johanssen and the festival red carpet appear in the field of the interface-screen (the television), showing the 'absent cause' of both the diegetic events of the high fashion narrative and, on a metacinematic level, the film itself, to be the film festival apparatus and its place in a global circulation of goods and images (Žižek, 2001b, 52). In its metacinematic dimension, this use of interface depicts the viewer's perspective on screen, making manifest the Gaze - the partiality of this perspective and the ideological investments on which it is founded (McGowan, 2007, 7-8). This is particularly so in the context of *Gomorrah's* premiere at Cannes: the

audience will have been watching the same kinds of red carpet displays either live or on the screens around the festival. Seeing the same image appear in the midst of a competition premiere, in a film about the Mafia, no less, is likely to have an uncanny familiarity. In doing so, *Gomorra* can be read as highlighting its own status as a product involved in the mediation of Italy's image. Rather than having a straightforwardly revelatory function, as Tulante argues, the film performs its own contradiction. This scene highlights *Gomorra* as a film whose depiction of southern Italy at once critiques the area's exploitation in Northern, capitalist hegemony, yet nonetheless depends upon an apparatus which is not only embedded within, but actively reproduces this exploitation. In short, the screening of the red carpet at Venice, and of Scarlett Johansson wearing a Camorra-made dress on it, can be read as an irruption of the Gaze. It makes manifest the film's, the viewer's, and the film festival apparatus's complicity in the excesses of exploitation, pollution and violence depicted in *Gomorra*'s earlier scenes. Moreover, in screening the glitz and glamour of the festival red carpet, it depicts the enjoyment - the senseless ideological complicity - that maintains the South's construction as the constitutive other of Northern capitalist hegemony.-

## **6. CONCLUSION**

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Considering *Gomorra* as a festival film highlights the way in which can be seen to, in fact, contain a subtle critique of the festival apparatus (on which the film, ironically, relies). The appearance of Scarlett Johansson on the red carpet at Venice, dressed in an outfit which the film has (in a kind of temporal short circuit) retroactively determined as *camorra* couture, suddenly brings into relief the structures of labour, migration and oppression on which festivals such as Cannes depend for

their pomp and glamour. Once more, the stakes of the synopsis' representation of the film as a realist, regional tale become clear. It would seem from the above that several of *Gomorra*'s narratives contain global dimensions, and do so in a way that undermines the ideas of Northern, capitalist modernity and Southern, criminal otherness that characterise the logic according to which the Cannes synopsis constructs the film. The festival synopsis represents *Gomorra* as a solely Neapolitan affair. It thus appears to be founded on the displacement of criminality, excess, otherness, onto a location presented as 'outside' the hegemonic system. Naples becomes the culturally essentialised 'other,' effecting a disavowal of the antagonisms underpinning global capitalism. In this way, the Cannes synopsis reproduces 'the political economy of location', best summarised in Chambers' (2015, 20) analysis of the 'Southern question'. The South

is maintained at a distance, transformed in to a separable 'other' and then rendered subaltern and subordinate within the institutions and practices of 'advanced' capitalist culture [...] at the same time structurally integral to the very production and reproduction of dominance and subordination (Chambers, 2015, 20).

Reading *Gomorra* in contradiction to the Cannes synopsis suggests the presence of this orientalist logic on the European A circuit: while the text constructs the South as 'other', displacing its inadmissible excesses onto this territory, the South depicted in *Gomorra* holds up a mirror to the North, revealing precisely these excesses as its own. Taken together with the previous chapter, it should become clear that European A festivals are invested in the 'politics of location' that Chambers describes, not only in the politics of where they take place, nor the way they represent films' territories of production, but also in their representations of films' settings

in a way that continues to orientalise the global South as distant, other.

Finally, *Gomorra*'s depiction of a criminality that is not the excess, but the constitutive feature of global capitalism - from waste management to the fashion industry, to film festivals themselves - highlights the ideological process through which a European A festival's representation of a film may effect a containment of its critical potential. *Gomorra*'s status as an emblem of Italian cinema and culture has allowed us to explicitly consider one of the crucial themes underlying this thesis: the influence of capital on A festivals' awarding and construction of Italian cinema. One of the aspects of the ideology of Italian festival cinema that has become apparent throughout this chapter is the way in which festivals appear to localise, to contain or co-opt, the political critiques a film might pursue - and to do so in such a way that attenuates the threat that such critiques may pose to global capitalism. With the final case study, this thesis thus comes full circle: while chapter one showed that European A festivals' construction of the universal of 'the art of film' via the auteur was at once a symptom and disavowal of their dependence upon capital, this chapter has demonstrated the way in which the festivals' claim to (geo)political universality, entrenched in a politics of the other, is, too, a crucial component of their reproduction of capitalism as both an economic and ideological system. All that remains, therefore, is to tie together the threads that have run through chapters one to five, and summarise the relevance of this relationship between European A festivals' embeddedness in and maintenance of global capitalism and their ideological construction of Italian cinema between the years 2000 and 2017.

## VII

# Conclusion: *Da capo senza fine*

This thesis has identified, analysed and critiqued the ideological structures conditioning European A festivals' awarding and representation of Italian cinema in the years 2000-2017. It has also developed a methodology of ideology critique that allows one to study institutions' ideological functioning and construction of cultural artefacts on three levels: the institutional apparatus, institutional representations of certain artefacts, and the artefacts themselves. Following these three stages, each chapter has first analysed the way in which European A festivals appear to function - their histories, rituals, economic organisation, and the claims that key figures, such as Festival Directors, make about them. I have shown how these aspects of the festival apparatus are central to their cultivation of a 'festival image' underpinned by ideological structures (Stringer, 2008, 1). Each chapter has then analysed the way in which these same ideological structures, and the implicit values reproduced through them, are distilled in the festivals' synopses of Italian films. The ideological aspect of the European A festival apparatus thus conditions such festivals' construction of Italian cinema in the new millennium. Finally, I have mobilised readings of the film texts as a means of further highlighting, and critiquing, European A festivals' ideological representation of Italian cinema. I have found that European A festivals' synopses of Italian award-winners manifest 'a totalizing gaze' over not one, but two 'split object[s]': the films being described and the festivals awarding and exhibiting that

film (Žižek, 1989, 50). The festival's 'image' mediates its representation of the films it awards top prize. I have also examined the way in which European A festival synopses compensate for the inherent failure of this process of totalising representation through a series of fantasy formations and unwritten laws. Such formations and laws constitute the 'institutional unconscious' of European A festivals and, thus, the ideology conditioning their awarding and representation of Italian cinema between 2000 and 2017 (Žižek, 2008, 142). To conclude, I will summarise in more detail the findings that this methodology has generated, offer a description of the primary superego law - the crucial unwritten rule - that regulates European A festivals' ideological functioning, and, finally, outline the ways in which the thesis's method and findings can be adapted for research into other areas and phenomena. I organise the summary of findings below according to the two main themes that have emerged out of the project: the claim to artistic universality and the claim to political universality.

## **1. THE CLAIM TO ARTISTIC UNIVERSALITY**

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The thesis began from the observation that European A festivals are characteristically sites of struggle: the struggle for which signifiers will come to represent the festivals, the circuit, and the kind of films they consecrate with a top prize. In chapter one I theorised European A festivals' struggle for meaning through the concept of hegemony, which allowed me to identify a crucial ideological procedure underpinning these institutions' representation of themselves and the films they award: the disavowal of contingency. For a meaning to appear hegemonic - universal rather than particular - the very processes of struggle through which such meaning is constituted must be retroactively erased; 'a minimum of "naturalization" is a condition of effectiveness of the

hegemonic operation' (Žižek, 2004, 96). Therefore, the hegemony of the notions of cinema that European A festivals reproduce depends upon a disavowal the very processes of struggle underlying said festivals' construction of meaning. This explains scholars' accounts of film festivals as 'mythological', of their 'bogus religiosity' and reproduction of a 'magical [...] notion of quality' (Brown, 2009, 218; Andrews, 2010, 10; Rich, 2003). I demonstrated that European A festivals are, specifically, sites of struggle between various stakeholders, including film industry professionals and commercial sponsors, due to their dependence on 'public and private subsidy' for their continuing existence (Rhyne, 2009, 9). In order to function effectively, the festivals must disavow their own contingency as institutions that are, in practice, 'split' by their need to negotiate various stakeholder interests. In turn, they also disavow the contingency of the meanings they ascribe to film, which are likewise marked by this split. This means that the disavowal of contingency as such takes the form of a particular disavowal - that of European A festivals' construction of film being contingent upon and conditioned by their dependence on capital. Throughout the thesis, I have aimed not only to demonstrate European A festivals' disavowal of their commercial underpinnings, but also show the forms it takes and effects it produces.

In particular, I have theorised European A festivals' functioning and self-representation in relation to the fantasy formations outlined in Žižek's theory of ideology. Beyond the fantasy of hegemony, I have identified and analysed the functioning of: the *sinthome* - the privileged signifier or figure, the 'point at which all the lines of the predominant ideological argumentation [...] meet'; the sexual relationship - the fantasy of integrating the other and rendering the symbolic order a 'harmonious totality'; and suture via 'symbolic opposition' -

displacing the Real lack in the symbolic order onto a 'constitutive Outside' (Žižek, 1999, 176; 1989, 193; 2004, 102). Chapter one and parts of chapter two demonstrated and analysed the functioning of two operations through which European A festivals attempt to disavow the commercial contingency that conditions the meanings they produce - the Real limit to their attempts to represent film. The first was their celebration of the auteur, who functions as a *sinthome* of the festivals' claims to operate under the universal sign of 'art' rather than capital. The figure of the auteur is the crucial representative of European A festivals' 'professed commitment to artistic excellence and nothing else' (Elsaesser, 2005, 95). The second was festivals' suturing of their own meaning via the construction of Hollywood as their 'constitutive Outside' - the 'bad object' which European A festivals often performatively oppose (Žižek, 2004, 102; Elsaesser, 2005, 100). These two operations can be thought of together, since, as discussed in chapter one, the figure of the auteur is typically used to differentiate some filmmaking from the kind associated with (a certain idea of) Hollywood - that is, filmmaking made under the sign of capital rather than under the sign of art. Therefore European A festivals' celebration and reproduction of the figure of the auteur, including their representation of films in an auteurist mode, complements their performance of an opposition to Hollywood, including the law of auteurism governing their representations of films - for example, as condensed in paratexts which downplay a film's entertainment value or commercial aspects.

Indeed, the auteur appears and re-appears in synopses of films across the corpus. *Facing Window* is 'Özpetek's new film' (Karlovy Vary International Film Festival., 2003). *The Great Beauty* is 'his [Sorrentino's] finest film' - and one made in the tradition of Fellini (Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival., 2013).

Tallinn's synopsis of *The Great Beauty* also offers a particularly auteurist recommendation to the implied reader and viewer-to-be: 'sometimes one must simply surrender to the filmmaker's whims'. Meanwhile, *Fire at Sea* is constituted by 'Gianfranco Rosi's observations of everyday life' (Berlin International Film Festival., 2016). In the extended corpus of secondary case studies, the trend continues. Another film directed by Rosi, *Sacro GRA* (2013), is framed by Venice in relation to the auteur's *oeuvre* and autobiography:

After the India of Varanasi's boatmen, the American desert of the dropouts, and the Mexico of the killers of drug trade, Gianfranco Rosi has decided to tell the tale of a part of his own country, roaming and filming for over two years in a minivan on Rome's giant ring road—the Grande Raccordo Anulare, or GRA (Venice International Film Festival, 2013).

*Sacro GRA* is not the only film in the extended corpus that festivals present through an auteurist lens. Just as *Sacro GRA* is described as the product of Rosi's 'roaming and filming for over two years in a minivan', *Caesar Must Die* (*Cesare deve morire*, Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, 2012) is the result of the directors' having 'spent six months following rehearsals for this stage production' (Berlin International Film Festival., 2012). The production in question is itself a symbol of 'artistic excellence', this time taken from the world of literature - the world-renowned William Shakespeare play, *Julius Caesar* (1599). *Caesar Must Die* is therefore legitimised as the work of both literary and cinematic authors, evoking a long tradition of authorship and art.

As demonstrated in chapter one, and have further evidenced through the observations above, European A festivals' self-representation and representation of the films they award are, in many ways, structured around the figure of the auteur - the

contradictory *sinthome* who represents the ideological universal, 'the art of film'. This ideological universal and its *sinthome* functions to disavow European A festivals' character as sites of struggle. Yet, in its contradictory dimension as a particular, contingent representative of a universal, the *sinthome* also highlights this disavowal. Analysing *The Son's Room* and its representation at Cannes allowed me to show the specific contradiction generated by the auteur as *sinthome*: the way in which notions of the auteur signify artistic freedom while, in practice, limiting that same freedom. The Cannes synopsis distilled festivals' attempts to represent a film as free from constraint - as a neutral artwork - through the text's disavowal of the fact that interpretations of *The Son's Room*, and the film's exhibition and awarding at Cannes, are contingent upon Moretti's persona and reputation. The paradoxical constraint of the film's meaning through its relation to the *sinthome* of its very freedom - its universal ideality as 'art' - became manifest through moments in which *The Son's Room's* appeared to perform its contradiction as an a-Morettian Moretti film. Offering an interpretation of the film through the notion of meta-cinematic hysteria, I demonstrated the way in which a film such as *The Son's Room* can foreground its own internal split, its ambivalence as an artwork. This, in turn, revealed a fundamental ideological structure of European A festivals' construction of Italian and art cinema: the presentation of 'art' as universal through the deployment of contingent signifiers that in fact delimit 'art' to a particular meaning. Therefore, the auteur's privileged position as *sinthome* at once manifests and contradicts European A festivals' claim to function under the sign of the universal of 'the art of film', when they are in fact engaged in a hegemonic struggle for the contingent meaning of this universal. I showed that this struggle is, moreover, one that is marked by

contingency on the basis of such festivals' embeddedness in global capitalism. The auteur is *sinthomatic* of both the economic necessity that European A festivals cultivate an image or brand identity and, in turn, that they construct this image under the sign of a universal, art, through which festivals may disavow their own constraint by economic necessity, as well as the constraint that their construction of certain notions of art is subject to.

I have critiqued European A festivals' claim to universality and corollary disavowal of contingency through the auteur as *sinthome* by showing its contradictions on a structural level (as the particular representative of the universal) and discussing its specific character as a signifier of artistic freedom that is mobilised to secure European A festivals' economic viability. In chapter three, I analysed an important ideological law that mediates European A festivals' elevation of the auteur to the status of *sinthome*. Just as the universal of 'the art of film' is constrained by its construction via the auteur - and this constraint is necessitated by films' and festivals' commercial aspects - so the auteur, as a human figure, is also constrained to another kind of particularity that confounds their status as signifier of the universal. Through the case of *The Great Beauty*, I demonstrated the gendered particularity of the auteur and, thus, the gendered particularity of the image of Italian cinema that European A festivals reproduce. I showed that this is not only empirically the case, with all European A festivals' top prizes for Italian films since 1946 being awarded to films directed by men, but also that it appears on a symbolic level. I demonstrated that Cannes' and Tallinn's representations of *The Great Beauty* are structured around the notion of art as being characterised by the expression of a masculine creative look directed towards a feminine object. In this way, European A festivals' investment in the *sinthome* of

the auteur in particular produces the effect of gendering the universal of art. This is, in part, due to 'the art of film' being represented through a human figure - one subject to a symbolic identity and, thus, a gender. On a structural level, the *sinthome*, as a particular signifier of the universal, necessarily renders the universal particular. Moreover, in effect, the *sinthome* constructed by European A festivals renders the universal of 'the art of film' particular in its form as a male auteur (at least to the extent that it mediates their representation of Italian cinema). The unwritten law of European A festivals construction of 'the art of film' via the auteur is, therefore, the law of sexual difference - the investment in a masculine/feminine gender binary that, in this case, results in the privileging of the masculine and exclusion of the feminine. Developing this idea, we might observe that the ideological procedure of disavowing contingency through the *sinthome* may give rise to a whole host of particularities that colour the content of the universal that European A festivals claim to operate under, resulting in a fetishisation of both art and identity.

## **2. THE CLAIM TO POLITICAL UNIVERSALITY**

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I have also made the stakes of European A festivals' ideological functioning clear by theorising it through ideas of the subject-other relation and two different ideological forms it can take: the fantasy of the sexual relationship and symbolic opposition. These procedures ultimately share the aim of providing an order of meaning with the appearance of consistency. The fantasy of the sexual relationship compensates for the Real of representation through the notion of a social order that can integrate all elements - that can integrate the other to form a 'harmonious totality' (Žižek, 1989, 193). This ideological

formation, in which the other is presented as inside the social order, thus filling its lack, is undercut by its dependence on the logic of suture. Here, the other takes the place of the 'constitutive Outside' - the lack is displaced onto the other (Žižek, 2004, 102). This thesis has shown that European A festivals' construct both themselves and the Italian films they award in a way that simultaneously constructs the figure of the other as an integrated element and outsider. Paradoxically, European A festivals both claim to be able to integrate the other and, in the same move, establish themselves on the basis of their difference from the other. On the level of festivals' humanist politics, the other that they claim to represent is the social other, contradictorily defined in opposition to common ideas of hegemonic identities (white, male, heterosexual etc.). Therefore, while European A festivals explicitly oppose themselves to Hollywood, they repeatedly reproduce the same dominant notions of who or what is other that they ascribe to Hollywood. In doing so, European A festivals displace their own investment in dominant categories of the other onto Hollywood as a means of disavowing their reproduction (and the ideological enjoyment) of such categories. The sexual relationship, the fantasy of integrating the other to form a harmonious totality, (in this case, totalising European A festivals' order of representation) is underwritten by the logic of suture in two ways. First of all, European A festivals engage in the process of suture by implicitly constructing the other - the queer, racialised, Southern and/or feminine other - as the constitutive Outside through which their dominant position (their status as 'subject' as it were) is secured. Second of all, European A festivals explicitly construct Hollywood as their constitutive Outside, their oppositional other, *as a means of disavowing and concealing the former operation of suture.*

Chapters two and four demonstrated that European A festivals mobilise notions of otherness as a means of further differentiating themselves and the films they award from Hollywood, while simultaneously reproducing the same dominant norms that they claim to counter. Chapter two showed that the Karlovy Vary synopsis of *Facing Window* was structured according to a rejection of tropes associated with Hollywood – for example, in the omission of the film’s more ‘mainstream’ aspects, such as the casting of heartthrob Raoul Bova, and the denigration of the film’s romance narrative – and a privileging of *Facing Window*’s more apparently ‘progressive’ aspects – for example, the paratext’s representation of *Facing Window* as a film that enacts the integration of the other through its portrayal of Giovanna’s friendship with Davide. I demonstrated that there was a tension inherent to the synopsis: the contradiction between its insistence on Davide’s strangeness and suggestion that he can be integrated into the very order that designates him as strange. I argued that the synopsis condenses the contradictory logic of the fantasy of the sexual relationship and its breakdown into a relation of difference. I demonstrated this through a reading of the *Facing Window* that foregrounded the moments in which it appeared to show the fantasmatic, impossible dimension of Giovanna’s dreams of an erotic relationship with Lorenzo. I argue that the film’s portrayal of the failure of the sexual relationship via Giovanna’s refusal of Lorenzo frames *Facing Window*’s insistence on Davide’s radical, disruptive otherness, culminating in a challenge to the fantasy of the sexual relationship as such.

Building on these findings, chapter four demonstrated the way in which the fantasy of a universal humanism – a social order capable of integrating all humans, including the other – structures the Berlinale’s representation of *Fire at Sea* and, in

turn, its depiction of refugees. Moving from the queer other in *Facing Window* to the colonised other in *Fire at Sea*, I observed that the same structure was distilled in both paratexts: the claim to integrate the other that, in fact, follows a process of suture that ultimately positions the other 'outside' the social order. I showed that the Berlinale synopsis implicitly represents *Fire at Sea* in the tradition of one of the founding pillars in notions of art cinema - Italian neorealism. If neorealism is one of the yardsticks against which art cinema, and its difference from Hollywood cinema, is measured, the representation of *Fire at Sea* in relation to this legacy implicitly positions the film as exemplary of art cinema and, in turn, serves to establish the Berlinale as a purveyor of art cinema in one of its most celebrated forms. Here artistic and humanist universality coincide through the prism of neorealism's reputation as an ethical, humanist cinema - a reputation constructed and mobilised during the founding years of the European A circuit. The chapter showed that the Berlinale deployed these same tropes, representing *Fire at Sea* and, implicitly, the festival itself as ethical and humanist. I investigated and critiqued the ideological underpinnings of this mode of representation through Schoonover's (2012) theory of brutal humanism, and his analysis of the Euro-American geopolitics in which ideas of neorealism's ethical import were forged. I argued that, in its appeal to progressive politics through a staging of pity towards the suffering other, the Berlinale synopsis expresses a brutal humanism that reproduced structures of Euro-American power and neo-colonialism. In this way, the Berlinale's representation of *Fire at Sea* distils European A festivals' investment in a form of humanism 'more reconciled with than resistant to the geopolitical affinities of large-scale capitalism and its multiple battle zones' (Schoonover, 2012, xix). In the Berlinale synopsis,

this takes the form of a clear ideological investment in images of refugees' peril and lack of agency which, in turn, emphasises the agency of the Northern subject. My reading of *Fire at Sea* consolidated the chapter's critique of this process. The interpretation focused on moments in the film that foreground antagonism as *internal* to Europe and, in turn, the implied spectator's investment in the displacement of that antagonism onto and *external* figure, the figure of the refugee. I demonstrated that European A festivals' representations of films and, moreover, of themselves, are structured around a distinction between subject and other which invariably gives European A festivals (and the geopolitical order in which they are embedded) the upper hand. Such festivals' construction of both themselves and their prize winners via a figure of the other therefore appears to be underwritten by the enjoyment of a 'flexible positional superiority' over that other (Said, 2003 [1978], 7).

The analysis I undertook in chapter five traced the irruption of European A festivals' ideological investment in categories of otherness through a case in which their displacement of antagonism became explicit. This chapter focused on the way in which European A festivals reconstruct geopolitical dynamics, representing the global South in an orientalist fashion. Examining Cannes' synopsis of *Gomorrah* revealed the festival's construction of the South as the site of a myriad of excesses: violence, tyranny, irrationality, and dehumanised, victimised or corrupt masses. Through this case I showed that the suturing operation that structures European A festivals' representation of Italian cinema - their designation of North as centre, and South as excessive other - displaces the antagonisms of global capitalism onto an 'elsewhere'. In doing so, the festivals appear to attenuate film's potential to critique the economic system's inherent contradictions. Beyond

observing the fact that European A festivals are embedded within, and required to reproduce, the logic of contemporary global capitalism - including its logic of uneven development - I utilised a reading of *Gomorra* that foregrounded the aspects of the film that showed these structures of excess and displacement as precisely the structures of global capitalism which European A festivals ideologically maintain. The analysis culminated in an interpretation of the *Gomorra*'s use of real footage from Venice. I argued that the film's screening of the festival - and, in particular of Scarlett Johansson wearing a dress that the film suggests was the product of exploitative, Camorra-led labour - made manifest the mediated nature of films and festivals themselves. I asserted that such scenes signalled, above all, festivals' repression of images of corruption and exploitative labour in order to produce their self-image of cleanliness and glamour. One can find a similar dynamic in Karlovy Vary's representation of another top prize winner, *Cert bambini* (Andrea and Antonio Frazzi, 2004). The festival's synopsis of the film instantiates similar tropes of southern Italy as a Mafia-ridden, impoverished and irrational territory, while foregrounding the film's realist depiction of the place. This is best summarised in the synopsis' concluding statement: 'This fascinating film bears cruel witness to how easy it is for a troubled child to get mixed up in Naples camorra' (Karlovy Vary International Film Festival, 2004). The sentence combines a brutally humanist conception of ethical witnessing and a fetishisation of southern Italy as a site of Mafia violence and the corruption of innocence (via the image of a 'troubled child'). Karlovy Vary's summary of the film exemplifies European A festivals' ideological designation of the South as other paired with a fantasy of integrating that other through a pitying gaze that, nonetheless, ensures that 'the

outreaching hand [...] will never actually touch that which it reaches for' (Schoonover, 2012, 66).

### **3. THE OBSCENE SUPEREGO LAW OF EUROPEAN A FESTIVAL IDEOLOGY**

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I have shown that European A festivals' ideological construction of Italian cinema is regulated by a series of fantasy formations and implicit laws that disavow not only contingency as such, but the contingency generated by their need to operate within, and maintain, global capitalism. These festivals must differentiate themselves from Hollywood, claiming to function under the sign of an artistic and humanist universality purified from any constraint by economic necessity – even while, paradoxically, it is precisely economic necessity that requires that such festivals engage in this process of differentiation. At the same time, European A festivals' practices and the meanings they produce are conditioned by their character as industry-oriented events located in one of the historical centres of capitalist and imperialist expansion – their need to channel their diverse stakeholder interests 'towards the goals of [European] nation-states and global capital' (Rhyne, 2009, 10). The fantasmatic underpinnings of European A festivals' representation of themselves and Italian cinema is best summarised by a passage in the essay from which this chapter takes its name. In 'Da Capo Senza Fine,' Žižek (2000a, 223) deploys a notion of the Real as the limit to resignification, signalling the repressed superego law that constitutes today's dominant ideology:

In so far as we conceive of the politico-ideological resignification in terms of the struggle for hegemony, today's Real which sets a limit to resignification is Capital: the smooth functioning of Capital is that which remains the same, that which

‘always returns to its place’, in the unconstrained struggle for hegemony.

The repressed element that ‘always returns to its place’ in the order of European A festivals, the repressed Real ‘which sets a limit to resignification’ is, *alla fine* (in the end), capital. Italian cinema and indeed art cinema may be signified and resignified in myriad ways – as a decadent tour through Rome in the tradition of Fellini, or an ethical witnessing of humanitarian tragedy in the tradition of neorealism. Yet the guiding principle, the ‘unwritten rule’ that sets the limit to signification is European A festivals’ need to maintain ‘the smooth functioning of Capital’ (Žižek, 2000b, 657; 2000a, 223). Such festivals’ construction of Italian cinema, and global art cinema, may celebrate ‘art’ and attempt to perform an integration of the other, but only do so provided that the Real of capital is left in place, and the symbolic coordinates of the global capitalist system (e.g. North/South) remain intact. In analysing European A festivals’ awarding and representation of Italian cinema in this way, I have aimed to present a systematic analysis of not only such festivals’ ideological functioning, but of the way in which these institutions are conditioned by their dependency on the economic system in which they are embedded, resulting in disavowals, displacements and the reproduction of dominant ideologies and power systems. Ultimately, I have aspired to uncover European A festivals’ ‘obscene superego [law] qua basis and support of the public Law’ – a law that ‘is operative only in so far as it remains unacknowledged, hidden from the public eye’ (Žižek, 2005, 71). In so doing I have aimed at ‘producing a rift in the seemingly unbreakable consistency of ideological formations from which the radical rearticulation of the very ideological framework suddenly appears possible’ (Vighi and Feldner, 2007). This rift is precisely the place from

which an intervention into the obscene law of capital, and the fantasies it generates, becomes possible.

#### **4. AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

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This thesis has analysed a necessarily limited corpus in order to provide an in-depth and systematic study of European A festivals' ideological functioning as it is manifest in their awarding and representation of Italian cinema in the years 2000-2017. It has aimed to provide the foundations for future research in a variety of areas; each aspect of the project can be expanded in myriad ways. Its methodology can be applied to a variety of paratexts within and even outside the discipline of film studies. Its corpus can be extended in each of its dimensions, allowing investigations of various historical periods, cinemas, awards and film festivals. In the interests of brevity, I now highlight a few of the most pertinent lines of inquiry that future scholarship might pursue. Within the field of film festival studies, the methodology and findings that I have provided can be used to analyse the ideological functioning of film festivals beyond the European A circuit. Loist (2016) describes the A circuit as 'hierarchical', and her claim is supported by Wong's (2011) and Dovey's (2015) analyses of the reproduction of a Northern hegemony within this hierarchy. It would therefore be useful to compare the way in which A festivals outside of Europe construct cinema, Italian or otherwise. Do other A festivals offer a counterpoint to the Eurocentrism of the dominant European A circuit? Or does their place in the global market and the 'subaltern sign economy' it generates result in a performance of 'auto-orientalism' (Elsaesser, 2016, 26)? Such research would contribute to an understanding of these important institutions' role in creating a certain idea of global art cinema as well as, perhaps, highlighting both the interconnectedness of and

dissonances between different festivals, territories and cinemas. Following a different line of research, one could also expand the methodology I have developed to include the paratexts and ephemera that scholars such as Wong (2011), Stringer (2008) and Zielinski (2016) identify. This would entail an analysis that puts synopses into dialogue with entire festival programmes, posters and reviews of films that appear in the festival press, films' press packs and even transcripts of press conferences that accompany the presentation of films in the main competition. While the synopsis presents the most distilled expression of the ideology of European A festivals, analysing the extent to which the same values may be manifest in other paratexts would assist our understanding of overall trends in the ideological construction of cinema at European A festivals. Moreover, since each paratext is associated with a different interest group, yet always mediated through the festival apparatus, comparing them would allow one to investigate the effects of festival apparatus on enunciation. Are the differences between the groups subsumed into an overarching ideological project, structured around the superego law of capital? Or do potentialities for resistance appear in these differences? Finally, another important area for research into film festivals suggested by this project is the question of audiences' reception and conception of films. For example, many festivals feature audience awards, and thus one might compare a corpus of top prize winners with audience award winners, analysing audience responses to either or both. Such research would provide insights into the relationship between the idea of art cinema that film festivals reproduce and audiences' conceptions of it. Again, this would provide further information regarding the similarities and differences, the homogenisation and resistance involved in, the

construction of art cinema at film festivals in all their dimensions.

Moving into other areas of research, one might also consider film festivals' place in an entire constellation of institutions engaged in the construction of Italian and/or art cinema. Work still needs to be done on the roles of the various institutions that Italian film scholars have identified as important actors in these processes: cultural institutes, art cinemas, ministries of culture, educational institutions and film criticism.<sup>116</sup> The methodology that I have developed can be applied to the paratexts produced by each of these institutions either as a means of analysing the ideological construction of cinema by each, or attempting to outline the processes common to all of them. My findings can also be used to investigate corollary procedures that affect the production, distribution and representation of Italian or other cinemas worldwide. Giacomo Manzoli (cited in Uva, 2013, 264) has described Italian state film funding as producing a 'cinema di regime' (regime cinema) in which only 'serious' films are awarded funding. Using the findings above, one might further investigate the way in which this 'regime' is conditioned by dominant notions of Italian cinema (re)produced by European A festivals. This would offer insights into the chain of Italian cinema's construction - from production (e.g. state funding) to exhibition and representation (e.g. at film festivals), to distribution (e.g. securing distribution deals at said festivals). To what extent is the construction of Italian cinema a circular process in which film projects that receive funding (and therefore are realised) are those which adhere to dominant ideas of 'serious' Italian cinema, therefore being likely to win awards at European A festivals, and thus reinforcing those same norms of Italian cinema? At which

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<sup>116</sup> See *inter alia* Hipkins and Renga (2016); Scaglioni et al. (2018); O'Rawe (2008); and O'Leary (2017).

points might this process break down - for example, films that fail to receive state support, to win awards at film festivals, or, even having won an award, fail to secure international distribution.<sup>117</sup> Theorising this circular process as ideology allows one to understand and intervene in it. Finally, this thesis's insistence on power of the film text to make manifest the Real of ideology can be applied across projects that seek to analyse films for political ends. Such projects would continue to mobilise interpretations of film texts as means of disrupting the dominant fantasies of our era, offering tools to radically renegotiate the ideological coordinates that regulate our lives.

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117 Indeed, in compiling the corpus for the project, I have observed that there are several Italian films that win awards at film festivals but do not secure international distribution, although this was not the case for any Italian film that won top prize at a European A festival in the period studied.

# Appendix 1: List of A Festivals

This list is adapted from the most recent *FIAPF Festivals Directory* (Anon., 2016).

<b>Festival</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Dates</b>
Berlin International Film Festival	Berlin, Germany	7-17 <sup>th</sup> February
Cairo International Film Festival	Cairo, Egypt	20-29 <sup>th</sup> November
Festival de Cannes	Cannes, France	14-25 <sup>th</sup> May
International Film Festival of India (Goa)	Goa, India	20-28 <sup>th</sup> November
Karlovy Vary International Film Festival	Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic	28 <sup>th</sup> June-6 <sup>th</sup> July
Festival del film Locarno	Locarno, Switzerland	7-17 <sup>th</sup> August
Mar del Plata International Film Festival	Mar del Plata, Argentina	9-18 <sup>th</sup> November
Montreal World Film Festival	Montreal, Canada	23 <sup>rd</sup> August-3 <sup>rd</sup> September
Moscow International Film Festival	Moscow, Russia	18-25 <sup>th</sup> April
San Sebastián International Film Festival	Donostia-San Sebastián, Basque Country, Spain	20-28 <sup>th</sup> September
Shanghai International Film Festival	Shanghai, China	15-24 <sup>th</sup> June
Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival	Tallinn, Estonia	16 <sup>th</sup> November-2 <sup>nd</sup> December
Tokyo International Film Festival	Tokyo, Japan	28 <sup>th</sup> October-5 <sup>th</sup> November
Venice International Film Festival	Venice, Italy	28 <sup>th</sup> August-7 <sup>th</sup> September

Festival		
Warsaw Film Festival	Warsaw, Poland	11-20 <sup>th</sup> October

## Appendix 2: Italian Films That Have Won Best Picture at a European A Festival, 1946- 2017

I have included Italian films that have won awards at Cannes and Venice prior to A accreditation due to their considerable influence both on the European film festival circuit and as founding members of the A circuit.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Film</b>	<b>Director</b>	<b>Festival</b>
1946	<i>Rome, Open City/ Roma, città aperta</i>	Roberto Rossellini	Cannes
1951	<i>Miracle in Milan/ Miracolo a Milano</i>	Vittorio de Sica	Cannes
1952	<i>Two Cents Worth of Hope/ Due soldi di speranza</i>	Renato Castellani	Cannes
1957	<i>Oh! Sabella/ La nonna Sabella</i>	Dino Risi	San Sebastián
1960	<i>La Dolce Vita/ La dolce vita</i>	Federico Fellini	Cannes
1962	<i>Arthur's Island/ L'isola di Arturo</i>	Damiano Damiani	San Sebastián
1963	<i>Mafioso/ Mafioso</i>	Alberto Lattuada	San Sebastián
1963	<i>Hands Over the City/ Le mani sulla città</i>	Francesco Rosi	Venice
1963	<i>To Bed or Not to Bed/ Il diavolo</i>	Gian Luigi Polidoro	Berlinale
1963	<i>Bell'Antonio/ Il bell'Antonio</i>	Alessandro Bolognini	Locarno
1964	<i>Red Desert/ Deserto rosso</i>	Michelangelo Antonioni	Venice
1965	<i>Sandra/ Vaghe stelle d'Orsa</i>	Luchino Visconti	Venice
1966	<i>The Birds, the Bees,</i>	Pietro Germi	Cannes

	<i>and the Italians/ Signori e signore</i>		
1966	<i>The Battle of Algiers/ La battaglia di Algeri</i>	Gillo Pontecorvo	Venice
1967	<i>Blow-Up/ Blow-Up</i>	Michelangelo Antonioni	Cannes
1970	<i>Dead of Summer/ Ondata del colore</i>	Nelo Risi	San Sebastián
1971	<i>The Mattei Affair/ Il caso Mattei</i>	Francesco Rosi	Cannes
1971	<i>The Garden of the Finzi-Continis/ Il giardino dei Finzi Contini</i>	Vittorio de Sica	Berlinale
1972	<i>The Working Class Goes To Heaven/ La classe operaia va in paradiso</i>	Elio Petri	Cannes
1977	<i>Antonio Gramsci, the Days of Prison/ Antonio Gramsci, I giorni di carcere</i>	Lino Del Fra	Locarno
1977	<i>Padre padrone/ Padre padrone</i>	Paolo e Vittorio Taviani	Cannes
1978	<i>The Tree of Wooden Clogs/ L'albero degli zoccoli</i>	Ermanno Olmi	Cannes
1980	<i>To Love the Damned/ Maledetti vi ameró</i>	Marco Tullio Giordana	Locarno
1988	<i>The Legend of the Holy Drinker/ La leggenda del Santo Bevitore</i>	Ermanno Olmi	Cannes
1991	<i>The House of Smiles/ La casa del sorriso</i>	Marco Ferrari	Berlinale
1998	<i>Così ridevano / Così ridevano</i>	Gianni Amelio	Venice
2001	<i>The Son's Room/ La stanza del figlio</i>	Nanni Moretti	Cannes
2003	<i>Facing Window/ La finestra di fronte</i>	Ferzan Ozpetek	Karlovy Vary
2004	<i>Private/ Private</i>	Saverio Costanzo	Locarno
2004	<i>A Children's Story/ Certi bambini</i>	Andrea & Antonio Frazzi	Karlovy Vary
2012	<i>Caesar Must Die/ Cesare deve morire</i>	Paolo e Vittorio Taviani	Berlinale
2013	<i>Sacro GRA/ Sacro GRA</i>	Gianfranco Rosi	Venice

2013	<i>The Great Beauty/ La grande bellezza</i>	Paolo Sorrentino	Tallinn
2016	<i>Fire at Sea/ Fuocoammare</i>	Gianfranco Rosi	Berlinale

# Appendix 3: Synopsis of Secondary Case Studies

## **A3.1 A CHILDREN'S STORY (CERTI BAMBINI, ANDREA AND ANTONIO FRAZZI, 2004)**

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Eleven-year-old Rosario lives in a cheerless apartment in the suburbs with his sick grandmother who spends most of the day in bed. He and a couple of friends spend time slacking off between a dive pub and the Las Vegas gambling joint. They smoke, drink and steal, imitating the worst of the adult world they see around them. The laughter that once graced their faces as children has been replaced by a queer, ambiguous smile bearing witness to myriad painful experiences. The makers of *A Children's Story* (based upon the novel by Diego De Silva) have placed incidents from the boys' lives in extensive flashbacks, mental flights Rosario embarks upon during long subway rides. With every new abrupt closing of the train doors, the boy drags us into his recent past and presents the three most influential people in his life: the admired Santino, the feared Damiano and the alluring Caterina. This fascinating film bears cruel witness to how easy it is for a troubled child to get mixed up in Naples camorra.

- *From the Karlovy Vary 2004 print and online programme*

### **A3.2 CAESAR MUST DIE (CESARE DEVE MORIRE, PAOLO AND VITTORIO TAVIANI, 2012)**

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The performance of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar comes to an end and the performers are rewarded with rapturous applause. The lights go out; the actors leave the stage and return to their cells. They are all inmates of the Roman maximum security prison Rebibbia. One of them comments: 'Ever since I discovered art this cell has truly become a prison'.

Filmmakers Paolo and Vittorio Taviani spent six months following rehearsals for this stage production; their film demonstrates how the universality of Shakespeare's language helps the actors to understand their roles and immerse themselves in the bard's interplay of friendship and betrayal, power, dishonesty and violence. This documentary does not dwell on the crimes these men have committed in their 'real' lives; rather, it draws parallels between this classical drama and the world of today, describes the commitment displayed by all those involved and shows how their personal hopes and fears also flow into the performance.

After the premiere the cell doors slam shut behind Caesar, Brutus and the others. These men all feel proud and strangely touched, as if the play has somehow revealed to them the depths of their own personal history.

*- From the Berlinale 2012 print and online programme*

### **A3.3 SACRO GRA (GIANFRANCO ROSI, 2013)**

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After the India of Varanasi's boatmen, the American desert of the dropouts, and the Mexico of the killers of drug trade, Gianfranco Rosi has decided to tell the tale of a part of his own country, roaming and filming for over two years in a minivan on Rome's giant ring road—the Grande Raccordo Anulare, or GRA—to discover the invisible worlds and possible futures harbored in this area of constant turmoil. Elusive characters and fleeting apparitions emerge from the background of the winding zone: a nobleman from the Piemonte region and his college student daughter sharing a one-room efficiency in a modern apartment building along the GRA; a botanist making audio recordings of the interiors of palm trees to detect and then poison the insects that are devouring them like a plague; a modern day cigar-smoking prince doing gymnastics on the roof of his castle, surrounded by the sea of new apartment buildings proliferating around him; a paramedic in an ambulance eternally on duty treating car accident victims along the vast road; and an eel fisherman living on a houseboat beneath an overpass along the Tiber River. Far from the iconic sites of Rome, the GRA is a repository of stories of those at the edges of the ever expanding universe of the capital city.

*- From the Venice 2013 print and online programme*

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