

# Introduction

In the minds of many Italian intellectuals at the end of the nineteenth century, the word ‘americanismo’ conjured up disquieting images of modernity. It spoke of mass-produced goods, feverish consumerism, dumb conformism, and a relentless pursuit of materialistic pleasure. A parallel between American culture and modernity was also promulgated by the Vatican through its interpretation of ‘Americanism’ as a sinister, materialistic degeneration that risked engulfing the entire Catholic community in the USA.

These voices, however, represented only one side of the debate. Positive interest was growing. The political and military role of the USA on the international stage had started to attract attention, first in the Spanish–American war of 1898 and then, more prominently, during the First World War. America’s economic strength was praised not just for its capacity for mass production and technological innovation but also for the enviable lifestyle that, among the lower and middle classes, was by then far more affluent than that of their European counterparts. Americanism for many meant social mobility and emancipation from tradition, it meant new forms of entertainment and a cult of modernity in all its expressions, from skyscrapers to jazz music, cinema, and the radio. Among the most enthusiastic philo-Americans were the Futurists, who were the first in Italy to rave about jazz and to identify New York as the new Paris of the twentieth century.

America began to loom more and more largely over the cultural horizon of many Europeans. In Britain, both newspaper editor W. T. Stead and literary author H. G. Wells saw America as envisioning Europe’s future, and as rising to the status of being the place where—in Wells’s words—‘the leadership of progress must ultimately rest.’ American philosopher William James added a prophetic tone in one of his foundational lectures: ‘Our children, one may say, are almost born scientific.’ American entrepreneurs proved the most successful in grabbing hold of the new opportunities offered by technological advances and in leaving their mark on the modern world that was taking shape on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>1</sup>

The progressive influence of American culture produced a shift from the expression ‘Americanism’ to ‘Americanization’, which implied a threatening,

<sup>1</sup> W. T. Stead, *The Americanization of the World or The Trend of the Twentieth Century* (New York and London: H. Markey, 1901). H. G. Wells, *The Future in America* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1906), 257. William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1907), 14.

foreign presence. Paris, the most cosmopolitan of all European capitals, which had welcomed American culture and American intellectuals, was also the centre of a counter-discourse that presented America as a perverse excrescence of European culture. The values and traditions of the old continent had to be defended.<sup>2</sup>

In Italy, more than ‘americanismo’ or ‘americanizzazione’, the neologism that best characterized the response of much of the Italian intelligentsia to American culture was ‘americanata’. The term was coined in the late nineteenth century to describe a spectacular act born out of a ridiculous and childish desire to impress. This neologism became so trendy that it was even used as a headline for a series of articles on American *faits divers* published by Italy’s most popular illustrated magazine, *La Domenica del Corriere*, between 1908 and 1913. The term has also survived the test of time and is still present in the Italian language today. In its early usage it was part of the condescending, self-defensive attitude with which much of the Italian media described America.

At the turn of the century, Camillo Olivetti and Giovanni Agnelli—each the father of a manufacturing empire—travelled to the USA in search of lessons to be learnt. But these were isolated cases. In general, Liberal Italy’s educated elite preferred to stay at home and read about ‘americanate’ in the pages of *La Domenica del Corriere*. The view of America as a violent land of extremes, populated by poorly educated men and morally dubious women, even in its north-eastern, industrialized version, remained dominant. It was a sort of motorized, skyscrapered version of Buffalo Bill’s world: a ‘Wild East’.

At the same time, unexpectedly, masses of semi-illiterate Italians began to leave Italy, fleeing the newly unified nation state, which, according to *Risorgimento* narratives, had made the dream of the Italian people finally come true. Economic historians can illuminate us on what went wrong, but a cultural look at the response to this demographic revolution yields surprising results. How was early migration discussed in the media? How was it represented through literary works? Outright condemnation and a sense of embarrassment were the recurrent tones in the press. At the turn of the century, if daily papers dealt with migration, it was mainly to report on some disaster, the sinking of a ship, overcrowded with third-class passengers, or the deadly collapse of a mine in some distant corner of the world. The implicit message was that migration had been a tragic mistake, which nationalists mixed with cries about the humiliation and degradation suffered by the noble Italian race. Literary works did not even do that. They mainly ignored the matter, to the point that Italy’s major expert on migration literature,

<sup>2</sup> On this, see Philippe Roger, *The American Enemy: The History of French Anti-Americanism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005); and Seth Armus, *French Anti-Americanism (1930–1948)* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008).

Sebastiano Martelli, has concluded that the great novel of Italian migration is yet to be written.<sup>3</sup>

It took the Italian government until 1901 before a raft of legislation attempted fully to regulate migration and tackle the exploitation and misery attached to it. By then about half a million men and women were leaving Italy, every year. The political class, the media, and literary authors had woken up late to a phenomenon that did not square with their nationalistic values. This generated the co-habitation of two images of America: the imagined promised land of popular belief, and the caricatured depiction of the printed press.

After the First World War, it became impossible to dismiss America as a sum of its ‘americanate’. A condescending attitude was still at work, but the voice of those seeing something else became stronger and stronger. The multidisciplinary approach of this book will allow us to see how different cultural fields reacted in different ways and at different times to the rising presence of the USA as an economic and cultural superpower. By the 1920s, Hollywood had become the ultimate locus of all there was to love and hate about America. It had also become the capital of world cinema. And it established itself as a beacon from which the flickering image of America entered the eyes and minds of people in every corner of the world. The ‘Americanization’ of the planet, if nothing else, was partly a visual invasion, and America became an imagined country.

Cinema was a powerful new art, born out of French technology—the Lumière brothers won the first round with their *cinématographe*, beating Thomas Edison’s kinetoscope as the key hardware in the film industry—but quickly fallen into American hands. This happened thanks to US protectionist policies, followed by the collapse of European markets during the First World War. Film was a new narrative form that slowly began to fight for recognition as an art. It was also the most transmedial of all arts: photographic mainly, but based on literary scripts and performed by actors with the complement of sound that, by the late 1920s, no longer meant the occasional presence of a group of musicians performing live.

By a wise twist of fate, the first ever sound film was entitled *The Jazz Singer* (1927). If the 1920s are today remembered as the jazz age, it is because its syncopated rhythms, the pounding presence of the drum kit (jazz’s gift to world music), the popularity of its dance movements, became the music score of those very years. Even linguistically, the move from the pre-war ‘Belle Époque’ to the ‘Jazz Age’ is indicative of a major shift in Europe’s cultural balance. The eminent historian Eric Hobsbawm, also a jazz connoisseur under the pen name of Francis Newton, humorously wrote that ‘the social history of the twentieth-century arts

<sup>3</sup> Sebastiano Martelli, ‘Dal vecchio mondo al sogno americano: Realtà e immaginario dell’emigrazione nella letteratura italiana’, in Piero Bevilacqua, Andreina De Clementi, and Emilio Franzina, *Storia della migrazione italiana. Partenze*, i (Rome: Donzelli, 2001), 433–55.

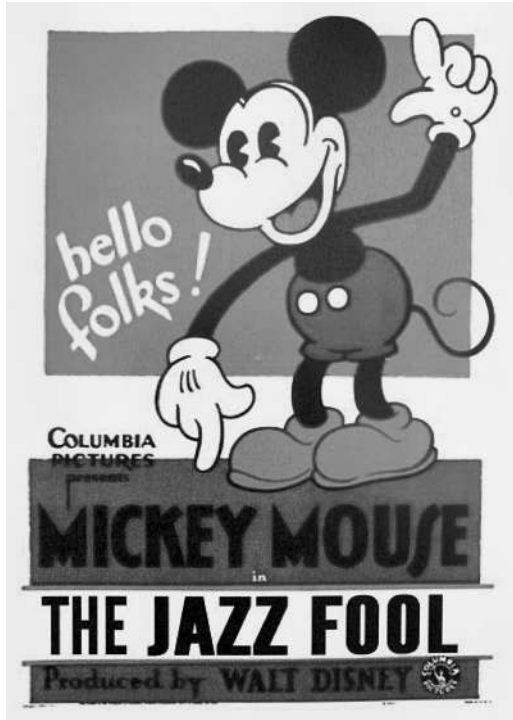


Fig. 0.1. Publicity poster of Walt Disney's *Mickey Mouse: The Jazz Fool* (1929). (courtesy of Rodney Rogers, New Orleans)

will contain only a footnote or two about Scottish Highland music or gypsy lore, but it will have to deal at some length with the vogue for jazz.<sup>4</sup>

And a vogue it was. Jazz travelled far thanks to the technology of vinyl records and the radio, but it also travelled thanks to cinema, often smuggled as accompanying music for the comic shorts by Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin, or through Walt Disney's early cartoons featuring Mickey Mouse. One of the early sound animations by Disney was *Mickey Mouse: The Jazz Fool* (1929), which the following year reached the first-run cinema theatres of most Italian cities with the title *Topolino ama il jazz*.

Mention of Walt Disney takes us to another cultural field where his products fought valiantly and became part of America's imaginary invasion of Italy: comics. By the mid-1930s, Mickey Mouse had become the main character of Italy's most popular comics magazine, aptly named *Topolino*. But by then the 'American craze' for comics was already in full swing, led by a colourful collection of superheroes mainly licensed by the powerful King Features Syndicate. Italian teenagers found themselves catapulted from the starched and tame

<sup>4</sup> Francis Newton, *The Jazz Scene* (Goring by Sea: McGibbon & Key, 1959), 14.

stories narrated in rhymed couplets by the *Corriere dei Piccoli* to the wild, science- and sensual-driven adventures featuring Flash Gordon or Mandrake. As Umberto Eco has suggested, those narratives were part of an increasing presence of American culture in Italy, often in direct contrast with the nationalistic vision promoted by Fascism's pedagogues.<sup>5</sup>

This brief, historical overview touching upon a number of different fields is an indirect argument for the need of a multidisciplinary approach in order to give an adequate sense of how American culture entered Italy. It is also an argument towards the need to pay attention to the economic and social context that generated those cultural artefacts and the one that received, replicated, and elaborated them.

When the USA emerged as an economic superpower at the start of the twentieth century, William Cody, better known as Buffalo Bill, was still touring Europe with his spectacular Wild West show. The popularity of Buffalo Bill serves as a reminder that there was another America that populated the minds of Europeans up until the late nineteenth century, and it was an America in many ways opposed to the image of the USA as an urbanized, technologically minded, and pleasure-seeking nation. It was a primitive land, violent and unforgiving, the vast theatre of romantic stories of individuals fighting for their survival. The popularity of the Western genre—in film as much as in literature and comics—allowed this image to continue into the twentieth century and coexist with the new vision of America as a modern civilization defined by the futuristic skyline of Manhattan's skyscrapers. What did Italians make of these opposing images?

Mention of Italians brings us to another introductory caveat: there was no such thing as a homogeneous entity of 'Italians.' Beyond the regional differences that still characterize Italy today, the cultural make-up of Italy's educated elite—the less than 5 per cent of the population that entered the classroom of a *Ginnasio-Liceo*—was very distant from the semi-illiterate rest of the country. It was so distant that one of the most respected historians on Italian migration, Donna Gabaccia, has written of it as 'two peoples who often seemed as different as two races.' This is particularly important in a study of Italy–USA relations, since one 'race' formed the vast majority of those millions who criss-crossed the Atlantic in search of a better life. And the other 'race' was the educated minority who wrote about America in periodicals and travel books.<sup>6</sup>

A literary narrative of a failed encounter between these two peoples can be found in Mario Soldati's early masterpiece, his travel memoir *America primo amore* (1935). In the chapter entitled 'Italo-americani', the young Turinese intellectual forces himself to spend some time with a family of proudly Italian American immigrants from the South. Soldati boasts about having learnt English

<sup>5</sup> Umberto Eco, 'Il modello americano', in Umberto Eco, Remo Ceserani, and Beniamino Placido (eds), *La riscoperta dell'America* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1984), 3–32.

<sup>6</sup> Donna Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (London: UCL Press, 2000), 19.

from scratch in his first six months there. His interlocutors, instead, only communicated using ‘a curious Sicilian–American jargon’. When invited into their home, Soldati barely tolerates the poor quality of their food, wine, and conversation, so much so that he finds escape in the reminiscence of superior parties back in Turin, which he glorifies with the quotation of a verse from Baudelaire’s poem in praise of wine, obviously in the French original. America meant different things to different people. Where a family of migrants were eagerly displaying their version of the ‘American dream’, a young Italian intellectual could only disapprove of America’s—and these new Americans’—lack of *finesse*.<sup>7</sup>

But, even among *litterati* such as Mario Soldati, what was their knowledge of America? Looking at Italian correspondents and travel writers in the USA, Michel Beynet has argued that Italian commentators lacked expertise. Even during the interwar years, the near-totality of books on America were written by non-specialists—often simple collections of articles written during a journey through the USA—free from references to other works on the subject. More than a coherent debate, there was a cacophony of many voices, each concentrating on his or her own impressions. There were no ‘americanisti’ in the universities either, to the point that the entry on ‘Stati Uniti d’America’ for Italy’s most prestigious state-sponsored encyclopaedia, the Treccani, was oddly given to a classicist.<sup>8</sup>

One of the first scholars to buck the trend was Mario Praz, who taught English Literature at Rome University but developed an interest in American literature. When he wrote about American travellers in nineteenth-century Italy, Praz warned his readers that the history of cultural relations between Italy and America was a troubled one, ‘often involving disguise and misunderstandings.’<sup>9</sup> This was also due to the fact that the number of Italian intellectuals who had first-hand knowledge of America—not necessarily because they had been there but simply because they were familiar with the English language—was very limited. As we will see, the publishing industry relied on French translations as a source for their Italian versions of American fiction well into the interwar years. One gets a similar impression of a ‘French connection’ in debates concerning cinema. When Florence’s most sophisticated literary journal, *Solaria*, devoted an entire issue to cinema in 1927, the discussion was an Italian supplement to what had happened in Paris the year before. *Les Cahiers du mois* had published its own

<sup>7</sup> Mario Soldati’s *America primo amore* (Florence: Bemporad, 1935); then in *America e altri amori: Diari e scritti di viaggio* (Milan: Mondadori, 2011), 40–9. The line of Baudelaire’s poem comes from ‘L’Âme du vin’ in his *Les Fleurs du mal*.

<sup>8</sup> Michel Beynet, *L’image de L’Amérique dans la culture italiennes de l’entre-deux guerres*, 3 vols (Aix-Marseille: Publications de l’Université de Provence, 1990), i. 6–8. The ninety-page-long encyclopedic entry, published in 1932, was coordinated by Angelo Taccone, then professor of Ancient Greek literature at Turin University. This is mentioned by Giorgio Spini in his ‘Prefazione’ to Giorgio Spini, Gian Giacomo Migone, and Massimo Teodori (eds), *Italia e America dalla Grande Guerra a oggi* (Venice: Marsilio, 1976), 9–22 (13).

<sup>9</sup> Mario Praz, ‘Impressioni italiane di americani nell’ottocento’, *Studi americani*, 4 (1958), 85–107 (88).

dedicated issue on cinema, and most of the critical references used by the *solari-ani* referred to the French debate, even when discussing American cinema. Equally telling was the adoption of the French nickname for Charlie Chaplin's iconic tramp character, Charlot. Italian film critics used it indiscriminately, often as an awkward synonym for Charlie Chaplin the filmmaker himself.

The question of knowledge of the English language takes us to the field of school education, which needed to be explored in order to understand the extent to which French prolonged its influential role in the cosmopolitan make-up of Italy's educated elite. This also raised questions of gender, following the creation of the Liceo Femminile, in 1923. But, rather than tackle this topic here, I will use it as a sign of the need to present the context and content of this book more systematically. The next section will dwell on the field of studies on American culture in Italy, after which I will outline the specific contribution of this book.

### The Academic Context

Today, no historian of twentieth-century Italy would question the major role played by American culture, sometimes welcomed with open arms, other times appropriated and reshaped in creative ways, or fought against and demonized as a sign of spiritual decadence. The study of the presence of American culture in Italy goes back a few decades. It found a literary forum in *Studi americani*, Agostino Lombardo's journal founded in 1955. It is easy to imagine how in those years the geopolitical context must have turned any discussion centring on the USA into a potential field for ideological entrenching. Stephen Gundle's study of the cultural policies of the Italian Communist Party during that period reveals this in some depth.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the development of cultural studies in the late 1960s created an interest in mass media and mass culture that inevitably put the spotlight on America. In Italy, however, this new discipline was slow to be established, and so debates around Italy's 'Americanization' remained within the fields of sociology and intellectual history.

A much-needed milestone contribution arrived only in 1991 in the form of the hefty, collective volume *Nemici per la pelle: Sogno americano e mito sovietico nell'Italia contemporanea*, with a scholarly introduction by Pier Paolo D'Atorre, who sadly passed away prematurely only a few years afterwards. Its twenty-three essays provided a wide range of studies to which a number of international scholars contributed. Then, following the end of the 'American century', a score of in-depth monographs concentrated on American culture in Europe and so, partly, on Italy too. In 2005, two of the most prominent figures in the study of

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow. The Italian Communists and the Challenge of Mass Culture, 1943–1991* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

American mass culture abroad, Robert W. Rydell and Rob Kroes, published a volume—*Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanization of the World, 1869–1922*—which examined the early phase of the expansion of American culture. Rydell and Kroes’s mention of Bill Cody’s Wild West performance in Bologna, however, was provocative rather than illustrative of a specific interest in Italy. It could have been London, Paris, Vienna, or any other historic European town visited by the Wild West show.<sup>11</sup>

In the same year, another monograph dedicated to the subject was published by a historian well rooted in Italian studies who had contributed to D’Attorre’s book: Victoria De Grazia. Her *Irresistible Empire: America’s Advance through 20th-Century Europe* came in the wake of her stimulating work of the 1980s and 1990s. It showed how America provided a model of economic strategies and social emancipation—from Hollywood’s marketing ploys to the Rotary Club—which spread throughout Europe with the intensity of a religious fever. After that came two other volumes published in 2012. They were the more traditional study of diplomatic and intellectual history by Mary Nolan—*The Transatlantic Century: Europe and America, 1890–2010*—which developed the notion of a two-way relation between Europe and the USA, and David W. Ellwood’s scholarly *tour de force: The Shock of America: Europe and the Challenge of the Century*. Ellwood, like De Grazia, is a historian whose research has often concentrated on Italy. In this book, beyond presenting a political history of the phenomenon, Ellwood provided countless examples of the deep impact of American culture abroad, with many examples focusing specifically on the Italian peninsula.<sup>12</sup>

Mention of four volumes by American and British historians raises the question of where Italian scholarship stood during those early years of the twenty-first century. Indeed, Italy’s leading Americanist of his generation, Maurizio Vaudagna, co-edited not one but two volumes in English. His own research interests, however, concentrated on economic policies, and so the cultural dimension was a secondary concern. Another ‘americanista’, Massimo Teodori, produced a book entitled *Maledetti americani*, which was more of a long discussion-essay than a scholarly work. The following year he coupled it with its anti-thesis, *Benedetti americani*, both books revealing how the polemics related to the political role of the USA in the post-WWII years were still fuelling attempts at historical analysis.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Pier Paolo D’Attorre (ed.), *Sogno americano e mito sovietico nell’Italia contemporanea* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1991). D’Attorre became director of the Fondazione Gramsci Emilia-Romagna in 1992, was then mayor of Ravenna until he died of tumor in April 1997, at the age of forty-six. Robert W. Rydell and Rob Kroes, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanization of the World, 1869–1922* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America’s Advance through 20th-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005). Mary Nolan, *The Transatlantic Century: Europe and America, 1890–2010* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); David W. Ellwood, *The Shock of America: Europe and the Challenge of the Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> David K. Adams and Maurizio Vaudagna (eds), *Transatlantic Encounters: Essays on the Use and Misuse of History in Europe and America* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2000). R. Lawrence Moore and Maurizio Vaudagna (eds), *The American Century in Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University



Again, the cultural dimension remained somehow in the background, and D'Atorre's book of 1991 remained unequalled. An Italian scholar who might have written an insightful book about the influence of American culture was Umberto Eco. Starting from his foundational work in semiotics and Italian cultural studies in the 1960s and 1970s, Eco paid particular attention to American culture as a paradigm of popular, mass-produced artefacts. Inspiring and entertaining were also his journalistic pieces written from 'the province of the American empire', to paraphrase the title of one of the books that collected them, *Dalla periferia dell'impero* (1977). These many thoughts and small contributions, however, were never condensed into a monograph. Instead, at the start of the twenty-first century, Eco produced a novel, the most autobiographical of his fictional *oeuvre*—*La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana* (2004). Recalling his own childhood during the interwar years, Eco dwelt at length on the importance of American comics in shaping his vision of the world during the Fascist regime. But, however stimulating this novel is, it was hardly a substitute for a scholarly study on American culture in twentieth-century Italy.<sup>14</sup>

The books just mentioned, and many other, shorter contributions, allowed me to form a detailed picture of the research field and of the portions that remained uncultivated. I had decided that my approach was going to be multidisciplinary but, in itself, such a line of investigation required a number of key methodological decisions. Help came from a hefty volume, once again by a historian of Europe with a particular interest in Italy. This is Donald Sassoon's *The Culture of the Europeans: From 1800 to the Present*. Its sixteen-hundred pages are the inevitable consequence of an ambitious chronological span and disciplinary breadth. At the same time, the book provides an erudite and thought-provoking reading that taught me two lessons. First, the importance of the connection between cultural artefacts and the social and economic context within which they find their place. Pierre Bourdieu's notion of 'cultural capital'—acknowledged in Sassoon's introduction—was a telltale sign of his intention to question high-culture canons and sedimented national narratives by simply looking at how artefacts fared within their specific fields and how they moved from one part of Europe to another. The second lesson concerned cultural models. Chapter 46 of his book is entitled 'Mass Culture: The American Challenge'. At the same time, the preceding 934 pages dwell often on the importance of France, and of Paris as a constant paradigm of the latest fashion. For a specialist in Italian culture, this chimed with something that, for years, I had wanted to get to the bottom of, ever since I had encountered an epigrammatic note by Antonio Gramsci that reads: 'We will

Press, 2003). Massimo Teodori, *Maledetti americani: Destra, sinistra e cattolici: Storia del pregiudizio antiamericano* (Milan: Mondadori, 2002); and *Benedetti americani: Dall'alleanza atlantica alla guerra al terrorismo* (Milan: Mondadori, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> Umberto Eco, *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana* (Milan: Bompiani, 2004); trans. in English as *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2005).

understand very little of Italian culture until 1900 unless we study it as a phenomenon of French provincialism.<sup>15</sup>

To my knowledge, nobody has written extensively on the ‘Frenchization’ of Italian culture, and the inelegance of this expression has perhaps defied any temptation. At the same time, when studying the cultural upbringing of the Italian educated elite throughout the nineteenth century—even before the Unification, whether in Francophile Piedmont, Austrian-ruled Lombardy, the Vatican’s Rome, or Spanish-sub-ruled Sicily—if there was one unifying thread, it was that of the presence of the French language and of Parisian culture in particular as models of a coveted cosmopolitan status and of a ‘modern’ lifestyle. The library of every self-respecting noble or upper-bourgeois family would have included a collection of French books, often accompanied by a subscription to one or two Parisian journals. Learning English or German was an exception, left predominantly to scientists and philosophy scholars. Reading and speaking French was the expectation. As Sassoon showed, this was taking place in Italy as much as in other parts of Europe. Throughout the nineteenth century, when it came to marketing its lifestyle, France remained—as recently defined by a British economic historian—‘a Velvet Empire.’<sup>16</sup>

No academic study, has fully traced this tension between French and American culture as it developed throughout the first decades following Italy’s unification, all the way until the First World War. The same can be said for the interwar years. In 1993, David Forgacs had insisted on the need to move back to the Fascist period in order to understand how American influence in Italy had taken shape. In the same year, Italian historian Emilio Gentile produced an essay on American culture and the Fascist regime, which provided a stimulating first answer although the role of French culture was still left in the margins.<sup>17</sup>

In more recent years, much has been written on the cultural history of the interwar period, and, although no single volume has been dedicated to foreign influence, the specific role of American culture has been touched upon by various scholars, from Ruth Ben-Ghiat to Forgacs himself together with Stephen Gundle. Most welcome was Daniela Rossini’s book on the ‘mito americano’ in the First World War. Mention of the ‘mito americano’ will remind many that, in the literary field, this had been a recurrent topic of study, based on the controversial thesis that interest in American

<sup>15</sup> Donald Sassoon, *The Culture of the Europeans: From 1800 to the Present* (London: Harper Press, 2006). Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderno 14* (1932–35); §37. All references to Gramsci’s *Quaderni del carcere* are based on the four-volume edition by Valentino Gerratana (Turin, Einaudi, 1975). The entire text is now freely available online at <https://quadernidelparcere.wordpress.com> (accessed 14 April 2023). Unless stated otherwise, all translations are mine.

<sup>16</sup> David Todd, *A Velvet Empire: French Informal Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).

<sup>17</sup> David Forgacs, ‘Americanisation: The Italian Case, 1938–1956’, *Borderlines. Studies in American Culture*, 1/2 (1993), 157–69 (161). Emilio Gentile, ‘Impending Modernity: Fascism and the Ambivalent Image of the United States’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 28/1 (1993), 7–29 (later repr. as part of his volume *The Struggle for Modernity: Nationalism, Futurism, and Fascism* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 161–80).

literature equated to anti-Fascism. On this, the recent, sadly posthumous, volume by Jane Dunnett—*The 'Mito Americano' and Italian Literary Culture under Fascism*—has shed much light. Overall, however, many questions remained unanswered, and the post-unification years stayed as an unexplored land if one excludes the work of diplomatic and political historians such as Giorgio Spini and, more recently, Daniele Fiorentino. Hence my resolution to concentrate this study on the period between Italy's unification and the implosion of the Fascist regime in July 1943, by which time America had started to come to Italy in the shape of GI soldiers.<sup>18</sup>

At its boundaries, the pre-unification period was aptly covered by a recent volume by Axel Körner, whereas the impact of the arrival of Allied troops during the last phase of the Nazi-led *Repubblica Sociale Italiana* has already been examined in detail by the seminal study of David Ellwood, *Italy 1943–1945*.<sup>19</sup>

As to my personal interest and contribution to this field of study, I should start by saying that until a dozen years ago my research interests focused exclusively on the fields of literature and film. At the same time, my interest in cultural history was slowly taking over. It took its first shape in a conference and an edited book on censorship in modern Italy, in collaboration with Robert Gordon, back in 2005. After that came an attempt to make sense of the demographic and cultural revolution that contemporary Italy was going through in those years. The former poor country that had seen millions of its citizens migrate to different parts of the world, America included, was now a wealthy country receiving waves of immigrants, in an epochal process that had started spectacularly across the Adriatic with the implosion of the Albanian regime in 1991. Again, this took the shape of a conference and book.<sup>20</sup>

Pondering on the past, present, and future impact of migration on Italian culture brought forth a notion that is as generic as it is fundamental for understanding who we are: cultural change. If Italy had been a crossroad of different civilizations throughout the centuries, to what extent could change be understood

<sup>18</sup> Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001). David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society: From Fascism to the Cold War* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007). Daniela Rossini, *Il mito americano nell'Italia della Grande Guerra* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2000); pub. in English as *Woodrow Wilson and the American Myth in Italy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008). Jane Dunnett, *The 'Mito Americano' and Italian Literary Culture under Fascism* (Rome: Aracne, 2015). A notable contribution by Giorgio Spini is the co-editorship and preface to *Italia e America dal settecento all'età dell'imperialismo* (Venice: Marsilio, 1976), which was paired to a second, complementary volume: *Italia e America dalla Grande Guerra a oggi* (Venice: Marsilio, 1976). By Daniele Fiorentino, see *Gli Stati Uniti e il Risorgimento d'Italia, 1848–1901* (Rome: Gangemi, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> Axel Körner, *America in Italy: The United States in the Political Thought and Imagination of the Italian Risorgimento, 1763–1865* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017). David W. Ellwood, *Italy 1943–1945* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1985).

<sup>20</sup> Guido Bonsaver and Robert Gordon (eds), *Culture, Censorship and the State in 20th Century Italy* (Oxford: Legenda: 2005). Emma Bond, Guido Bonsaver, and Federico Faloppa (eds), *Destination Italy: Representing Migration in Contemporary Media and Narrative* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2015).

through a study of the cultural history of the Italian peninsula? This was an ambitious research question, which introduced me to the challenge of discussing cultural change across different disciplines. More importantly, as a modernist, I was brought to focus on the study of the key phase of the arrival of American culture in competition with—and often mediated by—the historic foreign model of intellectual exercise and lifestyle fashion: France, or, better, Paris. This took me to another collaborative project, this time with Alessandro Carlucci and Matthew Reza, which produced a conference in 2016, a theoretical essay, and an edited volume entitled *Italy and the USA: Understanding Cultural Change in Language and Narrative*. My contribution to that volume is an early version of the third chapter of this book.<sup>21</sup>

By then I was sure about the need to study the arrival of American culture as strictly linked to Italy's entry into the modern world of mass production and mass culture. The solitary journey leading to this book had started.

### Questions of Methodology

Mention so far of two familiar names—Gramsci and Bourdieu—is an indication of my interest in connecting the social and cultural relevance of the objects of this study. Attached to it is the more recent field of world literature. Whether through Franco Moretti's *Atlas of the European Novel* or Pascale Casanova's *La République mondiale des lettres*, the perception of the wider horizon and of the many different journeys of literary works has made me familiar with a transnational mind frame. The wider, global context will be privileged as an agent in the cultural make-up of individuals and communities. The decades under scrutiny here witness a major shift in the strength and importance of transnational flows.<sup>22</sup>

At the same time, this approach has been enriched by other fields of research. The ambitious attempts at system theory by semioticians of the calibre of Umberto Eco and Yuri Lotman have allowed me to perceive the complexity and endless variations of the dynamics of cultural encounters and exchanges. I have also learnt much from the field of contact linguistics for their analytical and

<sup>21</sup> Guido Bonsaver, Alessandro Carlucci, and Matthew Reza, *Italy and the USA: Understanding Cultural Change in Language and Narrative* (Cambridge: Legenda, 2019). Guido Bonsaver, Alessandro Carlucci, and Matthew Reza, 'The Dynamics of Cultural Change: A Theoretical Frame with Reference to Italy–USA Relations', *900 Transnazionale/Transnational 900*, 3/1 (2019), 107–30.

<sup>22</sup> Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800–1900* (London: Verso 1998); Pascale Casanova, *La République mondiale des lettres* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1999); trans. into English as *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). Overall, I agree with Sven Beckert's definition of transnational history as 'a way of seeing' rather than a methodology, paying attention to networks and processes transcending politically defined spaces. See C. A. Bayly, Sven Beckert, et al., 'AHR Conversation: On Transnational History', *American Historical Review*, 111/5 (2006), 1441–64 (1454, 1459).

data-driven study of the organic variations of languages exposed to foreign borrowings. From these two areas of study I have derived the concept of the three phases through which foreign artefacts (material and immaterial such as an idea, a technique, or a word) are perceived, assimilated, and elaborated by the receiving cultural system: transfer, replica, and invention. The first, transfer, refers to the process of recognition and ostentation (as defined by Eco) in which a cultural artefact is identified and imported; replica takes place when the receiving culture starts to produce its own version of that artefact; and invention concerns the phase in which the process of elaboration comes to a stage whereby what is produced is only vaguely related to the originally imported artefact. The reality of cultural exchange is obviously more complicated and multidirectional. It is a simplification, however, which has helped me to conceptualize cultural change across different fields and different kinds of artefacts.<sup>23</sup>

It should also be mentioned that reception theory has added clear awareness of the subjective paths through which a cultural object ‘makes sense’ while interacting with the notions, attitudes, and intentions of its individual consumers. Individuals and groups are also capable of re-elaborating and producing an artefact entirely emancipated from—and indeed sometimes in opposition to—the original. This is one of the basic premises that allowed studies of American cultural influence to move away from its analysis as a one-way process of cultural imperialism or, as famously worded, ‘Coca-colonization.’<sup>24</sup> Jazz music, and a few decades later, rock’n’roll music, travelled across the Atlantic and provoked a myriad of different reactions that radiated in different directions, both socially and geographically, some recrossing the ocean and hitting America with equal force. As when four singing mop-tops reached New York City in February 1964 and spread Beatlemania across the USA. Or when, in the same year, the most autochthonous of all American literary and film genres, the western, was given a sharp twist by Italian director Sergio Leone, who began to play with its codes in *Per un pugno di dollari*.

Cultural history is a field of research that sits awkwardly between the stools of more established disciplines. This book is first and foremost a historical narrative,

<sup>23</sup> This classification derives mainly from Eco’s typology of the modes of sign production in his *Theory of Semiotics* (London: Macmillan, 1977; 1975 in Italian edn). The development of Eco’s model is detailed in the already mentioned theoretical article, Bonsaver, Carlucci, and Reza, ‘The Dynamics of Cultural Change’. The term ‘transfer’ comes from contact linguistics; see, e.g., Sarah Grey Thomason, ‘Contact as a Source of Language Change’, in Brian D. Joseph and Richard D. Janda (eds), *The Handbook of Historical Linguistics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 687–712. As for Lotman, the concept of semiosphere as developed in his *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture* (London: Tauris, 1990), although not used here specifically, has been stimulating to an understanding of the endless metamorphoses through which individuals and communities form a sense of being in relation to the environment in which they are immersed.

<sup>24</sup> The reference here is naturally to Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

and the monographs on European cultural history mentioned above have been instructive models. They also taught me not to lose sight of the particular. If I were to think of an inspiring forefather, then Carlo Ginzburg's classic, *Il formaggio e i vermi* (*The Cheese and the Worms*, 1976) deserves first mention. His micro-historical approach has always encouraged me to search for stories of individuals that allow us to sense the spirit of a period, or of the connections between places. The notion of 'national identity' is a delicate one and has often proved to be a theoretical construction rather than the actual experience of individuals: for this reason, no simplistic categorization of 'Italians' and 'Americans' will be applied. At the same time, during the years under consideration here, American culture began to acquire a defining presence in the lives and minds of people living in Italy, and as such it interfered with their sense of identity. It is a cultural historian's work to study this in all its many variations.

Most importantly, I should explain the selection of cultural fields explored by this book. Those examined in depth are six. The first concerns the discussion and representation of America in periodicals—from newspapers to illustrated and literary magazines. This provides much of the material towards an understanding of the many discourses that circulated in Italy. Then come the creative elaborations and theoretical discussions pertaining to the narrative arts: the traditional one, literature (from fiction to travel books), and the newly born one, film. The fourth field is that of music, made compulsory by the already mentioned importance of jazz, but also useful in order to see how the world of opera—historic territory for Italian composers—reacted to the emergence of American culture. The last two concern the interwar years, which brought new forms of cultural production beyond film in the form of the mass medium of radio and of comics. The latter were a first symptom before the post-Second World War explosion of what we now call 'youth culture'.

These six fields are complemented by other, secondary ones that simply presented themselves and needed to be discussed for better understanding of how America reached Italy. The first is the already mentioned field of foreign-language learning in the Italian school system. The perception of American culture throughout the entire period under scrutiny here was in many ways prejudiced by the fact that knowledge of the English language was limited to a small minority of the educated elite. Then came architecture, made compelling by the iconic presence of American skyscrapers, particularly so when asking what the Fascists made of their implicit challenge to Fascism's own ambition as a 'modernist' regime that intended to give a distinctive shape to every walk of life, buildings included. The same can be said about aviation, the technology which embodied modernity in the 20th century. Philosophy too knocked at the door, given the interest in American pragmatism shown at the start of the century by the Florentine *enfant terrible* Giovanni Papini, and passed on to the young Benito Mussolini himself. Finally came economic history, made necessary by the fact that America's Taylor-styled industries played a substantial part in America's image.

Overall, it goes without saying that for some of these fields of study I had to sit on the shoulders of their respective giants. At the same time, I thoroughly enjoyed the learning process of delving into each field's primary works. Studying the use of steel frame and concrete in high-rise buildings, or following the diaspora of New Orleans jazz musicians—some of Sicilian origin like Dominic James 'Nick' La Rocca—and the role of transatlantic ocean liners in providing a vehicle for Italian jazz musicians eager to reach America: these have been formative experiences whose excitement, I hope, is still detectable in the pages of this book. On top of this, those individual strands often coexisted and came entwined with one another. Sometimes this created narrative and visual 'knots'. One such experience is condensed in the second illustration of this Introduction. It shows two icons of the interwar years: Charlie Chaplin, one of America's greatest filmmakers, comically challenging Primo Carnera. The latter was then Italy's most famous heavyweight boxer. A few months after this picture was taken, Carnera became world champion but then, on the eve of Italy's invasion of Ethiopia—ironically, and embarrassingly for Fascist propagandists—he was defeated by African American boxer, Joe Louis. And, if the worlds of cinema, sport, and politics are conflated in the image, it is equally symbolic that this copy of the photograph should be a signed gift made by Carnera to Carlo Benzi, one of Italy's most prominent jazz musicians at the time. The two had befriended each other during an Atlantic crossing on the liner *Conte Grande*, in whose orchestra Benzi had played the saxophone. So, music is indirectly part of this photograph too, and the role of ocean liners—themselves much exalted as a symbol of Fascist Italy's technological achievements. Cinema, sport, politics, naval technology and jazz music: all converged and asked for 'their' story to be told, individual and collective.

Among the absent fields, one should say a word about the two most conspicuous omissions. First, there is no specific exploration of the fine arts. This is mainly due to the fact that, while the visual dimension is extremely important in the shape of film and photographs in illustrated magazines—and those are treated in depth—there was little transfer, indeed, perception, of American artistic production before the Second World War. Edward Hopper's suspended images of an American dream in crisis can rightly be put in parallel with Giorgio De Chirico's metaphysical art. However, it is a painting by De Chirico that was exhibited in New York in 1921. The impact of Hopper's work did not fully reach Italy—physically or artistically—until the post-war years. Indeed, Marla Stone's groundbreaking book on Italian fine arts during the Fascist years has very little to say about America, while, of course, this is a field that would compel extended treatment when dealing with the post-Second World War years.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Marla Stone, *The Patron State: Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998). On the late reception of American art in Italy, see Catherine Dossin, *The Rise and Fall of American Art, 1940s–1980s: A Geopolitics of the Western Art World* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 21–7.



Fig. 0.2. Charlie Chaplin comically facing Primo Carnera in a signed photo, which Carnera donated in 1930 to jazz musician Carlo Benzi during their crossing of the Atlantic on the liner *Conte Grande*. (courtesy of Adriano Mazzoletti, Rome)

The second absent field concerns the wider area of material culture—that is, how Italians changed their daily habits as a consequence of their contact—real or imaginary—with American culture. There is no doubt that things began to change during the chronological span of this book—and indeed some reference to these changes will be found in sections that address the experience of return migrants, for example. However, as in the case of fine arts, I would argue that this is a phenomenon that—for example, with regard to food culture—mainly concerns the post-WWII years. Fast-food restaurants were certainly mentioned by astounded Italian travellers to America during the interwar years, but there is no trace of that having any effect whatsoever on how Italians continued to eat their meals. Even the most Americanophile Futurists, when accompanying their performances in the Milanese and Roman nightclubs with alcoholic drinks, would sternly stick to champagne. Nobody was taken by the American predilection for bourbon whiskey (whereas the champagne versus whiskey topos is subtly displayed by Federico Fellini in his 1950s nightclub sequence of *La dolce vita*).<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> I expand on this in an essay entitled ‘“Senti’n po, a Gregori Pècche...”: Shavelson’s *It Started in Naples* and Fellini’s *La dolce vita* between Italian and US Culture’, in Guido Bonsaver, Brian



Clothing is another branch of material culture that has not found space here apart from a few notes about fashion in films that explicitly addressed the topic. Again, I would argue that it is not a field in which American culture had much influence before 1945. Sport and leisure time were more difficult fields to leave aside. No doubt Italian travellers to the USA commented on the dedication of Americans to leisure activities, and particularly shocking was the sight of young women playing sport with the vigour and competitiveness of their male counterparts. Mussolini's Fascism paid equal attention to sport and *dopo-lavoro*, and therefore parallels were offered. A study of the organization of sport and leisure time in Fascist Italy will probably show how America provided the example of a country already well developed in that direction. Indeed, Victoria De Grazia's monograph on women under Fascism already signals this.<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps it is fairer to admit that material culture is simply not at the centre of this book. I dwell on aspects of it when they emerge as relevant. At the same time, the core of this study is an understanding of 'culture' as the production of artefacts that are intended for intellectual pleasure: a newspaper article or a comic, a book, a film, a piece of music. Surely, food, clothing, and sport carry significant cultural connotations, but they principally serve non-intellectual functions. This is not an attempt at a hierarchy of cultural artefacts and social habits but simply a clarification of the main sphere of interests pertaining to this book.

As for the internal hierarchy and canons in each cultural field, following the cultural studies turn of yesteryear, I treat definitions of high and low culture with due caution. At the same time, it will be interesting to see the role this differentiation played in the judgement of Italians looking at American artefacts. The identification of America with mass production had enormous influence. Hollywood became a controversial paradigm of this process, constantly accused of allowing the commercial drive for mass appreciation to spoil the development of film aesthetics. American novels too, as we will see, were first seen as coming from 'below'. Before respectable bookshops began to display the best of contemporary American novelists—the stuff that fuelled the 'mito americano' in the 1930s—the stalls of street vendors and news kiosks were already crowded with scores of crime and adventure novels, and the craze for Jack London was already in full swing. What some of those works had in common was their middlebrow status. Americans were good at that. Even in the field of comics, when the Fascists eventually imposed anti-American measures in 1938, one expected response was that Italian magazines should give up those speech balloons and return to the dignified

Richardson, and Giuseppe Stellardi (eds), *Cultural Reception, Translation and Transformation from Medieval to Modern Italy: Essays in Honour of Martin McLaughlin* (Cambridge: Legenda, 2017), 331–51.

<sup>27</sup> Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).

literary tradition of rhymed couplets. A ‘higher-brow’ idea of children’s entertainment was re-established.<sup>28</sup>

Beyond the disciplines that have been mentioned so far, there is one that has always been implicit and now merits a comment: political history. The change from Liberal to Fascist Italy was so radical that we will need to consider its impact on cultural production and on the perception of America. The totalitarian and leader-centred make-up of the Fascist regime—at least in its intentions—turned Benito Mussolini into the ultimate judge of what constituted good or bad culture. His ideas on American politics, society, and culture are of great importance, whether or not Italians followed them in their multifarious practices. Mussolini might not have read comics, and he considered jazz to be only a type of dance music, but he was an avid reader of newspapers and books, and his weekly screenings of documentary and fiction films at Villa Torlonia are part of the history of Italian cinema, if nothing else because one of his sons, Vittorio, turned himself into an authoritative film critic and film producer.

The political dimension has been a recurring thread in my research interests even during the years in which literature and cinema were my main field of work. I constantly ended up focusing on authors and filmmakers whose political interests were worn on their sleeves. Working on censorship was also an exploration of the meeting point between cultural production and political power. If I look back, there is a work that is worth mentioning here, since it relates to politics and also provides a good bridge to another methodological question: the narrative style adopted in this book. In 2010, I wrote the biography of an extraordinary man called Gaetano Pilati, whose papers I had discovered in a Florentine archive. His life offered an ideal micro-story through which to narrate the radical changes that the Italian working class had gone through during its social and political emancipation in the early years of the twentieth century. The son of a semi-illiterate Bolognese farmer, Pilati moved to Florence in 1907 to become a modernizing builder (constructing affordable housing with reinforced concrete) and a militant socialist, finally elected to parliament in 1919. Under Fascism, he became a likely target and was eventually killed in cold blood, in the middle of the night, during the last anti-socialist pogrom of 24 October 1925.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> The notion of ‘middlebrow’ will be used in this study to refer to those literary works that mediated between the intellectual sophistication and ambitions of ‘high-brow’ literature and the commercially driven and coded characteristics of cheap paperback fiction. On this notion, in relation to the Italian publishing industry during the period under consideration, see Sara Sullam, ‘(Middle)browsing Mondadori’s Archive: British Novels in the *Medusa* Series, 1933–1945’, *Textus: English Studies in Italy*, 28/3 (2015), 179–201; Elke D’hoker and Sarah Bonciarelli, ‘Extending the Middlebrow: Italian Fiction in the Early Twentieth Century’, *Belphégor*, 15/2 (2017), 1–16; and Fabio Guidali, ‘Developing Middlebrow Culture in Fascist Italy: The Case of Rizzoli’s Illustrated Magazines’, *Journal of European Periodical Studies*, 4/2 (2019), 106–21.

<sup>29</sup> Guido Bonsaver, *Vita e omicidio di Gaetano Pilati: 1881–1925* (Florence: Cesati, 2010). The works on censorship I refer to are *Censorship and Literature in Fascist Italy* (Toronto: Toronto

When I wrote his story, I decided that the narrative should be a fabric weaving together written text and the visual clues from the images I had collected—old photos, documents, the odd memorabilia. It was a dialogue between text and image that was partially spurred on by the example of personal favourites such as W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* (2001), Benedetta Tobagi's *Come mi batte forte il cuore* (2009), and Edmund De Waal's *The Hare with Amber Eyes* (2010). Equally, though, it went back to a fond memory of my childhood: spending hours browsing through my father's four shelves of books, in particular through his illustrated history of the Second World War. I remember poring over those black and white photographs, some overexposed, some out of focus, trying to make sense of the three-dimensional reality they represented. This is the reason why this book comes with over a hundred images, all connected to the text. The visual journey contained within this book is not an appendix, but part and parcel of the narrative.

I should also add that my considerations will often be enriched by direct quotations. Similar to the decision to include illustrations, the purpose of this is to try and transmit the flavour and voice of those years. As cultural anthropologist Tim Ingold suggests, 'people grow in knowledge not only through direct encounters with others, but also through hearing their stories told'. He refers to stories of migration in distant lands, but I would argue that it is a similar question in relation to stories coming from a distant past, told by the people who experienced them and not just paraphrased by a historian.<sup>30</sup>

A note is also due concerning the use of America and American as synonyms for the United States of America and the US citizen. This is still the practised norm today, despite the terms' implicit ambiguity as a potential reference to the continent and the people living in both Americas. This book will not attempt to raise a linguistic crusade (although I applaud how the replacement of 'Indian' with 'native American' has eventually put right the centuries-old linguistic coda of one of the biggest blunders in human geography). At the same time, for the sake of clarity, the abbreviation USA and its adjective US will be used when abstracting from the historical setting and referring to the country and its citizens in a political sense. As for the use of Italian American with or without hyphen, I have come to the conclusion that 'Italian American' is the most respectful approximation, and I thank American friends and colleagues for helping me reach this conclusion.

The organization of the ten chapters of this book is, I hope, easily deductible from the table of contents. The First World War presented itself as a natural

University Press, 2007); and *Mussolini censore: Storie di letteratura, dissenso e ipocrisia* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2013).

<sup>30</sup> Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (London: Routledge, 2011), 161. I should also apologise for the lack of the original text in the many quotations from sources in Italian. It was present at first but had to be cut in order to contain the length of the book.

watershed, hence the division into two parts. Within each section, five chapters deal with the perception and presence of American culture, starting from the public debate and progressively concentrating on different cultural fields. The subdivision of the Fascist years comes from the need to underline the profound changes that Mussolini imposed in 1938 to the regime's cultural policies and how they impacted on the perception and representation of America.

Overall, these ten chapters should provide a stimulating angle through which to follow the development of Italian culture at a time of radical changes. By the 1920s, images of America were familiar to all Italians. Some remained suspicious, such as the country's leading playwright, Luigi Pirandello. Asked about it in 1929 during one of his long stays abroad, Pirandello had no doubts: 'Americanism is engulfing us. I think that a new beacon of civilization has turned on over there.' In Pirandello's mind, Americanism meant the end of Europe as he knew it, and the last bastion against this invasion was to be found in Paris. From his prison cell, Antonio Gramsci read the article and left a note about it in his notebook. He did not share Pirandello's apocalyptic tones. Better, he did not think that what was coming from across the Atlantic was such an alien, annihilating force. To him, 'it is an organic extension and an intensification of European civilization.'<sup>31</sup>

What the two agreed on, however, was that America offered a new paradigm, a new model of what the future might have in store for Italy, for Europe, and for the rest of the world.

<sup>31</sup> Corrado Alvaro, 'Pirandello della Germania del cinema sonoro e di altre cose', interview in *La Fiera letteraria*, 14 April 1929, pp. 17–19; now in Ivan Pupo (ed.), *Interviste a Pirandello: 'Parole da dire, uomo, agli altri uomini'* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2002), 427–31 (429). Antonio Gramsci's note appears in his *Quaderno 22* (1934), §15.