

The interwar decades of the 1920s and 1930s represent an important period for both film and politics. Indeed, many of the issues characterizing film studies in this era, including the silent versus sound film debates, the struggles between Film Europe and Film America, and the challenges posed to mainstream film in different ways by both the avant-gar

In writing about this institute, now obscure, I hope to contribute to a growing dialogue about the history and historiography of film studies. Cinema studies transcends films, of course, to encompass an examination of the spaces for their production and exhibition, as well as communities of reception. Associated with an internationalist political organization, the IECI provided a site of complex convergences of political film activity during the pivotal years when film was beginning to be treated as an aesthetic, educational and scientific object worthy of an autonomous discipline. Due perhaps to its instrumental approach to cinema, as well as its location within Fascist Italy, the institute has, by and large, been left out of the extant history of film, indicating, perhaps, that film history (the story of how films are made, canonized and studied) is dependent to no small degree upon the authorization of film scholarship. For the most part, film studies has opted to cleanse film history of its taint by both official politics and the institutions designed to apply political aims through education. This article begins an unearthing of a forgotten aspect of the history of film studies with a view to reconfiguring the preferences of existing literature. The activities associated with the IECI provide a crucial supplement, I believe, to other more well known organizations of the period, such as the BFI, MoMA and the Soviet school, and its journal can be compared to *Cinecine*, *U.S. Italic*, and *Estetica*.

The League of Nations was established in the wake of World War I to provide a new organ of diplomacy for the six major world powers, also known as the “concert of Europe”: Russia, Austria, Germany, France, Britain and Italy.⁶ At the first meeting of the League in 1919 a proposal was put forward to establish a technical committee for culture such as those being set up in economic and social spheres: child development, international drug and prostitution morality squads, labor (International Labor Organization), transit and communication, and health and hygiene (especially mental hygiene).⁷ In September 1921, French representative, Leon Bourgeois, submitted a report on intellectual organization, “urging improved and fuller exchanges of documents in all branches of knowledge and calling upon the League to fortify its ideals through the intellectual life uniting the nations and favor educational enterprises and research study as important influences on opinion among peoples.”⁸ The result was the 1922 meeting of an international roster of celebrated intellectuals that included such luminaries as Henri Bergson, Albert Einstein and Marie Curie, as well as lesser lights such as Mussolini’s Minister of Justice and Public Worship, Alfred Rocco, known as the jurist of Facism for the laws he wrote for Italy in 1926.⁹ In 1924 the French Government, which took an intense interest in its nation’s role in international cosmopolitan culture, offered to permanently house the commission in an Institute in Paris. By 1926 the Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, based in Paris, had begun operations, becoming asso-

sion about the role of national and educational film. A resolution taken at a 1928 meeting to make cinema a more effective form of popular education was typical:

That the producers of films should make documentary and scientific films as interesting as possible; that public administration encourage either by granting subsidies or facilitating distribution, or by the purchase of collections, the production of those films which for the moment is, and which for some time probably will be, less remunerative than the production of amusement-films. That the organizations for popular education by means of the cinema, compose cinema-programmes of proper length, and of sufficient variety, so that the worker may find in them the relaxation which he needs and at the same time the culture which he demands.¹⁵

Government, industry, educational representatives and social reformers utilized the League to promote theories of social design through film production, regulation, exhibition, and preservation policies. Yet despite the importance attributed to film throughout the 1920s, it took a fascist government to volunteer to fund a dedicated institute.

Based in Rome, the seat of Mussolini's government, The International Educational Cinematograph Institute played a complex role in mediating a variety of political philosophies. Although the League had shown great interest in film as art and education during the 1920s, it was not until Italy offered to fully fund an institute that the League was able to consolidate its efforts in a single heTVilla TorInoda. He its e

One reason may be connected to the fascist tendency to frame an appeal to a mythological vision of the past while utilizing the newest technologies, combining past and future in often contradictory ways. Mark Neocleous terms the particular combination of neo-classicism with hyper-modernism and folk traditions that characterized fascism as “reactionary modernism.”²⁰ Film technology was one of many new technologies applied to this paradoxical project. Benito Mussolini’s government had established a film agency, LUCE (*L’U n i t a t e C e n t r a l e d e l l a C i n e m a t o g r a f i a*), in 1924 to engage in a series of educational goals for cinema in Italy. The funding for the Institute just a few years later came from a state eager to consolidate its perceived power in this realm of cultural production and administration. To make the connection even clearer, Luciano de Feo, the head of LUCE, became the head of the Rome Institute as well.²¹

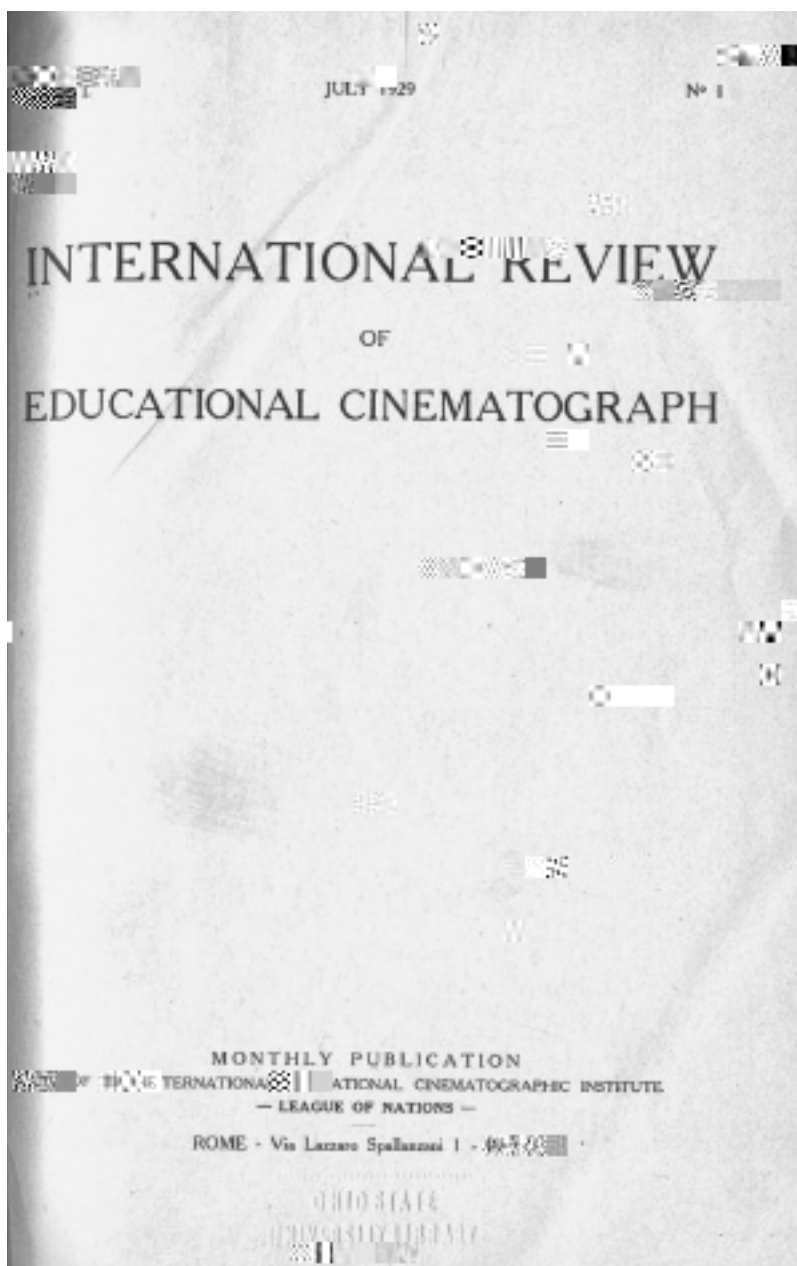
Nevertheless, especially at the outset, the Institute made real attempts to consolidate international opinion. The first board of directors included Louis Lumière, Hans Cürdis, the director of the German Institute for Cultural Research, Carl Milliken, American secretary of the Motion Picture Producers Association, and G.T. Hankin, representative of the British Council for School Broadcasting of the Ministry of Education.²² The Institute’s first project was to compile a list of educational film groups and institutes and to alert them to the existence of the

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assertions about the British Film Institute being indebted to LUCE and the Rome Institute.²⁶

From the outset, the Institute sponsored a monthly multilingual cinema journal, *T e l e a t a R e e f E d c a t a C e a t a*, which ran from 1929 to 1934 and was published simultaneously in Italian, French, Spanish, German, and English editions. By the end of its five volumes, the journal had over two thousand subscriptions, and it is still to be found in many university libraries. Articles by a range of writers—from academics to politicians and technical innovators—debate the role of film in modern life. Protracted studies of the effects of films on children are found side by side with reviews of documentary films, reports on international film conferences, surveys of educational film policies around the world, reports on studies of the use of film in programs of workplace efficiency, personal hygiene and national health, and general philosophical speculation on topics relating to visual education.

The Institute engaged in a few wide-ranging empirical surveys of film and



Cover of the first issue of the *International Review of Educational Cinematograph* was changed to *International Journal of Educational Cinematography* in subsequent issues of the journal.

The *Revue* restricted itself to reviewing films of a documentary nature. Most enthusiastically received were films about Africa and other colonial conquests. As the editors wrote in the April 1930 issue, "Africa is, as ever, the part of the world that most appeals to explorers and documentary film enthusiasts."²⁹ Needless to say, there were some seemingly irreconcilable contradictions in the journal. Studies about the terrible effects of war films on children were contradicted by other reviews extolling war as "the most important of all social phenomena."³⁰ Articles propounding film's capacity for universal communication appeared cheek by jowl with others exposing films with Eurocentrist and Imperialist points of view.

The Institute shared some common ground with reformist women's groups. American women's groups with mandates for social reform lobbied the Motion Picture Producers of America for higher moral quality in Hollywood films and were involved with the Rome Institute in thinking about the film and social hygiene. Mrs. Ambrose A. Diehl, Chairman (✶) of the Cinema Committee of the National Council of Women (U.S.A.) wrote in an article published in the *Revue* that the "unit of civilization is the family" and that it was women's role to regulate the effect of movies in her domain.³¹ In October 1931 The Cinema Commission of the Women's International Council held a meeting at the Rome Institute. The president of that organization, Laura Dreyfus-Barney, emphasized the role that women could play as censors.³² Reformist women's groups seemed to find a welcome reception at the Rome Institute. Their vision of a domestic woman fighting to improve the nation one family at a time dovetailed with the fascist vision of women as mothers of the nation, not to mention as moral censors. Although only Italy mandated that a mother be included as one of three members of the national film censorship board, other Western nations gave women pride of place as moral regulators when it came to film and children.³³ For example, Canada sent two members of the Canadian Council for the Protection of the Child and the Family, Miss Whitton and Miss Hawks, as representatives to a major conference at Rome on educational film, while many other countries sent official delegates.³⁴

Religious groups also were represented in the journal. The June 1932 issue included a report of the general meeting of the Catholic Organization of Educational Cinema, and advertisements appear for religious teaching films.³⁵ An article on missionaries and the cinema contends that in their role as "pioneers of civilization," missionaries have been important documentary filmmakers.³⁶ Nevertheless, in terms of quantity, articles about religion and film take a back seat to discussions of the role of the state and the school system in imparting lessons of morality and hygiene.

Although very different from modernist organs of the period, such as *Cine*, *U.S.A.*, *Écran*, *Le Cinéma*, *Cine*, *Cine*, *Le Cinéma*, *Spectacle*, *Spectacle*, and *Film*, the Institute's publication included figures recognized as modernists.³⁷ Rudolf Arnheim, a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany, took up a position at the Rome Institute in

1933, where he worked on projects of the Institute (on which more below) for five years.³⁸ Laszlo Maholy-Nagy wrote an article on film and painting.³⁹ Germaine Dulac was involved with the Institute for Intellectual Cooperation and other French initiatives around film. The involvement of these people not only indicates the wide variety of individuals who contributed to the life of the Institute, but also the degree to which Italian Fascism accommodated ideological and cultural diversity.⁴⁰

In his history of the British Film Institute, Ivan Butler notes that while the dominant discourse of the establishment of the BFI in 1933 was of the use of “film in education,” upon its foundation one of its most active areas actually became “education in film.”⁴¹ The Rome Institute’s journal also clearly connects discussions of uses of film for education with the beginning of education about film, or film studies. For example, the journal provided a space for the discussion of the need for teacher training in the use of visual aids, and advertised university and adult education courses on “cinema culture,” such as a proposal by James Marchant to build a “cinema university” in London. This emphasis on cinema culture converged with discussions of film preservation. A conference on “The Problem of Cinematograph Archives,” chaired by Louis Lumière, was reported on in the February and March 1932 issues. All film-producing countries were encouraged to create national archives and to cooperate in forming an international archive in which to preserve cinema history that would include both films and film-related paraphernalia, such as projectors and posters. These discussions demonstrate a confluence of the desire to integrate film into education and the need to make film itself an object of preservation and study.⁴² Discussions of film as a purveyor of knowledge were inextricable from discussions of the medium itself.

The journal also catalogues exemplary educational films, most, if not all, now lost. The first film produced for the League was *Stafetta* (1925), a twenty-minute film on the evils of war and the benefits of the League, shown widely to school children in 1925-6. The film was remade and expanded in 1926 as *The World of Tomorrow*.⁴³ A 1929 article on the working relationship between the Rome Institute and the International Labor Organization provided a catalogue of educational films relating to “scientific management,” many in the collection of the Federation of British Industries. Titles for these obscure films from the 1920s include *Babysitting* (about breast-feeding), *The Mammography of the Female*, *Reflected Circle*, *Udeedaad*, *Medicine*, *Tea*, *Office*, *Ante-Excess*, *La d*, and *Fishing*.⁴⁴ A film about the eastern opium trade, *Drug*, was circulated to support the work of the League’s anti-drug squad.⁴⁵ Another film, *Motherhood*, received favorable mention for the emphasis it placed on the responsibility of modern women to reproduce. Setting a tone for educational films to come, these short

didactic pieces were made to support specific governmental (and intergovernmental) objectives.

The Institute display

of Educational and Instructional Cinematography held in Rome 19-25 April 1934. Over seven hundred participants from forty-five nations attended and two hundred and forty written reports were submitted. The congress hashed out a number of issues about educational film, such as the need for a medical surgical film encyclopedia, and staged heated discussions about the standardization of reduced film format. Along with the familiar concerns about film training, social

sand illustrations covering all matters related to cinema, including the technical,

As Italy disowned its Fascist past after the war and the League of Nations was declared a failure, the Rome Institute was almost entirely effaced from film history, a state of affairs that has not been helped by the loss of its archive. One of the legacies of the postwar cleansing of film studies of the taint of politics in favour of the celebration of auteurs and the apolitical rubric of “world cinema,” has been the loss of the significant place of politics and political organizations in the formation of spaces for film studies.⁵⁷

It is perhaps tempting to dismiss the episode in film history I have been discussing as an aberrant example of politics masquerading as culture. In bringing this material to light, it is my goal to focus attention on the far-reaching and generative aspects of the Rome Institute—its conferences, publications, film festival-related activity, and associated legislation—in order to be able to consider it as a particular example of something more general: the more common—although still rare—phenomenon of the formation of state-run cultural institutions. In the period under consideration, the state was seen to be an important regulator of daily life and the source of an overarching plan for rationalizing and managing the nation. Educational film was considered a powerful aid in achieving these ends.

The discussion of film as a cultural technology was present from the earliest days of the League of Nations and seems to demand some mention of Foucault’s work on discourse and knowledge.⁵⁸ In a summation of his scholarly preoccupations that appears in the preface to *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault discusses the process of “problematization.”⁵⁹ According to his definition, problematization

industrial and commercial nature. They are of grave governmental concern and they are not merely the problems of one nation. They are the problems of all, and involve international as well as national considerations.⁶¹

While communist and fascist states made clear statements about the use of film for social engineering, and thus are always discussed when the subject of film and propaganda is raised, as Nicholas Reeves notes in *T e P e f F P a a da*, in the interwar period the practice was widespread: "From the totalitarian right to the revolutionary left, and including most moderate political opinion in between, the mass media in general, and film in particular, were seen to be well-placed to deliver unprecedented opportunities for the management and manipulation of mass public opinion."⁶²

The success of these various political forays, although interesting, is less significant for me here than is the methodological issue Foucault identifies around problematization. For discourse, in Foucault's view, is not abstract, but rather material.⁶³ The modernization discourse intersected with the discourses of education and film. What emerged was the materialization of a film institute in a fascist context that does not appear to have been unpalatable to liberalism. This overlap of political ideologies not around content, perhaps, although eugenics was fairly universally accepted at the time, but certainly around technique, tells us a good deal about common sense ideas about film and education. In Foucault's sense, these ideas crystallized in the Rome Institute and explain the popularity of the project with individuals and groups from a broad range of ideological positions. These positions, manifested with a large degree of contradiction and complexity, were sedimented into projects of the League and the Institute that ended up being fundamental for legitimizing the expenditure of resources on the study and promotion of certain types of film. Only later, when liberalism was attempting to remove itself from fascism, did the anxiety around the overlap between their programs assert itself and the distancing begin. My

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In the late 1930s, Italy was certainly not the only country to engage in a debate—in which film was central—about whether folk culture would, or should, be overtaken by mass culture and whether mass culture could be moulded with social aims in mind. These discussions of film's effect on populations and the films and publications they generated, seem less concerned with rational discussion appropriate to an ideal liberal public sphere, and more focused on affecting attitudes with appeals using fear, anxiety, humour, and a desire to conform. The strongly moral aspect of much early discourse about film and education through the League—including everything from promoting world peace and maintaining sexual health to putting money away in savings banks—does show that while in Italy the reigning ideology may have been reactionary modernism, elsewhere in the Western world this ideology resonated sympathetically with a kind of modern conservatism.

As I have tried to suggest in this essay, the example of the largely forgotten contribution of the League of Nations to film indicates that film studies has been rather selective about its past, choosing as a discipline to emphasize the progressive aspects over more troubling reactionary forces, perhaps, the artistic over the institutional. Yet the fascist focus on the popular aspect of film culture is in some ways more directly political than avant-garde film discourse of the same period, about which so much has been written. More work still needs to be done to parse the complex relationship of film, education and politics in the interwar period and to examine, among other things, the role of Fascism's extreme form of nationalism in influencing global educational film policies, not least because some of these policies are the basis on which national cinema projects and apparatuses of film production, preservation and study still rest. Another, perhaps more challenging reason for re-examining this forgotten aspect of film studies is to complicate our understanding of the concrete place assigned in different ways to both film and film studies in the complex project of modernization.

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1. See, for example, Anne Friedberg, *The Exotic Eye* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), and Leo Chamey and Vanessa R. Schwartz, eds., *The Exotic Eye* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
2. Richard Taylor, *The Exotic Eye*, 2nd ed. (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998).

46. Flavia Poulon, "History," in *History of the Italian Cinema*, Antonio Petrucci, ed. (Rome: International Exhibition of Cinematographic Art, 1952), 17; Taillibert, 258.
47. Marla Stone, "The Last Film Festival: The Venice Biennale Goes to War," in *History of the Italian Cinema*, 294.
48. *Ibid.*, 295.
49. *Ibid.*, 296.
50. For links between the League and UNESCO's film work see Zoë Druick, "Reaching the Multimillions: Liberal Internationalism and the Establishment of Documentary Film," in *Documentary Film: A History*, Haidee Wasson and Lee Grieveson, eds. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, forthcoming).
51. *History of the Italian Cinema* (Rome, 1934), 27.
52. *Ibid.*, 36.
53. Popular culture was connected with everyday folk culture, and included music and ordinary rituals, such as meals. Mass culture, by contrast, was the top-down imposition of industrially produced culture made not to reflect everyday life back to audiences, but to educate them about ways of life in modern, capitalist societies.
54. "The articles written in 1933 and 1934 in Rome for the projected *History of the Italian Cinema* are printed here for the first time," Arnheim wrote in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 1. See also Elaine Mancini, *Documentary Film: A History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Research Press, 1985), 123.
55. *History of the Italian Cinema* (1937), 8.
56. Butler, 80-82.
57. There are similarities here with the process of depoliticization of international art movements detailed by Serge Guilbault in *Documentary Film: A History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).
58. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller, eds., *Documentary Film: A History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Mitchell Dean, *Documentary Film: A History* (London: Sage, 1999); Jack Z. Braich, Jeremy Parker and Cameron McCarthy, eds., *Documentary Film: A History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).
59. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 2, Robert Hurley, trans. (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 10-13.
60. Braich, et al., 11.
61. Seabury, 7.
62. Nicholas Reeves, *Documentary Film: A History* (London: Cassell, 1999), 5-6.
63. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, A.M. Sheridan Smith, trans. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 46.
64. Bill Nichols, "Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-Garde," *Documentary* 27.4 (Summer 2001): 580-611.

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