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## **Figuring a Global Humanity: Cinematic Universalism and the Multinarrative**

### **Film**

**By Tiago de Luca**

Films with multiple narrative strands have become increasingly conspicuous in world cinema over the last two decades. The multinarrative film now accordingly forms a well-trodden theoretical terrain that has generated its own subdivisions and nomenclature, with ‘network’, ‘hyperlink’, ‘mosaic’, ‘multiprotagonist’ and ‘complex’ just some of the terms applied to what many critics and scholars recognize as a crosscultural genre in its own right.<sup>1</sup> Yet as these different terms demonstrate, the coexistence of multiple stories within a single film does not fully characterize the aesthetic and narrational contours of this genre, which can take on a myriad of forms. To provide an examination of these contours and corresponding taxonomy is, however, not my aim here, and for this reason I will stick to using ‘multinarrative’ for its more generic connotations. My interest instead lies in the ways that the multinarrative film can participate in the discursive articulation of what I will call a ‘universal humanism’ and, more specifically, in how this discourse finds two illustrious cinematic precursors – D. W. Griffith’s *Intolerance* (1916) and Roberto Rossellini’s *Paisan* (1946) – whose hitherto unexplored connections might shed fresh light on multinarrative universalism in the cinema.

To explore the ways in which a universalist project has been materialized in the cinema might seem a counterproductive move at a time when the ‘human’ is being displaced by the ‘posthuman’, the ‘inhuman’ and the ‘nonhuman’ in academic and

cultural discourses that aim to expose the historical limitations and contradictions of the mutually reinforcing categories of universalism and humanism. Identified with the principles of solidarity, community and egalitarianism in its more radical form, universalism has been exposed as fundamentally western, normative and imperialist at its historical roots. In her posthuman manifesto, Rosi Braidotti uncovers ‘the binary logic of identity and otherness as respectively the motor for and the cultural logic of universal Humanism’, a ‘universalistic posture’ whereby ‘Man’ ‘is implicitly assumed to be masculine, white, urbanized, speaking a standard language, heterosexually inscribed in a reproductive unity and a full citizen of a recognized polity’.<sup>2</sup> Contradictory and problematic though it may be, however, universalism continues to thrive in our time, its prevalence demanding that it be examined in its various guises and forms. As Denis Cosgrove notes, ours is a globalized epoch defined by the preponderance of a ‘one-world discourse’ concentrated ‘on circulation, connectivity, and communication’; a seemingly ‘universalist, progressive, and mobile discourse’ through which the ‘equality of all locations networked’ is highlighted.<sup>3</sup>

In the cinema, such discourse has been especially crystallized in the form of what David Bordwell has termed ‘network narratives’. Of course, whether a film will produce a universalizing canvas through a multinarrative structure will depend on textual operations and unifying devices specifically designed for such a purpose. Totality is not a necessary and inherent outcome of the multiplot film, for the multiplicity of characters, stories and settings that constitute the genre can be exploited for the opposite effect: that is, a narrative based on fragmentation and division rather than unity. As Bordwell suggests, films such as Jacques Rivette’s thirteen-hour *Out One* (1973) and Michael Haneke’s *Code Unknown* (2000), among

others, display an anti-totalizing ‘effort to leave a network in bits and pieces’ through specific narrative and aesthetic devices.<sup>4</sup>

More often than not, however, contemporary multinarrative films operate within a textual framework that creates an impression, or at least the suggestion, of a discursive totality with a distinct geographical demarcation. Through its situating of individual stories within a wider panorama, thus bringing into view the contrasts and parallels of human behaviour, the multinarrative film seems uniquely placed to offer a macroscopic allegory of human life in cities, countries and indeed the entire world. Films such as *Les Parisiens* (Claude Lelouche, 2004), *Wonderland* (Michael Winterbottom, 1999) and *Crash* (Paul Haggis, 2004), for example, all endeavour to produce overviews of interpersonal relations in major cities – Paris, London and Los Angeles, respectively. Jia Zhangke’s *A Touch of Sin* (2012) paints a state-of-the-nation report through its episodic narrative, divided into four tales set in different locations in contemporary China. More remarkably, a number of multinarrative films have attempted to transcend local and national borders in an effort to depict an increasingly transnational and globalized world. *Syriana* (Stephen Gaghan, 2005), *Traffic* (Steven Soderbergh, 2000) and *The Edge of Heaven* (Faith Akin, 2007), for example, all tell stories of different characters navigating their way across countries and even continents. The same is true of *Babel* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006), *360°* (Fernando Meirelles, 2011) and *Mammoth* (Lukas Moodysson, 2009), the universalizing aspiration of which is reflected in their very titles.

In many ways this globalizing quest may seem unsurprising if we concede that the consolidation of the global multinarrative film as a subgenre has coincided with a new world order, in which communication and satellite technologies, new migratory patterns and tourism mobility have drastically redefined traditional spatiotemporal

coordinates and interpersonal relations on local, national and global scales. In this light these films can be seen as attempts to reflect on these phenomena through the formulation of a universalist discourse, whereby a common foundation linking humanity is asserted regardless of class, nationality, creed or ethnicity – a link that, in most films mentioned above, is translated into the notion that what binds us all is suffering. The epitome of this idea is no doubt found in *Babel*, the project of which, as Deborah Shaw has noted,

is an attempt to construct a cinematic Tower of Babel, built upon a universal language of film to unite the scattered audiences of the globe. It does this by setting out the differences between people of a range of national identities (Japanese, North American, Moroccan and Mexican), then seeking to show them as fundamentally the same through a focus on universal human emotions. At the roots of the director's ideas of filmmaking is a grandiose idea that humanity is united in suffering, and that his cinema, through a form of visual Esperanto underpinned by a globalisation of emotion, can bring people together.<sup>5</sup>

*Babel* is certainly the most obvious attempt to forge a 'universal language of film' through the idea of a suffering humanity. Yet I would argue that not only does it amplify and literalize what is a recurrent staple of the genre as a whole, it is also illustriously preceded, in its multinarrative universalism, by two films whose historical, critical and aesthetic importance cannot be overestimated, *Intolerance* and *Paisan*.

Admittedly the connection between these two films, and between these films and contemporary multinarrative films, is far from self-evident. *Intolerance* is a silent film of religious-historical inflections; *Paisan* is emblematic of the traits with which

neorealism has become identified in film history. If we concede that it is the multinarrative structure that puts these two films on an equal footing, one must further recognize that they are themselves quite dissimilar: *Intolerance* interweaves four narrative strands over the span of 1500 years; *Paisan* assembles in chronological order six autonomous episodes, each of which takes place in a different region in Italy over the course of a year. Yet if we look at *Intolerance* and *Paisan* as attempts to forge a global humanity in the cinema and accept that this universalizing quest is inseparable from the narrative engorgement afforded by their respective multiplot structures, then the films lend themselves to surprisingly productive connections, whose examination might offer a historically nuanced perspective to the multinarrative film. At the same time, to revisit *Intolerance* and *Paisan* in terms of their narratorial strategies from today's privileged perspective provides the opportunity to shed new light on their universalizing ramifications at two crucial points in film history.

My aim here is to propose a different historical lineage for the multinarrative film, which is often traced back to films such as *Grand Hotel* (Edmund Goulding, 1933) and/or directors such as Robert Altman.<sup>6</sup> This may well be because *Intolerance* and *Paisan* tell stories that remain wholly independent from one another, with none of the chance encounters, crisscrossing between characters or 'intertwining plotlines [that ...] affect one another to some degree' that Bordwell deems 'the central formal principle' of the contemporary network narrative.<sup>7</sup> In their quest to depict unrelated characters connected through suffering as a means of highlighting the universal language of cinema, however, these two films can be fruitfully understood as early attempts to promote an all-encompassing vision of humanity geared towards a world community of spectators. No less importantly, if both films are fascinating case

studies of cinematic universalism, as I hope to demonstrate, this is because they are rooted in historically specific utopian moments and conceptualizations of film as a global medium. While *Intolerance* translates the contemporaneous notion of film as ‘universal language’ into a quadripartite textual edifice that is both transhistorical and transcultural, *Paisan* cannot be examined in isolation from a renewed belief in film’s (and human) universality that is inseparable from postwar humanist discourses. Yet the all-embracing utopianism postulated by both films cannot be taken entirely at face value and needs to be situated within the films’ respective geopolitical contexts, which will reveal fissures in their universalizing projects.

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Let us start with *Intolerance*, a film around which overlapping conceptions of universalism, nationalism and humanism coalesced in complex ways thanks to its atypical narrative design. As is well known, *Intolerance* deploys a quadripartite textual structure whose constitutive stories span a period of approximately 1500 years. Its present-day narrative strand, known as the Modern Story and inspired by the news of a mineworkers strike in Colorado, relates the plight of a working-class couple – the Dear One (Mae Marsh) and the Boy (Robert Harron) – as they face a series of fateful events: the couple’s baby is taken away by reformists on the grounds that the Dear One is an unfit mother, while the Boy is wrongly accused of murdering a gangster. By contrast, the remaining strands are all reconstructions of historical events or religious myths: the fall of the Babylonian empire to the Persians in 539 BC; the Judaeo-Christian story of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ; the massacre of the Huguenots in France on St Bartholomew’s Night in 1572. Rather than being

chronologically divided, however, *Intolerance* nonlinearly intermixes the four stories, turning ‘from one of the four stories to another, as the common theme unfolds in each’, as one of its first title cards didactically announces.

While many factors are said to have influenced the creation of this unusually multistranded film, its conception cannot be examined in isolation from Griffith’s previous (and infamous) *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). With its grandiose historical sweep, *The Birth of a Nation* was seen by many as the filmmaker’s bid to put himself on an equal footing with the directors of the ‘European “historical-spectacle” films’ he publicly admired, such as *Quo Vadis* (Enrico Guazzoni, 1912) and *Cabiria* (Giovanni Pastrone, 1914).<sup>8</sup> Significantly, Griffith had filmed *Intolerance*’s Modern Story, then conceived as a single-narrative feature provisionally entitled *The Mother and the Law*, during the editing of *The Birth of a Nation*, the tremendous box-office success of which then prompted him to rethink the dimensions of his next film, which began to appear too small in comparison.<sup>9</sup> In addition, owing to its racist vision of the Civil War, *The Birth of a Nation* famously reignited debates on film censorship, and Griffith saw his next film as an opportunity to voice his discontent with what he considered the rising ‘intolerance’ of artistic freedom represented by the Motion Picture Producers and Directors of America (MPPDA).<sup>10</sup> That he decided to expand *The Mother and the Law* and include other ‘chapters of intolerance’ from world history, then, is significant in a number of ways, not least in terms of the historical and religious authority that the new narratives imparted to the Modern Story by association, and especially when examining *The Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance* in the context of the roles cinema was beginning to assume in relation to nation-building and globalizing discourses.



As Ismail Xavier has noted, in its claim to the modern concept of nationhood *The Birth of a Nation* was the ‘first canonical example’ of a ‘national allegory’ in the cinema, espousing that the ‘criterion for the legitimate belonging to the collective body of the nation is whiteness, with the exclusion of any post-slavery sense of integration’.<sup>11</sup> In this context, the decision to situate the Modern Story within a wider narrative constellation that transcended the borders of the nation indicated a quest to move towards a universalist rather than a nationalist domain. As *The Birth of a Nation* was attacked in many quarters for its racially oriented construction of the nation, the situating of the Modern Story within other cultures and eras suggested the levelling of these cultures in terms of a suppression of difference in the name of the entire human race. On closer inspection, however, *Intolerance*’s self-proclaimed universalism, articulated through a multinarrative structure based on parallelisms, reveals ideological rifts that are not so easily reconcilable. For if its totalizing aspirations reveal ties with utopian discourses of universalism, the film also betrays a sense of national superiority through the centrality of the American narrative, as I discuss below.

In terms of its quest for universality, a major influence running through *Intolerance* is the American poet Walt Whitman. As William M. Drew has shown, Griffith’s ‘total historical conception’ is fundamentally Whitmanesque in its focus ‘on the continuity and unity of human experience through the centuries’, an idea that resonates with Whitman’s notion of a ‘flowing time’ in which past, present and future are all joined.<sup>12</sup> In particular Griffith makes a direct reference to the poem ‘Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking’ (in which Whitman attempts to conjure the universality of all existence) by turning it into a recurrent visual tableau, *The Woman Who Rocks the Cradle* (played by Lilian Gish). This image appears as a transitional device every time

the film shifts from one historical period to another, in an effort to impart a sense of conceptual unity to the film's disjointed structure. Also referred to as the 'Uniter of Here and Hereafter' (another line in the poem), the tableau further functions as an allegory of the cyclical history of the human race, for example when one of the film's first title cards proclaims: 'Today as yesterday, endlessly rocking, ever bringing the same human passions, the same joys and the same sorrows'.<sup>13</sup>

*Intolerance* was further indebted to the contemporaneous notion of film as a 'universal language', a notion theorized from within different conceptual frameworks by writers as diverse as Vachel Lindsay in the USA, Ricciotto Canudo in Italy, Louis Delluc in France and Béla Balázs in Austria. While a survey of these conceptualizations and their nuances falls outside the scope of this essay, suffice it to note that, in its most utopian form, the idea of a universal language hailed film's purely visual properties as a 'language' able to transcend cultural and national differences. Griffith was an outspoken advocate of this idea and aligned it with the Christian mythology of Babel from within a US millennialist tradition, as Miriam Hansen has shown.<sup>14</sup> In fact the myth of Babel is invoked in *Intolerance* in the Babylonian narrative at the beginning of Act II, with a title card indicating that the events portrayed are based on 'cylinders [that] describe the greatest treason of all history, by which a civilization of countless ages was destroyed, and a universal written language (the cuneiform) was made to become an unknown cypher on the face of the earth'. Yet, beyond and above this reference to Babel, the film's universalist formulation is inscribed in, indeed only made possible by, its ballooning multinarrative structure, as Hansen notes:

[The ambition to put the universal language proposition into textual practice]  
is most explicit in the structural (if not proto-structuralist) conception of the

film, the parallel imbrication of the four narratives whose ultimate meaning lies in their relation to each other, their value within a differential system. Since such a system does not pre-exist as in verbal language, the film has to establish it through and simultaneously with its own textual movement; hence the emphasis on the paradigmatic quality of narrative motifs, constellations, and gestures.<sup>15</sup>

Hansen goes on to examine the film's take on the universal language 'as a kind of hieroglyphics', both in terms of *Intolerance's* extravagant combination of pictographic, ideogrammatic and phonetic elements, and in relation to its emphasis on repetition and comparison, which requires 'an activity of reading and interpretation'.<sup>16</sup>

The fact remains, however, that the film's textual edifice is not sufficient in itself to sustain its claim for universality. Of crucial importance in terms of *Intolerance's* attempt to highlight the equivalence of humankind is the fact that such 'emphasis on narrative motifs, constellations, and gestures' transcends national borders and the film's own historical moment. What impresses in *Intolerance* is not only that the textual structure spells out its own value as a nonverbal system that awaits deciphering on its own terms, but also that the stories interwoven by this system span different periods and cultures, as the film combines and recombines them in an effort to bring into view the timeless resonances of a supranational humanity. Whether the film is successful in achieving such a goal, however, is another story, for it struggles to conceal nationalist forces that threaten to bring down its universalist edifice.

It is striking that the marketing surrounding *Intolerance* capitalized on its universalist credentials, as proved by the programme notes for the film's New York premiere, in which Griffith explained that 'the purpose of the production is to trace a

universal theme through various periods of the [human] race's history. Ancient, sacred, medieval, and modern times are considered.<sup>17</sup> Griffith's allusion to an all-encompassing human race is certainly not accidental as it served the purpose of redeeming the filmmaker in relation to the accusations of the racial nationalism of *The Birth of a Nation*, as we have seen. Yet it is here that the film's universalizing aspirations also begin to prove unsustainable, for, as Scott Simmon notes, the 'idea of a "race" that included Babylonians, Israelites, Frenchmen, and Americans requires a certain melting-pot ingenuity' informed by an 'Anglo-Israelite' racial logic according to which Anglo-Saxons were descended from 'Jews whose ten tribes were themselves descended through the Persians and Babylonians'.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, *Intolerance* eschews a direct confrontation with issues of race through its disregard for historical accuracy. An example is its Judaeo-Christian narrative, in which, as Griffith's assistant Karl Brown recalls, there was no concern with period detail or 'the actual physical appearance of Christ during his life as a man on earth' but, rather, with what people already knew about that era and his figure from recreations found in 'Bible pictures, Bible calendar, Biblical magic-lantern shows, Christmas cards'.<sup>19</sup>

The film's formulation of universality also begins to dissolve when one examines the unevenness of its textual division. While a comparison between *Intolerance*'s historical segments reveals significant differences between them in tone and style, as well as a certain privileging of the Babylonian narrative (on which I expand below), the three strands are nonetheless all schematic historical reconstructions. This stands in opposition to the relatively complex storytelling mechanisms of the Modern Story, itself emblematic of the traits that form the basis of Griffith's canonization in traditional film histories as the father of classical narrative cinema. No doubt the historical narratives are partly told through the lens of

individuals: the Mountain Girl's (Constant Talmadge) unrequited love for Prince Belshazzar (Alfred Paget) in the Babylonian narrative; the romance between Brown Eyes (Margery Wilson) and Prosper Latour (Eugene Pallette) in the French Story. Yet these individual stories are hardly developed, nor are these characters invested with the psychological nuances present in the Dear One and the Boy. This is even more the case as far as the Judaeo-Christian Story is concerned, which in the last instance remains a series of visual tableaux with no character or story development, confirming its placement within the narrative by dint of its Christian authority.<sup>20</sup> In a way, then, the fact that *Intolerance* was originally conceived as a single-narrative film can still be glimpsed from its unequal structure and the centrality of the Modern Story, both in the latter's flaunting of narrative codes and mechanisms of character engagement more in tune with Griffith's own style, and in its disproportionate running time when compared with the other three.<sup>21</sup>

The gulf between the Modern Story and the historical segments comes to a head in the film's finale, as the happy ending of the contemporary narrative stands in contrast to the catastrophic fatalism of the other stories. It is here, moreover, that the film's stress on the circularity of history begins to clash with a teleological countercurrent. As has been often noted, this tension is cinematically translated into an oscillation between alternation and acceleration, with the film's increasingly faster intercutting between the four stories climaxing in its famous last sequence: a montage tour-de-force of battle scenes – the fall of Babylon, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and the Huguenot massacre in Paris – that are juxtaposed around the rescue sequence of the Modern Story (when the Dear One finds out that The Boy is innocent, she pursues the train carrying the governor who is able to prevent his execution). For Christian Metz, the film's rhythm 'becomes more and more rapid, until a final crescendo where

the mixture becomes a visual whirlpool' and the interpenetration of the four stories takes on 'the affective status of a *fusion*', the aim of which is to convey the film's symbolic message: the equivalence of behaviour 'punctuating the history of humanity'.<sup>22</sup>

Such a fusion, however, carries within it a teleological ordering that culminates in the happy ending of the Modern Story. It is surprising that the Boy's terrible fate is averted when one considers the dramatic mechanisms of the contemporary narrative and those of the film's narrative economy as a whole, both of which are structured around determinism and fatalism. Despite its promise that it will focus on 'the same human passions, the same joys and the same sorrows' throughout human history, it is sorrow that takes the upper hand in *Intolerance*, with its depiction of a suffering humanity embodied by characters repeatedly confronted with actions over which they have no control. This includes the Modern Story, in which the Dear One and the Boy are characterized as having no agency regarding their fate.

To the extent that these characters are divested of political agency and their fate articulated on an individual rather than a collective level, the contemporary narrative confirmed Griffith as an exponent of a 'humanist cinema, focusing on character as the moral, individualizing, and expressive focus of narrative', while largely evading questions of class struggle and considerations of a socioeconomic order.<sup>23</sup> As Doyle Greene observes, as the product of the Progressive Era and fundamentally middle-class values, the 'ideological undercurrent of Griffith's cinematic project was liberal-humanism', a liberal ideology by which 'individual, community, and class conflicts were intertwined, resolved, and order established through individual ethics' rather than collective action.<sup>24</sup> This idea thus gains special relevance in *Intolerance*, in which the realm of the collective is thoroughly associated

with fatalism and the humanist individualism of the Modern Story ultimately overwrites all three historical narratives.<sup>25</sup>

That the Boy is saved from execution, then, means he escapes the cyclical pattern of history otherwise so obsessively stressed by the film and evidenced by the tragic finales of the three other stories, in which characters are killed in graphic detail. No less importantly, the Boy is saved thanks to the progress of technology, as the Dear One is able to rescue him with the help of cars, trains and telephones. For Hansen, the message is clear:

The triumph of Modern technology is no less a triumph of American democracy, especially in light of the particular choice of the historical periods. The temporal succession of settings – pagan antiquity, Judeo-Christian period, Renaissance-Protestantism, and the Modern Age – corresponds to a geographical movement from the Orient via the Mediterranean and Western Europe to the United States – and thus to the millennial prophecy that was mobilized in the nineteenth century by the ideology of Manifest Destiny: ‘Westward the course of empire takes its way’.<sup>26</sup>

The Boy’s survival puts an end to the film’s circularity, signalling instead a progressive movement on which all the other narratives converge. It is striking, therefore, that during the final sequence the Boy is associated with Jesus Christ through intertitles and interchanging sequences, for the aversion of his death postulates the rebirth of Christian values and the beginning of a new era in accordance with ‘a vision of the future, a millennium of universal peace’.<sup>27</sup> This is manifest in the film’s closing sequence, which shows, through tricks of editing, prisons turning into flowery fields and battlefields into pastoral gatherings, all intercut with images of luminous clouds and open fields whose religious connotations are obvious.

On a formal level, as Hansen and Xavier have noted, the centrality of the Modern Story betrays an assertion of the superiority of US cinema over its contemporaneous rivals, with the three historical narratives flaunting the international film styles then in vogue.<sup>28</sup> Whereas the French segment evoked the Films d'Art productions, the Judaeon narrative followed in the footsteps of the Passion Plays imported from France. The Babylonian strand alluded to the spectacular Italian films that Griffith so admired, including Giovanni Pastrone's aforementioned *Cabiria*, from which the director famously took his inspiration to adorn the Babylonian settings with historically inaccurate elephants, an aspect dramatized in the Taviani brothers' film *Good Morning, Babylon* (1987). As also alluded to by the Tavianis, the lavish Babylonian setting was in no less measure indebted to the popular 'world's fairs' of the time, with Griffith allegedly being under the spell of the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition during the making of *Intolerance*,<sup>29</sup> a fact that is significant for a number of reasons in terms of the film's multinarrative globalism.

For a start, the Babylonian setting lends material form to the film's monumental aspirations: recorded through aerial shots taken from a balloon that registers its full scale – 'over a mile in length and built to accommodate five thousand people' – its grandiosity crystallizes the film's quest to impress in the tradition of the orientalist visual spectacles of the world's fairs to which it was indebted.<sup>30</sup> In addition, it is tempting to see *Intolerance*'s multinarrative structure itself as the filmic translation of the globalizing thrust of these fairs, in which stands and spectacles of different human cultures were carefully arranged to produce the world itself as a spectacle to be consumed in its diversity within the confines of a single space. But this human and cultural diversity, as Robert W. Rydell notes, was also 'inseparable from the larger constellation of ideas about race, nationality and progress that molded



the fairs into ideologically coherent “symbolic universes” confirming and extending the authority’ of the USA in its ‘corporate, political and scientific leadership’.<sup>31</sup> In this context it is interesting to note how *Intolerance* oscillates between a utopian impetus to celebrate an encompassed world and a quest to legitimize the superiority of US culture in tune with dominant imperialist discourses.

This rift was made particularly visible in one of the film’s promotional posters featuring a globe (a common symbol used by the world’s fairs), over which the word *Intolerance* is stamped and beneath which is inscribed: ‘A sun play of the ages in which four paralleled stories of the world’s progress unfold before your vision in thrilling sequence’. Below this we read: ‘See the fall of Babylon Belshazzar’s feast, the humble Nazarene in the Holy Land, Paris under the scourge of Catharine de Medici, a gripping modern story contrasted with these historic periods’ (figure 1). Significantly the poster betrays an ideological conflict, for its announcement that *Intolerance*’s quadripartite structure is ‘paralleled’ between the four stories is immediately contradicted by its admission that the historical segments serve as backdrops with which the Modern Story is ‘contrasted’.<sup>32</sup>

The choice to illustrate the poster with a globe may be seen as coherent with the film’s more utopian aspirations, its own belief in the cinema as a universal language able to traverse the planet as well as its circular conception of world history, whereby sameness reigns over difference. Yet global images at this time could hardly be disentangled from colonialist discourses of world dominance. In fact they were the quintessential symbol of early modernity’s ‘imperial imaginary’, increasingly identified with cinema and featuring in the logos of film companies such as Columbia Studios, Universal, RKO and the UK’s Korda brothers.<sup>33</sup> As Cosgrove has shown, ‘global images’ and ‘the proliferation of universal exhibitions’ were part of a much

larger ‘public fascination with globalism in the closing years of the nineteenth century’.<sup>34</sup> *Intolerance*’s multinarrative universalism should thus be understood within the context of this public fascination, together with the fraught ideological tensions that animated globalizing discourses as they indistinctly oscillated between utopianism and imperialism.

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If universalist discourses flourished around the cinema during its beginnings, they became gradually untenable in the interwar period. First, as the case of *Intolerance* illustrates, notions of film as a universal language could no longer be disentangled from imperialist enterprises. Second, universalism received a blow with the advent of sound, which reduced the seemingly boundless space for circulation of moving images as the precondition for a cinematic world community. As James Tweedie points out, the ‘faded dream of a universal cinema [was] now scaled down to a multinational, rather than genuinely or plausibly global project’, with ‘the catastrophic devastation of World War II’ further bringing ‘that period to a halt’.<sup>35</sup> Yet ‘the utopian ambition of a world cinema manifested itself again in the immediate aftermath of the conflict’, with Italian neorealism inaugurating a new international film scene as ‘a major postwar export phenomenon’.<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, although neorealism was never consciously structured as a movement, it has survived the test of time as one of the most paradigmatic national projects in film history, whose enduring critical appeal and aesthetic importance are, conversely, attributed to its global influence on filmmaking and film culture. Thus it can be argued that if neorealism has proved so influential on an international scale, this is

because its formulation of the national was rooted in aesthetic and conceptual grounds upon which a renewed discourse of universalism could be cinematically formulated. And if *Paisan* presents itself as a fascinating case study in this respect, as I intend to demonstrate, this is because its multinarrative structure, not unlike that of *Intolerance*, enables the articulation of a humanist rhetoric around which the categories of the national and the universal complexly feed into each other.

In order to examine *Paisan* within the framework of the national, it is first imperative to distinguish the film from the cinematic nationalism of the Italian silent period. As discussed in the previous section, *The Birth of a Nation* was in many ways a response to Italian historical epics such as *Quo Vadis?* and *Cabiria*. But if *The Birth of a Nation* postulated nationhood through memorializing recent historical events, Italian spectacular films channelled ancient conquests in order to incite a patriotic belief in the then young Italian nation in the context of European imperialism. As the country had only recently completed its process of unification, the *Risorgimento*, cinema provided a powerful means by which the nation could be projected and imagined as a totality. An obvious example is the way in which *Cabiria*'s focus on the conflict between the Roman republic and the Carthaginian empire validated Italy's advances on the shores of North Africa as reclaiming 'its long-lost Mediterranean hegemony'.<sup>37</sup> More broadly, as Dudley Andrew has noted, this first Italian cinema 'was explicitly recruited [...] in a project of nation-building where it joined an earlier effort in opera to unite the regions of the peninsula and the regionalisms of language, class and culture under a common flag'.<sup>38</sup>

Andrew's summary of a first Italian national cinema may be taken as an uncannily apt description of *Paisan*, the narrative structure of which, made up of six different stories each set in a different location within the country, does indeed strive

‘to unite the regions of the peninsula and the regionalisms of language, class and culture under a common flag’. If this reveals the importance of the concept of the nation in both moments in the country’s film history, however, the similarities stop here. For if a first Italian cinema turned spectacle, grandeur and myth into a lofty ‘project of nation-building’ that culminated in the Fascist regime, postwar cinema participated instead in an explicitly anti-Fascist project of reconstruction of a ravaged Italy. In this context Rossellini’s films were instrumental in postulating a new-found sense of national community based on the humanist pillars of solidarity and fraternity. Eschewing a direct confrontation with the Italian Fascists, the director turned his camera to subjects like the Italian Resistance and a deprived population left at the mercy of the Germans. In *Rome Open City/Roma città aperta* (1945), the film that inaugurates neorealism in traditional film histories, the viewer follows the atypical union of forces between the Communists and the Catholic Church in their struggle against the Germans in a Nazi-occupied Rome. Here the city of Rome is conveyed through its destroyed physical features, documented by a camera eager to capture the harrowing reality of devastation as it had just happened, and also as a metaphor for Italy as a whole, a nation in ruins.

*Paisan*, Rossellini’s follow-up film, literalizes this metaphor by encompassing the entire country through a narrative comprising six chronological episodes. Partly based on the director’s and the scriptwriters’ own travels through Italy at the time,<sup>39</sup> each episode takes place in a different region, spreading northwards across the peninsula. In fact, owing to its financial backing (of which more below), *Paisan*’s quest to ‘map out’ the nation was given literal form in its US version, as images of the Italian map preceded each story, hovering over the peninsula and stopping on the areas indicated with a pincer. This idea of ‘zooming in’ to the country is further

achieved at the beginning of individual episodes through the use of montage, which assembles successive shots of decreasing scale and perspective, thus conjuring a sense of progression from the general to the particular. A case in point is the Rome episode, which begins with establishing and then long shots of crowds lifted from newsreel footage, followed by short-distance shots of the bar in which we find the prostitute Francesca (Maria Michi), whose appearance sets the episode in motion. The openings of the first and second episodes follow a similar pattern, and all episodes open with newsreel images. By situating individual characters first within the mapped borders of the nation, then in the regional context of large gatherings authenticated by documentary footage, *Paisan* thus conveys that these are not isolated cases of ordeal and suffering but constitute the norm in postwar Italy, with images of large crowds in public spaces continually underlining this idea in visual terms.

In *Paisan*'s narrative, then, strands are not intermixed as in *Intolerance*, unfolding autonomously from beginning to end. But the six episodes are unified through thematic links whose parallelisms gain in resonance as the stories accumulate in the viewer's mind. It soon becomes clear, for instance, that all episodes are set during the end of the war, and that they equally give pride of place to the real inhabitants of each region, who appear in the film in various roles. The viewer is also made aware that this film is not really about the Liberation and Reconstruction from the sole perspective of the Italian people, but is fundamentally about the interaction between the Americans and the Italians during the Allied occupation, an interaction which is semantically encapsulated in the film's title. As Peter Bondanella explains, the film's Italian title,

*Paisà*, a colloquial form of the word *paesano* (countryman, neighbor, kinsman, even friend) – was typically used by Italians and American soldiers

as a friendly form of address, and the implications of its deeper meanings provide the basis for Rossellini's exploration of the Italian–American encounter.<sup>40</sup>

This encounter takes diverse forms across, and sometimes within, individual episodes – mutual estrangement, romantic exchange and/or disillusion, camaraderie – and, with the exception of the two last episodes, these are personified in the figure of couples. The first, Sicilian episode depicts the communication barriers between the peasant girl Carmela (Carmela Sazio) and the soldier 'Joe from Jersey' (Robert Van Loon), both of whom end up killed by the Germans. The second, set in the rubble of Naples, focuses on the relationship between a black American soldier (Dots Johnson) and an orphan urchin, Pasquale (Alfonsino Pasca). The third episode spans a period of six months and tells in flashback the romantic encounter between Fred (Gar Moore), another American soldier, and Francesca (Maria Michi), an innocent girl who is forced into prostitution. The fourth episode takes place in Florence, following the journey of an American nurse, Harriet (Harriet Medin), and her Italian friend, Massimo (Renzo Avanzo), as they attempt to cross over to the still-occupied side of the city. The fifth episode is set entirely within a monastery in the Emilia-Romagna area. It depicts the arrival of three US chaplains, including a Protestant (Newell Jones) and a Jew (Elmer Fedman), whose religious views clash with those of the Catholics. The last episode, set in the Po Valley region, closes the film with the story of US army operatives' alliances with local Italian partisans and their subsequent defeat in the struggle with the Germans overseeing the area.

The conspicuous presence of Americans in *Paisan* has a circumstantial explanation, as does the film's episodic structure, which went through diverse treatments and authorship battles. As Teg Gallagher tells us, the film owes its

existence to Rossellini meeting Rod Geiger, a New York film agent who had found distribution for *Rome Open City* in the USA and, subsequently, financial backing for the director's next film, provisionally titled *Seven from the US* and to be scripted by Klaus Mann, Thomas Mann's son. This 'would tell about GIs encountering Italians during the nearly two-year campaign up the Italian Peninsula. Each American would die for Italians, and a white military-cemetery cross would conclude each episode.'<sup>41</sup> Hired by Geiger as a screenwriter for his production company Foreign Films Inc., Mann played a key role in conceiving the multi-episodic structure of the film.<sup>42</sup> As Giuliana Muscio notes, Mann was intrigued 'by the possibilities of new forms of realism', having previously proposed 'to a Hollywood studio a film project inspired by *Time*'s magazine celebrated newsreel series *The March of Time*'. He had started working on the script of *Paisan* in summer 1945 and, as a member of the Psychological Warfare Branch of the Allied Army, had been 'in all the locations of the film and personally experienced the difficult relationship between Italians and the allied army'.<sup>43</sup>

However, Mann's role as the film's main screenwriter, at the time already shared with Marcello Pagliero, began to diminish in scope and importance as Rossellini started to enlist others to write individual episodes. This included his close friend Sergio Amidei, who eventually argued with Mann over creative differences, causing the latter to abandon the project he had originally conceived but for which he would not even be given a screen credit.<sup>44</sup> At the same time Rossellini started modifying episodes as he, the crew and the team of writers (which now also included Alfred Hayes and Federico Fellini) travelled through the country, leaving room for improvisation and the interference of nonprofessionals. (That said, *Paisan* was still a

highly scripted film made with a large sum of money that in no way resembled the shoestring budget and artisanal production processes of *Rome Open City*).

No longer centred on the US experience of the occupation, the resulting film tilted its perspective slightly to the side of Italians, while deploying the intercultural encounter trope as the film's unifying thread. This decision to make the film less about the US experience and more about the clash of cultures is certainly relevant in terms of the film's articulation of a humanist rhetoric, for, as I argue below, *Paisan* tacitly invokes the notion of cinema as a universal language through its emphasis on the ineffectiveness of verbal communication. At the same time, however, the overwhelming presence of Americans in the film, a direct consequence of its original conception and funding, poses some obstacles for the film's larger universalist claims.

In the film, communication between the Americans and the Italians is functional at best and untenable at worst, with the film occasionally featuring Germans in its aural track as well. This linguistic diversity evokes a Babelist scenario that highlights, episode after episode, the absence of a common language uniting humanity, and the problems derived from such an absence. Colin MacCabe even goes on to say this 'emphasis on language as miscommunication seems at odds with *Paisan*'s message of the universal brotherhood of man [...] a contradiction left unresolved by Rossellini'.<sup>45</sup> I would argue, conversely, that it is precisely this sense of miscommunication that allows Rossellini to decry the role of verbal language in human interaction and, consequently, to stress that the 'universal brotherhood of man' is to be found and achieved beyond and above linguistic divergences – that is, through the universal language of cinema. Moreover, *Paisan* has a veritable sense of progression, with each new episode presenting a slightly brighter scenario in terms of mutual understanding between characters in the absence of a common language. If the



encounter between Carmela and Joe from Jersey is characterized by utter incomprehension on both sides, by the time the viewer is watching the last episode the ‘Italian partisans and American OSS soldiers [are] fraternally united’, as the voiceover announces, being comprehensible to each other in spite of the fact that they are each speaking their own language.

*Paisan*’s multilingualism is further observed in its featuring of regional dialects, such as those from Sicily and Naples, in the first and second episodes respectively, spoken by nonprofessionals. In fact, according to Italian film historian Adriano Aprà,<sup>46</sup> the film was screened without subtitles in Italy on its release, thus preserving a sense of linguistic confusion for local audiences, as even fellow Italians would have found some dialects hard to understand. In this respect Peter Brunette has argued that the film’s claim to

a homogeneous, single national experience, cannot disguise the fact that the spaces, the regions of Italy, insist on their heterogeneity in each episode just as strongly as ever. The clearly proclaimed regionality of the map thus defeats in advance its simultaneous proclamation of unity’.<sup>47</sup>

This is certainly the case, yet this heterogeneity serves a larger purpose within the film in its equally important aim to transcend regional and national boundaries through a humanist discourse. At the same time as *Paisan* strives to produce a state-of-the-nation report, it is also informed by a quest to suppress questions of nationality as a means of highlighting universal human qualities. The figure of the foreigner American, in this context, serves as a convenient point of comparison against which the regionality and/or nationality of the Italian people are rendered insignificant, and the common humanity binding both (and potentially all) cultures is accordingly highlighted. Yet in order to do this, the film often has to set both Italians and

Americans against thinly developed German characters stereotypically devoid of any humanity, which immediately complicates the film's universalism.<sup>48</sup>

As the episodes gradually show that camaraderie and solidarity *are* possible in the face of a common enemy, and even when language is an obstacle, *Paisan* postulates, not unlike *Intolerance*, that humanity's common denominator is suffering. Thus, in the Naples episode, the drunkard black GI sympathizes with Pasquale upon learning of his orphaned and homeless condition; in the Florence story, Harriet and Massimo are put on an equal footing due to their longing to join their loved ones on the occupied side of the city. But it is on a macrostructural level that this idea gains full significance in relation to *Paisan*'s imagined spectator, who, confronted with a panorama of characters in emotional and physical pain, is expected to identify with this suffering human community.

As Karl Schoonover has recently suggested in relation to neorealism's internationalist impulse, 'the displays of the imperiled body [on show in *Rome Open City* and *Paisan*] offer a narrational opportunity for the films to reach out to a postwar international viewer' by invoking a 'transnational and transhistorical empathy' through a 'universalist conception of human compassion'.<sup>49</sup> This conception gained special relevance in the writings of French film critic André Bazin who, speaking of *Paisan*'s Florence episode, noted how

[its] pathetic aspect [...] does not derive from the fact that a woman has lost the man she loves but from *the special place this drama holds among a thousand others*, apart from and yet also part of the complete drama of the Liberation of Florence. The camera, as if making an impartial report, confines itself to following a woman searching for a man, leaving to us the task of being alone with her, of understanding her, and of *sharing her suffering*.<sup>50</sup>

Implicit in Bazin's appraisal is the situating of this particular episode within the much wider constellation of human stories that is achieved and implied through *Paisan*'s 'aesthetic of narrative that is both complex and original', making it 'unquestionably the first film to resemble closely a collection of short stories [...] perfectly homogeneous in its diversity' owing to its common 'social, historical and human foundation'.<sup>51</sup> For Bazin it was this narratorial stance, allied with the film's 'impartial' style, that enabled Rossellini to reinvest the film medium with a new-found belief in its universality through an emphasis on a 'homogeneous diversity' of human characters with whom viewers could identify on the basis of shared human suffering.

If Bazin's enthusiastic praise of *Paisan* is important in any discussion of the film, this is not only because his writings were fundamental in bolstering the humanist discourse with which neorealism became indelibly associated, but also because he explicitly treated *Paisan* as neorealism's nucleus, arranging 'the major Italian films [of the time] in concentric circles of decreasing interest around *Paisà*, since it is this film of Rossellini that yields the most aesthetic secrets'.<sup>52</sup> Mostly this was because *Paisan* lent itself perfectly to Bazin's approach to national cinemas, which, as Ludovic Cortade has shown, was influenced by the French 'idea that the nation is the product of a balance between diversity, unity, and universalism' – a critical approach developed, crucially, 'at the very moment the United Nations was born'.<sup>53</sup>

Indeed it is important to contextualize *Paisan* and Bazin's criticism within the re-emergence of international humanism, in late 1940s Europe, 'as the watchword of a defensive postwar consensus' that 'would soon be affirmed internationally with the 1948 adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the General Assembly of the United Nations', as Justus Nieland has put it.<sup>54</sup> On the other hand,

the rapidly ascending hegemony of the USA at the time meant that internationalist discourses of humanist responsibility could no longer be disentangled from an uneven North Atlantic alliance through which the economic and cultural power of the USA was asserted on one side, and Europe's dependency secured on the other. This situation was ratified in 1947, with the US government's implementation of the European Recovery Programme (ERC), or the Marshall Plan, which injected nearly thirteen billion dollars into European countries with the aim of economic growth, with Italy in particular reaping the benefit.

*Paisan's* narrative anticipates this emerging North Atlantic alliance and geopolitical context through its reliance on the trope of the Italo-American encounter. Bazin goes even further in his analysis by linking *Paisan's* style, its factual, episodic and elliptical quality, to the 'technique of the American novel' of Faulkner, Dos Passos and Hemingway – a stylistic convergence he subsequently qualifies, problematically, by conflating the real occupation with plot details. He describes, for example, 'the exceptional affinity of the two civilizations as revealed by the Allied occupation. The G.I. felt himself at home at once in Italy, and the *paisan* was at once on familiar terms with the G.I., black or white.'<sup>55</sup> Leaving aside the inaccuracy of this statement, for in the Naples episode the black GI does not appear at all 'at home in Italy', this segment serves Bazin's humanist agenda by adding a racial dimension to the meeting of two nationalities that is at the heart of *Paisan*. Yet as Nieland points out, Bazin's view bespeaks a 'rosy Atlanticism' that fails to 'read this stylistic compatibility politically, as either an index of American economic aggression or as the naturalization of America's status as always at home in the world'.<sup>56</sup> In a similar vein, Schoonover has suggested that 'neorealism's rendering of a world spectator is

perhaps better considered in relationship to the ascendancy of the Marshall Plan and large-scale international aid than as an instance of left internationalism'.<sup>57</sup>

*Paisan* emerges in this context as an especially revealing text, assembling a number of individual episodes which, through diversity and accumulation, aim to transcend regional, racial and national differences in order to highlight a universal humanity. As Aprà remarks, 'from this coming together of different elements, despite the drowning with which the film ends, Rossellini's utopia can be born: not just a new Italy, but a new world in which different cultures meet and rise up together'.<sup>58</sup> Yet the fact that the cultures that meet in the film are essentially those of Italy and the USA cannot be ignored when the film is examined in relation to its production process and larger geopolitical context, for the 'new world' that ensues is a polarized one largely under US influence. In this respect it is interesting to note that the financial partnership between the Americans and the Italians that enabled the film to come into existence in the first place, and which directly influenced the film's resulting multinarrative structure and subject matter, anticipates the USA's economic power over Italy and the reconfiguration of the former as a postwar superpower. Seen in this light, the Italian map used in the film's US version appears less as an innocent didactic device and more as a symbol of conquest, tailored for a specific gaze on the other side of the Atlantic that was starting to draw a new world order from its own privileged perspective.

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Conceived and made in different epochs, *Intolerance* and *Paisan* are nevertheless comparable in their deployment of a multinarrative structure to cast a universalizing

eye on the category of the human. The arrangement of autonomous stories within an overarching narrative framework in both films permits the self-proclaimed articulation of a universalist discourse, whereby national differences are seemingly erased and a global humanity ostensibly asserted. In both films, likewise, the unifying thematic thread that connects characters and their plights is suffering, treated as the common denominator by which humanity can be efficiently measured and brought into view. Yet each film must also be placed in its respective context. *Intolerance* cannot be examined in isolation from an obsession with universalism that manifested itself in early modernity in countless guises and practices, not the least of which were utopian notions of cinema as a universal language. In its turn, *Paisan* must be situated in the context of a renewed belief in film's universal power after the calamitous consequences of the war, and in relation to recycled discourses of international humanism as ratified by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Yet the universality formulated by both films is not without its problems, for they exemplify in different measures what Cosgrove has described as 'a distinctive Western mentality': the 'paradox of a universality that is necessarily proclaimed for a positioned location'.<sup>59</sup> In *Intolerance*, universalism begins to collapse in view of its undisguised privileging of the contemporary US narrative over other narrative strands, a differentiation that frontally contradicts the film's emphasis on historical repetition and the notion of a cyclical humanity. For its part, *Paisan*'s formulation of the universal is articulated in relation to intercultural encounters within the nation aimed at an international spectatorship. But the ubiquitous presence of Americans in the film, a direct result of its financial backing, taints the film's universalizing aspirations precisely because they forcefully anticipate how 'American engagement [with the Old World resulted] in its global economic, political, and cultural dominance in the

second half of the twentieth century'.<sup>60</sup> In both films, then, utopian universalism cannot be disentangled from a specifically US globalism.

Although a select sample of their kind, *Intolerance* and *Paisan* bring a new historical and theoretical perspective to multinarrative globalism in the cinema, exposing the vexed ideological terrain of universalism. As Jay Winter observes, the 'language of universalism' of many twentieth-century utopian projects have 'either masked or encapsulated a particular ideology, the interests and outlook of discrete social and political formations'.<sup>61</sup> Troubling though they may be, these two films are nevertheless not to be dismissed as conveying univocal messages. As Winter notes, 'envisioning the [utopian] future is frequently a way of trying to break with the past while unwittingly revealing the hold of the present on the way we think and live'.<sup>62</sup> Seen in this light, *Intolerance* and *Paisan* are perhaps more profitably understood as texts that struggle to accommodate conflicting ideologies and conceptions within their multinarrative fabric; as dialectical force fields within which utopian views of the future cannot do away with the inescapable ideological demands of the present.

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<sup>1</sup> On 'network' narratives, see David Bordwell, 'Mutual friends and chronologies of chance', in *Poetics of Cinema* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), pp. 189–250; on 'hyperlink' films, see Alissa Quart, 'Networked', *Film Comment*, vol. 41, no. 4 (2006), pp. 48–51; on the 'mosaic' film, see Patricia Pisters, 'The mosaic film: nomadic style and politics in transnational media culture', in Mieke Bal and Miguel Á. Hernández-Navarro (eds), *Art and Visibility in Migratory Culture: Conflict, Resistance and Agency* (New York, NY: Rodopi, 2011), pp. 175–190; on the 'multiprotagonist' film, see Maria del Mar Azcona, *The Multi-Protagonist Film*

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(Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); on ‘complex narratives’, see Peter F. Parshall, *Altman and After: Multiple Narratives in Film* (Plymouth: Scarecrow, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), pp. 15, 65.

<sup>3</sup> Denis Cosgrove, *Apollo’s Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the Earth in the Western Imagination* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 263.

<sup>4</sup> Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema*, p. 221.

<sup>5</sup> Debora Shaw, ‘Babel and the global Hollywood gaze’, *Situations*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2011), pp. 11–31;

<<http://ojs.gc.cuny.edu/index.php/situations/article/view/742/1203>> accessed 9 December 2016.

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance: Bordwell, ‘Mutual friends’, pp. 194–97; Azcona, *The Multi-Protagonist Film*, pp. 46–79; Parshall, *Altman and After*, pp. 21–44. It must be noted, however, that Pisters, Azcona and Parshall do acknowledge *Intolerance* as a potential precursor of the multinarrative film, though they do so tentatively, briefly and in passing. Pisters, ‘The mosaic film’, p. 175–76; Azcona, *The Multi-Protagonist Film*, p. 9; Parshall, *Altman and After*, p. 14. *Paisan*, on the other hand, has to my knowledge never been identified as an antecedent of the genre.

<sup>7</sup> David Bordwell, ‘Lessons from Babel’, *Observations on Film Art*, 27 November 2006, <<http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2006/11/27/lessons-from-babel/>> accessed 9 December 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Melvyn Stokes, *D. W. Griffith’s The Birth of a Nation: A History of the Most Controversial Motion Picture of All Time* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 78.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.



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<sup>10</sup> William M. Drew, *D. W. Griffith's Intolerance: Its Genesis and Its Vision*

(Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1986), p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Ismail Xavier, 'On film and cathedrals: monumental art, national allegories and cultural warfare', in Lúcia Nagib, Chris Perriam and Rajinder Dudrah (eds), *Theorizing World Cinema* (London: IB Tauris, 2012), p. 30.

<sup>12</sup> Drew, *D. W. Griffith's Intolerance*, p. 89.

<sup>13</sup> One of the anecdotes surrounding *Intolerance*'s multilayered and cyclical conception of history is that it stemmed from Griffith coming across a billboard stamped with the phrase 'The same today as yesterday', when he was visiting New York for the premiere of *The Birth of a Nation*. See Paul O'Dell (with the assistance of Anthony Slide), *Griffith and the Rise of Hollywood* (New York, NY: Castle Books, 1970), p. 46. As O'Dell further notes, this expression appears as a sign in one shot at the beginning of the Modern Story, when millworkers are seen protesting.

<sup>14</sup> Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 77. According to Lillian Gish, during the making of *Intolerance* Griffith would have told an actress that she 'was working in the universal language that had been predicted in the Bible, which was to make all men brothers because they would understand each other'. See Lilian Gish, with Ann Pinchot, *The Movies, Mr Griffith and Me* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1973), p. 60.

<sup>15</sup> Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, p. 186.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 190–91.

<sup>17</sup> Griffith, cited in Scott Simmon, *The Films of D. W. Griffith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 143.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>19</sup> Karl Brown, *Adventures with D. W. Griffith* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), p. 135.

<sup>20</sup> This being said, the Judaeo-Christian narrative was allegedly not conceived to be as short as it turned out. Griffith would have been forced to cut it down after film executives thought it too unfavourable in its depiction of Jews. See O'Dell, *Griffith and the Rise of Hollywood*, p. 47.

<sup>21</sup> Hansen has also examined the ways in which the contrast between the Modern Story and the three historical narratives is doubled up in the film through recurrent compositional patterns that depict three-versus-one figures, such as the Cradle shot. See Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, p. 207.

<sup>22</sup> Christian Metz, *Language and Cinema* (The Hague: De Gruyter, 1974), pp. 107–9, emphasis in original.

<sup>23</sup> Mary Ann Doane, 'Facing a universal language', *New German Critique*, vol. 41, no. 2 (2014), p. 113.

<sup>24</sup> Doyle Greene, *The American Worker on Film: A Critical History, 1909–1999* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010), pp. 21, 29.

<sup>25</sup> For an analysis on how Griffith's montage technique served a 'liberal [...] slightly sentimental humanism', see Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (San Diego, CA: Harcourt, 1969), p. 233.

<sup>26</sup> Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, p. 170.

<sup>27</sup> Drew, *D.W. Griffith's Intolerance*, p. 20.

<sup>28</sup> See Hansen, *Babel and Babylon* p. 173; Xavier, 'On film and cathedrals', p. 28.

<sup>29</sup> Griffith is said to have declared that 'it would be a crime to let the exposition come and go without perpetuating it in photography. I don't mean ordinary photography, but something stupendous [...] I mean, in short, a film drama that will mark another

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forward leap as great as that of *The Birth of a Nation*.' Quoted in Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Exhibitions, 1876–1916* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 231.

<sup>30</sup> O'Dell, *Griffith and the Rise of Hollywood*, p. 63.

<sup>31</sup> Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> As also noted by Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, p. 171.

<sup>33</sup> See Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, 'The imperial imaginary', in *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 11.

<sup>34</sup> Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye*, p. 225.

<sup>35</sup> James Tweedie, *The Age of New Waves: Art Cinema and the Staging of Globalization* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Bondanella, *A History of Italian Cinema* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2009), p. 10.

<sup>38</sup> Dudley Andrew, 'Fade in/fade out: aspirations of national cinema', <<http://sdrc.lib.uiowa.edu/preslectures/andrew97/andrew.html>> accessed 9 December 2016.

<sup>39</sup> Peter Brunette, *Roberto Rossellini* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1987), p. 61.

<sup>40</sup> Bondanella, *A History of Italian Cinema*, p. 72.

<sup>41</sup> Teg Gallagher, leaflet for the DVD edition of *Paisà* (London: BFI Publishing, n.d.), p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Andrea Weiss, *In the Shadow of the Magic Mountain: The Erika and Klaus Mann Story* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 217.

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<sup>43</sup> Giuliana Muscio, 'Paisà/Paisan', in Giorgio Bertellini (ed.), *The Cinema of Italy* (London: Wallflower, 2004), p. 39.

<sup>44</sup> As Weiss notes, Mann was not given a screen credit 'despite a very clearly worded contractual obligation [...] Klaus took Rossellini to court and eventually won, but the credits were never changed'. See Weiss, *In the Shadow of the Magic Mountain*, pp. 219–20. Mann is credited as one of the screenwriters in the booklet accompanying the newly restored edition of the film for Criterion Collection.

<sup>45</sup> Colin MacCabe, 'Paisan: more real than real', *The Criterion Collection*, 26 January 2010, <<https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/1357-paisan-more-real-than-real>> accessed 9 December 2016.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Adriano Aprà, featured in the UK DVD edition. See *Paisan* (London: BFI, 2009).

<sup>47</sup> Brunette, *Roberto Rossellini*, p. 62.

<sup>48</sup> The film was seen as anti-British at the time of its release, which further complicates its universality. This was because of its depiction, in the Florence episode, of British soldiers leisurely overseeing the hills of the city while partisans were dying below. Similarly, in the last episode a US soldier remarks that the partisans 'are not fighting for the British empire. They are fighting for their life.' I thank Alison Smith for bringing this to my attention. See also Brunette, *Roberto Rossellini*, p. 369.

<sup>49</sup> Karl Schoonover, *Brutal Vision: the Neorealist Body in Postwar Italian Cinema* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), pp. 110, 112.

<sup>50</sup> André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Volume II*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2005), p. 37, my emphasis.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>53</sup> Ludovic Cortade, 'Cinema across fault lines: Bazin and the French school of geography', in Dudley Andrew (ed.), *Opening Bazin: Postwar Film Theory and Its Afterlife* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 23.

<sup>54</sup> Justus Nieland, 'French visual humanisms and the American style', in John T. Matthews (ed.), *A Companion to the Modern American Novel 1900–1950* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 119.

<sup>55</sup> Bazin, *What is Cinema? Volume II*, p. 40.

<sup>56</sup> Nieland, 'French visual humanisms', p. 130.

<sup>57</sup> Schoonover, *Brutal Vision*, p. 101.

<sup>58</sup> Aprà, *Paisan* (DVD).

<sup>59</sup> Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye*, p. x.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>61</sup> Jay Winter, *Dreams of Peace and Freedom: Utopian Moments in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 206.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 7.