

Editors' note

The articles in this issue originated as papers at the conference 'Italy in the Digital Era: Mapping the New Media System', which we organized on behalf of the UCL Centre for Italian Studies at the Institute of Romance Studies (IRS), University of London, on 13–14 October 2000. We are grateful to our sponsors, Fiat, to Nicolette David and Sarah Wykes at the IRS for their organizational support, to the editorial board of *Modern Italy* for agreeing to our proposal to publish these articles as a special issue and to our referees for their comments and suggestions.

The conference was designed as a forum for scholars working on Italian communications media to examine and exchange ideas about recent developments, from online newspapers and magazines to cellular phones and the Internet, and to draw a provisional map of the new media system. The old media system, in place from the 1920s to the early 1990s, was based on three discrete technological domains—print, film, electronic broadcasting—each with a distinct market and distinctive modes of consumption. The new system, which is still taking shape, is characterized by an increased convergence between these media made possible by digital technologies and by mergers and synergies between firms. It is more integrated, technologically and economically, than the old system but its contours are, as yet, unstable and unpredictable. It is not clear, for instance, how digital services will change the television market or viewing patterns, what will happen to public service broadcasting, how widely third generation (3G) mobile phone technology, integrating Internet connections, music and images, will be taken up, or what the future relationship will be between printed newspapers and online news services. Nor is it clear what role individual companies, the state and other political forces will play in shaping the system.

The area of new media is one where change happens very fast and where predictions are risky and generally best avoided. The articles that follow examine the recent past, freeze-frame the present and examine the emergent forces. Where they do include projections into the future these are tentative rather than definite. Sergio Brancato's essay in the 'Contexts and Debates' section is a personal comment on the current state of Italian cinema in relation to new technology and as such coincides thematically with the rest of the issue. All articles have been revised since the conference and, where appropriate, have taken account of changes between October 2000 and the end of May 2001, our copy deadline. Translations of articles written in Italian are by John Dickie, David Forgacs and Graeme Thomson.

David Forgacs and Stefano Magistretti