

## ***Italian Neo-Realism***

Italian Nation Film School created by Facists 1935-run by Mussolini's son.  
Cinecetta Studios (Hollywood on the Tiber)-1937

**Begins:** *Rome, Open City* (filmed between 43-45) - Roberto Rossellini 1945  
(makes *Paisan* 1946)

**Ends:** Umberto D- De Sica (1952)

Most Popular Films: *Ladri di biciclette* (aka Bicycle Thieves) (1948)  
*Sciuscià* (aka ShoeShine) (1946)

- 1) Movement is characterized by stories set amongst the poor and working class. Neorealist films generally feature children in major roles, though their roles are frequently more observational than participatory. Based on real or "composite" events.
- 2) Brought about in part, by end of Facism, poverty, destruction at end of WWII.
- 3) Semi-documentary Styles:
  - a. Long takes, natural light, Location Shooting, Non-professional actors, Naturalistic Costumes, makeup, sets.
  - b. Lack of Artiface
  - c. Camera angles from normal perspectives
  - d. Less Dominant Musical Scores
- 4) Dubbing of dialogue. The dubbing allowed for filmmakers to move in a more open mise-en-scene.
- 5) Filmed in long takes and almost exclusively on location, mostly in poor neighborhoods and in the countryside. Frequently using non-actors for secondary and sometimes primary roles. (though, in a number of cases, well known actors were cast in leading roles, playing strongly against their normal character types in front of a background populated by local people rather than extras brought in for the film).
- 6) Italian neorealist films mostly contend with the difficult economical and moral conditions of postwar Italy, reflecting the changes in the Italian

- psyche and the conditions of everyday life: defeat, poverty, and desperation.
- 7) A blending of Christian and Marxist humanism, with emphasis on the value of ordinary people . a compassionate point of view and a refusal to make facile (easy) moral judgements
  - 8) Because Cinecittà (a complex of studios in Rome--the center of commercial filmmaking in Italy since 1936) was occupied by refugees, films were shot outdoors, amidst devastation.
  - 9) Stylistically, Italian Neorealism was:
    1. an avoidance of neatly plotted stories in favor of loose, episodic structures that evolve organically
    2. a documentary visual style
    3. the use of actual locations--usually exteriors--rather than studio sites
    4. the use of nonprofessional actors, even for principal roles
    5. use of conversational speech, not literary dialogue
    6. avoidance of artifice in editing, camerawork, and lighting in favor of a simple "styleless" style
  - 10) Movement was developed by a circle of film critics that revolved around the magazine ***Cinema***, including Michelangelo Antonioni, Luchino Visconti, Gianni Puccini, Giuseppe De Santis, and Pietro Ingrao. Largely prevented from writing about politics (the editor-in-chief of the magazine was none other than Vittorio Mussolini, son of Il Duce), the critics attacked the *telefono bianco* films that dominated the industry at the time. As a counter to the poor quality of mainstream films, some of the critics felt that Italian cinema should turn to the realist writers from the turn of the century.
  - 11) The neorealists were heavily influenced by French poetic realism. Indeed, both Michelangelo Antonioni and Luchino Visconti had worked closely with Jean Renoir. Additionally, many of the filmmakers involved in neorealism developed their skills working on calligraphist films (though the short-lived movement was markedly different from neorealism).
  - 12) Elements of neorealism are also found in the films of Alessandro Blasetti and the documentary-style films of Francesco De Robertis. Two of the most significant precursors of neorealism are *Toni* (Renoir, 1935) and

1860 (Blasetti, 1934).

- 13) Neorealism was first introduced to the world in 1946 with *Roma, città aperta* (Rome, Open City), which was the first major film to come out Italy after the war.
- 14) Height of neorealism, in 1948, Luchino Visconti adapted *I malavoglia*, a novel by Giovanni Verga, written at the height of the 19th century realist *verismo* movement (in many ways the basis for neorealism, which is therefore sometimes referred to as *neoverismo*), bringing the story to a modern setting, which resulted in remarkably little change in either the plot or the tone. The resulting film, *La Terra trema*, (The Earth Trembles) starred only non-professional actors and was filmed in the same village (Aci Trezza) as the novel was set in. Because the local dialect differed so much from the Italian spoken in Rome and the other major cities, the film had to be subtitled even in its domestic release.
- 15) Italian neorealism huge influence. Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni, and Luchino Visconti, three of the most important and celebrated filmmakers of all time began their careers in neorealism, and brought elements of it with them through their careers.
- 16) The French New Wave critics celebrated neorealism and incorporated much of it in their own movement. Other movements in The United States, Poland, Japan, The United Kingdom and elsewhere developed many of the ideas first articulated by the neorealists. Some of the most notable neo-realist influenced films were the popular "spaghetti westerns" directed by Sergio Leone in the mid-1960s, which spawned many subsequent imitators.
- 17) Some of Pier Paolo Pasolini's works in the 1970s were considered part of a new neorealist sub-genre, even if Pasolini's attention to picaresque was this time openly declared and evident.
- 18) Italian neorealism was inspired by French *cinéma vérité* (and deeply inspired the French New Wave), German *Kammerspiel*, and influenced the U.S. documentary movement and the Polish Film School. Its effects can be seen as recently as the Danish Dogme 95 movement.

- 19) De Sica who sustained the movement. He collaborated with scriptwriter, Cesare Zavattini on all of his neorealist films. One of his greatest and most widely known films is *The Bicycle Thief*. In this film there is a Chaplinesque blend of pathos and comedy. The film is acted entirely by nonprofessionals and consists of simple events in the life of a laborer
- 20) Italian Neorealism begins to end in 1948. Liberal and left wing parties were defeated in the polls. Levels of income were surpassing prewar levels, most Italians liked American cinema and the vision of a desolate, poverty-stricken country outraged politicians anxious for democracy and prosperity. Italy's move from individual concern with Neorealism to the tragic failure of the human condition can be seen through Federico Fellini's films.

The celebrated 1952 film *Umberto D.*, by Vittorio De Sica, about an elderly, impoverished retired civil servant struggling to make ends meet is often cited as a classic neo-realist effort.

#### TEN POINTS (MORE OR LESS OF NEOREALISM)

In 1952, the Parisian journal *Films & Documents* published the famous "ten points of neorealism," which, to a large degree, still remain valid.

1. A message: for the Italian filmmakers, cinema is a way of expression and communication in the true sense of this word.
2. Topical scripts inspired by concrete events; great historical and social issues are tackled from the point of view of the common people.

3. A sense of detail as a means of authentication.
4. A sense of the masses and the ability to surprise (De Sica) or manipulate them in front of camera (De Santis, Visconti): the protagonists are captured in their relationship to the masses.
5. Realism; but reality is filtered by a very delicate e sensitivity.
6. The truth of actors, often non professionals.
7. The truth of decor and a refusal of the studio.
8. The truth of the lighting.
9. Photography reminiscent of the reportage style stresses the impression of truth.
10. An extremely free e camera; its unrestricted movements result from the use of post synchronization."

## **CINECITTA**

**Cinecittà** (Italian for "Cinema City") is a large film studio in Rome. Founded in 1937, it was bombed during WWII, was the filming location for several large American film productions like *Ben-Hur* in the 1950s, and became the studio most closely associated with Federico Fellini.

After a period of near-bankruptcy in the 1980s, it has been privatized by the Italian government and was chosen by director Martin Scorsese as the filming location for his *Gangs of New York*. Wes Anderson's *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* was also shot at Cinecittà. Cinecittà is the center of the Italian Cinema and many of today's biggest box office hits are filmed there. By the mention of the name Cinecittà many consider it synonymous with Italian cinema in general.

## **PRECURSORS and INFLUENCES**

- . The works of Giovanni Verga
- . *1860* (Alessandro Blasetti, 1934)
- . *Toni* (Jean Renoir, 1935)
- . *La Nave bianca* (Francesco De Robertis, 1941)

- . *Cristo si è Fermato a Eboli* (novel, Carlo Levi, 1947)

Main works:

- . *Ossessione* (Luchino Visconti, 1943)
- . *Roma, città aperta* (Roberto Rossellini, 1946)
- . *Sciuscià* (Vittorio De Sica, 1946)
- . *Paisà* (Rossellini, 1946)
- . *Germania anno zero* (Rossellini, 1948)
- . *Ladri di biciclette* (De Sica, 1948)
- . *La Terra trema* (Visconti, 1948)
- . *Stromboli* (Rossellini, 1950)
- . *Umberto D.* (De Sica, 1952)

Beginning of Italian Neo Realism

Rossellini

Cesare Zavattini- Spokesmen for Italian Neo-Realism

Vittorio De Sica

New Style

Michelangelo Antonioni

Pasolini

Ferico Fellini-Script writer on *Open City*, *Paisan*

## ITALIAN NEO-REALISM TIMELINE

### 1942

✓ *Ossessione* (*Obsession*, Visconti)

### 1943

✓ *I bambini ci guardano* (*The Children Are Watching Us*, De Sica)

### 1945

✓ *Roma, città aperta* (*Open City*, Rossellini)

### 1946

Il bandito (*The Bandit*, Lattuada)

✓ *Paisà* (Rossellini)

✓ *Sciuscià* (*Shoeshine*, De Sica)

Vivere in pace (*To Live in Peace*, Zampa)

**1947**

Caccia tragica (*Tragic Hunt*, De Santis)

Il delitto di Giovanni Episcopo (Lattuada)

Germania, anno zero (*Germany, Year Zero*,  
Rossellini)

Il passatore (Coletti)

✓ *La terra trema* (*The Earth Trembles*, Visconti)

**1948**

✓ *Ladri di biciclette* (*The Bicycle Thief*, De Sica)

L'amore (Rossellini)

*Senza pietà* (*Without Pity*, Lattuada)

**1949**

Il mulino del Po (*The Mill on the Po*, Lattuada)

In nome della legge (Germi)

✓ *Riso amaro* (*Bitter Rice*, De Santis)

**1950**

Il cammino della speranza (Germi)

**1951**

Il brigante di Tacca del Lupo (Germi)

Luci del varietà (*Variety Lights*, Lattuada/Fellini)

✓ *Miracolo a Milano* (*Miracle in Milan*, De Sica)

Persiane chiuse (Comencini)

**1952**

Bellissima (Visconti)

Roma, ore 11 (*Rome, 11 o'clock*, De Santis)

✓ *Umberto D.* (De Sica)

**NEOREALISM**, a term which over the years has been employed to describe what might loosely be defined as a trend or movement in Italian art, literature, and cinema. The term first appeared in 1930 in an essay by Arnaldo Bocelli (1900-76) which outlined the literary production of that year. The neorealist works were described as analyzing the human condition in the light of the social environment and of objective psychological insights, and as avoiding the then prevalent stylistic and formal hedonism. Foremost among these works, which until then had been generally overlooked or undervalued by the critics, was Alberto Moravia's *The Time of Indifference* (1929).

**Neorealism**, according to Stone's provocative view, makes claims about objective representation and stripped down means of production which are untenable when closely examined: the "neorealist fallacy" consists of romanticizing poverty and the class struggle and of exaggerating the underdeveloped nature of the means of filmic production and the use of non-professional actors.

Improvisation is a cover for rehearsed lines in Visconti's *La terra trema*; the child in *Bicycle Thief* cries because he had just been beaten for smoking cigarettes (not as a spontaneous result of the dramatic action) and this film's cloying sentimentality (as in most of De Sica) has been justly satirized with metafilmic insights by Nichetti in *Iceberg Thief*; and even Antonioni, the women's director, raised his hand to the beautiful fashion model lead in *Cronaca d'amore* in order to spur her final tearful collapse on screen....

The billions of American dollars of the Marshall plan guaranteed the Italian economic miracle and thus the neorealists' focus on social injustice is a nostalgic marxist gesture, a mechanism of defence for the guilt of collaboration with the fascist film industry, especially in the cases of Fellini and Rossellini (and in Visconti's patrician tastes, even though he was imprisoned). Stone's subversion of "the bicycle school of Italian neorealism," is a psychoanalytic interpretation in order to derepress the unconscious motives and biographical revisionism of this so-called school of directors.

The concept of neorealism deconstructs through internal paradoxes concerning the artifices of production and the ambivalent historical role of the Vatican during fascism. The liberationist Catholicism of the neorealists, moreover, fails to address the trauma of Italy's distinct role in the Holocaust (Rossellini, Visconti, and De Sica are unable to provide the Freudian insights of Bertolucci and Pasolini into the sexual pathology of fascism).

Zavattini A Thesis on Neo-Realism