



ISTANBUL TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

Film Art / Kağan DEMİRDÖVEN

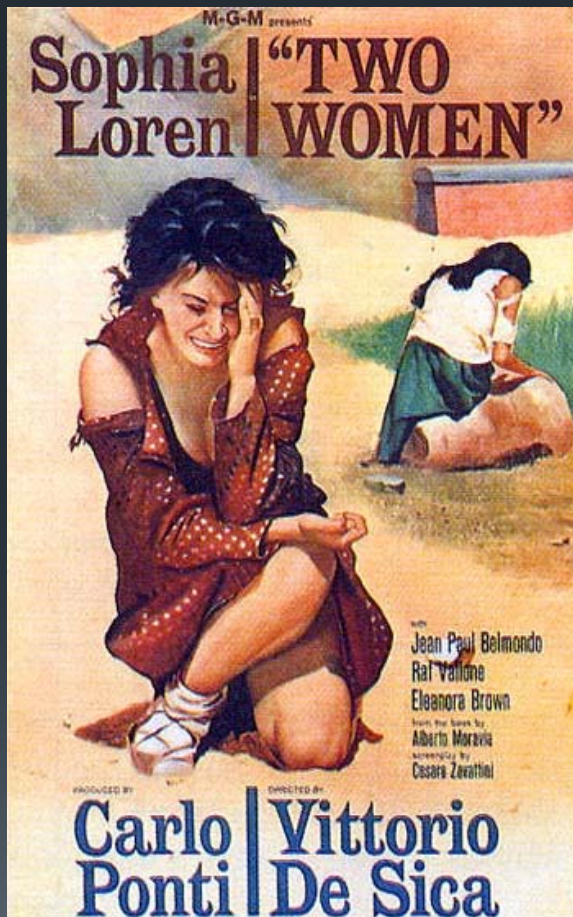
“CITY & CINEMA”



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Italian Neorealism

■ 1942-1952



Italian Neo-realism, 1945-1951

Historical Context

- **1922:** Mussolini (head of the Fascist Party) comes to power—appointed by King Victor Emmanuel III as Prime Minister
- **1940:** Italy enters the war on Hitler's side
- **1943-1945:** Germany occupies Northern and Central Italy after the Allied forces contribute to the imprisonment of Mussolini
- **1943-1944:** Rome occupied by Germans
- **1945:** Italy liberated by the Allies; Mussolini executed
- **1948:** Moderate Christian Democrats win elections; Popular Front (coalition of Christian Democrats, socialists, communists) dissolves
- **1948:** Andreotti Law—establishes quotas, subsidies, and censorship on films exporting unflattering views of post-war Italy

Italian film under fascism

1922-1945



- Early 20s: Italian film subscribed to an commercial industrial model
 - Production best handled by private interests
- In the 20s production fell dramatically because of competition from the U.S., France, Germany
 - 1920: 371 films; 1930: 8 films
- 1935: Ente Nazionale Industrie Cinematografiche (ENIC) established fascist control over the entire industry
 - ENIC controlled all first run theaters (80% of total box office)
 - Wrested control over all foreign distribution from private sector
 - Caused American studios to pull out of the Italian market in 1938
- Effects?
 - Italian film industry became the fifth largest in the world
 - Early 1930s: b/t 10 and 20 films per year
 - Early 1940s: almost 100 films per year
 - Cinema audiences grew dramatically
 - New film buildings

What Kinds Of Films Were Being Made In The 1930s And 1940s?

- Historical epics and war films
 - Ex: *Scipio Africanus* (Carmine Gallone, 1937): historical epic justifying Italy's invasion and conquest of Ethiopia in 1935
 - Funded by government
 - Largest budget to that date in the history of Italian film Giant box-office success
- Landscape dominated by escapist genres: costume dramas, musicals, melodramas, comedies

Ideology/Origin

- Developed during WWII
 - Mussolini
- Values and focus:
 - Realistic stories, lives of ordinary people
 - Decried postwar conditions
 - unemployment, poverty, child labor, government corruption
 - Skeptical of Catholic Church
 - But: not highly political

What is Italian Neorealism?

- A coherent (though not organized) movement in Italian cinema between 1945-1951
- A minority tendency: not dominant in terms of production
 - Scholars range in estimating the percentage of total Italian production in the post-war period
 - Some say 4% (20 films)
 - Others say 11% (90 films of 822 between 1945-1953)
 - Others say 32% (259 films)
- A minority tendency: not dominant in terms of box-office
 - Post-war return of U.S. domination of Italian film screens
 - 1948: U.S. holds 77% market share compared to 13% for Italian film
 - 1950: U.S. holds 63.7% market share compared to 29.2% for Italian film
 - Neorealist success at the box-office
 - Rome Open City: #1 box-office in 1945-46
 - Paisà: #9 box-office in 1946-7
 - Bicycle Thieves: #11 box office in 1948-9

Style



- Small budgets
- Authentic
 - Shot on location, mix of professional/non professional actors
- Post-production sound/dubbing
 - A more open mise en scene
- Documentary style w/long takes
- Simplicity in working methods
- But: still a cinematic production

Three Ways of Defining the Coherence of Italian Neorealism:



1. Shared Aesthetic Sensibility

Realism: commitment to the visible, physical world

- Location shooting
- nonprofessional actors
- natural light
- Unadorned mise-en-scene
- documentary style of photography
- avoidance of complex editing (i.e. unobtrusive editing)

Three Ways of Defining the Coherence of Italian Neorealism:



2. Shared Ethical and Political Sensibility

- a) Wholesale rejection of fascist politics and cultural practices
- b) Strong communist and socialist influence
- c) Embrace of ordinary working class people as worthy subjects and agents of change
- d) Aspiration to create a new and improved Italy

Three Ways of Defining the Coherence of Italian Neorealism:

3. Shared and consistent personnel
including

Directors:

Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio De Sica, Luchino Visconti

Writers:

Cesare Zavattini, Federico Fellini

Cinematographers:

G. R. Aldo (Earth Trembles), Otello Martelli (Paisá), Carlo Montuori (Bicycle Thieves)

Actors:

Anna Magnani

Italian Neorealism: Style

- *Mise-en-scene*
 - Location shooting
 - Non-professional actors
 - Vernacular dialogue
 - Natural lighting
- Editing
 - Continuity editing
 - Unobtrusive
- Camerawork
 - Long takes
 - Stable camera
 - Medium and long shots

Italian Neorealism: Narrative and Storytelling



- Loosening of plot linearity and causal links
 - Chance encounters
 - Use of ellipsis (missing causes for events)
 - Unresolved endings
 - Ex: Rome Open City; Paisá; Bicycle Thieves, Umberto D
 - Episodic (dictated by passage of time rather than importance of events to the action)
 - Ex: Bicycle Thief
 - Dead time/dwelling on “microactions”
 - Ex: Umberto D
- Consequences of the loosening of plot linearity
 - “Big events” and “small events” become indistinguishable
 - Treated in the same way with the same care
 - The daily and familiar becomes the object of scrutiny
 - Generic/tonal mixing (ex: Rome Open City—comedy and tragedy)

Italian Neorealism: Narrative and Storytelling



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Italian Neorealism



A movement of film realistically reflecting the difficult economic and moral conditions in post-WWII Italy

Roberto Rossellini



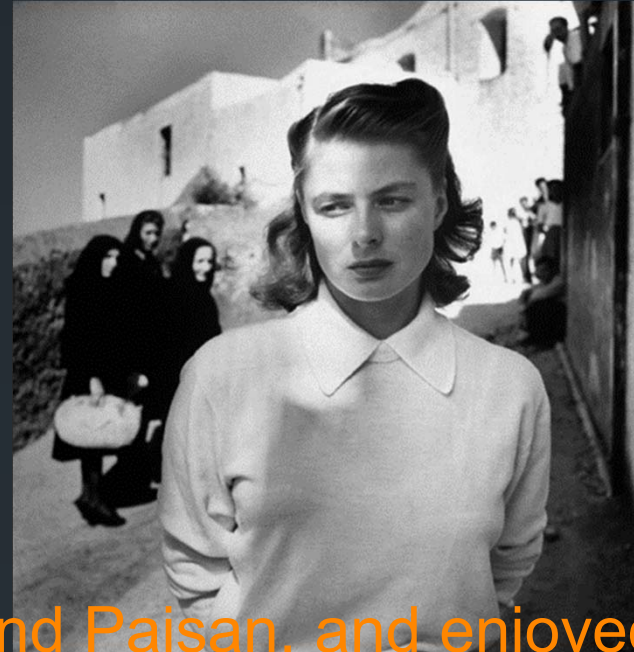
- Founder/father of Italian Neorealism
- WWII
- Rome, Open City (1945)
 - Drama, the Nazi occupation of Rome
 - War Trilogy
 - Federico Fellini
- Ingrid Bergman

1947

Dear Mr. Rossellini,

I saw your films *Open City* and *Paisan*, and enjoyed them very much. If you need a Swedish actress who speaks English very well, who has not forgotten her German, who is not very understandable in French, and who in Italian knows only “ti amo,” I am ready to come and make a film with you.

Ingrid Bergman



Rome Open City (Rossellini, 1945): Not a paradigm exemplar of Italian neorealism

- First film of the movement
- Manichean poles of good and evil
- Plot linearity and tight causal links
- Retains dramatic/melodramatic effects
- Constructs a unified national myth and a sense of Italian solidarity
- Optimistic ending
- Commercial success


Rome Open City: Catholic undertones



Bicycle Thieves

- Ladri di biciclette
- Vittorio De Sica, 1948
- a “classic movie” – it can mean different things to different people



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- Simple in construction and profoundly rich in human insight, *Bicycle Thieves* embodies the greatest strengths of the Italian neorealist movement: emotional clarity, social rectitude, and brutal honesty.
 - Criterion Collection

Legacy:

Stylistic and Narrative Devices

- Neorealism influenced international cinema for decades...
 - On-location shooting w/ post-dubbing
 - Amalgam of actors and non-actors
 - Plots based on chance encounters, open endings
 - Acceptance of subtitles
 - Mixture of tone (at times, extreme)
 - Scene *Rome, Open City*
 - Pina's death: she's the heroine
 - in real life (as opposed to movies) good people may die pointlessly
- 'The European Movie'

Example...

From Criterion:

An American housewife (Jennifer Jones) vacationing in Italy reluctantly decides to put an end to her brief affair with an Italian academic (Montgomery Clift). She flees to Rome's Stazione Termini, where she bids him farewell, but he begs her to stay. The film's plot is simple; its production was not. The troubled collaboration between director Vittorio De Sica and producer David O. Selznick resulted in two cuts of the same film. De Sica's version, *Terminal Station*, was screened at a length of one-and-a-half hours, but after disappointing previews, Selznick severely re-edited it and changed the title to *Indiscretion of an American Wife* without De Sica's permission.

Comparison: <http://vimeo.com/68514760>

Mise en Scene of Italian Neorealism

- Documentary-like visual style with an avoidance of special effects or unnatural lighting



Mise en Scene of Italian Neorealism



- The use of actual locations, especially city exteriors, rather than studio sets

Acting in Italian Neorealism films

- Directors cast real non-professional people—not trained actors—sometimes even for the lead roles.



Acting in Italian Neorealism films



- Screenwriting featured ***conversational, everyday speech*** rather than literary or over-dramatic dialogue
- Use of ***post-synchronized sound***—dubbing of dialogue in the studio—allowed for greater camera movement.

Characteristics of Italian Neorealism



- An emphasis on the value of ordinary people-- in particular the poor
- a preoccupation with Italy's Fascist past and its aftermath of wartime devastation
- Often featured Christian and Marxist humanism...the idea that all social classes should be treated equally and with compassion
- An avoidance of neatly or cleverly plotted stories
- A dark and gritty sensibility that often focused on darker themes

It was also a reaction AGAINST the Romanticism of American Cinema

- “This powerful desire of the [neo-realist] cinema to see and to analyze, *this hunger for reality*, for truth, is a kind of concrete homage to other people, that is, to all who exist...
- ...Whereas we are attracted by the truth, by the reality which touches us and which we want to know and understand directly and thoroughly, the Americans continue to satisfy themselves with a sweetened version of truth produced through transpositions.”

--Bernardo Bertolucci, Italian Director

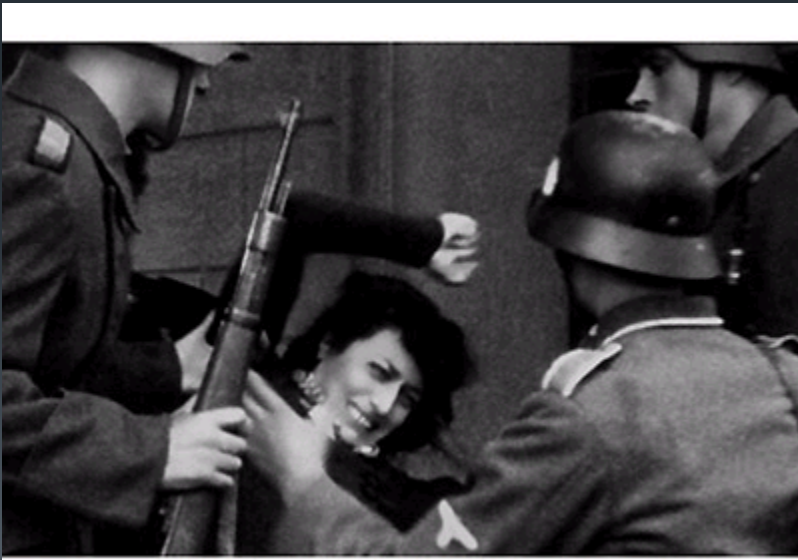
Birth of Italian Neorealism

- Director Robert Rossellini's 1945 **Rome, Open City**
- The film is about ordinary citizens fighting the WWII Nazi occupation of Rome shortly before the American army liberated the city.



Birth of Italian Neorealism

- Rossellini wanted to portray the cruel atmosphere that existed during Nazi occupation and many of the film's narrative elements are based on actual events during this time.



Italian Neorealism Continues

- Director Vittorio de Sica and screenwriter Cesare Zavattini advanced the movement.



Vittorio de Sica



Major Films of Italian Neorealism

- Their 1946 film *Shoeshine* told the story of boys getting into trouble with the police after trying to find the money to buy a horse.



Major Films of Italian Neorealism

- The film won an honorary Academy Award (before the Best Foreign Film category was invented)



The demise of Italian Neorealism

- Postwar Italian governments did not approve of films that portrayed Italy in a negative light.
- A 1949 law strengthening production and exhibition of Italian films imposed censorship on scripts that “slandered Italy.”

Italian Neorealism Influenced other filmmakers because...

- It opened the door to *filming on location* rather than in a studio
- It showed filmmakers that movies can be used to highlight *the reality of societal problems* and make viewers consider social change
- In Asia, Africa, and Latin America, in particular, it demonstrated that *you could make great films inexpensively with your own country's landscape* and people—without lavish sets or expensive stars.

Italian Neorealism

- Significant because its revolutionary characteristics influenced so many other filmmakers...even to this day

