

# CET Syllabus of Record



Program: CET in Florence  
Course Title: Italian Cinema  
Course Code: FL230  
Total Hours: 45  
Recommended Credits: 3  
Suggested Cross Listings: Italian Studies, Film, History  
Language of Instruction: English  
Prerequisites/Requirements: None

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## Description

This course examines the social, political and economic evolution of contemporary Italy as represented in the visual culture of the Italian cinema. The fundamental premise of the course is that Cinema is the 20<sup>th</sup> Century art form most suitable as a medium for observing and developing an understanding of the way that contemporary Italy has evolved since World War II, with cinema as the historical record of this evolution. As such, the cinema is also examined from an aesthetic point of view, the iconographic and stylistic developments of the medium also being crucial elements of a visual culture that complements and references traditional modes of representation such as painting and sculpture, as well as architecture, literature and the oral folk tradition.

The course takes as its starting point the origins of Italian Neo-Realism, the most important movement in Italian cinema and one which had a significant impact on World Cinema. This is explored in the works of early silent cinema, and the 1920s and 1930s. Neo-realism proper is represented by Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* (1942), and Roberto Rossellini's *Roma, Città Aperta*, as well as Vittorio De Sica's masterpieces *Ladri Di Biciclette* and *Umberto D.* The reaction to Neo-realism in the late 1950s and early 1960s took several forms and one of the most significant is the light relief of 'Commedia all'italiana', with its satirical look at the traditional Italian way of life as provided by Pietro Germi's 1961 classic *Divorzio All'italiana*, which has something important to say about Italian (Sicilian) society in the 1960s and beyond, and Mario Monicelli's crime caper *I Soliti Ignoti* (1958). The Modernist movement is exemplified by Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'avventura* and Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* with their very different analyses of the new Italy in the 1960s, the years of the economic boom and consequent social change, as well as Visconti's hybrid Neo-realist melodrama *Rocco E I Suoi Fratelli* (1960). Directors of the 1970s onwards found inspiration in revisiting the Fascist past and Bernardo Bertolucci's *Il Conformista* (1970), the Taviani brothers' *La Notte Di San Lorenzo* (1982) and Roberto Benigni's international hit *La Vita E' Bella* (1997) exemplify this trend. From the 1990s, the era of transition and the Post-modern, the works of Giuseppe Tornatore (*Nuovo Cinema Paradiso*), and Nanni Moretti (*Caro Diario*), reflect the nostalgic and the whimsical, in contemporary Italian life, while Emanuele Crialesse's *Nuovomondo* makes a retrospective study of the challenging realities of historical emigration in a modern context.

## Objectives

- Students acquire a knowledge of the history of post-war Italian cinema to the present day.
- They encounter the social, political and economic trends reflected in filmmakers' concerns in the context of the industrialized society which has evolved since World War II.
- They are exposed to the issues which have characterized Film Studies in relation to contemporary Italian cinema and the diversity of filmmaking in the Italian context.

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- They gain an awareness of how the cultural history of Italy has been portrayed in cinema – how this new 20<sup>th</sup> century art form reflects the country's past and present realities in ways both similar to and vastly different from previous visual representations.
- They acquire a broad overview of Italy's post-War reconstruction, providing an acquaintance with the issues affecting ordinary Italians through critical consideration of the ideas, contexts and practices of filmmakers and film commentators in this period.
- They acquire an intellectual framework that will enable them to explore the ways in which cinema relates to other visual arts and visual culture in general.

## Methods of Evaluation

Attendance and Participation	10%
Screening Quizzes	15%
Written assignment 1	15%
Written assignment 2 & Presentation	15%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	25%

## Primary Texts

- Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema from Neorealism to the Present*, Continuum, New York, 1997 (Third Edition 2003).
- Marcia Landy, *Italian Film*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000.
- Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film In The Light Of Neorealism*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1986.
- P. Adams Sitney, *Vital Crises in Italian Cinema: Iconography, Stylistics, Politics*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1995.
- Pierre Sorlin, *Italian National Cinema 1896-1996*, Routledge, London, 1996.
- Mary P Wood, *Italian Cinema*, Berg, Oxford, 2005.

## Outline of Course Content

Note: Students cover approximately one topic per week during the fall and spring terms. During the summer term, when class periods are longer, students cover approximately two topics per week.

TOPIC 1: Presentation/Recapitulation of the key concepts of Cinema Studies, ('How to Read a Film') and introduction to the historical contexts of Italian Cinema in the early silent era.

TOPIC 2: The Films of the Fascist Period through World War II

The popular melodramas of the 1930s ('telefono bianco' films), and Neo-realist precursors of the 1940s, focusing on Mario Camerini's *Il Signor Max* (1937) and Alessandro Blasetti's *Quattro Passi Fra Le Nuvole* (1942) The origins of Italian Neo-Realism: Visconti. The reactionary impulse and the influence of American pulp fiction and film melodrama on Visconti's *Ossessione* (1942) (excerpts)

TOPIC 3: The Rossellini War Trilogy

Classic Neo-realism: its essence defined, the social, cultural and political context of the 'movement' and subsequent critical writing on it by both theorists and practitioners Focus on *Roma, Citta' Aperta* (1945) (whole film). Selected excerpts from *Paisa'* (1946) and *Germania Anno Zero* (1948).

TOPIC 4: 'Post-War' Neo-Realism: Vittorio De Sica's Social Conscience

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Style and substance in De Sica's *Ladri Di Biciclette* (1948) (whole film). The high point and point of no return for Neo-realism: 'washing Italy's dirty linen in public'. *Umberto D.* (1950)

TOPIC 5: Commedia All'italiana

Mario Monicelli's crime comedy *I Soliti Ignoti* (1958) and Pietro Germi's comedy about Sicilian morals and manners *Divorzio All'italiana* (1961)

TOPIC 6: Modernism: The Economic Miracle 1960, *Annus Mirabilis* Part 1

Visconti's *Rocco E I Suoi Fratelli* (1960). Migration and Murder: Social realism and operatic melodrama.

TOPIC 7: Modernism: the Second Vital Crisis. 1960, *Annus Mirabilis* Part 2

Urban angst, debauchery and social disintegration in Fellini's Roman epic *La Dolce Vita* (1960)

TOPIC 8: Modernism. 1960, *Annus Mirabilis* Part 3

Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'avventura* (1960) : 'interior Neo-realism'. The primacy of style: 'paysage-état-de-l'âme' and temps mort, the importance of framing and composition, narrative ellipses, communication breakdown and social commentary.

TOPIC 9: Revisiting the Past 1: Regarding Fascism

A 'gentler' take on the impact of the ideology on public and private lives in Bernardo Bertolucci's *Il Conformista* (1970)

TOPIC 10: Revisiting the Past 2: Rediscovering and Reinventing Fascism

Revealing the brutal truth through faithful recreation in the Taviani brothers' *La Notte Di San Lorenzo* (1982)

TOPIC 11: Revisiting the Past 3: Rediscovering and Reinventing Fascism

Revealing the brutal truth through comedy in Benigni's post-modern take on the holocaust, *La Vita E' Bella* (1997)

TOPIC 12: Nostalgia and Transition 1

Nanni Moretti's video diary of modern Italian life *Caro Diario* (1993): the age of transition.

TOPIC 13: Nostalgia and Transition 2

Giuseppe Tornatore's sentimental retrospection in *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso* (1988)

TOPIC 14: The Post-Modern Take--Immigration/Emigration: Traumatic Realism. Current Trends 2 Post-modern retrospection in Emanuele Crialesse's *Nuovomondo* (2006).