

CET Syllabus of Record



Program: CET Siena

Course Title: Italian History and Culture through Film 1860's-1960's

Course Code: ITTR2630

Total Hours: 45

Recommended Credits: 3

Suggested Cross Listings: Italian Studies, Film, History of Art

Language of Instruction: English

Prerequisites/Requirements: None

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 20th 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 Crialesi'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 20th 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.

Course Requirements

Students must complete all reading assignments—approximately 30 to 40 pages per session—before coming to class.

Students are required to submit two written assignments of 2000-2500 words. Students receive a list of questions about films viewed in class. They may select one of the films/questions from the list or choose a topic of their own.

The second writing assignment includes a 10-minute oral presentation. The assignment and oral presentation need to demonstrate that the students have undertaken independent research using all available resources, accessed and used appropriately printed resources, the Internet, and the movies they have chosen. They also need to show critical appreciation of the art of cinema in general, the place of Italian cinema in cinema history, and the social, historical and political implications in the Italian context of the movies they discuss.

Following each film screening, there is a brief quiz in class consisting of short answer questions about the film, related readings from Bondanella, and screening notes sent to students.

Students are required to take midterm and final examinations. Each exam comprises short answer and essay questions.

Methods of Evaluation

Attendance and Participation	10%
Screening Quizzes (6 x 2.5 %)	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.

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Mary P Wood, *Italian Cinema*, Berg, Oxford, 2005.

Supplementary Texts

Ed. Zygmunt G Baranski and Rebecca J West, *The Cambridge Companion To Modern Italian Culture*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001.

Ed. Giorgio Bertellini, *The Cinema Of Italy*, Wallflower Press, London, 2004.

Robin Buss, *Italian Films*, B T Batsford Ltd, London, 1989.

Angela Dalle Vacche, *The Body in the Mirror: Shapes Of History In Italian Cinema*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1992.

Manuela Gieri, *Contemporary Italian Filmmaking: Strategies Of Subversion: Pirandello, Fellini, Scola And The Directors Of The New Generation*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1995.

Ed. David Overbey, *Springtime in Italy: A Reader On Neo-Realism*, Talisman Books, London, 1978.

Mira Liehm, *Passion and Defiance: Film In Italy From 1942 To The Present*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1984.

Millicent Marcus, *Filmmaking by the Book: Italian Cinema And Literary Adaptation*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1993.

Millicent Marcus, *After Fellini: National Cinema In The Postmodern Age*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2002.

Angelo Restivo, *The Cinema of Economic Miracles: Visuality And Modernization In The Italian Art Film*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2002.

Vincent F Rocchio, *Cinema Of Anxiety: A Psychoanalysis Of Italian Neorealism*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1999.

James Sholto Douglas, "Gianni Amelio: 'Through A Glass Darkly'" in *Traumatic Realism: The Persistence Of History In The Films Of The 1990s: Il Ladro Di Bambini, Lamerica And Così Ridevano*, University of Bristol M. Phil. dissertation, 2003.

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 - Course Introduction

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. Examples of (Fascist) 'things to come' in the silent cinema era, focusing on Giovanni Pastrone's *Cabiria* (1914)(selected excerpts).

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) (selected excerpts). 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) (excerpts)

TOPIC 5 - Commedia All'italiana

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

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

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

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) (excerpts)

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. (whole film)

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) (whole film)

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) (whole film)

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) (excerpts)

TOPIC 12 - Nostalgia and Transition 1

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

TOPIC 13 - Nostalgia and Transition 2

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

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