

# Italian neorealism



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In the period between 1943 and 1950 Italian cinema was dominated by Neorealism which became the most significant film style of post-war Europe. Formation began back in 1936 when propagandists opened modern Cinecittà studios and the film school name 'Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia'. Along with the opening of schools such as this was a movement that placed a group of cinematographers under full-year contracts, among them was Carlo Montuori who used his classic techniques in creating 'Bicycle Thieves' (1948) one of the most well known films produced during the Neo-Realism movement.

Perhaps also one of the most influential directors was Roberto Rossellini who directed Rome Open City at the end of WWII. Many directors and influential films such as this began to change and shape the way Italian films were made and what their relation to society was like. The neorealist style was developed by a circle of film critics that revolved around the magazine Cinema, despite a severe lack of funds and equipment the Neorealist film makers sought to reveal truth of the everyday life.

Filming outdoors in natural light and starring nonprofessional actors, it was a return to the Lumière ethic of framed reality. NeoRealism became a style of film which was characterised by stories that were set amongst the poor and working class people. Realism would always be emphasized, and performances were mostly constructed from scenes of ordinary people performing fairly uninteresting and everyday tasks, completely derived of the self-consciousness that a trained actor would usually produce.

The films would generally feature children as the major role but they were usually more observational rather than engaging. The film makers were heavily influenced by French poetic realism which was a stylised and studio bound movement that recreated the realism of society. Elements of neorealism can be found in the films of Alessandro Blasetti and the documentary-style films of Francesco De Robertis whose films *Toni* (Renoir in 1935) and *1860* (Blasetti in 1934) were two of the most significant precursors of the neorealism movement.

There are a few aspects that make Italian Neorealist films unique; they would use nonprofessional actors for their raw awkwardness and everyday habits, capturing the reality of their poverty and desperation. The film makers would shoot scenes on location and mostly in poor neighborhoods or the countryside, with the plot surrounding life among the impoverished and lower class. The films theme mostly handled the difficulty of the economy and struggling moral conditions of post-WWII Italy while reflecting the changes in the Italian persona and the conditions of everyday life.

What has become one of the best known Neorealist films is Roberto Rossellini's *Rome Open City* (1945), the film includes many of the characteristics of NeoRealism. The film contains a strong resistance towards conventional principles therefore showing an anti-establishment and revolutionary attitude. Just weeks after the German withdrawal Rossellini shot *Rome Open City*, this shocked and excited the film world because the film entails of the film was not expected.

They had an extemporaneous, documentary quality enhanced in the early era by the materials from which they were made--war-time film stock, cobbled-together equipment, non-professional actors, and location shooting. *Open City* is a good example of this early period in neorealism. Rossellini helped Italian neorealism to develop as a particular form of cinematic expression during the period when Italy was ruled by authoritarians. Rossellini would rewrite the scripts according to the (nonprofessional) actors' feelings and history. The regional accent of the area, dialect and costumes were shown in the film how they were in real life.

Truffaut (one of the major figures of The French New Wave film movement) wrote in his 1963 essay titled *Roberto Rossellini Prefers Real Life*, that Rossellini's influence in France particularly among the directors who would become part of the *nouvelle vague* (new wave movement) was so substantial that he was in every sense "the father of the French New Wave". The opinion that Rossellini's work had become the introduction to a new style of film was enforced by many of the up and coming directors of the time and his work is still appreciated in the modern film world.

When the economy began to improve and the rate of unemployment decreased people found Neorealism discouraging and began to favor light hearted American films which involved positive outcomes and happier endings than what the Italian people had come to know, with this change in favor came the end of the NeoRealism Era. Nevertheless Italian NeoRealism was essential to Italy's film industry at the time the war ended and while Europe was recovering from the war. Its impact on modern film has been

monumental, not only in Italian film but also on French New Wave cinema, and ultimately on films all over the world.