

# *Italian Neorealism*

## Brief History of Italian Cinema

- History of Italian cinema a legendary one that begins with the birth of cinema
- Along with France in the early teens, Italy began producing three-hour costume-historical epics, such as *Cabiria*, that inspired American directors

- Inter-war years (1920s-1930s), marked by fascist party's rise to power in Italy (not to mention Spain and Germany), considered a fallow period for Italian cinema
- In 1937, at the height of Fascist dictator Mussolini's reign in Italy, the state opened *Cinecittá* in Rome. The Italian film industry emerged at the site of political power for a reason

- By the late 1930s and early 1940s, much of Italian cinema was emulating Hollywood
- Critics describe Italy's film industry at this time as star-driven and favoring sentimental comedies and "frivolous" entertainment based on the rejection of reality

## The Seeds of Italian Neorealism

- One way to think of Italian Neorealism is as a response to some of these pre-war developments within the film industry, but also to the Second World War, which greatly affected Italy (and the world)
- The war added a sense of urgency, history, and tragedy that influenced the tone of post-war movies both in Italy and around the world

- The war in general fueled a turn toward realist-driven filmmaking and even documentary style
- The devastating effects of WWII were particularly felt in Europe
- For Italy, increased rates of poverty and unemployment after the war helped to foster a realist aesthetic — sometimes by necessity rather than choice

- Italian neorealism would become one of the most influential film movts. in history, impacting Brazilian, Indian, and American national cinemas, to name just a few
- Reacting against a legacy of fascism and to the War, one of the fountainheads of Italian neorealism, Cesare Zavattini, theorized the need for a return to humanism and realism in storytelling

## Tendencies of (Italian) Neorealism

- 1) mix of pro & non-pro actors;
- 2) more on-location shooting;
- 3) lack of trick or composite photography/special effects;
- 4) available lighting;
- 5) low-budget;

- 6) focus in plot on the struggles of poor, oppressed, and/or working class -- human concerns in modernity;
- 7) imperfect protagonists;
- 8) out of simplicity and the everyday emerge complexities;
- 9) mediates between: Marxism/materialism & Catholicism, as well as the masses and the individual

## Vittorio de Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*

- de Sica started out as an actor/ idol/crooner before becoming a director
- Zavattini wrote the script
- Often considered one of the best films of all time
- Consider what makes this *neorealist*?