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 Musollini’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
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
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<th>Vittorio de Sica’s Bicycle Thieves</th>
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<td>• de Sica started out as an actor/idol/crooner before becoming a director</td>
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<td>• Zavattini wrote the script</td>
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<td>• Often considered one of the best films of all time</td>
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<td>• Consider what makes this neorealist?</td>
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