

Georgetown University, Villa le Balze

Spring 2010

Syllabus for History of Italian Cinema 276-62

Class Meetings: Mondays 11:30-1:00 and 2:30-3:30 pm

Film Screenings: TBA

Instructor: Tina Fallani Benaim
t.fallani@virgilio.it

Office Hours: after class or by appointment

Required Reading:

Peter Bondanella: A History of Italian Cinema (Continuum 2009)

Millicent Marcus: In the Light of Neorealism (Princeton university Press 1986)
Chapters 1,2,6, included in the Course Reader

Packet of Articles and Reviews in the Course Reader (see weekly calendar) that includes Essays by:
Bazin, Burke, Chatman, Michaiczyc

Assignments: Attendance to lectures and screenings
One midterm paper and a final test (essay questions) covering the
entire program
Oral presentations

Grading System:

Participation 20%
Oral Presentation 20%
Mid-term exam 25%
Final Exam 35%

Course description

The course introduces the student to the world of Italian Cinema. In the first part the class will be analysing Neorealism , a cinematic phenomenon that deeply influenced the ideological and aesthetic rules of film art. In the second part we will concentrate on the films that mark the decline of Neorealism and the talent of "new" auteurs such as Fellini and Antonioni .

The last part of the course will be devoted to the cinema from 1970's to the present in order to pay attention to the latest developments of the Italian industry. The course is a general analysis of post-war cinema and a parallel social history of this period using films as "decoded historical evidence". Together with masterpieces such as "Open City" and "The Bicycle Thief" the screenings will include films of the Italian directors of the "cinema d'autore" such as "The Conformist", "Life is Beautiful" and the 2004 candidate for the Oscar for Best Foreign Film, "I am not scared".

The class will also analyse the different aspects of "Film Making" both in Italian and the U.S. industry where I had the pleasure to work for many years in the Editing Department on Films such as "The Dead Poet Society" and "The Godfather part3"

The Films in VHS or DVD format are dubbed in English or sub-titled.

Expectations

Come to class. Be on time. Do the homework. Bring the readings to class. Engage in discussion. Develop your own perspective. You are expected to have completed all the readings and critically engage in dialogue with the material each time you step into the classroom. You are expected to carefully watch the film, taking notes during the showing. You are expected to work together as groups, equalizing participation between your members. You are expected to do research, be friendly, and think constantly.

Structure of Class

Presentations:

Prepare a plot summary of the film. Distill the main points of the articles into short, succinct sentences. Ask your classmates to turn to a particular page of an article if you are quoting from a passage. If you are unsure about a concept, say you don't know. It is okay to not know. It will serve as discussion.

Your investigation will explore the social, political, technological, industrial, aesthetic, and cultural elements that relate to the film (including production and reception). You can engage with popular and scholarly sources, books and periodicals, DVDs and websites, trailers and advertisements, statistics and movie reviews and any historical document that informs us about the period. Select a few clips from the film to illustrate your argument. After presenting your analysis, ask questions of your classmates. They may observe something about the film that you hadn't imagined.

Speaking in front of a class for many students can be a harrowing experience. For others, it comes easy. Recognize this fact by calling on as many different people as possible and do so by name. Be patient when awaiting answers. Give time for your question to sink in. Be ready to rephrase your question if it seems confusing to your classmates. Don't answer your own question. If you ask a question, always wait for a response. Listeners, don't be afraid to write down your words before presenting them to class. Use your notes taken during the film to assist you in recalling information and thoughts.

To prepare for a discussion of the film, research these questions to put the film in a broader context:

1. Prepare a brief biography of the director.
2. What is the historical context of the film?
3. What were the conditions of the film's production?
4. What elements of the film itself are of artistic importance?
5. Cultural and social importance?
6. Historical importance?
7. Analyse each character of the film
8. What are the main issues that the film deals with?
9. What was the reception of the film?
10. How was the film reviewed when it opened?
11. How did it do at the box office?
12. Does the film engage with any particular technology or storytelling aesthetics?
13. How does it compare to the other films we have viewed?
14. Prepare a few questions for class discussion

Choose a few clips to anchor discussion of some of the above topics.

Make sure your approach to the film has a point. Do research, make an argument, and support it with well-chosen evidence and supplementary material. If members of your group disagree on a point or two, present it in the context of your report. Disagreement is productive and natural.

Tailor your project to the colleagues in the class. Remember, you know what the class knows. Present it as such.

Assume the class has watched the film and done the readings, but don't assume they remember everything they've seen or read. If you feel something is significant, repeat it without hesitation. What's better than repetition is amplification, using that text to respond to or lead into a larger concept or issue.

Attendance to class and screenings is mandatory. Students are expected to participate actively in the class discussions. Unexcused absences will result in the lowering of the final grade

Weekly Calendar:

Week one:

Monday, January 18

Introduction

THE LAST KISS, Gabriele Muccino 2000 (115)

Film Reviews

Screening: OPEN CITY, Roberto Rossellini 1945 (100)

Assignments: Bondanella: chapter 3 (pages 61-71)

Marcus: Rossellini's Open city: The Founding

Week two:

Monday, January 25

Lecture on THE LAST KISS and OPEN CITY

Screening: THE BICYCLE THIEF, Vittorio De Sica 1948 (93)

Assignments: Bondanella: chapter 3 (pages 85-89)

Marcus: De Sica's Bicycle Thief: Casting Shadows on the Visionary City

Week three:

Monday, February 1

Lecture on THE BICYCLE THIEF

Screening: LA STRADA, Federico Fellini 1954 (105)

Assignments: Bondanella. chapter 4 (pages 124 and 137-139 and 146-151 and 153-154)

Marcus: Fellini's La Strada: Transcending Neorealism

Bazin: La Strada

Week four:

Monday, February 8

Lecture on : LA STRADA

Student presentation and class discussion

Screening: LA DOLCE VITA, Federico Fellini 1959 (180)

Assignments: Bondanella: chapter 9 (pages 259 and 285-292)

Burke: La Dolce Vita

Week five:

Monday, February 15

Lecture on : LA DOLCE VITA

Student presentation and class discussion

Screening: BLOW-UP, Michelangelo Antonioni 1966 (120)

Assignments: Bondanella: chapter 6 (pages 268-275 and 277-282)

Chatman: "Il provino" and Blow-Up

Julio Cortazar: "Blow Up" (original short story)

Week six:

Monday, February 22

Midterm Exam

Screening: THE CONFORMIST, Bernardo Bertolucci 1970 (120)

Assignments: Bondanella: chapter 13 (pages 416 and 430-438)

Marcus: A morals charge

Week seven:

February 26 - March 7

Spring break

Week eight:

Monday, March 8

Lecture on : BLOW-UP and the THE CONFORMIST

Student presentation and class discussion

Screening: SWEPT AWAY, Lina Wertmuller 1974 (120)

Assignments: Bondanella: chapter 7 (pages 180-181 and 193-200)

Michaiczyc: Lina Wertmuller: The Politics of Sexuality

Week nine:

Monday, March 15

Lecture on : SWEPT AWAY

Student presentation and class discussion

Screening: CINEMA PARADISO, Giuseppe Tornatore 1988 (123)

Assignments: Bondanella: chapter 16 (pages 519 and 538-543)

Marcus: Giuseppe Tornatore's Cinema Paradiso and the art of Nostalgia

Film reviews

Week ten:

Monday, March 22

Lecture on : CINEMA PARADISO

Student presentation and class discussion

Screening: LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL, Roberto Benigni 1998 (118)

Assignments: Bondanella: chapter 16 (pages 533-538)

Marcus: The Seriousness of Humour in Roberto Benigni's Life is Beautiful

Week eleven:

Monday, March 29

Lecture on : LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL

Student presentation and class discussion

Screening: I AM NOT SCARED, Gabriele Salvatores 2003 (108)

Assignments: Bondanella: chapter 16 (pages 531-533)

Film Reviews

Week twelve:

Monday, April 5

Easter Monday

Screening: TBA

Week thirteen:

Monday, April 12

Lecture on : I AM NOT SCARED

Student presentation and class discussion

REVIEW

Week fourteen:

Monday, April 20

Final Exam