

European Film After World War II

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- *Open City* (Roberto Rossellini, 1945)
- Europe After World War II
- Italy: Neorealism
- Other cinemas (France, Sweden, etc.)

Open City: Background

- Italian Fascism, Benito Mussolini
- Italy's alliance with Germany (1936); on German/Nazi side in World War II (from September 1939)
- 1943: Allied invasion of Italy, overthrow of Mussolini
- 1943-1944: German occupation of Italy
- Allied victory in Europe, spring 1945

Open City: Production

- Takes place during the Nazi occupation of Rome in 1943-44
- Shooting started only weeks after Rome's liberation in June 1944
- Almost no money for production, physical shortages in the city, no good film stock
- Shot mostly in actual locations
- Shot silently, with sound dubbed later
- Most roles played by non-actors, a few by professionals

Open City: Style

- Gritty, documentary look and feel of the film
- Scenes from everyday life (shopping, family dinners, etc.)
- On-location shooting in poor and war-ravaged neighborhoods
- Importance of environment (physical and social surroundings)
- Conversational speech, non-professional acting
- Unassuming visual style
- Character and situation are more important than plot

Open City: Themes

- Dignity of ordinary people (rather than emphasis on extraordinary heroes)
- Importance of social solidarity
- Politics: cooperation between Catholic Church and Communist Party in struggle against Nazis
- Analysis of Fascism/Nazism
- Tragedy: bleakness of ending

Open City: Innovations

- Out of the studio, into real scenes of real life
- Everyday actuality, instead of a carefully constructed plot
- Collective rather than individual
- Lack of traditional identification with a hero/protagonist
- Nonetheless, there is still some melodrama in the film (cf. the music, the betrayal plot)
- But overall, a far rawer look & feel than had ever before appeared in film

Neorealism

- Building on French “poetic realism” (Renoir)
- Reaction against both Hollywood and Fascist filmmaking
- Social reality, instead of stars & contrived plots
- Sound and image are freed from the chains of narrative cause-and-effect
- Luchino Visconti, *Obsessione* (1943)
- *Open City* & Rossellini’s subsequent films
- Vittorio De Sica, *The Bicycle Thief* (1948)
- Visconti, *La terra trema* (1948)
- Objective vs. sentimental neorealism

Influence of Neorealism

- Continues to inspire returns to reality in filmmaking worldwide. Some examples:
 - Iranian cinema since 1980
 - the Dogme95 movement in Denmark
- Later careers of the neorealists
 - Rossellini: later “educational” films
 - Visconti: historical/decadent epics
- The movement lasted only a few years, but it provided a starting point for the next generation of Italian filmmakers (Fellini, Antonioni, Pasolini)

Postwar Cinema in other parts of Europe

- Sweden: Ingmar Bergman (1918-)
 - First film as a director, 1946
 - *The Seventh Seal* & *Wild Strawberries* (1957)
 - Continuing major films through early 1980s
- France after World War II
 - Max Ophuls (late melodramas in 1950s)
 - Jacques Tati (comedies, late 1940s onward)
 - Robert Bresson

Robert Bresson (1901-1999)

- Only twelve feature films in a career of over 40 years (1945-1983)
- Spiritual themes
- Use of non-professional actors
- Emphasis on “unreflective habit”
- Close-ups, fragmentation of space
- Dead time
- Careful manipulation of sound
- Example: *A Man Escaped* (1956)