CHAPTER – 2

INSPIRATIONS: ITALIAN CINEMA

The term neorealism which has been defined and redefined by so many socio-historians and humanists in their ongoing discussions was a marked force in the Italian cinema of 1940s and early 1950s. In the preceding part of the thesis, through historigraphical analysis we have tried to discuss and understand the meaning and implications of this movement i.e. neorealism in motion pictures in Italy. But without discussing the neorealist directors and the films they made during that period, we would not be able to make progress in our quest for understanding neorealism. Though these directors differed in their aesthetic concepts and treatment of subject matter but their hunger for reality with its deep and moral commitment led to the emergence of neorealism. Their commitment to the cause of portrayal of reality and the socio-economic conditions prevalent in their country not only de glamourised the cinema but made it more meaningful and purposeful. We will not only discuss the major neorealist directors and their works - Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio De Sica and Luchino Visconti but also the minor ones - Alberto Lattuada, De Santis, Luigi Zampa, Pietro Germi etc. At the same time we will also discuss Federico Fellini and his works who adapted and personalized neorealist aesthetic to such an extent that he was sometimes referred to as a betrayer to the cause of neorealism. An in-depth analysis of their films and their motives behind the making of such films will provide us with an opportunity to comprehend neorealism - its principles, aesthetics and ideals.

It would be important to mention that in 1930s Visconti assisted French film director Jean Renoir who was connected with French poetic realist movement and also worked on a film Toni (1934) that scholars view as the predecessor to Italian neorealist movement. Certainly, the social and pessimistic realism of poetic realism did cross-fertilize in to neorealism. Toni was based on an Italian migrant worker in France whose obsession for a woman led him to murder. Renoir employed non-professional actors, shot the
film on location and maintained the original soundtrack. The film has a grainy or rough, realistic appearance which the crackling soundtrack reinforces in its documentary verisimilitude.¹

**The Precursors**

De Sica’s *I Bambini ci Guardano (The Children Are Watching Us, 1942)* depicted the tribulations of family life with a truthfulness and openness which resulted in a strong displeasure from the Fascist establishment.² It portrayed the themes of an unhappy childhood, an emotionless marriage, adultery, and suicide. These ideas challenged the official Fascist propaganda, which believed that there were no unhappy children in the Fascist state, no adulteresses as only men could have extramarital relationships while women had to suffer and no suicides: suicide was anti-Fascist.³ The subject matter of the film transgressed the boundaries of the Fascist cinema and offered a transition to the neorealist period.

Alessandro Blasetti’s *Quattro Passi fra le Nuvole (Four Steps in the Clouds, 1942)* was one of the first attempts to change the direction of Italian cinema. Though a story of a poor, pregnant and unmarried peasant girl, it depicted certain unexplored scenes in the Italian life. The scenes of ordinary people traveling on a bus who are tired and unglamorous; old and untidy buses running on bumpy roads; images of villages destitute; unhappy girl; a traveling salesman unable to make ends meet were new to the Italian screen. But in the second half of the film comic interludes prevail and film ends on a happy note. De Santis called it as a use of ‘direct realistic language.’⁴ Although it was far too early to speak about neorealism, *Four Steps in the Clouds* made an effort to alter the course of Italian cinema.

In 1943, Antonio Pietrangeli, the scriptwriter of *Ossessione* coined the term neorealism when talking about *Ossessione (1942).*⁵ *Ossessione* marks the emergence of a style which was neorealist in conception and treatment. This film was not all that well known during that period as it also suffered from
censorship troubles. But it definitely put Italian cinema on a new course, which was later perfected and symbolized by *Rome Open City* of Roberto Rossellini.

**Trio of Rossellini, De Sica and Visconti**

The three renowned Italian filmmakers of the post – Second World War era - Visconti, Rossellini and De Sica - shared one thing in common that was a hunger for reality and an urgent need to attach oneself to reality. Their aesthetic concepts and treatment of the subject - matter were widely divergent but their shared desire to portray reality led to the origination of a style that became, with its abiding ethical commitment, the unifying agent of the movement referred to as neorealism. With the passage of time, apart from these three directors, others too were influenced by the neorealist ‘style commitment’ or ‘style as ethics’. Some of them who tried to incorporate neorealist principles in their own individual ways were De Santis, Alberto Lattuada, Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni, Luigi Zampa, Pietro Germi and Reneto Castellani. Rossellini’s apt remark about the application of neorealist principles in the divergent individual styles of various directors’ sums up the whole issue:

> There are many kinds of neorealism; everyone has his own. Mine was a moral position, an attempt to understand, an effort to understand myself inside a phenomenon.⁶

Mira Liehm remarked that Rossellini's personal, divine notion of reality and Visconti's stylised perception of reality as history and culture long outlined the neorealist period. De Sica's humanistic understanding of reality, however, was more close to the post-war cultural and political ambiance and worn out its potential as soon as its model - Italian society noticeable by shared tragedy-became more diversified and intricate.⁷ But De Sica infuses into his characters the capacity and power to love that he himself possesses as an actor. De Sica imbibes the humanitarian spirit and shares it with the world at large. De Sica possesses the ability and intention to convey and portray a deep sense of human existence, a charming elegance of expression and of
gesture which, in their distinctive manner, are an appealing testimony to humans. The characters of his films Ricci (*Ladri di Biciclette*), Toto (*Miracolo a Milano*) and Umberto D (*Umberto D*) provide proof of humanitarian style of De Sica. Andre Bazin praises it in glowing terms that in the world of De Sica, there lay a covert negativity, an inevitable gloom. And one can never be thankful enough to him for, because in it lives the appeal for the potential of humans to witness his fine and irrefutable humanity. When we will individually discuss the above mentioned films in the course of our future discussion, we will enrich our understanding about De Sica and his style of humanity.

The strength of Rossellini in his neorealist works emerges from his concern with human beings and their problems or to put it in his own words "man and that adventure, unique for everyone, which is life." The source of humanism of Rossellini is not a Marxist philosophy but the Catholic faith. Contrary to Visconti, who neglects the religious side of Sicilian life in *La Terra Trema*, Rossellini constantly exhibits concern with the behaviour of saints, priests and believers in his films - *Rome Open City* and *Paisa* (*Neighbour*). His two films *Stromboli* and *Voyage to Italy* conclude with what is virtually a religious conversion. One of Rossellini's popular descriptions of neorealism is in terms of the Christian doctrine of loving one neighbour and for him there is no contradiction between freedom and Christianity. In his opinion, to live life from the position of Catholicism in no manner suggests prejudice or absence of objectivity as when people talks of freedom, the first thing they include is freedom within certain confines but he discovers in Christianity an enormous power; it is because the freedom is absolute. One of the motivating forces of Rossellini's artistic vocation is his yearning to be free from the constraints of conventional dramatic structure. It is the foundation of one of his foremost achievements, his contribution in the deliverance of cinema from the grip of an aesthetic based on 19th century novel and the well - made play. Rossellini criticizes the continuity of narrative and says that he hates the rational continuity of the theme. The explanatory shots are essential to arrive at the
central event but he, by nature, is disposed to exclude and pour contempt on them. This conscious lack of narrative continuity in the structure of the film is evident in *Paisa* and in final part of *Germania Anno Zero* where he succeeds in sustaining a lengthy sequence depending solely on the power of the image.

The rules of the aesthetics of Rossellini fits to a vision of the world directly adapted to a framework of *mise en scene*. Rossellini's style is a way of seeing while De Sica's is mainly a way of feeling. The *mise en scene* of Rossellini lays seize of its object from outside. This is not suggestive of without comprehending and feeling - but that this exterior approach provides us a necessary ethical and metaphysical facet of one's relations with the world. In order to comprehend the above mentioned notions one needs to compare the treatment of child in *Germany Year Zero* of Rossellini and *Shoeshine* and *Bicycle Thieves* of De Sica.

Luchino Visconti, the maker of *Ossessione*,(1942) and *La Terra Trema* (1948) was another major neorealist director whose works bear a testimony to his commitment and approach. *Ossessione* was a forerunner to the neorealist approach a type of cinema opposed to the 'white telephone' films and hopeful bourgeoisie intrigue of the official cinema. In his views towards film structure, he was unlike Rossellini as Visconti kept faith in the shaped narrative that exhibits advancement of plot and character over a period of time. In a way, his films were planned in terms of sequences rather than of shots and he needed time, above all else, too for his story to progress and reach its climax. *La Terra Trema* has an intense stylistic unity that is further aided by its classic simplicity of form. Visconti uses simple techniques like repetition and the spacing of scenes to a wonderful effect. In *La Terra Trema*, the source of narrative style of Visconti lies in inspiration drawn from the adapted novel of Verga *I malavoglia*. Geoffrey Newell Smith argues that Visconti has carried over from *La Terra Trema* and the legacy of neorealism and his respect for the tough, intractable, documentary detail and the accurate geographical and historical background is as important for one's perception of his work as the type of themes that surface from the narrative and the manner in which it is portrayed.
Federico Fellini

Federico Fellini has often been accused by the critics for departing from neorealist principles. This personal and imaginative use of various skills and techniques, he learnt during his stint as script writer and assistant director to neorealist master Rossellini, has been attacked and termed as ‘betrayal of neorealism’ by Zavattini. Andre Bazin comes in support of Fellini and claims that it is ridiculous and outrageous to reject him a place among the neorealists. What De Sica shares with Rossellini and Fellini is evidently not the profound meaning of their films but the pride of place they all bestow to the depiction of reality at the cost of dramatic structures. Bazin claims that neorealism is not the private asset of any one ideology. Regarding Fellini’s contribution to the neorealist aesthetic, Bazin comments that he is likely to view Fellini as the director who goes the utmost in this neorealist aesthetic, who ventures so far that he goes all the way through it and finds himself on the other side. We could now observe the characters no longer among the objects but, as if they have become transparent through them.

In the films of Fellini, the scenes that create logical connections, important alterations in fortune, the main points of dramatic expression only convey the continuity links while the lengthy explanatory sequences, seeming to exercise no effect on the unveiling of the "action" proper, comprise the truly significant and revealing scenes, In I Vitelloni - the nocturnal walks and aimless strolls on the beach, and in La Strada - the visit to the convent serve this purpose. Fellini’s departure from rigid neorealist aesthetic can be seen in three of his fifties films - I vitelloni, La Strada and Nights of Cabiria. They are seen as ‘sign-posts out of the movement proper’ and methods of expanding and revising the genre so that it could eventually widen its influence to other styles, other ideas of filmmaking.

De Santis and Lattuada

De Santis, maker of Tragic Hunt (1947) and Bitter Rice (1948) describes that his standpoint with regard to realism implies a ‘transfiguration
of reality.’ He does not fully agree to Rossellini’s theories: putting one’s camera between real walls can easily lead to sheer surface realism. Art is not the duplication of simple documents. In his political approach and his style, De Santis associates himself more with Visconti: he likes to plunge himself in tradition, articulate the existing aspirations of the public through its traditions. Moreover, he argues, many Italian filmmakers happen to re-find the Italian tradition of melodrama and that applied to him as well.16 De Santis's *Rome, 11 o'clock* (1951) was based on a news item that appeared on January 15, 1951. When more than hundred women applied for a single typist job, the staircase collapsed causing one’s death and leaving seventy seven injured. But the film lacked artistic commitment and was completely unconvincing and unimaginative.17 Another neorealist film of 1951 was *Bellissima* of Luchino Visconti in which Anna Magnani played the character of a poor Roman woman who, after having dreamt of a future as an actress for her little daughter, understands and realises with bitterness, in the face of reality, the futility of every sacrifice.

Alberto Lattuada's two films *Il Bandito* (*The Bandit*, 1946) and *Senza Pieta* (*Without Pity*, 1947) deal with the phenomenon of violence which was both unavoidable and fatal to those involved in the turmoil of post Second World War Italy. The two films are penetrating testimony of indecision and social volatility, violence and rebellion and in the background of contemporary revolutionary circumstances in which Italy found it in the forties. Lattuada studies the necessity of violence which, in his opinion, ensues when the absence of equilibrium at the heart of society pushes man into unfamiliar paths and forces him to deal with conflicts which trouble and rupture his life. *The Bandit’s* early scenes are deeply rooted in contemporary circumstances and there are similarities with defeatist atmosphere of pre war French works like Marcel Carne's *Quai des Brumes*.19 But later it delves into conventional melodrama. His sense of affinity with opera and melodrama in his conception of cinema brings him, in the context of neorealist movement, stylistically much closer to Visconti and De Santis than to the naturalistic Zavattini, but he lacks
their marked commitment. Lattuada adapted neorealist ideals to his favourite genre, stories of unhappy love. His protagonists, carrying aspirations of immortal passions, were transferred to authentic environments and their sorrows unveiled against the backdrop of postwar Italy and social unrest.\textsuperscript{20}

\emph{Senza Pieta} also has a close link with immediate contemporary reality with the film set in the port of Leghorn, postwar centre of drug-trafficking, smuggling, prostitution and black-marketeering. A tragic love story of two social outcasts - an Italian girl driven into prostitution and an American black soldier - it depicts a vivid picture of one of the least pleasant aspects of liberated Italy: violence, crime and corruption. Regarding the conflict between filmmakers' mission and the concessions to commercial pressures, Lattuada comments:

that the artist must work towards, authenticity, and the clarification of ideas, must contribute to progress, struggle against conformity, seek modesty and humbly - that goes without saying - to say the things he feels capable of contributing to the redressing of errors, must be a guide, a 'detector' for society, but must not in any case be transformed into a mere instrument of Political propaganda.\textsuperscript{21}

Keeping up his apolitical stand, Lattuada, during his involvement with neorealist movement seems to have tried systematically to avoid making films that can be given any ideological label. To most critics, the major strength of Lattuada's neorealist work lives in its sharp and powerful capturing of the realities of the post war Italy, though he is overtly never satisfied merely to record with newsreel style photography.

\textbf{Others}

Another director Luigi Zampa blended the neorealist approach with his own predilection for farcical comedy. \emph{Vivere in Pace (To live in Peace, 1946)} of Zampa was a typical Italian style comedy, particularly adopting neorealist patterns. The film is unified by a fascinating humanistic message "let's love each other, we are all brothers!" Zampa indicates in the end, and that was precisely what the postwar world wanted to listen.\textsuperscript{22} Pietro Germi tried to implant the neorealist trend into the mainstream of the film industry. Using
components of conventional action films, he strove to attract a large audience to socially committed films. In, *In Nome Della Legge* (*In the Name of Law* 1948), Germi explores the social conflicts in a Sicilian village dominated by a rich landlord. In his earlier film *Gioventu Perdute* (*Lost Youth*, 1946) he portrays the delinquency of the younger generation during the postwar period, the theme closer to *Sciuscia* (*Shoeshine*) of De Sica. *The Way of Hope* (1950) begins with an impressive scene of a strike; the mine-owners have decided to close it because it is not profitable; the miners try to capture the shafts but are obliged to leave.\(^23\) *The Way of Hope* presents an important aspect of Italian life - emigration. The film narrates the tale of a group of Sicilian emigrants who travel across the country to the French border hoping to find work there. The neorealist techniques adopted by Germi such as foreground - background action juxtaposed with crowd scenes.\(^24\)

Rossellini considered filmmakers such as Zampa, Germi, Comencini or Castellini as ‘popularizes’ who came behind the real innovators. They were possibly more significant, as they spread neorealism, far and wide, and perhaps with better clarity and were more extensively understood.\(^25\) *Cronaca di un Amore* (*Chronicle of a Love*, 1951) by Michelangelo Antonioni portrays a love story between a man of modest social origins and a married lady of the high society of Milan. While watching the film, the grayish photography and the plot of the story persuade us to recall *Ossessione* of Visconti. Andre Bazin commented:

A film like *Cronaca di un Amore* by Michelangelo Antonioni can be described as neorealist … because the director has not relied on an expressionism outside the characters; he builds all his effects on their way of life, their way of crying, of laughing. They are caught in the maze of the plot like laboratory rats being sent through a labyrinth.\(^26\)

Carlo Lizzani’s first film *Achtung Banditi* (1951) also tried to revive the neorealist ideals, especially the thematic matrix of neorealism, the antifascist resistance. Lizzani opposed the Zavattini’s theory about the present as the sole source of art; he suggested the concept of history as a unifying agent of the past, present and the future. He hoped that neorealism, could be revived if
it reverted back to its original inspiration - the resistance. In his later films, he continued to address the present through the stories set in the past.\footnote{27} Earlier Renato Castellini made \textit{Two Penny Worth of Hope} (1952) which also deviated from the neorealist ideals. Millicent Marcus argues that though Castellini used non professional actors, a real location, local language, unobtrusive camera work, and a natural story, his persistence on happy ending indicated arbitrary, superficial remedies for the very unyielding social troubles his narrative vowed to investigate.\footnote{28} In a way, the focus was also on the intent of the filmmaker to deal with the existing reality rather than only on technical considerations or neorealist characteristics.

Neorealism affected the films in 1952 - 53 even if the social circumstances that characterized it at the beginning, had drastically changed. During these times, episodic films, begun by A. Blasetti’s \textit{Altri Tempi} (\textit{Other Times}) assume much significance. Carlo Lizzani's \textit{Cronaca di Poveri Amanti} (\textit{Poor Lovers Report}, 1953) set in the Florence of 1920 when Fascism violently oppressed and annihilated the last vestiges of opposition also makes interesting observations of the past. Luigi Comencini's \textit{Pane, Amore E Fantasia} (\textit{Bread, Love and Fantasy}, 1953) was first of a successful series built around the amorous adventures of Vittorio De Sica who is the central character in all these films. The film is more about love and lust rather than bread and it clearly departs from the neorealist principles towards comedy and fantasy.

\textbf{Anti-Fascism}

Stylistically, \textit{Ossessione}, (\textit{Obsession}, 1942) is the most realistic of Visconti’s films.\footnote{29} It was a kind of cinema which was opposed to ‘white telephones’ films and hopeful ‘bourgeoisie intrigues’ of the official cinema.\footnote{30} Based on James M. Cain's novel \textit{The Postman Always Rings Twice}, it was an electrifying tale of the seductive and destructive power of human sexuality. The authentic portrayal of the proletarian life outraged the Italian Fascist Government. The film depicted the affair between an attractive vagabond
named Gino and a frustrated housewife Giovanna. Their pure physical passion results in the murder of Giovanna's boorish husband. A dark and provocative drama of sexual tension - it was criticized as immoral and subversive. It was also a harbinger of a new era of realism in Italian cinema. Under the Fascist regime of Mussolini, the film suffered a strict censorship. It has been acclaimed as the first example of neorealist cinema which is powerful in its marriage of character and landscape and in its initial scenes of broiling sexual tension.\(^{31}\) The script of the film was signed by Alicata, Visconti, Puccini, Pietrangeli and De Santis and revised by Moravia. Pietro Jugrao, one of the post-war leaders of the Italian Communist Party also belonged to this group. Their activities were not only confined to theory but also they were active in the underground anti - Fascist activities. During the shooting of *Ossessione*, the secret police started the investigation of the group resulting in the arrest and imprisonment of Puccini, Visconti and Alicata. Lino Miccihe, Italian film critic and historian writes that the 'real text' of *Ossessione* begins prior to the first establishing shot of the motion picture and, in a way, it continues much later than Gino's anguish over Giovanna's deceased corpse.\(^{32}\)

With this story of grimy obsessions and shots fragrant with lust and sensuality, Visconti was intentionally defying governmental decrees of cleanliness and decorum on celluloid.\(^{33}\) The intense despair of *Ossessione* was as a result of the intention of Visconti to react against the obligatory optimism of Mussolini’s Fascist regime and its fantasy tales about a prosperous Italy inhabited with healthy minds in healthy bodies. There was an emphasis on the solitude of the hero along with the ugliness of their environment - shabby pubs with greasy tables, bumpy roads with broken fuel stations, filthy grass, apathetic and unresponsive faces of people. The character of Giovanna seems more alone towards the end of the film while Gino appears more disturbed, desperate and guilty. This face of Italy was earlier not depicted in the films.
Rossellini’s desire to chronicle a specific reality and to bear witness to a given state of affairs is visible in *Germany anno zero*. Though anti-Fascist, at the same time, it also poses an explicit question: The Germans were humans like everyone else what could have forced them to this tragedy? The answer to this is 'a corrupt idea' - an idea that encourages the forsaking of humility for the cult of bravery, the adulation of vigour rather than weakness, pride against humility. The best example of this idea is shown in the form of child protagonist’s former school teacher, an unreconstructed Nazi and a homosexual who tells the child protagonist that strong are meant to live and the weak to perish. This remnant of a corrupt Nazi philosophy, coupled with the father’s grumbles that it would have been better for the family, it he had perished, encouraged the child protagonist to poison him, thinking that he is doing a correct thing, a justifiable act.

Rossellini views school teacher’s individual sexual depravity as symbolic of the wider ethical and philosophical depravity known as Nazism. Ingrid, the lesbian Nazi of *Roma Citta Aperta* also functions in the similar manner. It is the ‘idea’ of Nazism that so obsesses Rossellini, for it is this corrupt idea that encourages all the specific individual corruption that is contained in the film. Here, the situation is even worse because as school teacher he is in an advantageous and revered position, from which he is capable of perpetrating his venomous ideas and beliefs on the most vulnerable. Furthermore, school master is a pederast of which twelve year old child is unaware, and his gestures - gentle caress of child protagonist’s neck as they talk in the street or the virtual hug when they go back to his room are certainly reflective of homosexual overtones. The two older children, Jo and Christel, to whom the child protagonist is introduced by the school teacher, are pernicious examples – the boy already an expert thief and the girl exhibiting in her posture an advanced sexual consciousness. Their attitudes are suggestive of the effect of Berlin's atmosphere on the defenseless youth.
**Haves v/s Have-nots**

The concern with labour and capital is also an important theme in *Ossessione* (1942) the problem of unemployment of the protagonist is also reflected in the rising unemployment in Italy in those times. The distinctions between haves and have-nots are evident throughout the film. The dramatic power of *Rome Open City* emerges in the reality of ‘the things’. There is Pina's house and its table with half-empty plates containing food insufficient to satisfy even a child's appetite; her tattered coat and chequered scarf; Don Pietro's residence with an unsteady and wood-burning stove, old newspapers and a bowl of thin cabbage soup; overloaded and congested buses; the greasy, untidy jacket of the waiter who serves food to Francesco, Manfredi and Marina at the restaurant, a face of a poor Roman woman as she hastens to apprise the priest of the coming disaster etc. For Rossellini, such details which might have emerged rarely in earlier films as component of a set or decor or as elements of montage, turned into the crux of the narrative and visual composition, the very root of the dramatic force.³⁶ The story of *Il Sole Sorge Ancora* (*The Sun Rises Again*, 1945) made by Aldo Vergano is set on a vast agricultural estate in Lombardy after September 1943. Its characters explicitly fall into two separate domains - owners of land on one side and exploited peasants on the other.

In Fellini’s *La Strada*, poverty is the driving force of the film - it compels the female protagonist’s mother to virtually sell her to a brute male protagonist, who had earlier taken away her elder daughter who died in his service. The fatal implications of employment with the male protagonist reflect how severe is the mother's decision and how desperate her condition must be to send another daughter to the same possible death. Millicent Marcus observes that *La Strada* certainly meets the yardsticks of a thesis cinema on poverty and social inequality, but it in no way remains that, leaving behind the traditional neorealist point of departure on its road to a far different poetic.³⁷ His theme is spiritual poverty and the quest for some form of salvation from it. But over and above this, the parallel between physical and psychological
voyage is drawn. Apart from visual reality, the camera treats the poor settings objectively by depicting their most characteristic constituents. On the other hand, luxurious settings are seen with a satire and only their most ridiculous elements are emphasized.\(^{38}\) Robert Philip Kolker, comments that *La Strada* and *Nights of Cabiria* remain, embedded in neorealism, in the observation of the deprived and disenfranchised drifting in a deserted setting. But the setting recedes as a vigilantly deliberate character in finely tuned melodramatic narratives goes further and elicits touching reactions.\(^{39}\) Andre Bazin while trying to defend *Nights of Cabiria* opined that one was now to witness the characters no longer in the middle of the objects, but, as if these had become transparent, *through* them.\(^{40}\) In a way, characters start to detach from objects and thereafter the two will contest.

De Sica’s *Bicycle Thieves* reflected the banality of the stabilized postwar circumstances where hunger, poverty unemployment and despair were the most common, subject-matter widely available. But Zavattini made an asset out of necessity, claiming that the dramatically inferior subject matter was by definition richer in truth, devoid of the temptations and fabrications of traditional narrative structure. De Sica’s says that his intention was to unearth the components of drama in every day situations, the wonderful in the local news considered by the majority as jaded subject-matter. When the male protagonist is reporting the theft of his bicycle at the police station, a journalist enquires if there is any news. When the policeman answers, “no, nothing just a bicycle”, the audience unexpectedly encounters a contest of viewpoints. For police and press, bicycle theft is inconsequential and devoid of any sensationalism while for the male protagonist policeman’s response is a cruel underestimation. At one point, the explanation is an authentic appraisal of the incident while at other point its unfairness is an offense to the notions of human justice.\(^{41}\)

There is, however, another Rome, staged in opposition to the male protagonist and his fellow sufferers. This is the middle class city of restaurant customers, church visitors and football fans who are engrossed in the
recreational pursuits of a typical Roman Sunday. What this indicates is that recent history has affected only the lower classes and that the bourgeoisie rejoices in a sort of a historical status, that their lives are free from the ravages of war and its aftermath and is disciplined only to the routine rhythms of the work week, with its ceremonial rewards. This difference between Riccis and middle-class exemplars in the film is most evident in the restaurant sequence where the male protagonist and his son are sitting next to a prosperous family of conspicuous consumers. The conceited son of the affluent family reflects his estimation of the male protagonist's son in belittling glances and table etiquettes caricatured to the level of buffoonery. It is the waiter, however, who pronounces a decisive class differentiation between the male protagonist and their neighbours, depriving them of a table cloth and failing to arrange the silverware, in distinct contrast to the amenities piled for the more affluent customers. \textsuperscript{42} Thus, this juxtaposition of rich and poor makes a strong statement about the prevailing situation in Italy in those times.

Satyajit Ray says that \textit{Bicycle Thieves} is the best instance of a story flawlessly portrayed on the screen in the most universally understandable terms. \textsuperscript{43} The film not only explores the intense suffering, despair, solitude and anxiety of the protagonist but the metamorphosis of a simple story into a penetrating chronicle of human agony within an apathetic and cruel social reality. The universality of its theme and the social consciousness it represented not only depicted, an acute and distressing picture of a working class family but summed up a whole epoch of hopelessness and frustration.

**Poverty and Inequality**

The main role in \textit{Umberto D} was played by a college professor named Carlo Battisti, who had reportedly never acted before. \textsuperscript{44} The film does not scrutinize the root causes of inequality and poverty but accepts them as inevitable realities and advances to tackle with understanding and sympathy a single, perhaps untypical case. Roy Armes argues that De Sica had opposed the argument that neorealism is in spirit a proletarian cinema and rightly claimed
that a problem which is evident in all his films is that of bourgeoisie: condemnation of and satire on the bourgeoisie obviously, it is to be understood at once that underneath the criticism is concealed affection for this humankind so packed with defects but still remaining human. It was obviously intimately related to De Sica's own environment in the poor middle class and he has described that he devoted the film to his father as he himself was an old bourgeoisie who fought against poverty and had his self-respect to preserve. The entire film manifested in defence of the bourgeoisie and in defence of the human being.  

Another face of the bourgeoisie is the land lady of Umberto D who embodies all the demerits of a society antagonistic to the old man: pretension, hypocrisy, callousness and stupidity. Though renting out the male protagonist's room for adultery and prostitution in his absence, she victimizes him for not paying his dues and is almost certain to throw out the maid when she learns of her pregnancy. The maid is another victim of the landlady and of society, and an example perhaps of the sub-proletariat. She is a girl from countryside who has come to Rome for employment, becomes pregnant by one of her two soldier lovers (she does not know which) and faces the prospect of an illegitimate child.  

The film exhibits a scornful social commentary in its criticism of the avaricious and hypocritical bourgeoisie embodied in the landlady who is sober with her fiance yet has no hesitation in renting out the male protagonist's room for one thousand lire per hour for adulterous purposes. The two sons of a patient to the right of the male protagonist's bed in the hospital exhibit concern over their father's condition in front of the nun, but recline into cheerful gossip about money when she has gone. The religious hypocrisy is also criticized in a scene when a nun is appeased by a fellow - patient for keeping the male protagonist in the hospital for an extra week in lieu of his proper show of Christian reverence. When the nun holds out the rosary to him as if it were a trinket for a child, her carrot and stick approach to religious piety is only too evident. Possibly the most lethal social critique is implied in the sequence at
the dog-pound, whose ruthless proficiency, enormous staff and sophisticated physical plant are an appealing indictment of a society which takes such extreme care and spends wastefully on the disposal of animals but cannot afford to supply hiked pensions for its elderly.\textsuperscript{46}

On the most concrete level, in \textit{Bitter Rice} (1948) at the level of individual story, Francesca's new life begins after the death of Silvana, who at the end of the film earns her personal honour and Marco's affection.\textsuperscript{47} Francesca who initially was a partner in crime with Walter shows a change in herself as the film progresses and is finally transformed by the end of the film. Marco, lover of Silvana, who was an antithesis of Walter, an unscrupulous thief, exerts a deep influence on Francesca who literally changes place with Silvana - not only in terms of their relationship with men but also their moral stance - during the course of the film. Silvana who began as an innocent maiden deteriorates and degenerates while Francesca balances this by gradually and systematically progressing towards redemption, or so as to say towards purification, truth, virtue and morality. The last shot of Marco and Francesca with their bags over their shoulders as the signal to look towards an optimistic future makes them symbols of the new genre into which the film has moved. The low camera angle, Francesca's white shirt, the determined facial expressions and their positioning against the horizon all attempt to present them as heroic figures representing popular resolve to subjugate exploitation and injustice.\textsuperscript{48}

In 1947, Visconti went to Sicily, with some money advanced by the Communist Party, to shoot what was at first to have been a short documentary. The film was to contain three connected episodes, depicting the lives of the fishermen, the peasants and the workers in the sulphur-mines. But not more than one episode on fisherman could be completed that was afterwards called as \textit{La terra Trema}.\textsuperscript{49} The film was a realistic portrayal of the hardships faced by the fishermen in their struggle for survival and genuinely portrays their environment and surroundings.
Moral Dimension

In *Bicycle Thieves* (1948, De Sica), the actual people who played father and son with such self-control that it rant the hearts.\(^5\) About the role of the son as a moral eye to the entire film Andre Bazin argues that the idea of the child is a device of brilliance as the boy provides to the worker's quest its moral element and transforms it to ethical position, a performance that might well have been merely social. The relationship of father and son is so sensitive that it reaches down to the fundamentals of the ethical life. The open embarrassment of the father, exposed on the road, is of slight description compared with the reality that his son saw it. When father thinks of stealing the bicycle, the quiet presence of the young boy, who guesses about his thinking, is brutal to the limit of obscenity.\(^5\)

*Sciuscia*, (1946, Vittorio De Sica) is a callous story of the victimized lives of child shoeblacks who are under pressure for their continued existence on the streets of post-war Rome.\(^5\) In the film, value judgement of the adult world is done not by scrutinizing it in its own terms but by contrasting it with the virtuousness and innocence of childhood. The portrayal of children as innocent victims lays the blame entirely on the adults whose actions prove them to be ignoble and hostile. Giuseppe's elder brother callously pushes them in crime, while the police use trickery to seek information from them, lawyers are mean and opportunistic and prison officials behave stupidly by separating the two days from each other, leaving Giuseppe in bad company and then punishing Pasquale for fighting a bully.

In *Rome, Open City* (1945, Rossellini) the comparison between Pina and Marina is another important highlight of the film. The repercussions of two categories of moral decisions are manifested by these two women who are juxtaposed to each other, in terms of physical appearance, emotional styles, amorous desires and cinematic precedents. Though both share the same humble origins but Rossellini portrays Marina fully liable for her choices, projecting Pina as a model against which she will be ceaselessly judged. Neither Marina's complicity has been ascribed to any bourgeois decadence,
nor to a perennial addiction to affluence, but instead to a personality shortcoming that makes her capitulate to the allurements of fur coat, drugs and lavish surroundings.

Marina appears to be a showgirl - glamorous and pretentious, where as Pina is plain, simple and without any pretension. Pine's language with its dialectical pattern and colloquialisms' puts her directly in the popular midst while Marina uses a neutral, non-regional Italian conforming to her 'pretensions to social mobility'. Pine dies in the name of courage and confrontation, Marina lives because of her shortcomings and when encountered the sight of her dead lover Manfredi, she only faints in a coward's version of Pina's heroic and noble martyrdom.53

Emphasizing the interpersonal success of Pina and the emotional insolvency of Marina is their different attitude towards love itself. Pina sees it as an internal force 'set in motion by an act of free will' while Marina views it as an external drive that oppresses those who become its victim. For Pina, the woman in love is an active determinant of her destiny and is ethically responsible for the direction of her passion while Marina sees her as a passive sufferer of an uncontrollable force to which she abandon shall personal accountability. Pina says, in a scene, "well a woman can always change, especially when she is in love", thus, viewing the woman as the architect of her own amorous transformation while Marina assigns love's alchemy to another source she tells Manfredi, "If you, had really loved me, you would have changed me", thus externalizing the reason for her ethical bankruptcy. When Manfredi had taken refuge at Marina's house, she seemed to be totally distraught on the question of informing Ingrid, the lesbian agent, about the whereabouts of Manfredi. Her mental conflict can be understood in terms of her moral sense (of right) versus material desires (of wrong). Ultimately her material urges overpower her and she betrays her former lover, someone who had sought refuge with her. At another level, the depiction of Italian life under Nazi occupation reflects a stark juxtaposition of good (the Resistance) and evil (the perverted Germans and their much less offensive
Italian allies). The positive figures in the film Pina, Francesco, Don Pietro and Manfredi share the common beliefs and vision which Francesco refers to an impending springtime in Italy and a better tomorrow. On the other hand, Marina and Pina's sister Lauretta are enamoured by the superficial values of the Cafe society and the consumer goods offered by the Germans.

On the one hand, it is a vivid depiction of 1943-44, a period distinguished by hunger (Pina), self-sacrifice (Don Pietro), will to continue the struggle (Francesca), corruption (Marina) and persecution (Manfredi) and on the other, it entraps the note of optimism with which the year 1945 ended. *Rome Open City* exhibited sufficient strength and momentum to continue its vision and to inspire a whole cinematic movement committed to its fulfillment. Later, filmmakers would revise the specificities of the vision, but none would raise a question about its necessary 'neither righteousness nor its urgent claim to repeated artistic expression.' On the whole, *Rome Open City* remains as the first forceful sign of genuine freedom in the Italian cinema after the lengthy dark era of Fascism.

In Rome episode of *Paisa*, Maria Michi’s fallen condition is not completely the consequence of a weak individual will-power. Rather the decline of the entire Italian culture because of poverty and the presence of American military conspire to bring her down. Rossellini does not specify this fall or its intricate causes. Instead he simply allows his camera to place on the face of the concierge (or Madame) after Maria Michi goes out from the house of disrepute. The economic hierarchy alluded to in this scene carries ample ethical overtones for audience to imagine a complex cultural web; in this way, this narrative appears as a reflection of a real historic setting which Rossellini has depicted with nominal props.

**De-dramatization**

In *Paisan* (*Neighbour*, 1946) Rossellini discarded the use of professional actors for the ‘six episodes of life in Italy’ at the end of the war. Rossellini, committed to the ideal of de-dramatization, exhibits only a few soldiers,
couple of explosions and a burning house. There is hardly any attempt to portray genuine anxiety or to show real heroics. Virtually, the entire episode is shot in medium or long shot and in semi-darkness, so that one has a powerful sense of being witness rather than identifying with the action. This episode portrays the bewilderment of the circumstances in which the Italians are entrapped between the two sides and has a distasteful irony in its conclusion, but as a statement on war it is distinctly restricted, moving no further than to testify that the contesting troops are virtually uniforms and filled with a similar carving for home.\[^{57}\]

The characters are not heroes or leaders but common people whose participation in war will, if they remain alive, be no more than a solitary incident in their lives. We understand their aspirations but none of the ideological confrontation behind the fight of American and German, Partisan and Fascist. The murder of two Fascists is shown in the similar serene factual manner as the execution of two partisans. This response to events is the result of a conscious belief on the director's part when he agrees that he constantly attempts to remain unemotional. He thinks that amazingly outstanding and touching in humans is exactly that the grand gestures or facts are fashioned in the same way, with the same stir, as the ordinary small acts of life; it is with the same humility that he attempts to record both: there is a basis of dramatic attention to be found there.\[^{58}\]

The formal elements like *mise-en-scene*, lighting and camera movement also work here in the direction of reality. In the final episode, the faces of partisans are often so perfectly blurred that we become consciously aware that we cannot view them, and thus we temporarily miss the grip of the film's narrative. In the Florence episode, the sequence of the execution of the Fascists appears so convincingly real precisely because it takes places very quickly: they are dragged into and out of the frame and summarily killed without any fanfare, in a few seconds. In fourth episode, when Harriet is suddenly told of Lupo's death, no time is devoted on preparations for or reactions to either event and we accept this as somehow more life-like.
because it is not what we see in conventionally "realistic films" where the fullest emotional effect is generally wrung from each image and event.\textsuperscript{59}

About the inconclusive nature of the episodes, Robert Philip Kolker suggests that the foreshortened emotions produced by the foreshortened composition of \textit{Paisan} their incompleteness and inconclusiveness allow and in reality persuade the spectator to transact with them with a minimum of directorial help, because of which this film, more than any other of the era, is so unsatisfying within the framework of one's cinematic expectations, and more successful in the context of neo-realist premise. It refuses to accomplish more than shown, or insist on more than that we comprehend what is shown. Further than that there is the option for us to put together the storyline with our perspective of the history its images reflect, an account of pain and loss, of deficiency and resistance, and of some type of triumph.\textsuperscript{60} The neorealists wished only to avoid heaping upon the audience clichéd emotion extraneous to what was required to comprehend the character in his or her immediate condition, and rather to permit spectators reaction to flow from the "image facts" and not a "preconceived notion of character." \textit{Paisan} also exhibits the effectiveness of Rossellini's stylistic technique: his capability to capture a seeming spontaneity, his unrestrained handling of locations, non-professionals and crowds, and his sensitive portrayal of various moods and atmospheres.\textsuperscript{61} Thus, Rossellini commands control over his own blend of realism and subjectivity, uniting the personal philosophy of his earlier films with a structure built on verisimilitude.\textsuperscript{62}

Millicent Marcus writes that De Sica's model of a film that is entirely without a dramatic superstructure and that dignifies the commonplace and the modest by taking 'any moment of human life' and presenting remarkableness, finds its closest possible realization in \textit{Umberto D}. De Sica has applied the term 'uncompromising' to describe his film, which makes no adjustments to commercial demands for drama, ostentation and emotional catharsis. Yet, this is not a film about ninety minutes in the life of a man in which nothing happens, as Zavattini's ideal for realist cinema is. It is not so much the non-
existence of the extraordinary, then, that explains *Umberto D*'s mark of authenticity, but the de-dramatization of essential dramatic situations and moments which De Sica rejects to order in any hierarchy of significance. The maid is the spokesperson for this device of de-dramatization when she tells the male protagonist in the similar matter of fact approach that she applied to complain of the ants in the kitchen leads to the male protagonist's exclamation: "Pregnant and you say it like that!" The maid replies, "How should I say it?" clearly emphasizing De Sica's approach of emotional leveling by not agreeing to give excessive dramatic thrust to her disclosure. Another instance of shying away from melodramatic trappings is witnessed when the maid tells the soldier from Naples that she is pregnant and he walks away in silent dismissal of any responsibility for her crisis, leaving the harsh realities behind.63

Andre Bazin praises the maid's kitchen scene for its dailiness and explains the approach of this narrative and direction in these words:

The narrative unit is not the episode, the event, the sudden turn of events, or the character of its protagonists; it is the succession of concrete instants of life', no one of which can be said to be more important than another, for their ontological equality destroys drama at its very basis. 64

**Portrayal of Women**

In *Bitter Rice*, perhaps the most prominent intrusion is that of the undisguised eroticism which Silvana, introduces into the otherwise neorealist canon. Though neorealism, recognized the sexuality of its characters in the premarital pregnancies of Pina in *Open City* and of Maria in *Umberto D*, for instance, it did not make eroticism one of the driving forces of the narrative activity, nor did it exhibit the physical statistics of its characters, the manner in which De Santis does in *Bitter Rice*.65 Silvana Mangano was gorgeous, ravishing and sensuous, displaying her black stockinged legs and her uncovered breasts with an innate defiance. In a way, she represented and personified sexual temptation and desire.
Another manner in which *Bitter Rice* transcends its own melodramatic assertion is by making melodrama one of the thematic interests of the film and then balancing it with a contesting disposition, that of documentary realism. The juxtaposition of these two competing forces is clear from the very opening titles which proclaim that man sought two things since the beginning of time - food and love. The film narrates two stories: one of hard work and other of the surge of emotions experienced by thousands of women who pick and plant rice crop for more than a month. The two stories that the film intends to narrate - that of food and that of love - unveils the division of De Santis's allegiance between the assertion of documentary reportage on the one hand and those of melodrama on the other. In the very beginning, the dual nature of his project appears as he juxtaposes the two narrative techniques that will depict women.

De Santis denies any erotic intent, explaining that in this film he was thinking not much of eroticism as of liberation, desiring to portray man, woman and society in their usual primeval honesty. He accepts eroticism only as an overall interpretation of nature, outside social or ethical practice, a total sense of nature, a cosmic sense of nature. If such is the case, De Santis doesn't really succeed in *Bitter Rice* as Silvana is the centre of the film with her physical presence, creating an international reputation for herself as the type of pin-up the film was supposed to denounce.

**Contradictions / Deviations**

*Miracolo a Milano* (*Miracle in Milan* 1953, De Sica) introduced a component of fantasy into the neorealist situation. Containing authentic elements, *Miracle in Milan* (1953, De Sica) also is a fairy tale, replete with magical and unbelievable incidents - recovery of Toto, the protagonist, by an old woman, long scene of Toto's granting of wishes to poor, blowing away of tear - gas used by the police and final departure of Toto and his friends on a broomstick to a heaven, all with the help of a magic dove - indicating towards
imagination and fantasy. This film has the elements of magic realism of Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

Zavattini unveils another layer of meaning beneath this entertaining surface by arguing that the elementary emotion of *Miracle in Milan* is not one of escape (the flight at the conclusion) but of resentment, a yearning for cohesion with certain people, a rejection of it with others. The film’s structure is planned to imply that there is a huge congregation of the modest ones against the others. But the modest ones have no ammunitions or they would have been prepared to protect their property and their habitat. Toto delivers no social message, nor does he has any solution to the problems of poverty and impoverishment, but instead, he serves to provide an outsider's partial evaluation of a situation whose complexities he is unable to comprehend, in this instance those of social organization and human motivation. De Sica provides a fairer assessment of the film when he comments that it was not a political cinema but a tale, and his solitary intention was a twentieth century fairy tale. Regarding the significance of the film, it was for him the victory of goodness: let men be good to each other. That was the only political message of his film.69

Barbaro points the violation of the neorealist technique in the zoom shot from Umberto’s window to the cobblestones below where the obtrusive camerawork and its subjectivity is suggestive of Umberto’s contemplation of a jump to death as the resolution of his dilemma. Another non-neorealist scene is that of the growling bull dog in the kennel, depicting Umberto’s (or Flike’s) subjective point of view on the unfriendly environment of the kennel. Another subjective set of images are presented when Umberto is traveling in a trolley car to the presumed destination of Flike. The city is shown through the eyes of a man who is watching them for the last time, whose resolve to commit suicide cannot stop this onset of late minute nostalgia. Millicent Marcus says that these scenes are not the transgressions of neorealist objectivity as they indicate towards an entire pattern, both psychological and cinematic, of ambivalent optics and changing viewpoints.70 In fact, the play of perspectives
is followed throughout the film, making Umberto the object of pathetic, humorous or critical treatment according to the shifting point of view.

In *La Tr era Trema*, regarding the improvisation of dialogues and the actors’ contribution to the evolution of the script in certain scenes, Visconti stated that the script was not a predetermined script but he made the actors compose it up themselves. He just provided the introductory draft and they brought imagery, thoughts, ideas and accompaniments. Then he made the actors rehearse the transcript and then they didn't alter the expressions anymore. They became predetermined, as if dialogues had been noted down though they were not written, but invented by the fishermen.71

The near absence of concrete spatial and temporal indicators to root the narrative in history is a departure from standard neorealist practice. Only once a geographic referent i.e. Rome is given, though we venture into anonymous suburbs of the city and never face any of its landmarks. The monument which has been mentioned is *San Paolo Fuori Le Mura* (St. Paul, Outside the Walls) whose very name suggests it to be on the outskirts of the city. Millicent Marcus observes that in view of time, the Esso sign in the backdrop of the first composite indicates that this is a postwar situation, as does the red - headed prostitute’s appreciative question, "Is it American?" when presented with the sight of the male protagonist's moto-trailer and sequence of their impending lovemaking.72 Edouard de Laurot indicates that the male protagonist’s refusal to identify his origins - his reply to the female protagonist ‘s question, "Where do you come from?" With the non-committal, "From my part of the country" and "Where were you born?" with "In my father’s house" - reflect as much his rootlessness as his conversational perversity. Millicent Marcus argues that liberated in time and space, Fellini’s narrative declares its departure from neorealist historicity and its inclination for a historical depiction of the human situation.73

In its departure from neorealist constraints of subject matter and ideology *La Strada* opened the path for forays into territory previously considered
forbidden for serious cinematic treatment. Georges Sadoul concurs, that far from betraying neorealism, Fellini enriched it by directing it along a fresh pathway.\textsuperscript{74} In \textit{Paisan} the use of flashback, when Fred tells prostitute about Francesca, is a departure or a new feature in neorealist practice in the narrative structure. With \textit{Umberto D}, De Sica and Zavattini have not renounced the radical promise of the initial neorealist films; they have simply transferred the responsibility from the level of narrative content to that of cinematic form. This retreat into form as the agent of social change is not so much a dismissal of the neorealist project as a modernization of it. The emphasis on working-class and the reference to resistance ideals no longer appealed to an Italy anxious to put the “bad old day” behind it, like Umberto’s landlady, and revel in the gains of reconstruction. By making the form the new repository of neorealist meaning, De Sica and Zavattini gave a blow to classical neorealism of content and made possible instead Fellini’s, Visconti’s and Antonioni’s application of its stylistic precepts to themes hitherto excluded from serious postwar cinematic portrayals.

In \textit{Paisan}, the actual news reel footage is integrated with the filmed narrative in such a manner that they blend together in a seamless whole, and the editing is done in such a way that it is extremely difficult to separate the two types of footage at the first glance. Rossellini’s style of blending various elements is also reflected in the selection of actors. The Americans, used in the film, were certainly not stars but they were nevertheless professionals with considerable theatrical experience in United States. The central roles in each episode are masterfully played by these professionals amidst a huge number of non-professional actors, generally in minor roles.\textsuperscript{75}

\textit{Rome Open City} was based on actual events that Romans underwent during the years of 1943-44. The plot highlights the happenings of the Italian Resistance during a three day period.\textsuperscript{76} The film portrayed the events during resistance with a ruthless intensity which made spectators believe that they were viewing reality.\textsuperscript{77} The whole film may be said to be about transformations - of peoples, of genres and of the systems of signification that characterize a culture. Rossellini’s concern with the second and third kinds of transformation
is what makes him the initiator of a new cinematic approach and of a new cultural foresight - in short, it is what makes him the first neorealist in Italian cinema. The generic transformation is the most evident and the easiest to recognize, credit to Rossellini's own commemoration of the impulsive creations of the actors: of Aldo Fabrizi and Anna Magnani in particular.\textsuperscript{78} Both had experience not only in the music hall presentations but also stage and film. The characters of \textit{Open City} blend the characteristics of music hall presentations with those of Italian popular comedy.\textsuperscript{79} The use of dialect and slapstick humour by Rossellini has been done so exquisitely and aptly that it generates relaxation in moments of almost intolerable dramatic intensity.

An analysis of the film points out the hoary truth that insufficient resources and difficult conditions of work are often helpful to the art. The fact that shooting had to be done in real streets and real houses for lack of a studio, the gray photography because of the lack of power units and abrupt cuts because of the fact that editing was done in bits and pieces and constantly improvised provided this 'reconstituted actuality' a semblance of documentary authenticity.\textsuperscript{80} The film was a huge success with public becoming the largest grossing film of the year. Ironically, no other neorealist film, or any other film of Rossellini was ever to be as successful at the box office again.

Peter Bondanella points out the entire cast of the Rome \textit{Open City} had vast experience in the entertainment world so the use of non professional actors for specific aesthetic effects is completely absent in it. But Rossellini cast his actors in unaccustomed roles, placing actors normally identified with comic roles in situations that would demand tragic or tragic - comic actions. The script of the film was written and rewritten again and again, thereby, repudiating one of the myths about neorealism and Rossellini's stylistic contribution to it - that of improvisation.\textsuperscript{81} Contrary to traditional belief that sets are of little importance in neorealist films, the very structure of the set of Gestapo headquarters heightens the drama. From Bergmann's Central office, where he interrogates his prisoners, two doors open out onto totally different
worlds - one to torture chamber where blood, sweat, cruelty and sadism rules and the other to a kind of recreation room for German officers where champagne, playing cards, piano music and gossiping flourish, oblivious to the human suffering on the other side of the wall.

In *Germany Year Zero* Rosssellini tried to relocate the neorealist experimentation to defeated Germany. Viewed within the context of neorealism and indeed of realism in general, *Germany Year Zero* arouses conflicting reactions. Its film portrait of Germany is bare and sparse. The exterior shots of the film depict authenticity and objectivity. While the interiors, which are studio - built in Italy exhibit superficiality, thereby causing a contest between realism and artificiality. Neorealism is usually seen as a social and political form of cinema but on both these estimates *Germania anno zero* is strangely quiet, anticipating Rossellini's later interest (in films like *Stromboli* and *Francesco, Giulare di Dio*) in purely spiritual problems. Politically, the film does not refer to the four way division of Berlin or the status of the invading authorities. In fact, the arrival of the French soldiers at the drinking club appears something of a surprise, so little have the mechanics of the occupation been dealt with, while the English soldiers whom the child protagonist meets merely appear like ill-at-ease tourists. Socially too, the film's indictment of the capitalist system where everything is on sale (including women) and even a record of Hitler's speech finds a consumer is only implicit and never put forward in any way as a conscious message.

*Bicycle Thieves* came closest to Zavattini's ideal of making films out of the natural drama of actual life. It was a neorealist masterpiece - with a huge budget, a cast of hundreds and a meticulously devised shooting style. Far from being economical, the entire cost of the complete film was approximately 100,000 Lire; that was nearly $50,000 at the then rate of exchange. Though this was a little budget by British standards it was quite huge by Italian standards as very few films in reality cost more, most cost less, and many much less. Zavattini and De Sica invested six months in preparing the script, discussing every image and continuously choosing the best possible places
for the shooting to take place. Film was shot with utmost care to optimize visual complexity, while concealing the art that went into its making; this is not to suggest that De Sica's careful aesthetic is in bad faith. On the contrary, it is reflective of a conscious ideological position against the elaborate traditions of the commercial cinema - a dismissal that is manifested in two scenes in *Bicycle Thieves*. First, when a co-worker curses the Sunday rain and laments that there is hardly anything to do but go to the film - a singularly uninteresting prospect for him - he is pleading for the un-relatedness of commercial cinema to the common plight. It is important, too, that Antonio's nightmare starts as he is pasting a publicity poster of Rita Hayworth's new film, indicating a noticeable disparity between commercial cinematic fantasies and the genuine survival problems troubling the Italian populace.  

*Bicycle Thieves* is one of the most meticulously crafted and also one of the expensive neorealist films. Through a highly stylized portrayal of a genuine environment (the whole film is shot in the streets, stores and apartments of Rome), the filmmaker transcend the explanatory proportions of the narrative, engendering in the spectators a feeling of immense empathy, which substitutes the usual identification with the characters. In the absence of a story and apparent lack of any *mise-en-scene*, the film produces a web of images that are projections of the emotions of the characters. Out of these images, symbolic meanings appear (the apathy of the crowd, the unity of the family, the solitude of a human being etc.) The carefully selected authentic locations make imagery with powerful emotional overtones (flea markets, slums and brothels of Rome; atmosphere of the sports stadium etc.). The story which would not be worthy of a few lines in ‘a stray dog column’ ultimately appears with remarkable dramatic effect and uniqueness; De Sica's instinctive distrust of historicity enabled him to transcend Zavattini's conception of *Bicycle Thieves* as an account of definite time period and set of social situations.

Perhaps neorealism in the chaste ideal theoretical conception of Zavattini never existed as *Rome Open City* uses skillful acting performances
and *Bicycle Thieves* employs dramatic devices to produce sentimentality. But we can say that the beauty of neorealism lies in the fact that it was adapted by various filmmakers according to their own filming styles. The sincerity of its practitioners to portray reality was unquestionable and their commitment to the cause of neorealism was also beyond doubt.

Thus, we can say that besides the contribution of Rossellini, De Sica and Visconti, the significant developments because of explorations of so many other directors in the realm of neorealist principles - Lattuada, Zampa, Germi, Fellini and others - the subject range of the neorealist cinema was considerably broadened, and an increasing number of topical problems were portrayed. These films provide no comprehensive analysis and most just only mention various facets of life in postwar Italy. However, the fact that they bore witness to the existence of the problems was significant. Not only the neorealists but also their fellow travelers were bitten by the prevailing desire to present as many facets of life as possible in films. Thus the subjects were changed and a less sharp social reality, having trust in the future, was substituted for the grievous and problem-ridden postwar period.
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68 David Robinson, *World Cinema…*, P.234. The magic realism of Gabriel Garcia Marquez is quite evident in the film.
69 Quoted in Roy Armes, *Patterns of Realism…*, P. 166
70 Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film…*, P. 106
71 Roy Armes, *Patterns of Realism*..., P. 124
72 Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film*..., P. 148
73 Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film*..., P. 148
74 Quoted in Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film*..., P. 163
75 Peter Bondanella, *The Films of Roberto Rossellini*..., P. 68
76 Susan Hayward, *Key Concepts*..., P. 202
77 David Robinson, *World Cinema*..., P. 234
78 Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film*..., P. 42
79 Mira Liehm, *Passion and Defiance*..., P. 64
80 Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film*..., P. 42
81 Peter Bondanella, *The Films of Roberto Rossellini*..., Pp. 49-52
82 David Robinson, *World Cinema*..., P. 235
83 David Robinson, *World Cinema*..., P. 234
84 Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film*..., P. 56
85 Roy Armes, *Patterns of Realism*..., P. 155
86 Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film*..., Pp. 56-57
87 Mira Liehm, *Passion and Defiance*..., P. 76
88 Andre Bazin, *What is Cinema*, Vol. II..., P. 50
89 Mira Liehm, *Passion and Defiance*..., Pp. 76-77
90 David Robinson, *World Cinema*..., P. 237