FROM VISUAL LEARNER TO
VISUAL TEACHER AND BEYOND:
Pedagogical Considerations on the
Role of Children in Vittorio De Sica’s Neorealism

by

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Department of Italian Studies
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Abstract

This dissertation will examine the role of children in Vittorio De Sica’s films I bambini ci guardano (1944), Sciuscià (1946), and Ladri di biciclette (1948). The strength of their function, as shall be outlined, lies in their expansive field of vision which allows them to take on great responsibilities. Those they come to affect, through what they see, are not limited to the characters with whom they come into contact. They become a source of identification for the neorealist spectator. Thus, the child will be shown as a symbol for the redefinition of what constitutes the male agency - a term which is already on unstable ground during the postwar years. What he lacks in virility and active potency, the child makes up for in insight and intuitiveness until those qualities elevate him to the heights of focal protagonist and moral compass. In support of this stance, the dissertation will employ the teachings of Gilles Deleuze in Cinema 1: The Movement Image and Cinema 2: The Time-Image, books which champion Neorealism for its ability to suspend the spectator’s need for decisive action to occur in film and for giving prominence to propelling reflection.
The impetus to select De Sica over other neorealists was crafted by the weight and presence of young characters in his films who were neither heroic nor crusaders for social change. They were, simply, children. What they represented, what their gazes revealed willingly and instinctively, were the basic facets of human existence: warmth, kindness, regret, guilt, and, above all, love. With the realization that within children there exists great humanity, the adults around them begin to question their own behaviour. Thus, the child, despite his restricted physical action, also takes on the role of teacher. How far the child’s pedagogical abilities can take him are also explored in a different, but relevant setting: the classroom. This dissertation, then, comes full circle when it aims to highlight the influence of the child on yet another spectator: the student-cinephile.
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Introduction: Personal Impetus

The figure of the child has occupied the moving picture frame since 1895, when the Lumière brothers captured Auguste feeding his young son in *Repas de bébé*. This early, short documentary-style home movie would be the first amongst several Lumière brothers’ films to follow which featured young children at play (*Jeux d’enfants dans une rue*, presumably 1895 or 1896; *Enfants jouant aux billes*, 1896), mischievous boys (*Arroseur et arrosé*, 1896), and the humanity that only a child’s smile can display (*Le village de Namo - Panorama pris d’une chaise à porteurs*, 1900). The expressiveness of their faces and wide eyes were, alone, enough to connect French audiences to French Indochina, in Northern Vietnam (where *Le village de Namo* takes place), the site of their colonial institution. The silent film era is an ideal place to begin this exploration into the use of children in films which are not necessarily intended for them, but for adults. As it will become apparent, the greatest strengths the youth’s characters bring to the screen seem to lie in what the child is not saying. Without the child’s ability to verbally express himself, the spectator is more captivated by what children’s eyes can take in and, in turn, tell. Before a child is old enough to speak and explicity state his needs, concerns, or emotions, an adult must look at him and listen to him to know how to proceed. This instinctive function of the adult in the child’s life is what, on a fundamental level, charges the appearance of youth and the moral lesson they offer us, through the cinema as well.

Just as the Lumière brothers in France had done, a number of Italian artists intuitively recognized the potency of children and took up the same interest in transposing them onto their own silent film screen. In Italy, the cinema industry was beginning to evolve and expand beyond the home video stage set by the Lumières and, as plot and narrative were finding their place on screen, children’s roles blossomed as well. At the centre of Italian films one could also see themes of family and precariousness, but quickly historical context began to infiltrate the screen and mesh with themes of comradery and sacrifice. At this stage in Italian film history, between 1907 and 1915, children revealed themselves to the audience as brave, spontaneous, and uncompromisingly loyal to both the family and the flag, during an era which did not view the two as mutually exclusive, but as metaphors for one another. The further the cinema went in depicting Italian history, the closer it came to being concerned with telling stories of nationalism,
as it pertained to the Resurgence, of propaganda and fascist occupation, and of mid- and postwar human struggles. Alongside the evolution of Italian cinema, was the transformation of the role of the child as he too was affected by those realities. As the director saw fit, the child was seen as a looking glass, used to champion ideologies, expose injustices, or reveal to the viewer new and fresh ways of peering into what made up the Italian landscape, culturally, and drove the Italian people, psychologically. The activity afforded to the child in cinema took on its own meaning and significance as well. Whereas during fascist propagandistic films, the child was highlighted for his ability to uphold heroic duties, in the next phase of films to be released in Italy, those known as neorealist, action was equated more so with the child’s visually perceptive aptness. What became important, during these years, was what the child’s eyes could teach the other characters in the film and, as a consequence, what the spectator could learn from them.

Exploring the myth of the child as a way to provide clues to how children should behave or have behaved throughout history has been the subject of scholarly debate, books, theories, and personal accounts. Questions that are often raised endeavour to pinpoint and understand children better based on how adults believe children should act. Perhaps one of the reasons why Neorealism is so discursively rich, in terms of childhood depictions, is because it turns the debate on its side by leaving children to their own devices. Instead of focusing our views on how children should behave, in Neorealism we are forced to question how we, as adults, should conduct ourselves. At the end of each film that employs children, we most often arrive at the general consensus that children behave better and on higher moral ground than we do and, if they do not, we should ask ourselves why and what part we have played in their straying from the right path. As a result of the prevalent use of children in cinema, critics have long pondered why the child is such an effective and popular choice for directors throughout the cinema of various nations.

A Brief Review of Recent Scholarly Contributions

Scholarly interest in the role and depictions of children in society has certainly been long-standing, among the earliest to chart their presence in global cinema is American psychoanalyst and writer Martha Wolfenstein. In “The Image of the Child in Contemporary Films,” in 1955, Wolfenstein offered a substantial and comprehensive comparison of children in films across four
cultures (Italian, French, British, and American) and concluded that no matter how far reaching the countries of origin were, the youth portrayed all had something in common. They were noble characters, depicted as nobler than the grownups around them, and they each represented moral demands and ideals to which the adults should aspire. The neorealist child, in particular, is at the forefront of Wolfenstein’s discussion for his ability to be an all-encompassing character. The young boys “recall men from wickedness to redemption” by being a saviour (in *Germania anno zero*, Roberto Rossellini, 1948), by bearing witness to adults failures (in *Ladri di biciclette*), or by suffering and sacrificing (in *Cuori senza frontiere*, Luigi Zampa, 1950) (Wolfenstein 291-292).

Although the films associated with Neorealism were only made for a little over a decade (from approximately 1942 until the late 1950s), nearly seventy years later this short-lived cinema has continued to spark the interests of cinephiles all over the world. Exalted for their artistic value, the majority of neorealist films were always better received abroad at the time of their release than they were in their home market. Local audiences knew all too well, and wanted to forget, the weight and reality of the images of postwar Italy. It comes as no surprise, then, that the recent surge in neorealist studies is concentrated on the effect Neorealism had, and continues to have, on modern national cinema as well on global cinema.

A neorealist style or mode of storytelling is the aspiration for directors who wish to recount the contemporary realities of their cities, primarily when attempting to depict the effects of poverty and war on the people surrounded by those tumultuous moments. As such, additions to scholarship, such as *Italian Neorealism and Global Cinema* (Laura E. Ruberto, Kristi M. Wilson, 2007), *The Altering Eye: Contemporary International Cinema* (Robert Phillip Kolker, 2009), *Brutal Vision: The Neorealist Body in Postwar Italian Cinema* (Karl Schoonover, 2012), *Global Neorealism: The Transnational History of Film Style* (Saverio Giovacchini, Robert Skla, 2012), and *Theorizing World Cinema* (Lúcia Nagib, Chris Perriam, Rajinder Dudrah, 2012), pose the comparison between Italian pictures and their influence on the cinema of, for example, Brazil, Iran, and Africa. In *Brutal Vision*, Schoonover takes his study one step further to include the influence that the foreign reception of early Rossellini and De Sica films had in shaping the creation of their subsequent works.
In relation to the topics discussed within this dissertation, those that make specific and substantial mention of the function and importance of children as a key characteristic of Italian Neorealism are limited to Kolker’s writings in *The Altering Eye* and Jaimey Fisher’s “On the Ruins of Masculinity: The Figure of the Child in Italian Neorealism and the German Rubble-Film” (in *Italian Neorealism and Global Cinema*).

While the primary focus of Kolker’s work is not to delve deeply into the role of children or into Neorealism per se, he discusses the influence the cinema has on overhauling or realigning the viewer’s gaze, especially in those images which are chosen for the big screen in a Europe that was living through World War II. In the chapter dedicated to the importance of Neorealism in revamping the cinema world-wide (Chapter 1, “The Validity of the Image”), Kolker discusses the efficacy with which the movement constantly asked the spectator to watch and analyze themselves and the truth of the world through the real images with which they were presented. To achieve that level of assimilation, the author cites children as one of the most potent tools. Kolker also places himself in opposition to Eric Rhode, who was “one of the few historians not captivated by neo-realist children” (Kolker 48). Rhode considered children to be mere weapons used to emotionally blackmail the viewer. He accuses them of being too passive to be inspirational. In Rhode’s words,

De Sica and Zavattini are not willing to accept responsibility for this conception of society. They reduce everyone to a childlike state, as though everyone were a child in the sight of God. Their childlike perception of the minutiae of daily life tends to be passive.... (quoted in Kolker 49)

Stating that De Sica and Zavattini’s children are ‘passive’ participants who are placed in their films to ‘emotionally blackmail’ the viewer are ideas which pertain primarily to their inability to physically change the situation in which the characters find themselves. While it may true that children cannot offer a definitive solution to their (or their parents’) struggles, I posit that the roles De Sica means for them to have are not tied directly to creating a positive turn of events (in fact, in De Sica’s Neorealism, there is never an overt example of a happy ending). Instead, the children’s view of their own situation, precisely that which Rhode believes is passive about them,
has the potential to inspire moral rejuvenation in their co-characters and in the spectator, without forcefully coercing the latter to feel more.

In Fisher’s essay, his analyses focus on the use of children as antitheses to the male protagonists alongside whom they [the children] often move throughout the film. More importantly, Fisher views the youth’s presence as a tool with which the director tears down the image of the heroic male, reducing him to a weak man precisely because of the child’s stronger capabilities. Fisher revisits Gilles Deleuze’s description of the postwar cinematic crisis as seen in Roma città aperta and, in less depth, in Ladri di biciclette. He also considers the following to be his foci: in the scene before his mother Pina is gunned down, Marcello is seen engaging in childish games. In a cruel thereafter, he is forced to struggle alone with the unexpected execution of his mother, which he does not see first-hand, but only hears before reacting, as he throws himself on top of her. Bruno, in Ladri di biciclette, is left staring at the devastating image of his thief-father trying to comprehend his actions (36-37).

Drawing on Kaja Silverman’s definition of what constitutes a defeated male, in Male Subjectivity at the Margins, Fisher states that neorealist cinema concentrated on “marginal males who were compelled, in the wake of the war and the social crises surrounding it, to embrace lack of action and overall inadequacy” (28). In this regard, Fisher reveals that one of the most effective ways to represent this lack was through the male child. The dispersive situations the child is placed in correspond to “the postwar meltdown of masculine agency and its replacement by a confusing manifold of gender, familial, and socioeconomic relations” (31). Finally, Fisher views the inclusion of the male child in a central role as a representation of the humiliated males, whose presence and fate refigure the traditional masculine action-image (Francesco, Don Pietro, and Pina in Roma città aperta and Joe, the black GI in the fifth Naples Episode of Paisà; Fisher 27). In these cases, Fisher believes that the child struggles to perceive and comprehend the uncertain and unpredictable situations.

My positions are in line with many aspects of Kolker’s and Fisher’s findings since both ultimately believe that the child is, by nature, more malleable and, subsequently, able to bridge the spectator-character gap. However, if we return to Eric Rhode’s earlier statements, his views undermine two other fundamental roles taken on by the children which both Kolker and Fisher
do not develop as thoroughly or consider secondary to their analysis: the child as quintessential passive and active observer (and what that means to the overall narrative and character development of those around them) and ideal representative of neorealist themes. De Sica does not use youth as catalysts for reconstruction of life after the war or as hope for a brighter future; whereas, the youth’s heroic lives or deaths in Rossellini’s works are the means to revitalize the community and forge new alliances. In all their genuineness, the boys, at times, come together to form the little island of hope in the big sea of despair that was 1940s Europe, but more often than not they are products of a cruel, raw society that abandoned its youth and offered no hope for the future. Hence, I will demonstrate the effectiveness of children as the neorealist character par excellence and show how effective Bruno, in Ladri di biciclette, is at turning his scope of vision into activity when that sense becomes all that is necessary to offer a reflective and pedagogical gaze into which his father and the spectator must look to learn.

With regards to works that deal primarily with the role of children in European cinema, Vicky Lebeau’s Childhood and Cinema (2008) and Giovanna De Luca’s Il punto di vista dell’infanzia nel cinema italiano e francese: rivisioni (2009), serve as most recent and comprehensive works. The child as technology’s spectacle and subject is the specific focus of Lebeau’s book where she centres her analyses on the depiction of children who are aware of the potential the moving image has. She cites Totò’s excitement (in Giuseppe Tornatore’s Nuovo cinema paradiso, 1988) at managing the cinematic apparatuses - the projector and film reel - because of its (and his) power to dictate the emotions of the audience. Later on, and like Fisher, Lebeau too highlights Marcello in Roma, but she sees him as representative of the cinema’s desire to depict the “painful iconography of the child as victim of war, certainly, but also as active, if radically traumatized, participant in adult hostilities” (141). Lebeau’s interests lie in emphasizing the

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1 Indeed, according to Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham, in War and Children, war conditions, through the inevitable breaking-up of family life, deprive children of the natural background for their emotional and mental development. Therefore, children have little chance to build up their future psychological health and normality which would be needed for a potential reconstruction of the world after the war (12).

2 Rossellini is considered the director who is most capable of projecting forward, a visionary, and not simply a guide into the rebirth of Italian cinema. For this reason, the children in his films are fighters and signs of hope for postwar reconstruction.
ability of Rossellini’s children to be increasingly privileged witnesses of war and murder. To Lebeau, the boys can be classified as ‘resistance fighters’ because at one time they have a firsthand encounter with the death of a mentor. Pina is gunned down before Marcello’s eyes while, in the closing scenes of the film, the boys gather to watch the execution of Don Pietro. Lebeau maintains that the children take up the burden of providing significance for Don Pietro’s death as they look on during his execution so that there is purpose in his sacrifice - and, by extension, in the sacrifices made by the Resistance - which will reveal itself in the boys’ better future (142).

What serves as inspiration for my dissertation, however, is the author’s discussion on the importance of privileging the child on film as a way to explore the “coincidence between the fascination, the charm, of the image on screen and the emergence of the human mind, human creativity, through the play, as well as the anxiety of looking” (18). It is through her latter appraisal of the pedagogical potential of the youths’ eyes, that I find key examples to reference in my discussion of Bruno in relation to his profound gaze which, regardless of age, holds enough experience beyond its years to be the man to Antonio’s child.

The scholarly work of De Luca is the most complete collection to date to deal solely with the question of the use of children in Italian and French cinema. This author’s position is not to contradict any previous criticism on the subject, but to establish herself in the field by providing a broad overview of the history of the child’s point of view (from Neorealism to New Wave to modern exemplary films). The nucleus of her discussion, with regards to Neorealism, employs the application of Giorgio Agamben’s notions of man who will become nothing more than a passive witness to his predicament because of his impossibility to transform experience into knowledge (25).³ Void of said experience, it becomes the duty of the child’s gaze to reach the male spectator and show him that they both possess the abilities to interpret their surroundings enough to rebuild their lives.

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³ More specifically, De Luca treats the writings in Agamben’s *Infanzia e storia* (1978) in which the philosopher explores the difficulty of describing one’s experiences with authority (with words and narration) because of man’s preference to remain outside of them, to observe them passively (24-25).
Throughout De Luca’s book, there are currents which are congruent to my own findings as evidenced in the parts dedicated to De Sica (throughout her introduction) and, specifically, to *Ladri di biciclette* (Part 3, Chapter 1, “Puer Senex e Puer Aeternus”). The exploration of the journey between Bruno and Antonio (out of which Bruno emerges as the more responsible of the two), the search for their lost bond, as opposed to a material object, and the important role Bruno has in establishing a connection between him and the viewer are also relevant topics I focus on in my dissertation. Importantly, then, I dedicate myself to De Sica (as opposed to analyzing a gamut of films, by a number of artists, over the centuries who have ever employed children in a role) because he makes the most exemplary uses of their range and potential.

De Luca and I differ in her choice to view Bruno’s place in his family, his apparent role as the purveyor of views on solidarity and obedience as a symbol for the reconstruction of a nation who wants to rebuild an image of itself (152). Were there an ideal and easy way to rebuild anything during the postwar era, and De Sica would agree, the child’s inherently good values would be the place to start. However, such heavy responsibilities are neither the director’s nor the child’s tasks. Moreover, and in greater contrast to my dissertation, De Luca discusses Bruno and Antonio’s role reversal in *Ladri di biciclette* in terms of James Hillman’s theories of archetypal psychoanalysis. In the American psychologist’s central work, *Re-Visioning Psychology*, parental fallacy, mainly paternal, is the key determinant of individual growth, for parents give us the genetic material, conditioning, and behavioral patterns we need to become adults.4 Upon the realization that the father is an imperfect being, there is no hope that order can be restored in the child and, thus, the future becomes a guaranteed reflection of a tumultuous past. A Hillman reading of the film causes De Luca to speak in dichotomous and final terms whereby Bruno’s role will always be defined as that of the *puer senex* and Antonio as the *puer aeternus*. That is, Bruno will forever be the old man-child who inevitably emerged out from the young boy after the broken father-son promise. Antonio is the man who cannot and will never grow up because he is constantly searching for a way to return to an edenic period of time, before parental fallacy.

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4 Hillman revisits Carl Jung’s analytical psychology in which the *puer aeternus* is an example of what Jung called an ‘archetype’ whereby man is possessed with both the potential for growth and change, on one hand, and the inability to effectually solve anything on his own (when he is seen as a man-child), on the other.
He is therefore incapable of maturing. While role-reversals are an essential component of my interpretation of the father-son relationship and of the growth I trace in Bruno, in the film *Ladri di biciclette* I do not view the two men as devoid of their actual roles in society. Despite his developed opinions and keen eye, Bruno is still a child who, at times, acts and understands only as much as a child can. I believe that the importance of Bruno in the film actually rests on his ability (whether active or not) to oscillate between roles and adapt as the situation calls for it. My focus will therefore highlight the De Sichian-Deleuzian interpretation of Bruno’s function in *Ladri di biciclette* as a potential teacher to his father, but more so as a demonstrator and storyteller of the world he lives in.

**Outline**

Roland Barthes wrote that the meaning behind every myth is surrounded by “a halo of virtualities where other possible meanings are floating: the meaning can almost always be interpreted” (132. Emphasis original). The same can be said for the endless reasons why a child’s role in a film is multi-purpose and why they are so frequently found within the moving picture frame. The fact that there is no one possible response to the query into the use and function of the child is both an homage to the rich portrayals of children and an ideal point of departure for an analysis of their function. To conclude that there is but one meaning to the child signifier or one single great use for children in cinema would be to negate the diverse artistry of all those who have ever directed them or wrote about them. The intent of this dissertation is to position the child as indispensible to postwar Italian cinema while discussing how vital his role has been in shaping the films, history, and culture associated with Neorealism. It is a study whose execution and purpose are to treat children in the same way neorealists did: as a tool to expose the function of their presence and ‘interpret’ the efficacy there is in watching childhood.

This will be done by discussing the roles of children in silent films and, then, by further analyzing their service to the films of De Sica. In an effort to redefine ‘action’ as not merely being a product of exertion or operation, but as synonymous with the keen sense of sight that is endowed upon the child, I will take the lead which Deleuze mapped out in *The Movement* and *Time-Image* and regard the child’s renewed agency as one which allows him to see and hear more than his onscreen adult counterpart(s). I will reveal, through Deleuze’s teachings, that
neorealist children represent both the action-image and, more so, its crisis in this cinema. More specifically, at times, the child can be active enough to create or change a situation (known as the action-image) and the spectator has come to expect, thanks to the conventions of Hollywood films, that his own perception would be extended into necessary action. At others, as is the case more often during Neorealism, the spectator no longer relies on action to carry forth a scene or bring about a conclusion. Instead, the only action that is required or that could be conjured is that of reflection since neorealisitss tended not to cut anything out of a scene, opting to display even the minutiae behind life’s everyday events. The urge to influence the audience to reflect was, indeed, the primary driving force for a director like De Sica who was well aware that invoking thought was a more realistic achievement than expeditiously rebuilding a nation. Hope and the possibility of a tangible reconstruction of the mind and of the city, was left up to his contemporary, Roberto Rossellini, an equally influential neorealist. While Rossellini can be said to have remained more faithful to the action-image, De Sica embodies a movement beyond. With this in mind, discussions surrounding De Sica’s films, in particular, will divulge that there is much the child can accomplish just by looking, both for the other characters and for the spectator.

Before arriving at the main film analysis of *Ladri di biciclette*, it is necessary to establish that a progression in the way children were depicted did indeed take place. Thus, in chapter 1 the role of the child will be seen against the backdrop of Italy’s earliest releases during the Italian silent film era. By citing such films as *Piccolo garibaldino* (1909, director unknown) and *Sperduti nel buio* (1914, by Nino Martoglio), it will become apparent that the first cinematic children were unseasoned characters who were limited in their power of vision and of influence. The reason for this lack can be attributed to the insistence, at the time, that children should only serve as beacons of morality and images of national pride without any analytical abilities afforded to them. That maturity was attributed to age or to societal positioning remains to be seen; but one thing is certain, their power of inception only grew stronger the more the cinema was entrenched into the cultural fabric of Italy. As such, chapter 1 will also attempt to trace the importance of fascist influence over the cinema industry and over Italians. Moreover, the section will also discuss the reaction to the party’s control on behalf of the artists whose many works were created against the regime in order to arrive at a more true-to-life type of cinema: Neorealism. Once the
many faces of Neorealism have been presented, and its various aspects and definitions explored, a Deleuzian reading of that era in cinema is necessary to be able to situate the child along a fundamental axis of analysis that will centre on his sensorial propensity towards sight and sound.

In films such as *I bambini ci guardano*, *Sciuscià*, and *Ladri di biciclette* the audience directly witnesses the effects of the war on the children that lost their innocence and were forced to become adults before their time. Indeed in these films, as in others, the plots are as touching as their little protagonists are genuine. The young characters in neorealist films are as diverse as their stories and become the perfect vehicles for exposing unjust familial restraints, poverty, and dilapidated social institutions. The children of De Sica’s neorealist films will end up reproaching the adults for indifference, lack of commitment, disloyalty, the breakdown of family relations, and the corruption of political structures.

In chapter 2, De Sica is established as the director who most frequently employs children in Neorealism as signifiers for the multifaceted definitions associated with it. His children, regardless of familial background or economic situation, can be linked by the very fact that their vision is used to its fullest possible potential. Moreover, the boys of *I bambini ci guardano*, *Sciuscià*, and *Ladri di biciclette* will each be seen as demanding a certain amount of reflection on the part of the viewer. In turn, as De Sica’s films progress, the title characters tend to learn more about themselves and teach more onto others around them.

Prico, the focus of *I bambini ci guardano*, in his spiritually orphaned state, finds himself in the same company as so many other children who are forced to wander aimlessly through city streets. The title of the film reminds us that we live surrounded by the watchful eyes of these overlooked beings who are constantly being associated with “… the vague outskirts of conflicts that adults (or anyone wielding power) regard as their private property” (Toles, “On a Train to the Kingdom of Earth” 123). Throughout *I bambini*, the camera’s focus is on the neglected boy who dictates the spectators’ emotional response to the situations the child faces.

*I bambini ci guardano* dealt with the moral problem of adultery only obliquely, through the eyes of the child who does not fully comprehend the damage that his mother’s affair directly causes his family. Similarly, in *Sciuscià*, the adult world is judged in contrast to the decency and piety of
childhood. Ultimately, the most important story for De Sica is the story of a childhood destroyed in its vitality, in its innocence, in its dreams, as a result of an adult world that does not know how to love, to understand, to smile. Again in this film, the juxtaposition of childhood versus adulthood is quite prevalent. When seen in contrast with the adult world, it becomes apparent that the children feel real emotions whereas the adults are lacking in sentimentality.

Sciuscia describes more sharply than I bambini ci guardano, the end of innocence. The important theme of adulthood versus childhood that is explored in I bambini ci guardano further evolves in this De Sica masterpiece, but it is not until Ladri di biciclette that it is perfected. With this film, the De Sica-Zavattini duo is able to incorporate the fundamental characteristics of the neorealist movement in its use of nonprofessional actors who would shorten the distance between the spectator and the screen as well as in the insistence to depict that which was “contemporary. Today, today, today” (Zavattini, “Some Ideas on the Cinema” 9. Emphasis original). For De Sica, condemning the politics of the time was best done through the analysis of the human being. The director once stated that his films “are a struggle against the absence of human solidarity… against the indifference of society towards suffering. They are a word in favor of the poor and unhappy” (qtd. in Thomson 260). Furthermore, to maintain authenticity, this “other” that De Sica describes (the ‘poor and unhappy’) cannot be portrayed by the handsome and well-trained actor, but by someone who looks as if he were plucked off the streets. The settings also needed to mirror reality and so De Sica was among the first to bring the camera into the austere streets of Italy.

Ladri di biciclette is a prime example of the realism portrayed on screen which adheres to experiences in the lives of the common Italian people. It therefore evokes a sense of the grim nature of the post-war times, the harshness of poverty and unemployment, the social chasm between the haves and the have-nots, and the isolation of the individual from the societal group. It is these ideas which gave meaning to the films of the neorealist movement, all embodied in Ladri di biciclette. The crux of the dissertation, accordingly, lies in the analysis of Bruno’s place in Ladri and in Italian Neorealism, in chapter 3. With Ladri di biciclette, one could strongly argue that the film would not have had the same impact were it not for Bruno Ricci, our witness, our silent narrator. But are those films that feature children more effective in the attempt to
describe the “new realities” of 1940s Italy? According to De Sica, the answer is certainly yes. Despite the presence of his father’s, Antonio’s, scattered points of view, it is always with Bruno that we feel the strongest connection.

*Ladri di biciclette* was adapted by De Sica and Zavattini for the big screen, based on Luigi Bartolini’s 1946 novel of the same title. Perhaps a clue as to why the film has overshadowed the original work for so long can be solved with the recognition that Bruno was a part which was added for the film. Since the novel concentrates not on the individual and his moral dilemmas, but on the actions and characteristics of others, Bartolini is the only witness we need. If Bruno acts as Antonio’s conscience, then the book acts as the narrator’s since Bartolini is admittedly writing about his searches for his bicycles. It is always through Bruno that we witness the major events of the film. His mere presence gives us so many clues into the personality of Antonio. Ultimately, the film’s finale is only as strong as the little boy in the scene.

Eventually, Bruno proves to be the ultimate neorealist character witness as well as its strongest visual teacher - a concept which started with Prico, but culminates with the young Ricci. The title of this dissertation, then, comes full circle with the characters analyzed within it and was chosen specifically for its ‘paratextual’ qualities. In *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Gérard Genette defines ‘paratext’ as the adornment surrounding the presentation of a work, such as an author’s name, a title, a preface, illustrations, etc. These features are what transform a work into a book or film or anything that is intended to be read, received, or viewed in some way. Paratexts can “make present [or] ensure the text’s presence in the world,” but they are also “at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it” (1-2). Likewise, the leading paratextual element (the title) for this dissertation, *From Visual Learner to Visual Teacher and Beyond: Pedagogical Considerations on the Role of Children in Vittorio De Sica’s Neorealism*, was selected to describe and encapsulate the characters at the centre of my discussion. The term ‘beyond’ touches on the variety of purposes a child’s presence can have in a film (which shall be explored through the dissertation) as well as makes reference to an important Deleuzian notion. More specifically, it alludes to the theorist’s assessment that, through the child, Neorealism does more than any other cinema to incite reflection in the spectator by making the viewer think ‘beyond’ cinematic convention. The terms ‘visual learner’ and ‘visual teacher’ refer to the way in
which young characters take in the world around them before ocularly instructing the adults in their lives, as well as the spectator. Children possess the ability to critique and to reveal real emotions through their eyes alone, without the need for words. By first watching the events unfold around them and, then, meeting the gaze of their father, mother, a crowd, or the camera, as the case may be, the children’s eyes offer an opening into which the former are encouraged to peer. As a result, those who find themselves onscreen and those sitting in front of it fall under the heading of ‘visual learner.’ When the adult-child gazes align, the children reveal themselves to be at once good and brave, independent and self-aware. Ultimately, the same virtual reality that the boys represent is directed at recreating the heightened human sensorium in others and rebuilding in them [the grownups] goodness, bravery, independence, and self-awareness.

The title also represents a guide to the evolution of the placement of each chapter as the roles of visual learner and visual teacher collapse in the final entry on teaching Neorealism in an academic setting. The fourth chapter, suitably, is dedicated to the importance and benefits of implementing film viewings in both the Cinema Studies classroom as well as in the Language classroom. In these venues, the term ‘visual learner’ applies to students, whereas the ‘visual teacher’ now wears two faces. First, the term describes the university instructor who champions for the use of cinema in the classroom for its proven ability to raise the learning curve through the visual medium. Second, it remains a reference to the role of the “other” (which children in cinema represent) who now displays that he possesses yet another quintessential pedagogical tool. At this point, the child and the study of Neorealism come to affect a new spectator: the student-cinephile. Just as the child taught his compatriots and his family how to persevere, so too does he now aid the student-spectator to strengthen critical thinking, develop deeper language skills, and, above all, excel in his or her learning environment. The function of the bicycle - a symbol which is so prevalent throughout the bulk of the dissertation, becomes a metaphor for the chosen paratext. That is, each working part has been put together in order to conduct a cyclical movement which takes the passenger-reader from one point to the next.

The journey which that movement takes to arrive at what is considered the wheel that drives the dissertation, the Ladri discussion, must first be paved by analyzing the entire mechanism’s frame: the subsequent and first chapter. There, I will explore in more depth the phenomenon of
Neorealism, an essential exploration into the era which produced the body of films being discussed in this dissertation.
Chapter 1

Children of the Golden Years

1.1 Glimpses of Children in Silent Films

Decisions to cast children in Italian films were made as early as 1907; however, the deeper cinema was woven into the historical and cultural fabric of the country, the more prevalent and significant children’s roles became. We are reminded of their use by Gian Piero Brunetta, in the first volume of *Storia del cinema*, who takes us as far back as *Cuore di biricchino* (1907), *Congiura di bimbe*, *Piccolo garibaldino*, *Il piccolo vandeano* (all 1909), *Piccolo cantoniere* (1910), *Piccolo violinista*, and *Il tamburino di Austerlitz* (both 1911) to demonstrate the earliest representations of children in cinema.\(^5\) Politically, children were the target audience of the pedagogy of the institutions: the latter wanted to ensure that future generations believed and shared a moral sense of national identity. The film industry responded in kind by inundating Italian cinemas with numerous representations of strong-willed, mistreated or benevolent children. They were used as examples of high moral standing, unfailingly loyal to the family, the nation, and the history of the homeland often against the backdrop of the Risorgimento.\(^6\)

In *Piccolo garibaldino*, these common pedagogical goals abound: the fighting spirit of Garibaldi’s soldiers, their reverence towards Italy and its flag, and their heroism and sacrifice for the nation all collapse within the figure of the young boy. The setting is that of the middle-class home of Garibaldino before his father leaves for battle dressed in a hero’s red uniform. In a gesture typical of the fighter spirit of Garibaldi’s soldiers, after admiring himself in the same fatigues his father donned, Garibaldino follows his father into combat, unbeknownst to the family. Despite the fact that Garibaldino is directly disobeying his father’s wish for him to stay at home with his mother, what is important is that he does not betray the family’s moral principles or ideals. His fighter spirit tells us that he shares his parents’ views on the importance of

\(^5\) In addition, Brunetta presents *L’orfanella dell’assassinato* and *L’orfano e l’omicida* (both 1908) as products of *feuilleton* that describe a world of orphans and derelicts.

\(^6\) In “Portrait of a Nation,” Giovanni Lasi offers *Piccolo cuore* (1907), *Il piccolo eroe*, *Il piccolo spazzacamino* (both 1908), *I piccoli esploratori italiani*, *Eroico pastorello* (both 1910), and *Il piccolo patriota* (1911) as exemplary titles (72).
patriotism. When Garibaldino meets his death in battle, he will be remembered for his heroism and sanctified into sacrificial martyrdom. The final scene is an intimate exchange, an identification between the individual, the family, and the nation, as he appears to his mourning mother in the family home as a vision, in proper uniform, ascending into heaven.

As Italian cinema evolved, the depictions of children slowly became richer and more diverse. Children were at the centre of what Aldo Bernardini and Vittorio Martinelli, in *Il cinema muto italiano: I film degli anni d’oro, 1912*, consider the realistic vein in Italian silent films. The youth took up roles which spanned across themes of mischievousness (*Le avventure di un monello*, director unknown, 1912), sentimentality and familial strife (director Gabriel Moreau’s *Mio figlio!* 1912), abandonment (writer Arrigo Frusta’s *Il Natale di Pierino*, 1910; *Miriam* or *La fanciulla araba*, director unknown, 1912), illegitimacy (*Il perdono del nonno*, 1912, produced by Società Anonima Ambrosio), and a life forced into begging and panhandling or childhood labour (writer Arrigo Frusta’s *Il piccolo lustrascarpe*, 1912; Augusto Genina’s *Piccolo cerinaio*, 1914).

At the *Centro sperimentale di cinematografia*, Italian film historian Umberto Barbaro identified a Neapolitan interest in realism during the same years as evidenced by on location shooting and the use of non-professional actors depicted in working-class environments. The implementation of those elements are further representative of a certain continuity within a long-standing cinematic tradition in Italy, rather than a violent break with the past (as was the view held at the height of Neorealism’s struggle for survival). Barbaro cites *Sperduti nel buio* as the first link to the thread which he considers the true precursor to Neorealism. While it is true that, as Brunetta maintains, children functioned as more than mere narrative ornaments in early cinema, as they

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7 Located near Cinecittà, the *Centro sperimentale di cinematografia* opened in Rome in 1935 and became the most influential school of cinema (for training, research, direction techniques in a wide range of genres) in Italy.

8 For Barbaro, the thread also includes *Assunta Spina* (1915), *Sole and Rotaie* (both 1929) and, in the 1930s, *La tavola dei poveri* (1932), *Treno popolare, Acciaio* (both 1933), *Vecchia guardia*, and *1860* (both 1934).

9 The tale is taken from a 1901 story by the Neapolitan Roberto Bracco.
were sometimes used to advance story lines, children were nonetheless limited in their power of vision and, thus, of influence. In fact, the protagonist of *Sperduti nel buio*, Nunzio, personifies the title as he loses his sense of sight at the age of nine and serves to live out the cliche that ‘love is blind’ when he falls in love with a mendicant (who is actually the illegitimate daughter of a nobleman).

The primary function of children was to act as the instrument used for the moral elevation of society through those they came to affect around them, but they were not yet given the responsibility of interpreting their surroundings through their own vision. Their stunted stature was equated with having a limited range of emotional capacity and a lack of *insight* which, therefore, paralyzed their potential to *incite* change or, at best, acquire a deeper interpersonal understanding of others. In fact, in so far as children were used primarily for politically charged pedagogy, their roles did not delve beyond those surfaces until the advent of Neorealism when often only children bore the responsibility of being able to see anything (and they saw everything) as well as being the tool used to strike the balance between objectivity and sentimentality which was sought after by so many neorealists. In the meantime, Italian cinema during the Fascist years was still preoccupied with images of itself, with depicting a perfect impression of reality. With that in mind, the truth that only a child could portray through his raw perception was as skewed as the ‘perfect reality’ transmitted on screen.

### 1.2 Paving the Path to Neorealism

In order to arrive at the fundamental impetuses of De Sica’s Neorealism, that is, the forefather-director who employed children at their maximum potential as the mirror images for the new reality they transposed on screen, it is essential to first establish how the pursuit towards said ‘realism’ came about. As Laura Ruberto and Kristi Wilson point out in *Italian Neorealism and Global Cinema*, audiences’ earliest experiences of viewing feature films during, or slightly after, World War I were linked to the documented reality of global social issues thereby interconnecting experiences of real-life tragedy with entertainment. With time, spectators grew accustomed to viewing these two different types of filmmaking in one sitting and, as a result, the

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10 The children are, as Brunetta states, “lo strumento ricattatorio per risolvere ogni tipo di conflittualità interpersonale e sociale” *(Cent’anni 44).*
experience of this combination gave rise to the acknowledgment that a story could also visually chronicle the social struggle at the time (2). In what is considered the key cultural and artistic initiation to have ushered in the neorealist movement, Mussolini himself turned to the cinema (Bondanella, *Italian Cinema* 21). Possibly following in the footsteps of Hitler’s Riefenstahl-style propaganda films, the dictator recognized the moving picture’s powerful potential as a tool that could convey political and ideological content to the masses. His call for documentary-style realism in film, to show the strength and virility of his regime, achieved critical recognition after WWII when Barbaro as well as French film historian Georges Sadoul pointed to pro-fascist films as key preludes to Neorealism.

Eventually, Mussolini also recognized the effectiveness of having a fascist influence on all aspects of film culture, not just on documentary-style films, as he considered cinema a most powerful weapon. In the mid-1930s, upon the realization that the cinema industry was an important political and ideological machine – one that the government should champion - the *Direzione generale per la cinematografia* (1934) was introduced in Italy. In 1935, with the construction of Cinecittà, the regime could control the big screen and, in turn, what the cinema viewing public watched. The majority of all Italian films were shot at Cinecittà and soon an entire school dedicated to cinema would open which included, among others, the *Centro sperimentale di cinematografia* and its journal, *Bianco e nero*, the film sectors of the Fascist University Youth, and the cultural journals run by prominent Fascist figures, such as *Cinema* and *Primato*.

Luigi Freddi, the head of the propaganda sector of the fascist party as well as the director of the *Centro sperimentale di cinematografia*, insisted on creating films that would appeal to consumers (by making the same types of films that appealed to customers in the past – technically complex, melodramatic and epical) and, in turn, placate them. In fact, cinema could offer the spectator, and the world, the appearance that Italy functioned like a well-oiled machine,

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11 Riefenstahl-style, named after director Helene Bertha Amalie Riefenstahl, were films used for pro-Nazi propaganda.

12 Similar words, “La cinematografia è l’arma più forte,” were printed on a propagandistic poster which hung outside of Cinecittà studios and in which Mussolini is pictured behind a movie camera.
a family led by a father whose order and discipline were an effective means to attain success (mainly through industrialization) and political unity.

Some of the directors to instill fascist ideologies in cinematic representations during these years were Alessandro Blasetti as well as Mario Camerini who, while clear in their political leanings, injected realism into their films which prefigured that of Luchino Visconti, De Sica, and Rossellini. Blasetti’s 1860 portrays the impact of Garibaldi’s take over of Sicily and his first major battle upon the lives of its citizens. The Sicilian people were represented by non-professional, dialect-speaking characters. The choice to employ non-actors, speaking as they normally would, was a common feature that would later appear in a number of postwar neorealist works. For the weight of characterization that is placed on children, it is perhaps enough to note that the youngest character, Totò, dies within the first ten minutes of the film. Before his death, he holds his rightful place in society as nothing more than a messenger between Father Costanzo and Carmelo Trau (the main protagonist) and as an affectionate son to his mother. Not having been graced with the gift of perception, Totò will unknowingly meet his death as he, without questioning the adults around him, is used as a decoy (to call him a martyr would be giving his character too much depth) to distract Bourbon soldiers from discovering Carmelo’s whereabouts. Perhaps the most significant function we can affix to this boy is that his early death sets a circular narrative in motion as the end of film (during the Battle of Catalfimi) also closes with images of mortality.

Just as in the silent films of 1912, the primary concern for fascist campaigners became that of political pedagogy. For this reason, youthful depictions would play a pivotal role in the diffusion of their propaganda. The documentaries and newsreels released through LUCE (L’unione cinematografica educativa, founded in 1924), the state institution which oversaw pro-fascist cinema, employed adolescents to highlight the exuberance of the youth in the military, in sports, and at school until children were considered a metaphor for the revivifying qualities by which the fascist movement wanted to be described (Piepergerdes 2012). In limiting their roles to display contrived and clouded ideals, fascist depiction of youth groups centered on adolescent patriotism (Giovacchino Forzano, Camicia nera, 1933), paternal order, heroic virility, and the
effectiveness of socialization policies, such as the reduction of juvenile delinquency (*Vecchia guardia*).

Peter Bondanella labels Blasetti’s *Vecchia guardia* a fascist film as it “portrays Mussolini’s supporters in a heroic light and concludes with a celebration of the March on Rome” (*Italian Cinema* 38). The story revolves around a young boy named Mario whose death, at the hands of the Socialists, renders him a heroic martyr to the fascist cause. In this case, the director’s realistic portrayal of the drama employed cinematic realism not for its tendency to lend authenticity and truthfulness to its characters and subjects, but as a means of legitimizing Fascism. As the youth and, for that matter, the nation were not expected to think for themselves nor see the world through their own devices, children were portrayed as voids, ready to accept the indoctrination of fascist ideals. In contrast, neorealist depictions of children will disrupt paternal order and heroic virility as they are always seen as being enmeshed in real-world struggles, stripped of their innocence, sole breadwinners, altogether outside of the traditional family unit or too far removed from one.

Blasetti’s last important film before the end of the war, *Quattro passi fra le nuvole* (1942), represents a simple storyline anticipates the neorealist plots of Vittorio De Sica and his long-time collaborator and scriptwriter Cesare Zavattini. *Quattro passi* provides early evidence that Italian cinema was moving towards an interest in eloquently depicting common human situations. It did so, however, without the reliance on simple characters played by non-performers or, much less, children to break through to a realistic appraisal of Italian daily life.

Despite Blasetti’s attempts at filmed simplicity, Italian feature-film production was more concerned with costume dramas, musicals, melodramas, and comedies. Other pro-fascist and pro-war films emphasized the ideology of the regime by reflecting contemporary themes of

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13 A traveling salesman meets a young unmarried girl who is pregnant. The man feels instant compassion for her as she worries she will bring great shame to her family. To help, he, albeit unsuccessfully, poses as her husband on their visit to the home. On the verge of denouncement from the family, the man urges them to forgive the girl and to show sympathy for her unborn child. His efforts are triumphant and the familial bond remains intact at the end of the film.
importance – the colonial wars and the Italian presence in Africa and Spain.\textsuperscript{14} The comedies of Camerini injected the genre with notes of cinematic realism, at least in visual style. This would make the director amongst the most important of those filmmakers to demonstrate realist tendencies in the fascist era. While Blasetti’s films gradually moved toward a truthful interpretation of Italian life, Camerini’s comedies explored Italian social values in a more light-hearted manner: romantic comedies which focused on sympathetic lower-middle-class characters, often young lovers, and their dreams for self-improvement in a modern urban society.\textsuperscript{15} Yet, the necessity to place emphasis on characters who could offer the films and their spectators a fresh view of the real world would only be felt years later by neorealists.

While some of the cinema-going public took to the serio-comedies of Blasetti and Camerini, as well as to those known as the \textit{telefoni bianchi} - others were seeking more out of the movie-viewing experience.\textsuperscript{16} Certainly, not everyone went to the movies to seek refuge from their present lives. For some, going to the movies was a way to regain some of the hope that the war had taken away. For others, the movie theatre was also a meeting place to reconnect with their compatriots by synchronizing their emotions, by seeking some sort of comfort in the knowledge that they, indeed, were not alone in their everyday experiences. In other words, to heed the demands of what the spectator wanted meant to understand that the spectator was receptive to a fresh view of the world. The cinema and, moreover, the theatre space itself offered a rejoining of a fragmented and lost soul. The theatre was frequented by those who were left waiting for their loved ones’ return from war – by those whose reality did not comply with the regime’s onscreen choices. The acknowledgment of such converging realities would allow the neorealist camera to

\textsuperscript{14} These films did not explicitly endorse Italian nationalism, Italy’s right to an empire, rejection of parliamentary democracy, or the physical force ideals of Fascism. Most made no mention of Fascism or war at all. Nevertheless, their themes were complicit with the agendas of the regime (Shiel 24-25).

\textsuperscript{15} Exemplary films include \textit{Gli uomini che mascalzoni} (1932) and \textit{Darò un milione} (1937). Ironically, these films, among others, starred none other than De Sica himself.

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Telefoni bianchi} films are defined by Mark Shiel as well-made, cinematically stylish, studio-filmed productions, with little social satire, but with a preference for the depiction of the material wealth and comfort of the upper-middle class. The critic cites Goffredo Alessandrini’s \textit{La segretaria privata} (1931), Augusto Genina’s \textit{Castelli in aria} (1939), and Max Neufeld’s \textit{Mille lire al mese} (1939) as exemplary films of the era (25).
be brought into the streets, to capture the suffering and the sadness as a way to transform the veracity onto the screen and empower the spectator.

1.3 From a Fascist Reality to a New Realism

While neorealists brought pieces of the outside world into the movie theatre to reach their audiences, the regime, before them, insisted on keeping the spectators’ eyes focused on that happily cohesive society they would like to see beyond the screen. Were the shackles never placed on those theatre doors by Freddi, and the supporters of the Direzione generale per la cinematografia, we may not be able to speak of a cinema that broke the chains: Neorealism. With the outbreak of WWII, even those directors who injected instances of realism into their films (like Blasetti and Camerini) succumbed to the agendas of fascist film production and adopted an art-for-art’s sake attitude (Shiel 29). But lessons learned by the two masters would be retained by a younger generation of critics and filmmakers (under the Cinema journal) who refused to make what they considered “increasingly dull bourgeois” (29) movies.

As fascist domination collapsed, the intellectual climate in Italy became skeptical of the regime. Critical opinion on fascist cinema, articulated in Cinema and Bianco e nero, became increasingly impatient with the types of films the regime was producing. Their films asked little of the spectator except to sit through a calculated repetition of basic themes which only displayed a world of unattainable fantasies. In the early 1940s, Neorealism was forming in films such as Visconti’s Ossessione (1943) and De Sica’s I bambini ci guardano, and would continue into the decade, characterized not only by the realism of, for example, De Sica’s Ladri di biciclette or Rossellini’s Paisà (1950), but also by the comic-fantasy vision of society exemplified in De Sica’s Miracolo a Milano (1950) and Rossellini’s La macchina ammazzacattivi (1948).

While film production had been restricted to fascist ideological depictions, the institutions, sets, training schools, and the social ideals of Fascism actually served to influence the phenomenon of Neorealism. Since many neorealists had also worked at the Centro sperimentale di

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17 Shiel cites the following films as having been produced in this vein: Camerini’s Una romantica avventura (1940), Renato Castellani’s Un colpo di pistola (1941), Mario Soldati’s Malombra (1942), Ferdinando Maria Poggioli’s Sissignora (1942), and Alberto Lattuada’s Giacomo l’idealista (1943) (29).
cinematografia, they would not entirely reject that which had been done there, but they would, in the aftermath of a war, “redirect the regime’s interpretation of ‘realism’ towards the new cultural and social climate” (Shiel 47). They wanted to encourage the spectator to think beyond the limits of the previously imposed national identity in order to propel him towards personal self-examination. The concern of the neorealists was with the most rudimentary process of filmmaking as well as “the methodology and ideology of representation, and the ways in which the spectator was asked to observe and partake in the film viewing experience” (Kolker 18). With the great number of comedies and epics present in the cinema during this time, there was little, if any, connection between what was being offered for consumption and what the people were actually experiencing. In the early 1940s, making movies using a “revolutionary aesthetic,” which would “provide an antidote to bourgeois stasis by staking its commitment to the lives and landscapes of ordinary working-class and peasant Italians,” was a long-time coming (Shiel 36).18

In the early fifties, Zavattini wrote that neorealists wanted to “see and to analyze” the world around them. He continues that they had a “hunger for reality, for truth” - desires which, when transposed, were used to pay homage to the common Italian man who was doing the best he could to navigate through those difficult times (“A Thesis on Neorealism” 69).

As the general intellectual climate during these years was intent on truthfully and artfully portraying the story of Everyman, the interests of the directors and screenwriters previously described would also take shape in literary arts. Post-war cinema and literature alike preferred to produce works by the people, about the people, and for the people and distance itself from fascist themes and lavish styles.

18 Building on the work of Mario Alicata and Giuseppe De Santis, Shiel states that the best cinema retains a link with real people and places through a faithfulness to great literature, specifically, the classics of 19th century European Naturalism in the novel and on the stage – Gustave Flaubert, Anton Chekhov, Charles Dickens, Henrik Ibsen and, most importantly Giovanni Verga. From France, Alicata and De Santis admired Jean Renoir and Marcel Carné. However, as Shiel points out, De Santis’ call for new realism did not easily and quickly produce a neorealist cinema. Instead, his version of cinematic realism preferred a well-crafted narrative while neorealist films of the immediate post-war period were, mostly, non-literary in inspiration and steered away from meticulous scripting. Visconti’s Ossessione, Rossellini’s Roma città aperta, Paisà, Germania anno zero, De Sica’s I bambini ci guardano, Sciuscià, and Ladri di biciclette support the accepted opinion that Neorealism is primarily visual and employs a new type of realism that is “not only disposed to traditional narrative but even antithetical to it” (30).
1.4 Literary Neorealism

Thematic and narrative inspiration were not hard to come by in 1940s Italy. Issues such as the trauma of war and occupation, the realities of hunger, poverty, displacement, and unemployment became necessarily tell-able for the literary intelligentsia as well. With the downfall of Fascism, everyone in the country could once again speak freely, expressing his or her opinions without fear of censorship or repression. This basic desire for demonstrative liberation generated the genre known as *La letteratura d’impegno*, inspired by writers Elio Vittorini, Cesare Pavese, and Italo Calvino.\(^{19}\) Vittorini, re-dimensioned the factual realities of his times by infusing such realities with universal meanings, appropriate for all men of all eras, thereby creating works for Everyman. His heroes are most often soldiers or members of the working class, while his themes are usually based on such fundamental human problems as fear, poverty, and social injustice. In this vein, the well-known anti-fascist writer and director of the cultural journal *Politecnico*,\(^{20}\) aimed to create a great diversity of characters, setting and plots, which served to constantly expose the cultural and political trends of the time.

In Calvino’s 1964 preface to the new edition of *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (1946), the Italian novelist explains how it was possible to affect such plurality:

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\text{La rinata libertà di parlare fu per la gente al principio smania di raccontare: nei treni che riprendevano a funzionare, gremiti di persone e pacchi di farina e bidoni d’olio, ogni passeggero raccontava agli sconosciuti le vicissitudini che gli erano occorse, e così ogni avventore ai tavoli delle “mensa del popolo”, ogni donna nelle code dei negozi.... (8)}
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\(^{19}\) At the end of the fascist reign, Vittorini, Pavese, and Calvino took a firm stand against the moralistic and rhetorical tendencies which began to evolve in Italy’s war literature (which portrayed a reality that was too brutally objective to have any value in an artistic sense). No longer influenced by the censorship of Fascism, these writers felt both the need and the responsibility to portray what they had experienced during the war. They were anxious to narrate their adventures as well as to depict the vast changes the war had brought upon society.

\(^{20}\) Founded in Milan in 1945 by Vittorini, the *Politecnico* was a passionately idealistic voice in post-war Italy, a voice which strove to convince its readers that culture must play a constructive and active role in society.
This need to recount vivid descriptions of events that were mainly concerned with the difficulties the intellectual force faced when trying to impose its presence in society, produced a diverse body of works and developed stories about ordinary people in a language accessible to all. The struggles of daily life belonged to everyone and the art of the neorealist experience was, thus, born out of that common denominator. Calvino defines the unifying factor as

[l’]essere usciti da un’esperienza – guerra, guerra civile – che non aveva risparmiato nessuno, stabiliva un’immediatezza di comunicazione tra lo scrittore e il suo pubblico: si era faccia a faccia, alla pari, carichi di storie da raccontare, ognuno aveva avuto la sua, ognuno aveva vissuto vite irregolari drammatiche avventurose, ci si strappava la parola di bocca. (8)

It was this first-hand participation, tangible and emotional, that opened up and charged the lines of communication among people who could see pieces of themselves in anyone they met. Remarkably, out of the commoners’ everyday lives and out of the war came a widely diffused narrative practice, made up of a plurality of voices, which invented its own expressive forms out of the necessity to describe the immediacy of their needs.

The sudden flourishing of storytelling constitutes one of the major characteristics of Italian Neorealism in both film and literature. In film, literary fiction, and even non-fiction, Neorealism constitutes an essentially narrative art. In fact, each novel, film, or newspaper article attempted to contribute to the “rebirth of Italian cultural life” (Re 29). Everyone wanted to share in the stories because they had all been, at one point, directly affected by the war. The tales are often true, lived, and, therefore, told in the first-person narration. Having a foot firmly planted in

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21 Of course, attempts to document contemporary social issues in a narrative fashion, as described above, are not limited to Neorealism. That manner of art grew out of earlier literary styles, such as Naturalism and Italian realism (verismo), which first strove to illustrate the stark realities of the peasant and working class with a detached, ‘scientific’ mode of narration.
historical experience and reality, also meant giving this body of literature and cinema artistic value.22

1.5 The Limitless Definition of Cinematic Neorealism

Like all Italian people, directors and authors of the neorealist era needed to confront a wide range of ‘new’ problems and ‘new’ struggles. All were now being summoned to bring forth innovative styles that could enable them to narrate the story of the Everyman who had been affected by the war and who was facing the postwar struggle with an urgent need to experience a rebirth of his own. In his Preface, Calvino clarifies that “‘neorealismo’ non fu una scuola .... Fu un insieme di voci” (viii) which, in its cinematic and literary production, employed a variety of stylistic approaches, thematic choices, narrative registers, and generic forms that reflected different ideologies. Similarly, as Italians were struggling to find themselves after fascist oppression, their lives appeared just as scattered as the descriptions of the artistic movement. For Zavattini, it was precisely this side of life that needed to be captured on screen. What was particular about cinema was its ability to not only carry on a realist tradition but to produce a near perfect illusion of reality. For Zavattini, the duty and strength of Neorealism was to be found in its coraggio della semplicità, nella grande voglia di scoprire e anzi proprio rivelare il mondo, facendo piazza pulita di mille mitologie e disumane mistificazioni; cinema come mezzo che contiene in sé la carica per far esplodere, salutarmente, la realtà umana delle cose. (quoted in Pecori 42)

The identification of this new autonomous art form in Italy would make the camera the vehicle of choice for politicians, artists, writers and directors alike, in transmitting their take on the pressing problems of the time – the war, the Resistance and the Partisan struggle, unemployment, poverty, and social injustice.

22According to Wagstaff, the strongest expression of the pre-war Italian notion of the ‘realist’ is to be found in its “function to penetrate through the ‘external elements’ to the ‘spirit’ of the people, seen in terms of psychology and morality” (74). Defining whether or not a film is documentary or fiction is, to Wagstaff, a secondary concern. What the critic retains as most pertinent, and that which is most applicable to our study, is that the inter-war philosophy of idealism generally defined “‘realism’ in terms of moral and social values, and ‘art’ in terms of ‘realism’” (21).
Whether a film’s ultimate goal was to be propagandistic (as used by the fascist regime), informative, critical, or moralistic, it was undeniable that the cinema could, more than any other medium, affect more effectively and directly the cultural and social backdrop. For its employment of sight, sound, and emotion, it would draw the Italian people in and provide a new view of the world by either creating an unattainable reality through which the people could experience a brief and voluntary feeling of alienation or by depicting a version of reality so close to the truth that the people could better understand their quotidian lives. As John J. Michalczyk has explained, “the purpose of the neorealist in filmmaking was to witness the ills of society and then to state them before the public in order to raise their consciousness” (14).

It is said motivation that will be the focus of the films analyzed in the upcoming chapters. The director and works at the focal point of our discussion “give in to an inter-personal ethics of tolerance and understanding” rather than a political program (Shiel 47). The notion of an apolitical close reading of Neorealism is a view maintained by the artists themselves, as substantiated by Wagstaff, in *Italian Neorealist Cinema: An Aesthetic Approach*. The author sustains that

Rossellini, Fellini, De Sica, and Zavattini are neither political ideologues themselves nor are they conscious mouthpieces for the political ideologies of others. Most people would describe them (and they would describe themselves) as ‘humanists’ (62).

The directors’ morality derives from a hierarchy of values in which the highest value is awarded to the works that best realize the “ontological potential of the human being: the organic.” The ‘organic’ manifests itself throughout the neorealists’ *mise-en-scène*, but especially in their display of the ultimate symbol of the ‘ontological’ – the non-professional actor (“the particular”) who is depicted in relation to others and to his surroundings (“universals”) (62).

While Neorealism includes a variety of approaches by a number of artists, they [the directors] all provided a decisive new context in which they could (and wanted to) make a moral cinema that
engaged the viewer with reality in a time of crisis. Ultimately, their films provoke the viewer to think and to deny the obvious, as Robert Kolker states in *The Altering Eye*, allowing the artists to ‘reject convention,’ or to take what they need from it, as long as their works invoke deeper feelings in the spectator (6). In a similar vein, for André Bazin, a chief supporter of this particular period in Italian cinematic history, the term ‘Neorealism’ applied to films that were part of the “triumphant evolution of the language of cinema” (2: 26) because of this realism’s propensity towards a more inspirational and evocative cinema.

The search for an absolute definition of Neorealism will lead a reader along an endless path of classifications since, as all neorealists themselves maintained, there are no set of rules governing their work. What we do have, however, are encompassing descriptions of Neorealism, like the ones we have seen, that allow us to apply our selected film analyses to this period in cinematic history. According to Kolker, Neorealism refers to an “aesthetic movement” that created a group of films between 1945 and 1955 (17). Similarly, Shiel accepts Neorealism as “a historically and culturally specific manifestation of the general aesthetic quality known as ‘realism’ which is characterized by a disposition to the ontological truth of the physical, visible world” (1). Along the same lines, Brunetta states that the neorealist’s camera is used as a microscopic eye that meticulously shoots everything there is to be seen in a given shot - leaving little up to the imagination to decipher:

Il cinema italiano del dopoguerra mette in opera anzitutto una serie di condizioni di riconoscibilità da parte dei destinatari e afferma, come prima condizione, l’esigenza comune di riappropriarsi dei poteri dello sguardo e muoversi senza limitazioni alla scoperta del visibile. (2: 23)

Succinctly, the realism of Italian Neorealism can be said to have mainly manifested itself in a distinctive visual style that was typified by a preference for location filming, the use of

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23 Wagstaff summarizes the neorealist intent in other directors such as Visconti whose interests lay in “the transgression of social and moral norms and his mixing of issues of class antagonism and human fate,” and Giuseppe De Santis and Carlo Lizzani for whom the years directly following the war represented “a historic opportunity to radically transform Italy into a new socialist society” (47).
nonprofessional actors, a neutral *mise-en-scène*, a preference for natural light, a freely-moving documentary style of photography, a non-interventionist approach to film directing, and an avoidance of complex editing and other post-production processes that would have otherwise highlighted the fabricated nature of the film image. It should be noted that as a result of postwar setbacks there were also logistical reasons which prevented the use of studios and studio lighting, such as an overall lack of funds, studio space (Cinecittà Studios, in fact, were bombed during World War II air raids), and proper filmmaking equipment. In many ways, then, the depleted funds and inadequate studios forced the neorealists to bring the camera into the streets. A fact which, considering the directors’ intentions for their films, served them well. Moreover, since movies made and/or approved by the Fascist regime, like those known as the *telefoni bianchi*, were filmed in contrived and glamorous sets, shooting a neorealist film inside could run the risk of appearing staged, even inauthentic, and as being associated with a product endorsed by the very values from which neorealists were trying to differentiate themselves.

Like those of other countries, especially Germany, Italy’s film studios and most of its film equipment were out of commission. Filmmakers were forced to look for creative solutions to the problem of producing cinema in conditions of extreme solemnity and asceticism. At the same time, the realities of hunger, poverty, displacement and unemployment, with which so many Italians lived, were characteristic of the society of the time and served as material for filmmakers to infuse their cinema with moral urgency and social purpose. In 1959, Alberto Lattuada best summarized the directors’ impetus, especially after the Second World War, to create art out of necessity:

> It is true that our studios were partly destroyed or occupied by refugees, but it is equally true that the decision to shoot everything on location was above all dictated by the desire to express life in its most convincing manner and with the

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24 Further to this point, Shiel asserts that without “established sources of funding, the first neorealist films were low budget and [made] with minimum production funds secured in advance by filmmakers for whom location shooting helped to reduce costs while also encouraging socially-committed cinema” (11).

25 In Rome, for example, much equipment from the main studios at Cinecittà had been removed by Germans and Italian Fascists when they fled the advancing Allies in the late summer of 1943.
harshness of documentaries. The very spirit of walls corroded by time and full of 
the tired sign of history, took on an aesthetic consistency. The actors’ costumes 
were those of the man in the street .... It was a poor but strong cinema, with many 
things to say in a hurry and in a loud voice, without hypocrisy, in a brief vacation 
from censorship; and it was an unprejudiced cinema, personal and not industrial, a 
cinema full of real faith in the language of film, as a means of education and 
social progress. (quoted in Armes 67)

Making a film devoid of ‘hypocrisy’ meant bringing the cinema closer to “visual truth” (Shiel 2). 
Neorealist filmmakers were intent on portraying the lives of everyday Italians as honestly as 
possible, without the interruption of overt political ideologies or cinematic conventions getting in 
the way of their visual realism.

The same characteristics, described above, are also akin to Angela Dalle Vacche’s notion of 
Neorealism as a particularly visual form of cinema, in favour of increasing optics and sacrificing 
or not bolstering the verbal (words, dialogues, tone, etc.) elements in a film (5). Shiel expands on 
Dalle Vacche’s assessment and concludes that Italian postwar films further demonstrated the 
preference of the visual over the oral sense in their non-diegetic practice of “dubbing the 
soundtrack in post-production and in the de-prioritization of elements such as script, dialogue 
and literary sources which are central to other cinemas, especially Hollywood” (11). Initially, 
neorealist films were shot first and paired with sound later as this method had been obligatory 
under the fascists (it created a more antirealist effect in the way that the sound and image 
appeared disjointed). However, directors made up for any loss of realism due to dubbing by 
compensating for it with the camera’s more “distinctive mobility and expanded field of view 
which [even] lightweight silent film cameras afforded the cinematographer” (Shiel 12). With 
these non-realist elements accounted for, there existed the emergence and eventual insistence on 
the visualization of ordinary events and environments of Italian life. Taken one step further, 
neorealists chose to tell of those ordinary events by dissolving classical narrative structures 
altogether in order to better maintain their realistic focus and avoid creating contrived, desultory 
conclusions (12). The approach to screenwriting, therefore, favoured a realistic account of the 
tales which, furthermore, respected the language, gestures, and speak of the communities.
Visconti maintained that film must always give the impression of improvisation even if it was not actually improvised while Zavattini preferred to abandon narrative altogether. In this respect, neorealist filmmakers benefitted from their decision to cast non-professional actors. For Siegfried Kracauer, who championed Neorealism in *Theory of Film*, non-professionals brought a raw authenticity or “documentary touch” to the cinema while also asking the viewer to focus more on “social patterns” and less on fictitious representations (a veritable risk associated with casting a well-known star in a lead role) (99). In the same way that Neorealism reinvented the actor/star system, their philanthropic strides are also seen as a refusal to give into the ‘insincere and inhumane’ caricature of the ‘political stardom of Mussolini’ (Shiel 13). In this regard, the neorealist character becomes as important as any other technique associated with the movement.

For the directors of cinematic Neorealism who sought to observe the present state and point of view of the Everyman, there existed a need to, first and foremost, record the individual and collective movements of this new man who was a far cry from the one depicted or wanted by the fascists – the uncertain, unconfident man who then had to learn how to communicate on an interpersonal level all that he saw and felt. There were no classical heroes. Protagonists, like the people, were often nomadic sufferers. Without a clear idea of how to take control of their current situation, the anti-heroes wandered through life, engulfed only by the unknown, living “at the whims of chance or fate which is a testament to the fragility and contingency of life in the aftermath of war (Shiel 13).26

Thematically, images of alienation, poverty, and unemployment were part of the neorealist insistence to inspire the viewer to explore what constitutes his inner self, his current (and past) experiences, and, by extension, to re-evaluate Italian society. These subjects form a foundation for what is considered the primary concern of Neorealism: how to best reflect social reality while not sacrificing artistry which, to directors, was attained by looking honestly at humanity. The way in which the aforementioned is achieved would, of course, differ according to the artist who was portraying their version of that fundamental. For example, for Federico Fellini, Neorealism was a way of seeing reality without prejudice, without conventions coming between it and the

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26 In *Ladri di biciclette*, the reliance on psychic powers to help pick up the pieces of a broken man who has been robbed of his dignity and his job through the theft of a bike, after days of aimlessly searching through Rome, provides a most clear example.
director – facing it without preconceptions, looking at it in an honest way – whatever reality, not just social reality but all that there is within a man (qtd. in Bondanella, *Italian Cinema* 62). Rossellini remarked that realism was an artistic form of the truth, linking Neorealism most often to a moral position similar to Fellini’s rather than to any preconceived set of techniques or ideological positions (qtd. in Bondanella, *Italian Cinema* 62). De Sica stated that his work reflected “reality transposed into the realm of poetry” (*Miracle in Milan* 166). However, as Pavese notes in *American Literature; Essays and Opinion*, all writers and directors were united in their desire to “readjust language to the new reality of the world, in order to create a new language, down-to-earth and symbolic that would justify itself solely in terms of itself and not in terms of any traditional complacency.” This new vision, in turn, could give “meaning, a name, an order, to the new realities and to the new instincts of personal and social life” (both citations, 197-198).

Ruberto and Wilson would find Pavese’s words to be substantial proof that neorealist cinema is comprised of historical documents. In their opinion, Neorealism also provides Italian history with lessons whereby the camera acted as an open window into Italy during those years. However, what is most key is that Neorealism “is a discourse inviting interpretation; it is a moment and an event in an hypothesized history of the cinema as an institution and as a language” (279). The very name given to the movement in which *I bambini ci guardano*, *Sciuscià*, and *Ladri di biciclette*, films studied here, have been placed, Neorealism, draws the viewer’s and the critic’s attention to the films’ representation of a material and historical ‘reality,’ inviting an interpretation of that representation (what the films ‘say’ about that reality, their ‘discourse’) and an evaluation of it (the usefulness of the representation for anything we might want to ‘do’ about that reality, such as change it) (Wagstaff 3).

The inclusion of the elements described above make the fusion of art and reality within the viewer a possibility since the distance between emitter (or conduit) and recipient is almost non-existent.²⁷ This type of direct participation, “emotional, rich, and strongly evocative,” awakens

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²⁷ ‘Emitter’ and ‘recipient’ here are translated terms for *emittente* and *destinatario* which recall those of Marina Zancan throughout “Tra vero e bello, documento e arte” in *Cinema e letteratura del neorealismo*. 
the senses and incites communication between the projector [both literally and figuratively] and the recipient [in this case, the viewing public] and allows the viewer to become directly involved in what they see on screen (Wagstaff 399). In order to achieve this, the neorealist can only use those tools to which the viewer can relate – from real locations, to performers whom they may recognize as friends, to the language they would normally speak. Thus, all neorealists and, primarily, the one in our study, De Sica, create an art which was tied to the truth of life, not because they wanted to create criticizing documentaries (in a genre that is known as documento-denuncia), but because of this art’s capacity to project a story.

Common driving forces behind Neorealism, the depiction of the truth of Everyman and his relationship with the society that surrounded him, were utilized to cultivate the spectator’s emotional awareness of the social problem in as raw and real a manner as possible. Removing the encumbrances of stylistic and contextual preconceptions that could impede the spectator from facing that world as if without meditation (Kolker 9) meant that the new image was closer to the social realities of post-war Italy and, therefore, closer to the spectator. What is more, attaining a higher level of awareness and knowledge also meant bringing the spectator closer to the characters on screen. Indeed, for many critics, Neorealism was a kind of new moral poetry whose purpose was to promote a true objectivity – one that would force viewers to abandon the limitations of a strictly personal perspective and to embrace the reality of the ‘others’ “with all the ethical responsibility that such a vision entails” (Marcus 23).

In “Some Ideas on the Cinema,” Zavattini states that the neorealist director and the spectator are aware of reality, but must learn how to look at it. The task of this cinema, according to Zavattini still, becomes not “to make people moved or indignant at metaphorical situations, but to make them reflect (and if you like, to be moved and indignant too) on what they and others are doing, on the real thing, exactly as they are” (1). Realism, in Neorealism, is therefore depicted through the camera eye, where the world, and not necessarily, the story, is seen as the object of recreation – stories are only important in so far as they present an unconscious way to de-mask human defeat (Zavattini, “Some Ideas on the Cinema” 1). In this sense, then, everything becomes a storyline as neorealists are concerned with depicting what is occurring and not necessarily with what had already occurred (Zavattini, Neorealismo ecc 40). As a result, everything, from location
to lighting to gazes to clothing, is not casually represented either. Rather, life is most closely represented in the carefully chosen descriptions and it is precisely that type of attention to detail which qualified the relationship between the individual and society. On the one hand, using the real world as a backdrop (and no longer specific battles or political ideologies, if we recall the films of the Silent age and those of a pro-fascist nature) served to render a character more objective. On the other hand, this objectivity, paved the way for the subjective gaze to project the character’s state of being and, ultimately, be received by the spectator. The narrative, then, begins to imitate the character’s thoughts, rather than describing his actions.

In summation, during post-war Italian cinema, the world was not made up of the same, aesthetically pleasing facades that inundated the screen before it. What populated filmic images were artistic representations of human content, of the sense of stasis affecting Italians who, on the other hand, longed for change and progression (Shiel 9). To analogize, the luxurious white telephone of old is replaced with the commodious simple bicycle of new. What is most important to note, perhaps, is that neorealists were well aware that, despite their ‘hunger for reality,’ they were still *artistic inventors*, but nearly seventy years later we consider them *artistic innovators* above all else.

### 1.6 The Neo-Point of View

If there is no single definition that can sum up Neorealism, is it possible to have an ideal vehicle to transform what we see into what we feel? How can this cinema report the facts, remain objective, be spontaneous, and transmit the truth in an unbiased language? The very nature of Neorealism affects the outcome. According to Kolker, that which constitutes a revision in film history has everything to do with the place of the viewer in that time period (16). He states:

> Every change in the formal patterns of film narrative constructions, and every change in the content and subject matter treated and created by that narrative construction, has meant changes in what is asked of and what is done to him or her, changes in the relationship of the spectator to the film being observed. (16)

The important revisions he described, converge in the ambitious quest of Neorealism to redefine point of view and entrust it behind the child’s eyes. This signals the strongest movement away
from a fascist adherence to the medium as the neorealist director’s intent is to capture the viewer’s attention, to inspire him to decipher his own meaning, through his own perceptive ability, and to engage himself in such a way as to produce further interpretation of the images, with regards to plot and character analysis, and to ultimately assimilate the aforementioned within himself.\textsuperscript{28} The act of looking at the cinema does not constitute comprehension or the assimilation of knowledge. In order to understand, the spectator needed to be placed in the world of the subject who has been turned into a visual object conditioned, always, by the cultural, historical, and personal contexts which shape the viewer’s interpretations (Denizen 27). Whether in reaction to, or because of the impositions of the regime on the industry, the war allowed directors to rediscover the variety within the ordinary man: “di coglierne le irregolarità, le contraddizioni, le incertezze, in individui o gruppi di persone senza alcun punto di riferimento morale e ideologico” (Brunetta, \textit{Cent’anni} 125). As the screen becomes a projection of the viewer’s everyday lives, the processes of identification within the film are inverted since the subject of the narrative which, conventionally, positions viewers to accept certain codes as “realist” and others as “fantastic” and so on are no longer easily distinguishable. This allows for the “‘I’ and the ‘you’ of discourse to collapse in the figure of the spectator” (Doane 10) and to, therefore, take up “shifting positions” of identification beyond the simplistic notion that a spectator relates only to that which or whom, onscreen, most approximates his or her own identity (Mayne 27).

The main role of the camera, as Jean Epstein notes in “Le Regard du Verre” (1925), is to be an amoral and unbiased eye. The camera-eye can see for itself, and reflect for us, that which we have lost the capability to see for ourselves.\textsuperscript{29} During the post-war period, with the acceptance that a film was not just a product of a particular cinema, but rather a projection of society’s most fundamental needs, desires, and beliefs, the child’s eye becomes the perfect vehicle through

\textsuperscript{28} This cinema, as Kolker also maintains, was used as a “probe” and the viewer was a kind of “co-worker in the field of meaning” (10).

\textsuperscript{29} Exact citation: “C’est un oeil sans préjugés, sans morale, abstrait d’influences; et il voit dans le visage et le mouvement humains des traits que nous, chargés de sympathies et d’antipathies, d’habitudes et de réflexions, ne savons plus voir.” Jean Epstein, \textit{Écrits sur le cinéma, 1921-1953: Édition chronologique en deux volumes}, vol.1, Paris: Seghers, 1974-75. 136-137.
which the camera eye could capture new perceptions and feel a wider range of emotions since
the reality of their surroundings was, now, inescapable. Reflected on screen, through image and
sound, children become a measure of the viewer’s social realities. Thanks to the former, the
preoccupation with vision and with the camera eye as the center of knowledge in the film allows
the spectator to bear witness, placing him in a position of unique understanding.

Film is a vehicle through which the spectator can engage himself in interpretations (as film is a
cognitive visual medium) and digest different filmic realities from one scene to the other and
from one director to the other. The movies are not just about a subject, but about the “rendition of
that subject for particular reasons and to create a certain meaning” (Corrigan 22). Moreover,
Timothy Corrigan states that the rendition of a story for cinematic purposes is also “a way of
marrying reality and art so that it may play the biggest role in shaping the cinema viewing
public’s perception of what they are seeing and interpreting (22).30 In this way, the child becomes
the clearest mirror image - the strongest bridge that can join the spectator to the emitter (the
child) and the spectator to himself through, first, the identification of one’s past self and, second,
the interpretation of one’s present state.

In post-war Italian cinema, the alignment of the child’s eye with the camera eye is also a product
of the need, on the part of the filmmakers, to depict time and space from what was left in the
aftermath of the war and heed to the necessity of starting over. Films like I bambini ci guardano,
Sciuscià, Ladri di biciclette, Roma città aperta, and Germania anno zero traced the rebirth and
reconstruction of the current cinema, the spectator, and the city from the rubble upward, creating
a tabula rasa on which the spectator could neutralize his previous self in order to conceptualize
his present situation. When this occurs, that blank slate also allows for a greater reception of the
child as a more blameless victim. The viewer can feel more remorse for a character who cannot
care for himself, but who should be cared for by another (Lury 106). Knowing this, directors like
De Sica and Rossellini fervently unearthed the potential that lay beneath the child’s point of

30 Corrigan also states that the validity of the cinema as highly powerful medium can also be
found the fact that “the movies frequently elicit a strong emotional and intellectual reaction.
Analyzing our reactions to themes, characters, or images like these can be a way not only of
understanding a movie better, but of understanding better how we view the world and the
cultures we live in” (4).
view. As the resurgence of the cinema in Italy came on the heels of fascist control, the insistence on the child focalizer also offered answers to the “crisi dell’essere adulto diventato incapace di provare sensazioni e perciò alla ricerca di nuovi stimoli, e/o della difficoltà narrativa a cui sembra mancare quell’emotività sensoriale” (De Luca 24). Italy, in being liberated from Fascism in 1943 to 1944, experienced “a new internationalist excitement” as a result of the cultural atmosphere of the day (Shiel 7). Freedom from the fascists provided a new film culture on which filmmakers, critics, and audiences were eager to work and watch.

As has been previously explored, Neorealism arose out of the trauma of Fascism, war and occupation, in response to which it offered a means of national and personal self-examination. De Sica explained the original impetus for Neorealism as an “overwhelming desire to throw out of the window the old stories of the Italian cinema, to place the camera into the mainstream of real life, of everything that struck our horrified eyes” (qtd. in Liehm 59). In this respect, Wagstaff states that

where artefact did express ‘reality,’ the viewer would recognize himself or herself in the ‘truth’ of the artefact, and would value it more highly, with the result that films that were ‘realist’ would speak more truly to the public’s need to understand the reality of their own existence. (68)

Likewise, art was, by definition, associated with realism because “where there was not that association, the artefact was merely evasione” (68). Thus, the consistency of Neorealism necessarily lays in the characters used to create those emotions - that ideal emitter who could not, or would not have to, avoid sentimentality, yet be capable of recording the subject matter with a certain objectivity. The ideal emitter could not be a pure activist lest a resolution was plausible and a classic hero warranted (and it most certainly was not in Neorealism). What was needed was a character who could display the right degree of inaction, have a lack of opportunity for action, suffer from a certain amount of ‘motor helplessness’ or the awareness that action is necessary at all. That character was to be found in the child - the pedestal on which so many neorealists relied to turn up the emotionality of their films.
1.7 Performers and Characterization: Breathing Life into Neorealism

The art of neorealist cinema satisfies the artists’ intention to create works that would act as signs for what constituted the reality of Italian moral, political, and spiritual life (Wagstaff 70). Indeed, this definition lends itself well to a study focused on the use of characters and performances that best encapsulate the aforementioned directors’ decision to cast, as leads, people taken from the streets - non-professionals. Performance (or non-performance as neorealists might prefer) is capable of aligning the character-viewer’s point of view, producing the director’s careful construction of neutrality, describing the relationships between characters, and revealing the paths towards plot advancement (as opposed to plot revelation) because the character is privy to a vision that “records” (an important characteristic of Neorealism as outlined by Deleuze in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*) both the story and the image for the viewer.  

Tapping into a social consciousness acquired due to war, and post-war suffering, neorealist directors discover that reality is an inexhaustible source of inspiration for the type of cinema they wanted to create – finding that the subjects and characters of their works were none other than the people themselves. A new type of character was needed - one who was capable of “seeing and showing rather than acting, and either remaining dumb or undertaking some never-ending conversation, rather than replying or following a dialogue” (Deleuze 2: 20). Non-professional actors, who brought no preconceived or contrived acting skills with them to the set, would reach the level of authenticity and raw emotional reactions that were required of them in neorealist filming (Shiel 56). Wagstaff makes an important distinction in this regard: a performance is not considered to be more realistic because the performer is not a trained actor. What is important, however, is that the employment of this type of performer narrows the gap between the character (the icon) and the spectator (the referent), thus creating a form of proximity that suggests greater authenticity (31).  

If the proximity of fiction and reality are the target as a means to incite

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31 In *Neorealismo: fra tradizione e rivoluzione*, Guglielmo Moneti describes the process of representation as a state caught between “la dissoluzione delle consuete prospettive del pensiero e dello sguardo” and “il percepire una sensazione, o il provare un’emozione, e l’agire del personaggio” (11-12).

32 In other words, the use of actors taken from the streets is a movement towards “‘proximity’ and ‘indexicality,’ and a movement away from conventionality and artificiality” (Wagstaff 31).
reflection (not necessarily action) in the viewer and if, as Monetti describes it, Neorealism is the
depiction of the grey area between what is real and what is not, between subjectivity and
objectivity, who is the best conduit (emittente) of the filmic message for the recipient
(destinatario) and in what ways is this achieved? It is important to mention that, in seeking the
ideal emitter, neorealists did not do away with sentimentality altogether. Kolker notes that along
with the desire to achieve objective observation, Neorealism did not attempt to supplant feelings
of sympathy towards the characters (66). The spectator closely followed the protagonists and was
therefore deeply moved by the displays of social and economic despair that befell them. Real life
was weaving itself into the viewer’s own understanding of the real-to-life (or life-like) images he
was watching.

The problem of how to capture the excess of events unfolding on the streets in the postwar years
and guide the viewer as to where to look, is resolved with the use of a child focalizer (Lebeau
25). The image of the child on screen is a tool to think with and to allow the viewer to reflect on
the significance of the ability to see and to know the child and his world better. Moreover,
because children “reveal the structural coincidence between the fascination ... of the image and
the emergence of human mind” (69), they are the bridge that gaps fact and fiction long enough to
seize the viewer’s attention and infuse him with meditation.

Non-professional actors are to neorealist cinema that which children are to that period in
cinematic history as well. Children have always played a fundamental role in cinema as both the
subject of a film’s story as well as the subject of the viewer’s perception. The use of children in
cinema is so effective because it offers the director an opportunity to depict “motivi patetici, o
proporre esempi edificanti contro ogni tipo di sfondo possibile” (Brunetta, Cent’anni 43). It is
easy to understand the attraction, for children are the most visible and obvious sufferers in
damaged spaces as a result of their impaired ability to impart or produce action - what Deleuze
refers to as the “motor helplessness” of children (2: 3). What is more important, this inaction (or

33 In Moneti’s words, “Oggettivo e soggettivo, fisico e mentale, reale e immaginario si
scambiano e si sovrappongono, sia in De Sica e Zavattini, che esasperano la naturale trasparenza
del cinema per dar vita a una sfocatura degli eventi e dei personaggi, in una impalpabile
dimensione dell’informe....” (12).

34 Deleuze refers to this as the viewer’s “intuitive consciousness of the new image” (I: 212).
helplessness) allows children to concentrate less on doing and more on “seeing and hearing” (2:3) which opens them up to a higher consciousness or scope of vision. Other than offering a few rare glimpses of hope in Rossellini’s films, children do not generally occupy the screen as metaphors for reconstruction towards a better and brighter future since their horizon appears grim before they have even reached adulthood (Parigi 90. My translation). The children are, more importantly, the lens through which the viewer more immediately sees the effect of burdening the weight of war, poverty, and familial strife on their small shoulders.

As stated earlier, Neorealism rises during a period in cinematic history when directors, writers, and all those associated with the film industry, are reinventing themselves. Their interests are focused on starting anew and depicting the streets from the rubble upward, rediscovering the world as if they too were seeing it for the first time. New realism can only be measured through the eyes of those who also see the world anew, who have no prejudice and no prior experience on which to base their opinion. The children on screen must do the work for the public who is familiar with this world already for it is only then that everyone can “rise up out of the ashes” of the war (Re 11).

1.8 Italo Calvino’s Child Narrator

While it is not the scope of this dissertation to delve into all crafts associated with Neorealism, it is worthwhile to mention that the cinematic neorealist child had its quintessential literary counterpart in Italo Calvino’s child narrator, Pin. With Elio Vittorini at the literary movement’s helm, the desire of intellectuals to step down from their ivory tower, and take on a more civic duty (un impegno) of recounting stories, flourished. This resulted in a vast literary and cultural movement in which a divergence of backgrounds, experiences, and personalities (of all those writing) could interweave thanks to shared moral and socio-political impetuses. Letteratura d’impegno, as described earlier in this dissertation, was seen throughout the arts in Italy - from literature to cinema to visual arts, but its roots remained the same: uprising from the necessity to

35 Exact citation: “Nonostante alcuni rari bagliori di speranza accesi dalle immagini infantili, i bambini di questi film non incarnano tanto il sogno di ricostruzione del dopoguerra, la spinta verso un mondo nuovo e migliore, quanto piuttosto il peso luttuoso della storia, che spesso vieta loro qualsiasi proiezione nel futuro. Sono bambini attraversati dalle ombre, segnati da un destino tragico.”
form a new relationship between intellect and mass populace in order to express Everyman’s story freely, without the fear of censorship. For Vittorini, this also meant redefining the writer’s new roles. As the writer himself puts it, an author is considered ‘revolutionary’ when he is able to “porre attraverso la sua opera esigenze rivoluzionarie diverse da quelle che la politica pone; esigenze interne, segrete, recondite dell’uomo ch’egli soltanto sa scorgere nell’uomo” (“Lettera di Vittorini a Togliatti,” Il Politecnico, 1947).

In his 1964 preface to Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno, Calvino takes up a similar discussion, describing that at the heart of Neorealism was a search for the best ways to express what the authors - the people - had seen and what they had experienced: “tutto il problema ci sembrava fosse di poetica, come trasformare in opera letteraria quel mondo che era per noi il mondo” (vii, 9). Calvino’s decision to write narrative fiction in a period of intense cultural activity in Italy, in the years immediately following World War II, is born from his desire to depict time, history and conflicts, as having been created by man (Re 72). To solve the problem of expressing the unprecedented amount of real stories which came about during these post-war years, Calvino’s novels deal with the brutal realities of war filtered through characters and settings which have been deformed by the author’s fanciful imagination.

Calvino is able to engage the reader in his understanding of history as human action by constructing the narrative around a series of adventures which develop like a fairy-tale and quest-romance. The result is a story which does not centre on the psychological make up of his characters, but on a seemingly sporadic arrangement of details, as they reveal themselves simultaneously to the novel’s narrator. With Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno, picking up what Vittorini had first postulated, the author writes his response to the letteratura d’impegno campaign. He does this by attempting to find the proper narrative strategy capable of reconstructing and revealing the fragmentary, chaotic reality of the Resistance while not wanting to “impos[e] on the reality of the Resistance a fictitious and arbitrarily totalizing narrative order” (Re 154).

To achieve this, Calvino felt he needed to widen the space between himself and the main narrator to avoid injecting his partial perceptions of the Partisan struggle throughout the story. In assigning the role of the narrator to Pin, an eleven year old boy, Calvino avoids the historical and
ideological framework that would otherwise influence the point of view of an adult narrator. Instead, it allows the author to opt for the perspective of a “fictional Everyman, a character whose constitutive naïveté makes him almost the lowest common denominator among all possible perspectives on the Resistance” (178). Calvino defends his choice of Pin in the 1964 preface, stating:

Tutto doveva essere visto dagli occhi d’un bambino, in un ambiente di monelli e vagabondi. Inventai una storia che restasse in margine alla guerra partigiana, ai suoi eroismi e sacrifici, ma nello stesso tempo ne rendesse il colore, l’aspro sapore, il ritmo.... (Preface, xii: 13)

This particular narrative strategy has a distancing effect between the reader and the author as the epic reality of the Resistance is objectified by being channeled through the eyes of a character who, unlike the reader, does not fully comprehend the movement. Pin’s perspective places Calvino’s reader in the position of looking at the Resistance as if for the first time, avoiding moralization as adult behaviours are now filtered through the use of the child (Re 189). Pin conveys to the reader certain elementary features of the Resistance as though they were adjoining human experiences: the sense of adventure, the strangeness and the fear, the excitement of seeing incredible things happen or of having to deal with the unknown and the undergoing of a series of trials in a quest for both survival and understanding.

In cinema, the choice to enlist the help of the child focalizer to carry forth the narrative and allow the actions to speak for themselves (Re 178) was also primarily De Sica’s (a notion that is in keeping with Zavattini’s insistence that Neorealism was to focus on the present - l’accadendo). In this way, Calvino and the director shared an interest in creating, within the narrative, a sense of proximity, on the part of the viewer, to the child’s perceptions of reality. Linguistically, Calvino’s narrative achieves simplicity through Pin’s recounting of events as only a child would - through a choppy narration made up of childhood stories told in the present tense. Throughout Il sentiero, the progress of the reader’s knowledge coincides with the itinerary of Pin’s quest for the true friend whom he could take down the path where spiders make their nests. This form allows Calvino to focus on the adventures Pin tells (and not, for example, on an analytical description of
political uprisings) and suspend the reader’s actual knowledge of the Resistance so that Pin and, in turn, the reader do not anticipate the events to come.

The narrative as a reflection of the child’s existence, which unfolds simultaneously with the viewers’, recaptures the authenticity and proximity that all neorealists, whether through pen or camera, sought. In neorealist cinema, the journey that the viewer is taken along is also one of a discovery of events as they unfold both to the narrator and for the narrative, as it was for Calvino’s reader. Like Pin, Bruno’s role, in De Sica’s *Ladri di biciclette*, is to advance the plot, but not reveal it, and to take the viewer, along with him and his father, on a trip (to lead a *ballad*, a combination of the words *ballade* (ballad) and *balade* (voyage) as used by Deleuze). As Bruno is not endowed with the ability to know what is about to happen, only that which is happening in the present, he and the viewer engage in an uncertain wandering (also referred to as *flânerie*). What becomes important on this journey is not so much what *will* happen, but what can be seen in what *is* happening. In this way, Pin and Bruno set out to be central participants in the adventures before them - the role that ultimately likens them to one another. In the end, it becomes the responsibility of both young protagonists to know the right path to take well enough so that they can show it to others.

1.9 Gilles Deleuze and the Child as the Ideal Representative for Neorealism

The concern of Neorealism was borne of the necessity to face, head-on, the post-war struggle in Italy and take little away from the manner in which the issues were contemporarily lived and felt by those who watched the films. Neorealism was a cinema that invited, and invites, an emotional response and the intellectual participation and commitment of its audience through what Deleuze, in *Cinema 2*, calls a break down of the action-image and a stronger insistence on purely optical images. That emphasis serves to produce greater viewer identification with the characters.

36 According to Wagstaff, the trip/*ballad* also causes the narrative in neorealist films to be centered on the representation of time and space as it is perceived and experienced both in real life and in the viewing experience (28). This is an approach which is also in keeping with Zavattini’s defense of the avoidance of neorealist films to tell contrived stories with conventional endings. Instead, the films should end only when all experiences have been exhausted (Zavattini, “Some Ideas on the Cinema” 217).
Deleuze credits Neorealism for causing an inversion in spectator identification by making the character a kind of viewer in the films of that era (2: 3). For Deleuze, the neorealist character shifts, runs, and becomes animated in vain, the situation he is in outstrips his motor capacities on all sides, and makes him see and hear what is no longer subject to the rules of a response or an action ... he records rather than reacts. (2: 3)

Similarly, there is no promise for change or guarantee for future action, on the part of the viewer, since, as Kolker maintains, Neorealism could only offer ways to see the world, but not necessarily change it (Preface xvii). This view was also established by Calvino, whose literary solution to representing the post-war struggle was transforming it into, if nothing else, a reflection by the reader (and not a presentation of a politically biased narrative), in order to give birth to a range of characters who will unveil a whole world of new fantasies, of new contacts with life, death, love, the city, nature; a range of characters that will be positive but neither rigid nor rhetorical” (“Ingegneri” 400).

In cinema, this was met by an equally strong desire, on the part of the directors and screenwriters, to observe the postwar world, freed from censorship, through an unembellished narrative (Kolker 12) and through characters which could just as easily have been sitting amongst the crowd of people watching the film. Neorealists further believed that if they allowed the camera to gaze into the world, the narrative would form itself through objective images which could be, however, countered by sentimentality. The entire mise-en-scène, then, would play an integral role in the assembly of the union between objectivity and emotion and indeed the visual elements of Neorealism become immediately recognizable in any of its representative films.37

The harsh grayness of the cinematography, the placement of the characters within their desolate towns, and the decision to cast performers with no formal acting training are all visual codes that

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37 According to Deleuze, the distinction between subjective and objective tends to lose importance since the optical situation or visual description, synonymous with Neorealism, replaces the motor action (2: 7).
immediately signal a particular attitude and approach to the subject without adding anything to the existing reality. For example, sophisticated cinematic techniques, such as cutting, are used only if they “reposition[ed] the gaze, center[ing] it on the major event in the sequence or the major participants in the dialogue” (Kolker 48). The lives of the characters were to reveal themselves through only the act of watching. Wagstaff summarizes Rossellini’s point of view as a construction, for the viewer, of the ways in which one or more characters knows the reality of another, and De Sica’s as an assembly of the mise-en-scène of his shots and sequences to force the viewer to a “narrative ‘reading’ of the implications of the sense data supplied” (70).

However, the strongest visual sign is that which can satisfy Deleuze’s ideal opsigns (optical images) and sonsigns (sound images), but which is also capable of moving experience beyond passive witnessing. The child is the symbol for this oscillation between activity and passivity as he embodies Neorealism. The inclusion of neorealist children was far from unintentional and they were not portrayed for their own sake, but “as an opportunity to explore their existence and dynamic nature, ... as bystanders or voyeurs of the great events of life” (Piazza 85). What is essential to cinematic Neorealism is that the child gained an ability to see and understand what he had lost:

he sees so that the viewer’s problem becomes ‘What is there to see in the image?’ (and not now ‘What are we going to see in the next image?’). The situation no longer extends into action through intermediary of affections. It is cut off from all its extensions, it is now important only for itself, having absorbed all its affective intensities, all its active extensions. (Deleuze 2: 272)

The depicted youth a. puts the viewer into contact with thought and conducts a more spontaneous narrative flow (a neorealist organization of the narrative is guided predominantly by chance rather than by a motivating action). What was once active searching for resolutions, on the protagonist’s behalf when he faced particular predicaments, becomes strolling or wandering and observing, contributing to Deleuze’s notion of Neorealism as film balade. b. The depiction of youth serves to weaken the adult counterpart until the man-child roles are reversed. At that point, the importance of agency (which can also be revealed in the child’s less frequent and weighted
use of language) is second to the child’s ability to offer a pedagogical gaze for his male counterpart who is markedly less mature than the former.

a. The recruitment of the child performer was of great benefit (even more than the choice of simply any non-professional actor would have been) to Neorealism and to the scope of each director’s concerns for his role could better produce authenticity and spontaneity and appeal to the collective. After all, the viewer was also once himself a child who had lived through the same war. By having children play an important role within the film, the cinematic medium significantly comes to affect the audience in a deeper, more emotional and direct manner. To a certain extent, the child perceives and uncovers the imperfections of the world around him because he still can as his perception is not fully blinded by what Robert Pattison calls “the light of common day” (118). That is to say, despite what the child has been exposed to (war, poverty), there is hope that he is innately genuine enough to sift through the ills of society. What becomes key to underline is what Ruth Goldstein and Edith Zornow call the spectator’s ability to observe “micro behaviour” or small clues to character in these children which, in turn, allows us to learn more about ourselves after looking at them (vi).  

Subsumed into the function of neorealist children is a sense that they will be the ones to inspire the viewer to question himself after he has embarked on a journey of rediscovery with the child.

The importance of children does not rest solely in what is done to them in these films, but the ways in which they see, on their own, what is happening around them and, by extension, to them. The neorealist camera as the window through which the child is observing his world, and ours, coincides with Deleuze’s consideration of Neorealism as producing new images of realism (what

38 In the words of Ingrid Bergman during the 1977 introduction to her PBS series “Childhood,” she stated that children are a reminder of “what it was like to be young, but perhaps they also open our eyes again to what our own children were like at all stages of their lives—one minute close to us, the next impossible to understand. And perhaps they make us think again about how we handle children—and how they handle us” (qtd. in Goldstein and Zornow 11).

39 As Joseph Featherstone further notes, “Images of childhood fashioned by artists and writers are important sources because they sometimes influence and reflect popular thought and because they often constitute profound imaginative explorations of unacknowledged cultural dilemmas and tensions” (357).
Bazin calls image-fact\textsuperscript{40} whereby this new cinema is better defined by the optical situation. The new elements, as Deleuze describes them, prevent perception being necessarily extended into action (the aim of traditional realism). What counts are the new opsigns (optical signs) and sonsigns (sonar signs) that put the viewer into contact with thought precisely because there is no call to further action. Through the purely optical images, the viewer is prone to perception by taking a greater or lesser part in identifying with the characters (and their reaction to situations) (2: 3).

Realism lies in the refusal to add more to the image than is actually there - to allow the facts and the character’s reactions and surroundings to speak for themselves (Kolker 38). In fact, children “exercise the powers of observation that make them valuable witnesses” (Rosenblatt 20) because they will not misconstrue what they see, they will simply report it. In \textit{Children of War}, child psychologist Roger Rosenblatt offers the following example: a child at the window, for hours upon end, has looked at nothing but a hill, or tree, or streetlamp. Somewhere in his memory he knows every detail about the objects in his line of sight. Yet in response to the question “What do you see?” he says frankly, “A hill” (20). Likewise, the neorealist children are used to create a world, casually, with as little embellishment as possible, and if they are considered ‘passive’ it is only because “passivity causes the least disturbance of equilibrium between stimulus and response” (Deleuze 2: 3). For example, in \textit{Roma città aperta}, Rossellini channels the film’s events through the observation of the children who appear most heroic as they witness the execution of Don Pietro first hand. De Sica too need not exalt his young character Bruno. The viewer comes to read the story of \textit{Ladri di biciclette} in Bruno’s observation of the people around him. Through his looks of disbelief mingled with fear and sadness, his gaze alone has the ability

\textsuperscript{40} Bazin explains that the image-fact is a “fragment of concrete reality in itself multiple and full of ambiguity, whose meaning emerges only after the fact, thanks to other imposed facts between which the mind establishes certain relationships. Unquestionably, the director chose these “facts” carefully while at the same time respecting their factual integrity.... But the nature of the “image facts” is not only to maintain with the other image facts the relationships invented by the mind. These are in a sense the centrifugal properties of the images—those which make the narrative possible. Each image being on its own just a fragment of reality existing before any meanings, the entire surface of the scene should manifest an equally concrete density” (2: 37).
to teach Antonio valuable lessons as well as prompt others to show his father much needed compassion.

Whereas the movement-image is characterized by the importance given to the action of characters and the situation that is produced as a result, Neorealism, overall, “is a cinema of the seer and no longer one of the agent” (2: 2). The neorealist protagonist is no longer primarily a protagonist who will affect change in the historical situation, but rather a protagonist of witness - a lens through which the spectator can “come and see” and appreciate the optics of Neorealism. “The situation,” Deleuze continues,

is not extended directly into action: it is no longer sensory-motor, as in realism, but primarily optical and of sound, invested by the senses, before action takes shape in it…. It is as if the action floats in the situation, rather than bringing it to a conclusion or strengthening it. (2: 4)

What enables the children to take up such an important space in neorealist cinema if they are not the only characters present? Their vision serves as the ultimate witnessing of the tragedies that surround them and their presence becomes more profound than the older protagonist’s since they can manoeuvre between action and inaction with more facility than the weak adult who can no longer maintain his authority. Prico in I bambini ci guardano, Giuseppe and Pasquale in Sciuscià, and Bruno in Ladri di biciclette are at the centre of such an argument for they embody the ideal neorealist character-seer who has the capability of watching, learning, and teaching, as the situation requires of them.41

In this transition from the action-image to the pure optical-sound situation, Deleuze suggests that the child appears as a central figure (2: 3). The film theorist cites Rossellini and De Sica as having put into question the traditional action-image since in their films there is “no longer a vector or line of the universe which extends and links events .... Insignificant events ... have a vital importance for the protagonists” (I: 212). The action-image inspires a “cinema of behaviour” whereby ‘behaviour’ is an action in and of itself that arranges and determines the

41 Fittingly, De Sica’s first film to place a child at its centre is titled I bambini ci guardano where the act of ‘looking’ will be the primary focus.
sensory-motor schema (situation-action, action-reaction, excitation-response) connected through rational intervals (Rodowick 75). A passage from the action-image of old to the purely optical-sound image becomes necessary as neorealists are faced with a disjointed, but free of fascist control society in which they needed to solve the problem of representation. In order to grasp the new life, “a new type of tale (récit) was needed to capture [the] elliptical and unorganized, as if the cinema had to begin again from zero, questioning afresh all the accepted facts of the American tradition” (Deleuze 1: 211). Children are an exemplary sign of Deleuze’s transformation from the action-image to the pure optical-sound image because they represent

A new character for a new cinema. It is because what happens to them does not belong to them and only half concerns them, because they know how to extract from the event the part that cannot be reduced to what happens: that part of inexhaustible possibility that constitutes the unbearable, the intolerable, the visionary’s part. (2: 19-20)

Because of their limited ability to incite action, sensory-motor images give way to pure optical and sound images to which characters, who have now become seers, cannot or will not react. Their only function becomes that of looking at the situation until that condition (viewing) is all the action that is needed in a scene (Deleuze 2: 128, 272). In terms of camera technique, since movement “can tend to zero,” the shot itself can remain stationary and, thus, the reintroduction of the fixed shot becomes useful (Deleuze 2: 128). Since there is no longer a need for movement, we are focused on watching a character who does not always know how to respond, against the backdrop of desolate streets and piazzas, and who ceases “to act so that he strolls, walks, comes and goes, vaguely indifferent to what happens to him, undecided as to what must be done” (Deleuze 2: 272). But how, then, does the child’s gaze align with that of the viewer’s? By suspending our intellect of what is real, our focus, like that of the child’s is on apprehending what we see. The distinction between subjective and objective, Deleuze maintains, loses its importance so much so that we too no longer know what is imaginary or real, physical or mental,  

42 These types of images - opsigns and sonsigns - appear after the war for external reasons: the calling into question of action, the necessity of seeing and hearing, the proliferation of empty, disconnected, abandoned spaces, but also through the internal push of a cinema being reborn, recreating its conditions, Neorealism, new wave, new American cinema (Deleuze 2: 272).
in the situation (what Deleuze calls a run in with “indeterminability [or] indiscernability” (2: 7).43

b. Another perspective on the argument sees the use of the child as akin to the overturning of the heroic male which causes a crisis of effective agency. This is best conveyed by the child protagonist when he oscillates between a position of activity and passivity (Fisher 29-30). According to Deleuze, this vacillation would constitute a metaphor for the movement from the action-image to the pure optical situation which, in turn, increases the viewer’s identification with the child. That which emerges from the ruins of the action-image, the “pure optical-sound situation,” is the main male protagonist’s inability to synthesize perception into action. The protagonist’s gaze no longer leads to understanding, action, and mastery through a traditional narrative flow (Fisher 31). Instead, the narrative, when led by the child, seems to develop by chance as opposed to through a cause-and-effect narrative revelation. The result is, as Fisher states, a “passive searching, sometimes confused observation of the character’s surroundings” (31). Such a development undermines the core of the action-image and subverts the male’s privileged position of specularity: the male protagonists become spectacles while children now watch and synthesize, and, sometimes, act (31). Moreover, the child constitutes a new domain of agency which causes us to reflect, to be caught up in a realm of “imaginative processes” (Miller 213). Subsequently, the child achieves this by compensating for the loss of active agency and by replacing subjective and objective dimensions of the experience with a more intense sensory evaluation of the story (Miller 213).

When the child looks at the situation, the spectator is often left uncertain as to what the youth understands and, subsequently, has “fewer expectations as to the child’s ability to act on its spatial or cinematic situation” (Fisher 32). This looking provides the viewer with greater tools with which to learn more about themselves (Goldstein and Zornow vi). The child becomes an indispensable means for the film to depict a lack of agency while still providing a space through

43 In this circumstance, Tyrus Miller, in “The Burning Babe,” states that “we do not have to know and we cannot know” how to discern between reality and fiction (211).
which the spectator is able to see and feel alongside the young character. While Deleuze acknowledges that the pure optical and sound images can never be totally void of the action-image, Fisher further believes that their co-existence is revealed in the young character who oscillates between active agency and passive observation whereby, as a result of a child’s ability to adapt and persevere even in unfamiliar territories, he can be inscrutably and passively observant, manifesting the resigning behaviour suggestive of the meek state of the male. At other times, however, the child acts in a manner markedly more effective than that of the male protagonist, such that its activity elucidates male lack and even threatens the central male figure. (33)

In both cases, the presence of the child highlights the limits of the male and the horizons of his [the child’s] effective agency. In Neorealism, as the adult male characters struggle with heroism, their internal struggles (or their inability to know how to confront their internal struggles) are revealed. This occurs only when the former are confronted with the male child whose presence is both “parallel (in its passivity) to the masculine protagonist as well as mocking (in its activity) that figure” (Fisher 34). When the child is active, his gaze becomes a moral compass for the viewer and for the other characters in the scene. Furthermore, he displays, to the adults around him and to the viewers, that he is an involuntary participant in adult hostilities.

The ability of one character to exert dominance over another can be tangibly traced by measuring the “degree of conversational expression exerted by speakers” (Piazza 88). In neorealist films which employ children as the ultimate witness, the use of words to assert oneself or question one’s surroundings and the responses chosen when faced with a particularly confusing or troubling situation have been primarily replaced with the youthful gaze. The result is another sign of the oscillation between the action-image and the pure optical and sound image that can be seen in the child’s rejoinders - be they verbal or visual - in the presence of those speakers who would have otherwise maintained “interactional dominance” (Piazza 88) or exerted power in a

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44 To Fisher, the lack of agency the child exudes is an even greater metaphor for “wider wartime and postwar social crisis” (33).

45 After all, according to Deleuze, the movement-image has not entirely disappeared, it is now only an initial dimension to the image which, in reality, never stops modifying itself (2: 22).
given scene. What remains most poignant in the scene is the director’s pointed request for the child to look away, to avert his face and eyes from the adults around him. Perhaps even more is revealed to us when the child’s eyes have been turned away from the other character(s) in the scene because in that moment the adults reveal an “impoverishment of vision” by contrast (Lebeau 59). So weighted is this ‘impoverishment’ that, as we have previously concluded, the child’s strongest potential for consciousness comes to him through what he sees. Without a returned gazed, there is no face in which the child can “see and find, or form, himself as an animate, and continuous being” (Lebeau 59) and no past self in which the male protagonist can recapture his man-child in order to create a more secure path towards the future. Indeed, in Neorealism, there is no comfort for the child thereafter either and the inconclusive endings, with which the cinematic movement is synonymous, further underline the uncertain future the child has come to symbolize.

The warmth and sentimentality with which the strong moral nature of De Sica’s films are shot are the primary focus of this study. De Sica, in particular, provides optimal clues as to how neorealists’ intentions are achieved through their notion of realism as being “a product of narrative,” characterization, and superior performances (Wagstaff 161). In this way, the function of the child-narrator becomes undeniably more weighted in De Sica’s neorealist cinema than in that of his predecessors. Infused with a less innocent view of their surroundings, his children serve as both seer and moral pendulum. They suffer from the inability to overpower anything while bearing the responsibility of being the saviours to those around them once they have made significant personal discoveries.

46 Piazza uses the term ‘interactional dominance’ to refer to those adults who have formed a greater ability to assert, react, and respond (88).

47 Christian Metz defines the act of two characters in fictional films looking at each other or looking away as having the following effect: “It can happen that a character looks at another who is... out-of-frame, or else is looked at by him.... [E]verything out-of-frame brings us closer to the spectator, since it is the peculiarity of the latter to be out-of-frame” (The Imaginary Signifier 55). According to Lebeau, the look or look-away fulfills other functions as well: it displays man’s retreat into his private contemplation of the spectacle of nature and to the abandonment of a man-child on the edge of the frame and the need for a look can be reflected back onto the spectator in so far as he is caught up into the pain, and perplexity, of this type of shot (67).
Small children have many more perceptions than they have terms to translate them; their vision is at any moment much richer; their apprehension even constantly stronger, than their prompt, their at all producible, vocabulary. (James, What Maisie Knew 6)

Chapter 2

Vittorio De Sica: Actor and Director

2.1 Before and Behind the Camera: De Sica’s Transition into Neorealism

Vittorio De Sica’s relationship with the cinema has long been characterized as an intense love affair with film and one which the director himself states was based on the importance of creating reality filtered through poetry (Samuels 144). Poetry, to De Sica, meant the desire to see man in as real a facet as possible even if what was produced from the image were feelings of immense sadness surrounding the post-war struggling individual. Poetry was also the tie that bound him and Zavattini for as long as it did (the two worked on numerous films between 1937 and 1973) and it was the river that ran through their repertoire. As Luigi Chiarini too attests:

L’elemento “poesia” è dunque essenziale nel realismo di De Sica.... I film di De Sica e Zavattini sono commoventi: in senso buono, in quanto vogliono toccare più il cuore dello spettatore che la sua intelligenza, perché essi credono nella bontà e pensano che solo in questa ci sia la possibilità di salvazione.... (quoted in Pecori 68)

De Sica began his career as a theatre actor in the early 1920s, until starting his own company in 1933, ever growing in popularity from his days as a screen actor to the films he directed that made him one of Neorealism’s most noted contributors. As a charming performer in a number of

48 In the Encountering Directors interview with De Sica, Charles Samuels offers a concrete example of the director’s definition of poetry. The exemplary scene can be found in one of the few playful moments in Ladri di biciclette when Antonio Ricci, the father, takes his son to the trattoria in order to cheer the boy up. Both characters are eventually overcome with the realization that the bike has not yet been recovered (Antonio’s worry) and that their economic problems have also not be resolved (Bruno’s preoccupation). The otherwise light restaurant experience diverts the father-son duo back into acknowledging the burdensome cloud of destitution that engulfs them (144).
prewar films, De Sica embodied the escapist trends that inundated the cinema of that era by most often playing the role of an endearing swindler. When he turned in his lines for more power over the camera, De Sica’s early work in filmmaking was influenced by the very conventions which he sought to reverse at the height of his neorealist career, namely in the telefoni bianchi pictures of the 1930s in which he had acted for other directors (like Mario Camerini) and for the penchants of contemporary viewers. His directorial credits leading up to his first neorealist work - *Rose scarlatte* (with director and producer Giuseppe Amato, 1940), *Maddalena zero in condotta* (1940), *Teresa Venerdi* (1941), and *Un Garibaldino al convento* (1942), were studio-made comedies, with contrived, repetitive plots. Moreover, in order to be considered ‘good’ by the public, these films often relied on narrative conventions, such as climactic events and cathartic happy endings. While this period in De Sica’s career gave him a forum as well as the experience needed to hone his technical skills, his films seemed to sometimes lack the reflection and introspection induced in both the characters and the viewers taking part in the neorealist works to follow.

How, then, could a man who was so implanted in the mind’s of the spectators as a gregarious actor and director make the leap into a cinema, Neorealism, which did not favour pomp, but cherished simplicity? For those who lend us their criticism of the man, one thing remained constant - his ability to garner a reaction from his audience, feelings of sentimentality which endeared the public to him or which, at times, caused his films to be judged as overtly emotional. In fact, ‘sentimentality’ becomes the word most frequently associated with De Sica as is evidenced by the following reviews. In *Vittorio De Sica*, 1980, Franco Pecori states,

[l]a simpatia, ecco la parola fondante del discorso di De Sica. Diviene racconto umoristico e dramma sentimentale, entra nella tecnica del corpo (il sorriso, la camminata dell’attore) e nella sintassi della cinepresa (un certo modo di trascurare la cultura cinematografica). (9)
In his 1941 review of *Maddalena zero in condotta*, Giuseppe Isani, the then head critic of *Cinema*, confirmed De Sica’s talents:

La misuratezza, ... un leggero tono di sentimentalismo ... pulito e composto sono le doti di Vittorio De Sica attore. Le stesse sono quelle di Vittorio De Sica regista ... il secondo film che il nostro attore dirige, rappresenta senza dubbio un gran passo avanti sul precedente.... De Sica è tanto più in questo lavoro come in nessun altro del passato; e non intendiamo parlare di quello diretto da lui, ma anche di quelli in cui entra come attore.... [C’]è qualcosa di diverso in quest’aria, c’è qualcosa di nuovo [:] Un indugiare, un sostare in certi motivi.... (quoted in Pellizzari 156-157)

And María Mercader continued in the same vein in her evaluation of her long-time companion:

C’era nella sua regia molto mestiere, nel senso più alto della parola, molta abilità nel toccare i sentimenti del pubblico e nel provocare in esso reazioni di consenso e di simpatia.... M’incantava, nei suoi primi film, la sua capacità di rendere leggera e accettabile una storia troppo sentimentale o troppo ingénue, il tocco in cui trasformava in divertimento anche la banalità. (53)

With every passing film De Sica directed, he gained greater acclaim and notoriety. The director aspired to the highest cinematic standards, asking the audience to respond to his unrelenting visual and moral aesthetics because, according to him, “[i]mages are the only important things” (Samuels 148). De Sica’s signature trait as a filmmaker was his ability to direct scenes with as little obvious intervention as possible so as to allow the stories to speak for themselves, through the voices and faces of the weak and marginal characters (a far cry from the roles he himself played). It should be noted, however, that De Sica never masked the fact that his was still a filmed version reality, “a product of cinematic illusion” (Bondanella, *Italian Cinema* 220). He made his films with a realistic texture, but they were not created by improvisation. While there were always a number of realistic elements in all of his films (on-location shooting, the depiction of social themes, etc.), the stories came about through meticulous planning. Non professional actors were chosen for their particular appearance, mannerism, or gait and the plots of his films
were carefully and purposefully written to move the sympathies of the audience to reflect upon their current state.

The inclusion of the aforementioned neorealist effects as well as the great attention to detail in the films’ screenplays were also due in large part to the work of De Sica’s long-time friend and collaborator, Zavattini. The two first met while working on *Darò un milione* and, although the encounter was brief, it sparked an immediate interest, on De Sica’s part, to work with the screenwriter. De Sica fondly remembers and recounts this meeting in the interview with Samuels: “A short time before that, I had met Zavattini in Milan and had thought, ‘Here is a writer I would like to work with.’ I admired his style” (144). Their first film together, *I bambini ci guardano*, represented a clear symbol of change from De Sica’s older films and those made postwar. The stark contrast between his comedies and *I bambini ci guardano* was evident in the heavy and gray space which surrounded the characters. The light air of *Maddalena* was replaced with an eerie calm which revealed itself in the moral crisis of a middle-class family. With this film, De Sica turned the camera on the audience of his early films and begged them to look up at the screen, in other words, at themselves and at what they had become. For De Sica, this constituted the definition of Neorealism:

> Neorealism was born after a total loss of liberty, not only personal, but artistic and political. It was a means of rebelling against the stifling dictatorship that had humiliated Italy. When we lost the war, we discovered our ruined morality.

(Samuels 145)

*I bambini ci guardano*, based on Cesare Giulio Viola’s 1928 novel *Pricò*, was scripted by Viola, De Sica, and Zavattini, making the latter a noteworthy De Sichian counterpart for the first time. Zavattini’s hand came through in the sadness and overall sentimentality throughout the picture which superseded the safe tender feelings that exuded from De Sica’s prior movies. De Sica gave credence to Zavattini for the “poetry and melancholy of [describing] a marriage failing before the witness of a child, who learns that adults make mistakes, who is forced to suffer his mother’s adultery and his father’s suicide” (Samuels 144). For De Sica, this constituted the definition of success.
2.2 Fruitful Collaborations Abound Out of De Sica-Zavattini

Zavattini would go on to become Neorealism’s biggest supporter. By his definition, Neorealism was not superficial, like other cinemas as it was able to find the spectacle in everyday life since man is never redundant and life is never unreadable. As Zavattini described it, Neorealism understood that the camera had an “overwhelming desire to see” and a “hunger for reality” (“Some Ideas on the Cinema” 217). Neorealists needed no longer “invent a plot” because they grasped that reality itself “[was] hugely rich” and that it was enough to make the viewers “reflect on what they and others [were] doing, on the real things, exactly as they [were]” (217). In line with Deleuze’s realization that Neorealism no longer favoured the movement-image, the intention of De Sica and Zavattini, before Deleuze, was not to ignite social change or anger in the audience, but simply to ask the viewer to reflect.

In his essay “Some Ideas on the Cinema,” Zavattini outlined the fundamentals of this new realism: There should be a natural development of situations, as opposed to having scenes linked together in a relative series of causes and effects (218-219). This is because life does not always present itself so neatly. At any given moment, like in any given scene, there is enough to be discovered. Moreover, cinema has the “capacity for showing things” as they are and in their “longest and truest duration” (220). It need not make moral judgements or rely on contrived metaphors, it should simply show all aspects of the story, unabashedly. On the same note, cinema should not propose solutions because facile answers are not realistic. Zavattini’s vision of Neorealism relied on reducing the area between reality and what appeared on screen which further indicated that there was no room for a heroic protagonist played by a well-known actor (224-227). Furthermore, to additionally narrow the gap, there should be a preference for the use of regional Italian since it is associated with the way ‘real’ people speak (228). In summation, the cinema should negate the classic Hollywood structure and always remember that man is tri-dimensional. In that postwar Italy, the camera only needed to be placed in the streets and patiently witness everything man did so as to teach the audience to look at itself with the same patience. The practice of diligently following someone, Zavattini called the act of pedinare and Deleuze referred to as film balade, as was noted in the previous chapter of this dissertation. In so doing, the viewer’s awareness of the reality of his fellow man was heightened (Wagstaff 79).
Wagstaff also views the result as a fraternal, moral achievement; that is, through awareness and knowledge, the cinema can foster living in fellowship (79). These principles were in opposition to the prewar style of the telefoni bianchi films that even De Sica and Zavattini used to make. Their interests were once again realigned towards a different path. Moneti, in this regard, offers the following assessment of the duo:

le novità formali del cinema di De Sica appaiono intimamente connesse con le caratteristiche dei personaggi elaborati da Zavattini, col loro modo di sentire e vedere il reale, di viverlo anche sul piano dell’immaginario, quale sogno o incubo ad occhi aperti. (60)

De Sica, like Zavattini, now wanted to make films in which fiction fused with reality, where ‘life was transposed onto the realm of poetry.’ Moreover, observing life, through the eyes of a child, was the pen with which the poem would be created. The neorealist gaze was best produced in postwar Italy through the eyes of a child because he alone was able to satisfy all that it [the gaze] required of him during these years. On the one hand, what came of his gaze was a vision that was capable of giving the world back to the viewer in its wholeness, as neorealists intended, and not fragmented by partial or subjective suggestions which risked making the directors appear like political ideologues. On the other hand, the privileged vision needed to take a moral stand to be respected and established as the primary field of vision that would restore some order to an otherwise tumultuous period in time. The type of gaze that was thus needed was one which could adapt to whatever reality it had in front of it and serve as its natural observer. Subsequently, the wide-eyed observations, through the youth, made the camera appear less like a lens and more like a human eye which was, at once, connected to the viewer; yet, given the child’s age, distant enough from him. Regarding youthful observation as the most important action to constitute the new type of agent found in Neorealism, the narrative could develop organically - according to what the eyes saw and not what the mind knew or anticipated. Lastly, identification between character gaze and recipient were also addressed because only the child could sweeten, even if only somewhat, the bitter realities of the postwar world. In this way, seeing became sentimental

49 Wagstaff borrows Zavattini’s conoscenza, coscienza, and convivenza for ‘awareness,’ ‘knowledge,’ and ‘fellowship’ (79).
and sentimentality became poetry. Further to this point, and to the effect child characters have on the viewer, Bazin accordingly argues:

We demand of them signs of complicity, and the audience quickly becomes enraptured and teary when children show feelings that are usually associated with grown-ups. We are thus seeking to contemplate ourselves in them: ourselves plus the innocence, awkwardness and naiveté we lost. This kind of cinema moves us....

(Bazin at Work 121)

2.3 On the Use of Children in De Sica’s Films

The De Sica-Zavattini duo embodied Deleuze’s notion of Neorealism as the manifestation of the breakdown of the movement-image in as much as the director and screenwriter used the clear visual space of the cinema to actually cloud the distinction between what is real and what is not and between subjectivity and objectivity. Their ability to overturn a traditional narrative in favour of “una impalpabile dimensione dell’informe, dove regnano la casualità e il provvisorio” (Moneti 12) was a sign of their cinematic innovation. The child best represented the middle world since he was not yet old enough to discern the difference between, as mentioned, what is real and imaginary. Everything to him, at that point, was real. The grey area was further enlarged when we think of the viewer who was fully aware that he was watching a movie, despite how real the images on the screen were. At the time, the spectator was forced to become childlike himself, immersed in disbelief and wonder as he saw those images through the child protagonist. It was as if, through Neorealism, the director was asking the audience to become a blank canvas (a tabula rasa) on which to receive the images without having the knowledge of experience fog his view of the onscreen world.

De Sica called on his viewers to look within themselves by placing children at the focal point for the emotional highs and lows through which the narrative travelled. The children of De Sica, namely Prico in I bambini ci guardano, Pasquale and Giuseppe in Sciuscià, and Bruno in Ladri di biciclette, coloured the grey area between right and wrong as they became the perfect vehicles for exposing unjust familial restraints and poverty, the metaphor for dilapidated social institutions, and the representation of individual and collective tragedy. The weak male role
resulting from Neorealism’s rejection of Fascism’s rhetorical gender stereotypes lead to the strong child personified. Their performances did not raise issues of heroism, as many of Rossellini’s characters are considered to have done, but they embodied the fundamental aim of Neorealism: to connect with the viewers on a closer level. In this way, the child became the identifiable “other” - the marginalized member of society with whom the spectator was able to sympathize and align his gaze - be it because of sentimentality or because in the child he saw his former self.

United in their depiction of young people as the image of surveillance, the children in I bambini ci guardano, Sciuscià, and Ladri di biciclette are placed in contrast to the adult world that has failed them as they are seen watching their elders. Their looks are specifically linked to parental conflict and neglect as well as to the young child’s direct or indirect blame of the society in which they suffer. These films, as we have mentioned, do not offer positive or hopeful solutions because they quite simply did not exist during war-time Italy, despite the better efforts of fascist propaganda to make the public believe otherwise. The children function above all as silent critics of human relations.

In this regard, it would appear that the revolutionary image of youth in Rossellini’s Roma città aperta and Germania anno zero, could become a branch of Neorealism which is decidedly more active than that of De Sica’s. In these films, the child carries the narrative forward until it leads to something, a promise for hope and a better future. The youth are portrayed as catalysts and rebels who are, for example, brave enough to run after their mother who has just been gunned down, as Marcello does after Pina in Roma città aperta. The same pack of boys, to which Marcello belongs, is seen as courageous enough to look on as their mentor, Don Pietro, is executed in front of their eyes. They have a strong enough sense of solidarity that they can walk off into the sunset with Rome as their equal, at eye level, knowing that the city will now eternally protect them and accept them into its ‘open’ arms. De Sica’s films make up another branch - a greater visual Neorealism wherein the child is at times active and, at others, a passive agent. Indeed, the characters there within are not armed with the same Rossellinian potential or even desire to make the world a better place because through their insightful vision they have come to accept that they alone cannot do the work that is needed to rebuild their surroundings. This is why De Sica’s
children are more often used as a moral compass that will lead to the love of family and the deeper knowledge of self.

While De Sica’s films were criticized for being too emotional and for taking advantage of the childhood perspective to exploit the sentiments of the audience, George Toles argues that such a perspective is essential for an analysis of the highly visual nature that constitutes the De Sica-Zavattini productions (“On a Train to the Kingdom of Earth” 102). Children are exemplary of a De Sichian definition of Neorealism as well an essential tool with which to analyze the director’s choice to enlist them in his films. They embark on open-ended journeys which favour reflection and deeper insight as opposed to the attainment of any material or palpable prize. The classic structure of a narrative which promises solutions to the problems posed in the film - a return to the nuclear family, the release from prison on the back of a galloping white horse, the retrieval of a bicycle - is replaced with the privilege to see that the aforementioned are impossible or unimportant. Thus, the experience of waiting for something to occur is superior to a conclusive solution as the former is more closely linked with the process of finding one’s place in the world. Metaphorically, the journey itself is the destination. In De Sica’s Neorealism, the child is an object of knowledge and has pedagogical potential. He is the return to humanity that the adults around him seek, even if they do not know it. He is also the source of the gaze into which adults must look before they can return, know, and learn.

No other child-observer is perhaps as memorable as those that constantly seek to challenge the image of the nuclear family, overthrow the paternal-heroic depiction of males in cinema, provide evidence of the failure of adults, and stand as a symbol of the unemployment, corruption, and lack of institutional structures as those cast in lead roles in De Sica’s neorealist cinema.50 Either as mute witnesses to or visual instructors in the war and post-war environments created by their elders, the young protagonists in neorealist films were as diverse as their stories. In this regard, the absence of images of carnage or political uprisings does not diminish the weight of the war (be it the World War or a personal one) and its effect on children. Bloody depictions are replaced with contaminated environments and relationships which are supposed to be safe and protective

50 Certainly, though, De Sica is more concerned with human emotions and relationships rather than with socio-economic issues.
(the home, a playground or park, the father figure). As Ian Wojcik-Andrews maintains, what is worse is viewing the war as a metaphor for a “disease” whose symptoms spread “to the otherwise sanitary places children inhabit [which] further sickens the audience” (163).

In conclusion, De Sica privileges the child’s point of view in order to carry the viewer to that level of visibility and identification that is much higher than one would otherwise experience. The director explains why he turned to children rather than to adults to be the inner voices of his films: “They gave me the true picture of how our country was morally destroyed,” and by noticing a sense of shame in their eyes, De Sica felt that only they could truly know that they were not leading the lives they were supposed to lead (qtd. in Parigi, “I bambini di De Sica” 91. My translation). In fact, in De Sica’s three central neorealist works, the films studied henceforth, the audience directly witnesses the physical and emotional effects of the war on the children who also lost their innocence and are forced to become adults before their time. As De Sica’s children discover the cruel adult world, they are brought in to reproach the adults for the breakdown of familial relations, for their overall indifference, lack of commitment, and disloyalty.

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51 Exact citation: “I bambini-solamente essi, sentono che la vita che fanno non è quella che dovrebbero fare.”
A child’s world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement. It is our misfortune that for most of us that clear-eyed vision, that true instinct for what is beautiful and awe-inspiring, is dimmed and even lost before we reach adulthood. If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children, I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unfailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantment of later year…the alienation from the sources of our strength. (Carson, The Sense of Wonder 54)

2.4 Children at Home:
The Image of Surveillance in *I bambini ci guardano*

Prico, the young victim of incessant familial neglect, is robbed of a family unit and faced with the ultimate impossibility of ever returning to a happy home when he witnesses his mother’s adulterous ways with an old lover. Its plot, a rather conventional story of a wife’s adultery, becomes more than that when her affair drives her husband to suicide and destroys her son’s affections. What makes the film additionally moving and eloquently rendered is that everything is seen from the child’s point of view, as the title suggests.

Prico’s journey is characterized by his hope of returning to a nuclear family unit. The first trip he takes to the park with his mother, Nina, gives the audience the first glimpse at Prico’s troubles. While there, she is more concerned with rekindling her romance with a former lover, Roberto. When the boy’s father, Andrea, finds out that Nina leaves in the middle of the night to seek out Roberto, the family unit is nearly shattered. In an attempt to mend it for Prico’s sake, the boy is taken on a family trip. This journey too ends in broken pieces when Prico runs away from the vacation spot at the sight of his mother and Roberto who are engaged in affairs. All eventually return home, but it [the home] is now only a space and not a symbol of unity. There, Prico takes flight again, at the request of his mother who asks him to go upstairs. Endowed with the direct knowledge, as a result of his own vision, of his mother’s deception and adultery, Prico realizes the truth of why Nina stays back. The home is now an empty space - Prico will leave it for boarding school, according to his father’s wishes who shamefully admits to the school’s director that Prico is in desperate need of a family (“È proprio questo di cui ha bisogno...una famiglia.”). The conclusion conjures up interesting comparisons to the endings of Charles Dickens’ novels *Oliver Twist* (1839) and *Huckleberry Finn* (1884). The images of the Dickens’ children, like
Prico, are vulnerable and in need of the protection of adults. Wolfenstein sees the latter as indicative themes of British literature and culture which focus on the effects of cruelty on the weak who, moreover, are more susceptible to suffering (278). To apply Wolfenstein’s assessment of the novels’ denouement to *I bambini ci guardano*, one would simply need to substitute the British proper nouns for Italian ones:

Oliver, after having undergone many gruesome experiences, as a helpless, unprotected child, finally enters into the haven of a good home into which he is adopted. Huck, faced with a similar prospect of adoption, decides to light out for the open road. (278)

Endless examples of neglect culminate when Prico’s father, no longer able to deal with his wife’s infidelity and incapable of properly caring for his son, commits suicide. Acknowledging that he is alone in the world, the film closes with one final journey, this time exemplified by the one Prico sets out for himself, along a long hallway, with his back turned away from his mother. His refusal to heed his mother’s call out for him and his marked gesture of confrontation as he does not return her gaze, are signs of the strength with which he is now imparted. The aforementioned gesture recalls Prico’s earlier failed attempt to call after his father in hopes of having him return to the child. The boy’s inability to change the course of events leading up to his father’s death comes full circle with his powerlessness to affect the outcome of his parents’ relationship, as seen from the onset of the film. The following figures chart the predicaments which present themselves directly in the boy’s field of vision throughout the film.
Figure 1. Prico understands that his trip to the park with his mother was a deceptive ploy to see her ex-lover. He refuses all contact with the man who is not his father.

Figure 2. The view of adultery from Prico’s perspective.
Figure 3. The anguish in Prico’s eyes is that of a boy who sees his father leave and who resigns himself to the understanding that a different outcome is impossible.

Figure 4. Prico’s final and long walk away from his mother is characterized by the high ceilings and empty spaces which signify the calamity of his gesture, but also the great sense of his alienation from that moment forward.
The above stills serve as exemplary shots of the adult world when, simultaneously with Prico, it is the subject of our gaze (as in the first two images). Our perspective in the latter two objectifies both him and the adults until our new point of view permeates “our stance toward the social world” in which the boy finds himself (Schoonover 152). The degeneracy of society becomes apparent to us as we engage in this oscillating visual plane by, on one hand, realizing the depth that Prico’s eyes can take in when everyone else (namely his mother) considers him invisible. On the other hand, our view is supplanted with Prico’s so that we too feel a sense of inadequacy in not changing the immoral society. Seeing, in *I bambini ci guardano*, is linked directly to marital conflict and neglect and to the young protagonist’s reproach. Prico’s ‘motor helplessness’ (to use a Deleuzian reference), however, is enough to disallow the potential for him to be an intermediary of reconciliation within his family. Moreover, as the problems within the film are not related to economic poverty but to familial destitution, it becomes more difficult for Prico to overturn that fate which has always plagued him.52 Through his vision, he is able to act as a critic of his parents’ failing domestic relations. His visual assessment, therefore, cannot bring the couple together, but it is powerful enough to keep them apart: his father thinks it best to leave his mother as well as enroll his son in boarding school. Furthermore, Prico invokes the sympathies of the viewer so that his gaze is aligned with ours until the audience too judges the shortcomings of the society surrounding this family. Since the adult world is always viewed through the eyes of the alienated child it appears all the more unkind.

The central concern of *I bambini* is to be a commentary on the family and explore how the effect of the mother’s and father’s flaws are felt by the vulnerable child. The reasons for the adultery

52 One could propose a psychoanalytical reading of the film based on Freud and Burlingham’s findings in *War and Children* in which the child analysts explore the impacts caused by any rupture in the mother-child relationship. Freud and Burlingham argue that when a mother, or “an object of love,” is not present for her child or does not show him warmth and comfort, his memories of the past will always be tainted by the same feelings of disappointment that plague him in the moment that he is rejected. For Prico, this moment occurs early in the film, at the park, during Nina’s first encounter with Roberto. Prico had to take charge and seek out his mother only to find her engaged in conversation with a strange man of whom the boy is immediately skeptical. This scene is soon followed by other, more damaging, occasions of heedlessness. With the destruction of the mother-son bond, there comes a guarantee that the boy has “no outlook into the future” (both citations, Freud and Burlingham 52).
are never revealed as they are not necessary nor could they help solve the family’s situation. The current predicament in which the child finds himself is the only story we need. In Prico’s eyes and on his face, we read about the world he lives in separate from any biting political review. De Sica could have injected the latter appraisal of his country; however, its want is precisely the factor that adds a more profound element to an otherwise common familial occurrence. Although war and politics are not directly treated, the depiction of the ruptured family image is nonetheless contradictory to fascist ideology. Its insistence was that the perfect family was fundamental to creating and maintaining a happy and prolific society. What is more, in *I bambini ci guardano* the child is indirectly associated with the war and with the young population formed within such an environment: Prico, in his spiritually orphaned state, finds himself in the same company as so many postwar children who are forced to carry on alone. The door towards which Prico moves opens out to reveal an unclear, but certainly solitary, future. Throughout this narrative, the camera and, in turn, the viewer is constantly made aware that the child is present in those scenes in which his parents perhaps prefer he not be. We can see Prico in our line of vision always; thus, we cannot forget about him as the adults who surround him have done so frequently. Together, the child and the spectator become critical of the broken family. Our knowledge that the boy is directly witnessing the damaging events and the emotionality within the child’s perspective are used to achieve a stronger sentimental and critical response from us.

*I bambini ci guardano* signalled the first departure away from other films released during the last years of the Fascist regime. In 1950, Mario Gromo wrote that the earliest signs of Neorealism, in films such as *I bambini*, “segnano l’inizio del nostro cinema d’oggi” where “[o]gni episodio è necessario, ogni inquadratura è significativa” (qtd. in Pellizzari 158). Thus, De Sica heeded the call to transform the cinema into an authentic expression of humanity in all of its dark and sometimes bleak reality. This could only occur during the war since it was, according to Brunetta, “il momento di purificazione e rigenerazione” (*I: 68*). The only solace one can find in war, describes Zavattini, is a “comune denominatore e possiamo trovarlo nel coraggio di accettare ciò che siamo e non ciò che vorremmo essere” (“Diario cinematografico” 59). Thus, even though cinema-goers were still interested in seeing fascist films that spoke of invasions by Italy and the strength of the Republic, De Sica instead felt the need to tell Prico’s story.
I bambini ci guardano grew from the necessity to tell the truth; that is to say, to redirect the camera away from the confining studio sets of Cinecittà and point it at real life. Since De Sica was admittedly suspicious of the ease with which professionals were able to change from one emotion to another (Bondanella, *Italian Cinema* 85), characters should only be portrayed by real men and not actors. De Sica calls his directorial process one which is “faithful to the character” and his casting of non-actors signals a “reversal of interpretation” (*Miracle in Milan* 5). To this effect, De Sica adds,

[i]t is not the actor who lends the character a face which, however, versatile he may be, is necessarily his own, but the character who reveals himself, sooner or later, in “that” particular face and in no other …. The man in the street, particularly if he is directed by someone who is himself an actor, is raw material that can be modeled at will. It is sufficient to explain to him those few tricks of the trade which may be useful to him from time to time; to show him the technical and, in the best sense of the term, of course, the histrionic means of expression at his disposal. It is difficult – perhaps impossible – for a fully trained actor to forget his professions. It is far easier to teach it, to hand on just the little that is needed, just what will suffice for the purpose at hand. (5)

De Sica patiently taught his untrained cast through imitation and he himself would become the man, the woman, or the child that he wanted the camera to capture, laughing and/or crying with them, as necessary. Pecori sees De Sica’s ‘reversal of interpretation’ in yet another way still:

Se le persone “prese dalla strada” diventarono attori, c’è da aggiungere che gli attori, con De Sica, divennero persone “della strada”, riuscirono a fare a meno della mascheratura professionale standard e quasi sempre diedero il meglio di sé…. [T]utto ciò che entra nell’inquadratura, nei suoi film, trae l’importanza non dal fatto di essere in un’inquadratura cinematografica, ma dalla vitalità che sprigiona, dalla simpatia che emana; il quadro sembra annullarsi, il montaggio sparisce, resta il “miracolo” di qualcosa che vive di vita propria, quasi che improvvisamente si fosse acceso lo schermo, senza che nessuno mai abbia neanche girato le scene. (17)
Finally, Bert Cardullo, in *Vittorio De Sica: Director, Actor, Screenwriter*, states that De Sica does more than bring out the best in his nonprofessional actors - to say otherwise would be a gross underestimation of his achievement:

He reconstitutes them [non-actors] entirely. Not through the facile device of giving the professional a role that is different from the part he usually plays, but by somehow revealing in him another actor, a richer one who is more imbued with the character he is playing. (63)

Undeniably, *I bambini ci guardano* owes much to the performance of the little boy, Luciano De Ambrosis, whom had no prior acting experience, but whose big eyes and expressive face forced the story to be told and felt more deeply. As he discovers the sour, disappointing fallacies of the adult world, we are reminded that we have opted to neglect those who are, regardless, always watching us.

De Sica’s interactions with and use of the child protagonist in his films would become even more meaningful in his next works, *Sciuscià* and *Ladri di biciclette*. In all three films, the themes of childhood innocence in confrontation with adult realities and the children’s inability to change anything links each of the boys. The ability to see what the grownups cannot is a trait they all possess and the one that ultimately ties each one to the other. For this very reason, De Sica will be remembered as one of the most expressive and effective directors of neorealist children. As Bondanella maintains, “De Sica accomplishes his works of art employing nonprofessional children in the principal roles, a reminder that the most complicated artifice can be combined with inexperienced actors by a skillful director” (*Italian Cinema* 56).

In conclusion, *I bambini ci guardano* gave audiences the first glimpse of De Sica’s concern in depicting the adult world through a child’s eyes, while remaining as objective as possible. Thus, the director privileges the child’s point of view while also establishing a certain detachment between him [De Sica] and the story through “the physical distance he so often maintains between the camera and his subject” (Cardullo, *Vittorio De Sica: Director, Actor, Screenwriter* 26). De Sica’s *mise-en-scène*, then, is the equivalent of Calvino’s first-person, yet, limited narrator, of which I spoke in the previous chapter. De Sica’s camera shoots through Prico’s eyes
and both are able to remain witnesses to the tragedy rather than be necessary active agents capable of directing the fiction or the family there within. This otherwise passive witnessing of events is precisely the same one championed by Deleuze in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. The family unit was always irreparable - evident from the first scene in which Nina has little interest in her son’s assessment of what he quite correctly sees as her interest in another man. The mother-son relationship too is doomed from that moment on. Prico’s distancing is inevitable and in line with the behaviour of any child who has a neglectful mother. As evidenced by Freud and Burlingham, the child will “turn away from the mother ..., and though at first unwillingly, will accept the comfort which is offered only by the teacher / the nurse” (52). This precise reaction is noted in the finale, when Prico ponders whose embrace to choose as he gazes back and forth between his mother and his nanny before ultimately selecting the support of the latter. Indeed, while Prico may have been unable to incite change through action, the only movement he now makes is also the most damning as, in the end, he has little interest in his mother’s new found regard for her son (which, moreover, we are not convinced is made up of genuine concern).

One may also conclude that the frequent employment of children allows De Sica to focus on the *what* in a scene, which, according to Cardullo is “more significant than the way in which he focuses his attention” (*Vittorio De Sica: Director, Actor, Screenwriter* 26). This notion runs parallel to Deleuze’s views on Neorealism since the manner in which De Sica shoots his version of reality - whether sentimental, objective, subjective, real or artificial, or through a hybridization of all five, becomes less significant. Moreover, De Sica’s style is consistent with Deleuze’s insistence that neorealist films focused the viewers’ attention on that which was necessary to look at in the scene, at the moment in which it appeared on screen, without concentrating on how or if it would develop into future action. As such, there is no relief for the viewer - the only deliverance we obtain, if we can call it such, is when Prico’s suffering turns into a heightened perception and awareness that his spiritual solitary confinement will not change. The tragedy of Prico’s father’s suicide alone ensures that the boy’s alienation is indefinite. Furthermore, the ultimate rejection of his mother and the gap in communication between the two of them will be
eternal, seen in the final long shot of an empty corridor down which the little Prico walks as an orphan (recall the images in figure 4, above).53

De Sica’s tactic of dispersing “the problems of the main characters’ stories into the collective life of a crowd” (Toles, “On a Train to the Kingdom of Earth” 123) is only possible if we accept that Prico’s plight is like that of so many others who are least responsible for their terrible predicament. More importantly, the clearer the sense the child has of what is occurring around him, the more damaging the inability to answer why it is happening becomes in both the child and the viewer. To this effect, Prico’s coming of age is complete, in the final scene, with the realization that he is alone and independent of parental protection. At the same moment, however, no longer able to look into the boy’s eyes, the role and responsibility of the spectator begins. As Toles states, perhaps the best that the spectator can do at this point is to “inhabit [his] own gaze more deeply, as if that were the child’s best hope for recovering a fit world (De Sica’s world) beyond his door” (124). The role of the young ultimate witness began with *I bambini ci guardano* because in the child we can learn the ultimate lesson: adults should begin to model themselves on the simple principles he [the youth] is able to understand - the difference between making good and bad choices, between showing forgiveness towards others or simply knowing when to walk away from them.

*I bambini ci guardano* was an essential work in De Sica’s filmography. It bound him to Zavattini for his foreseeable future works and it entrenched him into Neorealism. For its window into a demoralized society, its use of some on location shooting (at the beach resort, Alassio), and by using lesser known actors in main roles, *I bambini ci guardano* would spearhead the neorealist movement and become the best expression of this new wave of cinema. Unfortunately, during the years in which the De Sica-Zavattini partnership was making movies, cinema goers were still interested in Hollywood tales as they wanted to escape their reality. De Sica’s next film, *Sciuscià*,

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53 The communication gap, in turn, becomes a reflection of De Sica’s own views on humanity for, as a result of egoism, “[h]uman incommunicability is eternal” (Samuels 150).
proved to be a commercial failure, as a result.\textsuperscript{54} Shot in three months, under the limited financial and logistical resources of postwar production, \textit{Sciuscià} was not well-received in its home country. However, it achieved artistic recognition abroad and even went on to win what is known today as the Oscar for Best Foreign Film. De Sica, in turn, received international acclaim as a major director and the efficacy of this director-screenwriter combination was confirmed.

2.5 Orphans of the Institution: \textit{Sciuscià}’s Pasquale and Giuseppe

The door through which Prico passes reopens to reveal Pasquale and Giuseppe on the streets of Rome. The important theme of a childhood lost is developed more deeply in \textit{Sciuscià} as any sense of happiness or innocence is immediately destroyed upon contact with the adult world. Pasquale and Giuseppe are thrown into conflict with policemen, lawyers, and prison officials who constantly reveal their cruelty and corruption. In an effort to save enough money to realize every child’s fantasy of owning their own horse, the two boys fall prey to the schemes of Attilio, Giuseppe’s older brother, and agree to steal from the apartment of an old clairvoyant. They buy the horse, none other than an almost mystical white stallion, Bersagliere, which becomes a symbol of their innocence, their dreams, and, more importantly, of their strong brotherhood. Since no deed goes unpunished in De Sica’s films, regardless of circumstance or culprit, Giuseppe and Pasquale are sent to a juvenile prison. It is ‘juvenile’ only in its population, for everything else about the prison, from its appearance to its staff, seems more fit to handle hardened criminals. While there, signs of their impending doom are evident as soon as the shoeshiners are forced to dwell in separate cells. But everything takes a greater turn for the worse when, as result of the deceit and misunderstanding that surrounds them, the boys’ friendship is shattered and Giuseppe, the weaker of the two, comes under the influence of older, nastier boys with whom he takes part in an escape from the boys’ prison. Pasquale, at the same time, is tricked into turning his friend in to the authorities. \textit{Sciuscià} reaches its chilling climax when Giuseppe falls to his death after a quarrel with an angry Pasquale. As the horse - once a symbol

\textsuperscript{54} De Sica on the failure of \textit{Sciuscià} said, “[i]t is easy to see why. After the war, Italians were hungry for foreign films. They flocked first to American, then to Russian movies, but both proved a great disillusionment. Slowly, bit by bit, the public came back to their own. Rossellini, Zavattini, and I came out too early. Many films that were shown then would have a greater success if they were new today” (Samuels 145).
of their friendship - dashes out of the picture at this moment, so too do the childhood dreams and
hopes that Giuseppe and Pasquale used to share. What makes the narrative doubly damaging is
that any promise of a better life or of a return to an idyllic playground fade just as the camera
does on the image of the two fallen boys.

*Sciuscià* is De Sica’s first true neorealist film in its use of nonprofessionals, on-location shooting,
and social themes framed within the life lessons that present themselves to the two youths before
their time. Moreover, the plot of the film, aimed at moving the sympathies of the audience,
seemed to have almost sold itself to De Sica and Zavattini from the streets of a desolate, postwar
Rome, where bands of children would set up their personal work rings. Among the workers,
shoeshine boys emerged, often calling out ‘sciuscià, Giò’ as a way to ask the American soldiers
for their business (the equivalent of ‘Want your shoes shined, Joe?’). During this time, a
magazine released a photo story of two shoeshiners who went by Scimmietta (“Little Monkey”)
and Cappellone (“Big Hat”). Their pictures caught the attention of producer Paolo William
Tamburella, who showed them to De Sica and suggested he consider the story of Scimmietta and
Cappellone as the subjects of his next film (Cardullo, *Soundings on Cinema* 11). Both Zavattini
and De Sica took Tamburella’s advice and the two actually followed the shoeshiners, for a year,
as the latter went about their daily lives. They surveyed them while the boys tried to earn enough
money so that they could afford an hour of horseback riding time at a nearby stable. De Sica says
he watched the boys in all their affairs until the story for his film appeared out of “life itself”:
“One day, after the theft of a gas mask, Cappellone ended up in prison. The drama, not invented
by me but staged by life itself, was drawing to its fatal conclusion. I had merely to relate what I
had seen and felt during that year (qtd. in Leyda 107).

The two boys became the models on which *Sciuscià*’s Giuseppe and Pasquale were based. De
Sica had considered casting the boys from the street, the real Scimmietta and Cappellone;
however, he refrained, deciding that they did not have the face the director wanted. As a result,
Rinaldo Smordini and Franco Interlenghi were chosen from among those who came out to
audition for the roles of “Little Monkey” and “Big Hat” (see figure 5). The characters were
eventually renamed Giuseppe and Pasquale, respectively, to give the boys common Italian names
which would nationalize their plight for the Everyman to understand.
In addition to selective casting, there are a number of other elements which reveal the mastery of De Sica who was, perhaps more so than Zavattini, well aware that what he was doing was still creative - that Neorealism did not mean reality itself, but an interpretation of it through manipulation and volition. The script was the careful work of a number of contributors: Sergio Amidei, Adolfo Franci, and Cesare Giulio Viola who worked with the De Sica-Zavattini duo to methodically iron out the screenplay. The tragedy was scored with heart-tugging music (by composer Alessandro Cicognini) so as to explicitly call on the audience’s emotions should they have otherwise remained untapped. Although Sciuscià was mainly shot in real locations, the final bridge scene was shot in the studio (contrary to De Sica’s preference) albeit because the production company did not have the money to wait for good filming conditions outside.

De Sica also purposely used various camera angles and shots to highlight the limits of the two boys. For example, in the opening image, atop their horse, De Sica shoots the children from low-angle perspectives which ennobles their character and gives them the appearance, as Bazin noted, “of an equestrian statue” (2: 33; see figure 6). Later, while at their trade, the same low-angle perspective showcases their ignobility in the world as they are seen crouched and kneeling at the feet of the soldiers (see figure 7). A sense of confinement often surrounds the boys when they are seen through prison cells which fragment their ability to move (see figure 8).
Figure 6

Figure 7

Figure 8. The boys’ physical separation is depicted psychologically as the bars and shadows serve to symbolize the now obstructed and skewed vision they have of their friendship.
The newsreel quality of Anchise Brizzi’s photography, gives the feel of “an exhausted Roman city, bereft of its pride” (Cardullo, *Soundings on Cinema* 13). Despite the illusions of reality, De Sica’s empathy seeps into the streets and before his camera for the *Sciuscià* boys and for all of his young protagonists as they represent an entire generation of sufferers. In life, they pay the highest price for society’s failings and on screen they frame the drama enough to give it a human dimension. In Cardullo’s best definition, *Sciuscià* is a

“shining” of reality’s “shoes”, of the basic problems facing a defeated nation in the wake of war: ... for the ruled, how to survive amidst rampant poverty at the same time as one does not break the law; for the rulers, how to enforce the law without sacrificing one’s own humanity or that of the lawbreakers. (13)

As we had seen with *I bambini ci guardano*, the young characters can certainly be read as figures moving in opposition to the fascist ideology which championed for heroism and youthful ardor. Ultimately, however, the most important story for De Sica is the story of a childhood destroyed in its vitality, in its innocence, in its dreams, as a result of grownups who do not know how to love, to understand, to smile. When seen in contrast with the adult world, it becomes apparent that the children feel real emotions, whereas the adults are lacking in sentimentality. Child abandonment is prevalent in this film as well; however, the consequences of its effects are
developed differently than they were in *I bambini ci guardano*. Pasquale is an orphan, thus, his parents never appear and Giuseppe’s mother, on the rare occasions that she actually visits her son in prison, is more concerned with the well-being of the older, more corrupt son, Attilio. In fact, it is after his encounter with his mother that Giuseppe learns of Pasquale’s inadvertent betrayal. The misplaced maternal worry becomes a sign for the degradation that ensues. Had the mother been more attentive to her son and to the truth, things for Giuseppe and Pasquale could have been different. From this moment forward, the further breakdown of the boys’ relationship begins, as noted in Giuseppe’s reaction to the news (see figure 9).

Figure 9

The scene described above is preceded by yet another significantly moving and exemplary one which displays a child’s basic longing for his mother’s contact. This moment transpires when the sick inmate, Raffaele, is brought to the common room to meet whom he believes is his mother. What he finds, instead, is a messenger in her place who comes with gifts for the boy. His gaze tells us that the package, no matter how useful, is not what he expected nor remotely wanted (see figure 10).

Figure 10
As the film progresses, Raffaele’s health continues to deteriorate and without enough strength to run, he is trampled during a riot. The missing mother metaphor resurfaces as we wonder if things could have been different had someone not neglected the boy to begin with.

Utter unavailability and indifference is a characteristic that is true of all adult characters in the film. In fact, with the exception of Bartoli, the only employee of the prison that seems to display pity and compassion (at the bedside of the deceased Raffaeli, he feels compelled to say “Ho paura che questo non sia il mio posto...qua dentro, ci vuole gente più forte di me”), all the others seem to be part of an existence that is frantic and consumed by the necessity to survive at any cost. The other ‘grownups’ are made up of Panza, a bully; Attilio, Giuseppe’s conniving older brother; the man who sold the boys their overpriced horse; the distracted doctor of the prison; the two opportunistic lawyers who suggest that Giuseppe put all the blame on his friend; and the withdrawn judges who treat the children as though they were coldhearted adult criminals.

In Sciuscià, Pasquale and Giuseppe embark on a passage, more so than a journey, for their world is drastically altered on the other side of the prison walls. Cinematic effects of light and darkness also progress as the boys move inward from their playful open spaces to their grainy and grey confinement. Before entering the prison, the boys are still able to dream (the horse is a sign for the freedom they were aspiring to achieve) and their friendship is loyal and trusting. Once inside, the boys are separated and thrown into the same conditions as the multitude of children in their
company, a clear statement that their plight is the obvious collective one that may have gone unnoticed in *I bambini ci guardano* (see figures 11 and 12).

Figure 11. Another theme that characterizes the film is that of plurality. This aspect is seen in the long lines of boys who file through the prison halls and sit at crowded lunch tables, row upon row, captured in this still and the next.

Figure 12
In this cruel adult world, where Giuseppe and Pasquale are no longer masters of their domain as they were in the streets of Rome, they become untrusting of one another (and turn each other in). The journey for them ended upon their entry inside the prison, further signified by the darkness that has now enveloped the exterior once the boys suddenly find themselves outside again. What was once a symbol of freedom and play as the boys rode their horse, the streets of Rome are now tainted with the remnants of the prison bars still present in the gleams of the boys’ eyes. Initially, they were two boys against the adult world, intermingling with the corrupt grownups. In the end, that very world is a cause for and reflection of their demise.

The endings of *Sciuscià* and *I bambini ci guardano* serve the same purpose: the story of Pasquale appears to represent the great allegory of the painful passage from child dreams and imagination to the harsh reality of adolescence. Towards the end, the sounds of the gallops of their magical horse grow fainter and fainter with each day they spend in prison. At this point, their horse is nothing but a far gone child memory, no longer a living fairytale as it was to them in the beginning. When, involuntarily, Pasquale kills Giuseppe, he [Pasquale] does not even look the horse’s way perhaps because it is too difficult to stare at what was once associated with feelings of happiness. It is as if their friendship was all a dream. Pasquale can barely, if at all, gaze at his best friend just as Prico refused to meet the gaze of his mother whose fall from grace he could not catch. The final scenes suggest that the boys have been plucked out of their childhoods once and for all. As the horse distances himself from Pasquale and Giuseppe, it is literally closing the fairytale, leaving Pasquale to face the death of his friend alone. With each passing step, Prico neared a realization of childhood lost. With each gallop the horse takes away from the *Sciuscià* boys, any hope that things are better than they really are is dashed (see figure 13).
Figure 13

The juxtaposition of a cruel adult world versus the innocence of childhood was easily distinguishable in *I bambini ci guardano* for the young Prico’s suffering was caused solely by those with whom he came into contact. In a virtual rite of passage, either of the sciuscià may be the former self of Prico - a glimpse into the consequences of his abandonment. Since neorealist children have the weight of experience and knowledge on their backs, their innocence is jeopardized at the first witnessing of horror - be it in the form of a broken family, the war, poverty, isolation, or death. In fact, in both films, the relative catastrophe takes place within the first few minutes - a sign of the impossibility of escaping imminent sadness or breakdown. Yet, given their young years, they cannot denounce their inner child completely and so they maintain a sense of childish wonderment despite their daily struggle to survive in a very real, cruel world. As the shoeshiners live somewhere in the middle, not in the adult’s nor the child’s world, the gap between bad versus good and wrong versus right, where the left hand term represents the adult world and the right hand term represents the child’s world, is skewed. The middle world is the one we know only at the end of *Sciuscià*. That is to say, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, for us to judge the boys whom we know are active participants in a theft and whom we witness aggressively attack each other. Their behaviour cannot be seen as mutually exclusive from the influences of circumstance and geography (a devastated postwar Italy) and the negative effects
others (those, like Attilio, who had lost their innocence long before Giuseppe and Pasquale) have on the boys. The initial catastrophe is not resolved and the viewer must resign himself to the knowledge that the boys have been failed. Blame is no easier to lay, but shame is more easily felt as both Pasquale and the viewer find it hard to look into the face of a fallen boy.

Furthermore, *Sciuscià* goes beyond just the story of two boys who are neglected and then swallowed up by a corrupt system. In fact, De Sica avoids overt propaganda by not depicting the society that has wronged the children as “villainous, as consciously ... evil and exploitative“ (Cardullo, “The Art of *Shoeshine*” 130). In De Sica’s own words, he describes his intention for this film: “to emphasize a phenomenon that has always deeply saddened me – the indifference of humanity to the needs of others.... In *Sciuscià*, the difference has tragic consequences” (*Miracle in Milan* 4). Separate from any ideological leanings, De Sica’s film shines a moral light that can be heard in the words of Giuseppe’s corrupt lawyer who admits that if anyone should be found guilty it is the adults who have abandoned their children in favour of satisfying their own greedy desires. *Sciuscià*’s invective, therefore, is not only displayed against children, for which society will never be held accountable. It is also seen in the adults and in “society’s brutality against itself in the person of its future: its children” (Cardullo, *Vittorio De Sica: Director, Actor, Screenwriter* 36. Emphasis original).

As a concluding remark on *Sciuscià*, one can say that De Sica directed the film, but in so doing, he does not propose to solve the social problems there within. Not even the viewer can consider solutions to the issues that De Sica poses. We are only in a position to contemplate this social tragedy. In short, “[w]e are the ultimate recipients of De Sica’s *Sciuscià*” (Cardullo, “The Art of *Shoeshine*” 135). De Sica, as Woody Allen believes, gives “stature to all of cinema” with this film because it accomplishes the goal of all of the artists of Neorealism, especially those who treated the issues of the war through a child’s eyes. What is more, *Sciuscià* finds its new way of discussing Italy’s new problem since “*Shoeshine* is a poem ... in its simple humanity.”55 In its use of raw, regional dialects or cadences, it is more direct, the very characteristics that neorealist artists were searching for in telling the new stories. Ultimately, if ‘the children watch us’ they

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55 Exact citation: “*Shoeshine* is a poem and in its simple humanity gives stature to all of cinema” (qtd. in Micicché, *Sciuscià di Vittorio De Sica: letture, documenti, testimonianze* 23).
will see an adult humanity that causes horrors. However, if we watch the children, we will see
that the richness of their feelings of fantasy and vitality is incomparably great and that which
damages them may not be the war itself, but the sadness left in its aftermath which kills our
spirits.

2.6 The Making of *Ladri di biciclette*

Further inspired by the artistic success of *Sciuscià*, De Sica continued making films which
highlighted the brutal effects of war on children - its most salient sufferers. The flame which kept
his interests ignited was Luigi Bartolini’s novel *Ladri di biciclette*. Zavattini, who personally
liked the book, showed it to De Sica as a possibility for the basic premise of their next film. In
fact, very little of the actual story was adapted into Zavattini’s screenplay. What remained were
the title and the pursuit of a bicycle. Again, in this film, the final product was the well-
constructed realization of the assistance of other writers, like Suso Cecchi D’Amico, Oreste
Biancoli, Adolfo Franci, Gherardo Gherardi, and Gerardo Guerrieri.

After the box-office flop of *Sciuscià*, De Sica’s journey to garner funds for *Ladri* proved to be a
pursuit in and of itself. Promises to eventually release the film (only once it was completed) were
made, but money would only be offered on the condition that stars such as Cary Grant be given
the lead role of Antonio Ricci (a demand De Sica obviously refused). Money eventually trickled
in from local producers (namely Ercole Graziadei, Sergio Bernardi, and Count Cicogna of
Milan). For the role of Antonio, De Sica chose a man who was only at the audition in hopes that
his son would play the part of Bruno. The director, instead, was so taken by Lamberto
Maggiorani’s appearance and his long strides, that he cast him as the adult male protagonist.
Through a similar selection, Bruno would be played by Enzo Staiola whom De Sica picked out
of the crowd during shooting. In casting the two nonprofessionals in leading roles, De Sica
would put his faith in his directorial abilities and in the natural skills of the men taken from the
streets. Indeed, their performances are remembered among the greatest in Italian cinematic
history for they displayed a range of emotions and skills by silently reading the script to us
through their eyes.
Ladri di biciclette follows the life of an unemployed workman, Antonio Ricci, and his quick-witted son, Bruno, as they wander through the streets of Rome in search of Antonio’s most prized possession, his bicycle. The man gets a job as a bill-poster on the condition that he has his own transportation to be able to quickly move around the city. To do so, he retrieves a bicycle from a pawnshop by pledging his wife’s bridal linen from their wedding night. While he is pasting a glamorous poster of American pin-up Rita Hayworth, during his first day of work, Ricci’s bike is stolen - an utter disastrous crime against a man who, as a result, is deprived of the rare chance to earn tomorrow’s bread for his family.

Ladri can only be fully appreciated after a. being placed in its socio-historical context: that of a chaotic Rome where unemployment is the norm and where people are seeking to survive, b. recognizing that the film’s simple plot is more weighted because the trek is also taken up by, and seen through, the little Bruno. The socio-historical context, in short, dictates that a bicycle is not just a bicycle, but a means with which one can obtain a job and, subsequently, put food on the table. The importance here, as in Sciuscià, rests not on the notions of a struggle which comes on as a result of politics or on an economic solution to the strife.56 The white horse, which to Pasquale and Giuseppe was the tangible fruit of their labour as well as the dual symbol of their fantastical child imagination and its ultimate destruction, is replaced with the bicycle in this film. Ultimately, the bicycle in Ladri stands as a metaphor for the relationship between this next coupling of male protagonists and splits the story on two planes. First, the father’s selfish view of the world is explored - that is to say, the object becomes more important than his son and the potential discoveries he could make about hope and filial bonds along his journey. Second, the film follows the boy’s coming of age as he learns of his father’s errors throughout their search. The boy reaches a level of maturity when he acknowledges that in order for Antonio to truly rediscover himself, he [Bruno] must remain the mirror into which his father can always gaze.

Perhaps the most literal pursuit or balade is the one engaged in by Antonio and Bruno. To categorize their journey as purely literal, however, is to remove the importance of the boy in the film. In fact, it is because of Bruno that the journey becomes less about the search for a bicycle

56 The only reference to politics is made in a brief scene that shows the underground strike preparations at a workers’ meeting.
and more about the quest of a boy who must teach his father how to see the world and how to be happy despite the loss of a material possession. Nonetheless, through the streets of Rome the two travel, often aimlessly, side-by-side until their hunt is interrupted by Antonio’s desperate attempt to steal a bicycle. But the journey for the adult must end, while the vision of the child widens. Reflected back at him, the image of himself in his son’s eyes prevents their relationship from rupturing and eventually sets their path down the same road.

_Ladri di biciclette_, like _Sciuscìa_, also received better recognition abroad than in Italy (namely, in France, England, and the United States). It achieved critical acclaim and won the same special Academy Award for Best Foreign Film that _Sciuscìa_ previously had. In the home market, _Ladri di biciclette_ aroused press of a different nature in State Undersecretary and Head of the Direzione Generale dello Spettacolo, Giulio Andreotti, who long believed that De Sica’s films gave a pessimistic vision of Italy at a time when they should be constructively optimistic (Bondanella, _Italian Cinema_ 112). Accordingly, Italian audiences were split. As mentioned, some were not interested in seeing stories of unemployment, neglected children, or in experiencing non-cathartic, open-ended finales. They wanted glamour, happy endings, and a screen full of the biggest names in the star system. However, some viewers did remain loyal to watching the uneventful, mundane man and both _Sciuscìa_ and _Ladri di biciclette_ received the Italian Silver Ribbon Award in cinema (the _Nastro d’Argento_). Considered one of the greatest films of all time and Bruno’s as one of the best performances of all time, there is no where left for the neorealist child to go. With that, De Sica closes the chapter on his trilogy of childhood and sets his sights on other horizons.

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57 Bazin argues that _Ladri di biciclette_ is the best example of pure cinema and an end to the term [cinema] as people knew it because the film did not rely on actors, a story, or a set. Thus, “in the perfect aesthetic illusion of reality there is no more cinema” (2: 60).
2.7 A Coming of Age in Pictures

Before 1955, in a nod of thanks to his long-time partner for his tireless assistance on their previous films and for having given him the story of *Ladri di biciclette*, De Sica turned to Zavattini’s 1943 novel, *Totò il Buono*, to create *Miracolo a Milano*. The film still boasts a few common De Sichian-Zavattinian themes with a focus on society’s poor outcasts and the use of some neorealist elements, such as on location filming (this time off the streets of Rome and into the outskirts of Milan) and the casting of nonprofessional actors (albeit in minor roles). Yet, while the story is told through the eyes of a youth - Totò - he is much older than Prico, Pasquale, Giuseppe, and Bruno. More importantly, Totò is the return to male agency and less the voyeur as he is privileged with the conscious ability to promote change in the lives of those around him through mostly fantastical means (he is given a wish-granting dove by his guardian angel).

A few years later, the figure of the child disappears altogether as *Umberto D.* pans the lacklustre events in the title character’s day. It is as if De Sica’s young characters have grown up. They have traveled through cinematic time in a chronological progression and can now be seen in Umberto. In *Umberto D.*, the child is replaced with the old man who reveals that Prico, Pasquale, Bruno, and Totò managed to survive after all. The man is at ease with his inner self and he is capable of love because he has experienced it from others. The moral of the neorealist fable ends in this film with images of children seen playing in a park and bicycles riding along the streets - a collage of images first introduced in *I bambini ci guardano*, *Sciuscià*, and *Ladri di biciclette* (see figures 14 and 15). In the end, Umberto walks away and out of sight. While previous finales only carried the children towards more loneliness, mourning, and maturity, Umberto’s closure takes the viewer into unchartered neorealist territories toward the land of ever after - whether happy or sad and where, alongside the old man, we have finally found our place in the world. As there is no where else for the character or the camera to go, after *Umberto D.*, De Sica turns the neorealist camera off.

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58 The screenplay was written in tandem with Suso Cecchi D’Amico, Mario Chiari, Adolfo Franci, and De Sica himself.
Padre, se anche tu non fossi il mio
Padre, se anche fossi a me un estraneo,
fra tutti quanti gli uomini già tanto
pel tuo cuore fanciullo t’amerei.

Camillo Sbarbaro

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man;
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die!
The Child is father of the Man;
I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.

William Wordsworth

Chapter 3

Ladri di biciclette

3.1 Beyond Ideology

In What Is Cinema, Bazin hailed De Sica’s Ladri di biciclette a progressive outcry of protest, but further analysis of the film would indicate that its ideology is closer to that of a more liberal-humanistic vision. In lieu of a political agenda, the responsibility of the situation in which the protagonists find themselves is projected onto the collectivity through the careful examination of the lives of only two characters until Ladri becomes more concerned with a moral critique of personal injustices. According to Frank Tomasulo, in “Bicycle Thieves: a Re-reading,” one of the major stylistic achievements of Ladri di biciclette is one that involves the relationship between a single unit subject to a mass background or real environment in what the critic describes as “social shots” (164). Regardless of where the camera goes - into an interior location, such as the barren Ricci apartment or the pawnshop stacked with linens that have all been hocked - De Sica’s mise-en-scène always “structures a tension between the individual and his society” (164). That the events in the film are the plights of many is also suggested in the Italian title which employs
the use of the plural noun ‘thieves.’ In this way, the eventual crimes are generalized but so too are the desperation and degradation of everyone in postwar Italy. ‘Thieves’ is a more accurate title than the English singular translation which is also signified by the shots of bicycles row on row and the scenes at the Piazza Vittorio and the Porta Portese that suggest stealing is a way of life in this world and that Ricci is a mere representative type.

In the preface to Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno, Calvino viewed the essence of Neorealism as the product of everyone’s “urge to narrate” where ever and whenever they could (v-xxv). This personal “urge” to recount produced a diverse body of works, befitting and developing stories about ordinary people in a language accessible to all. In this film, as in much of the neorealist canon, Calvino’s ideology “reveals itself to the text as Life” (Tomasulo 161) by only indirectly dealing with the real forces of postwar chaos and unemployment. In fact, what is most important in Ladri di biciclette is the final conviction that ‘love conquers all.’ Love alone, whether of self or from family, has the strength to resolve dissension and feelings of estrangement because it is a warmth which arises from the depths of one’s being, “an interpersonal force,” as Tomasulo states, which soars above any inference of an interclass struggle (162). Of course, the film cannot be devoid of references to the remnants of a city in the aftermath of a World War and to the desire for reconstruction, given the year of the film’s release, 1948. Yet, since man has been given no sign of a tangible rebirth nor is he capable, in his defunct morale, of conjuring up one on his own, the film constantly searches for ways to frame the social struggles within relatable terms: the individual suffering of the Ricci boys. This personal versus social dimension justifies Tomasulo’s remark that this film becomes a

… displacement of an authentically phenomenological space – a closed space produced from within itself – onto a space organized from the vantage of another, absent site, the site of ideology, the closure of classical (or near-classical) representation…. (166)

For De Sica, displaying poetic images on a highly visual plane is of prominent import. As a director, he was inspired to always find the “humanity” of cinema and never to stray from the consideration that “[a]ny form of spectacle, any manifestation of art cannot estrange itself from this basic tenet: Humanity!” (qtd. in John Darretta, Vittorio De Sica: A Guide to References and
Resources 20-21). That being so, his camera is constantly aimed at recording that which appears like real life unfolding before the viewer’s eyes. As a result, he manages to also ensure that his style focuses not on mechanical technique, but on the subjects and their stories. To reinforce human authenticity, De Sica’s decision to cast non professional actors superseded any trickery of cinematic mechanics. All of these factors combine to reach the rational, humanistic vision that contribute to the realistic impression Ladri leaves.

3.2 Characterization

In the previous chapter, we encountered children who bridge the onscreen-spectator space for their placement in the character spectrum: the youngest and most genuine of them in I bambini ci guardano and the adolescent petty criminals in Sciuscià. Bruno in Ladri di biciclette completes the child trilogy as he is the neorealist youth par excellence who swings on the scales between passivity and activity. He is not as young as Prico, yet not as old as Pasquale or Giuseppe. He is neither innocent nor manipulative. Since the adult world has already been exposed as corrupt and the children are its known victims, Bruno can be an amalgamation of the best of the three former boys: endowed with wonderment and awe, charged with emotion, confidence, and precociousness. He is at times quiet or weak, but at others smart and vocal. He leaps across the character spectrum just as a grown man would, feeling an array of emotions, capable of seeing everything, and even strong enough to be teacher to pupil and father to child. While he too comes to us with a back story that began long before the opening credits, Bruno has accepted his responsibilities in this life (for example, as the only working man in the family). His parents are a happy couple, so he will not share in Prico’s pain. He is also an honest boy, so he will not deviate from the straight and narrow with Giuseppe and Pasquale. His devastation is not pronounced early so his vision is not immediately distracted or blocked.

Like I bambini ci guardano, Sciuscià develops the notion that sight is the most important sense by insisting that its absence “impedes access to knowledge” (Schoonover 153). In fact, without sight, assumptions prevail which produce further deception and breaches in camaraderie between the two boys. The scene to trigger it all is the faked torture of Giuseppe which leads Pasquale to
assume that his friend is being beaten. He never directly witnesses the scene, he only hears it. To save him, Pasquale admits what he knows about the plan to steal from the fortune-teller (of which he was only a small, unknowing, accomplice). Unaware of the torture ploy on Pasquale, Giuseppe incorrectly deduces that his friend had betrayed him and, so, he will do the same. Devoid of direct acuity, the boys are plentiful in doubt and hatred, which, in the end, result in their ultimate separation. In this regard, Karl Schoonover concludes that “[t]he visually unconfirmed always harbours an imminent danger” (155). Similarly, in Ladri di biciclette, when sight is not privileged, its absence sets the central conflicts in motion. In Ladri, Antonio never directly witnesses the theft of his bicycle and Bruno, the omnipresent seer, is absent from this scene altogether. Through a series of unmet gazes and, at key moments, exchanging looks, Ladri privileges the sense of sight more than the previous two films. Bruno will widen and develop his scope of vision. He will see, accept, and contemplate more than the other boys because the child’s biggest problem comes once the journey with his father is nearly complete (as our film viewing too draws to a close). And it will be of a different nature altogether than that of Prico or the shoeshiners. Bruno’s predicament will be a deep disappointment as a result of his father’s betrayal of moral standards and a subsequent fall from grace. The juxtapositions of recognizing good from evil and right from wrong will still be treated in this film, but by the frame that Bruno sets out for their worth. Bruno’s final gesture is the opposite of Prico’s towards his mother (in movement and meaning) and his gaze is filled with the courage that Pasquale’s lacked. In Bruno’s eyes, both Antonio and the viewer will see themselves and all will leave the scene together, towards no where in particular, but at least as one.

The real people De Sica casts replace the central characters of traditional cinema as this director’s protagonists are depicted in individuals who are on the margins of society. No matter how young or old, rich or poor, they are symbols of the same decaying society. What unites them

59 This scene also recalls the scene in Roma città aperta in which Manfredi is brutally tortured. Don Pietro must listen to the beating, but only sees it through a partial doorway and through his blurred vision. The loss of sight in this film too heightens our sense of sound and leaves more up to the imagination. Rossellini plays on Don Pietro’s and the viewer’s psyche to conjure up images far worse than what may be happening on the other side of the door. Vision, however, is immediately affirmed, as opposed to Sciuscià, when both the protagonist and the spectators see the scars on Manfredi’s deformed body immediately following the abuse.
is “l’universo con i suoi urli di pace, ma sull’orlo della Guerra…subita come dato ineliminabile a priori, ovvero come puro e semplice oggetto di studio a posteriori, che – in fondo – non ci riguarda, che indirettamente” (Siciliani De Cumis 21-22). Accordingly, De Sica’s non-heroes are characters who are limited to only aiming at changing their society through their personal influence on their co-characters. If their gaze successfully connects with that of the spectator, as De Sica and Zavattini both hoped, then at least the audience could envision lifting itself out of its fog and moving towards a clearer future.

The construction of the story around the struggling social class - a more authentic, vivid, and sincere representation of the real adversities at play, serves as a pedagogical reserve. The people teach the viewer that despite the war years and the post-war efforts to rebuild oneself, we must see ourselves better so as to see others through a more sensitive lens. In De Sica’s neorealist films, what abound are themes of human experience where the camera often follows characters that have embarked on a journey or a passage moving through the film as though it were a reformulated bildung. A bildung (usually applied to novels, but adapted to bildungsfilm to encompass the cinema as well) traces the moral and psychological growth of the main character (from childhood to adulthood) through a quest for identity that leads him or her to maturity. The character is usually out to seek answers and gain experience. In cinematic terms, bildungsfilm is the equivalent of a ‘coming of age’ film. Neorealist movies challenge or modify the journey to include a reawakening through what one sees before what one knows. Or, better, what one knows is only attained through what one sees. Moreover, not endowed with a perceptive sense of what is right, the protagonist’s change or discovery can only arise once his onscreen counterpart has seen and understood before him.

Who, then, is the main protagonist of De Sica’s films doted with the responsibility of looking and absorbing the sights? Who, consequently, offers the best vantage point through which to focalize our viewing of the film? Charged with the vision needed, children undergo the reformulated bildung first. Thematically, De Sica’s works deal with conflicts present within an adult society and an accountability that includes a failing marriage, a neglectful parent, poverty, unemployment, corruption, illness, and war. All are witnessed through the characters we have discussed (Prico, Pasquale and Giuseppe, Totò and his fellow squatters, and Umberto). It is
Bruno, though, who takes on the role of the ultimate witness in the overarching theme of humanity as he is brought to constantly attest to the mistakes of his father while serving as the child who will truly watch us all. The progeny is at once capable of being

… solidale, coi sensi di colpa del padre; orgoglioso, della responsabilità affidatagli durante la ricerca; vulnerabile, agli adescamenti del pederasta; resistente, sotto la pioggia battente; reattivo, se qualcuno gli pesta i piedi; implacabile, nel far notare gli errori al genitore; imbarazzato, davanti all’ingresso di un postribolo; impaurito, quando chiama la guardia nel rione dei ladri; disperato, di fronte a chi vuole far arrestare suo padre. (Moneti, *Fra tradizione e rivoluzione* 129)

The child visually and, at times, verbally expresses his feelings and states of being. This makes him our Everyman and the real main character of *Ladri di biciclette*. Bruno is the protagonist who embodies Deleuze’s notion of the oscillation between seer and active agent as a tangible sign for the transition between the action-image and the pure optical image. According to Deleuze, children are the perfect vehicles for the neorealist impression of impotence before real world demands as a result of their inherent sense of motor inadequacy. The role of the child in Neorealism, states Deleuze, is so evident because “in the adult world, the child is affected by a certain motor helplessness, but one which makes him all the more capable of seeing and hearing” (*The Time Image* 3). In Bruno’s case, however, his vision too is possessed with agency as he is effective when he is simply looking. In fact, the entire narrative is built on what Godfrey Cheshire calls a “symphony of looks” (“A Passionate Commitment to the Real”) and what Marcus refers to as “visual cuing” (*In the Light of Neorealism* 61) whereby the spectator’s affinity oscillates between two or more perspectives. On one hand, Antonio is the subject of our gaze; on the other, he is the object of our line of sight, just as he is being seen by Bruno. What makes this fluctuating exchange of gazes even more pertinent is that the boy’s eyes reveal many purposes for the narrative flow, after all “a film speaks most effectively when it has no need of the actors’ voices” (Weales 395). Bruno’s eyes signal the changes in the relationship between a father and son while they often replace and are more effective than any verbal cues the boy utters. In fact, dialogue is limited in this film in general, reinforcing its highly visual nature.
Bruno is placed in *Ladri di biciclette* to aid in displacing the social ideology of the time and in combining reality and poetry through the use of the father-son motif. Bazin further outlines the importance of Bruno to the film, a character which was added for the screen and who was not a part of the original novel by Luigi Bartolini. As a result, the inclusion of the child, according to Bazin, is precisely what gives Antonio’s adventure an ethical dimension (2: 53). Bartolini’s work is the story of a journey in search of the narrator’s stolen bicycles. It is full of endless descriptions of the presence of dishonesty and corruption throughout Rome. The author’s interests lie primarily in educating the people in his novel and, by extension, the reader on his anti-fascist views. For a while, the author-narrator, like Antonio, puts his entire faith in an object, a bicycle. Bartolini is happiest when he retrieves his bike, but in the end admits that even with the object in his possession, something greater is missing. Philosophically, he reflects on the simple privilege of having a friend (“un volto amico” 195) as being the true definition of happiness. This is a gift which, sadly, Bartolini never finds. Antonio, by contrast, is not left searching for ways to fill the same void. In the end, he learns the deeper lesson and realizes that his wealth lies in Bruno’s love. The boy is the sought after ‘friendly face’ who, in turn, represents an equal partnership in whatever lies ahead for the family. There is no bicycle and there are no jobs, but there is love and, therefore, hope—*fides*.60

Since the neorealist is someone who considers himself part of the world he records, it is fitting that Bartolini’s novel be autobiographical, telling of his experiences in Rome. In this case, both the author and De Sica deal with actual problems, through contemporary stories. Their focus is on believable characters taken most frequently from Italian daily life. However, the novel tends to make a judgment on the society of the time, the crooked cops, and the crowds of thieves at Porta Portese. It becomes more of a comment on the effects of the war on society and on how people change into untrustworthy, unjust citizens. In the film, De Sica’s carefully contrived visual effects underline the hopelessness of Ricci’s struggle and not merely the economic or political aspects of Italian society which have produced the dilemma.

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60 The bicycle that is stolen is a *Fides* (from the Latin word for ‘trust,’ ‘reliance,’ ‘credence,’ ‘belief,’ ‘faith’).
In both mediums, we are asked to question and are able to weigh our beliefs which are different according to the art form (the novel versus the film). By concentrating on the individual struggle, in the film, we are able to look introspectively and question our own morals. What is more, the after effects of the war have more of an impact because we become a part of Antonio and Bruno’s everyday routine and their lives. In both instances, so much attention is paid to the father and son that we begin to share in their feelings of sadness, of isolation. In Bartolini’s book, the first-person narrator takes our focus off a sentimental reading of his work. Our sense of closeness (or sentimentality) towards the narrator’s plight is as distant as his own feelings are for it. What is important to us is what is important to the narrator, a normal effect of an autobiography. As such, in the novel, we are only concerned with justice and we are satisfied when it is attained for the author who eventually retrieves his bicycle. The thread that unites most adaptations lies at the core of what the original form intended to portray: the fundamental impetus that drove the author to write is often the only necessary element that must be maintained. The unifying factor amongst the two works is stated clearly by Bartolini: “[…] la cosa migliore, per un poeta, consiste nell’osservare e nel rendere argomento di poesia anche i casi peggiori dell’umana esistenza” (50). Humanity is precisely De Sica’s tenet and its depiction is what he wanted to portray throughout the film. The director succeeded, however, at best showing what humanity meant to him because of Bruno.

Only in the inquisitive, sad eyes of the small boy does one see the condemnation of a society that does not respect the basic needs of childhood. It is undeniable that a story surrounding war-stricken cities and countries is touching for any audience. The addition of a child renders the entire story all the more moving, but also introspective. Nicola Siciliani De Cumis attests to the relevance and importance of children who find themselves growing up in difficult times in *Zavattini e i bambini. L’improvviso, il sacro, il profano*:

La guerra invece c’è, ad ogni ora. I bambini lo sanno da sempre meglio di chiunque, perché cominciano di fatto a rimuoverla con urgenza nell’immediatezza dei loro tempi, nella subitezza della loro instabilità e incoscienza, nella fretta di vivere alla giornata. (22)
According to Zavattini and De Sica too, there is truly something honest and direct about children – qualities that only they possess. Directors and writers of the neorealist period were more than their professional titles, they were story-tellers who assumed a responsibility as emotional archeologists – searching to transform Everyman’s story from common to moral imperative. As both Calvino and Pavese have previously highlighted for us, neorealists seek a new cinematographic and literary language which enables them to deal poetically with the pressing problems of the times. In Neorealism, tragedy is more directly felt by the viewer, regardless of whether or not it is a dramatic construct, because it is often of a familiar nature to them. However, through the use of important character individuation, *Ladri di biciclette* brings the spectator closer to the lives on the screen than ever before.

The characters, hence, allow for the realization of Zavattini’s wishes, in “Some Ideas on the Cinema,” for a cinema that better connects the screen to life. Neorealism created masterful pieces of cinema through a combination of form and subject matter and the most effective vehicles for this blend of art and reality was to be found in the role(s) portrayed by children (or, as in *Ladri di biciclette*, in both children and in child-like characters). The young people in neorealist cinema are often positioned as oppositional figures to Fascism, yet while they appear at the vanguard of new values and attitudes, they also articulate the traditional values of nationalism, male comradeship, the importance of competence, virility, leadership, and personal sacrifice (Landy 67). In this way, the cinema-viewing experience is more meaningful because these varying characteristics are what allow certain positions to be taken up by the spectator. The assortment of qualities children possess furnish the spectator with a privileged viewpoint from which he or she can better understand and evaluate what is appearing before him or her on screen. Inevitably then, the use of children in Neorealism, and more specifically Bruno, involves the audience in the film’s judgment on the declining society because “… when a child is watching in what is considered to be the spirit natural to childhood … he or she is a kind of ideal mirror for a person or event’s best intentions” (Toles, “On a Train to the Kingdom of Earth” 118). Children become images of surveillance, constituting an audience within the film (and, undoubtedly, Bruno is Antonio’s most attentive spectator).
The young Bruno’s role is so poignant because of the maturity he displays for his age. He is presumably between nine and eleven years old and he is the moral lens through which we witness the events and emotions unfold. For De Sica, Bruno’s vision is an effective surveillance since his unobstructed view of the story comes as a result of his [Bruno’s] keen humanity. That level of awareness elevates his sense of self and his propensity towards the love of the community around him (Schoonover 153). Furthermore, Bruno’s wide range of sight is the only hope the spectators have to abandon their restricted vision as adults, still tainted by images of war and devastation, in order to transcend themselves towards inner liberation. Consequently, together with Bruno, the spectator also sees everything that is wrong and sad with the society through Antonio, the child’s father, for even though he is an adult, it is precisely his infantile behaviour that allows this seemingly failed, cold man to win our sympathy. Identification with a certain character is understood as a position – and more properly as a series of shifting positions. This fact allows our views of Antonio to oscillate as it likens the vulnerable cinematic identification to the tenuous identity of the self (Mayne 27). In this respect, De Sica explores our flexible alignment by invoking the Wordsworthian paradox when examining the complex relationships between man and child. Ergo, the man has become the child and the child has become the “father of the Man” who is able to provide a model after which the adult should behave. In fact, from their respective opening scenes, Bruno and Antonio are seen in their reversed roles as Antonio starts off the film appearing bored while sitting on a curb, fiddling on the ground (see figure 1).
He is distracted, shoulders slouched, self-absorbed, and separated from the other men in the scene. Like a child who ignores a mother’s call, he does not hear his name being called by the man who could end his two-year unemployment. In various scenes, Antonio shows potential for perseverance, but is defeated at every turn. When he is offered a job on the condition that he has a bicycle, Antonio is not sure that he will be able to come through with one. His first reaction is to shed a negative light on this positive turn of events until he hears the chants of the other men who will happily take the work. Uncertain as to what he will do to attain a bicycle, he seeks out his wife, Maria. At this early point in the film, it becomes clear to us and to Antonio that everyone has their place in life except him. Self-deprecatingly, Antonio tells his wife that he will not be able to take the offer because he does not have a bicycle. As Bruno will later do, she reprimands him for ever having pawned his original bike to begin with. This is a sign that Antonio’s lack of foresight plagued him long before he sat on that curb and even before the opening credits rolled.

Privileged with the only problem-solving skills of the pair and as the one who demonstrates more control, on their way into the home, the wife occupies the frame and does the manual labour of carrying the water buckets into the kitchen (see figure 2). Antonio retreats to their bedroom to
sulk on the bed while Maria posits a viable solution: their only hope of having a bicycle is to pawn her dowry. At the pawn shop, it is Maria who deals with the broker and questions the money that he is willing to give them. Antonio is only in the frame to show that he does not know how to negotiate for a higher payout and that his eyes light up when presented with the same money that Maria recognized as insufficient (see figure 3).

Figure 2

Figure 3
Thanks to Maria, Antonio soon retrieves a bicycle and presents himself with it to his new boss (see figure 4). The attachment he shows towards the object reveals a twofold irony: Antonio is never as attentive to his son as he is to the bicycle and, eventually, he will turn his back on the bike in a gesture all too reminiscent of his abandonment of his son at various points in the film. His neglect comes as no surprise since the bicycle is equated with Antonio’s adulthood and propensity for caring. While still in possession of his bicycle, Antonio appears confident, and even entrusts it to the guardianship of a young boy outside the apartment of the seer, the Santona, whom his wife has gone to visit. The character of the aforementioned boy, although a minor one, is a harbinger of the watchful role that Bruno will soon undertake (see figure 5). Throughout the rest of the film and, specifically, once his bicycle has been stolen, the only Antonio we know is a fragile and inadequate man. All of his attempts to recuperate his bicycle, capture the thief, or steal a bicycle for himself, fail. But we continue to care for him because his childishness evokes pity in us despite. Often times, we find ourselves making excuses for him for we know that the road to destruction is paved with his desire to regain his bicycle – a symbol of his livelihood, his sense of belonging, and his authority. As Mark West affirms in “Holding Hands with a Bicycle Thief,” our feeling of compassion for him wavers between repulsion and charity: “we may come to feel in ourselves an unpleasant tension of inner division disrupt the balance of our judgment of his behavior, while mirroring Antonio’s own painful movement between extremes” (139-140).
The boy’s relationship with his father was part anger, part desperate affection. It couldn’t help but make an impression on the most primitive level.


3.3 What the Child’s Eyes Reveal

Direct images of war and devastation are not at the central core of De Sica’s repertoire. Instead, his vision is “a paradigm of life, an expression of the vicissitudes of fate that affect economics, social mores, and personal emotions” (Darretta 21) - a definition which we can also apply to Bruno’s vigilance. The watchful eyes of the child are what enrich ideological displacements most since the gaze of a child is “… always something that puts History up against a wall – a child is a privileged observer and narrator because [he is] ingenuous, direct … and on the road to transformation” (Marcus, Italian Film in the Shadow of Auschwitz 100). Developing more than just the dramatic circumstances of the tale, the child’s eyes create deeper meaning in the story. They add a greater psychological dimension to the characters and, by bringing ‘the text closer to life’ and to the spectator, they also give the film historical importance. In the same regard, in The Time-Image, Deleuze argues that the originality of Neorealism resided in its abandonment of the conventional movement image according to which sensory-motor stimuli lead to action on screen, giving viewers a vicarious sense of agency. In Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism, Millicent Marcus emphasizes that Bruno’s loyal company adds immense richness to the story by creating another layer to the narrative. Each event will be judged against how it results from and affects Antonio’s principles, the child’s inner voice of morality, and the constant clashes between these two forces (59). Bruno will follow Antonio very closely throughout their journey in order to demonstrate to his father that while he may never retrieve the bicycle, he will never lose his company. Ultimately, Bruno’s passages are increasingly large and important steps that will take Antonio farther than Fides alone has.

In addition to our sense of sympathy and self-division, our affection for Antonio also stems from the “enchantment of De Sica’s sublime poetry of [Bruno’s] human hand at play” (West 140). Bruno’s presence reminds the spectator and Antonio of the immense and potentially damaging disappointment the child will feel if we do not take up our role as moral models (Marcus, In the Light of Neorealism 58). With his help, then, the audience’s sympathies toward Antonio are
continuously engaged and (even) preserved. The film shows how Antonio first loses his fragile, human face, but how Bruno

… gives a variation of it back to him; how Antonio’s face is slowly overaken by the hard mechanical mask of Fascism, full of damaged pride and a desire for authority over others, and how it is finally reclaimed into a more resilient, softer humanity, through collapse and humility, through tears and his gradual transformation into a thief. (West 144)

Antonio’s bike is valuable to him only because it promises to replace his feelings of despair and futility with a sense of purpose and meaning. For Bruno, the bike is an occasion for an amusing relationship with the physical world and an end in itself. The bicycle, therefore, is to Bruno what “/ A rainbow in the sky” is to Wordsworth: only the happiest of images on which he fixes his uncomplicated fascination. Future pleasure is reliant upon that bicycle-rainbow only in so far as it binds their days “/ ... each to each by natural piety.” For Antonio, ‘natural piety’ should be his responsibility as a father, but the bike causes him to relinquish even that as it comes to mean more to him than the safety of his own son. Indeed, during the film, a conviction grows in us that makes us believe Antonio acts against his own knowledge of right and wrong, against his own inherent goodness, and does so out of a lack of assurance and a sense of vulnerability. Furthermore, it is in circumstances of such curious provocation that we become sympathetic and protective – as Bruno does, as parents do – despite Antonio’s otherwise deplorable flaws. The frantic search for a stolen bike also parallels the director’s implicit search for truth and his choice of Neorealism as the vehicle to achieve this objective. Conceding to this fact, Zavattini states that “Life is not what is invented in ‘stories’; life is another matter. To understand it involves a minute, unrelenting, and patient search” (“Some Ideas on the Cinema” 3). In De Sica’s own definition of Neorealism, in Samuels’ Encountering Directors, he finds that truth itself is to be found in the artful blend of poetry, mystery, and uncertainty:

61 De Sica too embarked on a journey of his own throughout Europe, in search of funds for this film. Well-known producers refused to lend a hand. In the end, his help came from friends and important supporters, just as Antonio’s came from his most loyal companion.
Most films today are made in a realistic style, but they are actually opposed to neorealism, to that revolution in cinematic language which we started and which they think to follow. Because neorealism is not shooting films in authentic locales; it is not reality. It is reality filtered through poetry, reality transfigured.

Antonio Ricci’s relationship to the world is complemented by Bruno’s relationship with his father. Bruno accompanies Antonio on his long quest in search of his bike and the voyage, for the child, is also a path to formation. This *bildungsfilm* brings both characters (and the spectator) to an understanding of how strong Bruno really is. Alongside Antonio, with the backdrop of a chaotic Rome, Bruno walks, achieving the poetic union that De Sica strove to relocate onto the screen. One character has his counterpart in the other as both of their strongest and weakest characteristics are displayed: the father, almost delicate and undoubtedly discouraged versus a son who is determined and decisive. What is more, as these two oppositional figures walk through the poverty and misery stricken Roman squares and streets, the social condition of the time and the boy’s destiny are reflected in his young eyes. As Cardullo affirms, De Sica tracks the film’s events through a … *pas de deux* of man and boy in their scouting expedition through the city – the boy nervously anxious to keep in time with his father’s mood and intention, the boy’s relationship with his father serving as a barometer of the effects of the agonizing search on this man’s soul. (*Vittorio De Sica. Director, Actor, Screenwriter* 38)

The father-and-son motif is developed almost “… bi-cyclically, as Bruno has, loses, then regains faith in Ricci – *twice*, once prior to the nabbing of the thief and once subsequent to that nabbing” (Cardullo 39). In this way, the bicycle itself becomes more than a mere material object. It is a metaphor for a father and son in search of their lost relationship. While the search may be a literal one, initially, it becomes the allegorical looking for an object which works because of the sum of its parts and cannot function if one piece is missing. Such a metaphor functions to reintroduce as well as amplify the theme of familial unity that was dealt with in *I bambini ci guardano*. The importance of the family, the political significance of the bike in the family
context, and the way it structures the relationship between father and son will be displayed visually during Bruno’s first appearance on screen.

3.4 Bruno as the Focal Protagonist

A new dawn signals Bruno’s opening scene which is much different than that of his father’s. Bruno is first seen through the spokes of the bicycle wheel as he polishes the frame. Unlike his father’s slovenly position towards the camera in his introduction, Bruno’s angelic face is surrounded by a warm aura. It is as if, as West has stated, Bruno’s presence is held up by the shining and symmetrical parts of the bicycle which seem to have given way to a happy day for his entire family, even if that joy is temporary and fleeting (141; see figure 6).

Figure 6

Two important connotations are present in this scene. The first is represented by the wheels which surround Bruno. They convey the way in which the frame holds all of the other parts of the bike in harmony and how that structure serves to join the two wheels that always work rhythmically with each other. The bicycle, therefore, is a sign for how the father-son coupling functions: “…each acting congruently with the other: now a generative driving force, and now a steering and directing intelligence” (West 142). The next connotative code, exhibited through our
first sight of the boy, tells us immediately that he is already a worker (he is in uniform), unlike his father who was seeking employment just the day before. This fact nearly single-handedly elevates Bruno’s status beyond just a passive character as he is the only active male earning money for his family. What is more, Bruno’s primary concern for the preservation of the bicycle, in the same scene, is more than Antonio has yet to extend towards it. Marcus reads Bruno’s action as a foreshadowing of Bruno’s “desire to rehabilitate his father’s parental authority” (In the Light of Neorealism 59) which is also apparent during the instances in which Bruno mimics his father, both in this scene and in others to follow. Dressed similarly, Bruno and Antonio prim themselves in the mirror, then place their lunch in their respective pockets simultaneously. However, given Bruno’s deeper scope of vision, the boy buckles modeling himself after his father at key moments which merit more attention as they further demonstrate the ways in which the father-son hierarchy plays out.

Bruno’s natural inclination to see more than his father and his comfort with his own feelings are consistent with the young, confident boy he is. This proves a further counter to the fascist rhetoric of virility since the adult male in this postwar society lacks the skills necessary to be master of his domain. The war did away with his morals and they now need rebuilding as much as the city streets do. In this scene, when Bruno takes note of the dent in his father’s new bicycle, the child is actually making a direct comment on his father’s role as head of the family. Since the bike is regarded as a metaphor for success to Antonio as it represents financial independence and power for him, the dent, which only the boy notices, is a metaphorical extension of the “permanent, if minor damage, done to [Antonio’s] authority” (Marcus, In the Light of Neorealism 60). The strong words and indicting tone within the following dialogue illustrate his conscious stance.

BRUNO: Papà, hai visto che c’hanno fatto?
ANTONIO: Che c’hanno fatto?
BRUNO: N’ammaccatura!
ANTONIO: Che ce voi fa’ magari c’era!
BRUNO: No, nun c’era! Questa è ‘na botta che j’hanno dato! Chissà come le tengono! Io j’avrei detto....
Bruno had already dressed himself in the dark and has almost completed the inspection of his father’s bike long before Antonio has even finished dressing. The boy, who knows the particulars of the bike well, cares for the possession as though he were a father looking after his son, protecting and worrying about it. At the same time, however, Bruno interacts with the bike and marvels at its formation as only a young boy can (West 142). To this scene, Marcus also adds that were this a conventional commercial film where concrete details are all governed by consideration of plot, the spectator would expect the dent to be a significant sign which would reveal itself to the boy as he searched through the tables of dismantled bike parts at the flee market. In other words, if the damaged part could be identified easily, the bike would be retrieved and Bruno would be the rightful hero that saved the day (In the Light of Neorealism 60). However, in true De Sichian style, these images cause a further inversion in the spectator’s expectations, for, as we know, the dent does not turn up again and there is no happy conclusion to be met. If anything, the dent is a tool used by De Sica to highlight the importance of his chosen metaphor as a prefiguration to the permanent damage to Antonio’s inner self (60-61).

The film shows how dwelling too much on the pursuit of what has been lost is more likely to foster a cycle of further and more serious losses rather than restore happiness. The only one to recognize this is Bruno who openly criticizes his father’s obliviousness. More importantly, however, is the fact that only Bruno shows any concern for right and wrong and justice. As already mentioned, Antonio lacks the child’s attention to detail or impetus to inquire about the dent of the bicycle any further. This is also one of the few occasions in which Bruno opts to verbalize his concern instead of letting his eyes speak for him. Upon contact with his son’s elevated voice, Antonio shuts down Bruno’s decisiveness by muting him, asking him to keep his voice down. Antonio’s reaction recalls the scene described earlier when he had done the same to Maria who reprimanded him for having sold his original bicycle.

In ways which recall the importance of the bicycle’s presence in the scene which introduced Bruno to us, reminders of the light and precocity that surround the boy are constant as he “plays the adult to Antonio’s child” (Marcus, In the Light of Neorealism 60). On many occasions throughout the film, Bruno displays qualities that would be more consistent with a man, not a child. His physical appearance is the first clue. Bruno is first shown to be dressed more like a
little man, than a child. In opposition to his father, Antonio is almost too delighted to be wearing a uniform and cap. Furthermore, Bruno covers up for his father’s irresponsibility and, subsequently, comes across as the stronger of the two males. Despite how similarly Antonio and his son look and move during the first scene in which the young boy is present, Bruno breaks away from his father two more times before the duo goes about their day. As he is about to leave the apartment with his father, Bruno remembers to close the bedroom shutters out of consideration for his sibling’s well-being. Shortly thereafter, when Antonio drops his son off at work, the little boy quickly takes up his job after waving ‘good-bye’ to his father. Bruno’s gaze is never lowered in this encounter which is a sign of his confidence. It is Antonio who feels compelled to turn his back to the sight of his young son hard at work.

Another example of importance arises: unlike the independence that characterizes Bruno, Antonio must be accompanied by his wife when he first reports to work. Outside of the office, at street level, Maria is left waiting for Antonio as though she were a mother reassuring an insecure child on the first day of school. Ultimately, the father has the dilemma of providing for his family financially, but he must also provide an example of morality for his son; paradoxically, Bruno does this more effectively. Again, we are reminded of the one fact which immediately undermines Antonio’s potency and elevates Bruno to a more masculine plane: the young child is the only member of the household earning money before Antonio started working and, presumably, long after he lost his job. These instances are reminiscent of so many later ones where Bruno’s forward thinking is necessary if Antonio wants to advance at all in his search for the stolen bike. In the second scene with the Santona, for example, while Antonio remains indecisive as to whether or not he should enter the room, Bruno, with a determined step, pushes his way to the front of the line and makes room for his father to talk to the clairvoyant (moving ahead of the others who are waiting). As is always the case, when in the presence of Bruno (or

62 Based on Wilhelm Reich’s *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, Tomasulo describes this as another example of how Antonio evinces the typically strict authoritative ideology of “patriarchy” (which Reich finds at the basis of Fascism): “In the figure of the father the authoritarian state has its representative in every family, so that the family becomes its most important instrument of power …. The structural reproduction of a society’s economic system in the psychology of the masses is the basic mechanism in the process of the formation of political ideas” (167).
his wife prior), Antonio finds it difficult to assert himself and, therefore, rarely looks the boy’s way in this scene. It is only when Antonio is alone - when he begins his job as a poster setter (he is still in custody of his bike), that he is confident enough to work and to navigate through the city with ease.

In all of these sequences, Antonio can still be considered as “embod[ying] the masculine action-image” (Fisher 37) until a word of advice from his boss (that Antonio needs a ‘good eye’ to put the posters up properly) proves to be both a warning and a sign. Antonio has clearly not been bestowed with the necessary power of observation that his friend recommended. This is suggested by the camera which opens onto the actress’s (Rita Hayworth) poorly affixed eyes in the poster (see figure 7). However, this reference is only the projection of a greater absence when Antonio fails to notice two men circle his bicycle before a third finally steals it. The theft, due to Antonio’s temporary and voluntary blindness, begs the question of whether or not the entire film would have been drastically different had Bruno been present at that moment. Would he have stepped into the role as observer and protector of the bicycle as he had already done in the apartment in the scene prior? Would not Bruno have watched over the bicycle as the child in a minor role did when Antonio and Maria first visited the Santona? One thing is certain: it is shortly after this crucial moment that De Sica brings the child’s gaze into service to increase our identification with the boy and highlight the limited agency of the adult male, Antonio, who is the antihero of the film. Now that Antonio is no longer in possession of his bicycle - a symbol of his dignity and worth, the film deliberately signals an inoperative action image within Antonio. This is immediately noted in his stance, which returns to the same dejected and humiliated appearance with which the film commences (see figure 8).
At the police station, Antonio’s first attempt at recovering his bicycle is to no avail. The police show no compassion towards his predicament as the theft of a bicycle is a frequent occurrence. The police officer who logs Antonio’s case actually launches the entire quest with his suggestion that Antonio look for the bicycle himself. Of course, as Antonio has already indicated, he has no depth of thought to come up with the idea on his own nor is he confident enough in his own abilities to recuperate the bicycle, as evidenced by his reply: “Ma che? Mi devo mettere pe’ gira’ a Roma?” Antonio cannot seem to do anything, successfully, alone - a quality which is substantiated whenever he runs to his wife’s side and when, symbolically, his bicycle is stolen when no one else is around. With the exception of his wife (and only at the beginning because she disappears for the majority of the film), Antonio seeks aid and validation from mere acquaintances or even strangers. He does not see the value that his son will soon bring to his search until the very end when his son offers him the legitimization for which the man has always longed. During the few instances in which Antonio shows initiative or dominance, Bruno is sent away by his father as if to suggest that Antonio cannot function (out of a sense of inferiority) when next to him. At other times, the boy is left out of the shot entirely, telling the viewer that he is also far from the eye of Antonio’s mind. As a further consequence to the shifts in the power struggle, our identification with Antonio comes and goes as well.

In mainstream cinema, the spectator identifies with the issues facing the protagonist, the hurdles he must overcome and with his subsequent, usually successful, goal-oriented solution. In De Sica’s Neorealism, however, the viewer’s identification is more often aligned with the child’s eye. This can be seen in the way Bruno represents a “normative social role for the male subject” (Fisher 37) - he is the new provider and father figure. What results from the father-son role reversal is “a powerful new regulative force” whereby the spectator, watching the film through the child’s eyes, “is introduced directly into the film’s specular system in which the male is now the object of the socially disciplining gaze” (37). As such, the gaze of the child will gauge and regulate Antonio’s actions and the spectator will be called upon to see the adult’s moves and decisions as Bruno would.

Clear instances in which Bruno’s gaze begins to take on disciplinary powers occur most frequently when the two characters undertake their journey in search of the stolen property.
Antonio’s first step onto that path begins with having to face his son when he picks him up from work. At this point, early on in their trek, we see Antonio’s character slowly diminishing by the gaze of the young counterpart who, after having waited long for his father’s arrival, immediately senses that something is wrong. His fears are confirmed when he sees that his father is no longer on bike. As Antonio cannot look into his son’s eyes, he taps into his physical strength to cover up his shame. With the long strides Antonio takes, he walks far ahead of Bruno. But the boy is still seeking answers from his father. Through his eyes, first, he asks the question which follows: “E la bicicletta...s’è rotta?” Of course, Antonio cannot bring himself to respond. What is more, proving that the man senses his own ineffectiveness when in the presence of the true dominant figure in the film - Bruno - Antonio’s next effort to regain possession of his bicycle comes in the total absence of the child.

Antonio purposely leaves his son at home before making his way over to a locale where he knows of an acquaintance who could help him. There, a union meeting has gathered (one of the few direct references made to a political uprising) and above Antonio’s conversation, the union leader’s voice ominously warns Ricci: “Non ve potete aspettare miracoli.” The portent could also be intended for the postwar audience who should not expect immediate returns on the promises for rejuvenation of their beloved nation. In fact, De Sica will summon the foreboding metaphor when the ‘miracle’ of a happy ending is not achieved. The brief investigation which ensues, into the circumstances of the theft, highlights Antonio’s inability to exercise conviction in his responses or through his unheeding eyes. He cannot bring himself to tell the friend he has met up with that the bicycle was stolen as a result of his unseeing. What is more, he struggles to admit (to both his friend and his wife) that he had not made the effort of going to look for the bike himself. As the husband and wife walk off in the same defeated and slumped poses, we know that she too has resigned herself to Antonio’s state. On the upcoming journey, she will no longer be present (and disappears from the rest of the film) because she cannot be Antonio’s aide or the beacon that she once was for him (see figure 9).
With the female “other” out of the picture, the role of the driven caregiver is transferred onto Bruno. In stepping into that role, the child is also wearing the face of a new type of marginalized narrative character - constituting another kind of “other”: one who maintains his dignity against the demands of the cultural setting around him. Henceforth, with all of the spectator’s attention focused on the way in which the child assimilates the actions of the father, we too will judge the adult male as though he were our own father. Alongside Bruno, we become frustrated that Antonio is incapable of retrieving his bike and we grow tired of walking the streets aimlessly. Despite all this, however, we are not prepared to abandon Antonio and his search no matter how deep our disappointment in him runs. This sense of loyalty can be best explained by drawing on the meaning behind the use of the trip/balade.

Mayne defines dominant narrative patterns as consisting in crisis and resolution whereby the disorder which is introduced into a series of events approaches several possible solutions before an ultimate conclusion is possible (25). The same cannot be said for the neorealist narrative in which the classical structure is not maintained. According to Deleuze, Neorealism focuses the spectator’s attention on apparently mundane events (the trip/balade) that, at the moment in which they occur, do not appear to affect the delineation of plot. Since the spectator no longer expects definitive action, he is provided with time to reflect on and accept the filmic images, before
thinking about their meaning beyond the theatre doors. To accomplish this, and to make the viewer feel at ease enough to enter into the meta-world of *Ladri di biciclette*, De Sica needed to render our identification with the characters flexible. As the stereotypes of father and son are set in motion, exchanging places and turning into each other, so too does our identification increase with Bruno. If our perception were only in line with Antonio’s, the journey and the finale would seem like a series of failures prompted by Antonio’s inaction. By privileging the child point of view throughout a narration which forces us to simply watch and follow the characters, the viewer acquires “an ability to see what he has lost in action or reaction” (Deleuze 2: 272) just as Bruno does until he emerges as the stronger of the two characters. The situation “no longer extends into action” (2: 67). We are in a position to accept the lessons Bruno will teach us (and his father), through his looks, which will say more than any measurable activity could. Bruno’s innocent love for his father seems to make Antonio more aware of his own childish helplessness, just as Antonio’s despair seems to reach out to and deepen his son’s understanding and maturity. Antonio is affectionate with the boy, but his caring is never spontaneous as it must be provoked either by an explicit request on Bruno’s behalf or out of a sense of guilt. The unconditional love this son shows for his father – the way that he continues to express love and attachment for him - is one of Bruno’s, and the film’s, finest qualities. And the child’s loyalty is of paramount importance for it will ultimately save his father. With the emotions that only Bruno can feel and offer, love will replace the need for any other action.

Bruno’s constant attentiveness to his father’s whereabouts are juxtaposed to Antonio’s disregard for the boy. In fact, early in the search for the bicycle, it is apparent that Bruno will not be the centre of Antonio’s eye when he twice trips struggling to keep up with his father’s large paces. As the man aimlessly walks back and forth looking for the Piazza Vittorio, a stockpile where bicycles are bought and sold, Bruno knows the right direction and leads the men (who have gathered to help Antonio) into the square. Once there, it is Bruno who actively seeks the bike since only he knows what to look for. Antonio will even admit that the boys knows the item better than him: “la conosce meglio lui di me.” Ultimately, Bruno only wants his father to be happy, an emotion that is displayed throughout the Piazza Vittorio scene in the boy’s upward glances at Antonio’s face. The son’s concern is not returned by his father who never notices that
he is slapped by a merchant (for touching the goods) and who barely pays attention to a pedophile’s advances on him.

Throughout the initial search, Bruno is left alone to fend for himself - a lack of loyalty which directly contrasts the concern the boy shows for his father. With his eyes, he asks his father what the two of them should do next, before he quickly realizes that Antonio will never provide that answer. Where Bruno’s gaze reveals his wonderment, admiration, and disappointment for his father, Antonio’s gaits emphasize his physical ability to exercise power over his son. But the only thing that his physicality reveals is his errant role as a paternal figure. This negligence on Antonio’s behalf can be seen in the ample sequences in the film when he walks ahead of his son, so self-regarding that he even endangers Bruno’s well-being. The father does not see his son fall - Bruno makes it apparent to him when he shouts “So’ cascato!” in a verbal cue that is “distressed as much by his accident as by his father’s apparent obliviousness to it” (Marcus, *In the Light of Neorealism* 64). Later, as Antonio carries on without paying attention to the boy, Bruno is nearly hit by a car (twice) and he is also the mistaken victim of a near drowning by the bridge. Antonio, incapable of telling his son about the intense terror that he felt at the possibility of Bruno’s accidental death, fails at capitalizing on that fear and turning it into a stronger sense of parental accountability.

Later, while seeking refuge from the rain, Bruno is hidden from view by a gathering of German priests. Once again, his father does not notice that his son is being blocked out and Bruno must push his way through the towering men so as to not be stifled (see figure 10). At this point, the thief makes his way into Antonio’s line of sight and Bruno is once more left behind while Antonio tries, but does not succeed, to catch up to the assailant. His failed attempt is mirrored in Bruno’s successful spotting of the old man who could identify the thief (again, the theme of the child’s gift of sight is prevalent). After walking closely behind the elderly gentleman, Bruno’s gaze reveals another muted dialogue that he wishes to have with his father: his glances beg his father to speak to the potential witness as soon as possible. This is not an easy feat for it would mean that Antonio would be directly conceding to the importance of awareness and sight which he constantly seems to lack. Eventually, Antonio confronts the man, but Bruno’s presence is needed to make the encounter effectual. The stranger, growing uncomfortable, tries to release
himself not from Antonio’s grip, but from Bruno’s who is now seen restraining the man (see figure 11).

Figure 10

Figure 11
Antonio and Bruno follow the old man into the church. At that point, another voice resonates, offering a cry, a definition for Antonio’s true search: “Io voglio uscire da questo luogo santo.” Once again, the call is not answered as Antonio’s focus is on trying to force the old man to accompany him to Via Campanello, where the thief lives. Soon after, the old man flees - yet another action which leads to Bruno being left behind. At this point, Bruno is completely invisible to his father and to the spectator as if to make his reappearance in the next seen doubly pronounced. Exerting his activism, Bruno looks up at his father. Aware that he must use his words to get his father’s attention, he reprimands Antonio for having let the old man slip out of his sight. Echoing his father’s own way of speaking to people, Bruno shouts, “Io non ce l’avrebbe lassato anna’ a piglia’ la minestra!” In an effort to regain his power in the only way he thinks he can, Antonio slaps his son to cover up his own incompetence. In disbelief of this gesture, after all that the boy has tried to do and be for his father, the pain is immediately identifiable through Bruno’s eyes. He can no longer affix them onto his father for they are filled with tears - a rare glimpse of the child that remains in Bruno until the very end (see figure 12).

Furthermore, Bruno deliberately places a great physical distance between the two of them for the first time in the film (see figure 13). He does so as soon as he understands, in the same scene, that as long as he is positioned in perpetual proximity to his father, he [Bruno] will always unearth a sense of reliance upon him. From his father, Bruno has now learned to position himself ahead of the pack to show superior strength. But this will not be enough proof that the boy is mature and capable of knowing more than his father. In fact, the boy’s remaining childlike qualities are signalled by his dwarfed stature next to the big monuments against which he now seeks refuge (see figure 14). This reminds Antonio and the viewer that Bruno is limited in what physical vigor he has, but this knowledge will increase the remarkability of the moral lessons he strives to impart on the audience.
At this point in the film, with Bruno completely out of the picture, a serious consequence presents itself to Antonio as a reminder of what could occur should he continue to evade his son. After the slap incident and Bruno’s subsequent straying from his father, Antonio is eventually prompted to look for his son when he hears, in the distance, that a boy has drowned near to where he is. His fears are assuaged when he finally spots Bruno, this time stunted atop a large concrete staircase (see figure 15). When he runs to him, Bruno still takes charge of the situation by repositioning himself far ahead of his father. Trying to regain some paternal control, Antonio tells his son to put on his jacket. But Bruno’s comportment and gazes are radically different now. He refuses all physical contact and he can no longer look in his father’s direction - too fatigued and disappointed with Antonio’s behaviour and failures. Figures 16 and 17 demonstrate the contrast in gazes. Whereas in earlier scenes Bruno’s gaze was affixed upwards at Antonio’s, they gradually change their angle until Antonio looks downwardly, seeking recognition from his son.
Figure 15

Figure 16
Perhaps no other scene is as indicative of Marcus’ notions of visual cuing, as the one depicted in the figure above, nor as important since it represents a turning point in the film. Antonio’s unnecessary disciplining of his son prompts a series of exchanging glances which additionally express the role-reversal amongst the two. Previously, Bruno would look up towards Antonio to observe the reactions on which he should model his behaviour (*In the Light of Neorealism* 62). When Antonio releases his frustrations about his situation (the real reason behind the slap) on his son, Bruno turns his eyes away from his father’s. Bruno’s upward gaze, which was once admiringly fixed on his father is completely changed. Prior to this, visual cuing presented the father-son hierarchy to the viewer and it kept Bruno in his subservient role. Now the gazes between the two characters are markedly different, and slowly the hierarchy itself will also begin to change before us (61). What is more, “… Bruno’s open face, as it is so often fixed on his father” is juxtaposed to Antonio’s closed face which is “shut down in defeat” as a result his incessant feelings of disappointment at the loss of his bike (West 144).

This scene spawns another function of the child to the story as he provides another dramatic angle. As the occasion necessitates, the boy knows to accompany or move counteractively towards his father until a rhythmic pattern is achieved. In other words, feelings of anger will cause Bruno to distance himself, whereas love and a sense of protection will cause the boy to
move closer to his father. These patterns in motion within the story are clearly observable in the orchestration of the steps of the child and of the grownup in what Cardullo eloquently reports is “… a form of situational ballet that gives the picture its lyricism [through] the adjustments of temper and tempo, the resolve, haste, anger, and embarrassment, the flanking movements, frustrations, and periodic losses of direction” (38-39).

In fact, before choosing to use this particular child for the role of Bruno, De Sica did not ask him to perform, just to walk. He wanted to play off the long strides of the man against the short trotting steps of the child, the harmony of this discord being for him of capital importance for the understanding of the film. It is in this aspect that we see Deleuze’s assessment of Neorealism come through most prevalently as Bruno’s and Antonio’s situation no longer develops “into action or reaction” (2: 272). The wandering in which the two characters engage is an example of Deleuze’s pure optical and sound situation. That is to say, since father and son do not know how to respond, they begin on a journey undecided as to what must be done. Simply put, without taking anything away from De Sica’s artistry, *Ladri di biciclette* is the story of a walk through Rome by a father and his son. What is important, however, is that “whether the child is ahead, behind, alongside” Antonio (Bazin 55), he alone will give meaning to the trek. Without Bruno, the fact that Ricci never regains his bicycle in the end would supersede the bond that the two have formed. More importantly, it would negate the lessons that Bruno teaches his father, that is, the child can and will continue to provide for the family and their unity is contingent on love, not on material wealth. In the final scenes, the two “men” will walk together, holding hands. Their strides will accommodate the needs of the boy and the man and as they “establish their new relationship of equality, their gait reflects this psychological change” (Marcus, *In the Light of Neorealism* 64).

On the one hand, from the reproachful scene onward, Bruno will only look at what is in front of him and try to understand what he sees until his large deep watery eyes can successfully reach out to his father. Antonio’s narrow eyes, on the other hand, will never be satisfied with what they take in and they will constantly be in search of looking for more. The restaurant scene becomes a particularly good example of how Bruno attempts to return to his childhood after the slap, through his obvious engagement in visual pleasures, but his reality and the pressure his father’s
presence places on him will not allow it. Bazin further underlines Bruno’s presence at the restaurant for having introduced a change of tone at the mid-point of the film:

…the supposed death by drowning of the child, in making the father suddenly realize the relative insignificance of his misfortune, creates a dramatic oasis (the restaurant scene) at the heart of the story. It is, however, an illusory one, because the reality of this intimate happiness in the long run depends on the precious bike.

(54)

In an attempt to buy back his son’s friendship, Antonio decides to treat Bruno to a special meal. While his offer is anything but an admirable apology, it turns pathetic when he tries to trick Bruno into drinking some wine so that he may use this later to blackmail him into not telling Maria that he had struck him on the face. What is most telling in this scene is Antonio’s inability to enjoy present pleasures, contrasted here with Bruno’s more genuine delight in his food (calling to mind Bruno’s childlike fascination with the bike simply because it was a machine and not a means to happiness as it was for his father). Like his father, Bruno is not sure how to eat his food in this unfamiliarly fancy place and so he looks to the adult and to others to model himself after them. In this same scene, Bruno seeks out the gaze of another child at a nearby table (see figure 18) and, despite being the same age, he recognizes the class difference between them. Taking another step further into his adulthood, he imitates the little girl’s manner of eating - first by using a fork and knife and then conceding to the much more enjoyable use of his hands. As if the glares of the little girl were not enough, his father ensures that the social gap is widened when he explicitly notes that to eat like the people at her table, the Ricci’s would need a lot more money than they have. This statement opens itself onto Bruno’s understanding that the two of them, indeed, should not be indulging considering that Antonio can no longer work (see figure 19). With his father’s permission, Bruno continues eating, in his own charming way. In a comic tug-of-war with the stringy mozzarella, Bruno’s pleasure is as bright as ever (see figure 20).
Figure 18

Figure 19
Bruno’s innocent games are short-lived as Antonio, again, interrupts them to give him the job of completing the calculations of his stipend (yet another sign of the boy’s more skillful agency). Antonio is once more swept up by his own selfish needs. As West maintains, in this scene the spectator also pities the way the man loses the simple pleasure of eating the food that he cannot easily afford, paralyzed, it would seem, by an imaginary world of inflated pay slips and extravagant menus, and spiced by his feelings of shame and bitter disappointment over losing his bicycle. (147)

It is up to Bruno to pull the two out from under the misery that Antonio had shed on the situation; thus, he suggests that they visit Porta Portese everyday until those who stole the bicycle are found. Antonio quickly dismisses the concrete plan and opts instead to go to the local seer, the Santona.

As described earlier, at the beginning of the film, when life was progressing well for the family (and Ricci had just purchased his bicycle), the trip Maria made to the Santona appeared senseless to Antonio. He negated her power of vision because he believed that he had attained his job
through his own devices (and not, for example, because the Santona had brought them luck). Without the bicycle, Antonio is no longer able to make such confident statements about himself and, therefore, decides that a visit to the psychic might be useful after all. Upon their arrival, as mentioned, Bruno takes charge and pushes his way to the front of the line (there is no telling how long they would have waited). When seated, Antonio looks to Bruno to answer the seer who asks why they are there, but musters up enough courage to shyly express his concerns (which he must repeat three times before the woman hears him). The seer’s function is to act as a mouthpiece for what Bruno has always tried to say, echoed in her words when she insists “Io posso di’ solamente quello che vedo.” Early on in the search, instances of Bruno’s fatigue are evident when he displays gestures of defeat (lowering his gaze, wiping his brows) at the sight of countless bike parts and pieces that seemed to bury the hope of him finding the stolen bicycle. Even then Bruno knew that the chances of recovering the bicycle were slim, yet he decided to continue on the journey as a loyal gesture and to ensure Antonio’s safety. In what has been read as an overly generalized and vague prediction, the Santona says to Antonio: “O la trovi subito o non la trovi più.” Bruno has always known that truth, when he first began to tire. The statement carries weight because it is a call to Antonio to see and to realize that the treasure waiting to be discovered all along is indeed Bruno.

Antonio’s unproductive vision affirms his failing agency in another key scene, following the visit to the Santona. The hostile crowd scene, outside of the thief’s home, is characterized by a. the overwhelming number of observing and judgmental eyes around Antonio which underline his inability to achieve any of his goals (of catching the thief or retrieving his bike) and b. Bruno’s gaze which becomes markedly more authoritative. This scene calls to mind Deleuze’s theory of the use of perception-images in cinema which resemble the notion of the point of view shot (in which viewpoint changes depending on camera movement). Deleuze challenges the latter and posits that point of view is not static. Instead, it is capable of being subjective and/or objective, in line with the characters, or somewhere in between when it takes on the free-floating unidentifiable point of view of the camera itself (what Deleuze refers to as a “semi-subjective” viewpoint; 2: 147-150). This can be seen when Antonio is both out of place and outnumbered in the thief’s area of Rome, via Panico. Here, the point of view is transferred to the crowd which has gathered around the man, of which Bruno is a part. At this point, Antonio confronts his
assailant, rendering the aggravated male an object rather than the subject of the spectator’s point of view. The child is not only asked to act as the boundary between “nature and culture, [and] the anguish endured in crossing the boundary towards the human community” (Lebeau 65), he is also charged with the wherewithal to take matters into his own hands and alert the police of the brewing duel (an example of the child’s faith in the institution of justice). The policeman who arrives takes Bruno’s place as leader and brings Antonio into the thief’s house to find his bicycle like a father guiding a scared child through the dark. The reliance on vision to solve any problem is brought up in the police’s repetitive counsel that if only Antonio had an eye witness, the alleged criminal could be apprehended. Upon the realization that his bicycle is not there, the watchful eyes of the camera, the family inside the apartment, and those of the crowd at ground level, visually ridicule Antonio (see figure 21).

Figure 21. From the anonymous point of view of the camera as well as the subjective one of the family.

At this point, Bruno must once again intervene to create a physical separation between the hostile crowd and his father. As the emotionally hollow man proceeds to walk away, we adopt an amalgamation of gazes which causes us to have an equally complex array of opinions on what we have just witnessed. Seeing Antonio leave, through the camera’s eye, makes us objective enough to be able to adopt both the crowd’s point of view as well as Bruno’s (see figure 22). The
former forces us to view the man and his recent accusations of the Via Panico boy-thief as pathetic (figure 23). The latter renders Antonio more human and our feelings for him fill with more compassion (see figure 24). This scene becomes a precursor and dictator of the ways in which our identification will also vary in the most important part of the film: the finale.

Figure 22. The objective camera view.

Figure 23. The subjective view from the crowd.
Figure 24. From the subjective point of view of Antonio and the semi-subjective one of Bruno.

3.5 The Importance of Sight in Ladri’s Weighted Ending

One of the strongest examples supporting the value of Bruno to Ladri di biciclette can be found in the film’s conclusion when sight, action, passivity, and the final journey all collapse and acquire meaning for Bruno. In the final sequences of the film, Antonio has one more chance to redeem himself as the mature adult and to prove that he will not be tempted to steal the solitary bike within his reach. Now cognizant of the fact that he could not commit a crime of this nature under the watchful and regulating eyes of his son, he asks Bruno to leave towards home. But Bruno, the helpless child at this moment, misses the streetcar and returns to where his father had been only to see Antonio leave the area on someone else’s bike. As in the confrontation with the thief at via Panico, Bruno’s witnessing of his father’s crime is projected onto the rest of the community who sees him commit the foul as well. Antonio is captured by a crowd of men leaving the nearby tavern, among whom is the bike’s rightful owner. Once again, Antonio becomes the object of their glares. Bruno pushes his way through this newly formed ensemble and saves his father in the only way that he can. His crying eyes force the owner of the bike to feel pity for the man and free him from any punitive action. As we have now come to expect, the male protagonist does not deactivate the crowd’s pressure, the child does. The only action that remains for the male is to “come to terms with his diminished status: the man has to learn to embrace the lack conveyed by the changed cinematic environment” and by the ultimate “social re-educator” (Fisher 46). Taking on the latter role, Bruno, therefore, enlightens both the father and the crowd enough for the male to be released from their grasp.

The aforementioned scene also underlines the focal position Bruno has occupied as part of the camera’s view. We are late to realize that Bruno missed the bus because the camera pans over to show Antonio’s narrative as he steals the bicycle (and Bruno is no where to be seen at this point). The camera’s neglect over Bruno’s whereabouts, reminiscent of Antonio’s continuous behaviour towards his son, causes the audience to worry about what Antonio will do next or what will happen to him since the boy, on whom we have relied so heavily to be our guide and Antonio’s
protector, is missing. When Antonio is apprehended, almost immediately, the camera pans back to show Bruno whose eyes stare in horror at the spectacle of his father turned thief.

For us, Bruno is the ultimate witness of the tragedy and its private chorus. It is the admiration the child feels for his father and the father’s eventual awareness of it, which amplifies the tragic ending:

The public shame of the worker, exposed and clouted in the open street, is of little account compared with the fact that his son witnessed it. When he feels tempted to steal the bike, the silent presence of the little child, who guesses what his father is thinking, is cruel to the verge of obscenity. (Bazin 2: 53)

The following images chronicle the boy’s stunned realization of the theft (figure 25) and his teary plea for the release of his father (figure 26).

Figure 25
At this point in the film, visual cuing is once again of paramount importance. What remains most striking, as Lebeau states, “is the staging of a turning-away, an aversion of faces charged with both menace and pain” (59). Furthermore, when Antonio’s decision to steal a bike robs him of his paternal authority, Bruno’s gaze at him reveals the now “radically changed terms of their relationship” (Marcus In the Light of Neorealism 61). All eyes have been ‘turned away’ from the man, except those of Bruno who is constantly seeking to meet his father’s gaze in order to comfort him and to assure him that the child’s support will carry the father forward. Antonio accepts the child’s gaze before both are swept up in the throngs of people walking the Roman streets. As Bruno has accepted his fallible father, so too has the spectator. Antonio is no longer object nor subject, he is one of us and we will accept him as such when we walk with him as the film closes. Bruno’s reassuring gaze in the direction of Antonio’s is evidenced by figure 27. The long-awaited conscious reawakening that occurs in Antonio when he finally meets the consoling eyes of his son is immediately noticeable in figure 28 when the man himself is brought to tears.
3.6 The Touching Finale

De Sica writes that the children in 1945 know they are victims of wrongdoing at the hands of others. The understanding they have of their own blamelessness for the corruption of the world they face is important, but it is not enough. What matters more, the director continues, is that adults take more responsibility for the young ones as they are not a lost cause. In fact, “[t]here is still much hope for them” (qtd. in Parigi, “I bambini di De Sica” 91. My translation). Only children do not accept the unjust rules of society because they, without knowing, preserve a measure of authenticity. According to Pattison, the child is able to perceive the true nature of the world around him better than anyone else because he is “closer to that imperial palace whence he came” and, as previously stated, his perception is not yet skewed by “the light of common day” (110-111). What this means for the outcome of Ladri’s child is that Bruno is able to better illustrate the theme of blurred definitions of good and evil, thanks to his unclouded perception. The boy’s black and white ideas on good and evil are juxtaposed with the reality of post-war Italy in which there cannot be such a clear distinction between the two terms (since good people are forced to act badly out of necessity). Upon the realization that his father is capable of crime, Bruno is forced to grow up. He must concede that life and love will not always be polarized by what is right and wrong. Bruno will spend his days henceforth within the grey area that has necessarily formed before him. The recognition that the grey area has superseded his prior feeling of absolute good versus absolute evil signals the completion of Bruno’s bildung. In fact, the ending of the film illustrates that though a child may constantly seek approval and validation from his father, the approval which a father must seek from his son plays an equally important and intrinsic role in filial relationships. Subsequently, the child figure, whose presence in literature is synonymous with concepts of a fallen world and of man’s guilt, occupies a great deal of common ground even when seen in other art forms because the child’s ultimate purpose, anywhere, is to reveal the frailty and limitations of the world which surrounds him (Pattison 110).

Antonio’s personal feelings of shame are mighty on their own; however, viewing the disintegration of his morale and of his values through Bruno, makes the story and the man’s

63 Exact citation: “C’è tanto da sperare per loro!”
crises all the more unsettling. Bruno’s eyes are the lens to his reality and his gaze reveals a breach of his ethical standards. As a result of Bruno views on right and wrong, we renew our identification with the boy, taking it away from the adult protagonist. If we did not know it before, we eventually recognize that we have watched the entire movie according to the boy’s principles (Marcus, *In the Light of Neorealism* 71-72). Furthermore, Pattison believes that if the child’s point of view carries more weight, it is still a child’s view. It is necessarily more unrefined and underdeveloped than an adult’s (113). The child’s qualities, however, enhance the truthfulness of what he takes in which, in turn, encourages the audience to side with the youth.

Traditional Hollywood heroes acquire audience identification through happy, or at least cathartic and consoling, plot resolutions. The great films of the neorealist era did not have the same effect as they were not among the most widely distributed in Italy and suffered both box office and critical failures. Italians preferred Hollywood movies or Italian farces because there was far less evidence of themselves in the film’s protagonists, making identification with the subject matter minimal or less painful for the spectator. Antonio is certainly not a typical hero and disrupts not only Bruno’s view of his previously heroic father, but also the spectator’s habit of identifying with the ‘good’ guy. Through *Ladri*, De Sica calls into question the definition of what poetry means to Neorealism as well as what the viewer expects from the film viewing experience (Marcus, *In the Light of Neorealism* 72). In the same regard, Marcus cites Rossellini for previously having violated our sympathies when he removed Pina from the stage midway into *Roma città aperta* which disappointed our expectations for a conventional outcome. However, as Marcello and the rest of his gang unitedly leave the scene, towards a decidedly (and literally) brighter tomorrow, Rossellini’s broad revolution still leaves the audience’s moral sensibilities intact. De Sica challenges even these, “…leaving us a vision whose only certainty is a son’s miraculous love of a father” (72).

In the *Ladri* finale, the two characters walk into the city without speaking, for each one would have a different way to tell the same story. What the viewer wants now, however, is for Antonio to change his view of the way the story actually unfolded, in order that it may coincide with ours, Bruno’s, and De Sica’s. We want that he may finally see the moral lesson that previously peered through the spokes of the bicycle wheel. Eventually, the director satisfies our hopes in his own
way as he slowly brings the two characters together with his interpretation of poetic justice: the film which opened with a lonely Antonio, isolated from the crowd of unemployed workers, at the very least closes with him and his rediscovered friend. The two can live in harmony as Antonio is now “… un tribolato, non lo sciocco padre che prende i cazzotti e chiede scusa” (Baldelli 229). Bruno is no longer a spectator or stranger to the disadventures of his father, he is his partner: “Egli patisce col padre; e siccome partecipa alla sua pena, tenta anche di collaborare” (229). The story of a stolen bicycle and a father-son relationship are finally entwined, as are the two hands that join them (figure 29).

Figure 29

Bazin feels that the final gesture of the little boy in giving his hand to his father has been frequently misinterpreted because the hand that Bruno offers Antonio is neither a symbol of forgiveness nor is it one of consolation. Rather, “… it is the gesture that marks the equality of this father and son” (Bazin 2: 53). With regards to offering any semblance of a plot resolution, the film reaches one only if we believe that Ricci’s personal tragedy is somewhat relieved by Bruno’s offer of support. Bruno’s tactile movement towards his father reverses the negative connotations previously associated with touch - Antonio’s slap and the son’s refusal to be caressed by his father shortly thereafter. It is a gesture that allows the viewer to come to terms with the moral turmoil to which they have just been privy because Bruno too has come to terms with it.
Once Ricci is let off by the owner of the bicycle, and by those who are holding him, Bruno takes his rightful place alongside his father. Together with Bruno, we are the only ones able to understand what his father has done because we have been along for the hard journey. We may never agree with the man’s actions, but we too extend our hand in familial and loving solidarity. Bruno dries his eyes for his father’s sake, for he now recognizes his own strength and, at last, Antonio mimics his son’s actions. At this point in the film, for example, we can see Antonio straightening out his hat in exactly the same way that Bruno had done when he first collected it off the ground in the previous scene. When Bruno sees himself reflected back in his father’s tears, and feels the strength of his father’s trust, when he takes hold of his father, the camera too reflects this negotiation and lets them dissolve into the crowd. The silent, yet unmistakably profound communication between the two “men” is not only visually captivating, but also certainly one of the greatest cinematic examples that captures the Wordsworthian paradox through the possibility and power for man and child to trade places before our eyes. According to De Sica, the ultimate goal of his Neorealism is to shed light on humanity. Ladri is meant to show the spectator that he too is capable of possessing great compassion and that Bruno will help him [the spectator] achieve it. With that, the film must necessarily end here, in the greatest gesture of role reversal the film has encountered when the child indeed becomes the “father of the Man.”

Beneath the final scenes of Ladri di biciclette and below the chaotic Roman streets, lies De Sica’s humanism: the nobility and power of life reveals itself in endurance, in the desire to continue on the road of life, wherever it may lead. Fittingly, the road of life in this movie, the final shot of the Roman streets, is also where this De Sichian vision comes together – as the child is the only one capable of taking us down that road, toward a potentially more luminous yonder. The filmmaker’s hope, no matter how small or subtle its affects might appear, is reserved to the extent that the personal relationship between father and son always remains intact. It is the very isolation of this reconstituted ‘happy ending,’ amid the plethora of negative ones one could read, which serves to polarize De Sica’s final view:

Bruno’s ultimate acceptance of his fallen father, despite the social and even cosmic conspiracy against him, makes the boy’s generosity remarkable to the
point of heroism. Conversely, the world’s utter imperviousness to Bruno’s humanizing example shows how unbridgeable is the gap between personal ideals and the larger world order. (Marcus, *In the Light of Neorealism* 75)

All that remains for Bruno to do is what he has always done and proffer his warm presence. Though the ending of *Ladri di biciclette* may stray far from conventional optimism, as the bike is never retrieved, Antonio liberates himself with the help of his son thereby achieving personal success and salvation. Justice does not always prevail, but that which is more important is the justice of humanity. The only glimmer of hope, on any larger scale, becomes the solidarity among the oppressed against the selfish society in which they find themselves. As the story comes together, the anguish of the journey and the bicycle theft is, at least temporarily, subdued and even conquered by the support of a son’s hand which will lead a father much further than two wheels ever would.

The spectator, like Bruno, has grown up: his eyes remain open long after the lights have gone out in the theatre. We recognize that Bruno’s big, brown eyes were always the camera lens through which we witnessed events. His gaze alone has served to outline the role reversal that occurs between him and his father while simultaneously allowing us to enter into the postwar Roman space. In Deleuze’s words:

> What defines neorealism is this build-up of purely optical situations (and sound ones) which are fundamentally distinct from the sensory-motor situations of the action image in the old realism…. He is prey to a vision, pursued by it or pursuing it, rather than engaged in an action. (2: 3)

Deleuze also maintains that Neorealism replaced the ‘movement image’ with the ‘time image,’ which prevents characters from translating sensory-motor stimuli into effectual action, cutting their responsibilities down to those of a helpless bystander. Certainly, on one hand, Bruno’s affections will not blatantly solve the Ricci’s financial woes. But that goal becomes secondary to the journey and to what Bruno has learned. What he can convey through his eyes, to his father, becomes the more important De Sichian conclusion and that which disturbs Deleuze’s helpless witness approach. The child has made the successful transition from childhood to adulthood.
Often times, he has also invited the spectator to reflect on the meaning of the duo’s daily events. What results from this reflection is, De Sica hopes, the possibility that the viewer, like Antonio, will walk out of the theatre a more intuitive man amongst, not against, a crowd of his peers. The film’s ending completes Bruno’s bildung. If the spectator can exit onto the streets carrying a different perspective than when he entered the cinema space, then he too has come of age. Together then, like father and son, the child and filmmaker coalesce to achieve poetic realism for Everyman, whether he finds himself in front of or behind the camera (see figure 30).

Figure 30
Chapter 4
The Effectiveness of Film in the Classroom

4.1 Chapter Overview

Throughout the dissertation, the focus has been to heighten the reader’s awareness of the insistence neorealist directors place on the spectator’s pure vision of the filmic events. In previous chapters, the child has been described as the most successful vehicle through which such onscreen messages are transmitted precisely for his unprecedented propensity for sensorial assimilation. The child’s gaze attracts the viewer not only towards the story at hand, but also towards a deeper reception of the medium, as a whole. The aim of the next chapter is dedicated to expanding the reach of the medium by including it in the classroom as a means to further enrich the students’ educational experiences. Today, Italian cinema courses are a staple of many North American universities (Bondanella, “New Directions” 8) and the student finds him/herself a frequent viewer of many neorealist classics. The audience in film classes is no longer made up of the desolate postwar man who can hardly bare to look at the screen, but it is comprised of the student-spectator who does not want to turn his and/or her eyes away even when the unexpected ‘FINE’ signals the end of the movie. Likewise, the student-scholar is not simply asked to receive the images, but to interpret them, to evaluate them, and to use the dramatic constructs to achieve a higher level of learning in this academic environment. In the foreign language classroom, the student can work towards deeper language acquisition since film-based instruction can serve as an effective stimulus for motivation (which will make the student more receptive to learning), it can increase linguistic skills (such as, pronunciation, syntax, and vocabulary extension), and it can heighten learners’ cultural awareness of the target language countries (Fawkes 3). Studying the role of the child, in the classroom, then, will prove to be yet another effective tool for the promotion of the students’ lateral thinking (in both a cinema and/or a language course), as case studies conducted in different courses, at the University of Toronto Mississauga, will demonstrate.
4.2 An Overview of Italian Film Studies

Academic interests in the realm of Italian cinema began to gain momentum in the country of origin when surveys of the history of filmmaking emerged from universities such as L’università degli Studi di Padova. There, Gian Piero Brunetta’s research and writing produced his pioneering overview of Italian cinema, in four volumes, titled *Storia del cinema italiano* (the first volume was released in 1979). What further entrenched Italian cinema in university studies was the documentation affixed to it by scholars outside of the peninsula. Over the course of the years and decades following Brunetta’s release, the list of comprehensive texts available to enthusiasts, cinephiles, students and teachers alike grew exponentially, spawning entire works dedicated to everything from the study of specific genres down to the analysis of even just one film. Various indispensable and fundamental resources written by Peter Bondanella, Millicent Marcus, and Antonio Vitti, that examine a gamma of themes, theories, directors, and genres, have ensured that interest in Italian cinema is inexhaustible and vibrant.64

For its specific place in Italian curricula, Bondanella describes the 1970s as a revolutionary decade for support, promotion, and research “centered upon the Italian cinema with a [particular] concern to provide useful study materials for our students” (“New Directions” 7). Eventually, according to Bondanella, cinema secured its place in most Italian Studies programs in North America thanks to film conferences in the Seventies at Purdue University (under the leadership of Ben Lawton) and to an entire chapter dedicated to Cinema Studies, titled “Teaching Italian Film,” in a 1976 *Handbook for Teachers of Italian* for the American Association of Teachers of Italian (AATI; under the editorial supervision of Anthony Mollica).

In a 1995 survey, published in the *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, Bondanella found that between 1984 and 1995 sixty-six books, dedicated to twenty-one different Italian directors, were produced in Italian, English, and French (“New Directions” 8). What is more, the countries to turn out the highest number of books on the subject of Italian cinema, other than Italy which

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64 Some of these authors’ major works include *Italian Cinema from Neorealism to the Present* (1993), *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism* (1987) and *Filmmaking by the Book: Italian Cinema and Literary Adaptation* (1993), and *Giuseppe De Santis and Postwar Italian Cinema* (1996), respectively.
produced forty, were the United States and Canada with nineteen books ("New Directions" 8). With these figures in mind, which have grown considerably since 1995, it is undeniable that North American scholarship, in particular, has made noteworthy strides in the area of Italian Cinema Studies.

The study of neorealist films outside of Italy is also ardent, in large part, thanks to the recognition of its value as a widely employed and effective instrument in today’s language classroom. Apart from those courses, most often delivered in English, which are dedicated to the study and analysis of the film art itself, the supplementary and core use of movies as a teaching tool in an L2 setting are applied throughout any multitude of textbooks in the forms of stills, clips, descriptions, activities, etc. Applicable language texts include, but are certainly not limited to, Ciao! (2011, Carla Riga); Sentieri: attraverso l’Italia contemporanea (2011, Julia Cozzarelli); Immagina: l’italiano senza confini (2011, Anne Cummings, Chiara Frenquellucci, Gloria Pastorino, Julia A. Viazmenski); Avanti: Beginning Italian (2010, Janice Aski, Diane Musumeci); Cinema e didattica dell’italiano L2 (2010, Diadoni, Micheli); Con fantasia: Reviewing and Expanding Functional Italian Skills (2009, Marcel Danesi, Salvatore Bancheri, Michael Lettieri); and Adesso! (2005, Marcel Danesi). In other cases, there are texts which deal solely with the instruction of the language through cinema or through particular films. The most recent selections include the Film Study Program series (2006, Elda Buonanno); Italian Through Film: The Classics (2006, Antonello Borra, Cristina Pausini); Ciak...si parla italiano (2005, Piero Garofalo, Daniela Selisca); Italian Through Film: A Text for Italian Courses (2003, Borra, Pausini); and the Cinema Italia series (Adalgisa Serio, Ernestina Meloni; 2008: Io non ho paura, Il ladro di bambini; 2009: Caro diario; 2012: Johnny Stecchino).

As shall be explored in the forthcoming sections, the inclusions of the aforementioned texts into the Italian classroom have, moreover, made certain that students are both exposed to authentic interactions with the language (via the film) as well as participating in activities which promote an overall increased communicative competence (Warschauer, “A Developmental Perspective” 454). As Erwin Tschirner finds, the students’ immersion and active engagement in the world of the target language, which employs an active use of the four language skills, will serve to then increase their L2 proficiency (Tschirner 305). Furthermore, the addition of historical, political,
and cultural contexts surrounding the films will arm students with useful para-filmic information which will, in turn, make the learning more effective and permanent (Hanley, Herron, Cole 58).

4.2 Cinema as a Teaching Tool in the Foreign Language Classroom: Beginnings

The educator can see documented signs of the impending essentiality of cinema in the classroom throughout numerous periodicals, beginning in 1948 when Philip Lewis published “The Future of Television in Education” in *The Phi Delta Kappan* journal in which he stated that “[t]elevision has much to offer education” (157). In his 1957 submission to *The Quarterly of Film Radio and Television*, Gerald Weales wrote about the validity of teaching film using full length features as opposed to just studying the screenplay. In this way, the professor recognized the cinema as autonomous and impacting pedagogical material. He firmly held the notion that while the script may be useful to those who already have a critical cinematic eye and the proper meta-language necessary to dissect it and see its worth, film can be truly understood only when viewed and closely examined (“Teaching Film Drama as Film Drama” 395-396). Similarly, Tania Convertini credits John Driscoll’s early findings in *Italica*, in 1959, when he stated that the cinema is a tool which can motivate students’ learning and generate worthwhile discussions (22). Driscoll maintained that a film is “the strongest practical visualization technique a language instructor can bring into his class” for the immediacy it creates between the learner and the target language (222). Moreover, students’ interests are fervently stimulated as they take an active approach to studying the material because they are “emotionally involved” (223) in what they see.

In 1965, when the U.S. Congress decided that federal priorities “should also be assigned to the media, both print and non-print,” the in-class use of films began to gain further popularity and expand to include even those that were not strictly considered ‘educational,’ that is, designed with students in mind (Johnson “Using Film in the Classroom” 2).

From the onset of its didactic employment, the use of video aids in the classroom is a practice which was championed for its ability to increase student comprehension through its sensory - aural, oral, and visual - appeal. Film is, as Ted Johnson wrote in 1971, a highly emotional and sensuous medium which immediately increases the students’ attention and activity in practices
centered on film analyses (5). In short, when incorporated into the curriculum, the beneficial effects to the students’ experience are multifaceted. A great number of articles have been written, papers given, and studies conducted which favour the use of film to carry the student towards a superior command of the foreign language. Below is a selection of the main currents in cinema pedagogy which emphasize the reasons why film is such a rewarding tool. The various authors describe the sensorial nature of cinema, the motivation it can create within the learner, and its ability to incite meaningful exchanges in the L2 classroom; however, their findings are certainly applicable elsewhere and are the fabric of the favourable outcomes in any course which employs the same medium.

4.3 Benefits: Increased Linguistic and Cultural Competencies

Interest in the moving picture as a tool for the language learner or as core curricular material in interdisciplinary and cultural studies only grew stronger since Lewis’ 1948 contributions. Current literature on the efficacy of employing movies in a multitude of academic settings is fervent.

The use of video enhances different aspects of foreign language instruction as a result of the varied and interactive nature of film projections. In general, exposure to visual and aural input in the classroom creates positive outcomes within the learner as fundamental L2 acquisition skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) become more enjoyable for the learner (Al-Seghayer, “The Effect of Multimedia Annotations Modes on L2 Vocabulary Acquisition”).

In 1995, Julia E.B. Hanley, Carol A. Herron, and Steven P. Cole compared the effect of video clips and static pictures on comprehension and retention of a written passage. The students who were shown a video clip with French narration scored significantly higher on comprehension tests than did their peers who learned the text through their teacher’s narration and who were shown still pictures of the context. Tschirner finds that in order to increase reading (and listening) comprehension, texts should be supported by visual elements which will serve to repeat and reinforce words and word sequences, making their meaning easier to recognize (311). In their study of twenty-eight Beginner French college students, Carol Herron, Matthew Morris, Teresa Secules, and Lisa Curtis found that learners in a video-based curriculum fared better on listening, writing, and reading tests because of the approximation to native speakers via ten
minute films which dramatized key concepts (verb conjugations, tenses, vocabulary) focused on
during lecture (“A Comparison Study of the Effects of Video-Based versus Text-Based
Instruction in the Foreign Language Classroom”). Steven Fawkes writes that the mix of visual
and aural cues presented in class, as a result of exposing students to television or film clips,
Enhances students’ overall language competence (Switched On?). Similarly, Janet Swaffar and
Andrea Vlatten maintain that “reading what is seen as well as what is heard enhances
learning” (175).

What of the efficacy of adding the visual element to a teaching tool which was always otherwise
aural or written? The implementation of the visual accompaniment to activities “increases
student interest and augments their listening attentiveness” (Canning-Wilson) more so than in
those students who are only exposed to aural exercises. In 1994, in “The Impact of Video on the
Comprehension Skills of Core French Students,” Iva Baltova described several advantages
associated with teaching comprehension through video. According to the author, video materials
expose students to a message using more than one mode (namely the audio and the visual
channels) which subsequently makes for better learning, their interests and attention are kept
active for longer, and their contact with the realistic discourse markers found on screen, such as
gestures, facial expressions, can generate anticipations regarding what the speaker is about say
or the meaning behind what he / she is saying (509-510). Specifically, in her study of students
across two French classes, Baltova found that visual cues enhanced overall comprehension in
those subjects who were shown a French story as opposed to those who only listened to it
(without the visual accompaniment). Her observations also demonstrated that her subjects more
successfully understood scenes in which utterances relied more on a visual delivery of
information (such as actions and/or body language) rather than on words or lengthy dialogue
(517). To this point, Canning-Wilson finds that action films, for example, as opposed to
documentaries, tend to peak and sustain the students’ interest most and that the same logic can be
applied to the use of any visual enhancers such as illustrations, pictures, charts, etc. The same
author summarizes the advantages of video in instruction as a form of communication which
functions without the assistance of language since “we often interact by gesture, eye contact and
facial expression to convey a message.” That being so, video serves as a visual stimulus which
“can lead to and generate prediction, speculation and a chance to activate background schemata
when viewing a visual scene reenacted.” Moreover, and as a result of the above notions, Canning-Wilson argues that language found in videos can help non-native speakers understand stress patterns through the use of authentic language and speech in various situations thereby improving the learners’ pronunciation.

Other research, specifically conducted on the effects of visual imagery on L2 vocabulary acquisition, in particular, is also prevalent. In discussing the utility of multimedia for increasing a learner’s vocabulary skills, Dorothy M. Chun and Jan L. Plass find that students’ retention of new lexical items is significantly greater after being exposed to text annotations that are associated with different types of media. Since recall cues are supported by both visual, written, and listening modes, the learner is offered more paths for retrieval in memory (189-190). In 2001, Khalid Al-Seghayer studied thirty students in an English as a Second Language Course and found video, in combination with a text definition, is more effective in teaching unknown vocabulary than a picture in combination with a text definition. The participants learned and recalled more words when video clips were provided than when pictures were made available. According to Al-Seghayer, the possible factors for the increased skills result from the variety of modality cues that help “learners build a mental image, curiosity increases concentration, and video’s combination of modalities (dynamic image and sound) facilitate recall.”

In terms of increasing oral communicative competence and production, Tschirner finds that videos can increase foreign language learning by focussing on phonological, grammatical, lexical, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic features within a situational framework. That is, students may examine pragmatic or sociocultural features of target language interactions by selecting particular scenes and identifying common features within specific interactional situations, such as how to introduce someone or how to conduct oneself in the service industry (Tschirner 307).

With emphasis placed on enhancing the value of the students’ overall learning through experiential processes and on methods that will develop their critical thinking skills, research highlights the prioritization of more authentic interactions with the subject area, of learner-centered approaches, and the fostering of motivating classroom environments that maximize the
students’ productivity in and the retention of core materials (Christensen, 1991). According to Carol Herron, the use of in class videos allows students to “witness authentic linguistic and cultural interactions between native speakers, and it is a medium with which students are very familiar” (190). Furthermore, information is optimally retained because video offers contextual support and/or helps learners to visualize words as well as meanings.

To this effect, Elissa Tognozzi states that authentic visual aids help “students understand meaning as it is conveyed by word choice, stress and intonation patterns, and body language, since the characters in the clips are able to model authentic language for the students” (72). Madeleine Strong Cincotta believes that students are more open to receiving the visual image because they are more familiar with it and because they can assimilate the information better than they would with only a written text. Cincotta states that it would be difficult to discover material which would better engage the now visually oriented students’ full attention and be the starting point for real, meaningful and oral communication (5). There are ways to engage the pupil’s attention by making use of the language of cinema, the visual image, either on its own or in conjunction with the written text to motivate students and create a climate of meaningful communication. These create several advantages: students are familiar with the medium of cinema and they more easily retain the meta-language needed to describe their opinions accurately and utilize them to criticize what effect, for example, certain camera techniques have on a scene. Amongst critics, films have always had the capacity to give rise to discussion and communication like no other medium can, the student-spectator’s experience is no different (Hung 174). Tschirner also believes that gaining insight into a culture is a corner stone of functional competence in a foreign language - not only for linguistic benefit, but also for a deeper, inter- or cross-cultural understanding of target language societies (312-313). In fact, films enrich students’ cultural experience, or their worldly experience, by allowing them to living vicariously through the cinema while the mere dramatizing nature of filmic events leads the students to identify more closely with the phenomenon or idea portrayed (Herron, Cole, Corrie, Dubreil 524-525). In Using Authentic

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65 Alice Y. Kolb and David A. Kolb defend experiential learning as a process in which the learner is able to “‘touch all the bases’ - experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting” and, consequently, be more responsive to the learning situation and what is being learned (194). See also Linda H. Lewis and Carol J. Williams “Experiential learning: Past and present” (1994).
Video in the Classroom, Jane Sherman also summarizes the value associated with using authentic film clips in the classroom for their ability to engage the learner in a global community which will, in turn, sharpen his or her cultural understanding of how others live, think, and behave (2). In using film to foster linguistic as well as cultural competence, the students can use their language skills as a vehicle to gain more confidence in the L2 (Harrison 93).

4.4 Suggestions for Integrating Cinema into the Language Classroom

As an avid adopter of audiovisual materials in the classroom, Michael Lettieri commented on the overall effectiveness of using videos in a Language course in “Il videoregistratore nell’insegnamento dell’italiano come lingua seconda” (1992). In the article, he states that the projection of moving images immediately attracts students to the material, more so than another teaching tool would. Moreover, he posits, the learner assimilates and uses the L2 more effectively as a result of his or her increased motivation after having the ability to contribute, in the foreign language, to various exercises associated with the viewing or after collaborating in a group setting made up of his or her peers. The use of visual media in the classroom successfully facilitates the learning process because the environment is one in which the “learning context [can] join the language production and content” in ways which appeal to a multitude of learning styles and which allow students to “practice multiple dimensions of language use” (Swaffar and Arens 30). Furthermore, in “Il cinema come complemento di insegnamento,” Vitti summarizes the far-reaching potency of film usage by stating that “[i]l cinema non è più osservato soltanto dalla storia dei film ma come il molteplice prodotto di forze diverse e interagenti” (75). The author suggests the types of activities which can be employed at various stages in the students’ L2 experience, ranging from role-play to comparative analyses between the country of study and the country of origin of each student (76-77). The following are additional avenues a teacher could explore and some of the results the students can achieve in a beginner, intermediate, and advanced level language course. Regardless of the level of proficiency, exercises must be designed with a focus on carrying the viewer toward comprehending one feature-type at a time (initially, and then increasing the tasks as L2 acquisition strengthens), allow for a discussion of what has just been seen or heard (to ensure comprehension), and inspire discussion among students, especially when differences in their perceptions arise (Swaffar and Vlatten 178). Giving
students the opportunity to talk about themselves and about their interests, creates a feeling of belonging which increases their success rate (Tschirner 316).

In a first year or beginner Italian course, a teacher may use the movie - whether in whole or in part (although, since a film is made to be viewed in its entirety, the full-length demonstration of a film is preferred), to incite creative and descriptive production such as, character descriptions, plot summaries, or for rewriting the finales of films as they so desire. Students can also be lead to provide argumentative or opinionated responses (regarding how the student receives the film) and make comparative approaches (is it similar to another film the students have seen, are they familiar with the locations on screen?). Skits based on pieces of the dialogue can be modified and dramatized by the students in order to build on their grammatical skills, and their interpretative abilities (Sherman 36; Swaffar and Vlatten 181; Secules, Herron and Tomasello 487). If the curriculum warrants a move towards more in-depth cultural studies, speech acts, connotations, etiquette, or social events that mark differences in the target culture can be identified and discussed (Swaffar and Vlatten 179) or acted out within created skits (Thanasoulas). Should the teacher choose to focus the language production on a theme-based approach, students will also have the opportunity to increase their interaction with the selected lexicon (Swaffar and Vlatten 177).

In an intermediate course, students can contextualize, with teacher guidance, the time period surrounding the release of the film and where that information can be seen on screen. Students may also begin to discuss the psychological (and not just physical) states of being of the characters and their relationship with others. In this way, the focus is less on quantitative descriptions in which what matters most are how many of the acquired language tools the students are indeed utilizing. Increased significance is instead given to the qualitative use of their skills, whereby the teacher can assess, for example, the depth of their grammar, the intricacy of their syntax, and their overall application and interpretation of what they have seen.

If the student has attained a certain comfort level and proficiency in the L2, interpolations on character motivations and conflicts, and on prevalent and recurring themes can be made. Students can also, then, analyze the film within the framework of the dramatic structure or arc: introduction, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. More importantly, if they have
already been exposed to other Italian films (whether within the same cinematic time period or not), they can increase their critical thinking by drawing connections between them (or the genre on the whole, if that information is present) or by cross-referencing Italian films to those of other countries. The greatest impact of the learning experience is achieved when the student is comfortable enough to deduce the quality of one film over another and express these views in the target language (Swaffar and Vlatten 177).

4.5 Selecting Visual Materials

As is sometimes the case, the film that is chosen and how it is deconstructed for the goal of linguistic apprehension will differ from teacher to teacher. Some instructors may choose classics of the Italian canon or popular blockbusters that the students may recognize prior to viewing, while others may highlight lesser known films and, consequently, widen the artistic field of knowledge in the student. Activities centered around the film can vary from beginner learners to advanced and can, of course, aim at developing the grammatical and communicative competence of the students. However, the focus is rarely so pigeon-holed. Instructors can utilize cinema in the foreign language classroom to invoke discussion while verifying that students’ language skills are improving, to challenge and invoke critical and analytical thinking, for cultural awareness or in preparation for interdisciplinary studies (Swaffar and Vlatten 182).

As Swaffar and Vlatten further outline, there are various advantages and disadvantages to consider when selecting the appropriate material to show and study in class. According to the authors, while short clips enable users to feel at ease with the material (and not overwhelmed with information) and to focus on specific aspects of the language (a simple verb tense or a greeting), they can also limit recognition of speech patterns (of the native speakers) or their own comprehension (without a storyline). Longer pieces or feature films provide the context necessary for students to be able to produce more language and to generalize ideas. The authors suggest employing clips of varying lengths with learning objectives clearly mapped out and expressed by the instructor, for the students (177).

Video clips should ultimately provide the opportunity to sustain a positive and interested attitude in the students by achieving emotional goals which stimulate a desire for further discussion or
more in-depth knowledge of the target language and culture (Tschirner 316). One such way is to choose a film which students themselves suggest (which indicates that they are already familiar with or have a natural interest in a particular film) or one which is rich in terms character identification. Specific materials of mention will be explored in the following section which also further describes the advantage of advanced organizers as models for achieving optimal learning.

4.6 The Visual Teacher for the Foreign Language Learner: Achieving Advanced Italian Adeptness by Studying the Neorealist Child

While I have always been a film enthusiast and I have often wanted to set the textbook aside in lieu of showing movies and talking about them in my foreign language teaching, I would continue to primarily adopt the textbook so as to not stray too far from prescribed practices. I was all too glad to employ, whenever possible, those textbooks (many of which I have listed above) that dedicated chapters to introducing students to the world of Italian cinema. Time permitting, viewing a film in class was implemented only as a reward to the students for having worked diligently for weeks on end, after we had completed traditional grammar lessons. The choice to directly complement grammar lessons with the extensive study of a film was made for an advanced Italian language course (in 2007), at the students’ request. While some of their pleas may have been cloaked in sarcasm to persuade me, they could not have been more correct in their fight. To discover if students could indeed learn more and whether or not the findings of other educators could actually translate into success for my students, in my classroom, I willingly yielded to their petition for a close study of an Italian film. The tasks, as students were made aware, would not be comprised of simplistic, content-oriented questions, which only test the students ability to recount plot details. In fact, students in both foreign language classrooms and in film criticism courses are always emboldened to go beyond or, as Adrian Martin states, to “not merely grasp ‘what is there’ on screen but, ultimately, to say something about the film that it does not – cannot – say about itself” (68). What I wanted from them was to see what they could learn about the film and about criticizing it and how they could relay that information in the target language. This time, they conceded. I wanted them to study the setting, the camera

66 The course is designated as Advanced Italian Language Practice and is given at the University of Toronto Mississauga.
movements, the characters’ personal motivations and gestures during a film era which relied so much on the visual attention and interpretations of the spectator to infer the filmic message and less on the explicit information delivered in the lines of the actors.

After giving them a brief description of Neorealism, the choice of what film to dissect was also directly inspired by various students in the course who had seen *Ladri di biciclette* and who wanted to delve deeper into it. They undoubtedly wanted to watch that film, in particular, as it represented a sort of ‘advanced organizer’ for them with which they would be immediately comfortable working. David Ausubel in *Educational Psychology: A Cognitive View* retains that the most important factor to influence learning is finding out what the learner already knows (vi). Through his interpretation of what constitutes “meaningful learning,” Ausubel developed his theories of advance organizers. An advanced organizer is any relevant and carefully selected information an instructor gives the student that helps him or her organize the new forthcoming information. In many ways, I was happy to oblige their suggestion of using *Ladri* for I too was already quite aware of its artistic excellence and felt that I could do a pedagogical examination of it justice for the benefit of the students’ experience. Naturally, the whole film would serve the purpose of my instruction; however, I also wanted to challenge Bruno to become a teacher in this venue as well. Could he be as instrumental to the foreign-student spectator as he had been in Antonio’s learning and in implanting the film within the neorealist canon? To arrive at the answer, a series of pre-, mid-, and post-viewing activities were created and assigned.⁶⁷

**Structure**

The film is viewed in its entirety over one lecture and key scenes are displayed, as necessary, over the course of the weeks in which our analysis is taking place. Occasionally, the showing takes place outside of class time, during extra-curricular, “Romance Language Cineclub” sessions (which function as both a movie theatre and a classroom). When the CineClub is used for discussions, it advocates for a more unrestricted dialogue. That is, moving our talks beyond

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⁶⁷ While I began compiling and creating these exercises in 2007, they have been ever evolving and expanding. Since 2010, at the onset of the advanced course, students have received a workbook designed for them and inspired by them, based on *Ladri di biciclette*. The workbook has been included in the appendix, 1, of this dissertation.
the classroom doors allows students to interact with peers who are at varying levels of Italian language preparation, feeling more free to express themselves without the fear of judgment or of making grammatical errors. In the three hour course, which takes place over a two-day period, one lecture hour per week, typically the last hour, is reserved for the sole purpose of discussing the film (and the students’ assignments) in plenum. The other two hours explore grammatical concepts and theme-based lexicon which students will apply to their responses pertaining to the film, during the appropriate class. Needless to say, should students want to bring up their findings prior to the third film study hour they are always encouraged to do so. The entire process of studying the film takes between two and three weeks to complete.

Pre-Viewing Activities

Exercises taken on before the film is shown are meant to establish a level of connectivity to upcoming materials which will, as a result, ensure a higher rate of success in the student. To this effect, Rafael Salaberry states, “The success of a technology-driven activity will likely depend as much, or more, on the successful accomplishment of pre- and post-activities than on the technology activity itself” (“The Use of Technology for Second Language Learning and Teaching” 51). Understanding of the subject matter is elevated because the student is able to make correlations between what he or she already knows, which act as the advanced organizer (in this case, the pre-viewing activity itself, if nothing else). In 1999, Christine Coombe and Jon Kinney stated that “[l]earners learn primarily because of what they bring to their classroom experience in terms of their perceived needs, motivations, past experiences, background knowledge, interests and creative skills” (“Learner Centered Listening Assessment”). The teacher aids comprehension by raising the students’ awareness of their already pre-existing

68 In 2009, after having been turned on to Edilingua’s grammar textbooks by a colleague, I decided to join forces with the publishers and implement their text, Nuovo progetto italiano 2 (2007), in Advanced Italian at the University of Toronto Mississauga. A few years later, when the Collana Cinema Italia books (as mentioned above, the series includes detailed analyses of four films: Caro diario, Il ladro di bambini, Io non ho paura, and Johnny Stecchino, for use in a grammar classroom) were made available at my institution’s bookstore, I was challenged to turn what I had already started with Ladri di biciclette into a similar booklet. Thus, much of the credit for the structure and delineation of assignments found within my work is rightfully that of the award winning teachers and writers, Adalgisa Serio and Ernestina Meloni, behind the progressive Collana series.
background knowledge or provides them with those proper organizers in advance. Advanced organizers have proven results that comprehension of core material is enhanced in classrooms in which video is implemented, as substantiated by yet another look into the investigation of that teaching tool in the classroom, conducted by Carol Herron in 1994. Pre-viewing activities, like the ones found in the *Ladri* booklet (in appendix 1), stimulate the students’ curiosity so as to anticipate what to look for and how to better assess key scenes. Moreover, these activities will also better prepare them to tackle the set of questions they will be responsible for answering during the film. Specific exercises, at this stage, include readings and written or oral reflections that detail information about the director, the cinematic movement to which the film belongs, and any other relevant historical or cultural information. In this way, not only are students increasing their linguistic abilities, they are also becoming familiar with the material on several interdisciplinary planes that will better prepare them to contextualize the filmic events. By being able to first identify the genre or type of video they will be watching, “events can become predictable [which] precedes having to comprehend the video fully” (Swaffar and Vlatten 178).

**Mid-Viewing Activities**

Students are encouraged to take an active and critical approach when viewing the film by taking notes in the target language that will help them answer the questions provided. Amongst the comfort of their peers, they are asked to share their findings and edit each other’s work so as to adjust any grammatical or content-based anomalies. During this portion of the work, students answer questions on character descriptions, motivations, the differences between protagonists, and their relationship to one another. In having the ability to take note of the key figures followed by the camera, either through shot distance, camera angle, or the amount of time a person occupies the frame compared to other characters, “students can decide who or what is important in the video scene and who or what appears to be peripheral, thus enabling them to focus on highly prominent information” (Swaffar and Vlatten 178). The purpose of the mid-viewing activities, however, is to prepare them for the final process, post-viewing, which will include the written and oral presentation of their reflections.

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69 While Swaffar and Vlatten proposals are geared towards an initial viewing with no sound, I find their suggestions equally as applicable to a course which offers the entire film-viewing experience from the onset.
Post-Viewing Activities

This last phase serves to solidify the students’ scope of understanding. What is more, filmic events are assigned a more pragmatic context as they are discussed in relation to the students’ own realities. Information treated after the film pertains to lighting effects, music, and the importance of the child’s gaze. These responses are turned into debates or presentations (portions of which are also submitted for evaluation) which have been expanded for maximum peer-to-peer interaction. Discourses include comparisons to other films, Italian or otherwise, and to the students’ personal experiences as opposed, or akin, to the situation, personalities, etc. of the characters. Students also attack the efficacy, or the lack thereof, of the transmission of the filmic message with an avoidance to ask and answer questions which risk simplistic responses such as, ‘Yes, I liked the movie’ or ‘No, I didn’t like the movie.’ Throughout each stage of the learning and studying, students are asked to expand their vocabulary by utilizing accurate terminology and varied synonyms to express themselves and their ideas.

Results

With the specific intent of answering the previously posed query as to whether or not Bruno would stand above the other characters as the greatest source of inspiration for the students’ responses and for their assimilation of the various meanings of the film, the results were promising. All film analyses which focused on Bruno were certainly the most heart-felt and intricate and included such findings which concluded that the child was the most important protagonist in the film and that he served as the moral compass against which Antonio was judged by others in the film and by those watching it. Through the boy’s gazes, students were able to denote and express a variety of emotions such as sadness, embarrassment, condemnation, and redemption, and they were also able to successfully recreate dialogues which, in the film, were only conveyed visually. When asked whether or not they felt the film had more impact because of the child, students immediately responded that he was probably, according to them, the reason why the film was as famous as it was. One student, in particular, compared the presence of Bruno to the presence of Giosué Orefice in La vita è bella (1997) and admitted that,
on top of the sensitive nature of the film, the little boy made the events and the film even more touching.\textsuperscript{70}

Regardless of competence level or of the driving force behind the inclusion of the film as core instructional material, the findings I discovered are certain to emerge as common denominators that unite the effects of film in the majority of foreign language classrooms. In the upper level language course, students were stimulated by the active role they took in the learning process, through pre-readings and lexical studies, which helped them internalize the information transmitted on screen. All students, regardless of competence, were be able to, for example, make reference to and read meaning behind various extralinguistic features, such as facial expressions, gestures, and face-to-face interactions between characters. More advanced learners were also able to employ meta-cinematic language to express themselves when describing particular moods, tones, and character motivations as a function of the cinema to convey specific meanings to the spectator. In the case of the child, all learners were able to describe the importance of his role to the film and some were even able to analyze him in reference to another young key figure in a different movie altogether. Above all, what resulted was the effective production of a message which they delivered to the teacher and the class, written and orally. The best that any Humanities instructor can hope for, and often expect, is that the student gain an overall increased interest in, and appreciation for, the language and for the Arts, in general.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{70} The findings are actual, translated, student responses. They have been synthesized for the purpose of this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{71} Interestingly enough, twenty out of the twenty four students enrolled subsequently went on to take other courses in Italian cinema a year later.
4.7 Transforming the Cinema Theatre into the Cinema Classroom: Personal Approaches

We can better understand Metz’ claim by conceding that ‘absurd’ here is used ironically to indicate the intricacy of the cinema and the potentially harebrained difficulties that may arise when one tries to talk about the movies. In the cinema classroom, Metz’ statement can be reversed by first showing students that Film Studies is not simply about accumulating more and more information about films, filmmakers, and the film industry. Moreover, the subject of analyzing filmic images need not be so daunting to them. The former would be a passive form of learning which, today, can be indisputably extinguished by searching through webpages which offer superficial facts on the cinema. The instructor must first direct the learners’ attention to the important questions and problems a movie can raise,

the film can help assure that all the great mass of fact and concept and theory and application that constitute any field of knowledge will fall into a coherent pattern in which more important aspects will be clearly differentiated from the trivial.

(Johnson 6)

The aforementioned assessment proves even more true in this day and age since film, for academic analyses, fosters in the student elevated practices of perception, judgement, and selectivity for the processing of the abundance of data at their finger tips. In 1987, even before the explosion of the World Wide Web in the mid 1990s, Linda Williams Post foresaw the validity of tapping into the inundation of all forms of technology, primarily audio-visual support, given that “students live in a media-oriented world, they consider sight and sound as ‘user friendly’” (28). By this evaluation, the educator’s role today, therefore, becomes that of teaching students how to filter through the wealth of information, mainly found online, in order to help them determine what is verifiably useful and important. In fact, in my own classroom, I have inevitably come to recognize that students have access to all of the information I could ever include on a course syllabus and that there is no author or movement that cannot just as easily be found through a variety of search engines. My literary or cinematic lectures, therefore, always
aim to contextualize topics by placing artists and movements, literary or political, within an historical, social, or cultural framework. Mark Warschauer considers the practice of implementing a blended pedagogical approach, like the one described above, a “most potent collaborative activit[y]” between the learner and the material which will, furthermore, aid in constructing new knowledge within him or her (“Computer-Mediated Collaborated Learning” 476-477). In order to further complement my lessons, I call upon the use of various web links for ulterior ways to increase learning through visual support and, subsequently, aid in memory retention of course materials. In so doing, I have also provided students with reputable points of reference and ways of learning how to decipher between what constitutes a good or useful website and what constitutes a bad or ineffective one. This is considered a valuable tool for today’s students who become more capable of “investigat[ing] the accuracy of [Internet] claims” while “expand[ing] their understanding of their field, and gain[ing] new information” (Linn 782).

Today’s instructors must accentuate an active form of learning in which students develop analytical skills that can be applied to the films seen in the course and, subsequently, to the films they will watch outside of the classroom. Alex Clayton and Andrew Klevan have revitalized the pedagogical efficacy of critiquing film at school when it [criticism] is employed to deepen students’ interest in individual films, reveal new meanings and ways of watching movies, expand their sense of the medium, and evaluate and discriminate the quality of one film over another (1). If the film student adopts a serious, responsible, and critical approach to film, film studies becomes as important as any other type of study. In fact, the analysis of films as an academic exercise is one which increases the students’ critical thinking abilities while complementing the diversity of their varying learning skills and goals.

4.8 What is the Profile of the Film Student?

He or is she is anyone who wants to develop an interest in analyzing, comprehending, and evaluating films. In short, regardless of their program of study or of their initial motivation for taking a film course, the student becomes a cinephile. While each pupil’s personal opinions are valid, and validated by the instructor, “intersubjectivity” is, above all, encouraged (Clayton and Klevan 3). What is discouraged is superficiality, that is, impressionistic criticism that causes the learner to only talk about their own impressions of a film or, better, their judgement on it as a
film they simply liked or did not like. Instead, the student is asked to view the film from the point of view of the critic whose purpose is to evaluate a work, not optionally, but as an undertaking which is “intrinsic to the viewing experience” (Clayton and Klevan 5). Engaging in film criticism brings the students closer to making sense out of the images and to discussing what those images mean to them. Toles defends the usefulness of some amount of ‘personal accounting’ when discussing film, stating,

I cannot see the point ... or the theoretical usefulness, of continued reports on what other spectators are supposed to have “seen” in a movie if they are not accompanied by some kind of personal accounting. What have we seen for ourselves, and how has the complex bundle of desires and fears that all our experiences draw from helped to shape what we have seen? (A House Made of Light 99–100)

Thus, this evaluation of what is ‘seen,’ even if it is personal, carries the spectator-student or the student film critic to find the worth in a given film and increase the “depth of our identification with what we see” (Toles, A House Made of Light 81). Ultimately, it is the students’ attitude that justifies the quality of film not the nature or popularity of the film itself. If indeed the cinema, as Metz memorably describes it, “is difficult to explain, because it is easy to understand” (Film Language 69), then by arranging for the students to become familiar with the main critical tools used to analyze films, the cinema will be theirs to dissect. To effectively execute this endeavour, students should be introduced to modes of analysis from the onset of their film course, that draw a distinction between describing a film and examining one.

On the first day of classes, I briefly define “Film Description” to students as

• Repeating, in words, what we see in a film.

• A necessary tool, but an insufficient one if it is used on its own to merely summarize the plot, setting, characters, etc. as opposed to discussing how we are watching the film, based on what has been constructed before us.
This is then juxtaposed to what students can expect to gain from the course through the careful investigation into a film’s overall form or structure, that is, the film’s design as a system of meanings and signs or semiotics. Students are also expected to eventually pick out the patterns that lie beneath the movie’s surface which the director has purposely included so as to affix to the entire work, or even only to certain scenes, more significance. Students are also asked to redefine what they consider a “good film” by analyzing it in terms of what Clive Bell considers “significant form,” the presence of which sets good art apart from bad art. “Significant form,” according to Bell, is the combination of elements that, when assembled, create a work of art (12). A film’s parts, for example, add up to a new entity that does not exist in each individual component which cannot, in turn, be appreciated on its own. If a film carries with it significant form, then it will “ascend to a higher level of visual meaning” for the spectator (Sharff 7). Thus, by moving beyond simplistic descriptions, towards analysis, students are able to avoid rudimentary assumptions by identifying a work’s significant form. It is that deduction which then gives them good reason to evaluate a film positively, by judging it a well-made film, or otherwise.

But how do we help the learner recognize significant form? Warren Buckland believes we can do so by training the students to recognize “the special qualities of a film, or each scene in a film .... and by being sensitive to the unique meaning of camera movements or framing at play” (3). For example, students are reminded that not all camera movements are the same: a tracking shot in a Hollywood blockbuster is different from a tracking shot in a documentary. Students should acquire the fundamental terminology and knowledge regarding the standard tools which filmmakers use so as to better understand that those techniques can be employed in a variety of ways that often characterize and distinguish one artist from another. To understand the special qualities of a film, students should develop a filmmaker’s perspective to discover the effects that are achieved when certain shots are purposefully used over others. In fact, Bell also believes that the value of art lies in its ability to produce a distinctive aesthetic experience in the viewer which he refers to as “aesthetic emotion” (28). He defines it as that experience which is aroused by significant form, suggesting that the reason we experience aesthetic emotion is because it is an expression of what has previously been felt by the artist in creating the work of art (52).
Bell’s notion raises other key functional approaches for the student-cinephile regarding the debate between *auteur* versus director and in genre studies whereby priority is given to furnishing the skills needed to see the cinema in relation its historical and social context. Buckland views the study of the decision-making process that took place in a film’s construction as the process which is necessary to “acquire a broad knowledge of the inner workings of a film” (3). This involves looking at the various technical, stylistic, and narrative options available to a filmmaker and the choices that he or she makes in putting together a sequence or an entire film. To emphasize a movie’s construction combines the study of film practice and film aesthetics. This is because we consider both the choices that are made when a film is constructed and the aesthetic effects these decisions have on the film spectator. Furthermore, tapping into Bell’s credence that significant aesthetics involve the viewer in what he is looking at on a superior emotional plane, students see the value in dissecting the cinema and positively accept that analyzing a film does not destroy the experience of going to the movies, but simply changes it and the way they interact with the images on screen. Students, who are not already aware, find out about the direct correlation between their perception of a film and the cinematic techniques (camera work, *mise-en-scène*, etc.) put into practice by all those involved in the filmmaking process to illicit those desired responses. The students, therefore, acquire the expository tools to analyze a film’s meaning which requires them, the new spectator, to take a step back from his or her desire to watch the film only for their amusement. They are now able to offer intricate responses as to *why* they did or did not appreciate a given film.

4.9 How Can We Achieve Higher Learning Through Cinema? Tangible Practices from the Film Classroom

In a recent interview with Dave Itzkoff for *The New York Times* (June 15, 2012), Woody Allen spoke at length on the essentiality of the influence Italian cinema has always had on his illustrious career. The American director states as much, in no uncertain terms:

> Italian movies were a great staple of our cultural diet. They were a tremendous influence in terms of showing us that one could make movies about mature subjects with profound themes.... They invented a method of telling a story and suddenly for us lesser mortals it becomes all right to tell a story that way. We do
our versions of them, never as shockingly innovative or brilliant as when the masters did them. (Itzkoff, “That’s Amore: Italy as Muse. Woody Allen on Italian Movies and To Rome With Love”)

Exercises I refer to as “bridging” activities aim at making the global classroom seem local to the students; that is to say that the information with which they are presented attempts to immediately appear more accessible to them, less daunting or ‘absurd.’ This is especially comforting for those enrolled students who are not registered for a degree in Cinema Studies or in Italian, per se, but are taking the course for general interest or for a Humanities breadth requirement. Specifically speaking, then, the implementation of bridging practices raises the students’ awareness of the long-standing relationship between Italian films and Hollywood movies. They too, like Allen and so many others, will see the ‘innovation’ and ‘brilliance’ associated with the virtuosos of Italian cinema. Comparisons of this nature can be revelatory to students as well as advantageous regardless of the student’s personal preparation in cinema studies. They are surely to be familiar with the genres and titles of many, if not all, of the mentionable American films. In fact, in his 2006 article, “New Directions in Teaching Film in Italian Studies Programs,” Bondanella saw this very approach as one of the new directions Italian studies should take so as to keep discussions of its cinema traditions relevant. In so doing, we are increasing students’ “attraction to what they will discover to be a fascinating collection of movies” (9). The critic envisioned the expansion of the field of study to include new courses which inspect, and could be titled, *Sword and Sandal Epics; Spaghetti Westerns; Film Noir and the Giallo; Spaghetti Nightmare Horror Films; and Zombie and Cannibal Films* (12-13).

In 2002, at the University of Toronto, Department of Italian Studies, Marcus delivered yet another interdisciplinary approach in her course *The Holocaust in Contemporary Italian Film*. The Professor introduced Italian graduate students to the literary and cinematic depictions of the Italian-Jewish experience, through the voices of both Americans and Italian artists, some familiar to students, others unknown, but who were all connected by the events of the Holocaust. Proof of the immensity of her lessons and the fruitfulness of in class discussions would be found in her next book which was published as a result, *Italian Film in the Shadows of Auschwitz* (University of Toronto Press, care of the Goggio Chair Publication Series, 2007). The aforementioned
innovations are not meant to, of course, take anything away from those already established and successful programs of study (such as any survey of Italian film courses), but they are useful in denoting the on-going phenomena of, for example, the influence of the two industries (Italian and American) on one another, Hollywood’s use of Cinecittà studios as a production base, and the links between fiction writers and Italian auteurs (such as, Visconti’s *Ossessione* based on James M. Cain’s detective novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, 1934, and Rossellini’s *Viaggio in Italia*, 1954, whose many themes were inspired by James Joyce iconic short story “The Dead,” *The Dubliners*, 1914). What is more, if we draw from Marcus’ example, her course opened up theories of spectatorship and identity and themes of poetic humanity. An exemplary film which has lent itself profoundly to many of my own class discussions is Ettore Scola’s short film ’43-’97 (1997; provided as an accompaniment to Marcus’ *Italian Film in the Shadows of Auschwitz*) which juxtaposes the Nazi persecution of the Jews in World War II to the racism many immigrants face in Italy, today. The story, which is set around the backdrop of a movie theatre, where the news chronicles the day’s events and classic film clips fasten the action to art and art to humanity, has proven to be essential instructional material.

Information delivered in class should always be captivating, interdisciplinary, and inspire the student to use their knowledge attained in one course for future or lateral studies outside of it. That philosophy actually prompted me to draw the Hollywood-Cinecittà comparison between three particular works, in two separate courses. In *Classics of Italian Cinema of the Sixties and Seventies*, a portion of the course is dedicated to studying films, movements, and themes which link the Italian industry to the American one. In fact, the aforementioned methods are woven together by the Martin Scorsese documentary, *My Voyage to Italy* (1999), which I use to commence any new topic. Students immediately identify with the Italian-American director for they already revere his works. In his inviting and clear explanations of the history of Italian cinema, students learn, for the first time, of his gratitude towards and appreciation for those films with which they too will soon become familiar. The sample of the course syllabus (see Table 1) is meant to delineate the new framework I employ for comparing films which Bondanella himself might categorize under new courses that link Cinecittà to world cinema by genres such as, Horror Films, the Spaghetti Westerns, and Gangster Films. Topics covered include Dario Argento in relation to his long-time and admitted source of inspiration, the British-American Alfred
Hitchcock. The course also calls attention to the constant exchange of impact between the American Westerns of John Ford and Sergio Leone’s Spaghetti classics, and makes honorable mention of present-day Hollywood directors such as, Quentin Tarantino, who are currently working on their version of the modern Western. Furthermore, I present the study of Spaghetti Westerns as a stepping stone for comparisons to the giallo and poliziesco films, and gangster movies, and, finally, to raise issues of Italian-North American identity in, for example, Francis Ford Coppola’s Godfather I and II (1972 and 1974, respectively). It comes as no surprise that the Leone-Coppola discussions always turn out to be the most favoured and the liveliest part of this course.

Table 1. Course Title: Classics of Italian Cinema of the Sixties and Seventies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lecture Weeks</th>
<th>TOPICS OF DISCUSSION</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Overview of Italian Cinema from the Silent Era to Today</td>
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<td>• The Cinema of Reconstruction according to Rossellini, Antonioni, and Fellini</td>
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<td>• Scorsese’s My Voyage to Italy</td>
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<td>• Cinema in Context: Italy during the 1960s</td>
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<td>• Overview of Pink Neorealism and Comedy, Italian Style</td>
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<td>Comedy, Italian Style</td>
<td>FILM: La grande guerra</td>
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<td>• Film Analysis and Discussion</td>
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<td>Comedy, Italian Style</td>
<td>FILM: Divorzio all’italiana</td>
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<td>Film Analysis and Discussion</td>
<td>Overview of The Horror Film</td>
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<td>Alfred Hitchcock and Dario Argento: Finding Hitchcock’s Spirit in Argento’s Style</td>
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<td><strong>FILM:</strong> Selections from Hitchcock’s <em>Vertigo, Rear Window, and Psycho</em> and Argento’s <em>Suspiria</em> and <em>Deep Red</em>.</td>
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<td>Film Analysis and Discussion</td>
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<td>Overview of The Spaghetti Western</td>
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<td><em>The Spaghetti Western</em></td>
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<td><strong>FILM:</strong> <em>The Good, the Bad, the Ugly</em></td>
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<td>Film Analysis and Discussion</td>
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<td>Spaghetti Westerns as a Stepping Stone for Gangster Cinema</td>
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<td>Cinema in Context: The Resurgence Revisited</td>
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<td><em>My Voyage to Italy</em></td>
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<td><em>La questione meridionale; The Diffusion of the malavita siciliana</em></td>
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<td><strong>FILM:</strong> <em>Il gattopardo</em></td>
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<td>Film Analysis and Discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cinema in Context: Italy during the 1970s</td>
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<td><em>Gangster; The Diffusion of the malavita americana</em></td>
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<td><strong>FILM:</strong> <em>The Godfather</em></td>
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<td><em>My Voyage to Italy</em></td>
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<td><strong>FILM:</strong> <em>The Godfather</em></td>
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| • FILM: *The Godfather cont.*  
| • FILM: *The Godfather: Part II* |
| • Overview of Italians in the Holocaust |
| • Overview of *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* |

*Italians in the Holocaust*

**FILM: *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini***

| • Film Analysis and Discussion |

*Italians in the Holocaust*

**FILM: *Pasqualino settebellezze***

| • Film Analysis and Discussion |

Concluding Course Remarks

The division of the lectures and the topics for discussion not only facilitate student learning, they also aid the teacher in selecting films for the course. As a result, *Classics of Italian Cinema of the Sixties and Seventies*, which would otherwise risk being a disjointed view into a decade of Italian cinema whose films were just as sporadic, enjoys new and interesting deliveries that assure maximum student consumption.

The second set of relative film analyses are made in the course, *Italian Postwar Cinema*. The study of Neorealism is a particularly rich source of analysis for its comprehensive and interdisciplinary appeal. Vitti, again, provides the clearest definition of neorealist cinema’s reach: Neorealism breathes life into “studi sull’adattamento / trasposizione / traduzione / trattazione o riduzioni critici e di pubblico” (75). In other words, it lends itself best to comparative, historical, linguistic, and cultural studies, in general, revolutionizing the way in which Italianists can teach
any limitless number of topics. While the Italian neorealist movement only lasted a little over ten years, its effects on the Italian and international cinema industries are ever apparent today, in the types of films that are still being made. To ensure that interest in Neorealism never falters, and as proof that it has not, we look to the popularity of its academic study in post-secondary institutions around the world and, specifically, in North America. It would be hard to imagine a current Italian Studies program which is devoid of the tuition of that cinema whatsoever.

Indeed to discuss any period in Italian cinema, it is fundamental to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of Neorealism as the genre which established so many Italian filmmakers within the industry and brought recognition to the overall institution throughout the world. In most schools, a survey of neorealist films and filmmakers, with an insistence on the viewing of films inside the classroom, is a staple in any program. Therefore, a course of this nature is an effective way to inspire learning in the subject area and foster retention of the material. As with Ausubel’s use of advanced organizers, the film teacher need first discover what comprises that knowledge and then teach the students accordingly. Thus, the student will carry forward the knowledge he or she has gained regarding the fundamental neorealist era into his subsequent film and literature studies. If the student has no intention to continue studying the same vein, the temporary cinephile will recognize Neorealism’s influence in any number of movies he or she watches, even if their viewing is separate from some other academic purpose. It is key, though, to capture learners’ interests early in the specific course first, even before thinking about what the student will do with the knowledge beyond that specific scope.

Peaking their attentiveness to absorb a period of history which, for today’s student, is so far removed from their reality, is not always an easy task. To do so, I, albeit controversially by some practitioners’ standards, draw on the students’ knowledge of the inundation of Reality Television that penetrates them today. In the cases of those who did not admit to watching Reality shows, they all, at the very least, held strong opinions as to why they decided not to follow such TV

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72 A few of the many important Italian films to be released in the recent past which pay homage to the entire cinematic history of Italy, including Neorealism are *La notte di San Lorenzo* (the Taviani brothers, 1982), *Nuovo cinema paradiso* (Giuseppe Tornatore), and *La guerra di Mario* (Antonio Capuano, 2005). The recent international phenomenon, *Slumdog Millionaire* (Danny Boyle and Loveleene Tandan, 2008), also owes to the influences of Neorealism.
programming. Out of the plethora of examples which everyone is eager to offer, debate, and discuss, students arrive at the simple, yet, important conclusion that audiences are attracted and captured by images of reality that follow the minutia (even if contrived) of ‘regular’ people’s daily lives. The idea of having a camera openly and, seemingly, unrelentingly follow someone is a practice that Zavattini and Deleuze first postulated decades before the appearance of this recent mainstream genre. As explained in the previous chapters, Zavattini’s notions of pedinare and Deleuze’s insistence on Neorealism as a film balade harmonized the directors’ intentions to capture the audience’s attention in order to promote reflection and fruitful discussions after their film-viewing experience. Creating such a link between the theories of neorealist spectatorship and reality television’s audience quickly makes the student feel at ease with the curricular material and comfortable enough to take an active role in the course for the material is already less foreign to them. What is more, students are able to understand the importance of identification in the cinema when they connect the neorealists’ employment of non-professional actors in lead roles to the use of ‘real’ people in Reality TV. On one hand, the non-actor is used to increase spectator introspection in a postwar age. On the other hand, the Reality star allows the viewer to judge himself in relation or contrast and decide how he would act in a similar situation or, for that matter, how the star should proceed.

In Postwar Italian Cinema (an advanced cinema course), as in Cinema of the Sixties and Seventies, the comparison between Hollywood films and Italian films is also relevant. The appropriations between the industries are again utilized once the student has gathered enough practice analyzing films and once he or she has been handling the core teachings of Neorealism for a sufficient amount of time. Typically, this can occur midway through the academic year in a course, like the two described, that lasts the duration of the September to April period. As Bondanella suggests, a genre course of this nature can also be introduced as a seminar-style class in upper level years (“New Directions” 11). At our particular institution, in the Postwar cinema course, the student has already watched at least twelve films by various directors, has read twice as many readings on the subjects, and has participated in over sixty topical discussions. Thus, they are prepared to relativize their knowledge of my pre-selected Hollywood comparison between Fellini’s I vitelloni (1953) and the popular American film Saturday Night Fever (John
Badham, 1977). Regardless of how deep the connections run or if Badham ever credited Fellini with character, setting, or thematic inspirations, students eagerly await the opportunity to have their say at cross referencing the films and highlighting whatever congruencies or differences they deem noteworthy to mention during the class discussion. It should also be noted that the viewing of Saturday Night Fever is useful on yet another level which could justify its use in the previously mentioned film course of the Sixties and Seventies. Questions of diaspora and identity arise as a result of Saturday Night Fever that inspire students to discuss the portrayal of Italians in the media, to debunk stereotypes, and to draw linguistic parallels between, for example, Italian-American speak and Italian-Canadian speak. Admittedly, many students had previously dismissed Badham’s film on the basis of what seemed like their disdain towards obvious character and theme conventions (stereotypical renditions of Italo-American families, macho male characters, the injection of a love story to give the main character more depth) and towards the specificity of the setting (which they believed, initially, made the movie more meaningful only if one grew up in Brooklyn, New York, in the 1970s). Their enthusiasm to see past Hollywood mores and any deficiencies in the plot or the lack of respect for time and space, means that they have transformed their pre-conceived notions into the emergence of something fruitful and critical.

In Toles’ analysis of the ending to Frank Capra’s Hollywood sensation It’s a Wonderful Life (1946), he reveals that recognizing a film’s conventionality is the ideal stepping stone from which all other sentiments and appreciations are developed. What Capra wants to achieve, and does not shy away from, is to create, out of conventions, a moment that effectively bursts the bounds of the familiar situation. His goal is to powerfully transcend convention without undermining it .... Convention allows Capra to bring the viewer swiftly into the midst of a strong dramatic situation.

(Toles, A House Made of Light 57)

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73 John Badham’s film is also included for practical purposes as one of the last films shown in the course. It serves as a link that joins the end of the postwar studies course to the beginnings of what students can expect to discuss in the next film course in the sequence, Classics of Italian Cinema of the Sixties and Seventies.
The transformation from their uninformed dislike to their newly adopted critical eye are well-founded breakthroughs for the students turned film critics who can now look at Hollywood classics differently and find value in styles and narratives (which they may otherwise have dismissed as lavish or too far removed from reality). Taken one step further, Toles’ statements also substantiate the analytical merit there is to be unearthed even if a student seeks pleasure from a film. That is, the student should be able to express likes and dislikes regarding a film if they allow him or her to ‘burst’ into ‘powerful’ critical territories. In a similar fashion, Clayton and Kevlan apply Stanley Cavell’s reassessment of Immanuel Kant’s sense of aesthetic value to sustain that taste or pleasure is the starting point from which all fruitful discourse is created (3).  

Even greater still is the fact that interdisciplinary studies abound in Postwar Italian Cinema when students are exposed to studying foreign and peninsular authors, artists, etc. whose works have served as inspiration for many of the films they watch in class. Examples include Luchino Visconti’s *Ossessione*, based on the genre of the detective novel and Cain’s *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, and *La terra trema* (1948), stemming from Verismo and Giovanni Verga’s *I Malavoglia* (1881). Students also learn to furnish comparisons between the literary subculture of the fotoromanzo and Giuseppe De Santis’ *Riso amaro* (1949), and they can detract the visual art of Edvard Munch’s iconic painting *The Scream* (1893) from the photography of Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Il grido* (1957). Finally, students learn that one of the most powerful films they watch, *Ladri di biciclette*, found its voice because of a novel, by the same title, written by a lesser known Italian author, Luigi Bartolini. On their own accord, they come to determine that the novel was perhaps so overshadowed because it lacked the most powerful character, Bruno.

74 In *Critique of Judgement*, the German philosopher maintained that one’s emotional response to art is a product of one’s own subjective view of the object. In order words, the viewer, reader, admirer, as the case may be, draws pleasure (or displeasure) from a work based purely on his personal esteem (or otherwise) (“The Intellectual Interest in the Beautiful”).

75 In fact, after my most recent showing of *Il grido*, in *Postwar Cinema*, students adeptly and originally concluded that both the male and female protagonists of the film were represented in the genderless, faceless form in the painting. The pupils further determined that the filmic characters took on Munch’s figure’s pose whenever the protagonists explicitly displayed their own inner psychoses or when the spaces and characters around them began to infringe on their sanity.
Classifying war films starring children usefully engages young viewers with topics of war and its historical and filmic contexts. As Henry Giroux attests, “children’s films in particular must be understood and taught as serious objects of critical analysis” (88). In subsequent analyses in the film classroom, channeling the discussion by asking students to contemplate their criticism through, among other things, the role of the child, adds yet another layer to their increased retention and understanding (as it had done in the foreign language setting). The child in neorealist cinema provides a highly visual plane from which the spectator can more easily read the images on screen through their superior identification with the child as object and as subject. Through the child’s vision, the spectator is able to follow the narrative more closely, analyze the psychological development of the youth, discuss the relationship between him and the characters around him, and contextualize the historical and social importance of the entire *mise-en-scène*. Whatever the audience reaction to the film (and as we have previously documented, positive reception of Neorealism was hard to come by), Neorealism charged the lines of cinematic communication on behalf of scholars and common spectators alike. United by the common experience of the war and postbellum traumas, Neorealism offered a level of connectivity between the audience and the screen which was unprecedented. The same can be said for today’s spectator-student who, through cinema, is able to critique

the society and history that made the film, the political function of media literacy, not just the analysis of film and television images but the institutions (Hollywood), economic systems (capitalism), and ideologies (bourgeois individualism) in whose interests those images are constantly reproduced. (Wojcik-Andrews 158)

Let us now return to the notion of the student-spectator who, thanks to Bruno, evaluates the quality of De Sica’s cinematic rendition over its literary counterpart by Bartolini. In this film, Bruno is introduced to the student through the concept of the Other in, more or less, Sartrean leaning terms as used in Part Three, Chapter One, “Being of Others,” in *Being and Nothingness*. In this section of his *Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, the other can cause someone to have
an altered sense of the world at the appearance of another person around which the world now seems to turn. The presence of the other, for Sartre, did not pose any need for resolution, but could serve as inspiration to feeling. When prompted, and with this information in tow, students provided the following insightful responses, after only one week of pre-lecturing, by the instructor, on the same film.\textsuperscript{76}

Instructor’s Question: Which medium, did you feel, most effectively portrayed the director or the writer’s artistic impetus?

Student Response 1:

In the film, because it’s a visual version of the story, Antonio wouldn’t be able to satisfy the role of narrator alone [like Bartolini could], mostly because he’s too deeply involved in his own problems. His selfishness causes him to not see what is truly right or wrong in his life. That’s where Bruno comes in.

Student Response 2:

I was sad whenever (and because) Bruno was sad...until the end. After he wiped his tears, it was like Bruno’s eyes were saying to his father, ‘I’m not mad at you for stealing the bike, I’m disappointed’ [which is worse]. And just like that, I wasn’t angry with Antonio either because I realized he didn’t really have a choice [given the postwar situation] and I also didn’t feel as sad because Bruno too had stopped crying by this point.

Student Response 3:

Could we compare the two: Luigi (the author) and the character of Antonio by asking which is luckier? The answer is not hard to find, unless, of course, your name is Antonio, in which case, you’re probably ignoring the answer that’s staring you in the face throughout the whole movie. Why is he luckier? Because he had Bruno, the author was alone.

\textsuperscript{76} The following Student Responses have been transcribed, as close to verbatim as possible, and represent actual answers they provided during the discussion to accompany the viewing of \textit{Ladri di biciclette}. Moreover, they are numbered from one through seven to represent that each contribution was made by a different student in the course.
Student Response 4:

Since we see the events of the film through Bruno, we also know so much about Antonio’s personality because of his son. Ultimately, I feel that the ending is only as stunning as the little protagonist in the scene.

Instructor’s Question: Can you refer to a few scenes in particular that would support these notions?

Student Response 5:

Bruno knows what is right and wrong, he offers accurate suggestions when, for example, he makes a comment on the dent he sees on his father’s bike.

Student Response 6:

I like the idea that he is the antithesis to Fascism or he ‘breaks down Fascist the rhetoric of virility,’ as you mentioned before with regards to Neorealism. He shows more adult qualities than his father since he’s the one with the job and, in the restaurant, he adds up his father’s weekly wage.

Student Response 7:

I even noticed, right at the beginning, that his father just left the room and didn’t pay any attention to his children, but Bruno noticed that his sister was still in the room so he closed the window. I guess it was to protect her from the light coming in.

In responses one through three, students sought to validate the novel but concluded that Bruno brought an effective and emotionally evocative element to the film which the novel, in their opinion, lacked. In response two, in particular, the student was able to tap into the other aspect of discourse, that is, emotionality as conveyed in the film. Bruno was particularly effective at harnessing the student-spectator’s identity to align it with the child’s and reproduce in the student the same emotions felt by the fictional character. Bell’s notion of the aesthetic emotion, associated with attributing quality to a work of art, finds its validation in the emotionally
charged, yet critically sound, response from student two. A result that would have made De Sica and Zavattini proud, the child encroached the space between the student and the screen so effectively, that the student was tearfully engaged and/or disengaged simultaneously with Bruno. What is more, the students were also able to touch on the juxtapositions of right and wrong as they had come to characterize the role reversal of father and son. In responses five through seven, the diversity of the filmic examples provided are a testament to the richness of film classes, to the variety and quality of production that is possible when students are placed at the centre of their own education, immersed in real and constructive “inquiry-driven” lessons (Twomey Fosnot 13). Taken one step further, if we return to responses two and six, the student has shown lateral development in their ability to make reference to other themes and theories presented previously in the course and has applied them to the task in front of them. In the case of *Ladri di biciclette*, it is often the first film that students watch in the postwar course and, based on student contributions from that early stage, it seems as though the pace and quality of the course has been set. Through the keen attention they are asked to reserve for dissecting the role of the young Bruno, the point of departure, from which all other cinematic examinations can soon be made, has been established. With Bruno, they are able to discuss characters from ideological viewpoints by discovering the social class to which he belongs. This, by extension, allows them to apply that knowledge and look at how other characters, the children’s families and their environments, in all neorealist films are represented in terms of social class.

Ultimately, the entire question of ideology can be channeled by giving importance to the children in postwar films and by raising questions of working class representations. Do child characters understand their position in the world as a function of specific economic conditions or as the natural evolution of history? Wojcik-Andrews posits other potentially expansive topics which can result from the study of children in pedagogy: “Which character and which social class in any given children’s film controls the film’s various discourses, its knowledge, its sense of reality?” (178). In the case of student six, coincidentally, her ability to use her knowledge constructively presented itself to me in a rather concrete fashion. In another course I was teaching in the same semester, *A Survey of Italian Literature*, the student raised an inquiry when the topic of the Other arose, this time in regard to the Italian-Jewish identity of Primo Levi in *Se questo è un uomo*. Recognizing the concept of Other, unprovoked by my own suggestion during
the lecture, she saw the relevance in applying the definition of the marginalized member of society to this medium and to this man as well. What resulted was an awe-inspiring moment for the student who was visibly impressed with her ability to see the struggles of Levi from the point of view of someone who was shunned without cause. What is more, the student’s cognizant utilization of the information she had learned, provided proof of the efficacy of teaching about children in cinema.

Clues as to why the role of the child is such a particularly confident weapon used by the students can perhaps be answered if we, again, take into consideration the perspective of the ‘other.’ Does not the student feel a sense of otherness in a room of his or her peers against whom he or she feels constantly compared? Is the student who is not a cinema or Italian student, the ‘other’ amongst those who are, indeed, enrolled in either or both of those disciplines? By aligning their gaze with that of the young child on screen, the student finds ways to be expressive about the cinema, but also about himself (as many of the personal responses indicated). In this way, the student is also constructing a role for himself in the course in relation to, in the case of Ladri, Bruno who is struggling to find his place in the adult society. What emerges for the student, if the classroom environment that is fostered is an inclusive one, is a sense of acceptance. Be this a credited reaction of his or her sense of confidence or because of the emotions that he or she could not avoid, which, consequently, incentivized the students to share their film viewing experience, one thing is certain: the process of assimilating and then actively producing criticism will ensure that the young scholar will leave the classroom and never watch a film the same way he or she had before the course began.

4.11 Methods of Evaluation

To attain the best results, students discuss films shown in class from a mix of what Buckland polarizes as “internal” and “external perspectives” (5-6). Internal perspectives are those that develop an intrinsic approach to film by studying its inner workings. An internal perspective studies the film itself, independent of a historical, moral, or social context in what is also referred to as a poetic reading of a movie (5). This perspective should be developed in the cinephile in conjunction with, not in substitution of, their external perspective: studying the relationship between the film and the particular aspects of reality outside of it, placing the work within its
historical and social context (6). Relying solely or too heavily on the importance of a film’s external qualities (its historical, cultural or national context) can limit the students’ creative production of writing or speaking about what he or she has discovered after interacting with the works on screen. According to Clayton and Kevlan, there can certainly be a distinction between good criticism and bad criticism as made by the student. However, he or she can be guided to superior analytical assessments without having to do away with an evaluation of the film in terms of why or how it appears to be an achievement, or otherwise, to the student in particular. The authors state that external information does not have to be “foundational nor does it legitimize the assessment ... criticism is observational and responds to the work as it appears” (1). In an academic setting, then, it is equally important for the student to situate the importance of the film in another time and place as it is for him or her to explore its effect in the here and now. Any negation of that fact would undermine the importance of teaching cinema at all, whatever the origin, whatever the era. These tasks and calls to action, on the students behalf, are clearly outlined to them from the onset of the film course as the following description for *Postwar Italian Cinema* (University of Toronto Mississauga) attests.

**Course Description:**

Part 1: The course will first analyze the neorealist period in Italian cinema, and its relation to the political and social climate of post-war Italy, where screenings include selections from the major exponents of Italian Neorealism: Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio De Sica, and Luchino Visconti, among others.

Part 2: We will then examine the evolution of Italian cinematic Neorealism and its revisitations in the early films of Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and others. Particular attention will also be paid to Italian holocaust cinema, cinematic adaptations, and Italian neorealist literature, in general. Students will have the opportunity, during both halves of the course, to share their findings with the class in exercises which allow substantial room for fact-based responses, but that rely on the inclusion of your personal stimuli to elevate the discussion to a higher critical stratum.
Through blended approaches, each student has the opportunity, at various times throughout the year, to engage in fruitful discussions that allow them to express their opinions about a film. This makes them feel in command of the learning process and in charge of the curricular materials they are responsible to read, synthesize, and present to both the teacher and to their peers. Each film is discussed at the centre of a series of discussion questions that first require pre-reflection, during my introductory lecture to the film as well as a reading of a supplementary article provided. With these advanced organizers satisfied within the student, the pupils are better equipped to view the film with a critical eye.

While it is tempting to just sit and watch, students know that the quality of their film viewing experience is also contingent on their ability to analyze it and to eventually evaluate it together with their peers in the applicable lectures to follow. Each student, therefore, receives a brief list of questions (approximately five questions seem to be a manageable number for them to work on throughout the film viewing), one of which they will discuss at length and on which they will be assessed during the next class. The latter is best tackled with a partner to ensure that vibrant ideas are fueled and exchanged. Naturally, all students, even those who have not volunteered to be assessed one particular week, are still required to participate in the class discussions. A lack of participation, whether for grading or not, is a problem I have yet to encounter while teaching a film course. Students watch between fifteen and twenty films throughout the course of the year and they are expected to be involved in the delivery of, at least, twelve to thirteen responses, which turns out to be one assignment per week. While quality is always championed over quantity, or the physical length of the submitted responses, the students’ ability to be accurate and concise are key when developing their presentation skills and when they must sift through and decide what is most relevant to include in their analyses. Thus, they are limited to speaking for no more than ten to fifteen minutes or to submitting, in written format, a response that is no longer than five pages.

This method is favoured above the traditional final essay since students appreciate the manageability of each assignment and they persevere in these more reflective exercises which leave greater room for them to express their opinions. Furthermore, handing in a lengthy paper, twice a year, allows the student to become more closely familiar with a few topics. However,
when the paper is research intensive, the student is merely transcribing from one written form to another, without having the experience of sharing his or her findings with peers or of being able to speak freely and comfortably on a larger array of subjects. The path to success, in this case, is one traveled by both the teacher and the student in a campaign for the integration of teaching and learning through the implementation of a peers-teaching-peers approach. The practice of holding weekly seminars is first conducted by the teacher to serve as an example of the required quantitative and qualitative expectations for the course. Students soon follow with their own lectures, as previously described, and require minimal, if any, teacher assistance to deliver them. It should also be noted, however, that, from the onset, such a deductive-lecture method is not the only one implemented by the teacher who, instead, provides students with a framework for the upcoming lessons. The “bare bones lecture notes,” as I refer to them, are incomplete - full of missing pieces of information, noteworthy criticism, etc. They become useful and more meaningful when the students attend lectures to produce the vacant responses themselves, during discussions, or receive the information through the teacher or peer channels. This process of constant interaction with the course material coupled with the learner’s continuous and reciprocal exchange of information is an effective strategy that increases student learning through constant engagement (Cooper and Robinson 6). Similar methods of this nature are considered to have ‘flipped the classroom.’ This term has been recently described by Dan Berrett, in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, as the “inversion of expectations in the traditional college lecture” (1). The flipped classroom, a long-standing practice in the Humanities, includes the activities described above as well as “just-in-time teaching (in which students respond to Web-based questions before class, and the professor uses this feedback to inform his or her teaching), and peer instruction” (1). Regardless of academic setting (a film course, a literature course, or in Berrett’s findings, in the Sciences), the techniques implemented share the following common impetuses: “Students cannot passively receive material in class .... Instead they gather the information largely outside of class, by reading, watching recorded lectures, or listening to podcasts” (1). The interactive nature of both the teacher’s and students’ lectures and the documented success in the retention of information are documented in C. Roland Christensen’s “Every Student Teaches and Every Teacher Learns”: fostering a discussion-based learning space is “critical to enduring learning” and since each student has the opportunity to take on the role of leader, he or she (as
well as the instructor) can “master both process skills as well as the substantive knowledge of their course (117). What is more, collaborative and engaging learning strategies, such as group discussions, interactive lectures, and student-led seminars, “go further than simply asking students to discuss academic concepts and ideas; they ... ask students to teach them to each other” which is amongst the most powerful ways to learn course material in a meaningful and deep way (Cooper and Robinson 10).

By adopting this point of view in teaching and learning, the success of the rate and amount of apprehension is no longer seen as a process in which knowledge is transmitted by the teacher and received by the students. Instead, the classroom becomes an interactive workshop (with emphasis deliberately placed on action). In this environment, the teachers are “facilitators” who “support discourse and development” (Twomey Fosnot 4). In other words, they are moderators in the classroom who raise questions and problems in order to create deeper and more conceptual learning in the young scholars. This approach is the aim of today’s “new” classroom which can be characterized by the following definition:

The role of questioning, disequilibrium, learners paraphrasing each other and discussing ideas in learning communities, the importance of think time and pair talk, and the role of problem-solving and inquiry.... (Twomey Fosnot 4)

The students’ sense of success, then, is measured against their own standards as well as their ability to, for example, evaluate a film’s quality or how it fairs in comparison to other films of the same time period. What is more, as the work covered, both in class or at home, is often accomplished as a collective task or in groups comprised of two to three students, students are constantly motivating one another to challenge their own and each other’s interpretation of the

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77 See also Alexander Astin *What Matters in College?* regarding the benefits of frequent student-student and student-faculty interactions. Astin states that students who are highly involved in their studies, through the aforementioned interactions, are more connected to their academic work which, in turn, produces positive associations with retention (196-197).
on screen events. The meanings derived from their viewing of the film are, as a result, always varied. These will, then, lend themselves well to lively exchanges which are charged with the inclusion of only the most noteworthy information that will help the interlocutor advance his or her argument. Through the use of the workshop/classroom, inquiry-driven approaches to learning, and by placing emphasis on the evaluation of materials through analysis, as opposed to promoting mere memorization of facts, both student and teacher become of service to one another in fostering “intrinsic motivation” (Fullan 3) - a key marker for academic success in today’s day and age.

4.12 Reinvigorating the Classroom

Based on Ken Robinson’s innovative and inspirational approach to the reformation of the way educators think about and plan their lessons, academic settings which employ film can address “aesthetic experience” (“Changing Education Paradigms,” 2012) better than most other art forms since it is such a highly sensorial medium. This is true of the use of cinema in both a foreign language classroom or in a literature and film course. The student’s senses are fully engaged and “operating at their peak, when they are present in the current moment” (Robinson) in which they are receiving the filmic messages. Additionally, in-class discussions centered on cinema have the capacity to inspire “divergent thinking” that is, the ability to “see lots of possible answers to questions, lots of possible ways to interpret a question” (Robinson) until they realize the richness that they can contribute to the intellectual debate. The debate, in turn, is charged thanks to multiple answers, not simply one that is right or one that is wrong. If the student carries forward their methods of analysis, which they have honed thanks to cinema, and applies them to, for example, other films studied or, better, other courses altogether, then he or she has achieved a level of lateral thinking which proves that knowledge has not only been assimilated, but that it can be recreated and reapplied for other purposes. Robinson criticizes ineffectual teaching for having pushed students through education by “anaethesising” them. That is, by essentially

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78 In Control Theory in the Classroom, William Glasser categorizes group-based tasks as “learning-team models” (Chapter 6). These models support individual and communal success since everyone’s intrinsic need to share his / her knowledge and interests with others is satisfied (72). Students feel in command of the activity, they are responsible for their peers’ learning, and they will be more motivated to convince the teacher that they have learned the material (75-76).
turning off their active impulses and numbing them to what is happening through the constant deductive shoveling of information. What we must do, instead, and, by extension, what I posit are the effects of having passionate discussions about the film viewing experience, is “aestheticize” students (to use a Robinson reference) and waken all of their senses to see that the powers of interpretation and education do not live solely with the teacher, but that they also rest squarely within the reach of the learner.

This process of ‘aestheticization’ of information occurred within the Postwar Italian Cinema students, previously described, who were able to analyze the filmic images, and the role of the child there within, to recognize prevalent themes and ideologies, before sharpening their evaluative skills of one art form over the other. One last concluding observation that merits attention is Wagstaff’s earlier association of the effectiveness of Neorealism for the representation, interpretation, and evaluation of historical reality. His conclusions allow us to draw the same striking parallel between the rich participatory impetus of the movement and the academic outcome of studying Neorealism in class. In other words, the teacher becomes like the post-war director: she presents Neorealism, and all of its historical realism, to the spectator-students who take on the role of interpreting and evaluating it like the cinema-spectators had done before them.
Conclusion

This dissertation aimed to be a journey into the important role children play in the neorealist films of De Sica. When discussing the themes of childhood that arise during this period in cinematic history, scholarly work often describes the use of non-professional, young actors as a means through which the directors could achieve a deeper emotional response in the spectator. Moreover, this study remedies omissions in the field which focus solely on the use of the child in polarizing roles. That is, I have attempted to demonstrate that the significance of ‘agency’ can be modified to contain various meanings. On the one hand, Rossellini’s children (in Germania anno zero or Roma città aperta) are considered more active because they are seen as lambs who are, personally, cognizant that they must sacrifice themselves for the betterment of society (Edmund in Germania anno zero) or march on in solidarity towards the brighter future that awaits them (Marcello and his fellow compatriots in Roma città aperta). De Sica’s children, on the other hand, are not the same stunted soldiers Rossellini knew. They are nonetheless charged with power, but theirs is equated to their superior sense of visionary, assimilatory, and pedagogical prowess. Thus, this dissertation avoids categorizing children, in the same ways that recent studies have done, as infinitely active or determinately passive. Seeking to illuminate the blank spaces left by Kolker, Fisher, and De Luca, authors introduced in my initial analysis of the field, I demonstrate that child witnesses (and De Sica’s children are always onlookers) should not be synonymous with possessing qualities of inertness because they are naturally malleable. What is more, as an observer, the child’s gaze is his true agency since it becomes the tool through which adults learn and, in turn, model their own behaviour.

Throughout my study, I made inquisitions into the various ways children were asked to be seers and recorders, students and teachers. To neatly sum up their neorealist function would prove to be as difficult as affixing one definition to the entire movement which held them in its arms so brilliantly. If the roles of children evolved as much as they did between the years of silent cinema and the Second World War, then it only stands to reason that their development can be traced in modern films as well. In her analysis of Il ladro di bambini (Gianni Amelio, 1992), Mignon è partita (Francesca Archibugi, 1988), and Respiro (Emanuele Crialese, 2002), Roberta Piazza finds that one of the ways in which children’s roles have progressed in Italian cinema can
be found by analyzing the quantity and quality of their verbal discourse. In her study she gathers that, indeed, the further into the cinematic landscape we travel, the more prevalence child protagonists are given and the heavier the weight of their control is over the other protagonists in the film. This, she argues, can be plotted in the increasing amounts of dialogue and verbal orders they give which, when compared to their linguistic affluence in Neorealism, is substantially great. The same investigation can be made into any other number of films that invoke the young narrators and this can be taken one step further to search for historical, social, or regional reasons that have influenced their dominance. Furthermore, given that Neorealism has proven to be a beneficial device in providing students with a context through which to learn about postwar Italian history, society, and politics, then an ideal venue for a homologous critique, of a linguistic or cultural nature, is the university. In fact, personal future considerations in the field of study entail discovering what further revelatory impact the child and the study of Neorealism can have in the classroom-theatre space.

I have henceforth discussed the efficacy of bringing visual aids into the academic setting where, by ‘visual,’ I am not only referring to the use of video accompaniments, but to highly visual, onscreen, pedagogical tools such as the child protagonist. Studies of students who are exposed to Italian (linguistically and culturally) through cinema, as opposed to those who learn about it using text-based lessons or the traditional lecture method, can be conducted to test the positive learning outcomes which take place. In fact, I am currently engaging in a similar investigation with the students enrolled in Classics of Italian Cinema of the Sixties and Seventies. Activities were created with the pedagogical objective of deepening cultural knowledge and sensitivity through the contextualization of previously taught material. The twenty-five participants will engage in the survey from their regular classroom.

In Part 1 of the study, the subjects will all be taught (through a traditional lecture and pertinent readings) the cultural background related to Kryptonite! (Ivan Cortoneo, 2011). The film will be referenced, but no clips will be shown to students. The students will then complete an activity/survey referencing the various cultural points brought up in class.

In Part 2 of the study, the film will be viewed in class and the instructor will provide a second time a similar survey to that in Part 1 (questions shuffled) referencing the same information
presented previously in class. The pre- and post-surveys will give students the opportunity to reflect on what they knew about specific aspects of Italian history and culture after the preliminary lectures and, subsequently, what they understood differently after viewing the films. The research seeks to analyze how student learning can become more reflective through the contextualization of the material through film, aiming to answer whether or not there are any marked differences and/or deeper reflections made by students after the viewing of the film in question. Moreover, I will seek to answer whether an analysis of these learning outcomes can be used by the instructor to create meaningful connections to future films studied and beneficial review activities for the student.

Focussing on modern Italian films such as *Kryptonite!* is as an optimal point of departure for the type of study described above as it serves the student two-fold: he or she will be introduced to contemporary Italian artists, while learning more about the Italy as we know it today compared to life there over forty years ago. Set in 1970s Campagna, realities of *napoletanità* abound in topics such as female liberation, unemployment, and the ever-passionate spirit of the people of that region. The film highlights the aforementioned while also touching on themes of family, adultery, sexuality, and death as they present themselves to the young Neapolitan boy, Peppino Sansone (played by Luigi Catani). In this film, as in those discussed throughout this dissertation, the only power the boy has is his wide scope of vision. In fact, there is a most literal metaphor offered in the importance given to the boy’s eye glasses. The mere fact that he needs them, that they are broken, and then repaired, are representative of and coincide with the stages of his family’s struggles. When the boy is wearing an old, but functioning pair of glasses, his family is intact, but deception in brewing. In the same moments that his glasses break (twice - despite his father’s promise that the new ones are sturdy), Antonio’s, his father, adulterous ways are revealed. With that, the true meaning behind the paternal figure’s fallible promise of strength, that was once applied to the glasses, is quickly transferred onto the family situation. Unable to come to terms with her discovery, Peppino’s mother, Rosaria, becomes an absentee parent. The boy is left to fend for himself, with the help of the ghost of his cousin, Gennaro-Superman, who reveals himself to Peppino as his protector. What Gennaro really represents, however, is the boy’s alter ego. In Peppino’s world, when he is left to his own devices, he takes on a persona closer to that of the fictional Clark Kent - reclusive and unassuming, with similar eye glasses.
which complete the analogous look. When he is in need of courage, his cousin - who signifies Peppino’s own superego, appears caped as Superman. The end of the film is signaled in the moment that Rosaria returns to the dinner table and the family unit can begin its path towards restoration. At this point, the two alternate egos are able to finally collide into their rightful place within the boy. Peppino, who has now seen enough of his mother’s state of depression and who can, moreover, stand up to his peer-bullies (another struggle Peppino faces throughout the film), no longer needs the caped superhero to carry him. More importantly, his eye glasses have become a fixed part of him. No longer a symbol of fragility, the bandages which once kept the frames together have disappeared now. As Peppino achieves this coming of age, Gennaro disappears. In regard to neorealist children, their ego - alter ego is rarely, if ever, explored. As they served mostly as moral beacons, they played the adult to the other protagonists’ child instinctively, but their psychological framework was never deconstructed. Perhaps, however, a deeper examination into their conscious and subconscious is merited. At the very least, a look into why it was not at the forefront of neorealist concern can also be made.

From the onset of this work, expressly titled *From Visual Learner to Visual Teacher and Beyond*, I have discovered that the richness of the characters portrayed by children evolved into deeper, more meaningful presences the further Italian cinema strayed from the silent era or from staunch fascist leaning control over the industry. The longer they stayed on as essential parts of Neorealism, the greater insight they gained into the world around them. The wider their scope of vision, the more morality they displayed and, consequently, instilled in their co-characters. The better the protagonist received the lesson, the broader the child’s affections were in delivering the same message to the spectator. The children were capable of such expansive impacts, not because they trudged forward with the expectation of reaching a tangible happy place or of acquiring a reward for all of their troubles, but because they were diligent and in tune with every step they took into their own journey (whatever that may have entailed). They knew, all the while, that they should not and did not have to stand for the adultery, corruption, deception, and indifference to which they were constantly exposed. In this way, and to paraphrase Fellini, the boys instinctively realized that the discoveries one makes while on a journey are more significant and impacting than the final destination. In other words, the ending point could be anything or
any place. What matters is how the road to arrive there was taken. Similarly, the exploratory analogy can be applied to the task of providing final analyses to this dissertation as well. There should also be no final destination sought when seeking to better understand the phenomenon of Neorealism or the multi-faceted world the child represents there within. What I want, instead, and indeed I find myself in that position, is to be left with open roads that allow me to continue my discussion, bring forth new discoveries, and examine other unexpended spaces.
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*Le village de Namo - Panorama pris d’une chaise à porteurs*. Dir. Gabriel Veyre. Lumiére, 1900.


Appendix

Parte A: Scheda del film di *Ladri di biciclette*

Ispirazione letteraria: ________________________________

Anno di produzione: _____________

Regista: ________________________

Sceneggiatore: ________________________

Personaggi principali / Interpreti:

Modello: 1. Antonio Ricci / Lamberto Maggiorani

2. ________________________________

3. ________________________________

4. ________________________________

Musica / Compositore: ________________________________

Fotografo: ________________________________

Tecnico del montaggio: ________________________________

Durata del film: ________________________________

Genere: ________________________________

Lingua usata: ________________________________

Prima della visione del film

Per essere ben preparata/o prima della visione del film, riempi gli spazi, cercando le risposte su internet.

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Parte B. Risposte libere

Scegli la risposta che ti concerne di più.

1. Hai mai sentito parlare di Ladri di biciclette prima di questo corso?
   a. No. (Rispondi al numero 2, sotto)
   b. Sì, ma non l’ho mai visto. (Rispondi al numero 2, sotto)
   c. Sì e l’ho anche visto. (Rispondi al numero 3, sotto)

2. Quale potrebbe essere la trama del film e chi è il personaggio principale? Basa le tue risposte soltanto sul titolo.

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

3. Se hai già visto il film, quali aggettivi useresti per descriverlo o per descrivere le tue impressioni del film?
   •
   •
   •
   •
Parte C: Trace biografiche. Leggi le biografie (dello scrittore e del regista) e rispondi alle domande che seguono.

Luigi Bartolini

Bartolini era un incisore, pittore e scrittore italiano, nato a Cupramontana, Ancona, nel 1892 e morto a Roma nel 1963. Tra i migliori incisori italiani contemporanei, fu più conosciuto per quel mestiere che per gli altri. Poeta, narratore, saggista, polemista vivace, il Bartolini scrive della società borghese, il suo amore per gli animali, specchio della vita istintiva, e la sua tenerezza fra sensuale e sentimentale per la donna. Mentre scrisse numerose opere (tra le quali Passeggiata con la ragazza, 1930; Polemiche, 1940; Il cane scontento, 1942), il suo Ladri di biciclette, 1946, è il libro per cui è più conosciuto, su cui fu basata la sceneggiatura di Cesare Zavattini per l’omonimo film di Vittorio De Sica. A Zavattini colpì molto il romanzo per la sua simplicità. Dopo averlo letto, lo diede a De Sica sperando che ispirasse anche lui. Trattano comunque di due versioni molto diverse, tranne per il titolo. Bartolini scrive e narra la sua storia in modo quasi autobiografico, recupera tutte le biciclette che gli vengono rubate che, per lui, non erano essenziali come lo erano per Antonio Ricci. Quello che conta per Bartolini è la condanna della società post-bellica. Tra l’altro, il tema della famiglia non è al centro del discorso e così neanche i personaggi Bruno e Maria esistono nel romanzo (aggiunte Zavattini-De Sichiani).

(tratto da http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/luigi-bartolini/)

1. Oltre ad essere uno scrittore, per quali altri mestieri era conosciuto Bartolini?

2. Cosa significa l’espressione “post-bellico”? Trova un altro sinonimo per questa espressione.

3. Di chi era l’idea originale di sceneggiare Ladri di biciclette?

4. Dopo aver letto alcuni dettagli del romanzo, cosa puoi dedurre della trama del film?
Vittorio De Sica


Domande


______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

2. a. Qualcuno, come De Sica, che si mette “dietro alla macchina da presa” è un ____________________________ (titolo professionale).
b. In quali film summenzionati pratica questo mestiere De Sica e in quali altri invece fa l’attore? Scrivi il titolo del film sotto ogni categoria appropriata nella tabella qui sotto.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>De Sica - dietro alla macchina da presa</th>
<th>De Sica - attore</th>
</tr>
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</table>
3. “È diventato molto popolare” o “piaceva molto agli spettatori” sarebbe un altro modo di esprimere quale espressione che si trova direttamente nel testo?

______________________________________________________________________________

4. De Sica entra nella fase del cinema conosciuto come il “_________________________” con il film dal titolo ______________________________.

5. Su quali successi hanno lavorato insieme De Sica e Zavattini?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

6. Quali film hanno fruttato (per quali film è stato premiato) un Oscar per De Sica?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

7. Compila la seguente tabella con le informazioni mancanti.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tratto dal testo</th>
<th>Infinito (se è un verbo)</th>
<th>Sinonimo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Esordisce</td>
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<td>Scanzonato</td>
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<td>Debutta</td>
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<tr>
<td>Muta (registro)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Parte D. Contesto storico-cinematografico

Mini-ricerca, in gruppi di 3 o 4

a. Che cos’è il neorealismo? Spiegate facendo riferimento ai temi più importanti, alle qualità filmiche, ai registi, ai film, ecc. che sono spesso associati con questo grande periodo nella storia del cinema italiano.
b. Cercate una definizione che descrive il personaggio-eroe tipico del cinema (neorealista e anche in generale) e riportatela qui.
1. All’inizio del film, cosa sta facendo Antonio quando il suo amico lo chiama per raggiungere gli altri uomini?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

2. Perché viene chiamato dal suo amico?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

3. Perché ha tanto bisogno di una bicicletta Antonio?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

4. Secondo te, cosa simbolizza (metaforicamente) la bicicletta per Antonio?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

5. Che ruolo gioca Maria nella vita di Antonio e perché gli è così importante (oltre ad essere sua moglie)?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
6. Cosa sta facendo Bruno quando appare per la prima volta? Confronta la sua scena iniziale con quella del padre. Cosa ci indicano tali scene del carattere dei due personaggi?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
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7. Tempo
Ci sono vari effetti (luce, annunci durante il film, commenti di vari personaggi) che indicano la durata della storia. Quali effetti ci indicano che l’intera storia si sviluppi in tre giorni?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

8. Luogo
Come sappiamo che il film sia ambientato a Roma? Quali riferimenti, indicazioni, luoghi specifici, ecc. vengono menzionati e che ci indicano il luogo specifico dove si svolge la trama del film?

______________________________________________________________________________
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______________________________________________________________________________
9. Musica

La musica serve per accentuare la vitale importanza delle nostre reazioni emotionali al film. Durante quali eventi importanti notiamo che la musica gioca un ruolo più importante nel film? Quali reazioni coglie la musica?

______________________________________________________________________________
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______________________________________________________________________________

10. Linguaggio

a. Perché, secondo te, il linguaggio usato dai protagonisti è romanesco e non necessariamente un italiano standard? Rispondi tenendo in mente alcune caratteristiche comuni al neorealismo.

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

b. Trascrivi in italiano standard le seguenti frasi prese dal film.

Ce vo’ a bicicletta pe’ fa’ sto lavoro. ____________________________________________

C’hai da fa’? _____________________________________________________________

Io nun ce l’avrebbe lassat’anna a piglia’ la minestra. ___________________________
11. I personaggi

Completa la descrizione di Bruno e di Antonio, usando la seguente tabella-personaggi.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bruno</th>
<th>Antonio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fisicità</td>
<td>Personalità</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. La coppia padre-figlio

a. Per certi versi, Bruno si rivela un protagonista che sia più adulto e responsabile del padre. Qualifica questa frase citando alcuni esempi, scene, ecc. presi dal film.
b. L’imitazione

Durante il film, Bruno imita molto il padre, tranne alla fine. Completa la seguente frase citando momenti specifici dal film.

Bruno imita il padre...

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
c. Gli sguardi

i. Durante la proiezione del film, Bruno e il padre comunicano spesso senza dover parlare: partecipano ed interagiscono scambiando sguardi. Accoppia le 5 emozioni date con le foto che le dimostrano, mettendo il numero corrispondente vicino ad ogni immagine. Usa 2 diverse emozioni per descrivere le foto che rimangono.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tristezza</th>
<th>Paura</th>
<th>Vergogna</th>
<th>Colpa</th>
<th>Rabbia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

![Photo](image1)

![Photo](image2)

![Photo](image3)

![Photo](image4)

![Photo](image5)
(A destra) Emozione:
Dove stanno per andare?

(Sopra) Emozione:
Cosa tormenta Antonio?
ii. Con un compagno / una compagna

Nel film, Bruno usa più i suoi occhi che la bocca per comunicare i suoi pensieri. Crea un dialogo da uno degli sguardi sopra, basato su cosa stiano pensando i protagonisti in quei momenti. Prima di ogni riga, sottolinea chi è il protagonista che parla.

Bruno / Antonio : _______________________________________________________________

Antonio / Bruno : _______________________________________________________________

Bruno / Antonio : _______________________________________________________________

Antonio / Bruno : _______________________________________________________________

Bruno / Antonio : _______________________________________________________________

Antonio / Bruno : _______________________________________________________________

Bruno / Antonio : _______________________________________________________________

Antonio / Bruno : _______________________________________________________________

Bruno / Antonio : _______________________________________________________________

Antonio / Bruno : _______________________________________________________________

Bruno / Antonio : _______________________________________________________________

Antonio / Bruno : _______________________________________________________________

Bruno / Antonio : _______________________________________________________________

Antonio / Bruno : _______________________________________________________________
13. I buoni e i cattivi

È facile distinguere tra personaggi buoni e personaggi cattivi nel film? Metti un trattino (√) sotto ogni categoria valida, secondo il tuo parere personale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personaggio</th>
<th>Buono</th>
<th>Cattivo</th>
<th>Entrambi</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antonio</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bruno</td>
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<tr>
<td>Il ladro della bicicletta di Antonio</td>
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<tr>
<td>La polizia</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
1. Quale locandina (a o b) usata da Criterion / Janus Films rappresenta il film in modo più preciso? Spiega la tua scelta facendo riferimento al film.

a. 

b. 

Dopo la visione del film
Esercizi di gruppo

2. Da consegnare

Dovete vendere il film ad un distributore nord americano. Create una locandina per il film che rappresenta la trama in modo preciso. Ricordatevi di includere tutte le informazioni, i dettagli, ecc. che uno vorrebbe avere prima della visione del film.


Da recitare

3. Raccontate la trama del film dal punto di vista di Antonio che si sente solo, frustrato e disperato. Una persona del gruppo reciterà il monologo per la classe.

4. Raccontate la trama del film dal punto di vista di Bruno che osserva le azioni del padre e gli avvenimenti del loro viaggio-travaglio insieme. Una persona del gruppo reciterà il monologo per la classe.

Da discutere con la classe

5. Paragonate le ipotesi della trama, scritte prima della visione del film, con i vostri compagni. Avevate indovinato bene? Se qualcuno aveva già visto il film, quali nuove cose ha notato dopo la seconda visione? Avete provato gli stessi sentimenti oppure il film ha avuto vari effetti diversi su tutti?

6. Chi sono i ‘ladri di biciclette’? Analizzate l’importanza del titolo e dell’uso del plurale del sostantivo “ladri” (a differenza del titolo tradotto in inglese che spesso si traduceva al singolare, *The Bicycle Thief*).

7. Contesto cinematografico: quali comuni caratteristiche neorealistiche sono presenti nel film?


Spazio appunti
Da consegnare individualmente


Vergognarsi

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Sentirsi in colpa

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Arrabbiarsi

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Consolare

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Essere fiero

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Preoccuparsi

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
10. I buoni e i cattivi

Riprendendo la tabella che avevi compilato durante il film, riverifica le tue opinioni. Puoi notare se sono uguali a quelle di prima? Adesso includi almeno una ragione per giustificare ogni tua scelta.

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<tr>
<th>Personaggio</th>
<th>Buono</th>
<th>Cattivo</th>
<th>Entrambi</th>
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<td>Antonio</td>
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<td>Giustificazione</td>
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<td>Giustificazione</td>
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</table>
11. Quali sono i temi importanti e ricorrenti che si trovano nel film? Rispondi usando il seguente come modello.

**Modello:**

Tema: Le classi sociali

Esempio: Qui Bruno vede la piccola bambina che mangia nel ristorante, vestita per bene, godendosi una grande cena. È chiaro che anche Bruno ha capito che lui è diverso, povero, in confronto alla bambina e alla sua famiglia.

Tema: __________________________________________

Esempio: __________________________________________

__________________________________________________

__________________________________________________

Tema: __________________________________________

Esempio: __________________________________________

__________________________________________________

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Tema: __________________________________________

Esempio: __________________________________________

__________________________________________________

__________________________________________________
12. Cosa significa il gesto finale di Bruno verso il padre? Cosa rivela del loro rapporto e del rapporto adulto-bambino, in generale?
13. Cinema e letteratura

i. Come si dice? Dal testo di Bartolini, accanto alle frasi italiane, scrivi la lettera corretta della traduzione. Poi, inserendo il numero giusto, indica quale foto (prossima pagina) corrisponde ad ogni frase.

Italiano


2. _______ Tutti immersi egualmente...è inutile sognarli, e persino stupido augurarselo.

3. _______ Un ottimismo - fuori posto - mi faceva sperare che, fra gli innumerevoli, fosse colui della mia bicicletta.

4. _______ Fatto è che lui non volle aiutarmi. E questo è il guaio... La ragione per cui non riuscì a rintracciare la bicicletta.

5. _______ ...assomigliava al ladro giovane... Era lui!

6. _______ ...esiste una sola realtà: non lavorare, ma rubare.

Inglese

a. A feeling of misplaced optimism made me hope that among these countless bicycles I should find mine.

b. Bicycles without tires or without inner tubes, bicycles unpainted, mended in bits. Behind the first rank were the venders of tires, inner tubes, and bicycle parts.

c. ...there exists another reality: to steal, not to work.

d. One of them looked like my bicycle thief. How well I remembered the face!

e. The shameful truth is that he did not want to help me, and that is why I shall not succeed in finding my bicycle.

f. It is useless to dream of such a life and stupid to hope for it.
ii. Nel romanzo non esiste il personaggio di Bruno perché il racconto è primariamente autobiografico. Bartolini descrive la ricerca delle bici rubate in modo clinico, cioè senza aggiungere molta emozione. Il narratore, Bartolini stesso, mantiene le distanze dalla sentimentalità che De Sica, invece, sfrutta per attirare l’attenzione del pubblico che è invitato a guardare il film accuratamente. Puoi immaginare il film senza il personaggio di Bruno? Come sarebbe stato diverso se non ci fosse stato lui nel film?
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