



**Director** Vittorio De Sica  
**Writers** Oreste Biancoli, Suso Cecchi D'Amico, Vittorio De Sica, Adolfo Franci, Gherardo Gerardi, Gerardo Guerrieri, Cesare Zavattini, based on a novel by Luigi Bartolini.  
**Producer** Vittorio De Sica  
**Original music** Alessandro Cicognini  
**Cinematographer** Carlo Montuori  
**Film Editor** Eraldo Da Roma  
**Production Designer** Antonio Traverso

**Lamberto Maggiorani** Antonio Ricci, the father  
**Enzo Staiola** Bruno Ricci, the son  
**Lianella Carell** Maria Ricci, the mother  
**Gino Saltamerenda** Baiocco  
**Vittorio Antonucci** The Thief  
**Giulio Chiari** The Beggar  
**Elena Altieri** The charitable Lady

**VITTORIO DE SICA** (7 July 1901, Sora, Italy—13 November 1974, Paris) was as well-known as an actor as a director. He took many of those acting jobs only to get the money with which he would make his own films, not unlike Orson Welles. Some of the 35 films he directed are *Il Giardino dei Finzi-Contini* 1970 (*The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*), *I Girasoli* 1970 (*Sunflower*), *Woman Times Seven* 1967, *Matrimonio all'italiana* 1964 (*Marriage Italian-Style*), *Ieri, oggi, domani* 1963 (*Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*), *La Ciociara* 1961 (*Two Women*), *Umberto D* 1952 and *Sciucià* 1946 (*Shoeshine*). He appeared in Andy Warhol's *Dracula* 1974, *The Amorous Adventures of Moll Flanders* 1965, *A Farewell to Arms* 1957, *Il Processo Clémenceau* 1917 and 156 other films.

**CESARE ZAVATTINI** (29 September 1902, Luzzara, Italy—13 October 1989) started out as a journalist and a writer of ordinary fiction, then became a screenwriter and the prime theorist of the Italian neorealist filmmakers. He and De Sica worked together on 25 films, among them *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*, *Sunflower*, *Two Women*, *Umberto D*, and *Shoeshine*.

**On neorealism** (from Liz-Anne Bawden, Ed., *The Oxford Companion to Film* 1976):  
 The term "neo-realism" was first applied . . . to Visconti's *Ossessione* (1942). At the time *Ossessione* was circulated clandestinely, but its social authenticity had a profound effect on young Italian directors De Sica and Zavattini, [who] adopted a similarly uncompromising approach to bourgeois family life. The style came to fruition in Rossellini's three films dealing with the [Second World] war, the Liberation, and post-war reconstruction: *Roma, città aperta* (*Rome, Open City*, 1945), *Paisà* (*Paisan/Ordinary People* 1947), and *Germania, anno zero* (*Germany, Year Zero/Evil Street*, 1947). With minimal resources, Rossellini worked in real

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**BICYCLE THIEVES/LADRI DI BICICLETTE**  
 (93 minutes) 1947



locations using local people as well as professional actors; the films conveyed a powerful sense of the plight of ordinary individuals oppressed by political events. The roughness and immediacy of the films created a sensation abroad although they were received with indifference in Italy. . . .

By 1950 the impetus of neo-realism had begun to slacken. The burning causes that had stimulated the movement were to some extent alleviated or glossed over by increasing prosperity; and neo-realist films, although highly praised by foreign critics, were not a profitable undertaking: audiences were not attracted to realistic depictions of injustice played out by unglamorous, ordinary characters. De

Sica's *Umberto D* (1952) was probably the last truly neo-realist film. . . .

Although the movement was short-lived, the effects of neo-realism were far-reaching. Its influence can be traced across the world from Hollywood, where stylistic elements in films about social and political problems echoed those of the neo-realists, to India, where Satyajit Ray adopted a typically neo-realist stance in his early films. . . .

***Ladri di biciclette and its times*** (from *World Film Directors*, vol. I. Ed. John Wakeman NY 1987), entry by Derek Prouse:

What is sometimes overlooked in the growth of the neorealist tradition in Italy is the fact that some of its most admired aspects sprang from the dictates of postwar adversity: a shortage of money made the real locations an imperative choice over expensive studio sets, and against any such locations any introduction of the phony or the fake would appear glaringly obvious, whether in the appearance of the actors or the style of the acting. De Sica therefore chose to work with unknowns who, under his sympathetic direction, could retain their naturalness and would bring with them no aura of personal legend or glamor.

With the passage of time and recovery of the Italian economy, some of the original impact of *Ladri di biciclette* (*Bicycle Thieves/The Bicycle Thief*, 1948) has been obscured. The film can only be fully appreciated when it is related to the traumatic, chaotic postwar years when a defeated Italy was occupied by the Allied forces. It is this failure to assess the film in its social-historical context that has ousted it from the place it occupied for many years in leading critics' lists of best films. To describe this picture, as Antonioni once did, as a story of a man whose bicycle has been stolen, is deliberately to miss the point. Here we have a man who has been deprived of a rare chance to earn tomorrow's bread; it is as urgent as that. The long Sunday the film describes becomes for him a kind of nightmare that betrays him into conduct which is fundamentally alien to him. *Ladri di biciclette*, loosely based on Luigi Bartolini's novel, was scripted primarily by Zavattini and De Sica. The latter, unable to find studio backing, produced it himself with financial backing from friends.

Another perceptive film critic and biographer, Lotte Eisner, sets the scene: "no famous monument shows that the action takes place in Rome. Here are drab suburban streets, ugly houses, instead of ancient or contemporary ruins. The Tiber flows sluggishly, its embankments are dusty and deserted. This could be anywhere in the world where people are poor. Where dawn brings the dustmen emptying the bins, the workmen going to the factories, the crowded tramcars. Nothing of the picturesque South: there are not even any beggars to be seen. They are to be found herded like a flock of sheep into an enclosure, where the lady members of a religious organization, with tight smiles, and a hurried charity which sacrifices one hour a day to the verminous, call the poor starvelings to their knees for a mechanical prayer in return for a bowl of thin soup.

For Lotte Eisner, *The Bicycle Thief* was the best Italian film made since the war. Others made higher claims: in 1952, a poll of 100 international filmmakers votes their

choices of the best ten films of all time. The list was headed by *Potemkin*, followed by *The Gold Rush*, and *The Bicycle Thief*.

#### **from *Film Notes* Scott Hammen Louisville KY, 1979**

The film's action encompasses many facets of the urban scene. Outdoor markets, churches, brothels, streetcars, music halls, restaurants, soccer stadiums, and lower-class neighborhoods all figure in the film's action and support De Sica in his announced goal of "surmounting the barrier separating the documentary from drama and poetry."

Part of the film's genius lies in the stark simplicity and appearance of total naturalism in its technique. Yet, contrary to all appearances, it was meticulously constructed. De Sica worked with his performers for months and had entire streets cordoned off for the shooting of outwardly impromptu crowd scenes. The film was so effectively thought out as to achieve just the opposite effect: a feeling of complete spontaneity.

Didn't get seal of approval in America because of several indelicate scenes. One NY area theater which attempted to show it was closed down when Knights of Columbus arrived in force with the objection that the work "glorified a thief."

#### **from the Criterion 2007 dvd**

##### "A Passionate Commitment to the Real" Godfrey Chesire

Viewed in retrospect, much of modern cinema can seem to flow from twin fountainheads: Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941) and Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948). Though separated by World War II, the two movies symbolize the cardinal impulses that came to captivate serious audiences, critics, and filmmakers after the war. The tendencies they signaled—ones soon fused into a singular aesthetic by the French new wave—are not so much divergent as complementary.

Where *Citizen Kane* heralded the age of the auteur and a cinema of passionate individual vision, *Bicycle Thieves* renounced "egoism" for collective concern, envisioning a cinema of impassioned social conscience. Both films reflect their directors' formal gifts, and their distinct approaches to "the real" transmute the very different production circumstances under which they were created. While Welles's use of deep-focus and other innovations brought a hyper-realist sophistication to the elaborate fantasy mechanics of the Hollywood studio film, De Sica's uncommon skills as a visual stylist and director of actors imbued the purist tropes of Italian neorealism—social themes, the use of real locations and nonprofessional performers—with a degree of poetic eloquence and seductive dramatic power seldom equaled in his era.

To an extent almost unimaginable today, the very different forms of realism exemplified by these films were seen as matters not just of aesthetic advancement but of moral urgency, too. Welles's critique of the collusion of media, political, and economic power was unprecedented, and he later paid the price for his boldness. In Europe, the searching self-examination provoked by a devastating war and the

revelation of Hitler's death camps implicated an entire culture, including a cinema of complicity and vain distraction, typified in Italy by the "white telephone" farces and historical superspectacles of the 1930s.

Born in the fires of war, neorealism served as a chastening, dis-illusioning rejection of Fascism and fantasy, yet its resort to documentary-style, street-level filming (especially in Roberto Rossellini's trailblazing *Rome, Open City*, from 1945) was initially a matter of sheer necessity. It soon became an ethical stance, one with consequences both immediate and enduring. Today, more than in any other passage in film history, the tactics and ideals evoked by "neorealism" continue to represent the struggle for authenticity and political engagement in cinema.

Yet neorealism, which by some counts produced only twenty-one films in seven years, was finally less a movement than a moment: a rush of creative energies sparked by, and ultimately tied to, a particular historical crisis. Its authors began in Resistance and thought they were headed for Revolution, but Revolution did not materialize. By the time we reach *Bicycle Thieves*, in 1948, the neorealist trajectory has reached its apogee. With Italy reborn not as a socialist paradise but as a capitalist purgatory beset with massive unemployment (the postwar boom had yet to launch), the film teeters between ongoing idealism and encroaching melancholy, a place where the earnest formulas of ideology are deepened by the intuitions of tragedy.

The film was the third official collaboration between DeSica, a successful actor and matinee idol turned director, and Cesare Zavattini, a screenwriter who also served as one of neorealism's leading theoreticians. Like *The Children Are Watching Us* (1944) and *Shoeshine* (1946) before it, *Bicycle Thieves* uses children as characters whose innocence interrogates the dubious adult authority around them. Though loosely based on a book by Luigi Bartolini, the film exemplifies De Sica's stated desire to "reintroduce the dramatic into quotidian situations, the marvelous in a little news item...considered by most people throwaway material."

The quotidian anecdote dramatized here concerns Antonio Ricci, a young husband who has been suffering a prolonged spell of unemployment when he is offered a job as a bill poster. The catch is that he must have a bicycle and his is in hock. Rescued by his wife's willingness to pawn their bedsheets, Antonio sets out proudly and confidently on his new job, only to have his bicycle stolen on the first day. Desperate to stay employed, he mounts a wide-ranging search across Rome, accompanied most of the way by his young son, Bruno.

More than half a century on, it's hard to recapture how strikingly Italy's new realism—with its actual city streets and unfamiliar, bard-bitten faces—was to world audiences in the late 1940s, when any comparable Hollywood movie would have been shot on a studio back lot, with a star like Cary Grant (David O. Selznick's choice for Antonio) in the lead role. Yet *this* film's neorealism is a bit anomalous. Far from being shot guerilla-style, with minimal crew and technical support, it was mounted by a team of movie professionals working on a budget generous enough to allow

for large-scale scenes, hundreds of extras, and even the apparatus necessary to create a fake rainstorm.

Here, the situational imperatives of early neorealism have become a conscious aesthetic—one, it must be noted, with proven market value in the cinephile capitals of Europe and America (neorealist films were always mostly an export commodity). Yet this isn't to question De Sica's and Zavattini's sincerity. Though they perhaps elected to compete with Hollywood on a comparable level of technique, they were still embarked on the heroic quest of speaking about the real people and places and social hardships that most moviemakers (then as now) took pains to avoid.

Their commitment to the real finds its most immediate gratifying proof in the movie's capacious, quasi-picaresque portrait of Rome. Like *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*, *À Propos de Nice*, and *Wings of Desire*, among others, *Bicycle Thieves* is one of cinema's great "city films." But its wide gaze isn't simply geographic. In a way that subtly links De Sica's vision to Dante's each of its physical spaces also has a social, emotional, and moral dimension—from the union hall where crass entertainment intrudes, to the sprawling thieves' market of the Porta Portese, to the church where the poor are run through an assembly line of shaving, food, and worship, to the brothels rough solidarity of the aptly named Via Panico, to the environs of a soccer stadium where Antonio's solitary ordeal reaches a humiliatingly



public climax.

This city symphony is also, at its most intimate cinematic level, a symphony of looks. From the first, we are drawn into Antonio's alternately hopeful and haunted gaze and what it beholds. In the shop where his wife pawns their sheets, the camera leads our eyes up a veritable tower of such linens, a catalog of forestalled dreams. In the search for the bicycle, Antonio both casts his own looks and receives looks of suspicion, curiosity, and, most prevalently, indifference. Sometimes looks are significantly blocked (by a slammed window, say) or misdirected (Antonio hurries on, looking ahead, while Bruno falls twice in the street behind).

In what's often regarded as the film's pivotal scene, Antonio decides to treat Bruno to a good meal. This complex gesture from father to son is played out against the subsidiary drama of looks exchanged between Bruno and a supercilious, pompadoured bourgeois boy at the next table. One could not



call this passage especially subtle, yet its haunting power and richness show us what cinema can do that novels and theater cannot.

Looks also cue us to a gradual shift in the drama of *Bicycle Thieves*. Though it starts out focused closely on Antonio's poverty and desperate need to recover his bicycle, by the latter sections what most concerns us is not what happens between Antonio and the bicycle or his social position but what transpires between the man and his son. Indeed, a second viewing of the film might suggest that this has been the drama all along, that Bruno has been "looking after" Antonio in several senses that point us toward the film's justly famous final moments, when a touching gesture of filial solidarity replaces the class solidarity that De Sica and Zavattini evidently saw as receding in Italy.

Given the importance of individual gazes to his drama, it's no surprise that De Sica depends far more on variable compositions and cutting than did his neorealist colleagues Rossellini and Luchino Visconti, who inclined toward a more distanced camera style. Yet De Sica resists using close-ups or montage for Hollywood-style emotional overkill. Rather, his directing remains impressive for its vigorous inventiveness, the sense that every scene abounds in moments and details that add to the film's accruing, multivalent meanings. Additionally, his genius with actors accounts for the indelible performances of the nonprofessionals Lamberto Maggiorani, as Antonio, and Enzo Staiola, as Bruno.

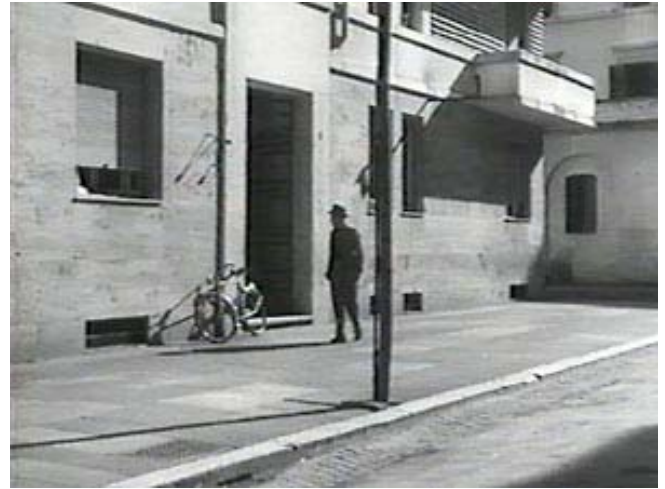
Much has been made of the fact that Antonio is putting up a poster for a Rita Hayworth movie when his bike is stolen. Apologists like Zavattini, in positioning neorealism as the antithesis to Hollywood, often made claims that today look extravagant if not fanciful. André Bazin was surely closer to reality when he spoke of a "dialectical" relationship than when he vaunted neorealism as approaching "pure cinema." Yet no important contribution to cinema should be condemned by its most utopian rhetoric. Judged by the brilliant conviction of *Bicycle Thieves*, neorealism still looks like our most potent reminder that a whole world exists outside the movie theater, to which our conscience and humanity oblige us to pay attention.

#### "Ode to the Common Man" Charles Burnett

*Bicycle Thieves* is truly one of my favorite films. I could watch it over and over again, and in truth, I have. It's a complicated and eloquent story in spite of its simple plot. The first time I saw *Bicycle Thieves* was in a class on neorealism, and I was immediately struck by how seamless and real it was, as if a camera were fortunate enough to be present in capturing an actual event. *Bicycle Thieves* gives meaning to the common man. And, as is often the case in life, reality here doesn't have a happy resolution. It was the same where I grew up: life was basically a continuous struggle. You endure, as William Faulkner points out. The people from the housing projects near where I used to live had a lot in common with those in *Bicycle Thieves*. In trying to find answers to what I experienced, I read a lot of Depression-era literature and studied the works of the photojournalists who focused on families struggling to make ends meet—slave

narratives and books like Richard Wright's *Native Son* and James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, which share the sensibility that produced neorealism. To tell a story without imposing your values is very challenging.

There is a group of filmmakers like myself who wanted to counter the distorted narratives and stereotyped images of Hollywood, and on seeing *Bicycle Thieves*, I was moved by how ordinary people were able to express so much humanity. The story achieved in very simple terms what I



was looking to do in films: humanize those watching. It is totally unromantic. The characters are just ordinary people, and the film gives the impression you are watching life unfold before you. It is entertaining, but that is not the goal. Its goal is to make audiences aware of a particular social condition that needs a political solution. It is clear that it was made as a tool for change.

Also amazing is the fact that the thieves are not portrayed as bad people but as victims of a corrupt society. It is postwar Italy, just freed from a Fascist government that had controlled information and lied to its people. When Antonio Ricci (Lamberto Maggiorani) forces the young man who stole his bike to take him to his house, all of the thief's neighbors come out to give him support. His partner comes out of his rundown apartment holding a baby when he hears the commotion. When he sees Antonio, he escapes back into his apartment. You find a kind of Lower Depths, but in spite of their poverty, they have grace.

The predators are rich and disconnected. De Sica's commentary is fascinating. The theft of the bike ironically unveils the layers of corruption at all levels of postwar Italy, but especially in the upper classes. You see a well-dressed, self-indulgent young man blowing bubbles and totally oblivious to Antonio's suffering as he and his friend conduct their through vendors selling bikes and parts. In the same scene, De Sica shows a well-dressed pedophile trying to seduce Antonio's son, Bruno (Enzo Staiola); no one seems to be concerned about the pedophile, as if it is all too common. Even the church is not a sanctuary. Class struggle is clearly a concern of De Sica's.

The most significant insight I gained from *Bicycle Thieves* is that stories don't have to be complicated. Something small can start a whole landslide of emotions.

**from *Encountering Directors* Charles Thomas Samuels NY 1972, interview w/ Vittorio De Sica Rome, May 9, 1971**

**DS:** But when it came out ["The Children Are Watching Us"], we were in the middle of our Fascist period—that absurd little republic of ours—and I was asked to go to Venice to lead the Fascist film school. I refused, so my unfortunate little film, came out without the name of its author.

**DS:** Neorealism is not shooting films in authentic locales; it is not reality. It is reality filtered through poetry, reality transfigured. It is not Zola, not naturalism, verism, things which are ugly.

**CTS:** By poetry do you mean scenes like the one in *The Bicycle Thief*, where the father takes his son to the *trattoria* in order to cheer the boy up only to be overcome with the weight of his problems?

**DS:** Ah, that is one of the few light scenes in the film.

**CTS:** But sad at the same time.

**DS:** Yes, that's what I mean by poetry.

**CTS:** You say that neorealism is realism filtered through poetry; nonetheless. It is harsh because you forced your compatriots right after the war to confront experiences they had just suffered through. Didn't they resist?

**DS:** 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. The first film that placed a very tiny stone in the reconstruction of our former dignity was *Shoeshine*.

**CTS:** Are you nostalgic for the earlier days?

**DS:** Very. *Umberto D* was made absolutely without compromise, without concessions to spectacle, the public, the box office.

**CTS:** Even fewer than *The Bicycle Thief*?

**DS:** Look, for me, *Umberto D* is unique [his favorite of his films]. Even though it has been the greater critical success, *The Bicycle Thief* does contain sentimental concessions.

**DS:** In Italy there are about a hundred actors; fewer, if you are critical. In life there are millions. . . .

For *The Bicycle Thief*, only one producer would give me money. David O. Selznick was the only one who saw value in the project, but he wondered whom I would cast as the father. I replied that I wanted a real Italian worker because I found no one suitable among the available professionals (Mastroianni would have done, but he was too young then, only eighteen). You know who Selznick wanted? Cary Grant. Grant is pleasant, cordial, but he is too worldly, bourgeois; his hands have no blisters on them. He carries himself like a gentleman. I needed a man who eats like a worker, is moved like a worker, who can bring himself to cry, who bats his wife around and expresses his love for her by slamming her on the shoulders, the buttocks, the head. Cary Grant isn't used to doing such things and he can't do them. Therefore, Selznick refused to give me money, and I had to beg to finance the film, as I always have had to beg. For my commercial movies, money was always available.

**CTS:** Bresson complained to me that you neorealists were violating reality by dubbing, since the voice is the truest expression of personality.

**DS:** It's not the voice; it's what one says.

**CTS:** Still, why do you dub?

**DS:** Because I didn't have the money. *The Bicycle Thief* cost a hundred thousand dollars, *Shoeshine*, twenty thousand. With such budgets, I couldn't afford sound cameras.

**CTS:** You've worked in color and black and white. Which do you prefer?

**DS:** Black and white, because reality is in black and white.

**CTS:** That's not true.

**DS:** Color is distracting. When you see a beautiful landscape in a color film. You forget the story. Americans use color for musicals. All my best films were made in black and white.

**CTS:** Most critics today maintain that the true film artist writes what he directs.



**DS:** That's not true. Directing is completely different from writing; it is the creation of life. If *Bicycle Thief* had been directed by someone else, it would have been good, but different from the film I made.

**CTS:** Does this mean that you think dialogue less important than images?

**DS:** Images are the only important things. Let me give you an example of what I mean. Five films have been made of *The Brothers Karamazov*, all bad. Only one came close to Dostoyevsky: the version by Fedor Ozep. That's how the director is an author. In all these films the same story was used, but only one of them was any good.

**CTS:** Why are you so drawn to the destruction of young children as a theme for your films?

**DS:** Because children are the first to suffer in life. Innocents always pay.

**CTS:** This is what you show in *The Children Are Watching Us*. But something even more remarkable in that film is the general decency of the characters. Even that nosy neighbor turns out to be all right, in the moment when she brings the maid a glass of water. Does this represent your belief about mankind?

**DS:** All my films are about the search for human solidarity. In *Bicycle Thief* this solidarity occurs, but how long does it last? Twenty-four hours. One experiences moments, only moments of solidarity. That glass of water is one of them. Two hours later there will be no more union; the people won't be able to bear one another.

**CTS:** But it's important that the moment occurred.

**DS:** One needs something that lasts longer.

**CTS:** Is that possible?

**DS:** No. Human incommunicability is eternal.

**CTS:** Incommunicability or egoism?

**DS:** Let me tell you something. I wanted to call my films from *Shoeshine* on, not by their present titles, but "Egoism #1, #2, #3." *Umberto D* is "Egoism #4."

**CTS:** Did you believe in your next film, *The Gate of Heaven*?

**DS:** No, I made it only to save myself from the Germans. As a matter of fact, the Vatican didn't find it orthodox enough and destroyed the negative. . . .

All the time the Fascists kept asking me when I would finish that Vatican film and come to Venice, and I kept telling them I was at work on it. It took me two years. I completed it the day the Americans entered Rome. It was made to order. There are some good things in it, but the final scene of the miracle is horrible. It was a film made only to save me from the Fascists.

**CTS:** Why do you use music in *The Bicycle Thief* so often to provoke an emotional response?

**DS:** I am against music, except at a moment like the end of *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* when we hear the Hebrew Lament, but the producers always insist on it.

**CTS:** You said that this film contains a compromise. . .

**DS:** Not a compromise, a concession. A small, romantic sentimentality in that rapport between father and son.

**CTS:** But that is the most moving thing in the film.

**DS:** Look, I agree that *The Bicycle Thief* and *Umberto D* are my best films, but I stoutly maintain that the latter is superior.

**DS:** [about *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*] I am happy that I made it because it brought me back to my old noble intentions. Because, you see, I have been ruined by lack of money. All my good films, which I financed by myself, made nothing. Only my bad films made money. Money has been my ruin.

**Cesare Zavattini on reality in film** (quoted in Jack C. Ellis, *A History of Film* 1979):

Substantially then, the question today is, instead of turning imaginary situations into "reality" and trying to make them look "true," to make things as they are, almost by themselves, create their own special significance. Life is not what is invented in "stories"; life is another matter. To understand it involves a minute, unrelenting, and patient search."

**De Sica on film technique** (from *Miracolo in Milano*): I follow the development of the plot step by step; I weigh, experience, discuss and define with (Cesare Zavattini), often for months at a time, each twist and turn of the scenario. In this way, by the time we start shooting, I already have the complete film in my mind, with every character and in every detail. After such a





long, methodical and meticulous inner preparation, the actual work of production boils down to very little.

**Censoring De Sica (from the File Room):** In spite of the praise and awards *The Bicycle Thief* was receiving from around the globe, Hollywood's Production Code Administration (PCA) was able to find two scenes that it demanded be removed before it would issue its Seal of approval. "The first was a brief, slightly poignant episode in the midst of the frantic daylong search for the stolen bicycle. Antonio's son pauses beside a Roman wall, apparently to relieve himself. His back is to the camera and before he can begin, his father compels him to abandon the call of nature and continue the chase. The second problem, more important to the plot, involved Antonio's pursuit of the thief into a "house of tolerance." The run went through the bordello. Showed nothing even remotely sensual. The women were clothed, unattractive and occupied only with their Sunday morning meal." (*American Film* 12/1989 pg.52) Although neither scene technically violated the official Production Code, Joseph Breen, the PCA's Director, personally opposed the scenes and demanded they be removed before he would issue the film the PCA Seal. Because most cinemas were still owned by the major studios, this Seal was imperative for a film's distribution. "The company presidents made the Production Code Seal the passport that the movies needed to enter the largest and most profitable theaters in America. They fined those who distributed or exhibited a picture without the Seal." (*American Film* 12/1989 pg.42)

Banking on the film's reputation and critics' support, Burstyn, the film's distributor, began a press campaign to have the Motion Picture Association overrule Breen's decision. The Association supported Breen's decision and demanded that the scenes be removed. Burstyn refused to make the cuts, and he was forced to release the film without the Seal. "The decision sparked intense criticism of the Production Code Administration. In a two-column *New York Times* story "The Unkindest Cut," Bosley Crowther termed the outcome of the appeal "the sort of resistance to liberalization or change that widely and perilously oppresses the whole industry today...In a series of press releases, he accused Breen of applying petty standards that the vast majority of Americans had long since rejected.." (*American Film* 12/1989 pg.53) As the support of the PCA began to be challenged by Burstyn and the like, *The Bicycle Thief* decision marked the beginning of the end of the PCA's rigid hold on film distribution.



#### **COMING UP IN THE SPRING 2007 BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS (REDUX) XIV:**

Feb 27 Yasujiro Ozu, *Tokyo Story/Tokyo monogatari* 1953  
March 6 Orson Welles, *Touch of Evil* 1958  
March 20 David Lean, *Lawrence of Arabia* 1962  
March 27 Jean-Luc Godard, *Contempt/Le Mépris* 1963  
April 3 Stanley Kubrick, *Dr. Strangelove* 1964  
April 10 Sergio Leone, *The Good the Bad and the Ugly/Il Buono, il brutto il cattivo* 1966  
April 17 Robert Altman, *Nashville* 1975  
April 24 Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, *Singin' in the Rain* 1952

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