

Bicycle Thieves

Intro

1948 - date made

Vittorio De Sica - director

Plot: Unemployed Antonio Ricci is elated when he finally finds work hanging posters around war-torn Rome. His wife, Maria, sells the family's bed linens to retrieve Antonio a bicycle, however, disaster strikes when Antonio's bicycle is stolen. With his new job/ way of life hanging on the balance, Antonio decides to stop at nothing to retrieve his stolen bicycle.

Scene 1 - Antonio getting bicycle

Noticeably colour is Black and White (Even though colour was available, seeing that before 1932, when three - strip technicolour was introduced, commercialized, subtractive processes used only two colour components and could reproduce only a limited range of colour. In 1935 'The Wizard of Oz' was made in Technicolour, so by 1948 they could have used colour but instead chose not to in order to capture the gritty, realisticness that Neorealism withheld.)

Press play.

Going back to the scene, we can see an official handing out jobs that are currently available, cutting to a wide shot, we can see the rundown city, (which is typical of Italian Neorealism films, as, after the war all or most of the studios were destroyed from the bombing. Not having enough money to rebuild the studios, directors took to the street to create stories, which involved normal everyday people in normal everyday situations that showed the norms of society post-war)

Press play.

If we go back to the scene, we can see a crowd of men gathering to acquire the limited jobs, shown via long shot, we then get a close up of Antonio's back as he walks towards the crowd.

Press play.

As we can see the only way Antonio manages to get his job (poster boy) however, the only way he got the job was by lying about being able to get one for the job, even tho his is broken. (Since jobs were scarce Post War, the people were desperate and most were severely poor, or lived in poverty, so they would lie to get jobs, so that they could get money and move onto a better way of life, escape the daly poverty and depression. On the topic of desperation you can clearly see this through the dialogue used for example one man who says 'And because i'm a bricklayer i should die of starvation?' this shows us a glimpse of how people lived, which is what neorealism aims to capture but also we can see that underlying desperation, we can assume this man has been given the title of brick layer and until a job comes up that matches that description he shan't be working, him saying, 'die of starvation' emphasises that lack of money, lack of food. Continuing the scene we see Antonio in mid close up get his job to which he responds, 'My God, a job!' the dialogue here clearly shows us that desperate time period, he seems to be astonished to be given a job, he says 'My God.' as if something miraculous has happened, which for Antonio it pretty much just has, he's got a job, and with it that new way of life. The dialogue continues to show us the very bleak reality of post war italy as we see the official say to one man, 'i've got two jobs, but they're not for you.' to which the man responds with, 'Because it's not for me i must continue to rot.' once again the use of words like starvation and rot help capture this bleakness that the film has to it. Finally we can see how rare jobs really are, not only from the visual of how many men there are but from how quick they are to say they have a bicycle, after Antonio says his is broken, moments after one man says, 'I have a bicycle,' and another man responds to him saying, 'you're not the only one, I do too.' The dialogue here once again helps to enforce that desperation which the men share but as soon as the men have hope for the job the official shuts them down saying, 'you're a bricklayer that's a different category.' So back to waiting those men must go whilst Antonio now needs to find that bicycle he promised to have.

Scene 2 - Antonio loses bicycle

Antonio begins work for his new job, Antonio, via two shot is listening to the boss tell him how to put the poster up. (Something to pick up on is the use of children. We can see two children approach Antonio and the boss. Aside from extras, children were often used in italian Neorealism to often create a sense of sympathy. For example staring aside Antonio is the other main character, Bruno. Bruno is Antonio's child and often acts as a symbol of morality, the focal point of Antonio's ethical and moral decisions)

Press Play

As shown the boss kicks the kid away. The kids are dressed in pressumable hand me downs, being that the shirts and jackets are far too big for them and as we can see it appears they are

begging, from the use of the boy playing the instrument. This creates sympathy for an audience as we don't like to see vulnerable people in vulnerable situations, and in Italian neorealism, we can see that kids are often used like this, not always but most of the time. In this case however it also aims to show once again the severe poverty which Italy is going through, even kids are begging on the street and chances are it is because their parents have died during the war, so begging is what they have to resort for, this again creates sympathy for a spectator watching.

Going back to the boss kicking the children away we see the camera pans and lingers on them as they walk off. (This is typical of Italian Neorealism as often the camera will linger and follow extras to create that realistic effect, in hopes of capturing the 'world' and not just the main characters) The scene ends with Antonio riding off to his destination, cycling through the streets of Rome.

Press play.

When the scene picks back up, Antonio is putting up his poster. However, we as spectators can see multiple people walking past and looking at Antonio's unattended bicycle. As we continue to watch we see one particularly suspicious looking man sneak around the cars and then quickly dart towards Antonio's bicycle, stealing it. It then cuts to a reaction shot of Antonio who calls out, 'Thief! Thief!' as the man rides off. After chasing the thief, Antonio loses him. Shown via close up we see Antonio stand, hand on head for a moment in worry. The non-diegetic music is sad and depressing which reflects not only the time period but shows how Antonio is feeling at that moment of his life.

Press pause and explain above text.

(typical of the style the main characters are often placed in difficult economical, ethical or moral decisions) For Antonio, he is now faced with an ethical dilemma, now that he's lost that new way of life, he must decide what he'll do to obtain another bicycle. During the entirety of this film, non-diegetic music is rarely used, used only in cases to emphasise how a character would be feeling. This is once again to show that natural realistic effect, for example during Antonio's chase and pursuit of the thief, if it wasn't a neorealist film then we would be listening to a soundtrack that would reflect what's on screen, probably something suspenseful and action-like, however the entire chase scene is full of diegetic sounds, from cars, to horns, the sounds of war torn Rome, only when Antonio loses hope do we hear that non diegetic soundtrack, which again is used to reflect his lost hope, lost way of life.

Scene 3 - Antonio steals a bicycle

Antonio, through desperation steals someone else's bicycle. Before Antonio steals a bicycle himself he sends Bruno (Moral Compass) away to catch the tram back to their house saying, 'Here, take the streetcar. Wait at Monte Sacro.' Bruno walks off but quickly turns to follow Antonio who at first notices and tells him, 'You heard me. Go on!' however, unbeknownst to Antonio, Bruno misses the tram and therefore remains to watch. Perhaps Antonio sent Bruno away because he knew he was about to do something bad, but for us filmmakers we can delve deeper and see it's really him sending his moral compass away, at this moment Antonio is making the difficult ethical, moral and consequential decision to steal, to better his life, which in turn would put the guy he's about to steal from, in his position so it's come full circle. Cut to a long shot and we see Antonio make the difficult ethical decision to steal a bicycle himself and in turn, become a bicycle thief.

Antonio, after spending all day searching Rome still can't find his bicycle, the police won't help so, Antonio becomes desperate. The bicycle for Antonio is his and his family's means of survival, no bicycle means no money, no money means desperation and threat to survival.

As Antonio approaches the bicycle, non-diegetic music is playing, this is once again to heighten the intensity of the scene, to emphasise it as an important moment in Antonio's life. To me I hear an almost siren sounding alarm in the non-diegetic track as if the soundtrack is foreshadowing Antonio's capture, or as if the siren sound is almost an alarm which seems to suggest Antonio turn around and leave, get away from the ensuing danger which he could have put himself into. To add to the further suspense, Antonio's costume is very film noir, the use of black and white almost makes him look like a shadow cast upon the wall behind him (via long shot) as he hesitantly walks up to the bicycle, his costume, being a rundown suit and fedora cast him as a shady looking person who is up to no good. Perhaps it is intentional that he look like this during his moral break as when he is playing by the rules, for most of the movie he is wearing work clothes with no fedora.

Going back to the scene Antonio steals the bicycle but is immediately chased (shown via multiple pans) and caught, all in front of Bruno (that moral compass) As a result of Antonio's desperation he is shamed, slapped in the face for a crime that went unpunished when it happened to him. Fortunately for Antonio the man decides to let him go and will not press charges against him. The film ends with Bruno and Antonio walking down the street with many other ordinary, everyday people. The ending is bleak and sad which again has been made this way because neorealism aims to capture reality, and in life not everything works out. The bleak ending represents post war and shows how life continued, there is no 'white telephone' hollywood ending and for Antonio he doesn't get his bicycle back. We watch him walk off and that's it, we can then assume he will have to go back to looking for a job, he may even lose his house, it's very real and very bleak.

To conclude Italian neorealism is a very refined way of storytelling, very natural and very true. Through the language of cinema however we can still see influences such as film noir and the fact they chose to shoot in black and white to capture the gritty neorealist feel. Some final additions to add on about mise-en-scene and language of cinema would be that we can see through costume the clear class deficiency, the rich and the poor in the restaurant or just spotting them as they walk about and also during the entirety of the film it uses natural lighting which again comes down to the style of film, being neorealist.

Any questions?

Word count =2004