

MIT Student
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Film Notes: *Bicycle Thieves*

The director of *Bicycle Thieves* is Vittorio De Sica. It was released in 1948 and takes place at an unspecified time after WWII in Valmelaina, Rome, Italy. The low-budget nature of film production meant that *Bicycle Thieves* was filmed on location.

Five adjectives or phrases I would use to describe the city portrayed on film: an open space that feels more like a container for people rather than a character with its own. The city also reveals itself to have little pockets of tight-knit communities where the crowds of people protect their own. Bustling. Mobile. In keeping with its neorealist style, there is no fixation on cueing the audience to the setting of the film with fancy establishing shots of major tourist attractions; rather, the shots are composed and scaled-down to focus on how people interact with their space, which made the film more accessible and its story more universal. It was filmed matter-of-factly, so even if there were grand monuments being filmed, I simply didn't notice because I just saw those architectural elements as being integral to the space.

One remarkable scene was when the father and his son went to the restaurant to drink wine and eat mozzarella sandwiches for lunch. The restaurant is crowded, and many people from different social classes butt up against each other in this environment. Like *Modern Times* and *Berlin*, the consumption of food and also where the consumption of food takes place are significant social markers in *Bicycle Thieves*. The silent exchange between Bruno and the other boy from the wealthier family, where they try to one-up each other by showing off what they're eating, is emblematic of the heterogeneity of the urban environment, and that the simple act of eating can turn into a demonstration of power dynamics between two distinct groups of people.

I also thought the ending was very moving and memorable. Ricci attempting to steal another man's bicycle (after sending away his son, because he didn't want Bruno to witness the shame of his actions) demonstrated how easily crime and suffering can perpetuate in the city environment, especially when the acts are more or less justified because he needs to keep his job in order to survive and feed his family. The issue of "crime in the city" was humanized in this film, and even though we see Ricci commit the immoral act of stealing another man's bike in the film, we sympathize with him, and in a way, also sympathize with the person who stole Ricci's bicycle at the beginning of the film.

Two questions/topics I would like to discuss in class: Would we sympathize with Ricci's character as much if Bruno was not in the film? I am also interested in discussing the sanctuary of "women's spaces" (such as the brothel, the psychic's room, and the kitchens of the poor woman and Ricci's wife) and what happens when a male enters that space. I didn't really notice or didn't really recall very many women simply wandering around the city while Ricci went around searching for his bike. Is De Sica explicitly making a point about gender roles in his film, or was he simply neglecting to hire women extras?

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