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Institution: University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

Classification: Senior

Grade Point Average: [REDACTED]

Area of Study: History

Title of Project: Reel Images of Post-War Life: Narrative Films in Italy and Germany 1945-1951

**Project Summary**

When examining early post WWII life in Italy and Germany it is important to consider the feature films produced during this time. Both Italy and Germany were entering into an era of change that would challenge filmmakers and instill new purpose into feature films. Gone were the days of escape cinema such as the 'white-telephone' films in Italy that frequently starred Vittorio De Sica, and the famous propaganda films of Germany like *Triumph of the Will*. With many studios across Italy and Germany bombed, taken over by allies, or bankrupt came a need for more creative filmmaking. In Italy many filmmakers began shooting outside of the studios at real locations, used real people as actors, and contributed to an overall film movement that would later be coined as Italian Neo-realism. German filmmakers resorted to a style of filmmaking known as *Trummerfilm* or 'rubble film' that was a result of production challenges similar to those of Italian filmmakers.

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The investigation of my research will cover the production methods, reception, and implications of certain feature films in Italy and Germany between 1945 and 1951.

Attitudes, perceptions, and memories portrayed in these films will be discussed to give greater context to the politics, society, and culture of post-war life. Texts concerning these topics will serve as secondary sources to the films themselves, the primary sources.

A short documentary will then be created that follows this research process and creatively shows the results and conclusions formed during the investigation.

## REEL IMAGES OF POST-WAR LIFE: NARRATIVE FILMS IN ITALY AND GERMANY 1945-1951

The end of the Second World War ushered in a new era that entailed not only the reconstruction of shattered cities, but also the reordering of politics and society across Europe. Perhaps nowhere was this process more momentous than in the former Axis countries of Germany and Italy, which experienced the widespread challenges of homelessness and hunger, polar shifts in politics, and, in the case of Germany, a period of division and danger on the front lines of an emerging Cold War. Beyond the obvious physical scars, the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s signaled a dramatic shift in the cultures of the respective countries, as Germans and Italians faced the challenges of the immediate future while confronting the enormity of crimes committed in the recent past.<sup>1</sup> As this project will argue, much of this process played out on the silver screen. For decades, Europeans had flocked to theaters to see the latest feature films and escape from everyday life. Now Germans and Italians used the fictions of the same medium to face the realities of the postwar world and to imagine alternatives to the world that had come before.

In order to understand how and why films played such an important role in the reordering or postwar Europe, this project will undertake a comparative study of the Italian and filmmakers whose work engaged the political, cultural, and moral issues confronting their homelands after 1945. In particular, this study will emphasize on the one hand the Italian neorealist films of such directors as Roberto Rossellini and on the other hand the films of the famed East German DEFA studios, which supported the work of directors like Wolfgang Staudte. Both of these directors have excited the interest of historians,<sup>2</sup> but thus far none have considered their work in a

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<sup>1</sup> Konrad H. Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945-1995*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Giorgio Bertellini, *The Cinema of Italy*, (London: Wallflower Press, 2004).

comparative context. This is surprising, because for both Rossellini and Staudte, filmmaking after the war provided not only an outlet of artistic expression, but also offered a chance for them to engage the legacy of their homeland's fascist or Nazi years. Moreover, both directors made films that brought their audiences into the process, challenging filmgoers to reflect on the ethical consequences of the Italian and German regimes while shaping the popular memory of the war years.<sup>3</sup> Yet each approached their films with unique styles and from within the context of distinct national filmmaking traditions, which in turn shaped the public dialogue in different ways.<sup>4</sup> With this in mind, this study will focus on the ways in which cinema changed in the two countries in the early postwar years, and how the films in turn changed the societies in which they were created.

Through a comparative approach, this project will address three major questions. First, how did the conditions of the immediate postwar years affect the production of films in Germany and Italy? In the case of the latter, the main studio, Cinecitta, had been completely destroyed, while in Germany, a strong studio system was taken over by Allied occupiers. Second, in what ways do the films relate to the postwar context, and how might they have allowed directors and audiences to transcend the hardships of reconstruction? Third, how did audiences and critics respond to the films in the two countries, and to what extent did responses to the films generate a larger discussion about contemporary issues? With such questions in mind, this project will attempt to draw larger conclusions about the role of film in the immediate postwar experience of these two nations during the first years of defeat and occupation.

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<sup>3</sup> Jean-Luc Godard, *Cinema: The Archeology of Film and the Memory*, (London: Berg, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Ezra, *European Cinema*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

## **Methods and Outcomes**

In order to answer its key questions, the project will start with a comparison of four films from two renowned directors: Roberto Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* (1945) and *Germany, Year Zero* (1948), and Wolfgang Staudte's *The Murderers are among Us* (1946). All of these films address important mindsets of post-war life and vary greatly from the escapist films produced by both countries during WWII. The elements surrounding the production of these films will first be investigated. Then the content of the films themselves will be explored and the goals of the directors and writers will be studied. Finally the reception of these various films will be examined by pursuit of critic reviews from the early post war period.

As a result of these investigations, this study will offer a greater understanding of post-war life and the development of postwar film. The products of the research will include an undergraduate thesis with possible publication of the results and a short documentary film, which will be submitted to the Little Rock Film Festival. In this way, the scholarly and creative components that comprise the main questions of the project will also be reflected in its outcomes.

## **Materials and Budget**

With the possible funds I plan to work with my mentor to retrieve films from DEFA and secondary source books, for which I have included a proposed bibliography. I will then contact the Cineteca film library in Bologna, Italy to retrieve the Italian neorealist films of Rossellini complete with interviews and critic reviews. Once my secondary and primary sources are reviewed I will purchase software for the documentary portion of my research project, and secure any necessary rights to film clips I will be using. I've estimated these miscellaneous items will be a cost of 625 dollars, which will also include the ticket purchase and submission fee

for the Little Rock Film Festival. Travel costs to the Little Rock Film Festival and the Texas A&M 5<sup>th</sup> Annual History Conference will also be included in my fees totaling to 750 dollars.

### **Preliminary Research**

I first will compile a list of secondary sources to be used, both retrieved from Mullins library and elsewhere. These secondary sources will include information on German and Italian post-war societies, politics, and cultures. This information will need to be retrieved before texts concerning German and Italian film are reviewed. Throughout this month I plan to complete research of secondary source books from Mullins library concerning German culture, society, and politics. Also basic research concerning an overview of WWII film in Italy and Germany should be completed first so that this information can be included in the introduction to the research, and further understanding of post-war film can be accomplished. After this is completed, work on the introduction should begin.

Then I plan to finish writing the introduction. I complete research of secondary sources concerning Italian culture, society, and politics retrieved from Mullins library. Next, I will compile a list of further secondary source books I wish to purchase that my mentor and I feel are essential to further research. Then I will decide on a final list of primary source films I wish to use, and will retrieve these films from institutions that offer the most recently restored versions. I plan to then begin screening my primary film sources and to write and complete sections concerning the context surrounding these films, i.e. politics, society, and culture.

Finally I will go through secondary sources retrieved from both Mullins library, and purchased elsewhere concerning post-war films in Italy and Germany. I will then view primary film sources once more and take detailed screening notes. I will also go through any added

secondary sources and add to the text of my research thus far. Finally I will analyze my screening notes and compare arguments with other primary sources, such as box office reviews and director interviews. I hope to then complete a rough draft of my research thus far.

### **Timeline**

**January 2014:** Throughout January, I will review the rough draft and include any new perspectives or arguments acquired through further primary and secondary source analysis. I will also view the films for a third time and complete a second draft. Also during this time I will begin retrieving footage for research documentary, and review certain editing processes on Final Cut Pro software that I wish to use.

**February 2014:** During this time period, I plan to finish retrieving footage for the documentary, and any interviews with directors such as Wolfgang Staudte and Roberto Rossellini. I will also purchase and obtain any necessary primary sources I and my mentor feel are necessary to further my research, such as movie reviews, box office statistics, and past interviews with directors. I will then edit footage and complete the documentary. Finally, I will complete a final draft of research and prepare for graduate school applications.

**March 2014:** I will submit research and the documentary to chosen graduate schools and touch base with research committee. I will then defend research to the committee and honors college. I will also present my research to the 5th Annual Texas A & M History Conference on March 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>, and to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Society of European Historians Conference at the University of Arkansas.

**April 2014:** I plan to submit my documentary to the Little Rock Film Festival.

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**Hanz Fritz Kollner. "Allez Hopp." Deutsche Film. 1946. DVD**