ABSTRACT

A Critical Analysis of Neorealism and Writing the Screenplay, *Mid-Sized City (Waco)*

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This thesis outlines both the historical and theoretical background to Italian neorealism and its influences specifically in global cinema and modern American independent cinema. It will also consist of a screenplay for a short film inspired by neorealist practices. Following this, a detailed script analysis will examine a variety of cinematic devices used and will be cross-examined with the research done before. The thesis will also include personal and professional goals.

A Critical Analysis of Neorealism and Writing the Screenplay, *Mid-Sized City (Waco)*

by

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A Thesis

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This thesis will consist of two main sections:

The first will be a critical analysis of Italian neorealism and how it has expanded
beyond postwar Italy. I will start by exploring pre-World War II Fascist Italy. Then, I will
discuss the historical and cultural factors that led to the formation of Italian neorealism.
Once this background has been established, I will dive directly into neorealism proper,
expounding on its aesthetic qualities such as shooting on location and use of non-
professional actors, long takes with deep focus, etc. My goal is to establish the evolving
nature of neorealism by looking closely at three films: *Rome, Open City* (*Roma Citta
Aperta*, 1945), *Bitter Rice* (*Riso Amaro*, 1949), and *Umberto D* (1952). My primary focus
will be the historical significance and aesthetic distinction of these films.

Following this, I will look at neorealism's global impact on Third Cinema.
Neorealism had a significant impact in other European countries like France, but also
internationally in places like Latin American, Africa, and India. Indian filmmaker Satyajit
Ray was heavily influenced by neorealism, which can be found specifically the Apu
trilogy: *Pather Panchali* (*Song of the Little Road*, 1955), *Aparajito* (*The Unvanquished*,
1956), and *Apur Sansar* (*The World of Apu,* 1959). I will then transition to look at
American cinema and how the influence of neorealism can still be found in many modern
American independent films, specifically Kelly Reichardt's *Wendy and Lucy* (2008),
Sean Baker's *The Florida Project* (2017), and Alexander Payne's *Nebraska* (2013). This

will also be important since I will be working toward a contemporary neorealist film and would like to examine how my work reflects (or does not reflect) qualities from those films.

The second part of the thesis will be creative, consisting of a script for a neorealist-inspired short film with detailed annotations including descriptions of what inspired it, why I felt this was important to the story, characters, theme, and so forth. It will also contain a complete breakdown of the tone, visual style, locations, production design, costumes, casting, cinematography, editing, color, and sound design. Throughout this section, I will cross-examine my writing with the historical, theoretical, and aesthetic analysis done in part one.

Personal and Professional Goals

While I had a fantastic undergraduate experience, it was almost entirely production-oriented, so I was excited to grow in my understanding of film history and criticism here at Baylor. I first became interested in neorealism after watching *Bicycle Thieves*. I was completely enamored by its simple yet captivating stories and stark, honest visuals. After further study of neorealism during my first semester here at Baylor, I quickly realized that I wanted to create a film inspired by it for my thesis. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, I was not able to pursue making a thesis film as I originally had planned, but, thankfully my advisors and I were able to find a creative solution as seen by the hybrid nature of this thesis.

I am hoping the experience of writing this thesis will challenge me to bridge the gap between my creative talents and my aspirations as a writer. My experience in film, both in higher education and in the workplace, has been primarily technical. I am

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specifically most confident in my editing and camera skills, but I feel I could grow in my writing (both creative and otherwise). I love making, watching, and writing about film and this thesis presents a great opportunity for me to grow as both a creative and critical writer. I also believe the experience I have in both areas impacts one another; studying and writing about film greatly affects the way I create films and vice versa.

This thesis will allow me to market myself professionally and further build my portfolio. While I do imagine myself working in production and market myself as an editor, I dislike the idea of putting myself in one box for the rest of my career. I could see myself working in both the production and journalism or academic side of film and this thesis allows me to market myself in both areas. I've also considered pursuing an MFA in film and my experience in this program would be invaluable if I were to pursue that. No matter where life takes me, the experiences this program has offered are sure to better me personally and professionally.

What is Neorealism?

The term neorealism originated in 1920's Italian literature to describe the poetry of Salvatore Quasimodo and fiction writers such as Alberto Moravia, Ignazio Silone, Carlo Levi, Vasco Pratolini, Carlo Bernari, Cesare Pavese, and Elio Vittorini. Much of the early neorealist literature was stifled by the Fascist regime, and it would not reach its zenith until after World War II, paralleling the cinematic neorealist movement ("Neorealism | Italian Art"). The literary and cinematic movements were by no means identical, but they had in common enough of common source material with the same aesthetic and ideological impulses to share a label (Marcus 18). This paper will focus

exclusively on the cinematic movement so when the word *neorealism* is used, it will refer only to film and not to any other artistic movements of the same name.

There was not an official coalition formed where the tenets of neorealism were specifically categorized and written out. "Different types of directors shared the same space, descending into the streets to see and retell the interchangeable stories of characters without stories whom the war had transformed into representatives of everyone's story" (Brunetta 131). This is why there is often a struggle to define neorealism. While there is a set of common traits that govern neorealist practice, the stylistic differences among filmmakers from this time are often "greater than their conformity to a given set of rules" (Marcus 22). This lack of uniformity also contributed to many filmmakers departing from neorealism proper in the 1950s and '60s.

While a universally accepted definition of neorealism may not exist, it is generally understood that neorealist films include traits such as on-location shooting, long takes, deep focus, a stationary camera, non-professional actors, meandering, and plotless narrative structure, and an emphasis on the lower-class and marginalized communities. Not all neorealist films will contain all of these traits, but they will undoubtedly contain some aspect of them.

Neorealism, however, can be best understood not as a checklist of technical requirements, but as a framework influencing a filmmaker's creative decisions. It was not the technical considerations that unified the filmmakers and artists of this period, but rather the ethical impetus. "Neorealism is first and foremost a moral statement". It was a statement against the lies that had imprisoned the people of Italy under the Fascist

regime—the lies that for so long sought to distort reality and neglected the people. As

Caesar Zavattini wrote in "Some Ideas on Cinema":

> We have passed from an unconsciously rooted mistrust of reality, an
> illusory and equivocal evasion, to an unlimited trust in things, facts and
> people. Such a position requires us, in effect, to excavate reality, to give
> it a power, a communication, a series of reflexes, which until recently we
> had never thought it had. It requires, too, a true and real interest in what
> is happening, a search for the most deeply hidden human values. (Zavattini)

With this historical foundation established, this thesis will approach neorealism as

defined by the two leading theoreticians of the movement, Caesar Zavattini and André

Bazin. Both Zavattini and Bazin were leading voices and proponents for neorealism and

helped establish a language and understanding of the movement that is still utilized by

scholars today.

André Bazin was a French film critic and theorist who argued for realism being

the most important function of cinema. He was perhaps the greatest advocate for

neorealism outside of Italy. Bazin was one of the founders of *Cahiers du cinéma*, where

he was a central critic and one of the driving forces behind the French New Wave

(Thompson and Bordwell 351).

Bazin's philosophy on realism and, as an extension, neorealism can best be seen

in his essay "The Ontology of the Photographic Image". The essay opens with Bazin

comparing filmmaking to the ancient Egyptian practice of embalming to the use of the

plastic arts including filmmaking. Embalming (and, later on, painting) sought the

"preservation of life by a representation of life." Bazin argues that the camera has finally

freed other artforms (especially painting) from their obsession with realism, allowing

them to explore more abstract methods because photography and cinema truly satisfy the

human obsession with realism and preservation. Bazin believed that the chemical process

of capturing an image was what set it apart, writing that it "satisfies our appetite for illusion by means of a process of mechanical reproduction in which there is no human agency at work" (Bazin and Gray).

Bazin wrote highly of filmmakers such as Jean Renoir, Orson Welles, and many Italian neorealist filmmakers including De Sica and Rossellini. He favored the use of long takes and deep focus, allowing viewers to take in the image with "its power to lay bare the realities" (Bazin and Gray). Bazin championed Italian neorealism and laid the theoretical groundwork, explaining its aesthetic importance and technical mastery and ushering in the recognition and respect for the movement that can still be seen to this day.

The other foundational figure for the movement was Caesar Zavattini. While widely known as one of the key theorists and screenwriters of the Italian neorealist movement, Zavattini was also a poet, fiction writer, journalist, cartoonist, art collector, and painter. His staunch commitment to democratic values and realism can be clearly seen throughout all his work (Bertellini and Ritter). He is, perhaps, most known for the interview he did for the Italian film publication *Magazine 2*, later republished in English as "Some Ideas on the Cinema" which laid out thirteen key points manifesting the importance and necessity of neorealism as a style.

As mentioned above, Zavattini was primarily interested in restoring interest and trust in reality. He carried a moral agenda that sought to awaken people to the beauty and actualities of the world around them and connect with reality which had previously been blurred and twisted by two decades of Fascist rhetoric. Zavattini writes that "it must be worthwhile to take any moment of human life and show how 'striking' that moment is: to excavate and identify it, to send its echo vibrating into other parts of the world"

(Zavattini). Zavattini's writings are undoubtedly made for and by Italy, yet his vision for

neorealism was global. That vision for neorealism can be seen throughout the world

cinema after World War II and even in American independent cinema seventy years later.

CHAPTER TWO

Critical and Historical Analysis

Italian Cinema Pre-neorealism

Italian cinema originated around the same time as Auguste and Louis Lumière

patented their Cinématographe in France in 1895. The Lumière invention was first

demonstrated in Rome in March 1896. In 1901, the first permanent movie house was

opened in Florence. Filoteo Alberini and Dante Santoni established the first Italian

production company, and their first film, *The Taking of Rome* (September 20, 1870) (*La

presa di Roma–20 settembre 1870*, 1905), was a reenactment of a battle that took place

during the Italian Reunification in which the Piedmontese army infiltrated Rome and

annexed the city. The film was a great success and established the Alberini and Santoni

Company at the forefront of the newly founded Italian cinema. Nine production

companies were operating by 1907 (Moliterno xxxii–xxxiii).

Italian cinema continued to flourish and grow. The first feature-length film*,

Dante's Inferno* (*L'Inferno*, 1911), took three years to create. It was very successful both

domestically and internationally. Since its birth, Italian cinema has clung tightly to

literature and theater for inspiration. In the early days, the major studios achieved

remarkable commercial success with their Greco-Roman epics, firmly establishing them

in the international market, especially the United States. The first Golden Age of Italian

cinema occurred in the years leading up to World War I (Moliterno).

Between 1913 and 1920, Italian cinema's star system developed. During this time, what became known as the diva phenomenon swept over Italian cinema. Stars such as Francesca Bertini, Lyda Borelli, Pina Menichelli, and Leda Gys transformed the current culture and societal expectations. Brunetta describes these women as "radiating light" and resembling "prismatic bodies" (Brunetta 43–50).

The industry was thriving, but as World War I dragged on, it became increasingly unstable. The major companies attempted to band together to prevent the terminal decline of the industry by forming the Unione Cinematografica Italiana. This union was short-lived, as internal conflict and corrupt leadership pushed them into bankruptcy (Moliterno xxii–xxv). As Benito Mussolini's Fascist regime took hold in Rome in 1922, the Italian film industry continued to decline until was all but dissolved by the mid-1920s.

While Mussolini marched on Rome, American film was exploding in budget and recognition, finding popularity in Italy while the Black Shirts took control. In 1924, L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa (also known as LUCE) marked a monumental political-cultural shift as the Fascist regime officially took complete control of the industry (Brunetta 54–61). Following this, many lead actors and directors abandoned their vocation or fled to Germany and France. The Fascist regime did not initially take hold of the film industry's potential for propaganda. Rather, they were mainly interested in newsreel and documentary filmmaking. While the production of films in Italy struggled, the theaters were full as more Italians than ever before were watching movies, most of which were American (Moliterno xxii–xxv).

The 1920s ended with Italian filmmakers eager to make inroads and reinvigorate Italian cinema. The introduction of synchronized sound and the subsequent proliferation

of "talkies" gave the industry new life (Brunetta 66). One of the most popular styles of film during the early sound era was the telefoni bianchi (white telephone films), most of which were comedies and melodramas that upheld bourgeois values and painted a picture of luxury that blatantly ignored the problems of the real world (Mancini).

The cinema under Fascist Italy was primarily capitalist, with aspects of fascism grafted onto it (Giovacchini and Sklar 24). In 1928, Mussolini founded the Istituto Internazionale del Cinema Educatore (International Institute for Cinema Education). Bold voices such as Alessandro Blasetti and Mario Camerini pushed for theoretical education of cinema and, because of this, sound movies began to acquire more substance and legitimacy. This, along with more funding, allowed Italy to produce more than 700 films between 1930 and 1942. The attitude of the regime during this time was not to use cinema as its favored form of propaganda. Luce newsreels and documentaries were still key components of propaganda, but narrative fiction films were largely devoid of explicit propaganda (Brunetta 67–73). In 1937, Mussolini inaugurated the Cinecittà, a large studio complex that would become the hub of Italian cinema (Moliterno xxvi). It was the most modern and well-equipped studio in Europe (Brunetta 71).

Prior to his career as a director, Alessandro Blasetti wrote for magazines and journals where he boldly called for the "rebirth" of Italian cinema. He made the transition to Director in the late 1920s and almost immediately rose to the forefront of the industry in Italy. He had a keen sense of rhythm, narrative, and flexibility and his aesthetics approach utilized the "signifying power of light and the composition of the image". He was also well versed in Italian painting and figurative art, which represented itself in his filmmaking. Mario Camerini was another filmmaker who rose in recognition

along with Blasetti. He was well regarded for his quiet and unintrusive style and would become known as the father of Italian comedy. Blasetti's success continued throughout the 1930s and early 1940s as he began working with the increasingly popular actor Vittorio de Sica (Brunetta 73–83).

Explicit propaganda was never the goal of the film industry under Mussolini. Rather, a certain artificiality and frivolity were used to distract people from the class and ideological battle being fought at the time. A film journal called Cinema, which became a home for many left-leaning critics including Giuseppe De Santis, called for a greater sense of realism and began denouncing mainstream Italian films. This idea was brought to fruition with Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* (*Obsession*, 1943) (Moliterno xxxii). *Ossessione*, along with other films such as Vittorio De Sica's *The Children Are Watching Us* (*I bambini ci guardano*, 1944) and Alessandro Blasetti's *Four Steps in the Clouds* (*Quattro passi tra le nuvole*, 1942) showed a somber seriousness that was largely absent in the blissful comedies and melodramas that were most popular at the time, making them direct forbearers of post-war neorealism (Giovacchini and Sklar 26).

World War II quickly drained Italy of resources and heavily damaged the morale and well-being of its citizens. Despite all of this, the production of films steadily increased throughout this period, with more than 120 films being produced in 1942. In 1943, with Allied forces taking the upper hand, Mussolini and his Fascist regime were forced north, creating a new government known as the Republic of Salò. While this new government had its own currency, flag, and army, it was little more than a puppet government for Hitler (Mancini 55).

Cinecittà was shut down along with the Fascist-controlled film industry. Most of the equipment and resources were looted by retreating Germans and other fascists. There was an attempt to revive national film in Venice as a part of the Republic of Salò, but fewer than 20 films were made, and many did not survive (Moliterno xl).

Similar to the cinema of Fascist Italy, contemporary Hollywood blockbusters often feature a large amount of escapism. While modern American society is by no means mirroring Fascist Italy, there is an undeniable parallel between the frivolity of Cinecittà films and the escapism of most big-budget Hollywood films. The most successful Hollywood blockbusters today utilize bloated budgets and over-the-top visual effects to offer a pleasant, distracting experience that is largely void of honest or accurate representation of modern American society. The United States is experiencing immense political, societal, and economical fracturing, and the goal of this thesis is to take a similar approach to the critics at the journal *Cinema* and call for a more realistic and truthful cinema that honestly portrays the brokenness of America's political, social and economic systems.

Neorealism Proper

With the fall of Mussolini, Italy was liberated and the period of rebuilding, known as the Italian Spring, began immediately. Cinecittà was transformed from a state-of-the-art production facility into a refugee camp, and most of the equipment was destroyed or taken by the Axis Powers. Despite all of this, films continued to be made.

Without the structure or the resources, they once had, filmmakers took to the streets. Italy itself became the soundstage and the people became the stars. Reality and fiction blended together more than ever before in the history of Italian cinema. This

reflects the soul of Italian society within which neorealism was birthed; on the verge of total collapse, filmmakers emerged from the destruction, eager to reconstruct their national identity. Many Fascist filmmakers were not banished as a central part of this new Italian identity was unity and a will to move on, purging themselves of their former sins. This was true across the board, from directors to actors to technicians (Brunetta 108–09).

It is important to remember that history does not proceed through clear breaks, and while there are obvious differences between the cinema of Fascist Italy and neorealism—notably neorealist cinema's focus on the lower class, social discomfort, and its unapologetically direct take on reality (Giovacchini and Sklar 19–20)—there are also continuities that can help explain how one could lead into the other. Certain institutions and apparatuses such as Cinecittà, the Centro Sperimental di Cinematografia, and the Venice Film Festival were created during the Fascist rule. It was during this time that an ideal was established that valued skilled technicians—not just directors, but also cinematographers, editors, stage designers, and the like. Many of the directors and their crew had already established themselves as incredibly skilled at their craft prior to the emergence of neorealism.

Roberto Rossellini was an unlikely figure to kick off this new revolutionary cinema. He was a relatively successful filmmaker, who could attribute much of his initial success in the industry to Vittorio Mussolini, son of Benito. Before the fall of the Fascist regime and Nazi occupation, Rossellini's body of work fit in nicely with the other films of Fascist Italy. His naivety and political self-interests can be seen in his "fascist trilogy," which celebrates the armed forces of the Fascist regime. It is important to note that even

these films, like almost all of the narrative features at the time, were not blatant fascist propaganda. It is also important to note that they very clearly were not antifascists (Bondanella 33).

The traumatic effects of the Nazi occupation of Rome led to the radicalization of many Romans, including Rossellini. Upon the fall of the Fascist state on July 25, 1943, many Italians suddenly found themselves antifascist. The amount of death and destruction that the Nazis brought into Rome, along with the heroic sacrifices made by those in the Resistance, flipped Rossellini's politics and ideology. While there is much debate over Rossellini's sincerity, there is no doubt that his first film in post-war Italy, *Rome, Open City*, was antifascist with its explicit Marxist/Catholic qualities (Bondanella 33).

There is a similar effect currently playing out within the United States. The combined impact of racial tensions unseen since the Civil Rights era, a deadly pandemic that has killed over 400,000 people, and the 4-year rule of a crypto-fascist President is bound to quickly radicalize people against the status quo and will hopefully result in filmmakers and artists directing their passion and skills to unravel the lies and represent a true and honest representation of reality. I find myself eager to push back against the safe, escapist nature of the American film industry*,* take to the streets, and, on a very minor scale, attempt to capture the realities of modern America.

Rome, Open City is set in Rome during the Nazi occupation. It tells the story of Resistance fighters, as well as everyday Romans, who heroically sacrificed all they had to fight against the Gestapo led by the tyrannical Major Bergmann (Harry Fiest). Major Bergmann and his German allies are searching for Giorgio Manfredi (Marcello Pagliero),

a communist and leader of the Resistance. The script was written by Rossellini, Federico Fellini, and Sergio Amidei. And, while the film is fictional, it was highly inspired by actual occurrences. Don Pietro (Aldo Fabrizi), a local catholic priest who aids the Resistance throughout the film, was based on an actual partisan priest; Manfredi's initial escape from the Nazis was inspired by Amidei's own rooftop getaway, and the death of Pina was based on an actual atrocity witnessed by actor Aldo Fabrizi (Marcus 36–37). In 1947, Amidei explained that they wrote *Rome, Open City*, "under the impression, the suggestion, and the influence of what we had just lived through. More than that, we all have been the instrument of the will of the underground army that was anxious to write its page for the book of history" (AMIDEI).

Don Pietro is a central character in the film. He works alongside the Resistance by housing key figures and is eventually executed by a German officer because of his actions. He embodies Rossellini's turning toward Christian humanism. In 1929, the Vatican signed the Lateran Treaty, alongside Mussolini, declaring political neutrality on behalf of the Catholic Church. Rossellini was very critical of the church's institutional neutrality but adhered to the Christian faith. Rossellini uses the character of Don Pietro to distinguish between the Christian faith and the institution (Marcus 50).

Despite his contempt for the institution's neutrality in the Resistance, Rossellini had a deep-seated love and respect for the Christian message. Pina is an unwed mother who, in the eyes of the traditional institution of the church, would be defined by these sinful qualities. Yet, her death is very clearly that of a martyr. Her redemption does not come through seeking penance for having a child out of wedlock, but rather her sacrifice for the people and fighting against oppression. Pina and Manfredi (a communist atheist)

both go to Don Pietro for confession. They approach him not as a church official, but rather as "the best possible embodiment of the Christian imperative to social justice" (Marcus 51). Just before Don Pietro's execution, Bergmann questions how he, a priest, could possibly collaborate with an atheist. Don Pietro replies, "I am a Catholic priest, and I believe that a man who fights for justice and liberty walks in the pathways of the Lord—and the pathways of the Lord are infinite."

Rome, Open City will inform *Mid-Sized City (Waco)* in its own unique way. *Open City* was ground-breaking and ushered in the Italian neorealist movement; but, beyond that, *Mid-Sized City (Waco)* will glean heavily from Rossellini's ability to utilize a city, making it a character in and of itself. I also hope to implement the Christian humanism seen in Don Pietro's character into *Mid-Sized City (Waco)*, which is simultaneously critical of the Church as an institution and the way it has consistently fallen short while also dramatizing the characteristics of Jesus and the overarching Biblical message rooted in taking care of the poor, feeding the hungry, and lifting the lowliest.

Rome, Open City was a critical success and, unlike the neorealist films that would soon follow, also a financial success, becoming the highest-grossing film in Italy the year it was released. It also garnered critical praise in France and the United States. The screening of *Rome, Open* City, along with Rossellini's follow-up film *Paisàn* (1946), let the world know that a new aesthetic phenomenon was brewing in Italy and that Rossellini was the spark that started the fire.

Often considered one of the founding fathers of neorealism, Giuseppe De Santis was a key voice for the journal Cinema during the 1930s. In this journal, he often called for doing away with the artificiality and aloofness of telefoni bianchi films and

embracing realism. He was a well-known figure in Italian cinema at the time, and people expected big things when he made the transition from critic and screenwriter to director.

He made his directorial debut in 1947 with *Caccia Tragica* (*Tragic Hunt*, 1947) (Moliterno 104–05). Most notably, this film revealed his stylistic propensity for wide pans, a variety of camera movements, and a belief that cinema should be "a collective choral voice" (Alsop). This concept of "choral voices," which refers to a film's ability to embrace the collective view over the individual, can be found throughout much of neorealist film and literature. Arguments have been made that this is a rhetorical construct, rather than a naturalistic one. Regardless, it is still a recurring aspect of many neorealist films, especially the films of De Santis.

De Santis's most successful film was *Bitter Rice* (*Riso Amaro*, 1949), which tells the story of two thieves, Francesca (Doris Dowling) and Walter (Vittorio Gassman), who are on the run. They attempt to hide among the crowd of women who are about to board a train to the rice paddies in the Province of Vercelli. The pair of thieves are forced to split, and Francesca boards the train with her new friend, Silvana (Silvana Mangano), who aides Francesca in the fieldworker's way of life. Francesca struggles along with other undocumented workers against their bosses. The tensions continue between workers and bosses along with a romantic entanglement involving Francesca, Walter, and Silvana. The film is known for its hybrid nature, combining worker-focused, documentary-like style with melodrama.

Melodrama refers to films that utilize heightened sentimentality through theatrical acting, heavy plot, heavy-handed music cues, and stereotyped characters. There is a heavy emphasis on clear and oftentimes excessive pathos and emotionalism in

melodrama (Ben Singer 58). The white telephone films of the 1930s relied heavily on melodrama and De Santis would have been very familiar with melodrama and its somewhat contradictory relationship to neorealism.

Bitter Rice was released at the height of the neorealist golden age, at which point the movement had garnered global fame. In 1948, Jean-Georges Auriol wrote, "at present, there is no doubt that Rome is the capital of cinema in Europe, if not the world" (Brunetta 117). De Santis saw the Italian neorealist style becoming increasingly purist and self-focused, and in response, he took an increasingly anti-formalist approach in his films. "He claims his own divergent hierarchy of interpretive importance. It is the content of the film that reveals its 'human and poetic value' and only once this basis of meaning has been established do the work's formal aspects, its 'figurative values' make sense" (Marcus 76–77).

Melodrama is the most obvious departure De Santis takes from the purity of the neorealist style. There is a clear influence from other genres, most notably noir and gangster films, but also musicals. Another huge intrusion on neorealism is the blatant eroticism of Silvana, which greatly contradicts the asexual films associated with the movement prior to this. Sexuality is acknowledged in films like Rome, Open City with the extramarital pregnancy, but there the eroticism is mostly implied, whereas De Santis does not shy away from presenting it explicitly (Marcus 78–79).

However, in Bitter Rice, De Santis transcends his own melodrama in many ways. The first and most obvious is the setting of the rice fields and its celebration of the working class. The women who work the fields are seen as strong and admirable, as

opposed to the men who hide away in office spaces and are generally seen as more conspicuous and weak (Marcus 82)

De Santis begins the film using a documentary approach represented by a news reporter at a train station. The news reporter's goal is to capture the facts and report reality as accurately as possible, reflecting the primary goal of documentary film. However, the documentary approach soon becomes limiting, as the reporter does not follow the women onto the train, which demonstrates his inability to penetrate beyond the surface level experience. "[T]he eye-witness news report necessarily distorts and falsifies the event it's covering by presenting the part for the whole (the leave-taking, the interview with one mondina), implying that those aspects which are inaccessible to its recording facilities are either trivial or nonexistent". The news coverage shows only the women loaded in these trains and truckloads waving goodbye to their loved ones. It is as if these women are off to summer camp for the chance to escape, make new friends, and commune with nature. "The truth is grievously, if unintentionally, lost in this type of media coverage" (Marcus 83).

In *Mid-Sized City (Waco),* I will attempt to use a similar hybrid nature. While I will not utilize the same melodramatic devices used by De Santis, the film will involve certain devices not normally seen in neorealist films such as music and dramatic moments heightened by chaotic camera movement. I will approach these moments with a similar mindset and seek to transcend this melodrama by representing working-class struggles under the current neoliberal, capitalistic structures, homelessness, and racial injustices.

Vittorio De Sica was another monumental figure in neorealism. He was at the heart of the rising star system in the 1930s, known for his roles in a variety of white telephone films such as *What Scoundrels Men Are* (*Gli uomini, che mascalzoni*, 1932) and *Mr. Max* (*Il Signor Max,* 1937). De Sica made his directorial debut in 1940 with *Rose Scarlatte* (Red Roses, 1940), and his early works closely followed the model set by Camerini until *The Children Are Watching Us* (*I bambini ci guardano*, 1944), where he abandoned the blissful atmosphere of white telephone films. The film is fully experienced through the eyes of a child, a narrative technique that would be used by many subsequent neorealist films. The beginning of De Sica's future directorial style and poetics can be seen in this film (Brunetta 83–95).

By the time of the Italian Spring, De Sica and Zavattini were regular collaborators and fully committed to a socially-minded, realistic approach to filmmaking. Their two landmark neorealist films were *Shoeshine* (*Sciuscia,* 1946) and *Bicycle Thieves* (*Ladri di biciclette,* 1948) (Moliterno, 108). *Bicycle Thieves* is a particularly potent example of how neorealism could capture the brutal realities that plagued millions of post-war Italians. In the film, a worker's livelihood is at stake when his bicycle is stolen. He wanders throughout Rome with his son at his side searching for the thief, which embodies the ideal advocated by Italian critics Alicata and De Santis of following the workers' "slow and tired step".(Thompson and Bordwell 324) The film is now regarded as a masterpiece of world cinema as evidenced by its placement in Sight & Sound Top 100 Greatest Films of All Time.

While certain neorealist films were financially successful, the country was still flooded by American films. Neorealist films from 1944 to 1948 were created in excess,

and most of them were not very successful financially. As a response to the flooded

market and surplus of neorealist films, the government passed the Andreotti law, which

established import limits and screen quotas, as well as increased loans for production

firms. The caveat for these loans was that a government committee was required to

approve the script and apolitical films usually received larger loans. The law also

prevented certain films that they deemed "slandered Italy" from being exported.

All of this contributed to a general drift away from the "purer" neorealism that

had occurred from 1944 to 1948. Filmmakers began to explore other styles such as

allegorical fantasy (De Sica's *Miracle in Milan* (*Miracolo a Milano*, 1951)) and historical

spectacle (Visconti's *Senso* (1954)). It was against this backdrop that De Sica and

Zavattini, respective director and screenwriter, released *Umberto D* (1951)(Thompson

and Bordwell 325). which is often recognized by critics and scholars as one of the most

perfect expressions of neorealist cinema (Moliterno 109).

Umberto Domenico Ferrari (Carlo Battisti) is an elderly pensioner struggling to

get by. He attends a protest calling for a pay hike in their pensions, but it is quickly

dispersed by the police. On top of this, his landlady is demanding 15,000 lire by the end

of the month or he and his small dog will be kicked out into the streets. The film follows

Umberto as he attempts to find the money he needs to save himself and his dog.

While *Rome, Open City* was the inauguration of Italian neorealism, Umberto D

could be considered its finale. The march of the young boys back to the city following the

execution of the priest in Rome, Open City is replaced with a demonstration of

unorganized old men protesting the inadequacy of their pensions. This protest is pitifully

ineffective, as their unity is easily broken by a bus that turns into the crowd and it is

eventually completely disbanded by the police. While the police scatter the crowds, Umberto and a few others hide in an alley. "Scoundrels," one of the old men mutters. "Who? The police?" asks Umberto. "No, the organizers of the protest—they should have had a permit," replies the old man, conceding the established power to set the rules for how they should protest. This opening sequence of defeat immediately sets the stage for the film's message of surrender (Marcus 96–97).

A couple of scenes later, Umberto is at a soup kitchen attempting to pawn his watch, oblivious to the fact that the people in the soup kitchen are in the same dire financial straits. Umberto is blind to the fact that the other patrons at the soup kitchen share his financial turmoil, instead, he sees them as potential contributors, emphasizing the continued lack of solidarity (Marcus 98).

Umberto returns to his apartment, where Maria (Maria-Pia-Casilio) is introduced. Umberto and Maria have much in common, especially the looming expulsion from the building by their tyrannical landlady. For Umberto, it is a lack of money, and for Maria, it is the fact that she is an unwed mother-to-be who will immediately be cast out when she begins to show. Marcus describes the representation of their relationship as "two disenfranchised social categories, the old and the 'subproletariat' who suffer at the hands of the rising bourgeoisie" (Marcus 99).

Despite Umberto's role as a paternal figure to Maria, their relationship is perhaps the most blatant example of the future of solidarity in Italy. Umberto is leaving the apartment, and Maria asks if she can visit him sometime, implying that there could be a happy ending for these two rejects of society. Umberto replies by pointing out that she, too, will be forced to leave the apartment, but, despite the hope of the viewer, he never

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offers to allow Maria to join him. In this moment, the chasms separating *Rome, Open City,* and *Umberto D* are felt. It is a true surrender to the isolation of the human condition and the impossibility of genuine solidarity (Marcus 100).

Aesthetically, *Umberto D* is arguably the most refined and stylistically pure neorealist film. In the same year as the film's release, Zavattini wrote his defining essay "Some Ideas on Cinema," in which he argued that an ideal film should be utterly devoid of dramatic superstructure and instead focus on dignifying the ordinary. This is accomplished by taking "any moment of human life" and displaying "how 'striking' that moment is" (Zavattini). This ideal is arguably more apparent in *Umberto D* than in any other neorealist film. De Sica and Zavattini's film is truly uncompromising, never once giving into spectacle, drama, or emotional catharsis. De Sica's camera specifically holds fast to Zavattini's ideal: "What he focuses on at a given point is more significant than the way he focuses" (Young). This is not to say that the camera lacks purpose or artistic intent, but it is never exploited for drama or spectacle.

There are multiple moments in the film that are at risk of being exploited by melodrama. Umberto faces the threat of a looming eviction when he falls ill and must be admitted to a hospital. Upon returning to his apartment, he finds it semi-demolished and his dog missing. He then goes and saves his dog from extermination at the pound. Then, out of loneliness and dismay, he contemplates suicide, only to resist at the last moment due to concern for the welfare of his dog. Yet, De Sica crafts Umberto's character to be somewhat closed and hostile, which mitigates the film's melodramatic leanings. Marcus argues that it is "De Sica's and Zavattini's supreme achievement that they succeed,

almost despite Umberto, in bringing us around to his cause and that they do so through no recourse to conventional melodramatic means."

Umberto D can best be described as a collection of events that continually impact the physical and emotional life of an elderly man. The authenticity of the film does not only come from an absence of the extraordinary but also "the 'dedramatization' of inherently dramatic moments which De Sica refuses to order in any hierarchy of importance" (Marcus 103).

There are two scenes that are often celebrated for their naturalism. The first is Umberto's preparation for bed. In this scene, nothing of narrative importance happens. The lack of dramatic significance effectively draws the viewer into Umberto's room, making them cohabitants. This room, which had been hijacked by a couple of adulterers a few scenes earlier, must be reappropriated by Umberto. This becomes apparent by his meticulous cleaning, airing out, turning over the pillow, and smoothing the bed (Marcus 108). A later scene with Maria in the kitchen has a similar effect. Just as the bedroom was Umberto's private space, the kitchen is Maria's. Her attempts to light the stove, exterminate the invasive ants, and grind the morning coffee all reflect the ritualized nature of the space. These scenes accomplish more than simply presenting the ordinary and uneventful aspects of these two characters' lives. Instead, as Marcus notes

> They reveal the characters to us in almost embarrassing intimacy—an intimacy far more revealing than confessional dialogue or intense dramatic encounters could afford. Umberto's bedroom and Maria's kitchen serve as stages for the private enactments of their innermost selves, freed from the pretenses and defenses of public life (Marcus 110).

With *Umberto D*, De Sica and Zavattini attempt to shift the focus of neorealism away from narrative content and toward cinematic form. By 1952, the cinematic ideals in

Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* feel lost. Allusions to the Resistance did not have the same effect in a country that was trying to put the sins of their past behind them. De Sica and Zavattini's shift away from narrative content and toward cinematic form paved the way for visionary filmmakers like Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni, and Luchino Visconti to apply the stylistic precepts of neorealism free from the narrative chains of postwar Italy (Marcus 116).

De Sica has influenced me more than any other filmmaker in the writing of *Mid-Sized City (Waco),* and *Umberto D* has specifically inspired a large number of its narrative elements. *Umberto D* is remarkably contained, following a singular character through a series of events as opposed to the war-time drama of *Rome, Open City,* or the choral nature of *Bitter Rice.* I will also draw heavily on the stylistic qualities and the largely undramatic nature of *Umberto D*.

Neorealism and Global Cinema

The Italian cinema of the 1950s and 1960s saw the original neorealist aspirations disbanded. Apart from *Umberto D*, the most common type of film during this time was "rosy neorealism," a term Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell use to describe neorealist films that continued to utilize certain elements such as location shooting, nonprofessional actors, and the occasional engagement with social problems, but absorbed into neorealism the distinctive Italian tradition of comedy. Rosy neorealism embraced the aesthetics of neorealism but discarded the social urgency and ambiguous endings in favor of melodrama and easily digestible plots. Italy was experiencing a dramatic economic recovery, and the neorealist tales of poverty and suffering were not connecting with audiences like they had following the Italian spring (Thompson and

Bordwell 329). Neorealism, however, soon found a global audience and was reimagined through a variety of international cinemas.

Not long after World War II, Italian neorealism's influence could already be seen throughout much of the western world. In France, a group of critics from the magazine *Cahiers du cinéma* and other cinephiles of the day pursued a style of filmmaking that rejected mainstream conventions set by Hollywood and the French studio system. They experimented with new visual and narrative techniques and attempted to directly engage in the social and political discourse of the day. This movement would eventually become known as the French New Wave (Giovacchini and Sklar 103). Many of the founders of this movement credited neorealism as a direct influence. The two movements do in fact share temporal and physical borders, and they both follow an unprecedented social and political crisis in their respective countries. They share a lot in common both technically and narratively with low budgets, location shoot, and loosely plotted narratives.

While neorealism and the French New Wave shared certain qualities, there are, of course, many differences between the two, most notably the experimental approach and heavy use of montage found in French New Wave films. Inspired by Italian neorealists, French New Wave filmmakers, along with other New Waves around the world in the '60s and '70s, tied social and political engagement directly to its aesthetic. While there may have been differences between the two movements and their specific approach to this aesthetic, both shared ideological common ground. The French auteurs of the time were pushing against institutions such as the well-established "Cinema of Quality," which relied heavily on literary adaptations and studio-established rules (Thompson and Bordwell 373). They were inspired by the cultural and socio-political upheaval that

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neorealism presented. It was a response against the ongoing institutionalization of cinema in France and throughout much of the western world post-World War II. It was this ideal of neorealism that inspired the young filmmakers of the French New Wave (Giovacchini and Sklar 116).

While neorealism was influential on the new French cinema and other post-World War II European cinemas, its impact was perhaps most felt in places like Latin America, Asia, and Africa. New Latin American Cinema (NLAC) arose in Argentina, Brazil, and Cuba in the late 1950s and 1960s "in response to the deepening underdevelopment and economic and cultural dependency of the continent" (Martin 18). It was a movement of continental unity against foreign domination through affirming national expressions of local populations. Despite this unity, the Latin American struggle against colonialism was and continues to be vast and diverse. It is by no means a monolith, but rather a collection of creative diversity, worldview, and political approaches against their systematic oppressors (Martin 18–19).

The links between Italian neorealism and NLAC are clear and present, yet it would be inaccurate to describe it as a direct transmission of aesthetics and language. NLAC developed its own network of complex political and cultural processes in the years following World War II and the 1960s. However, there are a few clear correlations that show the widespread impact of neorealism.

There was a trend of external factors that first established the bond between NLAC and neorealism. Following World War II, Italy opened many film schools where Latin American filmmakers came to train under European filmmakers and teachers. Along with this, many European critics and writers began to finally acknowledge the

cinemas of Latin America, giving them a much overdue platform. Along with this recognition, European filmmakers also aided with aspects of production, supplying Latin American filmmakers with funding and resources. Finally, the European film festival circuit began to screen Latin American films for the first time (Giovacchini and Sklar 163).

There are two generations within NLAC that utilized the tenets of neorealism in different ways. The first occurred in the 1950s with filmmakers who studied in Europe and saw the liberating qualities of neorealism within Italy and were not only inspired by them but were also taught under this school of thought. This period was not a direct echo of European thoughts through Latin American film, but rather a worthy struggle to adapt these ideals and practices into their own industry. Films that reflect this "dialogic" relationship between neorealism and NLAC include *Raices* (*Roots;* Benito Alazraki, Mexico, 1953), *La langosta azul* (*The Blue Lobster*; Alvaro Cepeda Samudio and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Colombia, 1954) and *Macario* (Roberto Gavaldon, Mexico, 1960). These films contained many neorealist qualities such as location shooting, non-professional actors, and especially giving a voice to the marginalized and oppressed (Rodríguez 163).

The second generation emerged in the 1960s when the attempted synthesis of European neorealism and NLAC was reimagined through an even more radicalized, revolutionary cinema (most notably in Cuba). A new generation of filmmakers took over with political ideas that stood closer to Third World radicalization than to postwar humanism (Giovacchini and Sklar 171). While this radicalized generation rejected most colonial talking points and aesthetics, there was still a deep commitment to reality. That

being said, the ideal for most filmmakers from the mid to late 1960s was more in line with the revolutionary aesthetic of *Battle of Algiers* (*La battaglia di Algeria,* 1966) than with classic Italian neorealist films.

"African cinema has been part of world cinema from the very beginning," writes Sada Niang in his article "Neorealism and Nationalist African Cinema." Francophone African cinema during the nationalist period (1960–1975) followed in the footsteps of many Euro-American postwar movements, including Italian neorealism and the French New Wave, even utilizing aspects of genres such as the American western and crime films. Perhaps the most direct correlation was to the revolutionary Third Cinema of Latin America in the 1960s. While there are multiple international influences, Niang focuses on three levels in which African cinema shares affinities with Italian neorealism: historical, institutional, and aesthetic (Giovacchini and Sklar 194).

Africa had been under colonial domination for the better part of the 20th century. The histories of African peoples have long been marred by revisionism and colonial privilege. Colonial regimes attempted to use cinema as propaganda through unobtrusive and distracting means, discouraging any true African filmmaking from happening. Sada Niang writes that, while the histories of Italy and Africa are far from similar, they do share some historical affinities with regimes that sought to distract from the realities of the masses and the working class.

Another link between neorealism and African nationalist cinema came through the institution of scholarship. Many filmmakers, especially from North Africa, came to Italy and studied at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia. Upon graduating, this

wave of students returned to Africa with the skills and knowledge needed to bring forth a new cinematic identity, combating the colonial narrative.

In 1973, filmmakers from Africa and Latin America gathered in Algeria to draft a resolution to guide filmmaking practice in Africa. While most participants were Algerian, there were also participants from other African nations. Many of the participants were those who previously studied at Centro Sperimentale, meaning neorealism was undoubtedly well understood and prioritized by many of the filmmakers at this forum. The committee of this resolution was chaired by the Algerian Mohamed Lamine Merbah (Giovacchini and Sklar 194–96).

The forum was open to filmmakers outside the continent, and Salvatore Piscicelli, a prominent Italian filmmaker, was in attendance. He was a direct link to Italian neorealism, as he aligned himself with Visconti and De Sica with his approach and utilization of regional settings and the focus on the lower class. Along with Piscicelli, Fernando Birri, an Argentinian who also studied at Centro Sperimentale, was very influential within the committee. His films are often acknowledged for their clear neorealist approach.

The aesthetic proposals that the committee drafted matched up very closely to the core tenets of neorealism. They argued that African filmmakers should "search for 'new forms taking into account the means and possibilities of third countries,' to foster ' films which bring about disalienation and … information for the peoples' and creatively to 'favor a cinema in the interests of the masses'" (Giovacchini and Sklar 198).

Both cinemas sought to reimagine society, people, and place without being dishonest or embellishing reality. In Italy, De Sica, Zavattini, and Rossellini shed light on

the devastating effects of World War II, including poverty and class warfare. In Africa, filmmakers like Ousmane Sembene, Souleymane Cisse, and Safi Faye faced the realities of cities infringing on traditional, rural spaces; ancestral values; World War II; as well as colonial wars such as the Algerian war of independence (Giovacchini and Sklar, 199).

The lack of "cinema infrastructure meant that few if any Africans trained as actors". Filmmakers were also heavily influenced by documentary filmmaking, which preceded fiction filmmaking on the continent. The legacy of documentary is so deeply ingrained in African cinema that the line between the two film forms is thin. Fictional films were rooted in "immediacy of place, current events and issues pertinent to spectators" Niang describes the shared qualities between African nationalist film and neorealism as "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 unprejudiced cinema, personal and not industrial, a cinema full of the real faith in the language of the films, as a means of education and social progress" (Giovacchini and Sklar 195–209).

Neorealism has greatly influenced many prominent filmmakers across the globe, including the Bengali auteur Satyajit Ray. He found his artistic roots in the 19th-century Bengali renaissance. The famous Tagore poet, Rabindranath, turned Ray toward "the liberal humanism that is the hallmark of his work" (Thompson and Bordwell 390). Some of Ray's influences include Jean Renoir, who he met on set of *The River* (*Le Fleuve*, 1951), and Italian neorealism, specifically De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*. His films are known for being undramatic and committed to an honest portrayal of reality. His most popular collection of works was "The Apu Trilogy" (*Pather Panchali*, *Aparajito*, and *Apur Sansar*), which tells the story of Apu, a boy living in a small Bengali village. Over

the course of the trilogy, Apu, who is played by Subir Banerjee, Samaran Ghosal, and Soumitra Chatterjee, faces death, love, loneliness, the incursion of technology, and familial complexities.

Ray often avoided moments of sentimentality in favor of subtlety. In *Aparajito,* Apu (Samaran Ghosal) attempts to hurry home to accompany his mother in her final days. Normally, this would culminate in a dramatic scene between mother and son where words of wisdom and emotion are directly spoken. However, Ray avoids this entirely, as Apu arrives too late after his mother had already passed away (Thompson and Bordwell 390). Ray stubbornly avoids any sort of melodrama or sentimentality.

Just as neorealism was a response to the cinema of Fascist Italy, the cinematic power of The Apu Trilogy can be viewed in contrast to the golden age of Indian Bollywood films of the 1950s. These large, star-driven studio productions were Hindi language films that were known for their melodrama (Varia 17). Ray attempted to find beauty outside of the glamor and melodrama that was so prevalent in Bollywood at that time. The Trilogy's realism embraces the mundane and celebrates everyday life.

While the direct correlations between Italian neorealism and the cinema of Satyajit Ray can be seen (location shooting, non-professional actors, loosely structured scripts, highlighting marginalized communities in everyday environments, etc.), his lyrical and individualistic approach differs from what is traditionally found in neorealist films. Ray explores complex character perspectives contained in space and scope, resulting in honest, yet less politically charged content, which contrasts many Italian neorealist films and especially differs from the revolutionary cinema of Latin America and Africa. Some critics have argued that "the Calcutta of burning trams, communal riots, refugees,

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unemployment, rising prices, and food shortages, does not exist in Ray's films" (Cardullo 88). Ray's politics leaned left, yet he shied away from political parties and broad ideologies, favoring instead a focus on the individual. Ray defended his largely apolitical filmography in an interview:

> I don't think a film is capable of bringing about socio-economic change. No film, or for that matter any work of art, has ever brought about such change. That is not my intention, in any event. I want to present certain problems in my own way—problems that may cause the characters to change—and help people to understand them, so that they can do their own thinking. And if that brings about social or political change, well . . . (Thompson and Bordwell 392).

Satyajit Ray was primarily concerned with documenting the realities of everyday life for their own intrinsic sake, reflecting the ethos set out specifically by Zavattini (Cardullo). Ray explores human relationships to their limits through a genuine belief in the mythical power of the ordinary and mundane. For example, the train sequence in *Pather Panchali* features a persistent hum from the powerlines permeating the whole scene and holding Apu and his older sister Durga in a spell. Despite being thoroughly Bengali films, The Apu Trilogy has universal appeal, not through the abstract, but through its simple and concrete details (Goritsas).

Of the various global cinemas discussed, *Mid-Sized City (Waco)* will most closely resemble the Apu Trilogy; specifically utilizing lyrical moments and largely following the experience of a single character as opposed to the revolutionary cinemas of Latin America or Africa. I do, however, plan to implement political elements more explicitly than what is normally found within Ray's work.

Contemporary American Independent Cinema and Neorealism

The modern American studio system is designed to crank out as many reboots, remakes, sequels, and adaptations as possible, with the goal to make millions of dollars for the studios. It is a consistent money-making machine, which is the reason there will always be a *Minions* (Coffin and Balda, 2015) sequel and an endless number of live-action Disney reboots each year. While this cinema of excess and spectacle dominates the box office, there has been a steadily growing audience for low-budget, personal stories, many of which reflect distinct neorealist qualities (Hess).

In 2009, A.O. Scott's article "Neo-Neorealism," in which he laid out the similarities between Italian neorealism and the modern American independent cinema. He looks at some modern-day films including Ramin Bahrani's, *Goodbye Solo* (2008), Kelly Reichardt's *Wendy and Lucy* (2008), and Lance Hammer's *Ballast* (2008), and compares their working-class characters, location shooting and natural lighting, and use of non-professional actors with Italian neorealism (Scott). The article *sparked* a lot of controversy in the film criticism world and was quickly and thoroughly rebutted by Richard Brody saying that Scott's article "rests on questionable premises and reaches dubious conclusions" (Brody). He then goes on to give eight arguments against Scott's article. While Brody's arguments are valid, his attacks were excessively aggressive. Arguments can be made as to the extent to which Italian neorealism and American independent cinema are related, but the relationship is there nonetheless (Hess).

The fact that forms of neorealism have appeared in modern American independent cinema is not surprising, as it matches what has happened historically when a cinema of spectacle dominates the public eye. Italian neorealism originated as a

response to the spectacle-driven and melodramatic cinema of Fascist Italy. The quiet, slice-of-life realism of Satyajit Ray was also a response to the spectacle and melodrama of Bollywood. In the same way, films such as Kelly Reichardt's *Wendy and Lucy*, Sean Baker's *The Florida Project* (2017), and Alexander Payne's *Nebraska* (2013) present intimate, nuanced stories featuring marginalized and lower-class characters, a heavy emphasis on place and identity, and intentionally subdued visuals.

Wendy and Lucy is a story about a lower-class white woman named Wendy (Michelle Williams), who is drawn to the hope of a decent wage and stability at a potential cannery job in Alaska. She attempts to road trip from Indiana but finds herself stranded in a small town in Oregon, where she struggles to support herself and her small dog, Lucy. In an interview with Gus Van Sant, Reichardt says, "We [Reichardt and Raymond] were watching a lot of Italian Neorealism and thinking the themes of those films seem to ring true for life in America in the Bush years" (E. Dawn Hall 68). She draws on almost every formal neorealist attribute, especially long, wide shots, deep focus, a simple plot, loose causality, on-location shooting, and circumscribed geography. The small, intimate grittiness of *Wendy and Lucy* is very reminiscent of De Sica's *Umberto D* and *Bicycle Thieves (Fusco and Seymour 57)*.

Wendy and Lucy also exemplifies Bazin's concept of neorealism as implicitly political cinema. Bazin explained that the "social message is not detached; it remains immanent in the event, but it is so clear that nobody can overlook it, still less take exception to it, since it is never made explicitly a message (Bazin 51). Reichardt did not need explicit political messaging because Wendy's inherent poverty and the ragged, post-industrial setting are implicitly political and economic.

Reichardt explained that the story originated in the wake of Hurricane Katrina when political figures and the news media were telling people that the answer was to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and overcome the obstacle of poverty by simply being less lazy. Reichardt described how she envisioned the character of Wendy: "we imagined Wendy as a renter; no insurance, just making ends meet, and a fire occurs due to no fault of her own and she loses her place to live" (E. Dawn Hall 70). Much like Italian neorealism's heavy emphasis on the lower-class struggle in a country rebuilding after Fascism, *Wendy and Lucy* also highlights this struggle but reimagines it in the context of a country suffering under capitalist greed and neoliberalism.

Perhaps the most significant departure from neorealism was Reichardt's decision to cast a well-known star, Michelle Williams, in the starring role. Reichardt, who is committed to the minimalist aesthetic, noted that she chose Williams for her body language and inferences, saying, "There is so much internal about her." While she may not be a no-name actress, Williams's style of acting fits perfectly with Reichardt's minimalist style and meditative goals (E. Dawn Hall 71).

Sean Baker's *The Florida Project* is set in Kissimmee, Florida, a city just outside of Disney World, and tells the story of 6-year old Moonee (Brooklynn Prince), who is temporarily living in the deteriorating Magic Castle motel with her mother, Halley (Bria Vinaite). The motel is run by the kindhearted manager, Bobby Hicks (Willem Dafoe). The film follows Mooney and her friends on their mischievous escapades while Halley, a single mother, desperately attempts to provide for her daughter and Bobby tries to keep her out of harm's way.

The title *The Florida Project* refers to the early name Walt Disney used for Disney World before receiving its official title upon its opening in 1971. This environment of swimming pools, fast food restaurants, bright pastel yet rundown motels, massive parking lots, and abandoned housing developments becomes the playground for the children. Baker brings the viewers directly into this decaying, urban fantasy world (Vacche 2). Baker chose to elevate this marginalized community, which suffers in the shadow of Disney World's corporate agenda. At one point, a pair of Brazilian tourists mistakenly book a room at the Magic Castle instead of Magic Kingdom. As the couple argues with Bobby over the mishap, it becomes clear that, despite their physical and titular closeness, the Magic Castle and the Magic Kingdom are drastically different from one another.

Like many Italian neorealist films, the children play an important role in representing innocence and the future in *The Florida Project*. Just as the children in *Rome, Open City* witness the harsh realities of Rome's battle against Fascism, the children in *The Florida Project* act as observers to the tragic realities of living on the margins of society. The realities these children face in their respective environments are very different from one another, which is why there is a much more somber seriousness and urgency to the children living in an incredibly violent, post-war Rome as compared to the juvenile mischievousness and boredom of the children in *The Florida Project* (Vacche 2).

Other than Willem Dafoe, the cast is comprised almost entirely of non-professional actors. Brooklynn Prince is an Orlando native and appeared in a few small commercials for Visit Orlando and Chuck E. Cheese. Baker found Bria Vinaite on

Instagram, where she attempted to sell marijuana-themed clothing and often, with a blunt in hand, spoke directly to the camera in a self-deprecating, yet genuine and funny way. He describes how he would walk through Walmart or Target "with his eyes open" for any casting opportunities, and eventually, he found Valeria Cotto, who plays Moonee's best friend. Jancey, at a Target in Orlando (Marotta).

Nebraska, which was written by Bob Nelson and directed by Alexander Payne, tells the story of a dysfunctional family from Billings, Montana. The father, Woody Grant (Bruce Dern), a senile, booze-addled old man, receives a notice in the mail that he can collect his million-dollar prize in Lincoln, Nebraska. Everyone else in the family sees this as an obvious scam, but Woody is determined to cash out his prize money. His son, David Grant (Will Forte), reluctantly agrees to take him to Lincoln on a road trip. During a stop in their former hometown of Hawthorne, Nebraska, Woody becomes a target for his former friends and family who try their best to get a piece of his supposed prize money.

In 2004, Alexander Payne published an article in *Variety* titled "Declaration of Independents," in which he argued, "For some 25 years we've had American movies but not movies about Americans" (Payne). When this article was first published, the United States was still feeling the societal upheaval and pain of 9/11 and was also living under the shadow of a looming financial crash unlike any seen since the Great Depression. "These times ensure increased demand for films with human and political content"(Payne). Nine years later, Payne found these national ideals realized in *Nebraska*—a portrait of rural, Midwest culture and its beautiful, yet slowly decaying rural landscapes

Everyone and everything appears old, washed up, and worn out. The film was shot almost entirely on location in Montana and Nebraska where the boarded-up windows, broken-down farm equipment, and fallow fields accurately reflect the decay throughout much of the rural Midwest. David works a job as an electronics salesman, which feels like the job of an era come and gone with the advent of online shopping and the demise of electronics stores such as RadioShack and Circuit City. Despite being 43 years old, David is one of the youngest characters in the film. It is a stark picture of an outdated and broken system. The opening sequence contains three long, wide shots of Woody walking along the street. It is probably the busiest street in Billings, and Woody hobbles along the side of the road where there is noticeably no sidewalk. There is also a noticeable absence of music, only the sound of the busy street. It is a stark image that invokes reflection in a way similar to Satyajit Ray and embraces the Zavattinian ideal of pure, unincumbered observation.

In a press conference at the New York Film Festival, Bruce Dern described Payne as a director who is "so approachable and so natural and so insistent on reality and being honest. He surrounds you—every scene or so—with 2 or 3 nonactors who are so goddamned honest you can't possibly start acting or performing in front of these people and that's the magic" (Bazin 51). Despite having a cast of fairly seasoned actors, it is clear that Payne was insistent on an honest, genuine portrayal of the rural Midwest.

Nebraska is probably the least neorealist of the three films discussed in this section. This is mostly due to its being equally comedic and dramatic. While there are elements of comedy in *The Florida Project*, they are not as prominent as they are in *Nebraska.* Along with the comedy, it also features a quiet and honest melodrama through

its uplifting ending and hopeful tone. It is a film that, at times, leans heavily on neorealism, yet its hybrid nature means it falls in line more with De Santis's *Bitter Rice* than Rossellini's *Open City.*

Each of these films offer unique stylistic elements from which I can glean from. I plan to utilize similar camera work to that found in *Nebraska,* to search for and utilize non-actors in a similar capacity found in *The Florida Project,* and to implement the meandering, plotless nature of *Wendy and Lucy*. While I will undoubtedly glean heavily from the original neorealist films, it is helpful to have modern examples and understand how neorealism might manifest itself in a contemporary American context.

Neorealism's humble origins lead way to global inspiration. Despite falling short of its initial lofty ideals, Italian neorealism continues to live on in a variety of cinemas throughout the world. Neorealism's aesthetic goals along with its social and political honesty inspired me to write my film, *Mid-Sized City (Waco)*. In the next section, I will be diving directly into the creative processes of making this film and looking specifically at how it reflects neorealist qualities.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

With the literature and theory established, I will now explain how I plan to incorporate this into the development of the script. I will provide an overview of how I plan to approach the writing phase and what neorealist strategies I will implement in crafting the story. I will also detail how I plan to dissect and cross-examine *Mid-Sized City (Waco)* in the script analysis chapter. The final two paragraphs will explain how I would approach the shooting and post-production process as if I were going to shoot and edit the film. I want to approach it as if I were going to make the film from start to finish, despite the film itself not being completed for this thesis

My writing process for the script will start with the outline. In my previous screenplays, this has mainly served to work out plot details and provide the backbone for the overarching narrative. However, since I will not be so reliant on the plot, I will spend less time outlining the narrative and focus more on character, tone, and location. While there will be some basic plot elements, the heart of the film will be the nuanced honest portrayal of central Texas, specifically Waco. I have personally visited all of the locations within the film (other than Orin's hometown Osceola Arkansas). Normally, I would write the script and then look for locations that matched the story I'm telling, but for this, I did the opposite and found the places first. I did the same with the main character, Orin. The character of Orin is based on a musician named Landon McGee from Arkansas. While I do not have a personal relationship with him, his musical style (acoustic and understated)

falls in line with my vision for this film. I am intentionally wanting to work with an untrained actor whose vocation in real life is the same as the character in the film. The goal is to create a film that feels meandering and plotless, yet, because of its fully realized characters and keen sense of place, is engaging and genuine.

I also want to incorporate certain filmmaking, writing practices, and formatting used by neorealist filmmakers. I plan to read scripts and production notes from the films written about in the critical analysis and research chapter. There is plenty to glean from both viewing the films and the scholarly analyses on them, but I believe reading the scripts and production notes on these films could be particularly useful in the creative process. There are many aspects of neorealist films that may be difficult to convey in writing such as long takes, nonprofessional acting, slow and unsentimental sequences, and shooting on location. I'm curious how these filmmakers expressed these qualities in their writing. This will also be beneficial for the script analysis as it will allow me to better compare and contrast my writing style with those that inspired me.

 The film analysis in chapter four will allow me to analyze my film in light of all the research I conducted in chapter two. I will look specifically at the tone, visual style, locations, costumes and makeup, casting, cinematography, and editing. Each of these elements within my film will be cross-examined with the historical, theoretical, and filmic influences of the literature review.

Even within the neorealist films I examined, there is a stark difference in tone between the violence and intensity of *Rome, Open City,* and the wry humor and comparatively low-stakes of *Nebraska.* I will glean from a variety of different films but primarily from *Wendy Lucy* and *Umberto D*. Both of these films spotlight one central

character and present a unique urban aesthetic that contributes greatly to the tone. There is a sense of destitution and alienation in both *Umberto D* and *Wendy and Lucy* which I will attempt to recreate. I will also draw on the Zavattinian idea of capturing the dailiness and the mundane, meaning there will be a sense of slowness and reflection throughout the film and differs from some of the militaristic tones found in the revolutionary cinema of Latin America and Africa.

The visual style is another key component of neorealism that I will draw upon. *Mid-Sized City (Waco)* will attempt to truthfully capture the post-industrial and often gentrified look of Waco, Texas. There may be a few scenes indoors and at night in which case, a minimal amount of artificial lighting will be used. The goal, however, is to rely primarily on natural lighting. The overall aesthetic of *Mid-Sized City (Waco)* falls most in line with *Nebraska.* I will also cross-examine how my use of location is similar or differs from Italian neorealist films.

In this section, I will breakdown each location explaining why each one was chosen. Real locations in Waco will be used to further exemplify the film's neorealist qualities. There are only two indoor locations as a large portion of the film takes place outside; in-between Orin's destinations. He navigates the urban environment mostly on foot.

The film will utilize mostly wide shots and deep focus as seen in The Apu Trilogy and draw inspiration from the cinematography of *Nebraska*. The scenes of Orin in the streets will draw heavily on the meandering of Woody in *Nebraska*. In my analysis, I mentioned the opening scene of *Nebraska* as being a striking image of Woody's wandering and it is distinct ability to capture the look and feel of the Midwest. I hope to

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implement similar techniques to capture Waco. *The Florida Project* also uses the camera to establish its world very effectively through its establishing wide shots and I plan to incorporate a similar strategy with my cinematography.

Since my film relies heavily on realism, costumes and makeup will need to be consistent and understated. Just as Wendy gets stranded in Oregon for a couple of days in *Wendy and Lucy*, Orin is also stranded so comparisons between the two characters' makeup and costume will be made.

The casting process of *The Florida Project* is another creative inspiration. I was enamored by Sean Baker's strategy of finding real people whose social background, personality, and characteristics match his characters through everyday means such as scrolling through Instagram or walking around Target. The small cast of characters in *Mid-Sized City (Waco)* would be largely made up of locals whose characteristics in real life, resemble the characters of my screenplay.

The editing process of neorealist films often rely on long takes and minimal edits to preserve a sense of realism and documentation. *Mid-Sized City (Waco)* employs a similar strategy yet is not as committed to slowness as *Wendy and Lucy* or The Apu Trilogy are. The pacing will be somewhat slow and methodical but will be broken up in a few moments of drama similar to that of *Bitter Rice* and *The Florida Project*.

The production process of this film would be relatively straightforward. As the director, I will work closely with the producer to form a small, yet committed team. I would like to keep the crew small mainly because a large one is not necessary as I will rely heavily on natural lighting and unobtrusive camera work, but also because I believe a smaller, less extravagant set will help put the actor's at ease since most will have never

been in front of a camera. There are also many scenes that take place in the streets and will require a more guerilla style of filmmaking. My biggest weakness is producing. Producing will be a very important role for this film, specifically to aid in scouting and securing locations as well as aiding in the casting process. Costuming and makeup are also important roles. The film takes place over the course of a few days and it will be really important to have Orin progressively, yet subtly look exhausted and dirty. It is important that I find a cinematographer who is on board with my vision. The camera will be mostly stationary and rely on wide shots with deep focus. This means I will need to have a detailed understanding of the locations as there will be lots of details in frame and in focus. Just as I will use

The editing process is crucial, and I plan to edit the film myself for a few reasons. First, editing is what I have the most experience in and it is what I'm most passionate about. After graduation, I would love to work as an editor so this will be a great opportunity to strengthen my resume. Second, the edit will be one of the most important aspects of this film. Pacing and shot length will be crucial in finding the balance between maintaining interest and embracing moments of contemplation. Because of its nuance, this is something I would like to have complete control over. I do, however, plan on having others help with color, mixing, and titles. I do not anticipate any need for visual effects.

CHAPTER FOUR

Mid-Sized City (Waco) Screenplay

Mid-Sized City (Waco)

Written By

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1   INT. DINGY OLD RESTAURANT KITCHEN - NIGHT

Old country music plays from a cheap, plastic mid-
2000's radio as a young man does the dishes. ORIN,
27, works as a dishwasher for the local family diner
in small-town Osceola,Arkansas.

The Kitchen is cramped, dirty, and harshly lit by an
overhead light. Orin is alone in the kitchen as it's
clearly late in the evening and the restaurant is
closed.

He sings along under his breath as he sets some
dishes to theside to dry. He appears comfortable in
this environment. He continues to wash without any
sense of urgency. A piece of food clings to a plate
he's attempting to clean and he scrubs harshly for
a few seconds before the piece breaks free and the
plate is clean. Finishing, he hangs up his apron
and walks out.

2   INT. CLUTTERED BEDROOM - NIGHT

ORIN sits at a desk clearly working on some sort of
music project on his small, severely underpowered
laptop. With unbroken concentration, he picks up his
acoustic guitar and messes around a bit, searching
for a riff that might fit the track. His focus is
broken when his phone rings. His phone isan older
android phone - a hand-me-down. He puts his guitar
down and answers.

                    ORIN
          Hello?

Orins face lights up with excitement as he listens

                    ORIN
          Wow, really?... I mean
          Yes!...yes, I'll do it...wow,
          thank you so much for this
          opportunity! And, remind me,

where are you
                    located?...Texas?

He sinks in his chair a little.

                         ORIN
                         (apprehensive)
                    Yes...that shouldn't be a
                    problem...Ok great! I'll
                    see you then.

He hangs up and immediately opens the google maps app

                         ORIN
                    Waco, Waco, Waco, that can't
                    be that far...

Google maps show directions from Osceola Arkansas
to Waco Texas is an eight and a half-hour drive. He
breathes deeply and stands up.

3   EXT. DRIVEWAY OF A SUBURBAN HOUSE - DAY

Orin throws his bag into a very average-looking
midsized sedan. His older brother, DERRICK, watches
him skeptically.

                         DERRICK
                    All I'm saying is you better
                    bring it back with a full
                    tank.

Orin laughs dismissively. Derrick says nothing but
looks around as if anxious he's going to get caught.
Orin finishes throwing his things in the car, smiles,
and gives his brothera hug.

                         ORIN
                    I appreciate this, man. I have
                    a good feeling about it.

                         DERRICK
                     (forcing a smile) Yeah...we'll
                     see I guess

                           49

ORIN
              You still don't trust me

                         DERRICK
              I do...or I want to at
              least. I just know how
              these things go with you.

                         ORIN
              I promise you, this is
              different. I'vebeen taking
              care of myself. Working for
              this opportunity.

                         DERRICK
              And you can afford it?

                         ORIN
                 (slapping the roof of
                  the car)
                  Having a car helps

        Orin climbs into drivers seat. He's about to
        pull out of the driveway when Derrick knocks on
        the window. Orin rolls it down

                         DERRICK
              I grabbed you a box of granola bar

        Derrick tosses a small box of granola bars into the
        passenger seat.

                         ORIN
              Thanks, Derrick

        Derrick nods his head and walks away. Orin pulls
        out of the driveway and onto the open road.

        EXT. SMALL OUTDOOR STAGE BEHIND A BAR/COFFEESHOP - NIGHT

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        ORIN is sweating from the heat of summer in Texas.

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He's performing on a cramped and dimly lit stage.
His barebonesacoustic country sound is reminiscent
of John Prine.
Strumming his guitar and finally finishing his song.

The outdoor area is small and most people are
ignoring Orin and engaged in conversation or on
laptops with earbuds in. Ashort and dim applause
from a small crowd lasts for a few seconds. Orin
looks up.

          ORIN
     Thank you all for coming. My
     name is Orin Tyler and you
     can find my work on
     SoundCloud and Spotify.

He packs up his guitar and walks off
stage smiling. A man walks up to him
nervously.
          ORIN
     Michael! Thanks so much for
     this opportunity. I love
     the understated setup.

          MICHAEL
    (cutting Orin off)
     Hey, Orin listen...we
     really appreciate you
     playing but unfortunately,
     we can't compensate you.

              ORIN
      What? But...we signed a contract?

           MICHAEL
     Exactly, it was in the contract.
     We needed at least 100 people to show
     up and the deal was that if that didn't
     happen, we couldn't afford to
     compensate you...

Orin is caught off guard and looks at him a bit
shocked.

ORIN
          Wow...so this was all just a scam?

                    MICHAEL
          Not a scam. It was in print.
          You should get into the
          practice of thoroughly
          reading your contracts.

                    ORIN
          ...I guess I should

Michael begins to back away, clearly avoiding
any further confrontation.

                    MICHAEL
          Well, I got to go help tear
          down, but I really appreciate
          you performing andknow you're
          always welcome here!

Michael turns and Orin sits there for a moment
trying to process what to do next. Eventually, he
gathers himself leaves.

5   EXT. AN OVERGROWN EMPTY PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Orin makes his way back to his car. His car sits in
an empty,forgotten parking lot lit up by a single
overhead street light. Crickets chirp loudly and the
unrelenting heat of the day carries over into the
night without much reprieve.

Orin gets in and starts the car to turn on the AC.
He puts his seat back and grabs a granola bar from
the passenger seat. The car begins to
sputter...looking down at the gas gauge, he sees
it's on Empty. A look of panic hits his face and he
grabs his wallet frantically and begins searching
for any cash he can find.

                    ORIN
              No...shit..no

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The car sputters and dies. Orin slams his
hands on the steering wheel out of frustration.

He reaches for his phone and quickly scrolls
through him contacts until he gets to Derricks'
name. He pauses for a moment. Taking a deep breath,
he tosses the phone onto the passenger seat. He
takes a moment to think about his situation before
cracking the windows and reclining his seat to try
and get some sleep.

6   EXT. AN OVERGROWN EMPTY PARKING LOT - DAY

Oring wakes up groggy from a poor night's sleep. He sits
for a unsure of what to do. The sun streams into the car.
He out a sigh and wanders up to the coffee shop again.

7   INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Orin makes his way up to the barista in the same coffee shop
he performed at the night before.

                    BARISTA
          Hi, what can I get you?

                    ORIN
          Hi! Actually, I was
          wondering if Michael is
          here?

                    BARISTA
          I believe he is. Let me go
          find him real quick.

She walks away to find her boss and returns with
Michael.Michael notices Orin and lets out a deep
sigh

                    MICHAEL
          What is it, Orin?

                    ORIN
          I have a bit of an issue with

my car so I was wondering if
I could borrow some money
from you.

Michael rolls his eyes and looks him over suspiciously

                    ORIN
          (noticing Michael's
          skepticism)
               No, no I'll pay you
          back I promise. I just
          need 70$ to pay for a
          couple of tanks so I can
          get back.

Michael shakes his head

                    MICHAEL
          Orin this isn't a charity, I'm not
          falling for it.

                    ORIN
          Falling for what?

                    MICHAEL
          Car troubles? That's the
          oldest excuse in the book and I
          know how you musician types
          are. I wasn't going to say it
          but you'll probably just blow
          it all on booze or weed.

                    ORIN
          That's insane...and untrue. I
          promise you it's my car. I can
          literally go show you my
          empty tank!

Michale starts walking away from Orin.

                    MICHAEL
               (muttering)

I don't have time for this...

                         ORIN
                    I promise I'll get you back.
                    I'll pickup a few extra shifts
                    at the restaurant and it won't
                    be a problem.

                         MICHAEL
                    Listen, man, I'm not here to
                    give handouts. There's a bar
                    on the other side of town.
                    They're always looking for
                    someone to play a set. They
                    might compensate you.

                         ORIN
                    Like for real? Or do I need to
                    fill the room?

                         MICHAEL
                    It's not my fault you didn't
                    read the agreement and drove
                    your ass all the way from
                    Arkansas.

Orin's eye's him suspiciously.

                         ORIN
                    ...ok. I'll do it. Where is it?

                         MICHAEL
                    Just take 18th for a couple of miles.
                    I'll do you a favor and email my
                    friend there right now and let them
                    know you're coming.

As Michael says this, he's walking back to his
office attempting to end the interaction as
soon as possible.

                         ORIN
                    Ok, and would you mind...

Michael slams his office door
effectively ending the conversation

                    ORIN
         (to himself)
         giving me a lift?

Orin looks around the shop for a moment before
leaving.

8   EXT. STREETS - DAY

Orin makes his way up the busy street, his guitar
slung over his back in the heat of the day. It
takes a long time.

Cars honk at him as he crosses a busy intersection.
The construction underway has totally destroyed
what little sidewalk there was so he's forced to
walk on the road or in the grass.

He crosses over a bustling, industrial-looking
bridge. Sweat and exhaustion catch up to him
quickly. By the time he arrives at the pub, he's
covered in dust and sweat.

9   INT. DINGY BAR - EVENING

ORIN walks into the bar, a bit unsure of where to
go. it's quiet and empty. A woman suddenly storms
past ORIN, yelling loudly at someone behind her.

                    JAMIE
         (yelling over her
         shoulder)
         Yeah, well you can tell
         Bobby to suck my...

She notices Orin standing right in front of her.

                    JAMIE
         Sir, we don't open til 3

she begins to walk away. Clearly a busy woman.

                    ORIN
          Oh...uh I was actually
          hoping I could play tonight?
          Michael from Captive Coffee
          should have told you I was
          coming?

                    JAMIE
          Ah yes. He mentioned you.
          Says you're a real talent.

                    ORIN
          Oh, thank you. Yeah, I'd
          love to play, but I just
          need to make sure I'll be
          paid for performing.

She looks back at him.
                    JAMIE
          Of course, I'll pay you. I'm
          not a monster...You're saying
          Michael didn't pay you?

Orin shakes his head

                    JAMIE
          That bastard. Not the first
          time. Yeahit's $60 flat

Orin looks away thinking. He would be cutting it
close but itwas still better than nothing and what
other choice did he have?

                    ORIN
          Ok... I'll do it.

                    JAMIE
          Great...You'll play at 11:15
          right after Eddy. And you
          get one drink onthe house.

She walks away to focus on bigger things. Orin

lets out a tired grin and walks up to the
small black stage in the corner.

10   INT. DINGY BAR - NIGHT

Orin puts himself into his music as he finishes his
set. Eyesclosed, he transports himself to a
different place, away from his situation just for a
moment. He opens his eyes and reality sweeps over
him.

The bar is bustling, hardly even noticing that the
song ended. A small group in a booth starts cheering
and clapping,and soon a good amount of the room
notices and joins in the applause. He packs up his
stuff and makes his way over to the bar for his free
drink.

                    ORIN
          Bourbon, please. On the rocks.

The bartender fetches his drink for him. Orin
breathes deeply - feeling good about himself.
The bartender returns with the drink.

                    ORIN
          Hey, have you seen Jamie, the owner?

                    BARTENDER
          Yeah, she's in the back.

                    ORIN
          Great thanks

Orin takes his drink and heads for the back room
where Jamie's office is. The door is open and he
knocks casually as he enters.

      INT. DIMLY LIT OFFICE, MESSY AND DIRTY - NIGHTORIN
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                    JAMIE
          Orin! That was a fantastic
          show. Theyreally ate it up.

ORIN
          Oh, thank you. I appreciate
          that. I'm just here to
          collect the $60.

                    JAMIE
          Absolutely, you've earned it.

She hands him an envelope with the cash in it.

                    ORIN
          Thank you

                    JAMIE
          No problem. I have another
          opening for that same time
          next week if you can make it.

                    ORIN
          Really?

Orin suddenly realizes that won't be possible.

                    ORIN
          Well...actually I can't. I'm
          heading home after this.

                    JAMIE
          Where to?

                    ORIN
          A small town called
          Osceola in Arkansas.

                    JAMIE
          What the hell? You drive all
          the wayto Waco just to play
          for Michael?
          Sorry about that, you deserve
          better.Keep your head up
          though. You've got talent.
          I'm sure if you stick with it
          you'll find success.

Orin sits there without replying. He's heard
this before. There's a moment where neither
person knows what to say.

                    ORIN
          Well, I got to get going.
          Thanks for the drink by
          the way.

She holds up her own drink as to toast and nods. Orin
leaves.

12   **EXT. BAR - NIGHT**

Orin exits the bar and is welcomed by the warm
breeze of thesummer night. He takes a deep breath
feeling relieved and happy. He notices something in
his pocket. He pulls out a small joint.

                    ORIN
               (to himself)
          If ever there was a timeto
          celebrate.

He walks around the corner and stumbles into 3 people
talkingamongst themselves in a wide alleyway. It's
the same people who cheered for him at the end of his
set.

Two men and a woman; JIMMY a short black man with a
scruffybeard, ERIC clearly the oldest of the three
is also black with a slender frame and average
height, and KYLA a young Latina woman with a streak
of purple in her hair.

                    JIMMY
          Hey, look who it is! This
          man knowshow to put on a
          show.

Orin notices them and smiles.

ORIN

          Oh, thank you. Y'all are too kind.

                    KYLA
          Honestly, man, those skills
          you have on the acoustic are
          impressive. Makes me jealous.

                    ORIN
          Well, we all have our strengths.

                    ERIC
          Yeah, actually, we're
          musicians too. Jimmy here
          sings and raps, I produce and
          play a bit of keys and Kyla
          playsdrums and sings a bit as
          well.

                    ORIN
          What? no way! Are you guys
          like in aband together.

                    KYLA
          No, we just like to check
          out the other local talent
          every once in awhile. Are
          you in a band?

                    ORIN
          No, I mostly do solo
          stuff. But honestly, I
          do love a good jam
          session.

                    JIMMY
          Oh, hell yeah, who doesn't?

The others nod in agreement. Orin is excited to
finally getthe chance to talk about what he's most
passionate about.

                    ORIN
          So have any of y'all performed here?

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KYLA
          Once a local cover band asked
          me to join them for a gig
          but nothing since then.

                    ERIC
          Jimmy and I have done a
          couple of shows here. It's
          not a bad spot but honestly,
          for whatever reason, I can
          never hear myself on that
          stage.

                    ORIN
               (laughs)
          Holy shit I honestly thought
          I was going deaf.

Orin lights his blunts and laughs.

                    ERIC
          For real, I love Jamie but
          she reallyneeds to invest in
          a better feedback system.
          Half the time it's a guessing
          game up there.

                    KYLA
          (talking to the 2 men) Did I
          tell youguys I recorded with
          Daniel? I think we really got
          something special this time.

                    JIMMY
          Hell ya, good for you!...hey
          Orin canI get a hit?

                    ORIN
          Of course, I brought it to share.

Orin passes the blunt to Jimmy and he takes a
hit. He passes it to Eric who also takes a hit.

ERIC
          So where you from Orin?

He hands the blunt back to Orin. Orin offers
the joint to Kyla who politely declines.

                    ORIN
          oh god... It's kind of
          embarrassing to admit but I
          drove all the way from a
          small town in Arkansas called
          Osceola.Only reason I played
          here tonight was so I could
          get the cash I need to fill my
          car up.

                    KYLA
                 (laughing)
          What? Man, you are committed.
                 I respect
                    that.

A cop car drives past them slowly and Orin tries
to hide the blunt out of sight. The group pauses
for a moment before resuming the conversation.

                    ORIN
          Yeah, well at this
          point I'm just trying
          to get home.

                    JIMMY
           I mean, what's the rush?

                    ORIN
          I'm broke as hell and I don't
          think my brothre would be too
          happy if I just stole his
          car.

                    KYLA
          Just settle your shit up
          there and then move back
          here, so we can all play
          together.

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JIMMY
          Yeah, honestly, you're the
          missing link we need to
          finally get a band
          together.

Orin considers this for a moment.

                    ORIN
          Well damn, I should have
          had y'all plan my future
          sooner.

Orin hands the blunt to Jimmy.

                    ORIN
          Honestly, it's so great to
          be here. It's been kind of a
          shitty couple of days but
          playing here tonight and
          bumping into y'all is making
          it feel like this trip might
          have been worth it.

                    JIMMY
          Hey, you're welcome anytime.
          We'd love to collaborate.
          We've been trying to put
          something together for a
          while.

The two others nod in agreement.

Blue and red lights fill the alley as the cop car
slowly backs up into the frame. The cop parks and
gets out. With his hand on his holster, he
approaches the group. Jimmy happens to be holding
the blunt at this moment.

                    COP
          Good evening folks

                    ORIN
           Can we help you?

The cop looks at the group of them. There's an
awkward moment of silence as he analyzes the four
of them.

                    COP
          Doesn't smell like cigarettes...

                    JIMMY
          (Stepping forward a bit)
          Sir, we'resimply having a
          conversation here.

                    COP
          Remain where you are and
          keep yourhands where I can
          see them.

The group looks at him in shock and disbelief,
putting their hands in front of them defensively.

                    ORIN
          We're not doing anything wrong here.

The cop moves forward toward Jimmy.

                    COP
          You're under arrest for
          possession   of   an
          illegal substance.

                    JIMMY
           (under his breath)
          You gotta be fuckin kidding me...

                    ERIC
          Sir, he hasn't done anything wrong.

Jimmy tries to talk to the officer but is
quickly overpowered and thrown to the ground.

                    ORIN
          (yelling) Hey! You're hurting him.

COP
              (yelling into Jimmy's
              ear) Stop resisting!

The cop picks Jimmy up and takes him to the
Car. The other three follow after him.

                         ORIN
                 (yelling and moving
                  towards thecop)
              Hey it wasn't even his
              blunt! It was mine!
              Arrest me!

The cop ignores him, nudging Jimmy into the
back seat and slamming the rear door shut.

                         KYLA
              What the fuck? You can't do this!

The cop simply ignores them.

                         ORIN
              Hey! Listen to me!

The cop speeds away. Red and blue lights fill the
night skyas Orin watches the car drive away,
incarcerating the only connection he's felt in a
long time.

                         ORIN
              Holy shit...I can't believe
              that just happened.

                         KYLA
              (hands on her head)
              We gotta go bail him
              out.

                         ERIC
                 (frantic)
              Yeah, I'll go pull
              the car around.

KYLA
          I'll just come with you. Orin,
          it was so great to meet you
          and I really hope this isn't
          goodbye forever.

                    ORIN
          Wait, I can come with you

                    KYLA
          Honestly, I think we
          should just handle this.

                    ORIN
          But it wasn't even his. I can
          explain that it was mine.

                    KYLA
          That doesn't help us. It
          doesn't makesense to have to
          bail 2 of you out.
          Just hang back. I'm sorry
          this is how the night had to
          end.

                    ORIN
          No, this is my fault. At
          least let me contribute to
          the bail fund!

He begins to pull out the cash Jamie gave him.

                    ERIC
          Orin...we'll be fine. You need
          that to get home. Just hang
          back. It'll be easier that
          way.

The two of them head down the ally and out
of sight. Orin stands there helplessly.

13   EXT. STREETS - NIGHT

Orin is once again, walking the familiar path he
took to getto the bar. He looks at the $60 cash in
his hand and keeps walking.

He soon sees a gas station. The old building is
rundown andthere are no cars in the parking lot.
Orin makes his way towards it under the faint glow
of distant streetlights.

14   INT. GAS STATION - NIGHT

Orin walks into a gas station and scans the shelf
for a gastank. He finds the smallest, cheapest one.
It still costs
$20. He looks at the counter and notices there's no
attendantthere. He looks around and notices an older
woman, clearly the only other person here, stocking
the fridge with drinks. He looks out the window and
view of the woman and walks out of the store.

15   EXT. STREETS - NIGHT

Orin makes his way back over toward 18th St. which
is bustling quite a bit more than the quiet gas
station he just shoplifted.

Orin continues to walk. His hair is greasy and sweaty
and his feet ache.

As he is attempting to cross through the
construction area, he steps on a nail. He grasps his
foot in pain and pulls the small nail out of the
bottom of his shoe. He sits down and pulls his shoe
and sock off to see a small bloody gouge in the
bridge of his foot. It's nothing too serious, but
still painful.

Orin attempts to tie his sock around his foot like a
bandagebut struggles to get his shoe back on. He
ends up just putting his slightly bloody sock back
on.

He continues walking until he eventually finds
another gas station. This one is a bit busier as
he is near the interstate now.

16   INT. OTHER GAS STATION - NIGHT

Orin makes his way up to the counter and hands the
clerk a
$10 bill.

                    ORIN
            $10 on pump 3.

The cashier takes the cash and Orin exits.

17   EXT. OTHER GAS STATION - NIGHT

Orin fills the little tank. While filling up his
tank, he notices there is a stray dog at the far end
of the parking lot. It's a medium-sized, wirey
haired dog with dirty, matted fur. The dog sits
motionless looking back at him. Orin returns the
gaze.

Orin continues to fill the tank and soon the dog
walks away.Disregarding this, he continues his long
walk back to his car.

18   EXT. AN OVERGROWN EMPTY PARKING LOT - DAY

Orin is relieved to see his car is still there. The
empty, overgrown parking lot is lit by the same faint
street light. Orin quickly tosses his guitar in the
trunk of his car and sits down in the driver seat,
closing the door. With the door closed the noises of
the streets, the crickets, and dogs barking are
abruptly shut out. Silence.

Orin looks forward and suddenly breaks down in
tears. Everything pouring out suddenly in the
silence and solitudeof his car.

He leans back in his seat and peers out the window,
noticing something.

A weathered and dirty stray dog is looking back at
him - thesame dog he just saw at the gas station.
The dog trots up toward him. Orin opens the door and
welcomes him.

CHAPTER FIVE

Screenplay Analysis

This chapter will cross-analyze the screenplay for *Mid-Sized City (Waco)* with the research established in earlier chapters. By utilizing the theoretical and historical background of neorealism, as well as its evolution over time, *Mid-Sized City (Waco)* can be understood as a modern iteration of neorealism. Each scene will be broken down in detail with each narrative and stylistic choice being explained in the light of neorealism.

Scene One

The film opens with a quiet scene of Orin working as a dishwasher in at a local restaurant in small-town Arkansas. Growing up, I had many friends who worked as dishwashers for local restaurants. Usually, it is the lowest paying and arguably least fulfilling position in the kitchen, and I wanted to contrast this with a man who is genuinely content to clean dishes in a dingy old kitchen. The fact that he is alone implies that he is the last one working at the end of the day. The scene itself will take place over two to three long shots with deep focus. The music will be diegetic and clearly coming from the old, mid-2000s radio.

Similar to the environmental decay seen in *Nebraska*, this scene will accurately capture poor working conditions and contrast this with Orin's seemingly misplaced contentment. It will also utilize implicit politics, similar to that found in *Wendy and Lucy,* by portraying the poor working conditions of this kitchen and the cheap labor by which Orin is clearly being taken advantage. The moment where the food is stuck to the

plate and Orin seeks to scrub it off is a throwback to the famous match-lighting scene with Maria in *Umberto D*.   Similar to how De Sica captures the harsh yet somewhat stale realities of Italy post World War II and through this scene, I attempt to capture the realities of modern America. This scene also establishes the tone and style of the film immediately.

Scene Two

After establishing the tone and style of the film in scene one, scene two acts to kick the plot of the film in motion. It establishes Orin's love for creating music and shows his ability to produce despite his menial setup. Orin's passion for music was inspired by my own. I made many feeble attempts to produce music on my own. Unlike Orin, I was never that good and came nowhere near to his level of creativity, dedication, and technical mastery.

 One small, yet significant detail is the electronics Orin uses. His phone and his laptop are old and cheap. I wanted to show how certain technologies (especially cell phones) are accessible to most everyone – even those in low-income situations. This is not necessarily a political statement but simply my attempt to accurately portray life. Just because somebody has a phone or internet, or a laptop does not mean they are financially stable. This is something I have personally seen and experienced and is not regularly portrayed in film accurately. Orin's optimism is constantly tested throughout the film, and his realization of how far away Waco is from his hometown in Arkansas is the first instance of this.

Scene Three

The character of Derrick serves to juxtapose Orin as seen by his comfortable life in the suburbs. The dialogue implies that this is not the first time Derrick has done a favor for Orin. I wanted to allow this scene to play out as naturally as possible. I wanted to paint a nuanced picture of a strained familial relationship where there is an undoubted loyalty and brotherly bond yet there is a lack of trust and skepticism from Derrick that has prevented them from being close. The scene is supposed to feel uncomfortable featuring awkward pauses and refusing to cut to other angles as to preserve that awkward authenticity.

The scene itself would take place in a generic suburban neighborhood. I want this location to feel somewhat sterile and lifeless. The camera will be mostly wide and stationary. Close-ups may be shot, but I do not want to rely on them.

When Derrick gives him a box of granola bars, it is supposed to serve as a moment of reprieve from the uncomfortable interaction prior. It will also be the only food Orin has on his trip as he will live out of his car eating nothing but those bars for a few days. While this scene is not as heavily neorealist as others, I was writing based on experiences of my own. I have three brothers and we have had our fair share of conflict over the years. I wanted to try and capture that feeling and incorporate some aspects of my own experience.

Scene Four

Scene four opens with Orin wrapping up his set. This is the first time we get to hear Orin sing, and the goal is to really portray Orin's passion. While his performance will be emotional, I will intentionally avoid melodrama. I will stick with long takes and

only include one-close up. The music will also be recorded on-set to attempting to capture the authentic acoustics of this location. I want to apply Zavattini and Bazin's ideals of capturing things as they are, rather than attempting to sway the audience's emotions with sweeping cinematic camera moves or dramatic edits.

Neorealism historically captures the realities of the working man, often in industrial settings such as factories. I wanted to use the same ethos behind those films and apply it toward a musician, attempting to paint a picture of artists as workers and the struggle that entails for them. The closest parallel of the films I wrote on would be in the film *Apur Sansar;* part of Apu's struggle is attempting to live as a writer. There are similarities between adult Apu and Orin as they both live in dingy apartments and struggle to make a living doing something they love.

In this situation, Orin is performing for this man, Michael, who exploits his talents and labor through the fine print of a contract. I initially wrote Michael's character to be apprehensive and feeling guilty for taking advantage of Orin. However, in subsequent drafts, I rewrote his character to show that this was intentional exploitation. Michael knew he could never get 100 people to show up to a show at his venue, so he tricks musicians like Orin into performing for him for free.

Scene Five and Six

These two scenes snowball on the previous misfortune of Orin. He gets back to his car, only to realize he has no money to put gas in his empty tank. The setting of these scenes will feel very post-industrial. It will be reminiscent of the overgrown parking lots the kids of *The Florida Project* explore or the concrete expanses of *Wendy and Lucy*. It is

an image that goes as far back as the streets of *Rome, Open City,* and one that I want to capture here.

There's a moment where Orin considers calling his brother for help but decides against it. Often, there is a shame that comes with asking people for help, especially from family members who are better off financially. At this moment, Orin is too embarrassed to ask his brother, who has already let him borrow his car, to bail him out again. America is obsessed with the idea of self-dependence and individual freedoms. This manifests in a nation that puts pressure on individuals to find their own success and simultaneously shames anyone who cannot. It also results in a government that denies aid for the most vulnerable in any given community. Orin is unable to ask for help, a problem that's more reflective of our society than of Orin's personality.

Scene Seven

In this scene, Orin gains the courage to ask for help. However, it is not from his brother, but from Michael, the man who refused to pay him the night before. Michael is skeptical of Orin's intentions for asking for the money. There are not many "villains" in this story other than the system that exploits people such as Orin (and later on Jimmy), but Michael's character is one of the biggest roadblocks for Orin. The character plays a similar role as the Land Lady does in *Umberto D.* She is not as imposing as the Nazi Commander in *Rome, Open City,* but she is the reason for all of Umberto's problems to begin with. Michael is similar because it is his exploitation (similar to the land lady's exploitation) that prevents Orin from getting home safely.

Michael attempts to put the blame on Orin for his predicament saying, "It's not my fault you didn't read the agreement and drove your ass all the way from Arkansas" as

if the problem is not his blatant manipulation. In the end, Michael recommends Orin go

to a bar that will pay him – an ironic recommendation. Michael lets Orin know that he

will do him "a favor" and email the woman, further driving home the narrative of

exploitation and gaslighting. Stylistically, this will all play out in long, wide takes and a

few medium close-ups to capture the nuances of each performance.

Scene Eight

Scene eight is one of the most purely neorealist scenes of the entire film. The

camera will be extremely wide for most of if not the entire scene. The section where Orin

navigates the road construction is very accurate to the current state of road conditions in

Waco. It is practically impossible for anyone to cross from one side to the other of I-35

without a car. The sidewalks are non-existent and there is not even a bike lane. In the

opening scene of *Nebraska,* the main character, Woody Grant, walks in a grassy median

on a busy street as there was no sidewalk for him to walk on. This scene of Orin making

his way to the other bar is heavily influenced by that moment.

I also find the 18th street bridge in Waco to be a perfect location for this

uncomfortably long transition from one location to another. The bridge arcs upward

allowing for a beautiful view of Waco. At the same time, if you look closely, there is only

a very narrow sidewalk surrounded by train tracks and run-down buildings on either side.

The goal is to linger on this shot long enough for viewers to notice that it is more than a

skyline, it is a narrow sidewalk surrounded by urban decay. This post-industrial look will

be implicitly political – similar to that of *Wendy and Lucy*. The circumstantial nature

allows for the politics of the film to remain incidental, without too much explicit

messaging.

Scene Nine

Jamie, the bar owner, contrasts greatly with Michael from the previous scenes. Orin is still skeptical of her offer, yet his desperation wins out in the end. Jamie's straight-up, no-nonsense demeanor also gives Orin the confidence that he will actually get paid. The bar itself is dark and dingy. It is considerably less nice than the previous venue, the coffee shop. It is a "locals only" type of bar and the character of the bar is reflected by the rugged toughness of Jamie.

Scene Ten

Orin performs for the second time. His performance shows just how therapeutic Orin's music is for him. Orin can find peace through his music despite his unfortunate predicament. The actor who plays Orin will also be a musician. The goal would be to find someone who has experienced some form of homelessness or poverty and is also a musician. I believe I could use a similar approach to Sean Baker utilizing social media and exploring congregated areas throughout Waco such as malls, farmers markets, music venues, and food courts to find someone to play the role.

I wanted to avoid a melodramatic moment where Orin captivates the entire bar with his amazing musical talent. In fact, most patrons do not even notice him. Both this and the first performance will be emotional yet understated. This scene also introduces Orin's friends who he will meet up with a few scenes later.   The scene ends with Orin quietly celebrating with some bourbon (his free drink courtesy of Jamie). Scene ten is one of the rare positive scenes in the film and is supposed to provide a sense of hope and appreciation for the little things.

Stylistically, I will stay true to what I've done in previous scenes; long, wide takes with a few medium shots and close-ups that attempt to simply capture this moment – specifically at the end of his performance. As he's putting his guitar away, the strap will get caught a few times and it will take an unusually long time for the camera to cut away from him as he methodically packs his gear up and heads off stage. This prolonged moment of Orin leaving the stage will reflect what Millicent Marcus describes as the "'dedramatization' of inherently dramatic moments".

Scene Eleven

Through the conversation between Orin and Jamie, I attempt to subtly portray Orin's struggle. Despite Jamie offering to have him perform again, he simply cannot because he does not have the financial capital or security to come back. It is in this moment that Orin truly sees just how difficult it would be for him to succeed as a musician without the privilege of industry connections, education, or financial security. This is not to say he will never find that success, but it is a daunting reality. While the struggle for the character of Umberto in *Umberto D* is completely different from Orin's, I was inspired by Umberto's struggle to save himself from being evicted from his apartment. Umberto fought tirelessly for his dingy, little apartment despite the system being stacked against him and his eviction imminent.

Jamie is incredibly down-to-earth and blunt, yet her belief that Orin can find success if he simply "sticks with it" is naïve. In America, the idea of being "successful" is so inherently linked to hard work, determination, and technical skill that even the most honest and genuine people can be mistaken. Orin is an amazing musician and incredibly

driven, but success (especially within the arts) will be incredibly difficult for him to find because of his material conditions and lack of support.

Technically, this scene will utilize more close-ups than previous scenes because I want to capture the subtle sadness and sense of defeat in Orin's eyes. In previous versions of the scripts, I had Orin say something to the effect, "the hard part is being heard". It was a bit on the nose, but I want the audience to feel the sense of disbelief when Jamie tells him "he'll find success if he sticks with it."

Scene Twelve

In scene twelve, Orin exits the bar and runs into a group of musicians. They happen to be the only people in the bar who cheered for Orin following his set. Orin immediately connects with these fellow musicians. A large part of this scene is small talk, yet it is one of the few instances where Orin is not alone or asking for help. He finds a group of people who share his passion, and this is why I commit so much time to this scene. The scene ends with one of the members getting arrested, but this scene offers more than just an insight into the corrupt criminal justice system in modern America. We get to see genuine human connection as Orin, for a brief moment, finds common ground through people who share his love for music. The conversation is not profound or philosophical, but I wanted to spend time allowing Orin to enjoy the pleasures of casual conversation with those who share his passion.

Human connection plays a large role in the Apu Trilogy. Apu is consistently navigating friendships and family dynamics. In *Pather Panchali,* Apu and his sister Durga bond through exploring the Bengali countryside and their boundless curiosity. In *Aparajito,* Apu struggles with his strained relationship with his mother and in *Apur*

Sansar, Apu unexpectedly falls in love with and marries Aparna followed closely by her tragic death. Ray was able to masterfully incorporate these elements of community and family in a way that was not sensational or melodramatic and that is the same approach I take in *Mid-Sized City (Waco)* as seen here as well as scene three when he borrows the car from his brother, Derrick.

The arrest scene itself is meant to feel shocking and raw. I rewrote this scene more than any other simply because I wanted to get the tone right and accurately portray this very stark reality of police brutality as it is something that affects every community in modern America, including Waco. Since the goal is to capture this intense altercation as honestly and genuinely as possible, I would avoid any use of music or unnecessarily dramatic lighting. However, I do want to capture the intensity of the moment through hand-held camera and the use of medium and close-ups. The edit will be somewhat fast-paced meaning more quick cuts than previously seen.

Mid-Sized City (Waco) mostly utilizes implicit politics similar to that of *Wendy and Lucy* and The Apu Trilogy, but this scene is very intentionally explicit with its politics as seen in *Rome, Open City*, and most of the NLAC and African Nationalist cinema. The sudden violence of this scene will be a call back to some of the revolutionary, political neorealist cinema of the Brazilian director Glauber Rocha or the Senegalese director Ousmane Sembene. Unlike the rest of the film, this scene is explicitly political as he witnesses first-hand the realities of police brutality towards a black man. This differs from the more implicit politics seen with his struggle with poverty or the decaying infrastructure of the city. The two political cinemas (explicit and implicit) are

both incorporated across the broad catalog of neorealist films and *Mid-Sized City (Waco)* will draw from aspects of both.

Scene Thirteen

Orin is once again alone in the streets. Despite having the needed money, he's feeling defeated after quickly making and losing his friends in a matter of minutes. As he returns to the streets, the style will return to a pure neorealist approach. The style will juxtapose that of the previous scene – returning to long takes and very wide shots.

This scene is simple, but extremely important stylistically. The transition from the previous scene to this one will feel intentionally jarring – similar to the unrelenting transition following the death of Apu's sister, Durga, in *Pather Panchali.* Ray eloquently navigates this traumatic event without exploiting it through melodramatic means and the goal of this scene is to do the same.

Scene Fourteen

Despite all of Orin's efforts, he stills finds himself needing to shoplift a gas canister so he can afford to put enough gas in his car to get home. At this point, Orin is defeated and desperate. Despite his best intentions and hard work, he still cannot afford to fill his car without shoplifting the canister. It is a similar message to *Wendy and Lucy* as Wendy finds herself unable to escape poverty despite her best intentions to work at a cannery in Alaska and must steal dog food for her dog, Lucy. Both Wendy and Orin tried their best to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, yet clearly, there are economic and structural hindrances that make achieving this "American dream" much harder for certain people.

Scene Fifteen

This scene is simply a continuation of the previous two. As Orin attempts to cross through the construction zone, he steps on a nail. This image is meant to be visually unsettling and prolonged. Throughout the entire film, but especially here, I try to embrace the Zavattinian idea of representing the world as it is and for Orin, it is bloody and unforgiving. I believe this will also allow the audience to share in Orin's pain, discomfort, and weariness. The goal is to provoke more than a distant sense of sympathy for Orin, but also a sense of urgency and discomfort that they, as the audience, also want to escape.

Visually this scene will use a couple of inserts to show Orin's bloody foot as well as a medium close-up of his face. This will be used along with the usual wide shots as I want the bustling, active streets to feel as though they are surrounding Orin. I also want to capture the intense honks and loud droning noise of cars on the highway above him.

Scene Sixteen and Seventeen

In these two scenes, Orin makes his way to another gas station and fills up the stolen tank. It will be a somewhat understated, quiet scene compared to the previous one. Orin simply gives the clerk ten dollars and fills up the tank. Despite its simplicity, I believe this scene will be visually provoking as a tattered man fills up a tiny gas tank under the harsh yellow lights of a dingy gas station. Its simplicity invites reflection.

Scene Seventeen also introduces the wiry-haired stray dog. Introducing the dog here serves as more than foreshadowing the following scene; it also is a clear moment of reflection for Orin as he looks into the eyes of this dog. Orin sees himself in that stray

dog – alone and hurting. There is an unspoken connection between the two of them – as if they have a shared experience.

Scene Eighteen

In the final scene of the film, Orin makes it back to his car. The overgrown parking lot and faint streetlight feel familiar. Orin collapses into the driver's seat in exhaustion and closes the door.

I imagined shooting Orin breaking down into tears in two different ways. The first was to follow Orin into the car with the camera. Visually I would use more close-ups and utilize the silence of the interior of the car before we see and hear Orin begin to break down. In this approach, we follow Orin as he removes himself from the outside world and we get to see him up close and hear him release his emotions. The second approach would be to keep the camera outside the car. It would consist of a wide shot with the car centered in the frame and the noise of traffic, crickets, and barking dogs continuing as we see Orin enter his car and close himself off. This approach is much more observational and less cathartic for the viewer as the camera stays in one place and we do not hear or feel close to Orin as he has this emotional breakdown. If I were to shoot it this way, I imagine I would do the entire scene in one take.

The film ends with the stray, who presumably followed Orin from the gas station, trotting up to Orin's car. Orin notices and, after a moment of hesitation, lets the dog in. Dogs play a key role in both *Umberto D* and *Wendy and Lucy*. Dogs serve as close companions to the main characters in both of those films. Also, the dogs serve as symbols of hope. It is because of Umberto's dog, Flike, that he does not step in front of the train at the end of the film. For Wendy, her dog Lucy serves as a constant companion and a

reason to keep on fighting through this difficult life. In a similar way, the stray dog in this

scene is a symbol of hope as Orin opens his door to let the dog in both literally and

figuratively.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

The history and evolution of neorealism, from Italian neorealism through modern

American Independent Cinema, has told many different stories for different cultures

using a variety of styles and technologies. Through my research, I've learned that

neorealism is so much more than just a style isolated to a ten-year stretch in post-World

War II Italy. As the founders understood it, it is not just a style or narrative framework

but an "ethical impulse". I was inspired by each one of the films I wrote about for

different reasons, but all of them share this dedication for presenting reality as it is and

embracing the raw, unfiltered truth of the human experience.

Through *Mid-Sized City (Waco),* I attempt to integrate my creative ideas and

experiences with the theoretical and historical framework of neorealism. Each scene

seeks to excavate the striking moments often overlooked in life and reveal the actualities

of the world as they are. My goal, in the words of Zavattini, is to connect people with the

world around them. I believe this is the power of neorealism; to connect more closely

and genuinely to our world.

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