

Diana Garvin – Short Form Course Proposal

ITAL GA 2720: La Dolce Diva: Theorizing Italian Women in Visual Media

Level: Advanced (Graduate seminar introducing feminist, film, and visual studies theory.

Advanced undergraduates welcome.)

Crosslistings: MCC-GE 2720, SCA-UA 2720

Notes: This visual studies and theory class, taught in English or Italian based on Department needs, serves as an introduction to feminist theory and film theory by taking women in Italian films as its subject. This class could also be reframed as a film survey course for undergraduates by considering the roles of women in two additional films (*Buongiorno, notte* and *La vita è bella*) and expository readings (*Women, Desire, and Power in Italian Cinema*) while de-emphasizing theory.

Course Description: Siren, victim, mother, terrorist: the contradictory and illusory female protagonist of Italian cinema, *la dolce diva*, serves as our enigmatic guide through selected highlights of popular 20th century Italian cinema, propagandistic newsreels, and advertising campaigns. In this course, students learn to apply Italian and American Feminist theory to Italian media, examining how visual representations affect, relate to, and are in turn influenced by film and advertising's portrayal of gender roles and sexual power dynamics. What visual qualities differentiate the women as subject and the woman as object? How do traditional categories of womanhood, such as seductress and ingénue, fuse or melt on screen? Why might representations of women shift dramatically or hold fast across media aiming to entertain, inform, cajole, or convince? To investigate these questions and develop argumentation skills, students study the structure of theorists' essays and assess the effectiveness of rhetorical strategies. In-class debates provide a safe space for students to test student theories and critiques prior to writing. Weekly peer-editing clinics hone essay organization skills and contextualize conclusions with reference to visual studies analysis.

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Critique films, video clips, and print advertisements featuring women using appropriate visual studies terminology
- Integrate American and Italian Feminist theory into visual studies analysis
- Devise arguments and counter-arguments for and to these major theories
- Infer how representations of Italian women in media shift over time
- Craft a case for the nature and significance of women's roles in Italian media with clear, provable thesis and concrete supporting evidence

Texts

Le filosofie femministe eds. Adriana Cavarero and Franco Restaino
Streetwalking on a Ruined Map: Cultural Theory and the City Films of Elvira Notari by
Giuliana Bruno
Women, Desire, and Power in Italian Cinema by Marga Cottino-Jones
Bellissima: Feminine Beauty and the Idea of Italy by Stephen Gundle
Gender Trouble (selections) by Judith Butler
Unbearable Weight by Susan Bordo
Decoding Advertisements by Judith Williamson

Films

Buongiorno, notte by Marco Bellocchio
Una Giornata Particolare by Ettore Scola
Il deserto rosso by Michelangelo Antonioni
La Dolce Vita by Federico Fellini
Grandi magazzini by Mario Camerini
Il Portiere della Donna by Liliana Cavani
Film d'amore e d'anarchia by Lina Wertmüller

Internet Resources:

Archivio Luce
Course website with selected Italian advertisements (Ferrari, Olivetti, San Pellegrino,
Benetton, Perugina, Prada, Barilla)