



DEPARTMENT OF FRENCH AND ITALIAN

Dissertation Defense: Edward Bowen

Nuovi Cinema Paradiso?: Closure, Urban Renewal, and Grassroots Movements in Rome, 1993-2014

Friday, April 17, 2015 at 1:00 pm in Ballantine Hall 209

The phenomenon of cinema closures has touched cities and countries worldwide, yet scholars have dedicated little attention to the impact of closures and conversions on local communities. Opposition to conversions in Rome—Italy’s cinematic and political capital—has been particularly charged. Activists, residents, and filmmakers have led protests, petition campaigns, and have physically occupied the buildings.

My dissertation investigates the role that cinema reuse has played in efforts to remake the city, in both urban renewal campaigns and grassroots movements. I present case studies focusing on three Roman neighborhoods where multiple historic cinemas have closed in the past 20 years: the area surrounding Termini train station, the shopping thoroughfare Via del Corso, and the neighborhood of Trastevere. I argue that the histories of these cinemas, their locations, architecture, and the symbolic values that people attach to them have all lent them political potential in an age of displacement. The cinemas I study in Rome were not only commercial spaces before their closures, but they also had communal value (as spaces of social aggregation), artistic value (for the celebration of film and other art forms), and also political value (for the types of films that were shown and their use for political rallies, debates, and protests). Recent mayors have favored cinema conversions into commercial spaces, such as luxury stores, banks, and supermarkets, in promotion of an urban renaissance largely based on tourism and commerce. By contrast, protesters, who have physically occupied the spaces, have tapped into the residual symbolic value of cinemas as associated with community. Just as film studies scholars Kevin Corbett and Karen Crowe have focused on the continued importance of cinemas for the construction of a sense of ‘community’ in small towns in the United States and Australia, I demonstrate how activists in Rome have utilized the spaces to promote solidarity amongst residents and to bring attention to social issues in an increasingly gentrified city. In addition, my study supports claims by political scientists Margaret Kohn and Alexandra Kogl that the social and symbolic values of spaces can be of important service for transformational political projects.

Committee

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Photo by Claudia Tombini.

If you would like to attend, please contact the Graduate Secretary, Casey Green, at 812-855-1088 or fritgs@indiana.edu

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