ITAL-GA 1981 STUDIES IN ITALIAN CULTURE:
LANGUAGE AND POLITICS IN ITALY

This course sets out to explore the place and agency of language within the political sphere in Italy from the late middle ages to the twentieth century. Language is understood for the purposes of this course in a broad sense, including visual, as well as verbal, communicative practices and codes. After an introduction segment focused on historical and contemporary theoretical approaches to language in its social and political dimensions, the course will be structured in two principal segments, one examining key topoi of political discourse (appeals to national glory, to destiny, to virility, to renewal, to sacrifice); the other to important media of political communication (public speaking, painting and sculpture, film, and civic ritual). The course will end with a consideration of the relation of language and politics in twenty-first century Italy with a particular focus on Berlusconi. One of the intentions of the course is to give students an opportunity to develop cross-chronological interests and to discern continuities, parallels, and differences between past and present political cultures. This type of comparative work will be encouraged in course presentations and submitted written work.

Course readings
The set readings for each session will be available on the Blackboard site for the course, and key works will be placed on reserve at the Bobst Library. Full citations for assigned works are in the bibliography at the close of the syllabus.

Course Requirements: Students will write a seminar paper (70% of the course grade). Paper topics must be discussed with the instructors before research begins. They may reflect any disciplinary formation, and may be written in either Italian or English. No incompletes will be given except upon presentation of medical or other documentation. Students also do one or two presentations during the semester based on that week’s readings, which count as part of the overall participation assessment (30%). Some of these presentations will take the form of responses to talks by the visiting speakers. The success of the seminar depends on the interventions and engagement of each one of you.

Schedule of course meetings and readings

Week 1: Introduction

Week 2: Language and politics in the rhetorical tradition
Readings drawn from classical rhetorical theory and recent analyses of classical rhetoric in its political aspect (Connolly, Gunderson, Habinnek)

Week 3: **Culture and politics in twentieth-century social theory**

Readings on the relationship between language and power (Foucault, Bourdieu), and on the notion of ideology/hegemony (Althusser, Gramsci, Zizek)

Week 4: **Political topoi 1: Nationalism and national character**

Focus on: ‘Italian’ consciousness prior to Unification; the shaping of *italianità* at critical junctures of modern history (state building after 1870; Fascism); what happens to such topoi when nationalism is discredited (1945)

Week 5: **Political topoi 2: Providence/destiny**

Focus on: the ‘heirs to Rome’ topos in medieval and early modern Italian culture; Savonarola and the apocalyptic tradition; modern Italian uses of the notion of destiny as linked to the legacies of Rome

Week 6: **Political topoi 3: Utopia**

Focus on: Fascist remaking of the word and world; 1968 as utopian project and its implications for political language.

Week 7: **Political topoi 4: Virility.**

Focus on: the gendering of *virtù* in humanistic political culture; fin-de-siècle and Fascist uses of notions of virility and the gendering of culture.

Week 8: **Political topoi 5: Decadence and renewal**

Focus on: ideals of reform in late-medieval and early modern Italy; themes of crisis and regeneration in liberal and Fascist Italy; the resistance as a “second Risorgimento”; 1945 as a “zero hour”.

Week 9: **Political topoi 6: Sacrifice and victimhood**

Focus on: the Counter-Reformation and the cult of martyrdom; the “proletarian nation” of liberal Italy and Fascist-era victimhood; martyrdom in the Resistance

Week 10: **Political media 1: The spoken and written word**

Focus on: speech culture in the medieval commune; political culture and the impact of print; the radio in Fascist and postwar Italy
**Week 11:**  **Political media 2: Painting and sculpture**

Focus on themes chosen from: Lorenzetti, Sala del Nove, Siena; Piazza della Signoria, Florence; apartments of Eleonora of Toledo, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence; Vatican stanze; the Macchiaioli; Arte Povera, abstractionism, and the turn away from narrative.

**Week 12:**  **Political media 3: Film**

Film as its own means of narrating politics and history; film’s relations with artistic and other means of representation; language and/in cinema.

**Week 13:**  **Political media 4: Ritual and spectacle**

Focus: Renaissance civic ritual in Florence, Venice, and Ferrara; Fascist and Communist political spectacle; the reinvention of Renaissance ritual in Fascist Italy; Berlusconian political spectacle

**Week 14:**  **Language and politics in contemporary Italy**

Focus on: Berlusconi’s language; the center-right, immigration, and rhetorics of inclusion and exclusion.
**Reading list**


