

of the double, of the musical mask where one might find a little march or a few languid notes of the violin, a joyous merry-go-round or else, as in *Il Bidone*, for example, an anguishing fear in black and white.

Il Bidone is an Italian story and the Italian is always accommodating, insincere and likeable, a polite swindler, often constrained by necessity. The war had favored the development of every kind of activity to make ends meet and the movies had amply those little edifying but justified aspects of an art of getting by that was typically Italian. The bicycle thieves had become a part of this history on a level with the multitudes of small-time crooks and swindlers that had crowded the Italian comedy of the Fifties and Sixties when they had adjusted themselves to the economic boom. Fellini's "bidonisti" (swindlers) present themselves as a connecting link between the illegality caused by sheer misery and the kind connected to the reconstruction from the rubble (physical and moral) of the war.

The most fearful of the *bidonisti* is Carlo, called Picasso. With his angel face he can con anyone, perhaps because he has about him the aura of the Fool. He can be dressed as a priest, the secretary of Monsignor Augusto, or as a simple layman pretending to allocate government housing. After the episode of the cigarette case and the scene made by Iris, this painter who has "lent himself" to the illicit because he "has a family to support" does not hesitate to return to the trade with the overcoat trick, his last excursion into crime that ends with the wild drinking bout that confronts him with a simple truth: that life of subterfuge is not for him and his real fear is less of the police than of being discovered by his wife. And then, he does not want to end up like Augusto. Picasso is a loser where money is concerned. "You don't even know how to say 'a million'," Augusto reproves him, "and do you know why? Because you can't even imagine millions". Perceiving this, if only in a confused way, he decides to go back to his old love of art and nature to which the others are completely indifferent.

On the contrary, Roberto, who repeats the character of Fausto in *I Vitelloni*, is a city fish with ambitions to swim in the great sea of the Roman underworld. Unlike the time-wasters of the provincial Romagna town who are together assiduously, he only meets with his accomplices on business and to work out the little preliminary maneuvers. He is more evolved than Fausto because less ingenuous. Both these shady personages, like the master of ceremonies in *Ginger and Fred*, are beautifully interpreted by Franco Fabrizi, an actor who in real life was quite the opposite of the immoral, cowardly and ambitious types he played in the movies. Roberto is the *vitellone* who is studying to be a con man, a simple pawn and an aspiring singer ("I have already bought all Johnny Ray's records – all of them. That's

just my style"). He aims to get set in the world of easy money even if he needs to let women keep him. Like Picasso, he does not want to end up like Augusto and in his way aspires to an artistic career (in music) by cultivating false illusions.

In Fellini's perspective *Il Bidone* represents a passing moment of an Italy undergoing change and the script allows the two youths, just because they are young, to be the first to understand that there was change in the air. And if Picasso decides to go back to painting, Roberto, without family responsibilities and although remaining in the "trade", will go to Milan where, at the precise time that Augusto is in prison, will set himself up in a big way, just like Rinaldo: "Boy, he really has it made. I saw him with an Aurelio Sport... Yes, Yes, an Aurelio Sport" Riccardo, another con man, will say.

But before setting himself up well, he will go quickly through all the phases of an initiation into crime: from a chauffeur to a hole digger in the "Monsignor Bidone" gambit. He will be the one to sift through the crowds of slum dwellers and end up as a petty thief in Rinaldo's house. During that New Year's Eve party he will finally learn his lesson and when he is found out he will submit with a smile to the man of the house's comment: "You have a long row to hoe before coming to fool around in here. Thus, Roberto begins hoeing his row by keeping the too-ordinary Picasso at a distance as well as Augusto who is too out of date. At best he might serve to help him link up with his real role model, Rinaldo with his vast business turn over, a white convertible, wife and children in Switzerland, a lover and apartment in Parioli, the rich man's quarter. At his parties figure the representatives of the (false) *dolce vita* of Roman nights that Fellini will soon be telling us about.

Augusto is as much at home in a nightclub at dawn as Zampanò is in a tavern. He is a vagabond gypsy, a lone wolf who has "always screwed everyone because the world is full of dupes", and because he wants to get out of that microcosm of two-bit crooks who want to prove to themselves how smart they are by pawning off old overcoats as new ones. The money is never enough for them because they spend it all trying to fill the vacuum of boredom that occurs after every job. This is why Augusto wants to exchange his liberty for a quieter job as manager of the Texas Club, a night spot he knows well because it is here – another prototype of the onrushing *dolce vita* – that he spends his nights when he has the cash. But Rinaldo does not accept his offer, because he now moves in higher, inaccessible spheres.

Between champagne and girls, the years slip by for Augusto, and he pays the price for neglected relationships with a painful and nostalgic loneliness. His chance

encounter with his daughter arouses feelings within him – a luxury that a real swindler cannot afford. In fact, with the peasants and the hut dwellers, his criminal technique is undeniable; his placid, hound-dog face conveys confidence, security and honesty. He easily extorts the credulity of others because – unlike Picasso – he believes in his work of instilling in his feeble-minded victims a sense of security and decency that make them trust his appearance as a “big, elegant bishop” – to use Pasolini’s description of Fellini – and hand over the savings of a lifetime. The meeting with Patrizia, after years of silence, puts chinks in his armor and, at the movie theater, a very Fellini-like narrative location, the director adds an artistic touch to his movie.

Augusto’s parabola begins a downward turn as soon as the first deceits begin to come apart. Sitting beside his daughter, he feels like a true father for the first time (“If you want to continue your studies... I will take care of the security money. Two or three hundred thousand is nothing to me. I can get it whenever I like.”), while the usher has mistaken them for an engaged couple. And it is right there at the movie theater that a former victim recognizes him and sends him to prison. But not before he has put on his tough-guy face again to ward off his daughter. The disguise for swindling the father of the paralyzed young girl will be the final pretext for the big one, the swindle courageously carried out alone, to the detriment of his greedy accomplices. Being predators of the same ilk, they will destroy him.

The scene in the movie theater could appear to be a cynical choice on the director’s part if we were not dealing here with the question of the contradictions of falsity, and if,

therefore, it were not necessary to balance the pretence with a more realistic anti-moralistic denigration. The effect has to be a strong one, particularly in the two interacting moments that explicitly refer to the cinema itself: the music of the comic strip bunch in *The White Sheik* brings to mind the set at Ostia and, immediately afterwards, the father’s arrest in the presence of his daughter recalls the end of *Bicycle Thief*. And so, in place of the appearance, there comes the clash with reality, a mixture of impulses so as to create a current – Fellini’s wind – which will implacably lead the false monsignor to the encounter with a quasi-daughter, the sunny Susanna who is compelled to drag herself around on crutches.

Overcome by that encounter, and by the fact that he has just swindled the amount of money Patrizia needs, Augusto comforts the lame girl and decides to carry out the final swindle of his life. He does a pretty convincing acting job until his accomplices find the money in his shoe. If he had used that money for the nightclub, he would most certainly have maintained his position in that unscrupulous world; but the anomalous act of the egoist that he basically is puts Augusto in a weak position, and exposes him to the vengeance of those who, like himself, know only the law of money.

His death, in the self-punishment that he has procured for himself, is casual, like that of the Fool in the clash with Zampanò: Augusto will fall and break his back in a way that prevents him from saving himself. He dies alone and in terror, with the false ring of the false monsignor still on his finger.

The Prostitute, the Innocent, the City and Love

The Nights of Cabiria • La Dolce Vita • The Temptations of Doctor Antonio


Sometimes they seem like coincidences, and yet the seeds contained in the early work reveal themselves as a mine to be exploited in the future. This is the case with *The White Sheik* which, as with many first works of great authors, contains much, if not all, of the Fellini poetry. These seeds bore fruit in the early Fellini movies, and constituted the humus in which the mature ones grew. One need only remember *Via Veneto* and, in particular, the heroine of *The Nights of Cabiria* (1957), the definitive proof of the human and clownish qualities of Giulietta Masina who was already cherished in the public's memory with her interpretation of Gelsomina. Cabiria, however, is something more.

The kind, demoralized prostitute, cheerful consoler to the despairing Ivan, finds a place in one of the most typical milieus of Fellini's film world: a baroque, nocturnal Rome, a fountain in a deserted piazza, lights that pick out the shapes of the sleeping buildings, the narrow alleys paved with cobblestones which seem to give off an expressionistic gleam. A quiet and rather magical atmosphere with an airy kind of enchantment, the ideal setting for a non-threatening appointment. Two women suddenly appear in this bewitching stage set, "one as wide as the façade of the church in the little piazza, the other very petite, wearing rubber boots, a chicken-feather bolero jacket, an umbrella which she brandishes like a sword, wide-eyed with the perpetual and joyous wonder of a nocturnal sprite. As I was shooting this scene, I gave a name to this character who, in the script, had none: Cabiria."

Because of "that outburst by the bridegroom, her tears, her despair, noted and expressed in the miming of extreme astonishment, innocent grins, unhinged emotions, Cabiria's silent grimaces of solidarity or mockery acquired such a pathetic and comical cadence and dilation, that I began to think that a little personage was born that night who might have the same strength and arouse the same empathy and feelings as Gelsomina in *La Strada*. In fact, Cabiria began to keep me company, and I thought of her often. To keep her quiet I promised her a movie all of her own."

In this way, Fellini lives and converses with his little

characters who have been only just barely sketched out, and are already in search of a definitive identity, using the same words as he used in his pre-cinema works. For example, *Il Mio Amico Pasqualino* (*My Friend Pasqualino*), a likable little man who talks with the furniture, with invented characters and names, and who, in the seventh chapter (*The sun sets and our likable vagabond begins to get some strange ideas which force us to give this chapter a rather vague title: '7:30 p.m.: Pasqualino At Times'*) even pays a visit to the prostitute Carmen, one who has "a sweet expression on her face" and may already be a foreshadowing of Cabiria. This name entered the history of Italian cinema as the title of the second national 'epic', filmed by Giovanni Pastrone in 1914, with its suggestions of ancient Roman grandeur filtered through an improvised and minimal inventiveness.

 While walking with Giorgio along the banks of the Tiber on the outskirts of Rome (the precise spot being near Acilia), the eccentric Cabiria, a street walker, is robbed of her purse, pushed into the water, and almost drowns. She is saved by a group of people, and comforted by her best friend and 'colleague', Wanda. She blocks out the memory of her lover/protector, and goes back to the profession as a 'freelancer', amidst heated discussions, derision and quarreling.

After a fierce quarrel with an older colleague, Cabiria tells Marisa take her to *Via Veneto*, where the high class prostitutes work, in order to give Marisa's new car a run.

There, in front of a nightclub, she witnesses a quarrel between the famous actor, Alberto Lazzari, and his elegant girlfriend, Jessy. Out of spite, and because he does not want to be alone, Lazzari invites Cabiria into his car, takes her first to the Piccadilly, and then to his beautiful villa where, for the first time in her life, the girl experiences the pleasures of a rich life, amidst impressive staircases, mirrors, huge rooms and 'white telephones', all of which increase her admiration for the screen idol. The arrival of the jealous Jessy interrupts the enchantment. Lazzari makes her hide quickly in a bathroom, and only lets her out at dawn, with a substantial amount of money for her trouble. Returning to her usual milieu, Cabiria recounts each little detail of her fabulous adventure.

One night, a religious procession passes by, heading for the Madonna del Divino Amore sanctuary. This arouses the faith and curiosity of the street walkers and their pimps, including Amleto's lame



Among the ancient ruins, Cabiria flaunts the symbols of her profession: a striped jersey and chicken feather bolero jacket. With no-one to guide her, she admires her colleague's small car, a real working class status symbol at that time

uncle, who wants to be cured. Wanda and Cabiria join the group, and the latter, greatly moved, implores the Virgin Mary to help her change her life. Like the lame man, her request is not answered and, during a picnic on the grass, she drinks and picks arguments because she is unwilling to resign herself to her circumstances. A group of orphans who pass by marks the moment of change in her very human story.

A few evenings later, Cabiria goes to the Lux movie theater where, prior to the screening of the movie *Processo alla Città*, there is a variety show starring a diabolical magician. Sighting his prey, the latter calls Cabiria onto the stage, and hypnotizes her, involving her in a romantic encounter with Oscar, an invisible prince charming, to the jeers of the audience.

At the end of the show, she is still feeling a little woozy, and an accountant, Oscar D'Onofrio, who is gentle, polite and persuasive, insists on making a date with her because he has been struck by the coincidence of the names and the girl's sweet nature.

The two of them see each other regularly. Oscar tells her about many things, brings her presents, asks for nothing in exchange. When Cabiria realizes how futile the relationship is, however pleasant, and decides to break it off, Oscar asks her to marry him. She happily sells her little shack and draws her savings out of the bank in order to begin a normal life.

After having lunch near Lake Albano, the couple go for a walk in the woods in order to admire the view from up high. Oscar, nervous and uneasy, manages to lead his fiancée to the edge of the cliff. Here, Cabiria finally realizes what is actually happening: the man robs her and leaves her lying, devastated, on the ground.

Later that night, leaving the woods, Cabiria reaches the road and encounters a group of young people singing and playing. As she walks among them, her sad expression changes into a smile.

In this play of coincidences, two of the less important, but critically revealing, details contained within this story, which had problems with the censor because of the subject matter, are a piece of clothing and a gesture in a frame towards the end of the movie. The item of clothing, the famous 'chicken-feather bolero jacket', which Giulietta Masina had already worn in *The White Sheik*, together with the pathetic socks, becomes the uniform, the identifying mark of Cabiria's clownish, common character, just as the cape and striped shirt denoted the misery of Gelsomina's vagabond existence. But Cabiria tries to evolve, pursues liberation from a reality in which exterior events play a determining role, in order to leave that world of the humiliated and the offended.

The context of the first insult to her person, decisively Pasolinian in kind, reveals itself as a determining factor right from the first images of the sunny shingled shore of the River Tiber at Acilia, a spurious agglomeration between Ostia and an unreachable Rome beyond the line of the high-rise buildings on the outskirts of town. Pasolini, whom the director called "most likable with that dusty mason's face of his, a proletarian face, the face of a bantam weight boxer from the slums" – plays an important part in the movie as a linguistic expert for the expressions in Roman dialect, and for his knowledge of characters from the proletariat masses, of whom he wrote in *Ragazzi di Vita*. Fellini and Pasolini go for long car journeys together, looking for locations, images and visions, which, due to the sponge effect (characteristic of his creativity), will end up recurring in subsequent works: "I went around with him visiting various parts of town immersed in a disquieting silence and with evocative names like medieval China, Infernetto, Tiburtino III, and Cessati Spiriti. He guided me like Vergil and Charon combined, both of whom he resembled; but he was also like a sheriff, a modest sheriff who went around keeping a check on familiar places." As well as locations, the two of them were really on the look

out – possibly just a pretext – for an old whore, the ‘Bomba Atomica’, whom Fellini had seen during his early years in Rome. When leaving the offices of the daily *Messaggero* at one in the morning on one occasion, walking towards Piazza Barberini, he saw her, a “kind of dirigible dressed all in white coming down the street – not on either sidewalk, but down the very middle of the street.” An incredible vision that “gave rise to the various *Saraghine* in my movies.”

There is unquestionably a great physical chasm between Cabiria and the ‘Bomba’. But it is all put to good use in the continuous internal working out and the prodigious capacity for recollection which, with no explicit motivations, utilizes memories at certain moments in incongruous contexts, as part of his accumulation of stylistic/inventive elements. Every fragment, quotation, remark, creates connections, links, recollections and ignites suggestions for present and future narrative passages.

The contradictions in the human affairs of Cabiria are many. Particularly in the representation of non-returned feelings in a dehumanized reality, for which Fellini is careful not to hazard sociological justifications which would be entirely unsuitable to his narrator’s sensibility, which is why he ends up showing – inventing – the dual soul, good and bad, of that reality.

An example of this is Cabiria’s monologue when she is feeling disconcerted by the theft and humiliation that Giorgio inflicted on her. She anticipates the sense of the movie, talking to herself, giving in to feelings and the enormous need for sincere affection: “But why? Why did he need to do it? I would have given him everything, I would... Everything he asked of me. So why did he have to do it?” These are the very same words she might have used of Oscar at the end of the movie, if it were not for the fact that the men she encounters in this circular story must first be individually portrayed in their negativity, which results in revealing the feminine positiveness of Cabiria, Gelsomina, and thus Giulietta herself.

Giorgio, “this dirty *vitellone*,” who has to return to “selling balloons at San Pietro”, is first portrayed in the figure of Amleto, Marisa’s protector and nephew of the lame man (played by Mario Passante, one of Fellini’s regulars, here playing the part of a cocaine pusher), a linking figure with the Divino Amore sanctuary episode, which they all experience with equal stupor, except for the brief parenthesis of religious excitement, decidedly unsuitable for bringing change to a parasitic existence.

Lazzari, played by Amedeo Nazzari in the self-ironical role of a movie idol, makes professional use of Cabiria at the most convenient time to resolve the problem at the nightclub, and for relieving boredom before his girlfriend, Jessy, arrives. In the morning, after keeping her locked up

all night, he pays Cabiria off, who is almost ashamed of taking the money: she does not feel she has earned it and, anyway, just having been in that house with that man would be sufficient compensation. Creeping quietly past, she looks at the half-covered body of the sleeping Jessy, perhaps imagining herself in her place. This is a conclusion which would have satisfied Anna Magnani, for whom the scene had been conceived, but which is more moving and human in Giulietta Masina’s interpretation.

Quietly leaving the villa, and adjusting her pathetic white socks, Cabiria might ideally have run into the bag man, a character who was cut in the final version of the movie. In this regard, Fellini recalls that there was very active censorship during this time and, fearing it, “following the advice of an intelligent and perhaps somewhat liberal Jesuit friend, Father Arpa, I went to see a famous cardinal in Genoa who was considered papal material and, perhaps for that reason, very powerful, in order to ask him to view the movie. [...] The movie was saved, but with one strange condition:



The *Nights of Cabiria* begins with our heroine’s first misfortune, as she is rescued from drowning in the River Tiber, having been pushed in by her former lover

the cutting of the scene with the bag man [...] part philanthropist and a bit of a magician, who, after having a vision, dedicated himself to a particular mission: he went to the strangest parts of town, finding the disinherited and distributing food and clothing, which he carried around in a bag, to them all. In the scene that was cut, Cabiria met him on Via Appia Antica, and went with him to the ghastly grotto of the 'Bomba Atomica'. There followed several little stories about that world of the disinherited. "It was a moving sequence that I was forced to cut. Evidently, those in certain Catholic circles found it disturbing that the movie should pay homage to that entirely anomalous philanthropist enfranchised by ecclesiastical mediation.

Another significant male character, prior to the appearance of the con man Oscar, is the illusionist, played by Aldo Silvani, who had already appeared in a vaguely similar role: the director of the Giraffa Circus in *La Strada*. Magician and hypnotist, he calls Cabiria to the stage and makes her exhibit that ingenuousness which will later make her easy prey for Oscar. But not before unwittingly exposing himself to the coarse mass of people making up the zoo-like audience, as well as the hurried interruptions after the show by the barman and the bus conductor.

And finally there is Oscar, with a sharp nose for the fragility and feelings hidden beneath the chicken-feather bolero jacket, and under the apparent self-assurance that allowed Cabiria to hold her own against the catcalls of the audience. The revulsion towards street life – similar to Marcello's disgust in *La Dolce Vita* – a feeling taken for granted, allows Fellini to avoid the danger of easy sentimentality and, worse yet, cheap moralizing. Just as it is implicit that living the 'low life' excludes one from divine grace. In the end, Cabiria is condemnable anyway, and condemned to live in sin and loneliness, which she confesses to the garrulous little *frate* Giovanni (it is no accident that this part is played by the clown Polidor, someone who unites aspiration, joy and a pervasive melancholy).

And so, using the lever of ethics on the contradiction between the pursuit of happiness and the sense of guilt, the director grafts the magical/fatalistic element onto the story which, repeating itself, returns to the opening message: experience is useless when the subconscious and love both go to work. And when the word love is used with reference to these characters, a special kind of love is intended – perhaps more a form of affection, deriving from the need to



The nightclub on Via Veneto – privileged setting for the dolce vita – used to play host to such stars as Alberto Lazzari (Amedeo Nazzari), and bold Cabiria, in contrast to the elegant location, shamelessly exhibits herself, heedless of her pathetic white socks



Greatly changed, the romantic ex-street walker falls recklessly in love with the trickster Oscar (François Périer), while the foreboding overhanging ledge of the lake foretells yet another tragic ending

have faith in the next fellow, a lay grace conceded only due to the fact of living and sharing a life together. Cabiria's for Oscar and, earlier, for Giorgio, is the same forced attachment of Gelsomina for Zampanò. And when Oscar's trap is set, Cabiria will no longer believe that she is destined to grow old miserably on the beat, and she will unhesitatingly turn to Wanda with the same mockery as Alberto for the road workers: "Take that!" – I've screwed you: you're staying here and I'm leaving – "Hey, Wa' [Wanda], I'm getting spliced!"

But this will not be the case, because the second detail insinuates itself into the picture, another meaningful gesture of apparently little import. A barely perceived action, because our attention is entirely concentrated on the dialogue. At the end of the lunch by the lake, Fellini frames Cabiria in a mid-range shot. She is about to pay for the lunch when Oscar, wearing sunglasses and a cigarette in his mouth, picks up the bill, pulls out some money and puts it on the plate, in the small space on the left of the screen that is not occupied by the characters. The situation is captured

at the precise moment immediately preceding the transformation. Cabiria has dressed like a 'normal' person, replacing the bolero jacket with a respectable little checked coat and a bizarre hat. Oscar, who has abandoned his office worker's briefcase and raincoat, looks like Giorgio without a jacket. Cabiria is saying that she wants to pay because, up until now, Oscar (like a good con man) has always paid for everything. She reminds him: "By now, everything I have is yours, isn't it?"

The director fixes this moment, unpredictable and yet already caught up in the looming fatality, before the shiver, and he does this with a simple movement of the woman's hand, which she places on Oscar's right hand: the hand of marital faith placed on the hand of a thief. The two look at each other, but the spectator does not see their eyes because Cabiria is seen from the back and Oscar is wearing dark glasses. After a brief pause, still shot in mid-range, Oscar removes his hand and places it on Cabiria's: the moment has come to bring the plan to its conclusion and, in the way that con men looked at each other or quickly changed their gestures, he moves his right hand to the wine bottle and pours. The switch to Cabiria reveals the packet of money tightly held in her right hand. In the subsequent passage, Oscar finally removes his sunglasses – an almost 'disinterested' moment for one who appears to be anticipating the joy of victory – then puts them on again, becoming evasive and nervous, as a close-up shot reveals his murky, malignant eyes in the disquieting light of sunset – a light that, together with the wind, reveals to Cabiria's mind the true face of her man, "one of those who takes money from women", one who has never loved her but only been after her savings.

All this is there between the folds of the images present in the scene showing the settling of the bill. It is a narrative and visual anticipation contained within an elliptical form of narration, which concludes the sordid business of the emotional swindle, of the fear of death, of the re-emergence from the inner bartering into which Cabiria suddenly sinks, rather than physically falling into the lake. The author suggests the ambiguity in advance, without depriving the epilogue of its tension, which is to be seen, less in order to find out how it ends, but rather to get a just confirmation of it.

This procedure is developed in putting Fellini's characters into motion when they must surprisingly enter or exit from an incongruous situation. The light breeze and those kids on a spree once again blow away Cabiria's illusions and her feigned cynicism – "one does everything for love," she had said – impelling her back on to the road again with an unforgettable smile: not onto her beat, for the time being, but towards her indestructible faith in an unjust life.

The last frame of *The Nights of Cabiria*, considered by André Bazin to be "at one and the same time the most audacious and the strongest of all Fellini's work", is the image of a fragile and sincere woman's desperate need for love, a hunger for affection that is also felt in varying degrees by the *vitelloni*, by Zampanò, by Augusto and by Marcello Rubini, the hero of *La Dolce Vita*: an epic movie that, since the death of the director, is only now beginning to take on more normal proportions, after having been excessively exalted and denigrated. A movie whose unusual length (at that time) demanded an enormous effort by its producers and makers, and which constituted Fellini's first sumptuous 'artistic lump', a story constructed upon reality, interlaced with the tragic and the fabulous, a truly authentic fake such as *Eight and a Half* and *Casanova*.

As occasionally happens to certain great movies, and not always the loveliest ones, *La Dolce Vita* (1960) was destined

to remain forever young and, with its bitter, astute prophetic confession, it was immediately interpreted as a prophecy of social disaster. A totem movie that expressed an idea and its antithesis, and, in the end, a movie-event because it marked the end of the cinema of the Fifties and its language, its customs, its socio-political complications, its polemics, its critiques, and much more. From a distance of almost fifty years, it is not easy to conjure up the provincial, curia-communist and 'vulgar' climate of those years, into which the movie came crashing like a meteor, yet it is still valid today, even if in a less intense way. Even if the rites and myths have changed, there has been no real change, except for the worse, in the ideology and the soul condition of that class of Fellini's *bon viveurs*.

To introduce this story, articulated into various episodes, and particularly in order to understand its true impact, it would not be a digression to refer to another Italian movie,

Cabiria, an innocent Gelsomina in a world of vice betrayed by her own feelings, wants to die after the final devastating disappointment. And yet, her infallible optimism and trust cause her to smile once again




winner of the 1961 Oscar for its screenplay. It is Pietro Germi's *Divorce Italian Style*, the bittersweet story of a crime of honor, a sarcastic comedy in which Baron Cefalù, in order to free himself of a petulant wife, plans to carry out his crime during the showing of *La Dolce Vita* at the town's movie theater. Under the rubric of a movie event valid even in a remote Sicilian village, Germi caustically plays with the leading actor of both movies, Marcello Mastroianni. In fact, the voice of the actor coming from the screen showing Fellini's movie creates a duet with the voice of the same actor in the guise of Baron Cefalù: "Preceded by huge public scandal, echoes of polemics, protests, denunciations and hosannas, a sensational movie came to the small town. The parish priest of San Firmino had launched his thunderbolts against the licentious movie and admonished his parishioners to boycott it, but with little result. Nothing of the kind had ever been seen before. Not even the chairs borrowed from the Central Bar and squeezed into the theater were sufficient to cater for the crush of spectators. They had even come in from the countryside, travelling ten kilometers on horseback."

Alternating between the hicks on the main floor, transfixed by the exuberant beauty of Anita Ekberg letting herself go at 'Caracalla's', and the well-bred bourgeoisie seated in the boxes, our curiosity is focused entirely on the 'handsome actor', ready to set his delicate criminal apparatus in motion, confident of finding his wife with her lover, and finally having a motive for killing her while in the grip, as it were, of his wrath. With acumen, Germi uses the pretext of the showing of the scandalous movie, thus bringing to the fore the ironic paradox of the organized improvisation: "the plan must proceed without the slightest hitch, it's success (and the alibi) will entirely depend upon this movie about the lustfulness and vices of Rome." What better thing is there than mass hypnosis in the face of an unapproachable world of bright lights and voluptuousness? Nothing. But the baron had counted his chickens before they hatched. He had not considered that his wife Rosalia would follow his own line of reasoning, and arrange an elopement with her peasant lover to coincide with the 'desert' effect created by Fellini's movie.

Using this tactic, Germi obtains the full consensus of an audience that can be found in cinemas everywhere, guaranteed to participate because its morbid curiosity has already been attracted by counter-attacks widely disseminated in the popular scandal sheets and weeklies. Accused by politicians of having "thrown a defaming shadow over the Roman people and the dignity of the Italian capital itself, as well as Catholicism", *La Dolce Vita* is threatened with censorship and even more bitterly opposed by the Church, except for the enlightened views of Father

Arpa. By recognizing the movie's moral qualities as well as its unquestionable cinematic merits, his own life will be anything but *dolce* for a long time to come.

 Marcello Rubini, having come to Rome from the provinces in order to work in the field of socially committed literature, is working as a journalist for a scandal sheet. For one week, he witnesses and participates in the daily life, and the even more lively nightly events, in Via Veneto, populated by the famous and the rich.

On board a helicopter with the photographer Papparazzo, he follows a statue of Christ that is crossing Rome from the Felice Aqueduct to St. Peter's, without missing the opportunity of making an advance to a group of pretty women who are sunbathing.

In the evening, while on the hunt for some spicy happening on Via Veneto, he meets Maddalena, a rich, bored heiress, with whom he goes for a car ride. In Piazza del Popolo, the couple offer a lift to a prostitute, who lives on the outskirts of town at Cessati Spiriti. In her squalid apartment, they spend the night making love.

Returning home at dawn, Marcello discovers that his jealous companion, Emma, has tried to kill herself. He takes her to the hospital and, after vainly trying to call Maddalena, he rushes to the airport to witness the arrival of Sylvia, a famous American screen star, eagerly awaited by a crowd of photographers, journalists and curiosity seekers. The actress is holding her first press conference in Italy at the Hotel Excelsior, but Marcello cannot attend because he must look after Emma who has been released from the hospital.

Sylvia, dressed like a priest for a promotional tour of the city, climbs to the top of St. Peter's dome, and is joined by a breathless Marcello who, fascinated by her natural beauty, will see her again at 'Caracalla's' nightclub, surrounded by the usual crowd of photographers. Sylvia lets herself go in a sensual, erotic rock dance. She gets into an argument with her husband Robert, who is constantly drunk, and then rushes away from the nightclub in a rage, followed by Marcello.

Sitting in the car in Via Appia Antica, they talk very little because of the language barrier, and Marcello, not knowing what to do, drives to Rome, after having phoned Maddalena. Whilst they are near the Trevi fountain, Sylvia falls in love with a kitten, and asks Marcello to find some milk for it. When he returns, the journalist finds that Sylvia has jumped into the fountain, fully clothed, and he is unable to refuse when she asks him to join her, dazzled as he is by that vision of pure beauty. Upon returning to the hotel, they discover Robert, who, awakened by the *paparazzi*, slaps Sylvia and punches Marcello, while the flash bulbs go wild.

The following day, while covering a fashion show at EUR, Marcello runs into Steiner, whose refinement and austerity he admires. They talk for a while in a church, but when Steiner goes to the organ and begins to play Bach, Marcello leaves in embarrassment.

Accompanied by the trustworthy Papparazzo and Emma, Marcello visits a place near Terni, where two children claim to have had a vision of the Madonna. Naturally, it is pure fabrication, but, exploited by the media, the news is creating mass hysteria among the crowd. Emma, drawn in by the atmosphere, prays to the Virgin to let her marry her man. A violent rainstorm and a sudden death conclude the long day.

An evening spent with Steiner and his intellectual friends brings to a

head Marcello's dissatisfaction with the mediocre life he has forced himself to live, compared with his friend. Spurred on by these thoughts, he decides to radically change his way of life, and goes to a *trattoria* by the sea in search of tranquillity in order to write something decent. Here, between phone calls to Emma, he meets a waitress called Paola, a simple, natural young Umbrian girl.

As always, he spends the evening in Via Veneto. But this time, there is a surprise visit from his father, who has arrived from the provinces. The journalist arranges an evening at the 'Kit-Kat', an old-fashioned night club, which his old man appears to appreciate, living it up with Fanny, a dancer friend of Marcello's. When the club closes, the woman suggests that they go back to her place to make themselves some spaghetti. When Marcello arrives sometime later, he learns that his father has been taken ill and intends to return home on the first train.

The following evening, Marcello is among the party guests at the great castle of Bassano di Sutri, where he once again encounters Maddalena, with whom he shares a moment of ambiguous intimacy, and also makes new acquaintances, visits the old villa, participates in a seance and finds himself in Jane's company when the bell signifying

first mass summons all the male descendants of that noble family to follow the princess mother to the chapel.

Another of the endless violent quarrels between Marcello and Emma ends up with a reconciliation in bed, following a series of violent reciprocal accusations – a prelude to the tragedy which is about to take place. Steiner, for no apparent reason, has killed his children and then taken his own life. Along with the police commissioner, Marcello waits in the street for Steiner's wife to return, while the *paparazzi* ruthlessly take flash photographs of the woman's emotionless face.

A pathetic orgy in a villa at Fregene, amidst crude undercurrents and improvised strip-teases, saturates the final scenario of our hero's week in Rome with cruel boredom. In the morning, a monster of a fish, dragged to shore by the fishermen, seems to be staring right at Marcello. In the distance, Paola, the young waitress from the *trattoria* , beckons him to join her, but Marcello vanishes in the opposite direction.

In *La Dolce Vita* , the highly mobile camera is at one and the same time the mover and the mirror of events which highlight solitude, cynicism, disgust and love. These are



La Dolce Vita as seen from the dome in St. Peter's Square: the journalist Marcello Rubini (Marcello Mastroianni) and the striking American movie star Sylvia (Anita Ekberg)



Emma (Yvonne Fourneaux), dramatically on her own, gives in to excessive maternal jealousy over her lover Marcello

classic Fellini themes, sometimes amply represented within several figures, and other times subsumed in a single character, such as the uneasy Marcello in the grip of a malignant freedom, a kind of eye that does nothing but record, more passive than a determining element in the story's development as he pursues the trends of the reveling city. He lives, looks, and describes the things and the people from a constantly changing viewpoint – along with Fellini's observations – subject to neither the realistic balance nor the composite distortion. In this movie, Alberto Moravia writes, "Fellini appears to change his manner according to the subject matter of the episodes within a spectrum of portrayal that ranges from expressionistic caricature to the most sober realism. In general, one notes an inclination to deforming caricature whenever the moral judgment becomes more cruel and more disdainful, not, however, without a pinch of satisfaction and complicity, as in the extremely vivacious scene of the final orgy, or that of the aristocratic party, which is admirable in its descriptive sagacity and narrative rhythm."

The restlessness in the movements of the curious camera, placing itself at the side of, on top of, and even *inside* the heart of events, is sometimes frozen into snapshots, not unlike the photos of the *paparazzi*, while, at other times, it

breaks up the story into a stylistically and thematically efficacious solution, wherein Fellini is better able to move than he could do within a rigid narrative context. Whereas the author, any twentieth century author, can only grab at confused scraps of reality, his alter-ego, Marcello, gathers up these fragments, 'pieces' of life, bits of a discontinuous mosaic, heterogeneous, unstable, completed by what the other eyes of the movie see, the camera lenses and the director himself.

This discreet stalker of the *dolce vita romana*, without any strong motivations, is another portrayal of the worn-out hero of literary tradition, the one who ought to realize his destiny, if only he did not have that small amount of humanity dedicated to others like Moraldo, Gelsomina or Cabiria. His contradictions are the image of his weakness, as well as that of a sick society, inasmuch as *La Dolce Vita* represents the sum of those single moments of crisis gathered together into the form of a movie that does not refer so much to itself, as to the idea of cinema, of 'movie-cinema'.

In contrast to 'movie-movie', which is to say movies that completely exhaust their text within the story, a 'movie-cinema', such as *La Dolce Vita*, is furnished with an inexhaustible 'classic' inner energy, having to broaden its range of action in an absolute expressive enrichment, unlike *Il Bidone*, a typical 'movie-movie', which, *after* the death of Augusto, has nothing more to say. Instead, a simple reading of the script of *Il Viaggio di G. Mastorna*, the movie that was never made, conveys the feelings that cinema imparts in a very intense way, because it communicates a particular form of pathos, bound to the written word, due to the world of the author and his personage. With *La Dolce Vita*, one gets more or less this same strange elevating experience of participation: the story of the spiritual journey of Marcello and his *deus ex machina* which, the more personal and suffered it is, the more it unfolds, on the one hand, in the direction of Cinema, and on the other, towards a sense of Death, light but present, ready to dig silently among Fellini's obsessions.

For this reason, the word *dolce*, as it is understood in a pagan and voluptuous sense, is another of the not few equivocal points of the movie. Starting from the optimistic idea that life may not necessarily be 'bitter', the message was misunderstood to mean unbridled pleasure-taking in the hedonistic individualism of the newly rich, up to the point of post-modern exhibitions of empty and ignorant television esthetics.

Loneliness. Cynicism. Disgust. Love. Four soul states with which one can walk arm-in-arm in the *dolce vita* of the southern dream of an inner Rome suspended between the crumbling vestiges of a great Empire and the comprehensive embrace of Christianity.



Marcello is lonely. He lives with Emma, suffocated by her possessiveness, her scenes, and her wild extremes. Emma, myopic and superficial enough not to notice her man's torment, cannot look at things with reason: all she sees is the outward appearance of the intellectual world, and she allows herself to be hypnotized by religion in its simplest sense, the fruit of excitement over a (false) miracle. She loves in an obtuse way, and despairs because her man disdains even her most ordinary attentions. Marcello is lonely even when by himself, because he wants to be what he is not, a writer, possibly left-wing, sent on extraordinary trips to important meetings, whereas his ignorance has turned him into an expert scandal reporter. All he does is concern himself with petty local news by day, and roam Via Veneto by night, accompanied by Paparazzo – the name that became a worldwide synonym for a society photographer – in order to inform his avid readers about what the VIPs eat, their love affairs and betrayals. In this sense, the reconstruction of Via Veneto at Cinecittà, confirming Fellini's bigger-than-life falsification, magnifies the ephemeral society that populates that street, a microcosm of fearful moths that warm up their spirits around the lamp of incommunicability and anxiety.

Maddalena's loneliness complements this. Stimulated only by new experiences, she is happy with Marcello – who is made of the same stuff, only poor – both in the prostitute's bed, and at the Sutri castle where, even when sincerely conversing at a distance with him, she cannot resist giving herself to another man, cannot bear the loneliness that, just for one instant, has encountered that of her friend/lover.

Marcello is isolated when he is with just one other person, or in a group, when he accompanies the beautiful Sylvia to St. Peter's, is with her at a nightclub, or at the sacred icon of the Trevi Fountain, convinced that he has found "everything, the first woman of the first day of creation, mother, sister, lover, friend, angel, home." And instead, in his confused and mystical search, he is frustrated by a blast of wind, by the cry of an American actor, by the dogs and the uninterrupted flow of the fountain, moments which accentuate his alienation.



Front page: Captivated by Sylvia's radiant beauty, Marcello seems to be poised between reality and Indifference, finally revealing all the signs of his personal existential crises
Top: in the Via Veneto recreated at Cinecittà, we even see the Spider, one of the bikers' badges of the boom years. Marcello is teetering between memory (his father, Annibale Ninchi) and the present (Paparazzo, Walter Santesso)
Right: Steiner (Alain Cuny), a destructive, unattainable model, completely fascinates Marcello, who, hoping one day to be a writer, must instead concern himself only with newspaper scandal



Even the 'provincial' parenthesis of his father's visit reveals his isolation in the pathetic attempt to renew a bond that has not existed since he was a child. He looks for company among the guests at the party and at the orgy, with perturbed women already suffering for their own reasons, when refusing the Paola's invitation on the beach, a presage of his loneliness, cynically experienced.

In fact, Marcello is cynical. As someone who is completely disillusioned, having to adapt to the society of appearances, he must necessarily pretend to be insensitive. With Maddalena, he speaks about Rome, and then throws her wealth in her face: "I like Rome very much. It's a kind of jungle. Warm and calm, where one can easily hide. [...] Do you know what your problem is? Too much money. Listen, you don't have to worry, with all that money you've got, you'll always land on your feet if you fall."

He acts the part of the innocent representative of public opinion, even when invading the privacy of a pair of adulterers: gets angry with Emma for her blackmailing suicide attempt; during the pandemonium of Sylvia's arrival, he removes himself from the collective enthusiasm

Above: Even Nadia's striptease (Nadia Gray) during the final orgy sours Fellini's dolce vita and the pointless customs of all the social classes portrayed
Right: The fake miracle, a set created in order to portray how people's gullibility is exploited by the cynicism of the Press
Front page: Anitona's pagan beauty against the mythical setting of the Trevi Fountain bestows on the movies an unmistakable moment of change which proves to be epochal







The dolce vita for Marcello's father (the actor Ninchi bearing a remarkable similarity to Urbano Fellini) comes to a head at the Kit-kat, an old style nightclub, with Fanny (Magali Noël), Papparazzo and his son

and chats a while with the flight attendants; he takes a caustic dig at the photographer at EUR; like Papparazzo, he does not believe in miracles, but rather in the realism of an existence he does not know how to change; he is rude to Paola because the juke-box disturbs him, but is actually angry with himself because he does not know what to write; he gets into quarrels at the castle, and demonstrates his cruel cynicism during the orgiastic games at Fregene. Here the cynical behavior of Marcello is synthesized. Is it the unveiling of his true character, helped along by the influence of alcohol, or is it his despairing reaction to Steiner's tragic death? Perhaps it is both. In any case, the common denominator is his anxiety due to the fact that the much-admired Steiner has renounced his life because there was *too much* order in it.

Directly connected to the motifs of anxiety and cynicism, is that of disgust which, in Fellini, is not detached from the acceptance of the state of things. Accentuated above all in the orgy episode, where we see how deeply Marcello, not being able to withdraw, ineptly immerses himself in the subject and physical acts which nauseate him, and wallows in his aversion for hypocrisy, pretended modesty, repressed impulses. Less a moral disgust than an esthetic one for that *dolce vita* and its disorder which, though not feeling himself responsible, he cannot do without, considering that this

confusion and chaotic frenzy is what earns him his daily, or more correctly, nightly bread. When all is said and done, except for certain private episodes, he is the man who, observing, noting, and even while having to accept the rules of the information profession, often disapproves of the *paparazzi* intrusions, and ignores their requests for a photographic scoop of Steiner's corpse.

In the end, Marcello seeks love, and looks for it in women. He needs to be considered a contradictory human being, fragile and needy of affection. He seeks, and rejects, this affection in Emma, the Italian mother: "I cannot spend my life loving you. [I'm afraid] of you, your egoism, the desolating squalor of your ideals. Can't you see that you are offering me the life of a worm? You cannot talk of anything but food and bed! But don't you understand, a man who accepts that kind of life is finished, has truly become a worm? I don't believe in this aggressive, ruinous, maternal love of yours. I don't want it! It's no use to me! This is not love, it's stultification." Emma will never be on a par with the women artists of Steiner's circle, but no-one knows as well as she does how to heal, in bed, the wounds left by her man's insecurities and cowardly actions.

The female American star, a more complete version of the tiny Gelsomina, is big, exaggerated, phosphorescent, possesses something more 'mystic', some astral difference

from the usual 'good-looker', is full of an instinctive love for life, but not for Marcello. She, on the rare occasions when he tries to kiss her – not understanding that she is only an ideal, a Dream Woman – is regularly frustrated by a sudden obstacle.

For their part, Maddalena and Jane represent the taste for danger, the novelty that excites, in contrast to the foreseeable present and future, the sexual surrogate for Emma's cloying love. For this reason too, Marcello, half immersed in the Trevi Fountain, barely allows himself to touch Sylvia's wondrous, distant face. The drops of water that she lets fall onto his head symbolize the return, the inner rebirth of a lay, existential nature. Perhaps one will exit from the disgust for the *dolce vita* with a new taste for the elementary things in life which, however, continue to keep some surprises in store.

The other love to which Marcello aspires is found in Steiner's house, where his gentle, smiling wife introduces him to a serenity that is interrupted only by the stormy wind – heard on the wire recorder – and the children waking up. In its satisfying tranquility, however, that love leads to suicide, a warning, or confirmation, of the fact that one must react in order to combat fear. Equally pointless was the

brutish orgy, and the rising back from the depths of nastiness that occurs with the walk in the pine woods at Fregene, before the hideous disgust takes form as a mysterious marine monster that, in absorbing the negative human factors, allows the 'soap-and-water' girl to be the one to take leave of the spectator.

It is certainly no coincidence that the locations and symbols of the movie, Via Veneto and the enormous marine creature, are *false*, only truly existing in the invented representation of a miserable world of lights that comes to life by reflection when the natural light of day disappears. It is a world like that of the cinema, taken from the reality of the years when the so-called Hollywood-on-the-Tiber existed, when the American cinema came to Cinecittà to shoot its epics, attracted by the low cost and high quality of the crews. Without that having happened, the mythicized Via Veneto would never have existed, and *La Dolce Vita*, the meeting point of two decades, is the documentation of an epoch from this point of view as well. Marcello's love is derived from Cabiria's: when his disgust for the degradation of feelings is transformed into a look that is almost inside the camera, we have arrived at the final frames of *La Dolce Vita*, with an innocent act to redeem the orgy, by the simple



Fellini on the set of *The Temptations of Doctor Antonio*, second episode of Boccaccio '70



Troubled, Doctor Antonio Mozzuolo scrutinizes the gigantic advertisement for milk (Peppino De Filippo and, on the poster, Anita Ekberg)

fact of existing. And if the endings of the two movies, despite having strong similarities in their optimism, do not coincide, it is because the buds of Fellini-style deformation are already beginning to turn into the psychoanalytic larvae of *Eight and a Half*.

Before shooting *Eight and a Half*, the second cruel emblem of 'movie-cinema', Fellini completes *La Dolce Vita* with *The Temptations of Doctor Antonio*, an episode in *Boccaccio '70*, directed in 1962 and featuring Peppino De Filippo and Anita Ekberg. The Fellini episode is the second part of a joke in four acts thought up by Cesare Zavattini, which also includes Mario Monicelli's *Renzo and Luciana*, Luchino Visconti's *The Job*, and Vittorio De Sica's *The Raffle*.

A grotesque reprisal on the bigots who had censored *La Dolce Vita*, the nocturnal adventure of the moralist Antonio Mazzuolo allows Fellini to play around a little more with the ambivalent mental fresco of Rome by night, alternating the small and the large, the true and the false, night and day and, to a large degree, prudery and the obtuseness of

censorship. *The Temptations of Doctor Antonio* is, on the one hand, a Fellini *divertissement* about the movies and, on the other hand, the tempered oppositions of his hyper-realistic humor, similar in tone to the long list of things he likes and hates contained in *Intervista sul Cinema*. "I don't like parties, holidays, tripe, interviews, round table discussions, requests for my autograph, snails, travel, standing in line, the mountains, boats, radios playing, music in restaurants, music in general (submitting to it), jokes, soccer fans, ballet, Christmas cribs, gorgonzola, award ceremonies, hearing people talk about Brecht, Brecht, official lunches, toasts, discourses, invitations to places, requests for my opinion, Humphrey Bogart, quiz programs, Magritte, being invited to art exhibitions, theater opening nights, typescripts, tea, camomile tea, caviar, previews of anything at all, the Maddalena Theater, quotations, real men, movies for young people, theatricality, temperament, questions, Pirandello, *crêpes Suzettes*, beautiful landscapes, political movies, historical movies, psychological movies, windows without blinds, commitment, non-commitment, ketchup."

Mazuolo, both moralistic and bigoted, enjoys making people aware of his views, and closes the curtains against the "scandalous" dancers






In his solitary crusade against an imaginary decline in standards, gloomy Doctor Antonio even looks for support from the authorities

There is no danger of using the list to interpret the reasons how and why it is that a certain person detests snails with ketchup, or eats caviar and gorgonzola – possibly before going to see a Pirandello play – but certainly the list of preferences, with its well-balanced combinations, is revealing. “I like: train stations, Matisse, airports, risotto, oak trees, Rossini, roses, the Marx Brothers, tigers, waiting to meet someone while hoping they will no longer be coming (even if it is a very beautiful woman), Totò, having missed being somewhere, Piero della Francesca, everything beautiful about a beautiful woman, Homer, Joan Blondell, September, *torroncino* ice-cream, cherries, Brunello di Montalcino wine, big butts on bicycles, trains and lunch baskets on trains, Ariosto, cocker spaniels and dogs in general, the smell of damp earth, the scent of hay, crushed bay leaves, cypress trees, the sea in winter, people who speak little, James Bond, the One Step, empty shops,

deserted restaurants, squalor, empty churches, silence, Ostia, Torvajonica, the sound of bells, finding myself alone in Urbino on a Sunday, sweet basil, Bologna, Venice, all of Italy, Chandler, women concierges, Simenon, Dickens, Kafka, London, roasted chestnuts, subways, taking buses, high beds, Vienna (but I have never been there), waking up, going to sleep, stationery shops, Faber No. 2, pencils, vaudeville shows, bitter chocolate, secrets, the dawn, the night, spirits, Wimpy, Laurel and Hardy, Turner, Leda Gloria, but Greta Gonda I also liked a lot, soubrettes, but also ballerinas.”

It is hard to avoid the temptation of remembering the winter sea in *I Vitelloni*, of the big bottom of the peasant woman on the bicycle in *Amarcord*, of the subway in *Roma* and *Fellini: a Director's Notebook*, of the high beds in *Eight and a Half* and *City of Women*, not to mention the vaudeville shows (*Variety Lights*, *The Nights of Cabiria*, *Fellini's Roma*), and the Venice of *Casanova*, along with a Poe-inspired project that never came off. Also, the predilection for Georges Simenon, his great and good friend, located somewhere between Chandler (plot) and Kafka (the hallucinatory and the absurd), or else between the concierges and roast chestnuts – images of Maigret's Paris and Fellini's Rome and provinces. The points of contact between Fellini and Simenon are surprisingly many – one need only remember the richness of fantasy and invention, the great rigor of their working methods, alternating between a furor of imagination and sudden ‘vacuities’, the alter-egos Maigret and Mastroianni who, in the simultaneousness of different lives, somehow make reference to Jungian synchronicity understood as acausality. These are questions to be taken up elsewhere, because they would lead us away from the fixations of Doctor Antonio who, far from being *The Man Who Watched the Trains Pass*, limited himself to watching, and while watching with prejudice, fell into temptation.

 Doctor Antonio Mazzuolo, the impeccable moralist who wears lugubrious black suits on hot Roman nights, has a fixation: the battle against the spread of immorality. He follows couples in solitary places and hates women in bikinis, as well as all other exhibitions of the female body. His iconoclastic furor is expressed in fervid rhetorical outbursts to boy scouts, nocturnal blitz raids, and the interruption of shows he considers indecent, up until the attack on a woman in a low-cut top.

One day, an enormous billboard is pasted up directly in front of his window, with a provocative blonde inviting people to drink more milk, causing Doctor Antonio to start his anti-vice crusade. First of all, he tries to prevent the pasting up of the poster, and then he goes to the promorality association, while the people of the neighborhood, unperturbed by his rage, merrily welcome the billboard with an outdoor party.

One morning, intent on shaving, he thinks he sees in the mirror the gloved arm of the woman on the billboard and, by now determined to

provoke a scandal, gets himself arrested after splattering it with ink. He accomplishes his purpose: the billboard is covered over, to the great joy of his unmarried sister, given to nocturnal ecstasies under a false name.

While playing the piano during a party with the friends of the association, Mazzuolo sees that diabolical blonde appear, a 'plausible' thing since a sudden rainstorm has removed the covering. In the moonlight, he discovers that the photo has changed position, and is winking at him and teasing him. When it finally stops raining, Doctor Antonio dreams that he has gone under the billboard but, while the great glass of milk has moved onto the grass, the body of the temptress has left the billboard.

"I have finally driven you away from the world of decent people", he says with satisfaction when the giant woman appears in the flesh. But the temptation continues and, although occasionally giving way a little, the Lilliputian enemy does not give up his fight for the spiritual well-being of the entire city.

When the girl takes on human proportions, and tries to reach a compromise, Doctor Antonio decides to try to redeem her, even if he is conscious that he has fallen into serious temptation. So he reacts by chasing her away. She responds by stripping. Mazzuolo defends himself even to the point of covering the camera lens and, armed as a medieval knight, breaks a lance against the woman who, having returned to the billboard, closes her eyes in death.

The night concludes with a funeral cortege following the gigantic coffin of the temptress, and Mazzuolo, realizing that he will never see her again, rebels, by now totally in the grip of sinfulness.

The light of day finds him clinging to the border of the billboard, and only by injecting him with a tranquilizer do they manage to take him away to the hospital, while the tune of the advertising jingle plays ("Drink more milk") and cupid laughs to himself.

In 1961, Sergio Corbucci's movie, *Totò, Peppino e la Dolce Vita*, appears on Italian screens, aiming at profiting from the scandal provoked by Fellini's movie while the iron is hot. A strong parody in which Totò and Peppino De Filippo carry out their archetypal shady dealings in the nightclubs of Via Veneto with a large group of pseudo foreigners. In *The Temptations of Doctor Antonio*, Peppino De Filippo – whom Fellini always preferred to his more famous brother Eduardo – continues partly in the role of the character of that parody. In Fellini's work, Antonio really takes on the ironic contours of the hypocrite disguised as a respectable crusader, who represents the director's answer to the wretched criticisms that greeted the appearance of *La Dolce Vita*.

In the opening minutes of the movie, following the pattern of the old comedians, Doctor Antonio reproaches a lady for her supposedly shameless way of dressing and, when she reacts, he gives her a couple of slaps, thus defending decency and recalling an episode which actually happened involving the censor, the Italian politician Oscar Luigi Scalfaro.

The middle part is devoted to promoting the joy of living,

as expressed in the femininity of Anita Ekberg playing the part of the corrupting demon of the upright male Italian. This characteristic is put in evidence by the agitated reactions of the moralist, who awards ridiculous little diplomas to boy scouts. Fellini has fun giving these big fat kids the names of movie people such as Rodolfo Sonogo (scriptwriter of many Italian comedies, for Alberto Sordi in particular) and Otello Martelli, the movie's director of photography.

The anti-sex sermons he preaches to these big kids in short pants are totally pointless, as life goes on and the workers are already there to erect the billboard. The director uses this to return to the question of the relationship between true and false, this time in connection with the alternating of big and small. Thus, no longer just the false resembling a dream-like state, but the false in a real dream on a reduced scale, with the result of confounding the eye and the character. In fact, the leading man engages in an unequal battle against Love and feminine Charm, only to be conquered by them under the amused eye of Cupid, the only one able to make the expression on a poster figure change and cause it to descend and do a strip-tease, before the final seduction when the clock strikes midnight, the 'non-hour', suspended between the old day and the new.

The billboard figure enters and exits from that particular screen, on which the director creates, somewhere between cinema and comic strip, an enormous cartoon for magnifying the most desirable features, nothing less than the incarnation of the exaggerated perception that the male lead has of feminine sensuality. With an unerring and sensual aim, his lance pierces her right breast, thus repressing even more the already suppressed appetites of the attacker. The problem of the reduced reconstruction of reality fuses with the 'very large', which always analogically completes Fellini's fascination, more than the proportions of the feminine temptation, which neutralize her dangerousness with one stroke, ridiculing whoever considered them obscene.

Antonio Mazzuolo would like that image to be invisible, as it were, to the spectator, because we are part of the farcical nightmare or repression, and so it is necessary to cover the camera lens – with one's pants if necessary.

If he were to abandon himself to real life, the temptations would vanish, and he too would be able to go out on the grass without worrying. Once again, here is a finale in line with the preceding ones: it is useless to look for the message of *hope*, but one must become aware that one is dealing with an author who does not like either 'commitment' or lack of it. Rather he prefers 'waking up' and 'going to sleep' – which is to say, to dream. In fact, it is now the right moment for the dislocations of *Eight and a Half*.



In Eight and a Half, director Guido Anselmi (Marcello Mastroianni, Fellini's alter ego) looks to the religious authorities, the Cardinal (Tino Masini), for answers to his questions

Nothing is Known. Everything is Imagined

Eight and a Half • Juliet of the Spirits • Toby Dammit •
Fellini: a Director's Notebook • Fellini's Satyricon

Right in the middle of a traffic bottleneck, in a silence illuminated by a blinding white light, a man in a dark suit tries spasmodically to get out of the car in which he is trapped. People in the cars around him stare at him. Others look like distant mannequins.

Finally, the man manages to free himself and climb on top of the car. He is floating high in space like a kite as an unknown person tries to pull him down to earth, and another figure arrives on horseback. That descent corresponds to the falling sensation the protagonist feels: he was dreaming, and a person in a white coat enters at the very moment of that perception.

In fact, it is the team of doctors at the Chianciano Thermal Baths, arriving to administer a tonic to the famous film director, Guido Anselmi, who is spending a restful holiday there in order to plan his next movie.

On a sunny spring morning, the guests of the spa promenade in the park and drink the medicinal waters. Guido imagines he sees a girl dressed all in white offering him a glass of water, but in fact it is merely the woman who works at the spring.

Daumier, the French intellectual who is working as an adviser on the movie, is waiting for Guido, who exchanges some thoughts with him. The writer assails him with an outburst of reservations about the philosophy of the movie and the way it is being handled. Impatient, the director jumps at the chance of an interruption – a meeting with a friend of his, Mario Mezzabotta. Mezzabotta, who is with his young English fiancée, Gloria, an aspiring actress and university student, is waiting for his marriage to be annulled.

Guido goes to the station to meet his current lover, Carla. With a high-society sojourn in mind, the woman is laden with luggage, and Guido has put her up at a hotel near the railway station, embarrassed by her vulgarity.

After lunch, the lovers retire to their room and excite themselves with a little fooling around, in which Carla, dressed only in a sheet and heavily made-up, pretends she has got the wrong room. After having sex, while Carla is reading a comic book, Guido dreams of his dead parents in a strange cemetery where his producer, Pace, and production director, Conocchia, are also present. Still as part of the dream, Guido puts on his college uniform and says goodbye to his parents. As he embraces his mother, she turns into his wife Luisa. Back at the hotel, he runs into some religious types who are attending to His Eminence, who has come to take the waters.

Other events follow which introduce us to the various characters who form part of Guido's movie: the collaborators, the production

crew, the little old men vying for the part of the father, Claudio's agent, the French actress to whom Guido does not want to reveal the character of the role, the American newspaperman and wife who is always hunting for news, the fleeting vision of a beautiful hotel guest, and finally the arrival of the producer (with a horde of secretaries and a goose of a mistress) who regales his director with a gold watch.

After dinner, there is an open-air dance. Pace checks the estimates proposed by the discontented Conocchia, the foreign newspaperman persists with his questions, and Carla has sat at a table far away from the movie crowd.

Private affairs and gossip about the wealthy Mezzabotta alternate with comments about the movie, until the atmosphere is livened up with Maurice's display of telepathy, together with his partner Maya. The woman, blindfolded, guesses the contents of one woman's purse, and then the thoughts of a mature lady ("I would like to live another hundred years"), before going after Carla who, embarrassed, plays for time, and finally on to Gloria, who brusquely declines to participate in the experiment. When Maurice tries to transmit the director's secret thoughts, Moya is unable to pronounce the words and writes them in capital letters on a blackboard instead: ASA, NISI, MASA. At this point, the action switches to Guido's private childhood memories of the playfulness of baby's bath with mother, of the aunt, of other women in the house and of the grandmother who talks to herself in Romagnolo dialect about her life. In the house, there is a stairway leading to the rooms on the upper floor where the children are lovingly put to bed while, just before going to sleep, a little girl repeats the words "ASA, NISI, MASA" several times to Guido.

Late at night in the hotel foyer, the French actress, Mezzabotta and Gloria arrive just before the director's telephone call to his wife asking her to join him at the spa. Passing through the rooms used by the production crew, Guido, in spite of the lateness of the hour, has a quarrel with Conocchia, who reproaches him for not giving clear directions.

In his room, the director is assailed by existential and artistic doubts. Not even knowing what the movie's plot is going to be, he abandons himself to his imagination. Claudia appears, moving around the room, caressing him and lying down on the bed... The ringing of the telephone brings Guido back to reality: Carla, alarmed because she feels unwell, asks him questions about their relationship. But Guido is distracted with thoughts about the next day's meeting with the cardinal. This meeting turns out to be nothing but a polite formality, because the priest is preoccupied with the sobbing intonation of the albatross – the bird that sang the funeral song for the death of Diomedes.



Fellini with Claudia Cardinale, who plays the girl at the spring and the actress chosen for the part

Disappointed, Guido loses himself in the memory of Saraghina, and the time he went with his friends to see her dance the rumba for a few pennies, and was caught and severely punished by the priests at his school. Guido will return to the woman at the end of the episode.

While at lunch, Daumier continues to take apart the movie's poetic/thematic structure, and the mention of Suetonius and the Caesars impels the action into the spa's steam baths, where the guests, swathed in white sheets, are immersed in salutary vapors. It is time for the second discussion with the religious authorities, which everyone expects to come up with a solution to their problems. But Guido only learns that the Church is everything, and that no salvation is possible outside of it.

Meanwhile, Luisa arrives with her sister, her friend Rosella and Enrico, a rejected suitor. All of them visit the spacecraft set, an impressive science fiction construction where the main scene of the mysterious movie is going to be shot. As some of them mount the scaffolding, Rosella, a clairvoyant, tells Guido that it is time for him to make up his mind. The evening ends with an argument in bed between husband and wife, who is wild with jealousy.

The following morning, at the coffee bar, Guido denies that he still has a relationship with Carla (seated close by), but Luisa is more and more bitter about the betrayal and the vulgarity of her rival. The director imagines that his wife, his mistress, Saraghina, the French actress, Gloria, the charming lady, Rosella and all the other women in

his life and in the movie can live together in the great house, surrounding him with attentiveness. One sees how the older ladies of that harem, the focal point of this scene of jealousy, love, gratitude and also of rebellion, must leave the field to the younger ones, and retire to the floor above.

The conclusion of the harem episode coincides with the beginning of the showing of the rushes. Guido imagines he has Daumier hanged. Although it is late to be choosing the actresses for the women's roles, Guido cannot make up his mind. He seems incapable of continuing with the movie. He is in crisis, exacerbated by the fight with Luisa, who can no longer stand his hypocrisy.

Meanwhile, Claudia arrives, the girl he imagined at the spring, which allows him to remain vague with Pace. Together in his car, he talks about the movie with her, of his fears and feelings, of love. They stop near the spring and, after a preview of the scene, Claudia realizes that there is no part for her.

Just when everything seems to be lost, the movie-machine goes into action: the movie is going to be shot. Pace has already called a press conference for the following afternoon.

At the spacecraft set, which is crowded with photographers, radio and television newsmen and foreign journalists, the producer pressurizes the director into finally revealing something about the movie. Guido, not knowing what to say, hides under the table. His failure is complete, just like his confusion between the figures in the

movie and those in real life. Perhaps he would like commit suicide: one pistol shot and his mother's voice calling him, and the fiasco is over.

At this point, the movie is called off. The scaffolding is dismantled, while Daumier draws his own rational, consoling conclusions. Guido is about to leave the set when Maurice approaches him and announces that everything is ready, they are about to start. As Daumier continues talking, Guido sees the characters in the movie, together with those from his life, appear, all dressed in white: Claudia, the women from his childhood, Saraghina, his mother and father, Carla, the prelates, the lady of the spa, Luisa and all the others. They form a line...

They have come for him, the filming can start. Four clowns and a boy wearing his old school uniform enter the scene. Playing instruments, they welcome the characters who, under Guido's direction, form a circle, joined by all the faces Guido has dreamed of and met right up until that moment. Guido closes the circle, asking Luisa to take his hand once more.

Night has fallen. The musicians leave the illuminated track. The last one to leave the scene is the boy, as the lights begin to dim, and then go out completely.

If one called *La Dolce Vita* an epic, one can say that *Eight and a Half* (1963) is an extraordinary vision of memory

turned into fable, the autobiography of a crisis overcome through the power of imagination and a freedom of expression never before seen on screen.

As Pierre Kast has noted, "everything that one can say against this movie is already in the movie", in confirmation of its uniqueness and the inimitable power of its visual narrative. One certainly need not go back as far as *Hamlet* to find examples of a play within a play – the illustrious antecedent of a movie within a movie – and it would be just as unproductive to go back to André Gide's *The Counterfeiters*, with its writer *manqué*, even if Gide stands in relation to Edouard as Fellini does to Guido. Moreover, Guido is the materialization of dream autobiography, which is to say, the fantastic conjunction of Fellini's kind of realism, subsuming as much of the real and the invented as can be embodied there.

Guido's experience is almost exclusively passive: he is continually summoned, chased after, greeted, interviewed, besieged, surprised, advised, accused, flattered, derided, punished, stimulated, loved and remembered because he is

The procession of characters and figures from Fellini's onelric world proceeds towards the unforgettable encirclement at the end of the movie





*Fellini and
Marcello
Mastroianni sort
out how a truck
is going to run
during the
resumption of
filming for Eight
and a Half*

so much at the disposition of life and other people as to be caught in a spider-web from which he does not know how to free himself. He runs away and everyone runs after him, calling Guido, Guido, Guido, and naturally Guidino (the producer) and Guidone (Mezzabotta). *Eight and a Half* is the exaltation of this name, whose echoes make us think of *Viaggio con Anita* (Journey with Anita), or *Viaggio d'Amore* (Journey of Love), and its hero Guido a project, originating in the memory of his father's death, that Fellini wanted to realize ever since 1957, in order to tell about the trip home of a writer with his lover, directed by Mario Monicelli. The movie came out in 1979 with the same title – *Viaggio con Anita* – but with specific changes. In the meantime, Fellini will disseminate many of his ideas up until the time of *Amarcord*.

In any case, Guido (derived from the Germanic *widu- wood, woods, forest; or *wida- distant) reveals spaces and contexts analogous to inner labyrinths in which the personage is lost as if in a dark and menacing forest. Not only that, but in a movie in which the *meta* aspect, so to speak, is essential – *metanarrative*, *metaphorical*, *metacinematographic*, *metacatholic*, *metapsychoanalytic*, and one could even reach the point of saying *metaneorealistic* and *metallic*, like the great spaceship set – it is interesting to interpret the etymology of Anselmi: it is composed of *ansa- (god, divinity) and *helma- (protection, helmet, magic hood), and its original meaning could be 'divine protection' or 'helmet, magic hood, given by the gods'. So we have a *god* (the director), equipped with a magic hood (Fellini's well-known hat, black and wide-brimmed, a kind of Faustian *Narrenkappe*) who, for some reason or other, has gone astray from the road of realism (of protection) which his earlier movies have followed. He has gone astray in a *forest* of symbols, in a dense mass of faces and situations which straddle and mix into each other within his two realities. At a certain point in the movie, Guido explicitly asks himself where he has gone wrong, and finds himself facing a menacing, futuristic forest of metal scaffolding – a return to the structure in *The Temptations of Doctor Antonio*, and a presage of the opening silhouettes of *Fellini: a Director's Notebook*.

The self-analysis of *Eight and a Half* clearly makes it a therapeutic movie, like *La Dolce Vita*. However, if the latter was an open accusation, a society on trial, the story of Guido is a confession. In other words, that which before moved outwards, here is introjected with an impulsive dynamic because the protagonists of the mind and reality demand a precise place within the director's body and spirit.

Among the many ideas that one can follow within the narrative of the movie, *mutatis mutandis*, a set-up analogous to the experience of the hero in revisiting chosen tableaux,

not necessarily in chronological order, but according to the logic of the dreams and psychic associations that permeate the whole movie.

The creator-creation motif, even if nothing new, is treated in an original way due to the lucid description of that relationship, and because of the switching that happens to the memory/fear equation. This latter is a *mis en abyme*, which is to say, that practice in heraldic science that consists of placing, within a coat-of-arms, another smaller version of the first one, and a third identical coat-of-arms that is smaller still, and so on. In this study of artistic creation oscillating between private life and psychoanalytic cinema, Fellini, in the guise of Guido, seems truly to refer to the phrase in Gide's *The Counterfeiters*: "I am very fond of the fact that, within a work of art, one can find the subject of that work again, transposed to the list of characters."

The human types in *Eight and a Half* are not on a Pirandellian search for their author, but it is rather the latter who calls them, and is himself called. When reality is going nowhere, boring, or slowed down with fatigue, it is then that Guido/Fellini, always eager for the unforeseeable, looks around in search of an antidote to the fear of the vacuum, and ends up invaded by visual or inexplicable pretexts that trigger memory and, along with it, the people, events or places of childhood.

The 'there' comes from Claudia's vision, the girl at the spring. In an overexposed photo – and so, for the whole movie, this will be the chromatic solution for the black and white 'fear and memory' color – the young Claudia Cardinale, with her deep, hoarse voice, triggers the stream-of-consciousness, the flow of a man's consciousness, in teetering balance between the possible and the illusory. The past only exists in being rendered anew, and memory does not express itself as something always the same, something filed away once and for all; and so Fellini's *art of memory* is the imaginary recreation of traces of the past. All of this, while igniting the joy of those who consider Fellini to be a great visionary outside the freedom of pre-packaged time, helps to confirm, if it were necessary, the false character of his cinema, expressed in the arbitrary invention of memories and of the past, among which live the true data of reality and the equally true ones of imagination: in *Eight and a Half*, memory enriches even more the artifices of his poetic imagination.

Guido's second dream episode comes after the love affair with Carla. The mother's gesticulations introduce the cemetery dream, where his father (once more played by Annibale Ninchi of *La Dolce Vita*) awaits him. The two are expecting the producer and Conocchia – both figures incarnating for Fellini 'sane and reciprocal diffidence' – and the substitution of Luisa for the figure of his mother.



Guido (Mastroianni) carries gifts through the snow for the women in his ideal harem, a set based on Fellini's memories of the country house in Romagna where they used to go on holiday when he was a child

Conversely, the episode with the mind-readers, Maurice and Maya, is one of voluntary memory stimulated by the gibberish "ASA, NISI, MASA", which can be the word 'anima' (soul), that which is continually threatened in Guido's mind by the difficulty of accepting reality for what it is. If the future, which is to say, the movie that is to be shot, is full of inner disquiet, a little peace can be found by the flight into childhood, the collective bath, the women of the big house and the high beds, before the three words which serve to make the images slide in the direction of present time.

The space-time inconsistencies, with the wadded, extremely white elements which obliterate the coordinates of metropolitan modernity and, above all, the flashback and flash forward, splendidly 'unessential', are incoherences that come close to *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), but less cerebral, simpler and more Mediterranean. This is illustrated by the elements of the blocked film director's private life as well as the regressive episode of Saraghina, subsequent to the second vision of the girl at the spring, and the useless encounter with the priest. Guido/Fellini knows very well – unlike the wager of the exponents of the *nouveau roman* Resnais and Robbe-Grillet – that the characters' prison is not spatial (the great hotel or the spa) but mental, interior and, having to decide that it is finally a good idea to do so with a little *coup de théâtre*, astute and moving. That is why both Guido and Fellini need Saraghina: by now, the autobiographical is introjected in order to make clear how and why a Catholic education interacts with an interior monologue, with the impulses, the fascination with the Prohibited, Sin, Woman.

In this film-essay so full of poetry and *bravura* – an excellent example of that kind of 'umbilical cinema' so frequently attacked because of the propensity of certain directors to "vomit out everything all over themselves" – there are other important problems. Above all else, the question of grace, bound to that of happiness. When enveloped in steam, the cardinal reminds Guido: "Why should you be happy? That is not your business. Who told you that you came into the world to be happy?"; during the first conversation, Guido had explained: "The hero of my story had a Catholic upbringing, like everyone else for that matter, which gave him certain complexes, certain needs... no longer possible to suppress. A prince of the Church appears to him like a holder of a Truth which he can no longer accept even though it fascinates him. And so he seeks a contact, help, maybe a stroke of lightning..." And if the 'cinematographer' is "too nonchalant about mixing sacred and profane love together", the question of revelation and ritual leads the problem back to Guido the man, his weaknesses and his confusions, with which he has to live. After the night-time discussion with Conocchia, he wonders if his is not "a crisis of *inspiration*? And what if it were not one that passes, my dear man? What if it were the final collapse of a huge liar who no longer has any flair or talent?", concluding with 'Sgulp!', a trivializing comment lifted straight from the comics.

The problem of doubt is related with that of chaos, to which the girl at the spring uselessly tries to provide a solution: "I have come for good and all. I want to create order, clean things up. I want to create order. I want to create clean..." , maybe through love, while erotic love breaks the

circle. Conjugal love (Luisa) and sex (Carla, also shot in the rushes) cannot, by themselves, oppose the disorder of life in which one carries the weight of one's own contradictions.

On two occasions, confession is the key to the meaning: in the upshot, after the unproductive conversation with Claudia, and before the blocking of the narrative that leads up to the finale, when Guido will admit: "I don't feel like telling a story that will be another lie." And once again on the visit to the spacecraft set, when speaking with Rossella, he gives voice to his fears: "I thought I saw things so clearly. I wanted to make an honest movie without telling lies of any kind. I thought I had something so simple, so simple to say. A movie that could be of a little use to everyone. Something that could help us bury for good everything dead that we carry within ourselves. And instead, I am the first to lack the courage to bury anything whatsoever. Now my head is all confused and I have this tower on my back... Who knows why things took this turn? When did I go off track? I have absolutely nothing to say, but I want to say it all the same."

It goes without saying that this limitation, transformed

into an attribute, into decidedly artistic imperiousness, carries with it a 'guiding spirit' which will make it possible to make the movie within a movie. Air, like water, is dynamic, expresses movement, the unknown, cinema, and that tender and timorous wind will bring Guido, together with his waves of memory, the inevitable, languid childhood conditionings, the first experiences of erotic curiosity and the mystique of punishment in the Saraghina episode, the authentic prototype of the Fellini woman, "the terrible, splendid dragon that represents the first traumatic vision of sex in the life of the protagonist."

This is how Fellini recalls it in *Fare un film* ('Making a movie'): "Saraghina was a gigantic prostitute, the first one I ever saw in my life on the beach at Fano, where I spent the summer vacation with the Salesian boarding school. She was called that because the fishermen obtained her favors in exchange for a few pounds of the cheapest kind of fish – *saraghine* (white bream). From us children, she was content to take small change, or even roast chestnuts [is this why roast chestnuts appear in Fellini's list of 'things I like'? It is likely, mainly because, within his process of falsification,

Guido as a child (Marco Gemini) at school, dominated by the stern, frowning portraits of former religious instructors





Two meta-Fellinian portrayals of our hero in the harem scene



roast chestnuts in summertime are perfectly plausible], and the golden buttons of our uniforms might suffice, or the candles that we stole from church. She lived in a little fortress on a high rock from the time of the great war, a kind of den that smelled of tar, rotting wood and fish. For two cents, she would let us see her rear, which entirely blocked out the heavens. For one cent more she moved it a little, and for four cents she turned face forward. What an immense belly! And under that hairy part, what was it, a cat? It is true, in my movies there is often the image of an abundantly formed woman, big, potent... But Saraghina is an infantile representation of a woman, one of the many and varied expressions of the thousand ways in which a woman can personify herself. It is a woman rich in animal femininity, immense and impossible to seize, but at the same time nutritive, just as an adolescent, hungering for life and sex, perceives her; an Italian adolescent obstructed and thwarted by priests, the church, family and a failed upbringing; an adolescent who, seeking a woman, imagines and wants her to be 'a big hunk of woman'. Like a poor man who, thinking about money, talks and raves, not about thousands of lire, but of millions, even billions."

And there is no continuity between all these women of the world and those of Guido's movie. Woman, as she is presented in the cinematic image, is gigantically enlarged, connected to the symbolism of the protagonist, who sees himself and his childish world in macroscopic dimensions. We are dealing with Fellini's *esthetics of memory* in an invented past revisited (and not its photocopy). A *dialectic of memory* that, without special effects, mixes items from personal life with those about the making of the movie, the harem episode, the finale. Let us look briefly at them in this running order.

At the spa, because he is physically a bit run down, Guido has nightmares about the movie, which does not satisfy him. He hides, he flees. This flight is impossible in reality, as in the opening dream, he is tied to a metal structure, which may be a symbol of the spacecraft set. And then, while taking the waters, not being able to avoid seeing the girl at the spring, he begins to experience real and evanescent phenomena, which come and spontaneously impose themselves, as in an alternated montage.

Mezzabotta is the first person in real life to call him 'old Snaporaz'. He does not talk to him about movies, but about his new love situation, in which he does not feel ridiculous even though he knows people are saying catty things about Gloria being with him because of his money. Guido, unfortunately, does not feel this kind of indifference, does not want to be seen with Carla, and, when Luisa throws his relationship with 'that cow' in his face, he claims, without convincing her, that he put an end to that episode years ago.

With regard to his private life, the figure of Maurice takes on great importance, a character who is the opposite of Daumier, the only one to really read his soul and thus be able to set the production of the movie in motion.

Daumier, in turn, displays Fellini's antinomy between reason and feeling, and remarks on the heavy impediments culture places in the way of the free manifestation of naturalness, passion, art. Throughout the whole movie, this French 'oracle' warns Guido about improvising, about the non-essentials of the script, thus offering Fellini a formidable critical and self-critical escape hatch – a total and ferocious shield against the possible limitations of *Eight and a Half*, and an ideal final commentary on Fellini's *opera omnia*, but also capable of really pushing Guido towards the completely fascinating border with the indefinite and the magical.

Daumier begins right at the heart of the matter, as if, by questioning the script, he wanted to block the girl's action: "Look, even at a first reading, it is obvious that the lack of a problematic idea or, if you will, a philosophical premise, turns the movie into a succession of absolutely gratuitous episodes... even if they could be amusing to the degree that they are realistically ambiguous. One asks oneself, what are the authors really after? Are they trying to make us think? Do they want to scare us? From the very start, the project reveals its poverty of poetic inspiration... Excuse me, but this could be the most pitiful demonstration of the fact that the cinema is fifty years hopelessly behind all the other arts. Then there is the narrative, which is not even up to the level of an avant-garde movie, while having all the deficiencies of the kind."

A little later, almost in a kind of juncture between the beginning and the arrival of Carla at the station: "And the willful apparitions of this girl at the spring, what are they supposed to mean? An offer of purity, of warmth to the hero? Of all the symbols with which the movie abounds, this one is the worst." And then, in commenting on the Saraghina episode: "What does this mean? This is a character from the memories of his childhood! It has nothing to do with a true critical conscience. No. If you really want to mount a polemical attack on the Catholic conscience in Italy, well then, my dear friend, in that case, believe me, the first thing absolutely required is a much higher cultural level, as well as inexorable logic and lucidity. Excuse me, but... your *tender ignorance* is entirely negative. Your little memories bathed in nostalgia, your inoffensive and fundamentally emotional evocations are the actions of an accomplice... The Catholic conscience... but just think for a moment of what Suetonius was during the time of the Caesars! No, you begin with an ambition to denounce, and end up aiding and abetting like an accomplice! Don't you see all the confusion, the ambiguity...?"

The writer's arguments gain the upper hand in the indecision of the artist. This advantage is interrupted – in the imagination – when the concrete movie gets moving ahead of the meandering of mental cinema, with the occasion of the rushes. Daumier says: "Frankly, I would like to be useful with some kind of advice. This evening, I think I perceive that you are called upon to resolve a problem that, in my opinion, has no solution. That is, to put a precise, definitive face on a mob of characters that, to judge by the script, are approximative, generic, non-existent. [...] Listen to this: 'The solitary I that turns upon its own axis and feeds entirely on itself ends up being choked by a great sob or a great laugh.' These are Stendhal's words, written during his Italian sojourn. If, rather than throwing them away, one read the messages contained within chocolate wrappings from time to time, one would avoid many illusions." And with these words, the director imagines that the intellectual has hung himself and freed him once and for all from cold logic and cultural rigor.

Daumier's leave-taking sanctions the chaos and incontinence of the project. That chaos which the producer had tried to exploit in order not to allow the press conference be a failure: "Talk, answer. I bought this mess of yours. I have been paying for it all for months. If you don't make



Another childhood memory in his paternal grandmother's house, with the smell of laundry, the sound of the Romagna dialect and disturbing shadows

this movie, I will ruin you." It is a caustic representation of those whom Fellini fought all his life in order for his movie titles and endings not to be changed and, in the final analysis, to defend tooth and nail his dignity and identity as an artist. Certainly the part of the producer Pace, played by Guido Alberti, does not speak like the 'legendary' Peppino Amato, who once said apropos of *La Dolce Vita* that "there is sporadic interest in the arrival of this movie", or who maintained that, with the title *Via Veneto*, the movie would remain a 'millstone' in cinematic history.

It is Daumier again who thinks he can sum it all up with the following words: "You have done very well. Believe me, this is a great day for you. Decisions are hard to make, I know, but we intellectuals – I say that because I consider you to be one – have the duty to remain lucid to the end. There are already so many superfluous things in the world, one ought not to add more disorder to disorder. In the final analysis, losing money is part of a producer's job. My compliments, there was nothing else that could have been

done, and he has got what he deserves for having gone so capriciously into such a frivolous venture. No, believe me, do not be nostalgic or remorseful. It is better to destroy than create when one does not create those few necessary things. And then too, is there anything so pure and righteous in the world that it has the right to live? A wrong movie for him is just an economic matter, but for you, at the point where you are now, it could be the end. Better to let everything collapse and strew salt as the ancients did to purify the battlefields. All we really need is a little hygiene, cleaning up, disinfectant. We are drowning in words, images, sounds that have no reason to exist, which come out of a vacuum and return to a vacuum. All one can ask of an artist truly worthy of the name is this one loyal act: train himself to silence. Do you remember Mallarmé's praise of the blank page? [...] If you cannot have everything, nothing is true perfection. Forgive me for this excess of quotations, but we critics do what we can. Our true mission is to sweep away the thousands of abortions that everyday obscenely try to be born. And what you want is nothing less than to leave



Movie folk in discussion: Conocchia (Mario Conocchia), the production director, reports to the worried producer Pace (Guido Alberti) about the expensive creative ineffectiveness of the director Guido



At the thermal baths, healing vapours and dark priestly silhouettes emphasize the magical-expressionist ambience of Eight and a Half

behind an entire movie like a cripple leaves his deformed footprint behind him. What monstrous presumption to imagine that others would profit from the squalid catalogue of your errors. And why does it matter to you to sew together the tatters of your life, your various memories or the faces of people whom you were never capable of loving?"

During this eulogy of silence, which we will come across again in *The Voice of the Moon*, the director and Daumier are once again in a car, in the same location where the opening dream occurred. Now, however, reality no longer intrudes on the dream, but just the opposite, as the wind of the unforeseeable has begun to blow again, causing the abandonment of reason in favor of Maurice, the personification of show business, of pretence, the vocation of the imaginary.

Other phases of the narrative also see the fusion of existential segments with those relating to work: the phone call to the wife is placed between the French actress and the production rooms; the visit to Carla, who is sick, is shoved into the space between the creation of the figure of the girl

at the spring and the distraction caused by the cardinal's visit; not to mention the steam baths into which the prelate's visit is immersed in anticipation of the creative mist that enshrouds Guido on the visit to the set.

The height of the confusion and panic comes with the press conference, a necessary step in the overcoming of the cinematic and real dreams contained in the harem episode, the personal place of Guido the man, just as the set will be his artistic place. In effect the two *narrative locations* are one and the same: the place where all the women of his lives are gathered in a harem without jealousy or lies so that his desire for Woman can finally be realized. Before Women and Characters can unite in a complete festive circle, the characters will first have to go through a screen test. Here cinema demands his attention, requires clear ideas and no more embarrassing and metaphorical playing around, analogous to what it will demand at the press conference where the two worlds of the director reach the deepest pit of negativity, total defeat.

But it is the world of feelings which creates a crisis for that

man of the cinema. In fact, no sooner does Guido, freed from a sense of guilt, feel a new sensation that makes him tremble with happiness than the Cinema, as a character within the movie, which has up to then been frozen by the paralysis of insincere feelings, spreads its imaginative wings and, with a touch of Maurice's magic baton, without fakery or conniving – which is to say, with all the blessed bag of tricks and deceptions of the director Fellini – gets down to work.

The fable-making effect of those remembered is white – white clothes, veils, hair and white surroundings – at the moment when they are 'grafted' with the movie people. Guido's ghosts crowd around his collaborators in a final regenerating bath after the purifying immersions (holy water, infants' baths, bath in the harem with hat on head) while the angels of the circus, the clowns, give the musical rhythm and the melancholy atmosphere necessary to spur Fellini's self-awareness towards its epilogue. Here the whip of the harem has become the megaphone, and the clown with the black director's hat can set up the final celebration of life, the last turn on the merry-go-round. Afterwards, the movie might even truly begin.

For us, meanwhile, *Eight and a Half* remains an inimitable *recherche*, a psychoanalytic journey in which the couch is replaced by the trolley, and mounted on it a movie camera that 'speaks' *sotto voce*, fluttering in the entrancing wind. An experiment in deciphering the individual and his feelings, beyond which, however, there lies a mysterious territory which one cannot clarify either in life or in the cinema. And this problematic aspect of *Eight and a Half* refers one to something *behind* it, which refers to another *Eight and a Half*, and then another still. There remains the initiatory itinerary on three levels, the projected film, the existence of the director/individual, and the ranks of the phantomlike characters of his imaginary universe. It is a little as if, paradoxically, Guido Anselmi, alias Federico Fellini, were in himself a kind of 'collective imagination', a fantasy of the singular, secretly hidden in the intimacy of his inner but intolerant eye under that magic cap given him by the gods of the seventh art which is the cinema.

Nearly ten years had passed since Giulietta Masina had last worked with her husband. The imprinting of the legendary Gelsomina, her strong characterization, the wide-open eyes and the clownish expression on her face, which had merged in the 'buffoonery' of Cabiria, had really left their mark. The ten year break, a very long period for the actress, had only partially succeeded in making the public forget the expression and the humanity which had decreed her international success. Ten years before finally being able to recount a different reality, almost as if Fellini, too, had wanted to dig into the universe of his 'unfamiliar' woman


in order to render it in dream images probably referring to a delicate phase of their lives.

Not that there was a lack of other projects: before *Juliet* and her spirits had delineated themselves, Fellini had thought of having his wife act the role of a nun (after the discovery of an ancient diary in the convent of *La Strada*), a famous medium (Eileen Garrett, a personal acquaintance), a fortune-teller and other characters. All of these subjects were never realized, partly because the director feared being accused of mysticism and magic, but perhaps mostly because they were roles that may have been unsuitable for Masina's personality. All of them, however, ideas dispersed into underground rivulets, as often happens with Fellini, only to reappear in the construction of the interpretation.

Juliet of the Spirits (1965) "was born of Giulietta and for Giulietta. It had a long, long gestation that went back to the time of *La Strada*. I wanted to do another movie with Giulietta, but above all I had the feeling that my desire to use cinema as an instrument to penetrate certain manifestations of reality could find its best guide in Giulietta."

His experience of Jung's theories by way of long conversations with Ernest Bernhard not only deepened Fellini's ideas about the importance and meaning of dreams, but stimulated his interest in magic and the occult, convincing him that there existed a 'terrain of the unknown', and fascinating him with the 'promise of the arcane', the contact with dimensions that go beyond the senses.

The discovery of Jung also helped him have more confidence in fantasy and to better understand its importance. His visit to the Room of the Small Memories in Switzerland enlightens him with regard to the deep influence of dreams on the understanding of oneself. "It was as if Jung had written specifically for me [...] I managed to apply what I found there to my way of being and to shake off the sense of inferiority or guilt that had remained since the days of my childhood, the recriminations of my parents and teachers, the mockery of the other kids for whom being different meant being inferior. To follow Jung is like going through a door already opened, that of 'the other' black and white reality of *Eight and a Half*. That reading taught him that mystery can be assimilated perfectly well by reason, and suggested a point of contact between the real and the imaginary, like the inner life of *Juliet of the Spirits*, torn between dream-like visions and hard, depressing reality. Such a balance requires the conservation of that sensory perception within which every individual's life is wrapped and which, if it is suppressed or not acknowledged, tips the balance of the unconscious towards the prevalence of fantasies and, as Jung once again teaches, of ghosts.

 Juliet's life is really quite unstable. We encounter her, a bourgeois woman on the threshold of middle-age, as she is preparing a candle-lit dinner to celebrate her fifteenth wedding anniversary. Giorgio, her brilliant, worldly husband (very much like Mezzabotta in *Eight and a Half*, and played by the same actor, Mario Pisu), appears in the company of many friends: Val, the lawyer; the sculptress and medium, Genius, who subjects Juliet to her experiments.

During a seance, Iris is evoked, and interrupted by Olaf, an evil spirit who speaks to Juliet, telling her that she is a nobody and of no account. Juliet faints with emotion, while a telephone call with no one on the line interrupts the proceedings.

The next day, as soon as Giorgio leaves, Juliet believes she sees a monster emerging from the fountain. In reality, it is just the gardener. On the beach with her nieces, she describes her childhood visions to a doctor friend. She closes her eyes and believes she is seeing Iris. In reality, it is Susy, her exuberant neighbor who lives in the next villa. Juliet dozes off and sees an old man pulling on a rope which he passes to her. She also pulls and, from the sea, emerges a raft with several dead horses, a crude amphibian laden with obscene figures, and a second with barbaric ones. On the way home, Juliet meets the sisters Adele and Sylva with their beautiful mother, all three sophisticated, gaudy, talkative, truly her opposite. Gossiping, they make accusations against Giorgio, but Juliet apparently takes no notice of what they say. Before they go off, the mother seriously warns Juliet to take more care of herself.

When her husband comes home, Juliet wants to tell him about her dream adventure, but Giorgio falls asleep and calls out the name of Gabriella, his lover. Juliet is worried and, the next morning, asks for an explanation, but without results.

Val invites her to a meeting with Bishma, the man-woman. In the big hotel where the meeting is being held, Juliet thinks she sees a wedding feast, and then again when she is ushered into the room for a private audience with the guru: once more she sees Iris transformed into Fanny, the immoral ballerina who eloped with her grandfather years ago. In the car, Juliet tells her friends about that flight and of how, in her imagination, she saw her grandfather fly off in the old circus airplane followed by the family.

At home in the evening, Juliet encounters José, a Spanish friend of Giorgio's who is preparing the 'oblivion' drink that Bishma had foreseen. While Juliet listens to the conversation, attracted by the poetic nature of their guest, Giorgio points the telescope towards Susy's house, whose orgiastic parties have provoked innumerable protests. In bed, Juliet tries once again to speak to her husband and, late that night, discovers him on the telephone to his lover.

More and more worried, she takes Adele's advice, and goes to the Lince detective agency. While at the home of her sculptress friend, she remembers a scene from her childhood. Convinced that God was hiding behind the trap-door on the ceiling of the nuns' toy theater, she made a pact with her friend Laura that whoever saw Him first had to tell the other what he was like. During a play, Juliet, playing the role of



The director frames Sandra Milo in Giulietta of the Spirits

a little girl, is tied to a grate as a martyr, and is being elevated to heaven. She is just about to reach the trap-door when her grandfather interrupts the show and brings her back down in the name of reason, ranting against all forms of mystification and mysticism.

On the pretext of bringing her cat back, Juliet manages to make friends with Susy, who amiably gives her a tour of the villa, and introduces Juliet to her strange, ambiguous guests. A bicycle ride through the pine wood seals the women's friendship. But Juliet runs away when Susy invites her to be lifted in a basket to a tree house, where two boys are waiting to 'entertain' them.

Meanwhile, the detective's report on Giorgio is ready, and when she is shown the film of his betrayal, timid Juliet's reaction is to go to the party being held at her new friend's house. There, Juliet feels ill at ease and a little afraid of the guests, particularly Susy's Middle Eastern lover

and his very handsome son who, after a voyeuristic visit to surprise the couples making love, waits for Juliet in order to spend the night with her. Attracted by the boy's sensuality, Juliet is about to give in when, looking up, she sees in the mirror over the bed the martyr saint admonishing her, and she rushes off home.

Juliet gives a garden party for her and Giorgio's many friends, including an American psychotherapist. But the hostess is reluctant to go down to her guests, because she is in the throes of a new and more disturbing vision: the house is invaded by spirits. And she sees other ghosts when she goes down to the garden (the nuns, the martyrs, Iris and others). Giorgio goes off and the psychotherapist takes Juliet aside to make her own opinion known: unconsciously, she wants a definitive break with her faithless husband.

Juliet finally finds the strength to confront her rival, and goes to

Two opposing female characters square up to each other: the striking and slightly lascivious Susy (Sandra Milo) and the calm, passive wife, Juliet (Giulietta Masina)



Gabriella's house, ready to make a big scene. After a long wait, a telephone call makes her realize that Giorgio is now lost to her. At home, Giorgio is packing his bags and mutters excuses while Juliet stands in front of the television set where the close-up face of a clown looks at her in commiseration.

Now Juliet is alone. Spirits and real people invade every corner of the house and, in the bedroom, in front of a wardrobe door where God may be hiding, her mother appears, prohibiting Juliet from opening it. But this time, Juliet refuses to obey, saying that she is now no longer afraid. At these magic words, her beautiful mother immediately ages. Opening the wardrobe door, Juliet sees herself as the little martyr in the childhood show, just as her grandfather and Fanny arrive on the scene. The defeated spirits return whence they came, and Juliet sets off towards the pine wood, while a friendly voice murmurs that perhaps it can be of use to her.

The subject of matrimony is the pretext for *Juliet of the Spirits*, a story composed of various other stories, probably including that of the Fellinis. Juliet "exemplifies one kind of Italian woman who, due to her upbringing and what she has been told of the state of matrimony, believes that marriage automatically brings happiness. Each time she discovers it is not true, she does not understand or know how to face the situation."

In *La Strada*, Gelsomina nullifies herself in Zampanò, even though she is far superior to him. But Juliet, faced with a similar insensitivity in Giorgio – the vacuous second lead in the life of a couple in crisis – will learn through hard knocks not to defend him all the time; and, in time, she will escape from under that repressive education which has turned her into an insipid woman, an unhappy prisoner. In short, a rich, modern Gelsomina, she allows herself to be abandoned, only to begin living a real life again.

"In my movies I have often felt the need to represent the degeneration, the caricature of a marital relationship. It is problematic, the most problematic of all. It is profoundly individual. You cannot regulate it with collective norms imposed from the outside by the power of taboos. It ought to be forbidden to sit back in a marriage. Many of us stretch out passively on the laws of nature deformed by current usage and let ourselves be sucked out and swallowed by matrimony, neglecting its highest aim, the only one: the attempt to form a true union." Giorgio and his wife only achieve the appearance of a true union, a little like Guido and Luisa in *Eight and a Half*. The reference is not an accidental one, because in *Juliet of the Spirits* one gets the impression that Fellini wanted to complete the portrait of a marital relationship that had only been sketched out in the preceding movie, where Guido-Fellini was too distracted by his own crisis of inspiration to pay any real attention to Luisa's anguish.

Within the story of the protagonist, the simple autobiographical reflection of the fulfillment of a true

marital union is loaded with psychoanalytical meanings, touching upon communication, "a man's difficulty in speaking of woman", but of the contrary as well. As if, once having overcome the existential crisis to a large degree, Fellini felt the impelling need to expose the question of the couple's alienation, even while knowing that he had not the necessary clarity or honesty to do so. Here he aims, in words, at the intention of "giving woman back her true independence, her unarguable and inalienable dignity."

It is a first goal, a prophetic vision of the new feminine condition at a time when one scarcely heard the word feminism pronounced, and coming furthermore from the creator of *La Dolce Vita*, the man who exalted Anita Ekberg. This vision, however, was not shared by Giulietta Masina who, perhaps for the first time, opposed her husband with a will of iron on several counts. First of all, on esthetic grounds, because she wanted to look more attractive in the movie, but mostly because of the content. "Giulietta and I were in disagreement: each of us interpreted the future of the character in a different way. Because of my respect for her ability to delineate character, I asked for her advice. But from the moment her husband leaves her, our ideas were completely different. I stubbornly defended my position. But, with the passing of time, I came to understand that she was right. [...] In her opinion, Juliet was not on the point of finding herself, but of losing herself." This was because, as usual, Fellini the clairvoyant was too far ahead of the times. During that time, an abandoned woman with her upbringing would have actually been a woman destroyed.

Incontestable, however, is the heroine's flight into her very private world of memories. Under the influence of Bernhard and Jung – 'the older brother' – Fellini puts the dreams front stage, together with a whole series of symbols connected with them. Naturally, the director cannot help but begin with the world of childhood: like children, Juliet has "a hazy, emotional, dreamy relationship with reality. Everything is fantastic [...] a gigantic spectacle, gratuitous and marvelous, a kind of boundless, breathing amoeba where everything lives, subject and object, confused in a single unstoppable flow, visionary yet unaware, fascinating yet terrifying, from which the watershed, the boundary of consciousness, has not yet emerged." For Fellini, if those infantile visions had continued into maturity, they would probably swallow up one's entire capacity to think and act. "The important thing would be to rediscover, on the conscious level, that visionary faculty. Just because it is one of the possibilities of human nature and there is no reason to deprive oneself of it."

In the light of this information, one can get a better focus on Juliet's character, which is that of a woman who has to learn to walk alone, even while experiencing situations that put her in a disadvantaged position with regard to any sort



Sandra Milo, who in Juliet of the Spirits also plays the part of the frivolous Fanny, enriches the gallery of spirits which haunt Juliet



The mysterious, striking clairvoyant (Valeska Gert) will assist our heroine in overcoming the distress caused by her own imagination

of provocation, ready to bow her head right up to the threshold of middle age, when she is conceded that which was denied to Gelsomina and Cabiria: assistance from that particular power of her visions, not a repressed nebula, but assimilated into her personality as a balancing element. Having a simple nature, Juliet is prey to phenomena which, in a more structured personality, would have little influence, or at least be kept under control. Instead, she allows herself to be contaminated, to be influenced by that magical world inhabited by subhuman beings, petulant spirits, which she perhaps faces with less anxiety than she does the humans around her: hypocrites like Giorgio, the detectives, her sisters or women friends, swindlers like the lawyer, the sculptress, Bishma and his court, and the most repressive

and regressive of all, her very beautiful mother, the model of a woman and, at the same time, of a movie star (played by the superbly elegant and charming Caterina Boratto).

The magical landscape that opens up before this 'Alice in Spirit Land', with its intense colors (Fellini's first color movie), is an intimate part of herself, which is why Juliet forms an immediate familiarity with sinful Susy, who is so apparently different from her, and slips pleasantly into the ambience of her court of miracles, the very antithesis of the beautiful people who frequent her own villa at Fregene.

The spirit world that enshrouds the foundations of the subconscious deeply affect Juliet's life, even if they seem, at first, to escape from ordinary sensory perception. Far too much of a contrast to real life, but gradually more absorbing, little

by little Juliet accepts them as representing 'another' reality that is gradually less frightening. At bottom, Susy's villa, the witch's house of fairy tales, belongs to all climes and epochs. "Our dreams and nightmares are the same ones that people had three thousand years ago. The same basic fears that enjoy living in our homes were experienced by them in their caves." With regard to the myriad characters and visions of her inner conflict, Juliet's courageous act consists of breaking that circle of fear and reliving the infantile role of the holy martyr to which her life has conformed by enduring her husband's lies, the superiority of her sisters, the repressions – including the esthetic one – of her mother.

Furthermore, Juliet settles accounts with the men in her subconscious who are – unlike the single one in her life – many: tempters, Middle Eastern satraps, bawling headmasters, barbarians, monsters. Her very human grandfather gets off scot-free, even though he abandoned her for the dancer Fanny. The reality of Juliet's soul finally emerges with the vision of the play, that is to say, when she manages to make contact with her childhood (the door behind which is God): an ingenuous dream to re-create, by recognizing it, her new personal equilibrium and a coming-

to-terms with the complex reality of her conscious existence, a long journey which gives her the strength to face life.

To return to a famous old quotation, one could really affirm, if it were still required, the ambivalent character of Fellini's personality: if the director was both Gelsomina and Zampanò, this time he really is Juliet in the deepest sense of the words: "*Giulietta c'est moi*".

As we have said, *Juliet of the Spirits* is also his first feature movie in color. Color as an expressive element in a movie where the protagonists are dreams, and inner life constituted no small challenge considering that "the story, its structure, its feeling, are determined and come to life exclusively through the colors, and it is therefore only the colors that can relate it, interpret it, express it." And they are the colors of memory and of visions "concept, feeling, as in truly great painting... Those who dream may see a red meadow, a green horse, a yellow sky, and these are not absurdities. They are images saturated with the feelings that inspired them." From now on, Fellini will give them his utmost attention and *Casanova* will be the text of his personal theory about colors.

In *Juliet of the Spirits*, Fellini takes a vaguely impressionistic



At the party at Susy's villa, Juliet turns down the chance of becoming the lover of the young, attractive newcomer (Fred Williams)

direction: the eye, a selective organ, brings out the things that strike him most in relationship to the emotional and cultural burden of the spectator, but who must come to terms with the lens that records "what the light, so variable in its movement, suggests to him from moment to moment", trying to accommodate everything within a "result that interprets, by means of faithfully expressing them, his idea, feeling and meaning, his recollection of color without its whole being spoiled, betrayed by the imponderables of lighting, shooting and printing." To visualize thoughts, create the magic of dreams where everything monstrous takes on plastic beauty, was a problem that could have made the expressionism of old black and white despair. But no, because Fellini, very modern, grants color the recognition of its power, the capacity to enrich his 'living pictures' and give them a new expressive dimension. In other words, he paints the images with the colors he carries within himself.

The movie subsequent to *Juliet of the Spirits* was to be *Il Viaggio di G. Mastorna*. Fellini recounts: "My first idea came during a plane journey in 1964, as we were landing. It was winter in New York, and I had a sudden vision of us crashing. Fortunately for the cinema, that vision did not come true, but it transformed itself into the reflection of another vision, that is to say, the theme of *Mastorna*, which Fellini proposed in 1965 to De Laurentiis. The following year, the director fell ill, perhaps because "I was afraid of doing that movie, or did not feel I was up to it. The sets had been built, the people hired, the money had been spent, but I did not feel like going ahead with it. I was suffering from acute neurasthenia aggravated not only by the need I felt to outdo everything I had done up until then, but also by the usual debilitating arguments with the producers. I even thought the movie was killing me because it did not want to be made. However that may be, I found myself in a hospital room at the beginning of 1967, convinced that I was terminally ill."

Happily recovered from the illness (the argument with De Laurentiis not entirely resolved), Fellini has a new producer, Alberto Grimaldi, a new scriptwriter, Bernardino Zapponi, and a new office in the auspicious Via della Fortuna in Rome. All these are positive promontory signals for a proposal by Raymond Eger to make a movie of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* as one episode of three for a movie entitled "Three master directors for the master of the shiver". Fellini does not give a definitive reply. He waits for more signals, but in reality he is giving the project a lot of thought, sucking on it like a sweet to draw the last drop of taste out of it and then let it sink into his world of visions.

Poe is not an author easy to translate into images, his dense style being constructed on a 'philosophy of composition' with precise and deceiving rhythms. For Zapponi "to violate that intimacy is an impious as well as



Polidor, faithful Fellini clown, playing the part of a blind elderly actor who is awarded a prize at the opening ceremony of an improbable catholic Western (Toby Dammit, third episode of The Spirits of the Dead)

difficult proposal. There is something shameless about dissipating those mists, extracting the episodes, the characters, giving them their independence. In the light of the sun, those characters turn to dust, the reflectors of the cinema put the shadows to flight."



Terence Stamp portrays Toby, a character partially based on the hero of Edgar Allan Poe's story *Never Bet the Devil Your Head*

Even a dreamy and mercurial director like Fellini, well disposed to extra-sensory magic and fascinated by the mysterious, could find himself in trouble faced with the disturbing atmosphere of Poe, unless he managed to produce the same neuroses, even, perhaps, without actually working with the text itself. In fact, unconvinced by the choice imposed by the French producers, Fellini tries to find an alternative story, and commissions the 'historical' secretary, Liliana Betti, to make brief summaries for him. Fellini would like to use the story *L'Appuntamento*, but it is too hard to handle (he will take up the idea again for the movie *Venezia*), and he turns to *L'Angelo Bizarro*. Finally, his imagination is captured by the clean, surreal demon of *Never Bet the Devil Your Head*. Not that he is entirely convinced by that "old limping man with the appearance of a venerable gentleman, as clean as his immaculate collar with a black apron and hair parted like a maiden's." But giving the devil the innocent appearance of a maiden, according to the mad law of contrasts, overturns the situation: "Is the devil ugly and evil? Let us make him attractive and innocent. He shall be a young boy. Better yet, a young girl" – in short, a familiar tempter, like the baby Cupid of Dr. Antonio or the tiny voice that offers help at the end of *Juliet of the Spirits*.

Probably due partly to the photo of the writer that Fellini

keeps in his wallet, he galvanizes himself and accepts the commission. The advance payment and the chance of putting *Mastorna* to one side seem to have given him enough enthusiasm to begin. Except that, after signing the contract, the project, as usual, loses motivation due to a hint of indisposition and an associated rejection crisis. He wants to do a different story, proposes Zapponi's *L'Autista* (but the rights for it have already been sold) or a different Poe, *The Premature Burial*, to be located in the Castelli Romani. This idea is rejected by the producers, so that there is nothing left for him to do but hedge his bets on the 'devil' movie.

All he has prepared is "that ending, created with all the coldness of the great clowns", but there are the remaining 25 minutes of the movie to be thought out, the most interesting of the three episodes to be released in 1968 with the title *The Spirits of the Dead* (the other two entrusted, by a process of elimination, to Roger Vadim's *Metzengerstein* and Louis Malle's *William Wilson*).


And so begin long nights of cruising in the car with the scriptwriter, primarily in the Castelli area, full of mysterious ruins that are an antithesis to the pleasure trips outside town and the meals in numberless *trattorias* that display effigies of chefs offering inviting plates of *fettucini* (figures which, in the movie, will suddenly leap out of the darkness

as anguished, disregarded signs of danger for the hero). With the problem of the location resolved, there remains the site where the hero is to die (it will be the broken bridge at Ariccia), but above all the selection of the leading actor.

Peter O'Toole would appear to be the perfect choice for the Shakespearian actor in his decline who comes to Italy to film the first 'Catholic Western'. After the first enthusiastic contact, however, O'Toole has second thoughts, probably recognising himself too well in the irascible and drunken Toby Dammit. Afraid of losing the public's favor, he declines, thus becoming perhaps the only famous actor ever to reject a part with Fellini.

After considering Richard Burton and Marlon Brando, the choice finally falls on Terence Stamp, rebaptized as Terenzio 'Francobollo' [literally 'postage stamp' in Italian], an actor sufficiently distraught and hallucinated to accept the challenge of an impossible wager. 'Terence Stamp,' Fellini writes, "arrived in Rome and, at first sight, I liked him for his boyish modesty. He was subjected to a long trial of make-up with Pierino Tosi, in an attempt to make him look as much as possible like Edgar Allan Poe, with imploring, frightened eyebrows. Then Pierino invented for him that

black velvet jacket with violet trimmings and a violet foulard. The result is a romantic, anguished hero, altogether similar to the timeless 'Edgardo' – as Fellini familiarly referred to the writer – for whom he nevertheless had such great admiration and respect as to impost upon himself a kind of detachment with regard to another artist's creative work whose primogeniture he recognizes, as he also did in the *Satyricon* and, more subtly, in *Casanova*.

 Toby Dammit, an unemployed English actor and an alcoholic, is signed up to shoot an Italian Western financed by Catholic parties. He arrives in Rome and, while stuck in a nightmarish traffic jam, he is approached by a gypsy who wants to read his hand through the car window. But, at the sight of his palm, she flees in alarm. Toby sees a little blonde girl, who invites him to play with her by throwing him a ball. During a television interview, the actor replies haughtily to the reporters' stupid questions, stating that he believes in the devil who is a little girl.

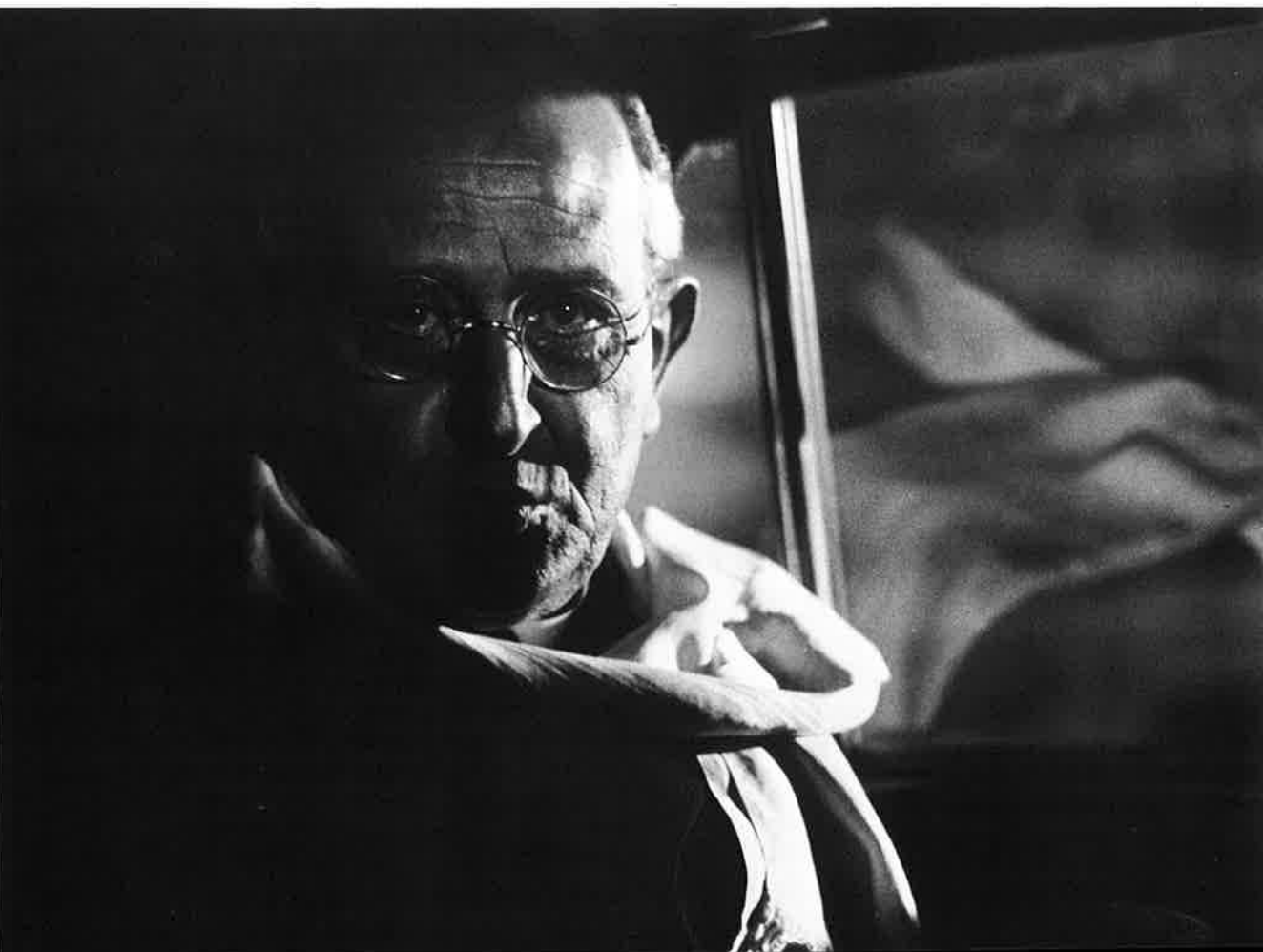
During a social evening at an eccentric night club, a *Lupa d'oro* award is presented to a blind old comedian. When Toby's turn comes, he recites the passage from *Macbeth*, "Life is a tale told by an idiot/ Full of sound and fury/ Signifying nothing" and, disgusted by the human fauna applauding him, he drives off in a rage in the flaming red Ferrari the producers have given him.

Dammit, the cursed actor who stands out in contrast to the gothic Roman atmosphere of the cinematographers' party, goes after his own personal ghosts before reciting some Shakespearean verse





*This despairing man's tragic destiny
frightens the gypsy who reads his palm*



*His own father, Spagna (Salvo Randone),
senses Toby Dammit's inner intensity,
and feels foreboding about his desperate
fate when he meets him at the airport*

Driving aimlessly, he arrives at the Castelli Romani where, in the darkness, the car headlights illuminate the advertising cut-outs outside the restaurants, a flock of sheep, night workers and several closed streets, like the hallucinatory course of his disrupted mind. He finally finds himself at a collapsed bridge, where the little girl reappears and invites him to play again. Toby accepts and launches the car at full speed in order to leap the gap in the bridge. He succeeds, but his head is cut off by a cable stretched in mid-air. The ball bounces over to where the head is lying: the devil-child has won the bet.

In 1969, when all Italian society is being rocked by youthful dissent, Fellini shoots *A Director's Notebook* and the *Satyricon*, works which, at first glance, appear to be entirely removed from the new demands for change. The former, made for television, represents a pause for meditation, a director's interval of indubitable interest, not so much because it offers revelations of surprises to come or mere explanations of what has been, but because it is a vision, with commentary on projects, ideas, fragments which the director, always reticent about these things, has in his sights on the set of his imagination.

The part dedicated to *Il Viaggio di G. Mastorna* is almost as touching as the text published in 1964. A Utopian movie, a ghost frame, a journey and a character constantly pondered, periodically taken up anew, feared, hated and never made, but it is nice to think that *all* his work constitutes the dream journey of Fellini-Mastorna. In time, it was transformed into an icon of cult movies, for which reason a revisiting of his little troupe constitutes a fine monument to the dream of a dream, to *Fellini's Unfinished*.

And speaking of dreams, it is well to remember that along the route from neo-realism to the fantastic, which is to say from *La Dolce Vita* to *Eight and a Half*, there is to be found the *Book of Dreams*, which Fellini began to compile along the lines indicated by Ernest Bernhard, writing down drawings and comments about his inexhaustible nightly dream activity. He methodically devoted time to these notes for about twenty years, filling large notebooks bound in leather or Varese paper, writing with China ink or felt-tipped pens. They are preserved at the Fondazione Federico Fellini in Rimini, presided over by his sister Maddalena, and have never been published except for a few dreams in the magazine *'Dolce Vita'*, No.3, 1987 and No.12, 1988, in the monthly *'Il Grifo'*, Nos.1-9, 1991, and particularly those printed in the catalogue *Federico Fellini* edited by Lietta Tornabuoni for the exhibition/conference held in 1995. These are seventeen dreams in color with titles, dates, hand-written notes and a brief commentary: *'Il Cardinale'*, April 15, 1961 (about Fellini's encounter with Montini, Archbishop of Milan, later Pope Paul VI, as 'reparation' to the director for the negative position taken by the prelate towards the unity that the Jesuits and Father Angelo Arpa of the Centro San Fedele in Milan

gave to *La Dolce Vita*); *All'Indietro*, June 23, 1974 ('Myself at the wheel of a black car that sped dizzily in reverse along a path spiralling around a mountain'); *'Punti Interrogativi'*, August 22, 1974 (Fellini paints red question marks that run under the ironic look of Oreste Del Buono); *'Colla Acustica'* and *'Su i Binari'*, October 30, 1974 (two descriptions: seated on some railway tracks with a woman in a large yellow hat, Fellini talks on the telephone, but the words are incomprehensible; and then a second scene, which was described, with some variations, in the television advertisement that Fellini shot for the Banca di Roma with Paolo Villaggio and Anna Falchi); *'Lucianona'*, January 1, 1975 (one of the typical women of Fellini's imagination – a hypnagogic image); *'Happy, Unhappy'*, January 21, 1975 (the director's interpretation: 'A dream about a word game can be an invitation to recognize that, if you do not know English, a foreign language, just as the language of the unconscious is unknown to you, how can you dare to reach conclusions about the meanings of things and to make definitions and diagnoses that are based on premises deeply sunk in ignorance?'); *'Gigantic New-born Babe'*, April 1, 1975 (a hypnagogic image, a nude woman, 'P', seated on a cloud in a blue sky, Fellini blows, the cloud floats in space and the woman takes her big breasts in her hands while it rains); *'Folle Velocità'*, November 25 and 26, 1975 (an elevator that soars up towards room No. 672 of a hotel occupied by others, and a projection of the fears relating to *Eight and a Half*); *'Mastorna'*, September 9, 1978 (a photograph of the face of 'the elusive personage that has now been my obsession for years, stalking me and then abandoning me'); *'Le Belve'*, June 22, 1980 (a representation of the figure of the 'painter of wild beasts' who does portraits of lionesses that smile with human lips, in reference to women and the preparations for *City of Women*); *'Giuseppe Verdi'*, *'Giovanni Agnelli'*, *'La Mia Fine'*, *'Sempre Più Buio'*, *'Sandrocchia'*, *'Guerriera'*, are all dreams deliberately left without a date and an original text, but with the director's comment that they refer, in this order, to: shots of the backs of four women, all with very heavy asses, that make an airplane fly crookedly until the musician appears; after a party at the house of the Lawyer (popular nickname for Giovanni Agnelli, translator), a woman with a lovely round rear end gets out of the bed in which there are Fellini and Agnelli...; a hypnagogic vision of Fellini who, encircled by flames, is machine-gunned by the Germans; a crocodile grabs him by the waist to drag him 'endlessly into the depths of the river which gets darker and darker...'; the pet name Sandrocchia is for Sandra Milo as she appears dressed in *Juliet of the Spirits*, and there is also a black and white monkey who nibbles at the director's left hand; Fellini, blocked and turned to stone, standing before a grotto where a powerful woman is sitting on the ground, perhaps an Aztec, and above the arch of the grotto is written



The girl with the ball (Marina Yana), allus the devil, waits for the fiery custom-built car so that she can lure the hallucinating Toby (front page) into a game of death

'Everything you can do has already been decided long ago!', while a merry little boy is crouched down, laughing and saying: 'Yes! Yes! But making poo is something you can still always do!!! Ha! Ha! Ha!'

The cinematographic fantasy of the Great Dreamer, therefore, owes much to these nocturnal creations that he transferred to the heavy sheets of paper of the *Book of Dreams*, a sum of sequences, of visualized dream rushes, the precipitation of the effervescent Fellini solution of reality-dream-sleep-memory. This generally abstract activity, colored and fleeting, had absorbed him ever since childhood: "When I was about six or seven, I was convinced that there were two lives, one with open eyes and one with eyes closed. In the evening, I could hardly wait to go to bed. I had named the four corners of the bed after Rimini's four movie theaters: Fulgor, Savoia, Opera Nazionale Balilla, Sultano. The show began as soon as I closed my eyes. First, a velvety darkness, deep and transparent, a darkness that flowed into a second darkness. Then flashes began to break across the darkness like over the sea at evening when a storm threatens and the watery horizon is bombarded with lightening. Then I found myself deeper within it, the flashing happened behind me, and all around me as well. There appeared colored spirals, constellations, bright points, scintillating spheres, sometimes circled by rings like the planet Saturn. The dark sky was constellated by blinding forms and colors that began slowly to rotate around me at the center. The spectacle enchanted me. While rotating, little by little the splendor of the galaxy of light became attenuated and faded, like a merry-go-round that runs down. Everything became paler. This meant that, in that corner, the show was over, and I changed to a different corner of the bed. Once again the vortex of light started up, became filled with lights, was extinguished. I changed corners once more. These shows repeated themselves every night. For years. They were not real dreams – I saw the lights, heard the noises of the house..."


Even if Fellini, the great faker Fellini, had never dreamt all these things, the simple fact of having invented them for the written page would make him an extraordinary, eclectic narrator, an 'absent' artist, a little 'à la Nino Rota'. So one can understand how *Il Viaggio di G. [Giuseppe] Mastorna* can open up the images of *Fellini: a Director's Notebook*, a notebook that, even while preoccupied with the movie that never was, is already sending out feelers towards the future incursion into the ancient Rome of the *Satyricon*.

Mastorna, a surname that Dino Buzzati casually took from the Milan telephone book, established itself in Fellini's poetic world as a synonym for obsession, perhaps of a most particular obsession connected with the figure of his friend



Bernhard, upon whose death in the summer of 1965 he writes this singular journey, a journey that neither begins nor ends. Like a dream somewhere between memory and oblivion, it truly has no point of origin, but does not want to die for at least twenty years, as long as, at Dinocittà, in the spaces occupied by Dino De Laurentiis productions, there are still the structures, the building façades and the great framework of the airplane with which Mastorna, landing in the piazza, was to have begun a story of death, a subject that was still far from the magic circle of the man and the cineast.

For the *Notebook* troupe, the same thing that happened on the set of *Eight and a Half* occurs once again, where, faced with the structure having to be dismantled, the force of the characters brought to life had determined the ending. In its own way, this ending was falsier than false, because it was not written into the script, but invented on the set, that is to say on a duplicate of the spaceship meta-set.

 Fellini, the cameraman, the sound man and the secretary roam among the surviving carcasses of the *Mastorna* sets, to which the director attributes a greater attraction than he did at the time of the project. Some young foreign hippies are living among those old structures, where they have even celebrated an 'alternative' marriage

ceremony. The site and the objects there inspire one of them to write a poem, which sees Mastorna as a non-place, a ghost town, a storehouse of 'sleeping' materials: *I live in a place called Mastorna, which a madman's dream placed upon the grass, a useless place where no-one lives, where no-one loves, works, hates, dies. There is an airplane nailed down that cannot fly, and the shops have wooden doors that never open. Mastorna, sad and lovely town, with a beauty I love above all others because it is called Dementia, city of dust and rags, like all other things. I want to die in Mastorna, be buried in that paper church where no priests enter.*

Framed in the airplane's window, we see the silhouette of Mastorna/Mastroianni, on whose image the rushes focus. Here too, as in *Eight and a Half*, there is a character inscribed within an actor who, in turn, is filtered by the director, with the difference that Guido was saved from the girl at the spring, whereas now no character survives: Fellini's wind blows up strong, almost viciously, sweeps the landing area violently, shakes the young people, raises the dust, enters the fuselage and makes it look like a long coffin, brings on snow and, within its swirling, also causes Mastorna to appear from the back with his violoncello. But Mastorna's world arouses "something like remorse [in Fellini], as if I felt millions of eyes fixed upon me in expectation." And fleeing, as usual, from uneasiness, he diverts the spectator's attention, turns a page in his notebook and projects himself into the sites and sensations of the *Satyricon* to come: the Colosseum at night,

populated by transvestites, homosexuals, hustlers and transsexuals, disturbed by the spotlights of the movie cameras, a long flashback on the silent pictures about ancient Rome (the first movie that Fellini remembers having seen at the Fulgor movie theater was *Maciste all'Inferno*, 1926, directed by Guido Brignone).

There follows the conjuring up of Genius the medium, who 'senses' the underground presence of those ancient, joyful 'cutthroats', and knows how to make contact with them. A trip on the subway in the company of the expert becomes a visual experience, because the names of the stations are written in Latin, while a large group of ancient inhabitants look on and go along for the trip to a place where they find the practitioners of the world's oldest profession and, along with the images of the prostitutes, some 'wolves' howl and attract truck drivers from our own time.

The mixing up of past and present continues with an 'annotation' of Marcello Mastroianni's Roman villa, for which Fellini puts on a mini show dedicated to "dear, excellent Marcello: the faithful, devoted friend, the wise [other half of a] true, beautiful friendship based on a healthy reciprocal trust. It is a pleasure working with Marcello: discrete, helpful, intelligent, he enters his parts on tiptoe, without ever asking for anything, without even having read the script. [...] He allows himself to be made up, dressed, combed without objections and asking only the most indispensable questions; with him everything is soft, serene, relaxed, natural – so natural that he is even able to fall asleep at times during his scenes, possibly even during close up shots."

The actor is so prepared to do anything that is asked that he will show himself to American tourists from a terrace like a true Latin Lover. Old Snaporaz, who wants to make a movie about an aged Tarzan, or about Mandrake – *Mandrake de Frosinon* (a popular Mandrake from the country province where Mastroianni himself comes from, born in Fontana Liri in 1924) – is the extraordinary interpreter who yet is not able to satisfy his director in *Mastorna*, that monstrously complicated character, because he is not permitted to appropriate the part, as he himself will comment in the film testament *Mi ricordo, si mi ricordo* directed by Anna Maria Tatò.

Then the *Mastorna* idea comes back, impossible to put into focus in spite of the numerous attempts to define its invisible essence, to make it rational before going on to the artifice of the images. The rushes are nervous, agitated, full of tensions and people, and do not work because, as the director comments: "Marcello felt my uneasiness, he was disoriented by my uncertainty. We tried it with a moustache, without a moustache, with a wig, without one, contact lenses, but there was no *Mastorna*, he continued to implacably remain hidden." In spite of his fears, Fellini takes revenge on his elusive stone guest, who lives only in the hide-out of his anxiety. He takes note of this and goes on to another idea for the *Satyricon*, but not before Mastroianni makes one final attempt at helping his creator ("If you convince yourself that I am *Mastorna*, I become *Mastorna*").

The final part of *A Director's Notebook* is entirely dedicated to the choosing of the 'faces' for the movie on ancient Rome. This, of course, brings up the subject of one of the cardinal aspects of his cinema, which owes a great deal of its plausibility, narrative atmosphere and evocative power to physiognomy.

The casting is a delicate, fundamental process, which comes immediately after the writing of the script. It is a sacred act, auguring well, in which the director places all his expectations and desires,

almost a small, independent birth, a movie within the movie in gestation: "I open an office, begin to receive people and let hundreds of faces file past me. It is a kind of propitiary rite for the creation of the atmosphere. For me, it is the most joyful phase: the one in which the movie is open to all possibilities, with everything still unsettled. It can become something quite different from what it was proposing to become. The point is to find the faces which will give it life. And, in the meantime, it remains in a kind of limbo, while my office becomes a police station waiting room, with my assistants calling London, New York, investigating, trying to find people on the basis of the vaguest traces. The photo archives are continuously searched, thumbed through. One discovers that, among the candidates for a role, one has fled to Latin America, another has had a sex change, yet another has turned from an ephemeral adolescent into a hairy, sweaty military recruit. I would like to see every face on the planet. I am never contented, and if I should be contented, I still want to compare the face that satisfies me with others, with all possible faces. It is a neurosis. [...] When I am in my office, the door opens and in comes an old man, a whore, someone who wants to sell their watch, a countess, a fat man. I see a hundred faces in order to cast two parts in the movie: but I take note of their clothes, their dialect, moustaches, tics, attitudes. [...] I have never chosen an actor on the basis of his acting skill, his professional ability, just as I have never discarded a non-actor because of his inexperience. Expressive faces are what I am after, with character etched on them, faces that say everything about themselves as soon as they appear on the screen. Furthermore, I tend to emphasize, with makeup and costume, everything that illustrates the person's psychology. I have no system for choosing. My choice depends upon the face in front of me, and on how much I can divine behind the faces of people who are generally strangers I am seeing for the first time. [...] Everyone has a face that suits them, he can have no other: and every face is the right one: life does not make mistakes."

The description of this ritual fills the final 'pages' of *A Director's Notebook*, first with the sequences shot at the Mottatoio di Testaccio (the old Rome stockyards, trans.), and then in the studios of Cinecittà (as will also be seen in *Intervista*), when a heterogeneous procession from a court of miracles begins to file past: faces, self-caricatures, improbable musicians, street vendors, pensioners, foreigners... In short, a chain of men and women, Roman and non-Roman of every size and shape, every age and condition, including those who are not actually looking for a part, but just hoping for a hand-out in cash, or trying to sell a villa or a painting by an unknown artist 'better than Raphael', up to the giant who, running the whole length of the corridor, stops in front of the movie camera and, with a kind of curtsy, greets the director, whose notes are scattered everywhere. In fact, Fellini is thinking of ancient Rome and the words of Genius at the tomb of Cecilia Metella: "It is not easy for us to grasp, to have a psychology that goes back to times before the Christian myth. I told you this about the butchers: eat, drink and enjoy. There was no sense of the suffering in life. They were butchers, but likeable", portrayed in a very beautiful, estranging manner in *Fellini's Satyricon*.

His encounter with Petronius goes back to high school Latin classes, extemporaneously recalled: "The professor was comical when he demanded enthusiasm from sixteen-year-old rogues for the recitation in his tiny voice of the last

remaining verse of a poet: *Bevo appoggiato alla lunga lancia, and I then became the promoter of uncontrollable mirth.*" That long-ago memory turned into a 'constant and dark temptation' during the golden age of the Funny Face Shop, when he was commissioned to do a cover illustration for a new edition of the *Satyricon* of Petronius. The publisher will discard Fellini's sketch in favor of the one by his partner De Seta. But the book, in turn, prods him into the idea of writing a kind of musical about it with his friend of that time, Aldo Fabrizi, in the part of Trimalchio.

Having gone on to work in cinema, already during the creation of *I Vitelloni*, Fellini makes a kind of 'stop-gap' movie of the *Satyricon* (1969), one of those projects periodically presented to producers in order to make them finance the movie one really intends to make. His final re-reading of Petronius, during his convalescence after the great illness, triggers a kind of urgency in him to make it, almost a desire to start all over again. At the age of fifty, he has broken the ties with many of his habitual collaborators and has once again put off *Mastorna*, dissolving his contract with De Laurentiis. He has a good working rapport with his scriptwriter Zapponi, as well as with the young producer Grimaldi, who does not find the episode in *The Spirits of the Dead* enough to make him qualify as Fellini's producer.

When Grimaldi accepts the idea with enthusiasm, Fellini and Zapponi begin work on the script. The fragmentary condition of the *Satyricon* fascinates him, but, in one way, its disjointedness is not very suitable to the concatenations of film sequences. At the same time, this structure opens up new possibilities: those unexpected gaps make room for the imagination, hence for his favorite game of true and false, of the reality of the printed word and the artifices of the imagination; in that "unfamiliar landscape, shrouded in thick mists that occasionally part to allow a glimpse inside", Fellini faces his new challenge.

As far as the depiction of the ancient world is concerned, he perceptively chooses the right path by deciding to "nullify the line of demarcation between dream and fantasy, to invent everything and then objectify this fantastic operation, detach oneself from it in order to explore it as something at one and the same time intact and unrecognizable." At bottom, he shares many affinities with Petronius. Both of them sense, or better, have a premonition of the imbalances of their time and are capable of portraying them wrapped in a nebulous instability, in that feeling of uncertainty that precedes changes soon to come. The latter – while they mark the existential crisis of all transitional periods with a melancholy vein that leaves room for ambiguities which are never gratuitous – are faithful mirrors of the scenario of an

epoch that is about to end in a state of economic well-being and the abandonment of positive values.

For Fellini, the movie must suggest "the boundaries, the reality of a world gone by, the life of creatures whose customs are incomprehensible, the rites and the daily life of a continent that has sunk into the galaxy of time." He calls his approach "an exercise of sorcery in ectoplasm" and, by moving the action from Magna Grecia to an unknown and extra-terrestrial Rome, leaps over the usual cinematic iconography – torment and joy of mythological movies – with its glossy marble, its broad, magniloquent gestures, its fierce beasts and reclining couches. In short, he thinks, writes and creates an inner Rome (like the one in *La Dolce Vita*), a fantasy Rome suspended between inaccessible antiquity and science fiction, a strange "adulterated mixture of the Pompeian and the psychedelic", a peplum of the mind. In this way, Fellini accomplishes his habitual expressionistic somersault: the more familiar we are with those ancient ruins, the less we know of that civilisation and, hence, must reinvent it.

That does not mean that Fellini neglects to carry out historical, artistic, linguistic and architectural research. He visits ruins and museums, gathers material and, above all, creatively filters all his impressions, keeping hold only of the feelings those texts or archaeological finds instill within him, rightly convinced as he is that the meaning of a work of art dies along with its epoch, and hence understanding the past and changing it into images is just about impossible, because that epoch can never be conveyed to modern man.

The same kind of problem exists on the linguistic level, and presents a few problems. What language should one put into the mouths of the men of that time? To underscore the incompatibility of the two worlds, their incommunicability, Fellini wants to try a form of invented Latin dialectic, then changes to a more comprehensible baroque Roman dialect and finally, only because of the producers' requirements, surrenders to Italian.

Undeniably, novelty makes his mouth water, and the further he gets into the reconstruction of another world, the more his taste emerges for challenge, courage, the desire to excite discussion, to wander picaresquely in the world of the dreams reflected in that somewhat murky and fearful Martian society. In his opinion, a point of contact between ancient Rome and the world of his time are the 1968 youth movements, the desire for liberty proclaimed aloud that inspire the main characters, Encolpius and Ascyltus, dissenters uninhibited to the point of immorality, refractory towards all rules.

Paradoxically, the preview at Madison Square Garden in New York after a rock concert was definitely a magical sign for Fellini. It was an event that confirmed his convictions, as

he recalls: "It was a stupendous spectacle, that fabulous army of hippies that had arrived on incredible motorbikes and in brightly colored cars with blazing lights, a volcanic public with whom the *Satyricon* seemed to find its natural place. It no longer even seemed to be mine in the sudden revelation of so secret a bond, of such subtle, uninterrupted ties between that ancient Rome and that fantastic audience of the future."

Confronting Petronius with his own personal sensibility, Fellini seems to get younger, even though he has to renounce satire, an easy way to interpret the *Satyricon*, and a sure-fire way of making it a success. Having chosen to document a dream, he also abandons the sly winks and identification with the character, returning to the detachment displayed in *Juliet of the Spirits*, almost as if taking that world into a mediumistic zone, this time more mediumistic than ever before, required a special attitude of amazement. Because the pagan world cannot be figuratively retrieved, the director will shoot the dream of the painter of the final fresco, an icon taken from the subway episode in *Fellini's Roma*.

Faced with so complex a task, all of Fellini's baroque aspects come to the fore in the *Satyricon* – a negative connotation for many people, but an important component

of his genius. It is the ideal way to express the precarious feelings of an epoch, the cognitive anxiety condensed in experimentalism which, in turn, creating a break with the limits of form and space, brings on complex geometries whose points multiply into a dynamic background. These points are Petronius's fragments 'replayed' in the director's figurative imagination who, within the missing sections – the dark zones between one episode and the next – creates 'his' *Satyricon* in *Fellini's Satyricon* (a title chosen to distinguish it from that of Gianluigi Polidori, a movie of scarce quality and success, shot in competition).

When choosing which dream fragments to reconstruct on awakening, Fellini avoids the extreme situations and avails himself of Luca Canali's advice (the Latinist who now, some thirty years later, is writing a new translation of Petronius, considering it to be unquestionably modern, thus confirming that Fellini's prevision had hit the mark). Stating in several interviews that he is creating historical fiction, the director intends to create historical fiction out of that remote past without excessive respect for the original text, immersing the fragments in an unhealthy atmosphere, the same atmosphere, with different facets, as he had created in *Fellini's Roma* and would create in *Casanova*. In so doing, he opened a phase of his cinema that could certainly not be



Petronius according to Fellini. In the centre, Fortunata (Mogali Noël), wife of Trimalchio (Mario Romagnoli) during the feast at the home of the rich ex-slave