


called sunny, and which would continue, more or less, until *The Voice of the Moon*. Thus, over the next twenty years, he portrays the mysterious, gloomy atmosphere of his totem-work *Il Viaggio di G. Mastorna*.

The hardest work lay in the preparations: Fellini worked incessantly for seven months in preparing it, and another seven in shooting it. His producer, Grimaldi, in partnership with United Artists for the guaranteed minimum, gives him free rein to choose his actors with non-modern faces, monstrous, matronly, a series of "masks which do not immediately display their characters, faces occupied with other thoughts, types that seem to have breathed a different air."

In fact, the parts of Encolpius and Ascyltus are given to two almost unknown actors, Martin Potter and Hiram Keller. Max Born is the ephebus Giton, while he chooses Mario Romagnoli, a Roman restaurant owner, as Trimalchio, after having tried to sign Boris Karloff, whose health would not allow him to accept, and having ignored Aldo Fabrizi, who badly wanted the part, and was resentful about it ever after. Salvo Randone plays Eumolpus, and Vernacchio, an invented character, is the comedian Fanfulla, while Lica was only later given to Alain Cuny. Constantly surrounding everything are new faces that are sometimes changed within a single scene in order to make the atmosphere more anguishing and upsetting.

 Encolpius is in a state of despair, because the ephebus Giton has been abducted. He meets his friend Ascyltus, who confesses to having lost Giton in a dice game with the actor Vernacchio. Encolpius searches for Giton in the slums, where Vernacchio is presenting a lewd farce in a run-down theater. During the play, a criminal's hand is cut off, but miraculously grows back with the intervention of an actor called Cesare. Meanwhile, Giton jumps down onto the stage from above in the part of Eros, and Encolpius reclaims possession of him. During a fight at the theater, which a judge who is present at the show tries to calm down, the two boys flee and pass through the slum area, which is overflowing with vice and human monsters, so the pair takes refuge in the Insula Felicles. They spend the night together and, when Ascyltus finds them, Giton, after a discussion, decides he prefers to go with him. A sudden earthquake destroys the Insula and Encolpius finds himself alone and despairing once again.

The old poet Eumolpus gives Encolpius a long tirade against riches, which brought about the death of art, then invites him along to the home of Trimalchio, a freed slave who has become rich and thinks he is a poet.

At the villa, there are many guests, grouped according to their importance. After their ablutions, the pair stretch out on divans. A sumptuous banquet is served. Then Eumolpus recites some of his poetry, but the guests prefer the verses of Trimalchio. Eumolpus calls Trimalchio the 'new Horace'. Flattered, Trimalchio recites another poem, but this time Eumolpus puts aside the flattery and accuses him of having copied Lucretius. He is beaten bloody for his pains. Trimalchio's wife dances and then abandons herself to the embraces of a woman friend.

The large company is led on a tour to Trimalchio's tomb, where a



*Encolpio (Martin Potter) prepares to fight in a scene from Fellini's Satyricon*

fake funeral rite is celebrated. Genius tells the story of the matron of Ephesus, a widow who consoles herself with a guardsman on duty guarding the corpse of a hung man. When the body is stolen, the soldier is in despair, but the woman suggests hanging her husband's body on the rope so as not to lose her new lover. Meanwhile, Encolpius and Eumolpus find each other again and, before falling asleep, the poet predicts his imminent death.

On a beach, Encolpius sees Ascyltus and Giton again, who have been captured. Encolpius, too, is seized, and all three are taken to Lica's ship, a proconsul out to find new amusements for the emperor. After having challenged Encolpius, Lica falls in love with him and, dressed up as a bride, celebrates his wedding night with the boy.

The sailors catch an enormous fish. Caesar's ship is attacked, as is Lica's; the emperor dies and the proconsul is decapitated. A new emperor marches on Rome.

Two nobles, faithful to Caesar, decide to kill themselves, after having liberated the slaves and having placed their children in safety.

Encolpius and Ascyltus reach their villa and discover the corpses, but, heedless, they spend the night with a black slave woman who has not fled the villa. At dawn they flee, while the corpses of the suicides burn, set on fire by the new masters.

During their wanderings, the boys encounter a small cortège conducting a nymphomaniac to the hermaphroditic oracle. Ascyltus pays the woman for her favors, but does not succeed in curing her.

A crowd of supplicants kneels before the albino hermaphrodite. Many have brought gifts, which are handled by two elderly assistants. Ascyltus and Encolpius, together with a predator, abduct the oracle, who dies along the way, needing to be kept continually moist and unable to bear the sunlight.

Thrown into the center of an arena, Encolpius must enter the labyrinth and encounter the Minotaur in order to win Ariadne. The boy is defeated, begs the monster for mercy, who, laughing, pulls off his mask and reveals human features: the festival of the God Laughter has begun. Encolpius is obliged to satisfy Ariadne in public and is unable to do so. The arrival of Ascyltus announces Eumolpus.

The old poet has become rich, and takes his young friend to the garden of delights in order to revitalize his virility. Before leaving, he gives him an appointment aboard a ship that is going to weigh anchor off Africa.

The brothel owner tells the story of the witch Enotea, who had captured a would-be sorcerer. As revenge, the sorcerer made fire disappear from the earth, and told men to look for it between the legs of Enotea, who is obliged to light all the torches in the village. Encolpius is not cured, and Ascyltus takes him to her. The witch, old, fat and ugly, manages to accomplish the miracle.

The two friends are back on the road, but Ascyltus dies in a fight. Eumolpus dies too, making his heirs those who agree to eat his body. While many are preparing for the macabre banquet, Encolpius who is opposed... it becomes a piece of a Pompeian fresco only decipherable in some parts.

As we have said, so complex a story requires an unprecedented effort, which negates once and for all the unmerited fame Fellini has always had of being an improviser. In fact, it would have been an impossibility to improvise 89 newly constructed sets and a multitude of extras. This was also a challenge for Fellini's collaborators: Piero Tosi for the sets, and Danilo Donati for the costumes, "the great expert of art incarnate in a variety show property man" (who,

*Fellini explains a crowd scene to his "ancient Romans"*



*On the slippery slopes of the hill, the gladiators are ready for combat*

at the very time he was working on this, received an Oscar for his costumes for Franco Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet*).

Because the figurative rather than architectonic aspects are fundamental to *Fellini's Satyricon*, the sets are made of light, as in dreams. The demand for the figurative element's continuous, inventive capacity – dark colors and tones – means that the few open, clear spaces (the villa of the suicides, the flight with the hermaphrodite, the sea episodes, but little else), require "a constant, crepuscular, unchanging light, or rather, the vertiginous, anguishing darkness of the night."

Within the disorder of that ancient civilization, called to mind by the murky atmosphere, the mixture of races, the absence of the usual rubbish of 'Roman' cinema, Fellini feels himself to be "like a chameleon that must always be harmonizing with the colors around it", and, at a certain point, this search for harmonization begins to nauseate him, also because, as he goes along, he is progressively editing the movie. With his fussy perfectionism, he makes that dream world come true, particularly in the falsification of the false, which is to say in the invented episodes, the truly Fellini/Petronius ones, perfectly balanced within the



*Fellini's irrepressible inventive genius creates a cosy, yet strangely futuristic femininity*



story as a whole. Avoiding every least trace of vulgarity, which furthermore is also missing in the original text (while still having a distinct commercial impact), the truculent effects of Trimalchio's orgy are cut in an attempt to rehabilitate these feasts, because movies have accustomed us to "seeing the usual fat men dripping with sweat who bite into lamb legs and dangle bunches of grapes into their throats, the usual greasy mouths kissing lasciviously and only detaching long enough from each other to gulp down wine." The freed slave Trimalchio, in fact, "is no fat man with a carefree, festive air, but an elderly, thin, tall, pigeon-breasted man, with the mean face of an ex-slave", while the ambience of the banquets, somewhere between wildness and melancholy perturbation, call up images of peasant wedding feasts in Romagna.

The ancient world, Fellini suggests, possibly never existed, possibly posterity only dreamed that it did, and the details of this dream have therefore remained isolated, inflated and rendered horribly beautiful, that is to say, sublime: its surroundings are dark, the sun pale, the circumscribed spaces tendentiously framed at a distance. The clothes themselves are opaquely colored, as if covered with the dust of those pagan times. Everything seems to be played out within the duality of counterpositioning. Just as Encolpius and Ascyltus are the two faces of the same coin, so are Trimalchio and Eumolpo: one the rich, trivial, aspiring poet who organizes his own bogus funeral; the other poor, cultivated, finally becoming rich and organizing his own real funeral, a macabre and poetic ritual because his body is the body of poetry.

Alongside the invented episodes, Fellini enlarges the characters of Eumolpo and Lica of Taranto (the invented episodes are those about Vernacchio, the suicides of the nobles, the emperor's assassination, the hermaphrodite, the nymphomaniac, Ariadne and the Minotaur). Lica, in particular, the last character to be developed through extensive changes to the original script, is turned from Petronius's rich merchant into an imperial envoy, neurotic, cruel and effeminate, who desperately loves beauty, almost as if his glass eye, besides making him harder and more disdainful, wants to snatch away everything of beauty and youth that appears before his eye. Lica concludes the parade of characters who are closer to us in their alienation the more fantastically far away they are, the protagonists of an intensely dreamed fresco.

*Two excellent examples of the detailed iconographical and oneiric search undertaken by Fellini and his collaborators in order to create the faces and expressions of characters from an unknown world*

# When the Summing up Results in Poetry

The Clowns • Roma • Amarcord

Right from the time of his emergence, Fellini never ceased making reference to the motley world of the circus until finally, in 1970, he devoted an entire movie to it with *The Clowns*, made for Italian television. This came between the successful American project *Fellini: a Director's Notebook* and some others which fell through: *Experimental Hour* (an interview for NBC, another project by Peter Goldfarb) and a series of contemporary 'portraits' which would have included Pappa, Rimini, Mao, a Tibetan convent and a U.S. factory. These works would have meant travelling, abandoning Rome and, above all, would not have taken into account that America was truly another world for the lazy singer of the Romagnolo countryside: "They have invited me to go and stay for twelve to fifteen weeks in order to get some ideas from this visit. My American friends, kind and generous, want to be my hosts, put their homes at my disposition, give me their time, their shows, their writers and coast-to-coast trips. And they tell me that I can visit the big cities and the provinces, and tell me to see everything I want to, because all my desires will be met. Once again, there would be meetings with artists, people of culture, all those who indicate that they would be happy to meet me, from Mailer to Woody Allen, from Capote to that fascinating, gentle specter that is Andy Warhol. They would certainly show me their homes, the places and people that they consider to be the most 'Fellinian', and who would make me feel totally embarrassed." A stimulating offer, but inferior to his artistic awareness of the differences: "I would not know how to make a movie in America, because even if their country fascinates me, seduces me and appears to be an immense set very congenial to my view of things, I would never know how to portray it on film. New York! It is stupendous, an immense spaceship set loose in the cosmos, without roots, depth, but suspended over an infinite crystal plate. Nineveh, Venice, Damascus, Mars, Benares, all the cities of the world fused together in a brilliant set, futuristic and decadent. New York is sweet, violent, very beautiful, terrifying: but how could I portray all that?"

Torn between his fascination with this great place so different from his fantasies, and the uncertainties, the sense

of being lost that assails him as soon as he leaves Italy, Fellini, with the ever convenient excuse of working on the *Viaggio di G. Mastorna*, grabs at a clause in the contract to wriggle out of the American commitment. He proposes something quite different to RAI (Italian National Radio and Television): "Let's make *The Clowns*, the ambassadors of my vocation." And without using Teatro 5, his invented circus, he organizes the movie, together with Bernardino Zapponi, like a draft for a research paper, an essay 'à la Fellini' about the circus and, in particular, about the lunar figures of the clowns.

In his imagination, the ideal circus-clown-Gelsomina-cinema sequence enabled him to avoid abandoning the circus ambience and its aura which, together with the wind of dreams, had pretty well characterized the universe of his childhood. It was enough for him to apply the peculiarities of the circus world to the movie camera and the thing was done, the trick had worked once again: the clowns become actors, the ring becomes the set, the people a troupe, while the performances, the shows, become the episodes, the plots, the stories, the cinematic representations. This goes on for an entire career, until the death of *that* circus and *that* cinema ordain the death of the clown, taking with it the fictional departure (the funeral at the end of *The Clowns* and of *Ginger and Fred*), prior to the arrival of the movies of lucid pessimism, of old age and death, even for the director of the Fellini Circus-Cinema.


All this is found in *The Clowns* (1970) and, as is well known, this juxtaposition of clown and death is not at all out of keeping with the ambience, inasmuch as the dramatic atmosphere, the irony, the fantastic realism of Fellini's cinema is immersed in melancholy and a sense of anguish equal to his declared intention of finally freeing himself from that love, of 'liquidating' the circus.

So then, for Fellini, whom by now we have seen to be a liar in small details but not in fundamental things – where, on the contrary, he deals in high artistic mystification – the cinema is nothing other than a metaphor of the circus. "The clowns, aberrant, grotesque, large-shoed, ragged, in their

total irrationality, in their violence, in their abnormal whimsicality, seemed to me like the drunken, delirious ambassadors of an ineluctable vocation, the premonition, the prophecy, the annunciation of Federico. And the cinema, I mean the making of movies, living with a troupe that is shooting a movie, is this not like the life of the circus? Extravagant artists, muscular workers, technicians, extroverted specialists, women so beautiful as to make you faint, tailors, hairdressers, people who come from every part of the world, but nevertheless understand each other in a babel of languages, and the invasion of that ribald army from the streets and squares in a chaos of shouts and calls, anger, fights and the sudden silence that can sometimes be obtained by a loud howl. And underlying this apparent disorder, a schedule that has never been abandoned, a drumbeat miraculously respected, and then the pleasure of being together, working together, moving and travelling like an enormous family, realizing the ideal of a harmonious living together, of a Utopian society... all of this is what happens prodigiously during the shooting of a movie – is it not a circus life?"

With the two halves fused together, the clown becomes the image of Federico as a child, filtered through his sprite-women, mixed with the figures of clairvoyants, mediums and sorcerers, right up to the 'lunatics' of his final movie.

This hybrid, resulting from the two forms of mass entertainment found in Fellini's works, takes a leap in quality with the amount of the vital, the stirring and the compassionate magically contained within it. But perhaps one should say 'how much there was', because in *The Clowns*, the sense of something finished and past is most intense.

 Awakened one night by the noise of the circus folk setting up their tent, Fellini the child cannot resist the fascination of the deserted ring, and goes out only to encounter the biggest surprise of his life. That evening, there is a show with the fire-eater, the strong woman, the dwarfs, the fakir buried alive for forty days, the mermaid eating little fish, the Siamese twins under glass and, finally, the clowns.

The sad memory of the evening introduces, in Fellini's voice, a small anthology of provincial characters: Giovannone, a slightly idiotic vagabond who watches the form-honds work; the dwarf nun absorbed in her mission of salvation, who constantly commutes between madhouse and convent; and once again the faces of the denizens of the wine house, one of whose wife goes to fetch him with a wheelbarrow because he cannot make it home on his own; the invalid of the Great War and Signora Ines who knows all of Mussolini's speeches by heart. Finally, the railway conductors constantly fighting among themselves, and the station-master, Cotechino, who calls the Fascist police chief to protect him from the derision and the raspberries of the kids on the train; and Giudizio who, whenever he goes into crazy mode, puts on his uniform, takes up his rifle and, thinking a war is on, mimicks a military attack.

The scene changes to Fellini's office as the director dictates to Maja, his muddled secretary, a text about the world of the circus, a world gone by whose almost invisible traces he has decided to follow with his small troupe (Roy, the English cameraman, the sound man Alvaro and his mother, seamstress, and hairdresser, and Gasparino, the set's director). The first visit is to one of the most important Italian circuses, that of Liana, Rinaldo and Nando Orfei, where Fellini witnesses some moments at the end of the show with the clowns and the elephants – a prelude to the appearance of the 'panther', Anita Ekberg, before the communal dinner, with its recollections of those melancholy masks and their stories.

Next comes a trip to Paris to interview some glorious old clowns. The head of this whole tribe is Guillaume, the true creator of the drunken clown, extremely talented at covering his nose with his lower lip. He discharges himself from hospital in order to watch Foutite and Chocolat's performance, two colleagues whom he had never seen, and he dies at the circus.

In Paris, which has elevated the circus to an art form with the Cirque d'Hiver, Il Nouveau Cirque and the Medrano, the troupe goes in search of the best and most famous clowns, together with the circus historian Tristan Rémy. A few of them are still alive: Alex, Nino, Ludo – the only dwarf white clown – and Maïss. In a bistro, these old artistes discuss who had been the best clowns of the past. They talk about the famous Antonet, recalling his transformation of the white clown (the one with the sugar-loaf hat), and remember, in a wealth of detail, the fabulous costumes of their careers. It is an apt occasion for performing a sketch and to parade their gorgeous stage costumes.

The search goes on, with a few short visits to other personages: the ex-animal tamer Buglioni, previous circus directors like Hugue, and several clowns who, by now elderly, live in retirement homes, or modest houses in the center of town, or in the Parisian *banlieue*. These old people recall the good old days, anecdotes, a few show numbers and their great nostalgia for the ring, or for their home towns. They bring out photographs, posters from the golden age, and talk about the human affairs hidden behind those heavily made up faces.

During an evening with Pierre Etaix – film director, actor and husband of Annie Fratellini – as the time comes to show a rare movie about the famous Fratellini, the projector acts up, the film breaks, catches fire and gets stuck. To honor the magnificent art of Paul, Albert and François, Fellini reinvents the little shows they put on free of charge in hospitals, asylums and the trenches.

Then it is Père Lorient's turn, 68 years of career, 28 of them spent in the circus. He worked with the most famous clowns, among them Porto, Rhum and Bario, a Livornese whom the troupe goes to visit, where they shoot pictures of the rooms where he spends his days assailed by nostalgia for the circus and for Italy.

Trying to track down traces of Rhum, the clown who Rémy calls the greatest of them all, the director watches a film made by French television, which is too short to document the greatness of this artist. It is the moment of the clowns, most of them Italian, who perform the funeral of Fischietto. In a crescendo of gags, somersaults, absurd mimicry and verbal numbers, the clowns say their goodbyes to their departed companion.

At a certain moment, the hearse and horses arrive, a snapshot is taken, the workers put together the casket, the orchestra director and

players appear, while the white clown, his stage companion, draws a terrible portrait. The widow is in despair. Fischietto is placed in the hearse, and the cortège begins to circle faster and faster around the ring. An enormous bottle of champagne is uncorked and, amidst music and confusion, the circling of the ring becomes more and more frenetic. The old clowns slow down and stop and, while shots are heard from all sides, and rockets go off, the clown firemen arrive amidst smoke and flames: the funeral celebration reaches its height, ending with dancing, music and the final cruel, romantic jokes of the clowns.

Amongst themselves, while the lights are being turned off, old Fumagalli talks about Fru Fru, his partner in the dead man performance: the two call each other by playing the trumpet, and leave the circus ring together.

"I have an embarrassing confession to make: I know nothing about the circus. I feel like the last person in the world who can talk about it with any clear notions of its history, facts, news. [...] On the other hand, I ask myself why shouldn't I? Even if I know nothing, I know everything about the circus, about its storerooms, its lights, its smells and even something about its most secret life. I know, I have always known. Ever since the first time I immediately felt a traumatizing, total connection to that clamor, that deafening music, those disquieting apparitions, those death threats." In this admission of presence and absence, we see the whole relationship of affection and fear, of sympathy and compassion, nourished with ups and downs for an entire artistic life. Conflicting feelings, doubtless, but highly synthesized in both the image of the clown and, above all, in what Fellini calls 'the party's over', the tormenting melancholy of the circus.

The cinema, too, is a party that is over, it is death at work, a manifestation of the collective creative chaos which makes one laugh and cry. It reinvents the comedy of life, just as the circus does which, possibly under a much patched tent on the outside – "a balloon, a spaceship that was not there the night before and suddenly is present" – presents a show with which one can identify, as one can identify with the clown, whether of the circus or street variety.

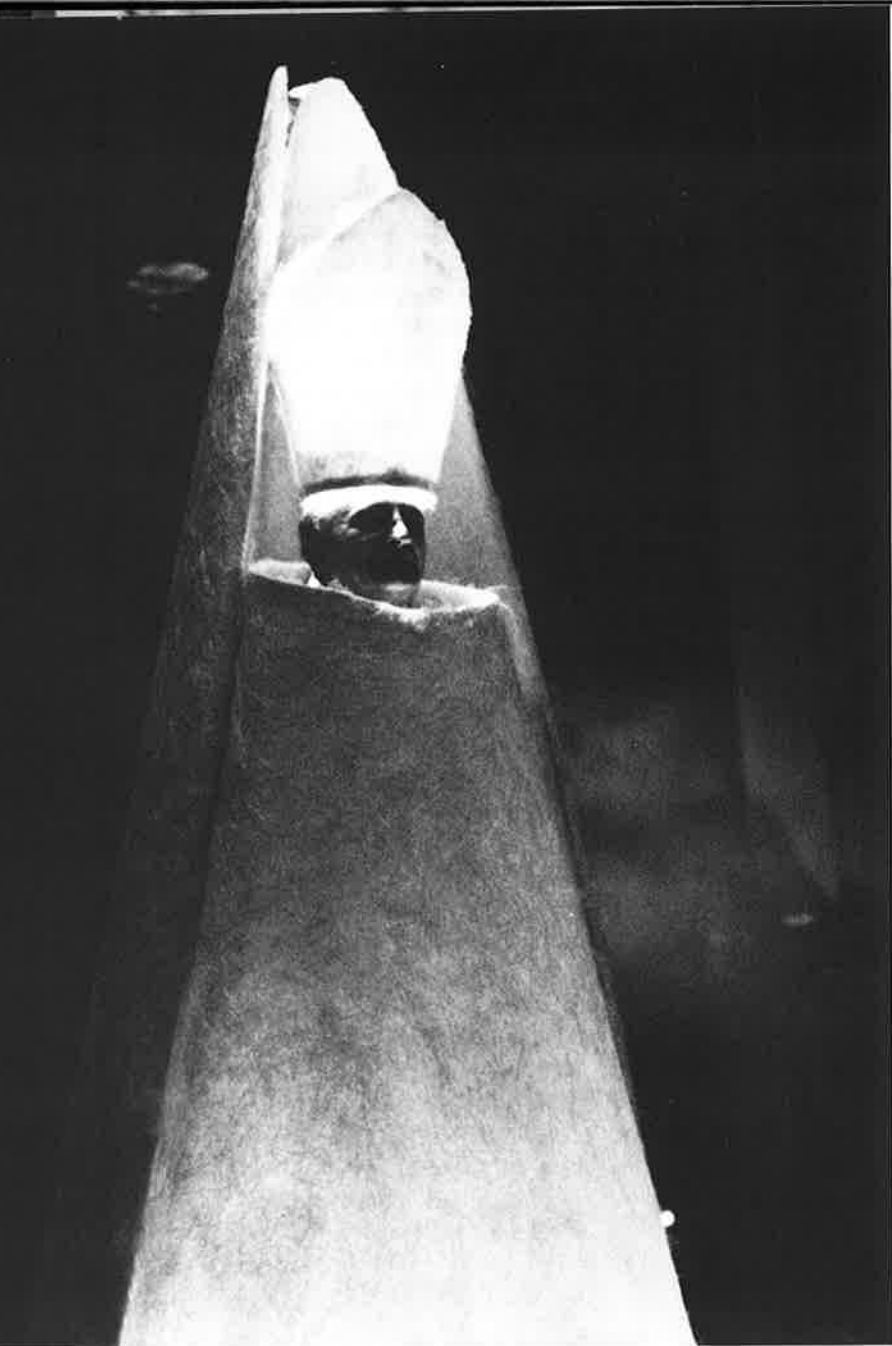
With his formidable bravura in choosing faces, circus faces that fill up reality, Fellini has thus traced a clean line of continuity between the historical tradition, its evolution, its slow death throes and the gallery of clowns – eccentric, melancholy and fearsome – with which his films are strewn. Continuity, because in one way or another the Fellini Circus guarantees the existence and perpetuation of the figure of the clown and, naturally, of the *Fellini clown* in the vast number of meanings that spans from Gelsomina to Ivo Salvini, from the White Sheik to Casanova, from Cabiria to Fred, passing through dozens of close-ups of people, extras, bodies, apparitions, shapes, ghosts, comedians, dancers, mimes, character actors, interpreters and actors, real and

unknown, entering and exiting from his fantastic frames. Agony, because unquestionably this buffoon no longer exacts a reaction in the social mirth of the last few decades.

Even if *The Clowns* is a television movie, and therefore feels the effects of an orientation somewhere between chronicle and a program edited in closed narrative blocks, it insists upon the search for people and their worlds, an expression of the antinomy that strikes at the form of a show when it is overtaken by another more modern one. The historian Rémy, the old pensioned clowns, their heirs and their families – all of these insist on the idea of the death of the traditional clown, of his inadequacy with respect to today's reality – but will it not be exactly the other way around, of the incapacity of the present to involve and understand the circus of the past, and the manifest impossibility of making people laugh as they once did?

With his affectionate investigation, Fellini indemnifies this world, altered by being forgotten, inserting amongst the interviews little scenes in which he resists not the temptation of thinking, conceiving and directing the shadows of the old-time clowns on the same level as the many performances and the concluding funeral ceremony. But if Fischietto's funeral is the funeral of the clown, there is no need to fear: Fellini does not kill off the clowns and their magical atmosphere, but, in 1970, he bears witness to a phenomenon that could be accepted by television. In the end, how could Fellini renounce the transgressing soul of the clown and thus lose his own, and how could he do without the irrational and pathetic comic quality of the white clown who fights with his side-kick, the Augustan one? In brief, he could not continue to make movies if he killed a part of his own ego, since "the clown is the incarnation of the fantastic creature that expresses the irrational part of man, the instinctive element, that part of the revolutionary and dissenter from the higher order which we all carry within ourselves. He is a caricature of man in his animal and childish aspects, of the mocked and the mocker. The clown is a mirror in which man sees his image made grotesque, deformed and comical. It is his very shadow. It will always exist. It is as if we asked ourselves "Is the shadow dead? Can the shadow die?"


"As soon as you construct a thought for yourself, laugh about it", or "If you construct a thought for yourself – white clown; laugh over it – Augustan clown." In his considerations of the figure of the clown he paraphrased from Lao Tzu, Fellini at one and the same time displays a snapshot of the *shadow*, the reflection of the body which one cannot deprive him of, except in particular conditions, along with an excellent introduction to the image of Rome, the city to which he is deeply attached by having given as



*The imagination of Federico Fellini and Danilo Donati, accompanied by the evocative music of Nino Rota, is unleashed in the unique ecclesiastic fashion show in Roma*

much as he took from its inspirational humus, its existential, historical and 'political' atmosphere. Thus, it was inevitable, if not a duty for him, to dedicate a movie to 'his' very special city. A movie which is not a movie, in the same way that *his* Rome is not seen as a city, but with the ambiguous figures of *his* imaginary and changing projection. It is a shadow, an idea of a city which exactly fits the principle of "As soon as you manufacture your thought about Rome, you must laugh about it" – certainly not to

deride it, but in order not to take it too seriously, thinking that you can easily delineate its boundaries and describe them. The creator of *La Dolce Vita* at the very beginning of the Seventies sees it and portrays what he sees with the following sequence of cadences:

 In search of the first images of Rome, Fellini displays a large, ancient stone on the road to town (Rimini), and the notions learned at school: the crossing of the Rubicon, the armless statue of Julius Caesar, his death at the theater, the headmaster's lessons about the geese of the Capitoline, the monuments and churches of the capital being projected for the children of the boarding school, among which, by mistake, the image of the lovely bottom of a seated girl.

To complete the identity marks of *Fellini's Roma*, one must add the pope's Sunday benediction on the radio, the silent film screening, and the Luce newsreel that portrays a gymnastic celebration of Fascism. But the Roman way of being in those days is also the simple evocation of a name, Messalina, which is enough to conjure up the image of the phoramacist's wife thirsting for sex...

The picture of Rome seen by someone far away is consummated by the comments of the people in the café, and the train stopping on its way to Urbe in Rimini's small station under the gaze of a small boy dressed in a sailor's suit (Fellini).

The same gaze observes its own arrival by train in Rome in 1939. The Termini station is jam-packed with people vociferating in big-city confusion. The twenty-year-old who plays the part of Fellini goes to the boarding house for artistes in Via Albalonga, run by a big, big lady. There, he takes a room and gets to know its special guests (a seasoned actor, a prostitute, someone who resembles Mussolini, a Japanese, etc.).

It is summer and, in the evening, one eats outdoors at the *trattoria* below the house amidst small family events, wisecracks, pleasant slang, singers and beggars. One makes the most of the abundant food and the typical Roman dishes, until night empties the streets, brings out the squads to repair the tram lines, the shepherds lead their sheep across town, the prostitutes stand like wild beasts among the remains of the past.

After the encounter with Rome at the end of the Thirties, Fellini and his small troupe attack the city from the Great Ring Road. Traffic is chaotic and noisy on a flooded road, narrow and full of holes, with accidents, student protests, sirens, trucks of every variety, carts, motorcycles, Neapolitan soccer fans, prostitutes, hitch-hikers, small factories, industrial buildings, historical sites and ruins in a crescendo that ends with a gigantic traffic jam at the Colosseum, and thousands of flashing lights.

A third approach from above, with the camera mounted on a crane, shows the panorama on a beautiful sunny morning. A bus full of American tourists, the inescapable Roman 'latin lover', a group of students talking with the director, while several people comment on how the city is going to hell. The handing out of lunch boxes puts an end to this scene, but not before the director, convinced that everyone must only do what he finds congenial, introduces the long episode to follow, the *Teatrino della Barafonda* during the war.

During the variety show, there are performances by mediocre artists, risk-taking amateurs, mimics, singers and dancers, all confronting the implacable, terrible audience of common people, so



involved that it does not miss the slightest opportunity for mocking, criticizing, shouting provocations and playing heavy-handed tricks on other members of the audience and the artistes who, in turn, pay them back in the same coin. When the news of the war arrives and the alarm sounds, the tawdry occasion breaks up as everyone rushes off to the air-raid shelter.

Another part of Fellini's description of Rome is concerned with the construction of the subway across the city. The visit to the underground construction site takes place in the company of the head engineer, who explains the enormous difficulties due to both the eight layers of terrain and to the many archeological finds which are unearthed, and thus block progress or force a change in route.

At the end of the gallery, the technicians have come to a halt, because the transmitter has signalled the presence of an empty space, a cavern, perhaps a catacomb. With an automatic drill, a small passage is accurately opened, which reveals an ancient Roman house with frescoed rooms and a statue, all in a perfect state of preservation. But the air that penetrates through the opening causes the frescos to dissolve before the dismayed eyes of those watching.

The liberty that contemporary young people have gained, and openly display, takes Fellini back to the times of the brothels, described in a variety of manners according to the different types of people and ambience. A series of scenes portrays the various phases: the arrival, the waiting in a group, the display of girls, the choice, and going up to the room (a practice that not even the young Fellini deprives himself of).

The ecclesiastical fashion show held in the palace of the Princess Domitilla is another of the thousand aspects of Rome, the papal and aristocratic Rome. A world that has survived time, but that harbors a

cardinal, a high representative of the clergy, diplomats and nobles with their heirs, waiting to see a demonstration of religious habits, in an accumulation of images and scenographic solutions, culminating with the figure of the pope bathed in light.

The tour in search of the real Rome moves to the 'Festa of Noantri in Trastevere, perhaps the most 'Roman' quarter of all. The camera roams among *trattorias*, tables in the street, pizzerias, taverns and stands full of *porchetta* (whole pigs roasted on the spit), of candy and



Above: In the modern day episode about the construction of the underground railway, the journey through the underground tunnels leads to the discovery of ancient frescoes, which are completely turned to dust by the air they let in



Left: Life in the brothel, a narrative location devised for the imaginary man of the Fascist years, creates the scene for a series of characters who are often local heroes within a microcosmic tragicomedy

watermelon, shouting Romans and many tourists strolling around the narrow streets, the characteristic carriages, a boxing match, and wandering musicians. It catches salacious comments, snatches of often incomprehensible dialogue, while the youths of Piazza Santa Maria in Trastevere are chased off by the police. In this lively confusion, Fellini, off camera, interviews Marcello Mastroianni, the American writer Gore Vidal, Alberto Sordi, and Anna Magnani. Each of them relates his relationship with Rome from his own personal point of view.

At the end of the *Festa*, a hefty group of motorcyclists depart from Ponte Garibaldi for a tour of Imperial, Seventeenth Century Rome, illuminated by the reflected light of the summer evening and by the evocative artificial lights. Filing in front of the baroque churches and some of the most beautiful and famous spots – the Castel Sant'Angelo, the Piazza di Spagna and Trinità dei Monti, the Piazza del Popolo and its gate, the Muro Torto, the Quirinale square and palace, the Teatro di Marcello, the temple of Vesta and the Colosseum – the rumbling motors leave the ancient walls behind them and head out via Cristoforo Colombo for the new EUR quarter.

“The intellectuals and artists who always live in a state of friction between two different dimensions – reality and fantasy – find here [in Rome] the impulse needed to free their mental activity with the comfort of an umbilical cord that keeps them attached to solid ground. Because Rome is a mother, and she is the ideal mother, because she is indifferent. She is a mother with too many children, and so is unable to give you her whole attention. She asks nothing of you and expects nothing from you. She welcomes you when you come, and lets you go when you depart, like Kafka's court. In this there is very ancient wisdom: African, almost prehistorical. We know that Rome is a city loaded with history, but her evocative power lies in something prehistorical, something primordial which is clearly demonstrated in some of her boundless, desolate aspects, in certain ruins that seem like fossils, bony, like mammoth skeletons.” These few lines contain all of Rome's attractions for Fellini, an intuition of the real influence that also affected other cineasts – from Pasolini to Greenaway, from Aldo Fabrizi to Verdone, from Luigi Zampa to Ettore Scola and Nanni Moretti – and autobiographically breathed in, metabolized and returned by Fellini's sponge in the form of poetic images.

Whether it is a question of the ill-mannered, greedy, generously plebeian Rome, or the middling Rome of clerks, the *petit bourgeois* and the sated mediocrities, or of imperial, papal, fascist, aristocratic Rome (not to mention the artistic, cinematographic, governmental and political, lay, religious, bureaucratic, commercial, alternative, slum Rome, or the Rome outside the city and even outside the province) – to whatever Rome you may refer, in short, the special thing about Fellini is that he has depicted almost all of them – either directly or obliquely, with characters or with a face, with real places or constructed sets, with a quotation, a single name, the summoning of more or less historical

figures, in the use of dialect, in a hundred other narrative and visual ways, his Eternal City is the true representation of the Shadow of the Great Mother in whose opulent womb all find hospitality.

In many aspects, Rome is the irreconcilable opposite of New York, the Big Apple, the crucible that makes everything possible as long as it reflects the future of the “magnificent destiny and progress” of the New World. In Fellini's Rome, the embryo of the Old World, *the first*, there is no need to do, everything has already been said, done, seen; all that is left is to observe with the inner eye or the eye of the camera, to be a witness and travelling companion of a piece of the past, of history, of time. But one must be a lucid and disinterested witness, motivated by love, but disenchanted and ironic, otherwise that shadow will be dispelled in the exploited stereotype of a chaotic, lazy Rome, suffocated by traffic and environmental, as well as human, degradation, aspects which Fellini always felt as foreign to him.

*Fellini's Roma* (1972) is Fellini's point of arrival, the place where he lives and works, where the presence of the city is figuratively strong and decisive for the narrative, as the context for the Cinecittà sets within the folds of his imagination. In a word, his cinematic subconscious is Roman, and composed of progressive stratifications like the seven layers of earth below it.

Already in *The White Sheik*, the arrival by train portrayed the Rome of the Holy Year, disenchanted and distracted by the vicissitudes of Ivan and his bride. In *I Vitelloni*, Fausto and Sandrina go to Rome on their honeymoon, Alberto's city, on whose outskirts the circus of *La Strada* is camped. The whole of *Il Bidone* would be meaningless outside the Roman context, in the same way as the ‘slum hut’ reality of Cabiria would be between the *Passeggiata Archeologica* and Via Veneto. Not to mention *La Dolce Vita*, the prototype throughout the world of Fellini's Rome, and all subsequent movies up until *Amarcord*, a moment of transition and preparation for the mature, concluding phase. This homage to a particular Rome, and Marcello's journey through its splendors and shame, is metaphorically an act of love in order to possess its ambiguous fascination, a charm which has been extended beyond the center of town to the modern EUR residential quarter, where the moralist Mazzuolo lives, or the psychoanalytical Fregene of *Juliet of the Spirits*, not to mention the nocturnal and Gothic Castelli Romani of *Toby Dammit*, and the imaginary city of *Fellini's Satyricon*. In Fellini's accounting, *Fellini's Roma* closes the books on the debt to Rome, just as *The Clowns* liquidated the circus and *Amarcord* will liquidate the provinces. So then, the last liberating show for seeing the Roman circus, according to Fellini, is in these episodes, which are to be thumbed page by page like a precious illustrated art catalog.

The first page opens the memory of Rome coming from the misty north. A distant Rome, remote, perhaps just a name like any other. It is the milestone outside Rimini, the statue of Julius Caesar, the outing to the Rubicon. The signs of approach continue with the didactic-religious projection, an amused pretext for an introduction to the contradiction enclosed in the walls of the holy city, an authentic Fellinian twist where the historical/sacred images are interrupted by a girl's bottom, a competitor to be feared by the 'cupolas' of the Christian basilicas. And then, the theater – the death of Caesar – and the radio (the benediction *urbi et orbi*), which is to say the pre-cinema techniques and language, are those that contribute to increasing the distinctive signs of Roman-ness reflected in silent movies.

Thus, when Fellini recalled his Roman roots, and when, like Moraldo, he feels he must leave, he takes the train that, as a child, he had so often seen stop at the little station with three people and two hens aboard and, when he gets off in Rome, the first of his life's journeys is ended: that from the provinces to the capital of Italy, of Christianity and of cinema. It is a journey transformed by the prerequisite of all the preceding and subsequent mental journeys, a sequence of variations on a reality observed through the deforming lens of the imagination.

His arrival in Rome is an invented projection, a 'debarking', if not 'science fiction' like Fellini's *Satyricon*, at least a caricature, now exaggerated and now distorted by the exigencies of making movies, occasionally marked by moments and linguistic expressions that must have struck the young man from Romagna, who freely recalls them in statements and interviews: the greetings exchanged by two friends at the Termini station, the overcrowded tram with the back door left open because of the excessive number of passengers, the snapshot recollection of a fat man washing at a public fountain as if he were at home, the comment on the price of meat and other pet expressions in Roman dialect.

From the start, Fellini frames building facades in a few fleeting upward shots, only to return immediately to the street that leads to the arch of Santa Bibiana, from where they reach Via Tiburtina and the San Lorenzo quarter with the Verano cemetery. A choice of life or death, like the street where the outdoor meal was held, almost on the tram tracks, a microcosm of the common people, the 'big Roman heart' with its customs, its faces, funny and grotesque, ancient and vulgar, the fat faces and bodies, a little worn out, from which Fellini knows he can draw out a very tasty Roman sauce – at least as tasty as the flavors and smells of the numerous dishes that come and go on camera: "Cannolicchi

*Beneath the gaze of Princess Domitilla's Roman ancestors (invented by painter and friend, Geleng), ecclesiastic mysticism and symbolism glorify the macabre, grotesque ritual of the unusual fashion show*





Even the pagan ritual of football hooligans adds to the picture of city chaos, typified in the ring road scene and the final traffic jam

with cheese and pepper, penne all'arrabbiata, macaroni... rigatoni with anchovies, schiaffoni al norcino, fettuccine with chicken giblets, bucatini alla carbonara, coratella, facioli co' 'e cotiche, ch'a sarciccia, tripe, snails, la pajata..." an alimentary orgy, a coarse, elemental exaggeration of the good life ("as you eat, so you shit", or the assimilation of the food-sex-death chain) that the young Fellini gets to know, along with the indolent and only seemingly gross character of the Roman. A paradox that closes with the fine scene of the proud prostitute-wolf among the ruins, a symbolic image of synecdochic eloquence for the strident contrast which, in Rome, takes on the fracture – or the continuity – between past and present.

The big outdoor dinner is the favorite collective ritual for advancing the choral action within the group, while detailing here and there a few close-ups or minor characters in Fellini's mosaic bestiary, for the purpose of creating 'confusion'. It is the *mise en espace* of the many artistic rehearsals preceding Fellini's cinema, the many drawings created while pondering the movies still to be made. If one were not to consider the preparatory phase, the visual traces and the surrealistic automatic writing of the sketches and drawings in which Fellini's bizarre creative imagination discharges itself, his movies would simply not contain that cause and that chaos which is indispensable to reconstructing the sense. It would be like a dead body without veins, blood or members. "This almost

subconscious, involuntary doodling, making caricature notes, interminably drawing puppets that stare at me from every corner of the page, this automatic sketching of obsessively hyper-sexual female anatomy, the decrepit faces of cardinals, candle flames, and again breasts and backsides and an infinity of other hieroglyphics, constellated with telephone numbers, addresses, delirious verses, tax figures, appointments – in short, this spreading and inexhaustible graphic rubbish heap which would delight any psychiatrist, may be a kind of track, a thread, at the end of which I find myself on the set, lights blazing, for the first day of filming."

Fellini's sketches are independent, pre-filming expressions, which also serve to communicate with his collaborators in the preparation of everything necessary for making the movie. They represent characters, moral likenesses, and are expressions of his avid curiosity, of his not wanting to lose anything of what passes before his eyes and through his mind. Images of cultured people in all their crude reality, their habits, their ways of speech and, in the specific details which become the seasoning of the movie: "If it is true that, in Rome, there are very few neurotics, it is also true, as the psychoanalyst maintains, that neuroses are providential in that they are a way to make deep discoveries about ourselves. It is like diving into the sea to find the hidden treasure of fairy tales; they oblige the child to become an adult. Rome does not do this. With its big belly

like a placenta, and its maternal aspect, it avoids neuroses, but it also halts development, true maturing. There are no neurotics here, but neither are there any adults. It is a city of unambitious, skeptical, rude children. They are also a little psychically deformed, because it is unnatural to block development. This is also one reason why, in Rome, there is such a strong attachment to the family. I have seen no other city in the world where one speaks so much about relatives. 'Let me introduce my brother-in-law. This is Lallo, my cousin's son.' It is a vicious circle: one lives among a circumscribed number of people, immediately recognizable for sharing a common biological element. They live like nestlings, in a brood [...] There is even comfort in the very common phrase: 'Who the hell are you? You're nobody!' Because it is not only disdainful, but also liberating. [...] Receiving insults like no other city, Rome does not react. The Roman says: 'Rome sure isn't my responsibility.' This invalidation of reality, which is the Roman when he says, 'So what the hell do you care?' comes perhaps from the fact that he has something to fear, either from the pope, the gendarmes or the nobility. He encloses himself within a gastro-sexual circle. His interests are extremely limited. [...] Certain Romans say 'I am going to visit papa, or I am going to visit uncle', and then one discovers they mean they are going to the cemetery. [...] This takes the anxiety out of death, the neurotic anxiety: it is enough to remember that Romans call death 'la commare secca' ['the dry buddy', trans.]. Buddy – so then, almost a relative itself. And then certain other fine expressions: 'andato agli arberi pizzuti, sta a fa tera pe' ceci' (more or less 'pushing up daisies')."

And if anyone should think that this snapshot of the Roman taken by Fellini is labored or, at least, referable only to the first post-war years or the Fifties, all he needs to do is to go and trace the last phase of the careers of Roman personages from the Italian comedy to verify the full reality of a symbolic description somewhere between tails, the religious habit and the sleeveless undershirt which, deep down, does not change, or only changes very slowly.

And if it is true that Fellini's Roman cannot be of help to him on an individual level because he is "an ignoramus who does not want to be bothered, and is the most exact product of the Church"; and if there is also truth in his "heavy image: quite gloomy, dull and suggestive of a leaden, pessimistic view of things, downward looking, sleepy, disapproving, uncurious, or rather not believing that curiosity is of any use", Fellini's love for the city of the Romans is still undeniable, which, once it reaches you with its "ancient enchantment, all the negative judgements you may have made of it disappear, and all you know is that it is a great fortune to live there." Feeding on its defects and decadence, it becomes a necessity for Fellini to portray

through a movie how things are going to be in a year's time for the loved and hated Rimini of *Amarcord*.

Fellini had four other parts in mind for *Fellini's Roma*: the *circolare notturna* (the night tram that circles Rome), the Roma-Lazio soccer game where the two local teams play each other, Roman women, and lastly the *ponentino* evening wind and clouds. Cut from the script, these elements make their way into the movie in a different way. The *circolare*, a two-car tram that once called at many metropolitan quarters, is turned into the chaotic ring road. An orgy of steel plating and noise, of auto vehicles, people and objects squeezed into a space that could reasonably only hold cars and trucks.

In his excited and exaggerated vision of traffic, there is, on the one hand, a prophetic intuition of the round cage which that peripheral race-track circle was to become and, on the other hand, the presence of a rich variety of fauna, from those boxed inside their cars (similar to the 'mannequins' of *Eight and a Half*), to a horse, to the calves spread out on the ground after an accident, to the chained dog that barks while another, presumably a thoroughbred, slips away in its luxury car. And then there is the man pulling his cart, the prostitutes with their bonfires beyond the guard-rail, the hitch-hikers, and all the other unidentifiable figures on the outer edge of the confusion. Finally, there is a shot of the crowd motif, the *Fellinian crowd*, made up of small assemblages that fill the frame, often saturating it in such a way as to exponentially increase the effect. For example, the ones of the Termini train station, the main floor of the vaudeville theater, the people at night in Trastevere.

The confusion of the ring road approaches the image of what we could call the *Fellinian Finale*, a great decadent fissure rather than a total disaster, as the words of Gore Vidal confirm when interviewed at the 'Festa of Noantri': "You ask me why an American writer lives in Rome? First of all, because I like the Romans, who don't give a damn whether you are rich or poor. They are neutral, like the cats. Rome is the city of illusions. It is no accident that the Church is here, the government and the movies, all things that produce illusions, as you do (to Fellini), as I do... The more the world approaches its end from overpopulation, too many cars, poisons... and what quieter place from which to wait for the end from pollution, from overpopulation. It is the ideal point from which to observe, whether everything ends or not."

At the time of *La Dolce Vita*, Marcello was content to hide *inside* Rome. Now everyone, the common people, intellectuals, and the bourgeoisie, can stand at the window and *look*, also through the grand illusion which is cinema, at the rubble of a dying civilization, wait without anxiety to

see... one never knows. The other people interviewed are almost like guest stars representing a golden frame for the picture of a Rome which, the longer one observes it, the more it seems to flee, slip out of one's grasp like Mastorna's city. At the same time, hiding behind its robust entrance door is Anna Magnani, "symbol... of the city. A Rome seen as a wolf and a vestal virgin, aristocrat and bag lady, gloomy, comical...", who does not trust Fellini and sets the movie off towards its epilogue.

The ecclesiastical fashion show is a true *tour de force*, a synthesis between the analogous scene of the white clowns (in *The Clowns*), and the illuminated pit of the television studio (in *Ginger and Fred*). This is a moment of great cinema in which Fellini optimally expresses the ironic/visionary aspect of the sets (with the masterful collaboration of Danilo Donati and Gino Landi), supported by Nino Rota's original music. The Church and the Roman aristocrats – "a cemetery full of cadavers who don't know they are dead" – are gathered together for the fashion show. The show is clear and vital in displaying the styles in a rhythmic crescendo, vaguely macabre and sublime, up until the papal empyrean: from the creation called 'Petite soeur de la tentation du Purgatoire', to the red 'Au Paradis toujours plus vite' for prelates on roller-skates. But it is also dark, old, dead and mummified in the dust of centuries, represented by the audience, a pathetic, infantile funeral choir that accompanies that magnificent agony, very slow and sumptuous, lugubriously eternal, to which Rome seems destined by the circularity of time and the history of progress.


The irreversible destiny of some pre-modern symbols will characterize Fellini's project for a movie about Venice, the city *par excellence* of the much-invoked 'End'. This movie was never made, but was at least partially sublimated in the world of *Fellini's Casanova*. However, there do exist some quite beautiful pages written by the director on a subject rich in ideas, where "the city seems to present fascinating figurative and pictorial seductions that are most congenial to a certain way I have of looking at cinema, or better, cinematographic narration. This would be a series of pieces that, as in a mosaic, separate and disintegrate the narrative, the situations, the characters, in a molecular decomposition that is continually menaced by even further fragmentation, but which, in its entirety, offers a mirage of unity, of vision, of a panorama and, in this case, of a city which can appear even more to shimmer and shake because mirrored in water and palpitating with lights and reflections." Perhaps *Fellini's Roma* is really to Fellini's Venice what *Amarcord* is to the city of Mastorna.

That the director always likes the less showy aspects is exemplified in the flaking away of the frescos in the ancient Roman house. That wind which usually stuns Fellini's

men/children, brings on dreams and fantasies, flash-backs or surprising flash-forwards, now unconsciously liberated, soughing, destroys those who brutally 'awaken' the sign of the past with the horror of the movie camera. The frescos of the Roman house, opened after who knows how long, are other shadows that vanish before the impotent eye of an acritical progress, just as the brothels vanished. Always in a condition of semi-destruction, these are the sites where female faces and symbology are concentrated. Thus, they do not intend to represent the world of commercial sex, as much as a cinematic imagining of the Body of Rome, a variation in the idea of the prostitute. Just as Sylvia was Woman and Cabiria a prostitute/clown, the prostitutes of *Fellini's Roma* are Rome, vulgar and protective, 'maternal' and aggressive. They incarnate the other mother, the tolerant one who does not put obligations on you, does not create duties, does not sit in judgement. She is not jealous or possessive. She welcomes you when you arrive and lets you leave whenever you like. The brothel and the prostitute "have been a surrogate which, in the straight jacket of our education, helped to smuggle in at least a part of what had been forbidden to us."

The Barafonda Theater, a world apart, reflected in the world of its own of show business, another microcosm of Rome in a reinvention of the historical site of vaudeville, the Ambra-Jovinelli theater. Fellini is fascinated by the audience rather than with the show itself. That is where the real actors are, a place loud with cruel remarks made in Roman dialect, that the director depicts with the swift strokes of a master. Moments, situations, characters and jokes that reach the stage from the audience in the auditorium, and return again to the hall. A cocktail of cynicism and gutsiness in the fight between the 'mob' and clumsy, amateur artistes, which reflects events that have been occurring for centuries in the streets and squares of the real world, comments on them in low linguistic forms, in the improvised gags, in the parodies and belly-laughs, rather than with the brain. A treacherous and grotesque exhibition of improvisations, therefore, a show of extroverted spectators, of decidedly ball-breaking hecklers which, while it places the vaudeville show somewhere "between the Circus Maximus and the brothel", reverts to the two crude qualities of *cynicism* and *viscerality*, and would be able to rewind the movie to its opening shots. There, among the aphorisms of the cutting language of the people which had already accompanied the young Fellini's initiation as he was about to become a paying guest in the Palletta family, the young author hears a scene played out on the stair landing which, in itself, subsumes the Roman character, fugitive and wise, mocking and lazy, good-natured and irreverent. An intermezzo suitable for making the curtain

fall, without regrets, on the bitter, caricature-like fresco of *Fellini's Roma*, a mosaic that sparkles with pessimism and gratitude, mental indolence and sweaty carnality, in the anti-rhetorical portrait between being and appearing in the inner life of a city. A movie that tells its story simply, and without which that masterpiece of ironic observation, *Amarcord*, could never have existed.

 The changing of the seasons sets the rhythm for the life of the small suburban town on the Romagna coast during the Thirties. The beginning of spring, like the 'fogarazza', the winter bonfire, is an occasion for a festival for the various characters that, one by one, introduce themselves into the story. In order of appearance, they are: Giudizio, a trouble-maker who is always hanging around, and prepares the faggots and old wood for burning; the barber/musician,

the beautiful Gradisca, and Titta's family, the messenger boy in the events to follow. The owner of the Fulgor Cinema (a double for Clark Gable) is present, Biscein the pedlar, and the people in the piazza who greet the end of the cold with a brass band and fireworks. Even Count Lovignano celebrates the same propitiatory rite with his small family in the courtyard of his villa. During the final events of the evening, Cantarel the blind accordion player, Volpina the nymphomaniac, the Venetian veteran and Lallo, brother of Miranda, who is Titta's mother, all arrive on the scene. A motorcyclist riding over the embers ends the festivities.

The lawyer, devoted to local history, gives information about the town, its people and its province, in spite of having to deal with a mysterious, witty heckler who interrupts his learned discourse.

Titta's class, together with the principle, Zeus, and all the teachers, are gathered for the school photograph. Then, one at a time and according

*Fellini with the eccentric  
Biscein (Gennaro Ombra),  
the incredible story-teller  
in Amarcord*





*"It's the year of the snow". The village youths bombard an amused Gradisca (Magali Noël)*

to their subjects, the teachers come up to the lectern and demonstrate all their defects during the explanations and the questioning.

Titta's family life is introduced by Volpina, who goes to Aurelio's workplace, the head of the family and chief engineer of a small construction company. Everyone is at home for dinner, including uncle Lallo, Gina the maid, and the lively grandfather, Aurelio's father. Amidst shouting, the soup, chicken and cabbage are consumed, interrupted by a quarrel between father and mother because Titta pissed on the hat of the distinguished Mr. Blondi from the movie theater balcony.

During the evening walk, the kids do not miss the chance of a bit of fun by molesting Gradisca, while the other characters are immersed in the routine of provincial life. The lawyer continues his discourse on architecture, the Fascists march up and down the main street, as do the principle and the teachers. The end of the evening is marked by the arrival of the new 'fifteen' – the change of shift at the local brothel – the closing of the movie theater and the turning off of the lights.

Just to give vent to his erotic thoughts, Titta confesses to the priest Don Balosa: the tobacco woman with her overflowing breasts, the mathematics teacher, the bottoms of the farm girls on their bicycles, the chance meeting with Volpina, the clumsy pass made at Gradisca in the deserted movie theater. The distracted priest absolves all the boys who,

at the end of the episode, masturbate together in the car parked in the garage.

The festivities for the foundation of Rome, on April 21, are held in euphoric adherence by the Fascists, including races, ceremonies and gymnastic exercises. Ciccio even imagines that the Duce is personally presiding over his marriage to Aldina, his haughty comrade who prefers someone else. Aurelio, who is an anarchist sympathizer, remains at home because Miranda will not let him out. But, when a gramophone in the bell tower begins to play the 'International', he is seized by the Fascists for interrogation. He will return home at two in the morning full of castor oil, which has its rapid and inevitable effect.

The elegant world of the Grand Hotel announces the arrival of summer, the sun and amorous adventures. It starts by recalling the affair of Gradisca and the prince, which changed the girl's real name, Ninola, after the girl freely offered her favors. There follows the odalisque scene, and Biscein shooting off his mouth with a lie about having had each one of the thirty highly-guarded wives of the emir. In the evening, on the terrace, uncle Lallo and his good-for-nothing friends pick up some foreign women for love and sex adventures that will fill their winter tales.

A hot summer day favors an outing by Titta's family to their country home. They take along Aurelio's brother Teo, who lives in a mental



hospital. According to the doctors, he is basically quite well, but, in the carriage, he displays the stones he keeps in his pocket, and then, after asking them for a stop to relieve himself, he wets his pants. After lunch at the farm house, Teo profits from the others' distraction to climb a tree and shout that he wants a woman. Then he throws stones at anyone who tries to approach him. In desperation, Aurelio organizes a fake departure and other ruses to make him come out of the tree, but only when a dwarf nun from the hospital arrives is Teo convinced to come down and return to the institution.

The Rex, a large ocean liner on its way from America, is going to pass by in the night, and all kinds of boats take to the water during the late afternoon, taking the whole town to see its sudden, swift passing.

The great autumn mists make everything unrecognizable, packed in wadding and unsettling. The grandfather and the youngest grandchild get the worst of it. But Titta and his friends cut up on the terrace of the Grand Hotel, closed for the winter, dancing around in order to shake off their melancholy. Then there is the 'Thousand Mile' automobile race. Titta and Ciccio imagine that they are famous racing drivers, and that they have won the heart of the mini-skirted Gradisca, for the former, and have snubbed the haughty Aldina, for the latter.

The adventure with the tobacco woman at closing time results in uselessly strenuous attempts by Titta to demonstrate his strength, who ends up in bed with a fever for his efforts.

A heavy snowfall arrives – the year of the 'big snow' – to the delight of the boys, but Aurelio's displeasure, and changes the appearance of the town's streets and squares. The mysterious motorcyclist, however, continues to appear out of the blue with a loud rumble. The young, and not-so-young, throw snowballs at each other and at Gradisca.

Miranda is taken ill, and receives a visit from her husband and eldest son, who does not realize how seriously ill she is. At the funeral, Lallo faints when Aurelio criticizes him and is about to take revenge for having kept him all these years. Now, with the house silent and empty, Titta goes to the sea, and as he stands on the wharf, the spring breezes appear once again.

It is the season of beginnings, and also a good time for the wedding of Gradisca to the police officer, Matteo. At the wedding banquet, amidst rhymed toasts, mimicked excuses by the kids, and the inevitable photograph, a very brief downpour soaks the blind accordion player, Cantarel, who is accompanying the dancing on the meadow. As the melancholy music plays, goodbyes are said, and the married couple leave. A few people remain to finish off the party. There is a fade out in black, the sound of the wind and the surf, and the title of the movie appears... *Amarcord*.

After *La Strada*, *The Nights of Cabiria*, and *Eight and a Half*, *Amarcord* (1973) also won the Academy Award the following year as the best foreign film, immediately gaining unanimous international critical acclaim, as well as public favor. In fact, it has all the ingredients to please both the professional press, the intelligentsia and ordinary movie-goers of all ages. For his part, the critic can perceive in it the director's third and definitive liberation. After the circus and Rome, Fellini finally puts the provinces behind him with *Amarcord*, those of his origins, and the other, broader provinces of the movies of the early Thirties, in which his movie is intuitively set. Intuitively,



Aurelio (Armando Brancia), Titta's anarchic father, is questioned by the Fascists, because someone played "atorvazzonata" in the square on the anniversary of the foundation of Rome.

because those years are not entirely reconcilable and, if we did not know Fellini's habit of intentionally covering his tracks, there would be some question marks, which are fortunately resolved in Tullio Kezich's thorough biography ("It could be 1933, the year of the VII Mille Miglia and the maiden voyage of the transatlantic steamer, The Rex, cited in the movie. But it could also be 1935, when, with the war in Ethiopia, one began to sing 'Facetta nera'; or 1937, when *Shall We Dance?* came out with Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire, of which we see a poster.")

In one of these years, or perhaps more plausibly in the chronological anthology subsumed in those five years, the same process occurs as in *Eight and a Half*, when real and cinema personalities freely came to the (double) director's mind, who could do nothing but welcome them all in the confused universe of his fantasy. The characters of *Amarcord* create a similar invasion for the artist to deal with. And, if one remembers that here too 'I am another', and that one of the titles considered for the movie – along with *Hammarcord*, *Vive l'Italia*, *Romagna*, and *Il Borgo* – was *L'Uomo Invaso* ('*The Invaded Man*'), one understands the intentional direction and the symbolic presence of the personalities and masks of this suburban town.

Entirely constructed at Cinecittà (including the scene of



Gymnastic display by the local schoolchildren: on the right, Titta (Bruno Zanin), and on the left, his classmate, the unfortunate Ciccio (Ferdinando De Felice)

the passing transatlantic Rex), the Rimini of *Amarcord* is similar to the Rimini of Ostia reinvented for *I Vitelloni*: truer than the real thing, and thus cinematographically and superlatively false, realistic and convincing, an aggregate of obsessions that had always pursued the director, filtered through the scurrilous, ironic loudmouths of *Fellini's Roma*, and sifted through the real characters and clowns of the circus essay. Through this process, Fellini finally manages to clear away the "decrepit and ever contagious little theater of Rimini", whose marionettes, despite their different roles, all work together to compose a "rosary of dusty samples", a village fair in which the style and the group story respect the rules of choral works, except, naturally, for the subjective invention of memory, precisely a *m'arcord*.

Like an animal tamer who both loves and fears his animals, the director uses sugar and the whip, feeling and grimacing in sending his camera wandering through the streets, the psychology and behavior of a typicalness bound to local history – "the mocking character of such

populations, which have Roman and Celtic blood in their veins, and a character that is exuberant, generous, loyal and tenacious..." – and, because of this strong identity (also negative), recognizable within other realities outside of Romagna.

In fact, the movie brushes up against several primary units of society, from the small to the large. *The family*: Titta (inspired by his friend Titta Benzi); Aurelio, master clown; Miranda the housewife; the lively little grandfather, with his unforgettable erotic gesturing; 'little lord' Lallo, good-for-nothing Fascist. *The school*: represented in the delicious vignettes involving the teachers of the Fourth Latin School, in hierarchical order from gloomy principle Zeus to the religious studies teacher, and parish priest Don Balosa, who alternates the scholastic catechism with rapid sexophobic confessions. These, and many others, typologically inserted with all the caricatured tics deriving from their profession: the physics professor protected by photos of the king, the pope and Mussolini, who explains the laws governing the pendulum by the use of a rock; the history professor who questions Titta about Tiberius and Agrippina, but is only interested in keeping the ash of his cigarette from dropping; the sullen Alfieri, who is tested by the Italian teacher in a stormy atmosphere; the philosophy professor who moves excitedly around the classroom trying to reconcile the ideals of the State with those of the Church; the mathematics teacher and the Greek teacher, who are dreadfully afraid of the students' pranks. And finally, the most delightful character of all, the little art teacher, who explains Giotto speaking rhythmically of "per-spec-tive".

Within these tableaux, there are fluctuating sensations of memory, an affectionate look taken at a time when life was serene and unproblematic, but, at the same time, the worrisome awareness of the ideological/political, authoritarian, obtuse, old and fundamentally anti-educational elements behind it all. With regard to ignorance and adolescence in particular – fertile ground for what the movie has to say – Fellini insists on the historical responsibility of "personal" Fascism, thus making of *Amarcord* a movie that is attentive to the social and political realities, as well as an explicit warning about the significance to be attributed to this. "Politics – I mean to say, a political view of life where the problems of living are stated and confronted only in collective terms – seems to me to be a limitation. Everything which risks obliterating, hiding or altering the individual and his very personal story, turning it into abstract, schematic reality, confounding itself among 'categories', 'classes' and 'masses', instinctively repels me, I must confess. [...] If, on the other hand, by politics one meant the possibility of living together, to function in a society of individuals who

have respect for themselves and who know that their personal liberty ends where the freedom of others begins, well then, my movies seem to me to be political, because they do speak of these things, perhaps by denouncing their absence, by portraying a world in which they do not exist. I believe that all of my movies try to unmask prejudice, rhetoric, schematicism, the aberrant forms of a certain type of education and the world which produced it. What else can one do?"

One can, as Fellini does very well, portray Fascism using the truth of simple language within a single episode, that of the Christmas festivities in Rome, with the rhetoric and the 'Roman' destiny of Fascist Italy reduced to a few salient moments: the late arrival at the train station, the hierarchy on the flight of steps, authorities, teachers, various VIPs and, finally, the gramophone and the castor oil. Moments which, all on their own – "Of all the seas, the Adriatic has always been the most Fascist" – pungently depict a "psychological, emotional way of being Fascist, a sort of block, an arrested development in the adolescent phase." When then the

author states that "I seem to discern the eternal premises of Fascism precisely in being provincial", one cannot help having before one's eyes the suburban Fascists, the good-for-nothing friends of Lallo, and Lallo himself, youths who are already old, and whose jokes, swims, hair nets and snow balls are a substitution for the awareness that comes with growth, causing them to remain as eternal children, seeing that "Fascism and adolescence continue in some degree to be permanent historical stages of our lives."

More eloquently than a documentary, the connections in *Amarcord* between ignorance, adolescence, the provincial and Fascism are developed into something like a radical cure for that kind of thing. Thus *Amarcord* is another of the countless therapy movies against something, a satirical wringing out of Fellini's sponge in order to liberate mental space and leave the door open for the equally critical *Casanova* and, in particular, *Orchestra Rehearsal*, the stage where those castrating historical bonds are absent and are recklessly replaced by the unreasonable, deafening confusion of contemporary chaos.

*In this family scene, Titta, who has been up to all sorts of tricks, tries to hide from Aurelio's anger*





*The tobacconist (Maria Antonietta Beluzzi), a typical large Fellinian woman, subjects our young hero to a suffocating sexual initiation, while the Supreme Poet watches with puzzled sternness*

To free himself of these burdensome traditions, a director like Fellini, constitutionally unsuited to following the schemes of the old political movies, must necessarily avail himself of irony and the structure of the funny story, because he is too attentive to details, irrelevant, intimated, submissive and unusual facts. Therefore, descending, as it were, the hierarchical social order of *Amarcord*, after Fascism, the church, the school, there are the family, the coffee bar, the movie theater, the class photograph, the piazza, the community, including the closing meal at the *Paradiso trattoria*.

In these moments, like the blind man's accordion, the movie elongates itself into broad frescos – the bonfire, the passage of the Rex, the Grand Hotel in autumn, the 'year of the big snow' (which was, after all, in 1929), the count's peacock, the wedding banquet – only to narrow down again by focusing on (self)portraits, scenes and incomparable personalities. From Titta himself, uncertainly moving between carefree and emotional states, to Uncle Teo with his cry of "I want a woman!", to Ninola 'Gradisca' and the prince, to the grandfather with his mortal fear of the silent mist ("I feel like I'm no place: if that's the way death is, it's a bad job. Shove it!"). And the grandfather again: "My pa's pa used to say that, to stay healthy, you have to piss a lot,

like dogs do", and you had to believe him, because at 106 his sex life was still going strong.

The sketches of Titta and his parents are also exemplary. Aurelio, the father, with that circus clown's head of his, slaps himself hard across the face when angry, while Miranda (Pupella Maggio) seems to be very sensitively playing out her role again as housewife Concetta in Eduardo De Filippo's play *Christmas at the Cupiello's*. And, furthermore: the south Italian lawyer who takes his bicycle along on the boat, the priest who sniffs at his fingers during confession, Ciccio and the other kids, the tobacco woman – emblem, quotation and premise for the gallery of *City of Women* in gestation – and all the other actors, present, past and future of the *Amarcord* Circus, the little adolescent hot-air balloon that came from a sleepy provincial town.

Several sequences were excluded from this closed world of Fellini's youth and nostalgia, including the one of the man, Colonia, cleaning out the cesspools and searching for the countess's diamond ring (eliminated because it would be incomprehensible in the United States where, Fellini thought, this kind of scavenger would be unheard of); the tornado that was meant to come between the Uncle Teo sequence and the passing of the Rex, but not shot for financial reasons; and finally the Chinese tie seller (a scene that ended



*A lively scene involving uncle Teo (Ciccio Ingrassia), the family madman. He will only climb down from the tree, where he has taken refuge and is loudly asking for a woman, when the dwarf nun peremptorily commands him to do so*

*Titto in the concluding scene of Amarcord*





The walk down the main street is an opportunity to bother alluring Gradisca, while the poster of Gary Cooper reminds one of the drawings which Fellini did as a boy for a picture house in Rimini

up, Kezich recalls, together with the cesspool one, in the television special *Fellini nel Cestino* ('Fellini's Waste Basket').

In a reduced world where, however, Fellini's oblique resentment is unable to leave out the pleasant group feeling, the life of comradely relations, where others are like oneself, one can more easily feel at home in the same places: at the coffee bar where they tell the same old stories, at the Fulgor movie theater where everyone waits for the snow to come, where Titta pursues love, Gradisca dreams of a husband like Gary Cooper in *Beau Geste* (a movie that the faker Fellini has fun passing off as the non-existent *La Valle dell'Amore*). And in the piazza, too, where there is a place for everyone, from the mysterious horseman to Biscein's tall stories; in the 'exotic' Grand Hotel between the elegance of the 'vecchia signora' and the closed, deserted atrium; in the nocturnal wait for the transatlantic steamer, with the idea of the always possible, but never actual, adventure, like the painted sea of the false liner; and finally, in the two collective moments of the ending, Miranda's funeral and Gradisca's wedding.

In the rites of death and of life, analogous to what he did

at the end of *Eight and a Half*, Fellini once again presents the whole cast in order to close this anthology of faces and characters that his imagination – and particularly the poetic imagination of Tonino Guerra, the Riminese of the suburbs – have bestowed upon cinema comedy.

The melancholy motif of the story fades out splendidly, a little at a time, in the light of the equally melancholy finale, in the fleeting merriment of a party that has ended and only just begun. The tone is almost subdued, suggested by the wide-angle shots of the toasting, of the photograph and the continuation of the movie after Biscein's goodbye, the unconscious desire to avoid the words 'the end', which Fellini never attached to his pictures. The movements of the camera, corresponding to those of the director in the town set, and the atmosphere created by the music, untiringly depict impressions and memories solicited by the never absent wind which, at the opening, brings the springtime and, at the end, together with the sound of the sea, suggests once more the maternal character – enveloping, fecund, unstable and deep – of the basic elements of the cinema of memory, of his Great World Theater.

# The Wind Blows Where It Will

Fellini's *Casanova* • *Orchestra Rehearsal* •  
*City of Women* • *And the Ship Sails On*

“It is easier for a person to change his deep convictions than to change his clichés,” Fellini remarked with regard to *Casanova* (1976), the movie that possibly caused him the most suffering and turned him into the protagonist of “one of the most dreadful clashes in the history of cinema” (Bernardino Zapponi). The dual-name *Fellini's Casanova* could be considered the classical producer's *coup*, a really big deal, because the director's name appeared alongside that of the most legendary seducer, which, almost by chance, Fellini had proposed to Dino De Laurentiis. The idea, as had happened with *Mastorna*, came to nothing for many reasons, among them the director's refusal to cast an American actor (Robert Redford or Dustin Hoffman) in the title role.

The project was taken up by Andrea Rizzoli for Cineriz, who eventually dropped it for being too expensive to produce, as well as for its weak cover funding on the foreign market. Finally, in 1975, Alberto Grimaldi entered the scene, on the strict condition that, in order to keep down the costs, it had to be filmed in London studios and in the English language. Director and producer finally reached a compromise: it will be shot in English, but at Cinecittà, and the lead is to be Donald Sutherland, closer in appearance to the physical type Fellini had drawn in many sketches. Three years passed from the first negotiations until the movie was finished.

*Casanova* is another ‘stop-gap movie’, like the *Satyricon* and the hypothetical projects for a *Decameron* or *Orlando Furioso* – “a protective system of intentions, excuses, desires and convictions whose sole purpose is to allow me to make the movie that I need to make at that moment in time.” One of those movies in which the producer must, as often happens with Fellini, do nothing but believe in the project and accept everything the director wants. Grimaldi is not accepting enough, and the work is plagued by friction, mostly due to an increase in costs, which was not actually very great.

Fellini takes up *Casanova's Memoirs* only after having signed the contract and, from this moment, the trouble

begins: “I waded into the endless paper ocean of the *Memoirs*, into that arid catalogue of a quantity of facts amassed with the statistical rigor of a file clerk, finicky, meticulous, cramped, not even much of a liar, and annoyance, alienation, disgust, boredom, were the only variants in my state of mind, depressed, disconsolate. It was this rejection, this nausea, which suggested the approach to the movie.”

The project proceeds punctiliously, the director feels less and less emotion on reading the Venetian's ponderous diary, and the same goes for the Eighteenth Century, “the most empty, exhausted, drained of centuries. What was European society on the eve of the French Revolution if not a cemetery?” It is this very funereal atmosphere that is taken as a paradigm, to accentuate the eternal juxtaposition of love and death, or better, love and non-life, a constant in the melancholy progress of a man who is a prisoner of his origins. In effect, the historical *Casanova*, overbearing male, great seducer, immoderate in all his ways, holds as little interest for the director as does *Casanova* the writer. Fellini shares out the boring task of reading the diaries with Bernardino Zapponi and Tonino Guerra, filling his pages with acid comments, noting all of antipathy for the character, an antipathy that will lead the director to portray him as an unfeeling marionette, a strange vampire who “never dies because he was never born, an aquarium fish”, in short, an eighteenth century *Nosferatu* whose life is “a frenetic, mechanical dance without any purpose, something out of an electric wax museum.”


Using his beloved law of opposites, the director begins to overturn even the hero's physical traits: for the tall, robust and vital Giacomo *Casanova*, he substitutes *Fellini's Casanova*, a smooth gigolo and unctuous sexual athlete, constantly and futilely searching for public recognition of his qualities as economist, philosopher, alchemist and what you will: a search constantly frustrated by the demand for that one and only thing: his sexual services, which conclude every scene. Substantially, a *Casanova* who is the victim of an ineluctable destiny, made by his own hands, a solitary



*Fellini stubbornly issues precise instructions to one of his actors, as a great artist who was trying to turn a cab driver into a clown would do*

anti-hero, a romantic misunderstood by the immoral humanity with which he comes into contact, from the lowest to the highest ranks. A neurotic Casanova who finds his *raison d'être* not so much in sex as in reveries, in fantasizing, not a woman's body, but a single great intellectual opportunity.

Be that as it may, from the memories of an old embittered man, the director distils what, in his opinion, is the very essence of the man, who possibly never was the victim of a mother complex, as suggested by the false clue thrown up during the meeting with his mother in Dresden – an expedient for making him more human, after the antipathies and reservations aroused on every occasion. One can accept or reject this psychoanalytic interpretation, but there is no doubt that Fellini, with his capacities as a 'medium', has sucked out the best to be found in his subject, targeting his sensibilities as an old good-for-nothing, as a smoke vendor, or as an Italian man conditioned by the woman-mother-lover figure, having little credibility with his cumbersome fame and yet modern, a man greatly curious about the world, born in the wrong century.

 *Fellini's Casanova* opens with titles that scroll across the waters of the Grand Canal in Venice. Near the Rialto, carnival season is being celebrated with the flight of the ceremonial angel, today known as the Colombina, as the masks respond in chorus to the oration for the city in the verses of the Venetian poet Andrea Zanzotto. The Doge cuts the ribbon, and the angel falls from above into the

canal, as an enormous figurehead takes shape on the water through the noise of the *fiesta* and firecrackers. As the populace recites *La mona ciavona*, a cable breaks, causing the head to sink: this is a sign of disaster, but not for Giacomo Casanova who, masked, receives a note with regard to an amorous *rendevouz*.

It is an encounter with Maddalena, the mistress of the French ambassador, a voyeur who watches the union, delicate and ritualistic, to the beat of the mechanical bird that the great Venetian lover always has with him. Taking advantage of the invisible observer's satisfaction, Casanova – not only an able and intense lover, but a scholar of philosophy, mathematics and economics – does not hesitate to ask, in vain, for a letter of introduction for France, a country he loves like a second homeland.

On his way home, in the very midst of a storm over the lagoon, Casanova is arrested by order of the Messer Grande and the inquisitors. Unjustly found guilty of practising black magic, of possessing books placed on the index and of despising religion, he is condemned to prison in I Piombi, Venice's lugubrious, insalubrious prison.

In his horrid, narrow cell, Casanova remembers his earlier life of freedom, the erotic encounter with the woman who loved being whipped from behind, and of the episode with the anemic embroiderer, Annamaria, whom the intuitive Casanova had saved from debilitating blood-lettings and had 'cured' after a night of love.

The nocturnal escape from I Piombi, which Casanova himself calls "a masterpiece of intelligence, of exact calculation, intuition and courage, all of which qualities were rewarded with good luck," leads the Venetian to Paris, and the esoteric salon of the Marquise d'Urf, surrounded by magicians, occultists, clairvoyants and mediums – among them Cagliostro – whose one and only purpose, apart from magical or philosophical disquisitions on the conception of the



Madonna, is to realize the Great Work: to die and be reborn as a man who will live forever. This will be possible after carnal union with an initiate of her own pyramidal sign, such as Casanova, who, with the help of Marcolina, his temporary bed companion, succeeds in making love to the withered countess.

Two years later at Forli, he meets Henriette, a French girl travelling with a Hungarian officer who, being obliged to continue north, entrusts her to him. Giacomo falls madly in love, and goes with her to the fête organized by the hunchback Count Du Bois, an arts patron and homosexual. There, after discussions about the female soul, the guests hear a short metaphorical opera on love, entitled *La Mantide Religiosa* ('The Praying Mantis'), composed and sung by their host himself and his lover, Gianbruno.

The sudden clandestine departure of Henriette, indissolubly bound to a great, mysterious European personage who has total power over her, throws Casanova into the blackest depression, and he considers becoming a monk or even killing himself. This despair will be equalled only by a despair he feels many years later in London, due to two

women, "the infamous Charpillon and her daughter, who is completely worthy of her." These two, after infecting him with syphilis and robbing him, abandon him with his few bags to the adverse destiny of wretched, generous spirits. Determined this time as well to kill himself, he puts on his best clothes and wades into the river. But upon espying a very tall lady in the company of two dwarfs on the opposite shore, his lively curiosity is attracted and he desists from his intention.

In his search for the giantess, he arrives at a circus where, amidst shows, rides, masks, human jokes and tattoos, he also witnesses the presentation of the 'Great Mouna', a kind of throat, whale's belly, symbolic cavern in whose depths everything originates and can be found. A friend unexpectedly comes to the rescue, and informs him that there is also a giant woman at the circus, young and from the mountains of Veneto, very tall, very strong, but also fair and gentle. Sold to the circus by her wicked husband, the woman now puts on a show at fairs and circuses, beating the most robust men at arm wrestling. Two Neapolitan dwarfs take care of her and, under Casanova's discrete gaze, they bathe her lovingly and are moved when

*In mist-covered London,  
Giacomo Casanova (Donald Sutherland)  
is discarded by his last lovers  
(Diane Kourys and Carmen Scarpitta)*



she sings a little dialect song, the dirge of her hometown. The following day, the circus has folded its tents and Casanova leaves London.

One of his unforgettable days was one spent in Rome, first in the presence of the smiling pope, whose hand he could finally kiss over and over again, and then, in the evening, at the party of the English ambassador to the Holy See. In the ancient palace of Prince Del Brando, some rather lusty, primitive games are played, such as a wine contest. Casanova's fame as a tireless lover leads the host to organize a contest between Casanova's more 'intellectual' approach, and the brute instincts of the prince's coachman, to see who can publicly make love the most times in one hour. The couples are formed. Casanova chooses the Roman model, while a noble lady puts herself at the disposition of the servant. After some respiratory exercises and drinking eighteen eggs mixed with spiced Spanish wine, Giacomo wins the contest and is carried around in triumph.

The travelling Giacomo experiences his next sexual encounter between Berne and Dresden. In the latter city, as guest of the entomologist Moebius, he is taken ill, perhaps because of witnessing

the insects being pinned down alive by the scholar's two young daughters. Feeling better, thanks to their loving care, he falls in love with Isabelle, and makes an appointment with her in Dresden so that they may live together for the rest of their lives. The girl never shows up at the Inn of the Moors, but Casanova still has a night of unbridled sex with the singer Astrodi, an old lover from Venice, and the insatiable little German hunchback.

The following evening, at the end of the opera *Orpheus and Eurydice*, when the theater is deserted and the great candelabra extinguished, Casanova happens to meet his mother, who, now almost paralyzed, lives in the country. He carries her to her carriage on his back, and tries to find a way of remaining with her for a while, but the carriage goes off into the snowy night.

During the years that follow, he finds himself in Holland, Belgium, Spain and Norway, where he is taken seriously ill, but finally ends up at the brilliant court of Wuerttemberg. There, he tries to convince the duchess to intervene for him with her brother, but the fête is extremely noisy and full of unexpected surprises, the atmosphere tipsy and

*Going into the belly of the whale (the Grande Mouna), one of the most significant circus sideshows, from the London episode of Fellini's Casanova*



*The tall lady, Angelina (Sandra Elaine Allen), assisted by her dwarf attendants as she bathes, sings a gentle Venetian dirge after her routine circus exhibition*



military, and the music deafening, played by organists roosting on high stools, which make it impossible for him to be taken seriously, and the same is true for the projects he proposes. The court sings the melancholy, patriotic ditty "The Hunter of Wuerttemberg" and, seeing the mechanical doll Rosalba, his disappointment is transformed into the most lively interest for the magnificent automaton.

Unable to resist temptation, he goes down into the salon during the night where, to the playing of a music box, he embraces Rosalba and dances with her. The doll with a porcelain face moves jerkily, but Giacomo, excited, uses it to make love.

The memories of his last years relate to his life in Dux, and its long Bohemian winters. There, Casanova has been librarian to Count Waldenstein for a long time, a job which he holds very dear, because it allows him to sate his unextinguished thirst for knowledge. But his indignation is roused for two reasons: the necessity of having his meals in the kitchen with the servants, where he does not always find 'maccaroni', and the dishonest behavior of the major-domo, Faulkirchner, and his mistress. These two take their revenge on the old man by smearing his portrait, and the first page of his novel *Icosameron*, with excrement.

During a fête in honor of the young count, Casanova recites a passage from his beloved Ariosto, which is not appreciated by some, who furthermore thought he was long dead. Offended, he retires to his rooms and the consolation of his books. Thinking about Venice, where he now feels he will never be able to return, he remembers a dream...

It is night. On the gray and gelid waters of the moonlit Grand

Canal, a young Casanova goes to meet Rosalba, while several of his women run towards the Rialto Bridge. On the other side, very brightly lit, a golden carriage arrives, drawn by four horses. It stops, the door opens, and inside there is the pope, smiling and nodding to him. Half hidden at the pope's side is his mother, whom he saw for the last time in Dresden many years ago. Once again with the Rialto as a background, in the half light of the moon and the sighing of the wind, Giacomo Casanova dances once more with the genteel automaton to the sound of a music box... The red and puffy eyes of the old Venetian are dissolved in the last romantic embrace of the two waxen figures, who slowly rotate round themselves.

Of all Fellini's movies, *Casanova* is the one that is most inspired by painting. It is as if the director, in his supposed antipathy for the character, had turned all his inventive inspiration to creating vast pictures – the episodes of the rake's life taken from his memoirs – drawing upon the heritage of eighteenth century figurative art. During the early stages of preparation, he appears to be very busy, keeping himself amused by drawing, making little models, studying costumes and details to be constructed in the studios of Cinecittà.... Everything in *Casanova* is clearly fake, and yet true to life, a product of the mind and hands of the artisan of genius, who wraps his creations in an aura of melancholy.

And so, these claustrophobic sets are created, which



*Angelina (on the right) challenges the strongest men in the tavern to a test of strength, and beats them all*

*Through the wide-open mouth of the whale, the Venetian libertine sees the "light of the origins"*



remind one of the interiors of Pietro Longhi's paintings, the papier-maché Venice and the plastic lagoon, the exact opposite of Canaletto's radiance, the opening of space and light that, whilst exploring the lagoon city, had seemed to Fellini to be too 'sunny', even during the darkest hours, so that he rejected the idea of shooting the film in its natural setting. For the director, the colors and light had to complement the dark wedding of Eros and Thanatos, the sadness of love without feelings, underscored by the example of the bed/coffins that host Giacomo's virtuoso performances. As in *Fellini's Satyricon* then, crepuscular tones prevail, which open to the light only in the Henriette episode, true love, the only woman to whom Giacomo says 'forever'. Dark gray, brown, deep green, black and red, these are the colors of a century that was dirty, and is shown to be such in the bad smells of the inns and taverns, and the courts swarming with crude and vulgar personages. Casanova himself is often in underwear and corsets of an indefinable color, rather than white, and in sharp contrast to his highly colored, rich clothes: velvet waistcoats, lace collars, golden buttons and powdered wig.

At this point, it is worth remarking on the complicated business of casting Donald Sutherland as the lead and, above all, his edgy relationship with the director. A skilled, professional actor, Sutherland's looks and sensibilities were still far from Fellini's idea of Casanova. Imprisoned in a 'sea-horse' mask with a protruding chin, a humped nose, shaven head and eyebrows personally designed by the director, the actor underwent a daily crisis, until Fellini explained that he had to let himself go, give up the stereotype and put himself at the disposition of the dream Casanova.

In his long career as a lover, Giacomo never excluded any type of woman. A champion of love even without feeling, he chooses women who can complete him, without concern for their beauty, except in Henriette's case. Fellini therefore accentuates the crossed eyes of Maddalena at the paroxysm of pleasure, Annamaria's hysteria, and the daughter of Moebius the entomologist, who enjoys the erotic/intellectual game between Giacomo and her sister Isabelle. She is beautiful, but it is a funeral kind of beauty, as slick as that of Rosalba, the inexpressive and obedient mechanical doll. Angelina has the same characteristics, an enormous doll with a body as large as her brain is small, an inaccessible myth whom Giacomo does not even try to touch. The other women in the movie are horrid: from the old, libidinous Marquise d'Urf, to Marcolina, shapely but disfigured by a black eye. Then there are the hags like Charpillon or Astrodi, the prostitute and the princess of the sexual contest in the Roman episode.

If Casanova – half poet, half adventurer – really loved every woman, Fellini does not believe it and turns that love



*Acrobatic slideshows and amazed expressions create a proto-cinematographic atmosphere, full of nebulous mystery, in the oniric fresco depicting the restrictive, gloomy world of the eighteenth century created by Fellini*



into dark misogyny, even taking care to provide a psychoanalytical justification: through his mother's fault, Giacomo cannot have a real woman. And he demonstrates that woman is a symbol of perdition by inserting the drawings of his friend Roland Topor into the magic lantern at the London circus.

Fellini's gallery is enriched by Hogarth's style in the London adventure, and the encounter with the great whale, one of the most symbolic and pictorial in the movie. In his monograph on Fellini, Mario Verdone remembers having met him at an exhibition of circus posters, standing in front of one entitled 'The Whale Theater with the Magic Lantern', that he was to use exactly as it was in his movie. In the long line of people waiting to enter the whale's stomach, there is also Giacomo who, in front of Topor's disquieting images, will fall back into his nightmare and, physically, fall among the human variety of monstrous circus charlatans who populate the tavern, and is redeemed by the presence of Angelina, a victim like himself, and therefore part of his inner world.

The Dresden scene is divided into two parts, with the common background of the Italian opera. It is the occasion for the chance meeting with his mother and Astrodi, mother and mistress, that is to say the two faces of woman, broken into pieces, which Casanova does not succeed in recomposing. And if Astrodi will further exalt his love-making capacity, his superficial side, his mother will make him once more compare himself with his phantoms, his condition as victim of the woman who gave him his first refusal. With the infinite tenderness of a child looking for affection and petting, Giacomo announces his successes (not sexual ones) at European courts, and receives only indifference in return. At this point, Fellini can no longer lie, and briefly reveals a wave of sympathy – and fraternity – with the unfortunate chap. In short, his exterior opposition dissolves in the images of that lake of solitude and intense humanity reflected in the glance of his personage, in a cul-de-sac.

From this moment on, ever gloomier colors and events accompany the Venetian on his road towards old age and death, which has been all too often announced. When sexual athletics no longer sustain him, he will become painfully aware that not even his fame as a scholar will be enough to earn him consideration. He is no longer credible, no longer believed, but only just tolerated. Old, irritable, isolated, dirty and untidy in his outmoded clothes, his mechanical bird out of order like himself, he will live, forgotten, in his study in Bohemia, keeping his last amorous thought for the doll Rosalba, the only one who cannot judge him.

At the gloomy court of Dux, Fellini's wind will begin to sough again – and forcefully – when the dream of the old Casanova is recounted. That same breath of wind will carry him back to his beloved Venice, to the frozen Grand Canal,

*The first romantic encounter in Casanova takes place during the Venice Carnival, when Giacomo meets up with Sister Maddalena (Margareth Clementi) in order to satisfy the voyeuristic tendencies of the Ambassador of France*



*Images from the subconscious (the sketches are by Roland Topor) contained within the unique portrayal inside a cetacean's stomach, a figurative metaphor of the eternal, somewhat stereotyped, myth about sex*

in the company of the automaton, before closing his eyes and returning to that mother who, from her carriage, finally sends him a benevolent gesture.

From the Venetian adventurer's large, prolix diary emerges a reckless combination of cavalier and genius, and Federico Fellini extracts a most beautiful, complex film, in which he contemplates himself non-narcissistically in the mirror. A mirror visually very rich, pictorial, dream-like, to express the autobiographical solitude of Casanova, and his own artist's melancholy in seeing his creative energy frustrated, almost foreseeing the events. Precisely what will happen in *Orchestra Rehearsal*.

The sonoric commentary to the great ring road episode of *Fellini's Roma* is dissonant and unpleasant, to the point of visual saturation in the emblematic Colosseum traffic jam. For the titles of *Orchestra Rehearsal* (1979), Fellini reverts to that sound-track once again, as an introduction to the movie.

And so, in this musical *prova* (rehearsal, trial, trans.), one finds once again the theme of accumulation, of baroque exaggeration, of clairvoyance, of *contemporary chaos* according to Federico Fellini. It is an apocalyptic/ironic picture of social life and politics, a prelude to those sketched in *Ginger and Fred* and *The Voice of the Moon*. Analogously to what occurs in Ingmar Bergman's movies – to which, sometimes in an instrumental manner, his movies have been compared – Fellini's *prova* intends to direct itself elsewhere. He is interested in nosing around, digging into the *before*, primarily among the folds, but also in the *after* (a little like in Bergman's theater piece *After the Rehearsal*) in order to analyze the effects produced in the individual and the collective, the conductor and the orchestra, by the pretext of a performance to be tested, rehearsed, modified.

In the same way that he had tried out elsewhere, Fellini assumes the fictitious and discrete role of the interviewer, interested in showing what lies *behind* or *ahead* (of a personage, event or context). He is interested in the *surroundings* as well as the *inside*, being aware that the internal dimension is implicit, acquired. This, too, is the reason why he repeatedly shows the movie camera, the *mode* in which cinema images are made, because he has always known and felt – and with him the spectator – that the fascinating thing is not the *what* but the *how*. With regard to what there is of the political in the fable behind *Amarcord*, it would be equally reductive to trace back the political 'message' in *Orchestra Rehearsal* to the collapse of general order in the system, to the annulling of some rules of behavior, to the confusion and uncertainty of an epoch (for Italy, 1978 means the year of Aldo Moro's kidnapping and assassination by the Red Brigades, and the first government the Italian Communist Party voted for).

Fellini is an artistic thermometer, apparently superficial, but deep in substance: deep because, with the objective eye of the camera, he analyzes the small daily gestures of the musician-personages, and their behavior due to being part of a cohesive group, or what is supposed to be such, bound together by music; superficial because, in refusing didacticism, he places the observer both within and without the business, through the acting out of a senseless, provoking musical rehearsal.



An old oratory that holds the tombs of no less than three popes and seven bishops has been turned into a concert hall. The old copyist, who is putting the parts on the music stands, is explaining things to the television crew that has come to interview the orchestra and conductor. He talks about the different stages of transformation of the place, its marvelous acoustics and his own imminent pension.

The concert-master arrives, a Piedmontese who wants to relate the history of the oratory. Then Mirella, the pianist, enters with two other musicians and, a few at a time, others arrive and begin taking their places in front of their music stands, arranging the chairs and tuning up their instruments.

There is a lot of the usual talk about everyday life, about sex, the characters you meet in heavy traffic, and, while the players are finishing their preparations, various things take place. Some are listening to the ball game on the radio and others, like the concert-master, check the humidity on the barometer before starting to quarrel with another neurotic violinist. A few are still eating sandwiches; one trombonist finds a balloon in his instrument, which inflates as he blows and explodes... in short, a series of jokes and scenarios.

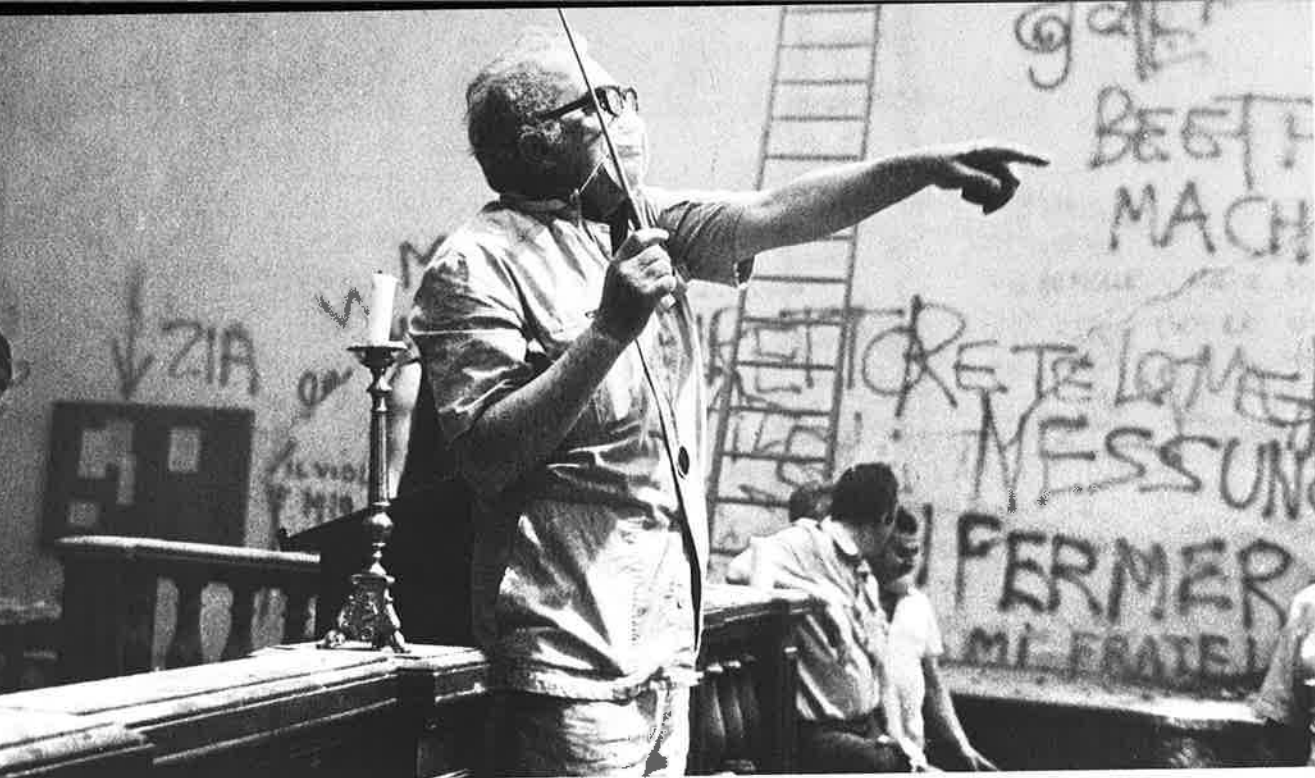
The orchestra manager comes in, as does the Sardinian union delegate, and officially announces the presence of the television crew (which not everyone is happy about). Immediately after, two muffled knocks are heard from a distance, and Clara the harpist arrives.

A series of interviews begins with the musicians talking about their own instruments: the piano is the most difficult; a young, slightly eccentric, Tuscan lady shows off her flute and, like many of the others, compares her instrument to the human voice. There follow the trombone and the percussion instruments – almost isolated because the violin and flute treat them with detachment and condescension – the violoncello, the violin again, the bassoon, the clarinet, the trumpet. Behind every instrument there is obviously not only the musician, but the human being as well, whose job it is to describe the qualities, defects and betrayals which each one experiences in his professional, artistic and personal relationship with his instrument.

During the preliminary doodling of the musicians, the union delegate expresses his own ideas, and while the small organizational details are being settled, the German conductor arrives, the preliminaries are ended and the sonoric arrangements for the rehearsal begin.

The music is interrupted and repeated various times in order to correct rhythmic, timbric and dynamic errors. The rehearsal proceeds as best it can, while those who are not playing continue speaking, giggling and chatting, and some still listening to the radio...

The conductor is not at all happy with the situation – he complains and throws away the score, while the musicians regard him with annoyance, sarcasm or mockery – and wants to start again at a



*Under the roof of an ancient auditorium desecrated by the musicians' protest slogans, we find the cineast, surrounded by a cloud of dust created by the scuffle in Orchestra Rehearsal*



*The German conductor (Baldwin Baas) vainly tries to get the members of the orchestra to play in harmony*

different passage, introduced by the piano. It is necessary to begin again several times *da capo*, because the sound is not compact enough. The constant incitement of the conductor's harsh words, emphasized by his German accent, finally causes some of the musicians to remove their jackets and shirts, or fan themselves and take a handkerchief to mop up the sweat induced by the hard work.

When the conductor asks for the clarinet to play a passage by himself, the situation, already tense, becomes really problematic: the clarinet player refuses, saying that the contract and the union agreement do not call for such services. Offensive remarks are made by both sides, which are interrupted by a new noise, distant and disturbing.

The horn is not present at the rehearsal which, meanwhile, is suspended for a double pause of twenty minutes, unilaterally called.

During this break, some of the players go to the bar, while others remain in their places, and the interviewed musicians comment on the conductor, the joys and pains of the profession, the value of music and the instruments, the obsessions and tics, vices and other extra-musical topics.

While the oboe insists on his absolutely determining role in the orchestra, the old copyist takes the television crew to the conductor, concluding his remarks with a criticism of modern methods compared to the rigor and respect of the past.

Now it is the conductor's turn, concluding the series of interviews with a mixture of exultant memories about his beginnings and completely negative judgments about the state of music, the law and musicians.

As he is about to remount the podium, a blackout occurs, and the conductor wants to continue the rehearsal by candlelight. Looking into the hall, he discovers that a rebellion has broken out against him, and the supposedly dictatorial powers and arrogance that the musicians believe that he represents. His role, function and usefulness are contested, inkpots thrown against the portraits of the great composers of the past, and the walls covered with insulting, offensive graffiti of



various kinds. Political music for all is called for, but the union delegates do not even try to intervene, and later fight among themselves.

Confusion and rebellion increase and, under the conductor's mute, impotent gaze, the musicians give way to vandalism, sex under the piano, quarrels and vindictive slogans, slapping. Meanwhile, plaster begins to fall from the ceiling and the drums beat the rhythms of the devastation in full sway.

Struck by a violinist, the harpist, who was the only one not to give an interview, now expounds her poetical views on the harp – a devoted friend and not merely an instrument to play for a living.

"Orchestra. Terror. Death to the conductor." "Orchestra. Terror. Anyone who plays is a traitor." These are the slogans that accompany the entrance of the 'new conductor', a giant metronome, disliked by many. Groups of dissenters form, verbal and physical violence take place, no holds barred, and then an elderly violinist, who until that

moment had been silent and looking lost and dazed, pulls out a pistol and begins shooting into the air...

Silence ensues, except for the muffled noises that are now closer at hand. On the wall opposite the podium, deep cracks appear, and a steel ball, a very heavy wrecking ball, creates an enormous hole in the wall.

Everyone is paralyzed, pale with terror, speechless amidst the dense dust, and sorrow for the dead harpist buried under the rubble.

The conductor brings the situation back under control, restoring faith in music, in the work of each individual and the love for each one's instrument. The podium is restored to its place, the musicians all return more or less to their places, the rehearsal begins anew, while the dust settles and the faces of the musicians are more recognizable.

The music of the strings move some of the players, others smile as if in peace, recovered and fused in music... But the conductor begins

*The tidy arrangement of the music scores by the elderly copyist (Umberto Zuanelli), who has vivid memories of that musical venue, is now scattered in this Fellinian fantasy, which also marks the last collaboration between Master Rota and the director*





*The rehearsal begins, and the slightly anonymous, depressed faces of the members of the orchestra register boredom, ill feeling and frustration with the "real world"*



*For the benefit of the cameras, a strange, slightly disconsolate expression on the face of the sentimental copyist, a thoughtful witness to the rehearsal*

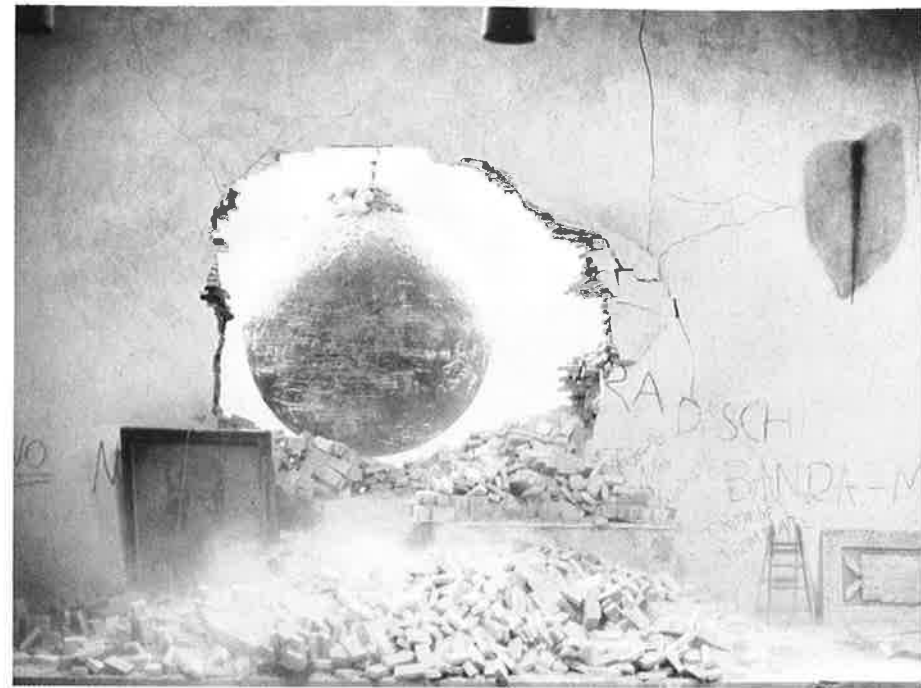
to... act like an orchestra conductor, to criticize harshly, to mistreat the musicians with that Germanic Italian of his, hard and metallic. The picture fades and his stentorian voice gives way to the music and the end titles.

Contrary to the norm, Nino Rota wrote the music for *Orchestra Rehearsal* before the filming to be used in playback: *Gemelli allo Specchio*, *Piccolo Riso Melanconico*, *Piccolo Attesa* and *Grande Galop* – a quartet of anticipatory compositions, creating a crescendo alongside the events of the movie, and a 'prova' of its nightmare. However, it is not simply an anticipation, as it is flanked by Fellini's pre-vision of the great uncertainties of the end of the decade.

If art serves to interpret the past and to scrutinize the unknowable future, and even though the director concluded the interview in Costantino Costantini's book by saying: "I foresaw nothing. What happened had to happen, it was in the nature of things. We are all subject to a kind of fatal predetermination", it is still true that the presence of Fellini's genius in the art and society of the Twentieth Century allows anyone who knows how to, and actually wants to do so, to rend the cultural veils, to instinctively sense and reveal the changes. Fellini opened up views of things which it was not incumbent upon him to enter and gaze upon: the rot, the corruption and the stupid intolerance; nor was it his place to find solutions. Fellini was a director and, with a movie, the most you can do is open an abyss in the concert

halls – in the political headquarters? – with heavier sledgehammers than the enormous weight of obtuse collective behavior, foolish greediness and the imposition of the judgement and privileged position of the uncultured – those same uncultured whose basis is insensitivity and incapacity for moral order and the understanding of the beautiful.

This describes that little movie that was made while awaiting financing for *City of Women*. A little movie in length (lasting hardly seventy minutes), but great in the nobility of its non-partisan conception of politics. A picture dedicated to the search for simple and collective harmony, which is reached for a moment towards the end after the self-destructive catastrophe, when the conductor manages to scratch up a pinch of individual dignity and bring the agitated back to their senses. More shocked than satisfied for having unleashed their frustrations and their ignorant rage at the conductor and the podium (symbols of power without which art cannot exist), they return to their places and exert themselves to seek some justification and consolation, and approach the maestro to get his consensus, his responsibility and guidance. But it only lasts for a moment. As often happens in Fellini's work, here too an overly desperate or excessively 'happy ending' conclusion would be superficial, and easily intriguing or exploitative



Both the outside world and the world of music seem to be collapsing beneath the powerful, demolishing blows, until the temporary Fellinian reconstruction

*The stress and strain of the rehearsal provokes unseemly behaviour, and slogans are chanted to the beat of the metronome to drown out the "ineffectual" and dictatorial orchestra director*



(should we not say unrealistic?). The harmony is splintered again by generational and cultural immaturity. And the stereotype of the German 'commander' who uses his harsh, biting tongue, a messenger of disdain and poetry with that strident "da capol!", annuls the lovely moment of music's victory over the banal and fragile quotidian.

A wrestling match sustained for the whole of the film, from Nino Rota's music in the interruptions of the musicians, in their airs of self-sufficiency, in their disdain for musical quality and love of their instruments – a love which, on an individual level, does come through here and there during the interviews, amidst frustrations, mediocrity, wrong choices and senile delusions. Some of the orchestra musicians play as if they were going to the office, attempt to open contractual negotiations and even let themselves be convinced to put their welfare in the hands of defenders who guarantee such a degree of conflict that will shield them from their true nature as musicians. The refusal of the clarinet player to play for a third time not stipulated in the

contract is perhaps one of the most evident examples: he was saved from the eternal mists of his home town on the Po thanks to his instrument, he is proud because the maestro told him: "Bravo, young man. Finally I get to hear a clarinet with a beautiful sound", and yet he refuses to play a passage solo, particularly after the conductor had contested a dramatic passage which he considered comical. Perhaps on a point like this, one could have established a different kind of contact, rather than bet on the introduction of a metronome to fictitiously settle all problems.

And so, Fellini's metaphor in *Orchestra Rehearsal* would no longer address only the feeling of a progressive collapse, announced by revealing signs that were ignored until it was too late even for short respites. "Maestro, but how did this happen? When?" some of the musicians, who do not know how to explain events to themselves, ask of the conductor. And their chief reacts to scurrilous vulgarity and the musical ignorance of the masses and the lack of ice in the champagne bucket by buying houses all around the world

*Federico and Marcello, as the woman in the train (Bernice Stegers) has to kiss Snaporaz (Mastroianni) at the beginning of City of Women*





*A padlocked wedding dress is the feminists' provocation, as they hold their convention in the Miramare hotel where, following to the newcomer, chauvinist Snaporaz will turn up*

and, as soon as he gets the baton back again, begins impassably anew from where he left off.

So then, Fellini's metaphorical *Orchestra Rehearsal* would no longer seem to need television to accentuate the chaos that, within a short time, the very language of television would become part of. The orchestra musicians take advantage of television to speak ill of the conductor and the union delegate (who takes bribes under the counter), and the latter provokes a rebellion that leaves things as they are. Little does it matter that he will have the death of the poor harpist on his conscience, who had the premonitory dream of a horse in her room (the enormous demolition ball in the oratory).

So then, Fellini's fable in *Orchestra Rehearsal* will have to show other emblems of epoch-making rubble and of their looming apocalyptic pessimism, and, for this, one will only need to await the forthcoming movies. The general climate of Fellini's cinema is worsening, the circus-oratory is getting uglier, with nastier, colder, more aloof faces. By pure luck, there still remain some modest moments of alienation and unessential realism: the invisible waving of the threads in the spider web when the trombones vibrate, the stolen gesture of comfort for the cellist's haemorrhoids, the former Greek professor in *Amarcord* and, most of all, the old copyist.

He speaks to the scores that play tricks on him and, with a leap, manages to get clear of the falling masonry. Even if Fellini's scenarios are turning ever darker in color, one will find it again in *City of Women*, in the guise of a memory magician, and in *And the Ship Sails On* as the singing teacher who makes music with water glasses, a *trait d'union* in the new and pessimistic discourse initiated by *Casanova*, the lover of women.

With a great metallic noise, a train enters a tunnel. Marcello Snaporaz has dozed off in a compartment and, upon waking, finds a lady wearing a busby and boots seated in front of him by the window.

Struck by her charm, he meets her in the restroom where, after an intense kiss, he immediately tries to have sex with her, but is frustrated by a sudden halt in open countryside. The woman gets off and Snaporaz, because of his sexual excitement, follows her into the Fregene pine wood, and there, for the second time, the mysterious, headstrong woman leads him to believe that she consents, only to leave him with closed eyes leaning against a tree like a fool.

Seeing her enter the Hotel Miramare, the man decides to continue following her, and he discovers that there is a crowded feminist congress being held there. Looking for his woman, Snaporaz roams through the rooms full of girls, attends anti-masculine seminars, ironic shows about the exploitation of housewives, collective liberation rallies, and slides against usurpation by masculine power. He is observed with



*Here Snaporaz walks through the gallery of sound and images which record the romantic encounters of Sante Katzone (Ettore Manni), a former schoolmate*

great suspicion and hostility, made the butt of jokes, derided, threatened quite openly and forced to leave the rooms where the congress is being held.

Inexplicably, two girls help him find the elevator, and together they reach the gymnasium. Putting on roller-skates, he may manage to make a getaway, and after wobbling around a bit he rolls down the stairs and finds himself in the boiler room, where the robust boiler woman offers to take him to the train station on her motor scooter.

As they travel through the countryside, the girl stops at some greenhouses covered with plastic awnings. On the pretext of wanting to get seeds for the stationmaster, the girl leads him inside to make love with him. Snaporaz, who has no desire, is saved by the providential arrival of the boiler woman's elderly mother, who kicks the girl around for her uncontrollable lustfulness, which allows Snaporaz to make for the station, again in the company of a girl.

He gets into a car full of punk girls, dazed by music and drugs and, when night comes, finds himself near an airport landing strip, where the group watches planes land, and one of the girls wants to shoot at

them with a pistol. Snaporaz leaves the punks, whose number has now grown so that they require three cars, which chase him threateningly. He arrives at the home of Sante Katzone, an ex-schoolmate and symbol of masculine virility, who lives in a villa with three large dogs, and defends himself from the women with rifle fire. Sante asks Snaporaz to stay for the party, held in celebration of the ten thousand women he has had so far. While waiting for the guests to arrive, Marcello discovers some erotic objects that Katzone keeps around to enhance his consideration for the phallus and, in particular, admires the gallery/cemetery of his female conquests, accompanied by a loud commentary on the most successful performances.

Before the extremely exhausting ceremony of extinguishing all the little candles (Katzone deals with those placed on high with a jet of pee), Snaporaz runs into his wife Elena, who drunkenly reproves him for the crisis in their relationship and the passing of the years. In a trance, Katzone's last mistress stuffs coins and pearls into her pussy and, a little later, the policewomen break in: they have killed one of his beloved dogs and destroyed the laboratory where he was making his

ideal woman. The party, also attended by the roller-skating girls, is suddenly interrupted.

Snaporaz and the two girls perform a kind of Fred Astaire dance routine, then he is accompanied by the housemaid and Katzone's old governess to his room. While a tempest rages outside, Elena, hotly excited, joins him in the big double bed, her face covered with skin cream. She wants to make love with him, but ends up falling blissfully asleep.

Hearing some voices, Snaporaz crawls under the bed and finds himself at the opening of a long, winding slide, which is suddenly illuminated with many lights, operated by three old men, three strange little wizards in tails.

Sliding down in his nightshirt and bathrobe, the illuminated circles act as mirrors of memory at every curve and stretch of the run, and cause Snaporaz to relive certain moments from the past: the provocative laundry woman; the fish seller with her wriggling eels; the German nurse at the spa; the two motorcyclists dressed in black leather; the female bather spied through a hole in the cabin wall, who seductively walks towards the sea; the starlette of the silent film, with the male audience that indulges in collective masturbation underneath the sheets. And finally, the brothel, where the grotesque madam is at the cash register, and the large-assed prostitute in the bedroom.

At the foot of the slide, the three wizards, feeling cold, are taken away by their patient wives, while Snaporaz, captured by a feminist rally, is put into a cage and sent to a shed run by homosexuals, where he will be prosecuted by the female population who, sometimes masked and sometimes not, charge him, as a man, with a whole load of crimes.

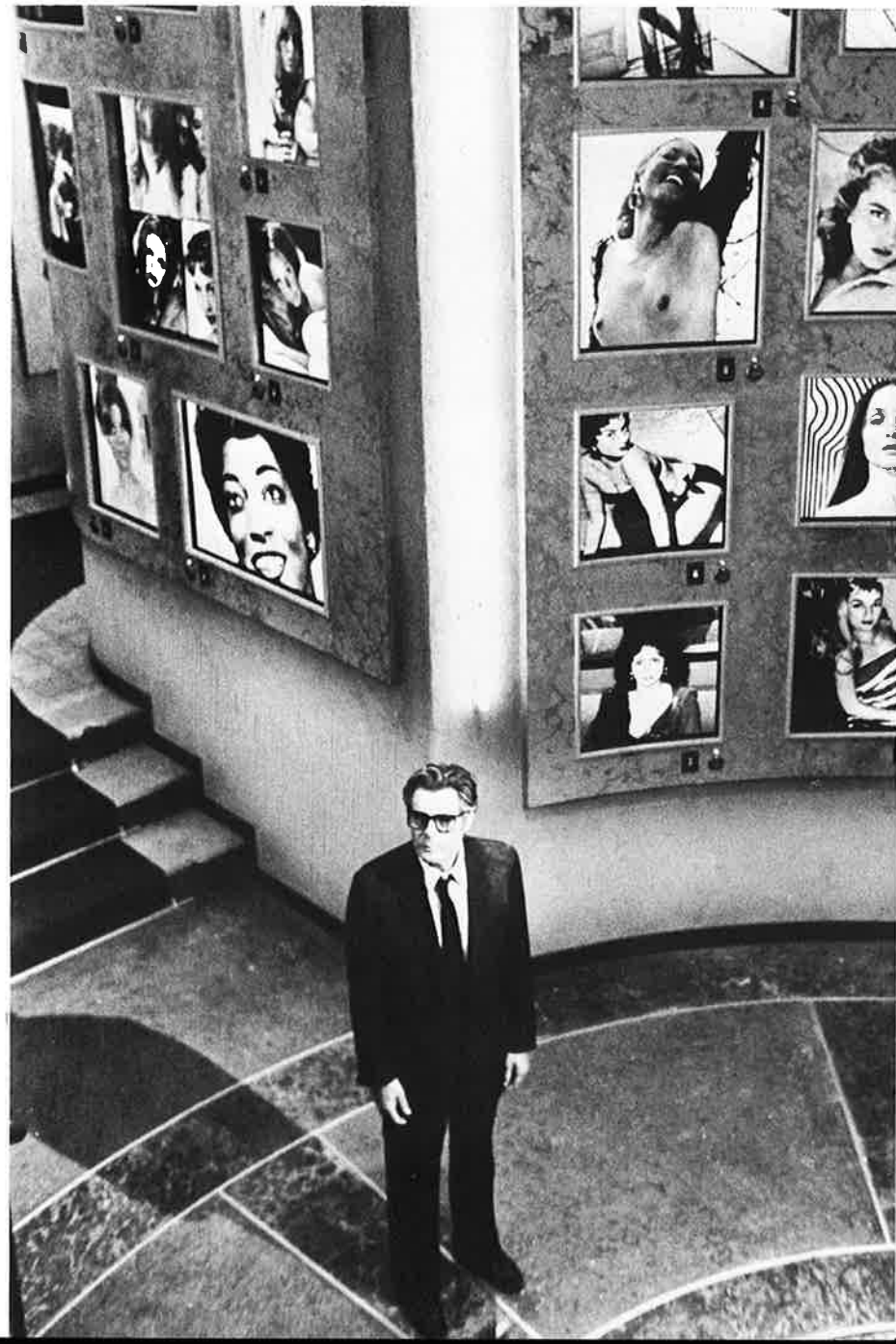
Inquisitive about noisy shouts coming from a nearby arena, Snaporaz learns that some male combatants are fighting for the ideal woman, under the watchful eyes of a feminine crowd. He wants to go and watch and, after passing through a long, narrow corridor, he finds himself in the blinding glare of floodlights in front of the tiers of the arena crowded with women, who throw flowers and firecrackers at him, whistling and jeering, while a young terrorist mockingly observes him from beneath his hood. Two girls dressed up as Laurel and Hardy point out an iron ladder to him, at the top of which is the deserted ring, and the old governess informs him that he has won the fight. The audience begins to disperse, and Snaporaz is helped into a balloon poised for take-off. The balloon is shaped like a curvaceous girl, with a luminous halo like the madonna's over her head.

Free at last under the stars, Snaporaz is happy, but the masked girl shoots at the balloon, which deflates and falls to earth. Snaporaz grasps at the cables, to which another woman is also clinging... He awakens from the dream. In front of him is his wife, and the woman in the busby enters the compartment, followed by the roller-skating girls. He watches the women for a while, picks up his dark glasses with one lens missing, and is about to doze off again, looking forward to a continuation of his dream. The train enters a gallery.

If the first impression leads one to consider *City of Women* (1980) to be a modern fairy tale, in which Snaporaz is a helpless Little Red Riding Hood lost in the feminist wood, or else to be one of those visual dreams to which Fellini has got us accustomed, in reality, if one thinks about it, this movie

is a wave. And, like a wave, it is in continuous motion (the travel theme, an inquisitive search, a true quest), rushing headlong only to break and recompose itself endlessly (the encounters and clashes with the feminists), growing and developing only to exhaust itself and grow again (the forms of desire), overtaking itself, dissolving into fragments and finding its crest again in other subsequent waves (the

*In the central room of the museum/cemetery, our hero seems overwhelmed by the feminist images and voices, a prelude to his flood of memories*



dynamics of memory, of an infantile and adolescent *amarcord*, a little curious and more vague in its anxiety). Like a tireless, never-ending wave, it possesses a slow-motion inner rhythm (the unnatural pace of the dream and the story), and an external rhythm that depends upon other things (the rhythmic language of cinema, the energy of social or vitalistic moments). And, of course, it is an incoherent, wave-vague movie, cold deep inside (in the gallery/cemetery of women/tombs) and hot on the surface of events (the train, the feminist congress, the Katzone episode, the slide).

Naturally, the wave does not exclude the dream, on the contrary it exalts it, presents more symbols to be elaborated, invented, imagined, explored. All of these are aspects around which, as we know, Fellini's pictures have always completely revolved. And yet, in *City of Women*, the outcome is, in some way, much more familiar than usual, encountered if not exhausted in the earlier works. In the female characters – completed in the social chronicles and history by the 'feminist' ones – as in the character of

Marcello/Snaporaz/Fellini, and his other half, Katzone, or the internal dramatic settings, metaphorical, congenial to the idea of swamps, of labyrinths, of aspirations to sinking and thus to its opposite, flight: in all of this, one can find the sense of the movie. If there is a stairway, or else a wave – and even in *City of Women* there are several – one can try to go up, stride over it, go down, fall, drown, sink into it. To laugh grotesquely under the scourge of dreams when one is low is a sublimation – completed by illusion – of elevation, of penetration (the tunnel and the woman on the train), of the revisitation of the male, of what there is between earth and heaven, man and woman, clown and the anxiety of passing time. The final slide completes the transformation of the incoherence of the wave: only immutable on the surface, it is actually Fellini's creative shuttlecock which insists on the dream dimension.

Attempts to understand the other half of oneself and the female universe having turned out to be sterile or obsolete, the 'old Snaporaz' – and, with him, the sixty-year-old director who, after the fable of *Orchestra Rehearsal*, is no



*The shell bed enfolds Marcello and the two young soubrettes, Donatella (Donatella Damiani) and Sara (Rosoria Tofuri)*





*The trial of a (Fellinian) man is almost complete, and Snaporaz, imprisoned between his own paranoia and the Jungian impossibility of fully understanding a woman's world, awaits his destiny*

longer on the same wavelength as the 'in crowd' (the young punks, music, feminism) – once more takes refuge in the maternal, reassuring circus of thought, of memory, of time past. Another *déjà vue* parade of women: a housemaid from Romagna (one imagines one can smell freshly washed laundry, together with the sweaty potato-peel odour so often recalled by Fellini); an excited, exciting fish seller; one of the nurses from the spa in *Eight and a Half*; and the blonde motorcycle riders. So then, we have once again the circus and popular shows, the soubrette in a bikini who is a kind of anticipation of *Ginger and Fred* and, to close, the balloon, for a moment a Woman/Madonna who might give him the illusion of having overcome the macho complex of Sante Katzone and of forgetting the movies.

But it is not possible. The dream wakes the dreamer at the moment of the fall – has the anxiety of Gido returned in the opening of *Eight and a Half*? – and the wave, with its rhythmic, magmatic, erotic flow (the boiler woman, the slide, the balloon), replaces the manifestations of the incongruous political context, moves it away and returns to the opening dream image – the lucid intoxication of the cinema. In the train compartment, Snaporaz sees the dream take on the recognisable connotations of reality: his wife instead of the mysterious woman (she wears her busby), his eyeglasses which had fallen and lost one lens in the dream adventure, the two soubrettes sitting in the vacant seats. The looks exchanged are almost of astute complicity for a dream – one which Snaporaz, happy and languid, prepares to rejoin *in reality* in the darkness of the tunnel, a black hole where one glimpses a little light (which anticipates the dawning light of the moving reflections in *The Voice of the Moon*).

Rather like the end of Hitchcock's *North by Northwest*, which makes the ascendance/penetration a metaphor for the end of the action and the marriage to be consummated, the circle of *City of Women* is the last of Fellini's innumerable excursus "into the body of woman". Kezich, the first to use the Hitchcock ending, has noted that the Italian director "does not succeed in being equally consolatory." This is not entirely true, since consolation would have given continuance to the flight of the subconscious and of eros over the blessed fields of Fellini's nocturnal imagination. The poet Andrea Zanzotto, Fellini's friend and amused collaborator on some precious occasions, recalls in the introductory pages to the text of the movie that "walking around in the city of women, everyone, even while noticing that they had been placed in the center of a spinning top moved by a delicate rod, finally feels, after the appearance of a balloon destined to disintegrate, that they have gone into a free fall that may be true liberty."

But if Fellini the dream magician were as consolatory as

Hitchcock the thrill magician, it would be taken as complementary to his refusal to flirt with the public in a film where masculine psychoanalytic incursions into the mysterious sphere of the feminine come into play, and the variations of a statistical age that make one see things in a different, darker light. This is also due to events such as the sudden deaths of Nino Rota, of his friend and factotum Bevilacqua, and of Ettore Manni, the portrayer of Sante Katzone. And yet, in spite of all this, as always with Fellini, the dream of the imagination is what generates cinema. Furthermore, one should not forget that, for Fellini, Jung's words about the female image are totally valid: a man cannot know her because he projects onto her the dark and unknown side of himself (and so if that dark side is unknown, how can woman be known?). Just as there is no difference in the comparison between the cinema and woman, inasmuch as "in the alternation of light and dark, of images which appear and disappear, the cinema is itself woman. As in the maternal womb, one sits still and focused at the cinema, immersed in darkness, waiting for life to be given to you from the screen... One ought to visit the cinema in the innocent condition of a fetus... My movie is the after dinner jabbering of someone who is slightly drunk. It is a fairy tale about the women of today and yesterday, as told by a man who cannot know women because they are inside of him: like Little Red Riding Hood lost in the woods. It is a dream, and it speaks the symbolic language of dreams. It would please me if one could watch it without being blinded by the temptation to understand: there is nothing to understand."

And with this declaration, we can, for now, take leave of *City of Women*, because a gust of that strong wind that Snaporaz felt strike him while going down the slide, will gradually lift us to *The Voice of the Moon*, the film-testament of *listening* as opposed to *understanding*: "Woe to those who try to understand", the poet of images continues to implore. Contemporary mediocrity could, at this point, agree with him, but perhaps it still needs some other ineffable, deadly support to convince itself of this. And Fellini is a director who is very attentive and helpful to everyone, as patience is certainly one of his best qualities. He will wait. He will wait until his other films of the Eighties get through, the last decade of his very fervid productive life.

"Making a movie today is like taking off in a plane without knowing where, how and when you are going to land. Since the purpose, route and end of the trip are unknown, there is nothing left but to tell about the trip for its own sake." And this will be *And the Ship Sails On*. Between *City of Women* and the preparation of this movie, more than three very long, inactive years pass by, in which Fellini lives through and comments on what he had portrayed in



*It would be the end of Snoparoz/Fellini if it were not for the enchantment of memories, represented by the ghostly slide, and Donatella's skates which conveniently allow him to escape*




*An unlikely performance of illusion, particularly suited to Katzzone's vulgarity, livens up the festivities celebrating the hundredth woman to be won over*

*Orchestra Rehearsal* – that is, collapses, modifications and a sort of inevitable lack of preparation, both personal and generational. The recognized master of international cinema has (the usual) difficulties in making a movie, finding the right producers and coming to terms with them. In the end, he begins to find himself in the condition of someone who had given a lot and is now left to one side – regally – a little in the shade, by himself. The one exception is receiving the Golden Lion for his career at the 1985 Venice Festival, a prize that its beneficiaries generally consider to be midway between a golden handshake and an artistic gravestone.

So then, during these three years, between the ironic, the poisonous and the melancholy, Fellini recalls himself as “standing at the street corner to watch how the world and the movies were changing. If you place yourself at the street corner, you meet everyone: the tramp, the thief, the prophet, the assassin, the mystic, the apocalyptic preacher, the bankrupt, the suicide. It is the only way of knowing how the world is changing, what direction things are taking. Thus, as I was standing at the street corner, I understood that movies were changing, that it was no longer what it used to be, had nothing to do with pictures as we used to make them, while all around I heard the drumbeats of the invaders, the Attilas, the Genghis Khans, the Star Wars, the

electronic directors, who shoot for the maximum while demanding the minimum. To satisfy a spectator molded by television, the movies must make as much noise as possible: once the firecracker explodes, it no longer exists, just like fireworks.” And if bitterness for the missing workplaces – the studios of Cinecittà – synthesizes with “where churches stood, they now open brothels”, one must certainly not think of those constructed from his images, but rather of the idea that the Great Demolition of the Imagination was working at full speed with tremendous damage.

This pessimism, while keeping him from falling into the trap of making a movie *against* the current, is a contradictory fluid which, capably and laboriously, Fellini transforms into a creative proposal. *And the Ship Sails On* (1983) expresses an evident nostalgia, since metaphorically the funeral that is being celebrated in the memory of the singer is also that of the (old) cinema, an art that is disappearing or already gone, a traditional author's way of turning images into a narrative, and not viceversa, an artistic philosophy of which Federico Fellini had been one of the great voices.

 Black and white film images document, with the typical hum of silent movies, the preparations taking place along Wharf Ten at the port of Naples for the departure of the steamer Gloria N.