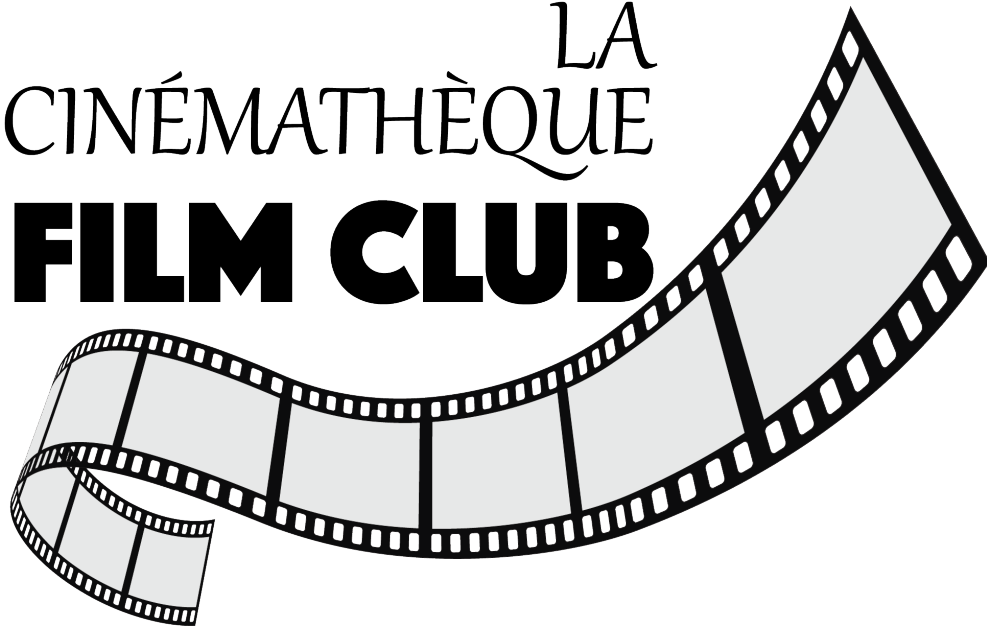


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Federico Fellini
1920-1993

La Dolce Vita
1959

Fellini, Federico

Antonia Shanahan • July 2002

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b. January 20, 1920, Rimini, Emilia-Romagna, Italy.

d. October 31, 1993, Rome, Italy.

Federico Fellini's Cinema¹

Federico Fellini, a canonical name of personal expression and artistic fantasy in the cinema, had no formal technical training in his profession. Born in the seaside town of Rimini in Italy in 1920, he quit the provinces for Rome at age 18. Enrolled in law school, he abandoned the degree. He never considered attending Rome's Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, whose graduates he would later collaborate with. And unlike his contemporaries, he never frequented the cinema clubs that screened the best Italian directors' films and international titles from France, Germany and Russia. When pressed for his influences, Fellini preferred Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Laurel and Hardy, the Marx brothers, Pietro Germi, and Buñuel (with his black humor) to "cine-club" names such as Dreyer, Griffith and Eisenstein. Young Fellini supported himself as a wandering caricaturist until hired by *Marc'Aurelio* in 1939. The famed humor bi-weekly served as an unofficial training ground for scriptwriters and directors of the postwar period.

Fellini's formative influences can be traced back to the popular Italian culture of the period, and not primarily the cinema. The cartoons, caricature sketches, and radio comedy that were his popular art métier brought him to the cinema as a gagman and scriptwriter. Novelist Italo Calvino diagnosed the influence of mass culture on Fellini's later sophisticated cinematic language as a "forcing of the photographic image in a direction that carries it from an image of



caricature toward that of the visionary."² Fellini trained for a professional life as a visionary with over ten years of scriptwriting and on-the-set apprenticeship.

For the postwar Left, a film's critical value was based on whether it depicted Italy's social problems and offered a Marxist remedy. Directors who followed their own imperatives were labeled conservative or reactionary. As a veteran of the scripting team responsible for two exemplars of Italian neorealism, *Roma città aperta* and *Paisà* (both Roberto Rossellini, 1945 and '46), Fellini was interested in moving toward a "cinema of

¹ Short films "Un'agenzia matrimoniale" (1953), an episode in *Amore in città*; "La tentazioni del dottor Antonio" (1962), an episode in *Boccaccio '70*; and "Toby Dammit" (1968), an episode in *Tre passi nel delirio* are not covered here. *Casanova* (1976), and *La voce della Luna* (1990) are not available for viewing in any format in the United States. *Block-notes di un regista* (1969), *I clowns* (1970), and *Prova d'orchestra* (1979) were made for television and are also not covered here.

² Cited by Peter Bondanella in *The Cinema of Federico Fellini* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, p.9), from Calvino's preface to an edition of four Fellini scripts published in 1974, "Autobiografia di una spettatore," in Federico Fellini, *Quattro film* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974), p.xxii.

Reconstruction.” After *Paisà*, he redefined his artistic credo to “looking at reality with an honest eye – but any kind of reality; not just social reality, but also spiritual reality, metaphysical reality, anything man has inside him.”³

Italian cinema scholar Peter Bondanella identifies the first of Fellini’s innovations in his conception of film character and considers the first three films his “trilogy of character” because they dramatize the clash between a character’s social “role” or “mask” and the more authentic “face” of his instincts and aspirations. *Luci del varietà* (1950)⁴, follows the vagabond wanderings of a second-rate troupe of variety players on a circuit through provincial Italy. The group’s leader, Checco Dalmonte (Peppino DeFelippo), is susceptible to the charms of amateur dancer Liliana (Carla del Poggio). In a reversal on *All About Eve* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1950), Checco believes his protégée to be likewise enamored, and betrays his faithful fiancée Melina Amour (Giulietta Masina). When Liliana abandons him for a rich theater producer, his vanity and her mercenary nature are fully exposed. The film ends with Checco making overtures to another pretty girl on the train while Melina sleeps beside him.

Lo sceicco bianco (1952) marks Fellini’s debut as an independent director and expands his vision of film character beyond the comic Checco. Two honeymooners arrive in Rome from the provinces. Ivan (Leopoldo



Trieste) is a typical petit-bourgeois, concerned with social proprieties, planning a tour of national shrines and a papal visit. Wanda (Brunella Bovo) is a romantic daydreamer with one thought: to see her idol the White Sheik, the star of her favorite photo-novel, the postwar pulp romances consumed by a mostly adult, female clientele. A fan letter written from home brought an invitation to meet her sheik at the magazine’s offices, where she sneaks off for what she believes will be a brief rendezvous. A full day of parallel misadventures

ensues for both protagonists that reveal Ivan’s slavery to social convention and Wanda’s silly romantic illusions. “Mask” and “face” are worn by two different characters, and the story resolves only when their compromise is achieved.

I vitelloni (1953), which translates to “young bullocks,” is about four friends from a seaside province who also endure an “unmasking.” Fausto (Franco Fabrizi) is the womanizer of the group, Leopoldo (Leopoldo Trieste) its would-be playwright, Alberto (Alberto Sordi), a “momoni” who lives with his mother off the wages of his sister, and Moraldo (Franco Interlenghi), the group’s conscience and presumed narrator. Fausto attempts to avoid marrying Moraldo’s sister when he discovers she is pregnant, has a string of affairs after their marriage, and is whipped by his father into behaving, at least temporarily, by film’s end. Leopoldo thinks his novice plays interest a travelling variety actor who only wants to seduce him. Alberto’s sister elopes, leaving him his empty posturings about family honor and no means of support. Except for the fact that the woman Fausto cheats on is Moraldo’s sister, Moraldo remains outside the circle of his friends’ failures. But in the end he takes a dawn train for Rome, in silent farewell to home and his fellow vitelloni. Fellini gives Moraldo a logically impossible

³ Federico Fellini, “The Road Beyond Neo-Realism,” in Fellini, “La Strada”: *Federico Fellini, Director*, ed. Peter Bondanella and Manuela Gieri, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987), p.217.

⁴ *Luci del varietà* was co-directed with Alberto Lattuada.

perspective from the moving train: the camera sweeps through the bedrooms of the four sleeping vitelloni he leaves behind. It's Moraldo's subjectivity that Fellini grants omniscience to in the final entry to the trilogy of character.

La strada (1954), the film Fellini called "the complete catalogue of my entire mythological world,"⁵ is a starring vehicle for wife Giulietta Masina as Gelsomina, a clownish waif who communicates best with nature and children. Sold by her mother to Zampanò (Anthony Quinn), a travelling circus strongman, she accompanies his act on trumpet. They are joined by the Fool (Richard Basehart), who walks a tightrope high over provincial squares. When brutish Zampanò accidentally kills the Fool, Gelsomina goes mad and eventually dies. News of her death wrings tears from Zampanò at film's end. The first entry in what Bondanella deems the "trilogy of salvation or grace," these figures derive meaning from their emotional impact and symbolic significance, not their material circumstances. Gelsomina and Zampanò play out the grim relations between the sexes, a vagabond version of "Beauty and the Beast," and the roles of "savior" and "convert." So much so that Fellini was savaged by the Left for betraying his neorealist origins.



Fellini explores the materialism and moral corruption of Rome with the sentiment of a Hollywood gangster film in *Il bidone* (1955). "Il bidone" means "the swindle" and American gangster film vet Broderick Crawford stars as confidence man Augusto Rocca. He and his henchmen's signature swindle is to bury bones and bogus treasure on a provincial farm, then disguised as a priest and his assistants, convince the peasant owners that in a deathbed confession to murdering his partner, a thief buried the body and a stolen fortune on their farm. The recovered treasure will be the property of the landowners as long as they pay for masses to be said for the soul of the thief. For what appears a fortune in gold and jewels, the farmers scrape together the



exorbitant fee. After this successful sting, Augusto has a crisis of conscience exacerbated by meeting his neglected daughter who needs his help to post bond for a cashiering job. All the successive swindles, some successful, some not, point up Augusto's small-time criminality and his accumulating angst. Then he's arrested in front of his daughter when recognized by a former victim. The final grift returns to the priest swindle, complicated by the fact that the victim's daughter is crippled, and the money he must extort is meant for her support. Augusto tells his cronies

that he could not take the money. They stone him, discover the ransom, and leave him for dead. The film ends with mortally wounded Augusto reaching toward a passing religious procession, unsuccessfully crying for help.

⁵ Federico Fellini, *Juliet of the spirits*, trans. from the Italian by Howard Greenfeld, ed. Tullio Kezich, (New York: Orion Press, 1965), p.26.

The possibility of joining the procession after a painful death is left open. But the contrary case could be that this is Fellini's tale of salvation astray.

Another circular structure governs *Le notti di Cabiria* (1957), the tale of a Roman prostitute (Giulietta Masina) looking for love. The film opens with Cabiria taking a stroll with her lover in a scene that should end with a cliché kiss. Instead, he pushes Cabiria into the Tiber and steals her purse. Saved from certain drowning by some passing boys, she tells them to go mind their business by way of thanks. On Via Veneto, a famous actor having a spat with his girlfriend picks up Cabiria as consolation. They go to his place where the girlfriend turns up and Cabiria winds up hiding until dawn. On pilgrimage to a shrine Cabiria prays for change. Thrashed by the Left for the religious undertones of *La strada* and *Il bidone*, Fellini shows the shrine to be ineffective for a crippled man who falls flat trying to walk, and for Cabiria whose prayers go unanswered.



In her last attempt at happiness, Cabiria sells her shanty home to marry Oscar, a man who has convinced her he loves her. Oscar takes her for a cliffside view of the sunset where he robs her of her life's savings. In the coda, Cabiria clammers back to the nearby road where she hears music, then a band of singing youngsters accompanies her. Cabiria, unlike Augusto, joins the procession, for a Fellinian occasion of "music as salvation."⁶

Le notti closes the back-to-back trilogies on Reconstruction Italy. *La dolce vita* (1959) takes up Italy of the economic boom – the late '50s through the '60s – and the rise of its consumer society and celebrity culture. It can be seen as a modified sequel to *I vittelloni*, with Marcello Rubino (Marcello Mastroianni) as Moraldo, now a photo-reporter in Rome.⁷ The important departure point is Fellini's modernist approach to plot in cinematic narrative – circular structures no more. He modeled the film's form on its decomposition in the manner of Picasso. Plot and storyline give way to an emphasis on the composed image and an unrelenting narrative pace. The narrative follows Marcello, his affairs with his sometime mistress (Anouk Aimée); escorting a Swedish-American actress (Anita Ekberg) around Rome to wade through the Trevi Fountain; meeting up with his mentor Steiner (Alain Cuny); his coverage of a sighting of the Virgin by two children; attending a party of Steiner's that features vapid intellectualizing; wearing out his father in the course of the older man's short visit; discovering Steiner's suicide and murder of his two children;



⁶ "Music as Salvation" is the title of an essay by Claudia Gorbman about Fellini and the film scores of Nino Rota: "Music as Salvation: Notes on Fellini and Rota" in *Federico Fellini: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Peter Bondanella, pp.80-94, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

⁷ *La dolce vita* is an updated version of what was to be called *I vittelloni – Moraldo in città*. See Bondanella, *The Cinema of Federico Fellini*, p.133.

drunkenly riding a young woman on her hands and knees at a decadent orgy; and stumbling upon a monster fish on the beach at dawn.

The story of “boom” life is told as tabloid events, flatlining intellectual debates, religion for exploitation value, and sterile love affairs. The opening shot of a helicopter towing a statue of Christ over the city and the final image of the massive dead fish offer two takes on symbols of Christ. The failure of Marcello to hear the words of the young innocent whose image concludes the film points to his unchecked descent and Fellini’s increasing pessimism after the trilogy of grace.

La dolce vita marked a shift from location to studio shooting⁸, and from the construction of real, public events to the private, inner fantasy of *8½* (1963). Fellini’s turn toward dream, imagination and memory after *La dolce vita*, nascent in the earlier films, drew inspiration from the dream theory of Carl Jung. Causal relations and logical connections in storylines gave way to further interplay between fantasy and reality. For instance, the theme of *8½*, the fictional tale of a director who no longer knows what film he wishes to make, was a crisis lived by Fellini concerning *8½* with the finished script in hand! The fictional crisis on film was a factual auteurial crisis of insecurity behind the camera. Guido Anselmi (Marcello Mastroianni), frequently interpreted as an autobiographical figure, was as invented as his story according to Fellini. Guido’s two-week rest cure at the baths is the presumed “real” story of *8½* but his dream life (like the famous opening when he flies from his car in a traffic jam to be pulled down to earth by a rope around his ankle), and the presence of studio lights in odd locations, blur the line between reality and dream and designate both categories as cinematic illusion. His mistress shifts to whore; his mother turns into his wife. His childhood women, his nanny, his grandmother and La Saraghina, a prostitute who inhabited an abandoned beachside bunker in his youth, all march freely from Guido’s subconscious across the screen. All his lovers converge for a harem sequence where they are all amenable to one another – or subdued with a whip as in La Seraghina’s case. Temporal perspective is destroyed by characters appearing in 1930s and contemporary dress. Establishing shots are eschewed. Narrative flows between reality, fantasy and flashback. His wife, his colleagues, his work and its savaging by a French critic, the unfinished film, its set and screen tests – all form a uniform barrage of imagery from within and without Guido. His final reconciliation with all the “characters” who “star” in his life is Fellini’s remedy of art as salvation.



Giulietta degli spiriti (1965) analyzes the identity crisis of identity of a middle-aged Italian housewife, almost a female counterpart to Guido, in Fellini’s first color feature film. One of the first postwar Italian films about women’s social status in Italian culture, it is structured after the story line of *8½*. Giulietta’s (Giulietta Masina) quest for psychic freedom is impeded by both her philandering husband and the critical, reprimanding women (her mother and sisters) who surround her. Her gift for seeing spirits summons a passel of them, all ghosts from her past with whom she must reconcile.

⁸ The Via Veneto, the dome of Saint Peter’s, the nightclubs – more than eighty locations were recreated for *La dolce vita* in the studio.

Fellini Satyricon (1969) adapted the fragmented original text to visual narrative with wholly invented material. Curing the central character's impotence not with the male lover of the original but an earth mother figure is a marked alteration. The Labyrinth and Minotaur sequence is Fellini's, figures of the psyche and its ferocious unconscious.

Image over storyline is the continued practice of *Roma* (1972), a subjective collection of episodes and images reflecting Fellini's memories, opinions, and even a glimpse of the excavation of the Roman subway. A slide lecture to a schoolboy's class on Roman monuments is interrupted by a sexy slide of a near naked woman.



Ancient Rome occupies his cinema screens. The schoolboy grows up and moves to Rome and his landlady's adult son curls up against her as she lies in bed. Fellini's Rome is a dominating maternal figure that infantilizes her males. Rome is "penetrated" by Fellini and crew's entry into the city on the autostrada in pouring rain, culminating in a traffic jam by the Colosseum, both autostrada and Colosseum fashioned at Cinecittà. Perhaps the *pièce de résistance* of *Roma* is the ecclesiastical fashion parade, from cardinals to pope.

Amarcord (1973) returns to the provinces of Fellini's childhood for a sampling of his "invented memories" of Rimini in the fascist era. The overt subject of *Amarcord* is a group caricature of the town's inhabitants, but its main thrust is its dissection of the origins of Italian fascism. Fellini juxtaposes a vignette of an individual character with sequences that show the

consequences of his or her symptomatic behavior on a grander scale. When Gradisca (Magali Noël), the village beauty and object of masculine desire, catches a glimpse of the Fascist federale welcomed with a parade in the town square, she almost faints with sexual excitement. In the following sequence, main character Titta's (Bruno Zanin) family takes their "insane" Uncle Teo (Ciccio Ingrassia) from the asylum for a day excursion. Teo escapes, climbs a tree, and screams from the treetop, "I want a woman!" Without outlets for sexual drives, the townspeople go mad or displace their stifled desires onto political symbols manipulated by the regime.

La città delle donne (1980) takes up the adventures of Snàporaz (Marcello Mastroianni) at a feminist convention, showcasing male anxiety in the era of the women's movement. While Snàporaz represents the vulnerable, sympathetic aspect of male sexuality, his counterpart in Katzone (meaning "Big Cock") (Ettore Manni), lines his home with photographs of all the women with whom he has made love, complete with recordings of their cries of passion.

La città delle donne is an inventory of Snàporaz' subconscious fantasies of desirable women and their opposites, as revealed by the framing device which, like the visit to Oz, reveals *La città* to be a dreamed destination.



E la nave va (1983) and *Ginger e Fred* (1985) examine grand opera and television, two art forms Fellini disliked. *E La nave va* follows the funeral ceremonies for a famous diva of Italian grand opera aboard a cruise ship carrying her colleagues, former lovers, and the Grand Duke of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Set in 1914, the ship delivers her ashes to the island of her birth. What Fellini shares with opera is its distance from realism. When Serbian refugees are taken on board the ship (marking the start of World War I) and an Austrian battleship forces them to be surrendered, the passengers sing in chorus to protest. Fellini salutes the emotional appeal of an essentially irrational art form.

Ginger e Fred skewers the medium Fellini loved to hate with a behind-the-scenes view of a variety show broadcast, a genre he loved except when mutilated by TV. Two former dancers from the 1940s, Ginger (Giulietta Masina) and Fred (Marcello Mastroianni), who imitated the dance routines of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, reunite after retiring for 20 odd years. Only Ginger and Fred offer any genuine emotion in this showcase of superficiality and exploitation. And it's clear that their act is the swansong of authenticity, at least in this representative program.

Intervista (1988) concentrates all the issues reflecting on cinema itself since 8½ in what Fellini called a “filmetto” – an intimate “little film.” In a documentary vein, a group of Japanese journalists visit Fellini at Cinecittà for an interview while he prepares sets and screen tests for an adaptation of Kafka's *Amerika*. Fellini's re-creation of his first visit to Cinecittà as a young journalist to interview the diva star of the spectacle in production is the film's concurrent fictional thread. And when Marcello Mastroianni appears fresh from the set of another film (ostensibly), Fellini hijacks the actor for a visit to the home of Anita Ekberg where the much older actors screen the Trevi Fountain sequence from *La dolce vita*. Although *Amerika* is a project that was never carried out, *Intervista* is in an amalgam genre that considers its author's present and past, or what Fellini called a “live” film (“un film in diretta”).



The Fellini *oeuvre* departs from the neorealist dictum of character determined by historical circumstance to the personalized character steered, for better or worse, by his or her subjectivity (*Luci del varietà*, *Lo sceicco bianco*, *I vitelloni*). Character “subjectivity” includes questions of spirituality and salvation (*Il bidone*, *La strada*, *Le notti di Cabiria*), and *La dolce vita* points to the failure of the boom to promise either. 8½ takes up the theme of auteurial self-consciousness which then resurfaces in *Roma* and *Intervista*, and has its distaff expression in *Giulietta degli spiriti*. Fellini also supplied essays on fascist Italy (*Amarcord*), male/female relations (*La città delle donne*), and the death of variety showbiz (*Ginger e Fred*). His career compresses the comparable progress in literature from 19th century realism to the reflexive post-modernity of compatriots Italo Calvino and Luigi Pirandello. Exposing the means of fiction, playwrighting, or filmmaking in Fellini's case (in contrast to the neorealist posture of delivering an unmediated story with newsreel aesthetics), all these authors uncover the “ploy” of authorship. It's as if Fellini critiqued realism as an impossible notion by pointing up its fabrication and adding the suppressed element of the fantastic. In his own words, “I make a film in the same manner in which I live a dream...”⁹

⁹ Bondanella, *The Cinema of Federico Fellini*, p.327.

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Filmography

- ***Luci del varietà (Variety Lights)*** (1950)
Script: Alberto Lattuada, Federico Fellini, Tullio Pinelli, Ennio Flaiano
Photography: Otello Martelli
Producer: Capitolium Film
Cast: Peppino De Filippo (Checco), Carla Del Poggio (Liliana), Giulietta Masina (Melina)
- ***Lo sceicco bianco (The White Sheik)*** (1952)
Script: Federico Fellini, Tullio Pinelli, Ennio Flaiano
Photography: Arturo Gallea
Producer: Luigi Rovere
Cast: Brunella Bovo (Wanda Cavalli), Leopoldo Trieste (Ivan Cavalli), Alberto Sordi (Fernando Rivoli), Giulietta Masina (Cabiria)
- ***I vitelloni (I vitelloni, The Young and the Passionate)*** (1953)
Script: Federico Fellini, Tullio Pinelli, Ennio Flaiano
Photography: Otello Martelli
Producer: Peg Films
Cast: Franco Interlenghi (Moraldo), Franco Fabrizi (Fausto), Alberto Sordi (Alberto), Leopoldo Trieste (Leopoldo)
- **“Un’agenzia matrimoniale” (“A Marriage Agency”)** (1953) one episode in *Amore in città (Love in the City)*
Script: Federico Fellini and Tullio Pinelli
Photography: Gianni di Vananzo
Producer: Faro Films
Cast: Antonio Cifariello (journalist), Livia Venturini (Rossana)
- ***La strada*** (1954)
Script: Federico Fellini, Tullio Pinelli, Ennio Flaiano
Photography: Otello Martelli
Producer: Carlo Ponti and Dino DeLaurentiis
Cast: Giulietta Masina (Gelsomina), Anthony Quinn (Zampanò), Richard Basehart (The Fool), Aldo Silvani (circus owner)
- ***Il bidone (The Swindle)*** (1955)
Script: Federico Fellini, Tullio Pinelli, Ennio Flaiano
Photography: Otello Martelli
Producer: Titanus
Cast: Broderick Crawford (Augusto), Richard Basehart (Picasso), Franco Fabrizi (Roberto), Giulietta Masina (Iris)
- ***Le notti di Cabiria (The Nights of Cabiria)*** (1957)
Script: Federico Fellini, Tullio Pinelli, Ennio Flaiano, with the collaboration of Pier Paolo Pasolini for dialogue
Photography: Aldo Tonti and Otello Martelli
Producer: Dino De Laurentiis
Cast: Giulietta Masina (Cabiria), Amedeo Nazzari (actor), Franca Marzi (Wanda)
- ***La dolce vita*** (1959)
Script: Federico Fellini, Tullio Pinelli, Ennio Flaiano, Brunello Rondi
Photography: Otello Martelli
Producer: Riana Film-Pathé Consortium Cinéma
Cast: Marcello Mastroianni (Marcello Rubini), Anouk Aimée (Maddalena), Anita Ekberg (Sylvia), Walter Santesso (Paparazzo), Lex Barker (Robert), Yvonne Fourneaux (Emma), Alain Cuny (Steiner)



- **“Le tentazioni del dottor Antonio” (“The Temptations of Doctor Antonio”)** (1962) an episode in *Boccaccio '70*
Script: Federico Fellini, Tullio Pinelli, Ennio Flaiano
Photography: Otello Martelli
Producer: Carol Ponti and Antonio Cervi
Cast: Peppino De Filippo (Doctor Antonio Mazzuolo), Anita Ekberg (Anita)
- ***8½ (Otto e mezzo)*** (1963)
Script: Federico Fellini, Tullio Pinelli, Ennio Flaiano, Brunello Rondi
Photography: Gianni di Vananzo
Producer: Angelo Rizzoli
Cast: Marcello Mastroianni (Guido Andelmi), Anouk Aimée (Luisa), Sandra Milo (Carla), Claudia Cardinale (Claudia), Rossella Falk (Rossella), Edra Gale (La Seraghina), Caterina Boratto (Beautiful Unknown Woman)
- ***Giulietta degli spiriti (Juliet of the Spirits)*** (1965)
Script: Federico Fellini, Tullio Pinelli, Ennio Flaiano, Brunello Rondi
Photography: Gianni di Vananzo
Producer: Angelo Rizzoli
Cast: Giulietta Masina (Giulietta), Mario Pisu (Giorgio, Giulietta’s husband), Sandra Milo (Susy/Iris/Fanny), Caterina Boratto (Giulietta’s mother)
- **“Toby Dammit”** (1968), an episode in *Tre passi nel delirio (Spirits of the Dead)*
Script: Federico Fellini, Bernardino Zapponi (based on a story by Edgar Allan Poe)
Photography: Giuseppe Rotunno
Producer: Les Films Marceau/Cocinor – P.E.A. Cinematografica
Cast: Terence Stamp (Toby Dammit), Salvo Randone (priest)
- ***Block-notes di un regista (Fellini: A Director’s Notebook)*** (1969)
Script: Federico Fellini
Photography: Pasquale DeSantis
Producer: NBC and Peter Goldfarb
Cast: Federico Fellini, Giulietta Masina, Marcello Mastroianni, Marina Boratto
- ***Fellini Satyricon*** (1969)
Script: Federico Fellini, Bernardo Zapponi
Photography: Giuseppe Rotunno
Producer: Alberto Grimaldi
Cast: Martin Potter (Encolpio), Hiram Keller (Ascilto), Max Born (Gitone), Mario Romagnoli (Trimalchione)

- ***I clowns (The Clowns)*** (1970)
Script: Federico Fellini, Bernardino Zapponi
Photography: Dario di Palma
Producer: Federico Fellini, Ugo Guerra, Elio Cscardamaglia
Cast: French clowns – Alex, Bario, Père Lorient, Ludo, Nino, Charlie Rivel, Italian clowns – Riccardo Billi, Fanfulla, Tino Scotti, Carlo Rizzo also, Federico Fellini, Liana Orfei, Tristan Rémy, Anita Ekberg (as themselves)
- ***Roma (Fellini's Roma)*** (1972)
Script: Federico Fellini, Bernardino Zapponi
Photography: Giuseppe Rotunno
Producer: Turi Vasile
Cast: Peter Gonzales (young Fellini), Fiona Florence (beautiful prostitute), Pia DeDoses (aristocratic princess), Federico Fellini, Marcello Mastroianni, Gore Vidal, Anna Magnani, Alberto Sordi (as themselves)
- ***Amarcord*** (1973)
Script: Federico Fellini, Tonino Guerra
Photography: Giuseppe Rotunno
Producer: Franco Cristaldi
Cast: Bruno Zanin (Titta), Pupella Maggio (Titta's mother), Armando Brancia (Aurelio), Magali Noël (Gradisca), Ciccio Ingrassia (Uncle Teo)
- ***Casanova (Fellini's Casanova)*** (1976)
Script: Federico Fellini, Bernardino Zapponi, with lyrics by Andrea Zanzotto and Tonino Guerra
Photography: Giuseppe Rotunno
Producer: Alberto Grimaldi and Universal-Fox-Gaumont-Titanus
Cast: Donald Sutherland (Casanova), Cicely Browne (Madame d'Urfé), Tina Aumont (Henriette), Margareth Clementi (Maddalena)
- ***Prova d'orchestra (Orchestra Rehearsal)*** (1979)
Script: Federico Fellini, Brunello Rondi
Photography: Giuseppe Rotunno
Producer: Daime Cinematografica and RAI, Albatros Produktion
Cast: Balduin Baas (conductor), David Mauhsell (first violinist), Francesco Aluigi (second violinist), Elisabeth Labi (pianist)
- ***La città delle donne (City of Women)*** (1980)
Script: Federico Fellini, Bernardino Zapponi, Brunello Rondi
Photography: Giuseppe Rotunno
Producer: Opera Film Production and Gaumont
Cast: Marcello Mastroianni (Snàporaz), Anna Prucnal (Snàporaz's wife), Bernice Stegers (mysterious woman on the train), Ettore Manni (Katzzone)
- ***E la Nave va (And the Ship Sails On)*** (1983)
Script: Federico Fellini, Tonino Guerra, with opera lyrics by Andrea Zanzotto
Photography: Giuseppe Rotunno
Producer: Franco Cristaldi, RAI, Vides Produzione, Gaumont
Cast: Freddie Jones (Orlando), Barbara Jefford (Ildebranda Guffari), Janet Suzman (Edmea Tetua)
- ***Ginger e Fred (Ginger and Fred)*** (1985)
Script: Federico Fellini, Tullio Pinelli, Tonino Guerra
Photography: Tonino Delli Colli
Producer: Alberto Grimaldi
Cast: Giulietta Masina (Amelia or "Ginger"), Marcello Mastroianni (Pippo or "Fred"), Franco Fabrizi (master of ceremonies)
- ***Intervista (Interview)*** (1988)
Script: Federico Fellini, Gianfranco Angelucci
Photography: Tonino Delli Colli
Producer: Ibrahim Moussa, Aljosha Productions, RAI-Uno
Cast: Sergio Rubini (journalist), Paola Liguori (movie star), Maurizio Mein (assistant director), Anita Ekberg, Federico Fellini, Marcello Mastroianni (as themselves)
- ***La voce della luna (The Voice of the Moon)*** (1990)
Script: Federico Fellini, Tullio Pinelli, Ermanno Cavazzoni
Photography: Tonino Delli Colli
Producer: Mario Cecchi Gori and Vittorio Cecchi Gori, RAI-Uno
Cast: Roberto Benigni (Ivo Salvini), Paolo Villaggio (Prefect Gonnella), Marisa Tomasi (Marisa)

La Dolce Vita

Wheeler Winston • April 2010

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Federico Fellini, one of the cinema's greatest artists, began his career as a cartoonist, and then enrolled in the University of Rome Law School in 1938 in order to avoid being drafted into Mussolini's fascist army. However, Fellini never actually took any classes, and instead spent his time as a court reporter, where he met the actor Aldo Fabrizi, who hired Fellini at a nominal salary as an assistant. By the early 1940s, Fellini was writing scripts for Italian radio programs, and developed an interest in film as a result of his work in the relatively new medium.

After the fall of Mussolini, Fellini and some friends opened up a storefront business that he christened "The Funny Face Shop", where, functioning as a sidewalk sketch artist, he drew caricatures of American soldiers. A chance meeting with Roberto Rossellini developed into a friendship, and Rossellini asked Fellini to help with the script for the film that became *Roma, città aperta* (*Open City*, 1945). The success of the film encouraged Fellini to delve further into the cinema. He wrote several more scripts for Rossellini, including the scenario for the groundbreaking "Il Miracolo" ("The Miracle", one of two segments in *L'amore*, 1948), in which Fellini also had a major role as an actor.

Fellini then served as an assistant director and/or scenarist for the young Italian directors Pietro Germi and Alberto Lattuada, both of whom had attended the Italian national film school Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia. In 1950, Fellini made his first film as a director, *Luci del varietà* (*Variety Lights*, co-directed with Lattuada), but this modest comedy, about a vaudeville troupe, failed at the box office. His second film, now as solo director, was *Lo sceicco bianco* (*The White Sheik*, 1952), a parody of the popular *fumetti* comic books then popular in Italy, which used captioned photos rather than drawings to tell their story.

This film, too, failed to meet with public favour, but Fellini finally clicked with his next effort, the semi-autobiographical film *I vitelloni* (1953), about a group of young loafers who hang about in a small Italian town waiting aimlessly for something to happen in their lives; the film would much later be remade by George Lucas as *American Graffiti* (1973), set in a small California town. *La strada* (*The Road*, 1954) was an even bigger success, starring Fellini's immensely talented wife Giulietta Masina as Gelsomina, a sort of "holy fool" who tours the Italian countryside as an assistant to the strongman Zampanò (Anthony Quinn). Alternately heartbreaking and comic, this deeply perceptive film about the vagabond carnival life struck a chord with audiences worldwide, and won an Academy Award for the Best Foreign Language Film.

Fellini's career was now in high gear, and for the rest of the 1950s, he created a series of unforgettable films, including *Il bidone* (*The Swindle*, 1955), starring American actor Broderick Crawford as Augusto, a fast-talking con man who is not above donning a priest's collar to cheat his poverty-stricken victims, and *Le notti di Cabiria* (*Nights of Cabiria*, 1957), starring Masina as an eternally optimistic prostitute who perseveres in her faith in mankind, no matter how shabbily the fates, and her various clients, may treat her. The film won Fellini another Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film.

But all of this was merely the prelude to Fellini's most ambitious project, in which he hoped to paint a broad canvas of the collapse of modern society and the rise of celebrity culture, *La dolce vita* (literally "*The Sweet Life*", 1960), a biting condemnation of throwaway "pop" culture and the cult of celebrityhood, which also coined the term *paparazzi* for tabloid photographers. Marcello Mastroianni, in the role that made him an international

celebrity, plays Marcello Rubini, a scandal reporter for a sleazy Rome newspaper. The film came about partially as a result of Fellini's new celebrity status; forsaking his usual haunts, the director spent much time in the cafés of the Via Veneto, a gathering place for the rich and famous of the era. Working throughout 1958 with the screenwriters Tullio Pinelli, Ennio Faliano, and Brunello Rondi, Fellini used sections of an earlier, abandoned screenplay, "Molado in città", but now expanded his new screenplay to encompass all of Italian pop society¹⁰.

Famously, the film's initial producer, Dino De Laurentiis was unhappy with the screenplay, finding it too gloomy and downbeat; he also wanted Fellini to pass over Mastroianni for the lead, and give the role to Paul Newman. This was not entirely out of line, for Fellini himself was set on casting Maurice Chevalier (!) as Marcello's aging, ailing father; Henry Fonda as the intellectual Steiner, Marcello's best friend; as well as Greer Garson, Luise Rainer, Peter Ustinov and Barbara Stanwyck in supporting roles¹¹. This would have resulted in a very different film indeed, but while he was willing to compromise on other matters, Fellini refused to budge on Mastroianni, and after strenuous negotiations, De Laurentiis backed out of the project.

But sensing the commercial possibilities of the project, redolent of sin and scandal, three other producers soon stepped up to fill the void, which for a time complicated matters, as Fellini soon found himself involved with all three simultaneously. At length, he made a deal with Guiseppe Amato and Angelo Rizzoli, as the "Riama" company, signing the contract for the film on 28 October 1958. The fiery Amato caused numerous scenes during the shooting of the film, but in Rizzoli, Fellini at last found a producer who respected and admired both his work, and his shooting methods. "Rizzoli is the ideal producer", Fellini later remarked; "without him, I could never have made *La dolce vita*"¹².

Shooting began on 16 March 1959, with Mastroianni and Anita Ekberg (as Sylvia, the American sex siren), starting with the scene in which Marcello chases Sylvia up the steps inside St Peter's Dome; in fact a set which had been constructed to match the original location. Also on the set was Walter Santesso, a young documentary filmmaker and actor, in the role of Paparazzo, Marcello's sidekick, a stop-at-nothing photographer who specialises in catching stars in compromising situations. Immediately after this, Fellini shot the sequences documenting Sylvia's triumphal arrival at the Rome airport, and then the famous scene at the fountains of Trevi¹³.

The scenes of the Via Veneto – reconstructed within the confines of the Cinecittà studios for the film – went smoothly, once Fellini realised that shooting on the actual location was impossible because of the notoriety the film itself was attracting, even during production; ironically, the daily power struggles to complete *La dolce vita* were now hot gossip items for the Rome dailies. Luise Rainer, for example, had been written into the sprawling script as "Dolores, an old and lonely nymphomaniac who becomes infatuated with Marcello", but after reading the script, Rainer rejected her role as "sordid and hateful"¹⁴.

Rainer then came to Rome to argue the case in person, and attempted to soften her role into a sort of beneficent muse who helps Marcello write the book he's always wanted to complete, but has been unable to. There was also talk of a sex scene between the character of Dolores and Marcello that Rainer objected to, but

¹⁰ Hollis Alpert, *Fellini: A Life*, Paragon House, New York, 1988, pp. 118-21.

¹¹ Angelo Solmi, *Fellini*, trans. Elizabeth Greenwood, Merlin, London, 1967, p. 141.

¹² Solmi, pp. 141-2.

¹³ Solmi, p. 143.

¹⁴ Solmi, p. 144.

there are varying accounts of this, and the real truth may never be known¹⁵. At length, annoyed with Rainer's interference, Fellini decided to jettison both Rainer and the character of Dolores entirely, and the resulting tumult was covered extensively in the press¹⁶.

Yet shooting pressed on, and as the film gathered speed, *La dolce vita* seemed to explore every aspect of modern Italian society; the supposed glamour of stardom revealed as a mere scramble for publicity at any cost;



the non stop party life that is shown as both empty and rotten; and the intellectual “haven” offered by Steiner (Alain Cuny) and his family that is seen as an inadequate refuge from the harsh realities of 20th century pop culture. Always on top of the latest trends, Fellini spotted a young “scenester”, Nico (billed as “Nico Otzak” in the film’s credits, but born Christa Päffgen), who would soon go on

to star in Andy Warhol’s *The Chelsea Girls* (1966), and put her in a small role as a blond, hedonistic pleasure seeker caught up in the “sweet life”.

Mixed in with all of this is the backdrop of the endless quest for sensational headlines, where anything and everything that can make “good copy” is grist for the mill. When Sylvia’s drunken husband, Robert (Tarzan actor Lex Barker), shows up and almost spoils Sylvia’s debut with the Rome press, and is later involved in a fight with Marcello, Paparazzo is there to take pictures, along with photographers from the competing tabloids, to splash across the front page. Later, two young girls, clearly coached by their fame-seeking relatives, claim to have been visited by the Virgin Mary; most of the press in attendance know that the entire episode is a fraud, but they play it up as news because they know their audience will be intrigued. When the “visitation” turns into a full-scale riot, in the middle of a torrential downpour, so much the better; it makes for more spectacular visuals.

Throughout the film, Marcello spends his nights searching for gossip and scandal, going to endless, meaningless parties, hanging out on the Via Veneto in Rome, and constantly looking for action. He fights endlessly with his gullible, clinging fiancée, Emma (Yvonne Furneaux), who attempts suicide when Marcello neglects her. Seeking respite from Emma’s persistent demands for a typical, bourgeois life, Marcello drifts into a relationship with Maddalena (Anouk Aimée), a cynical member of the jet set who lives only for the pleasure of the moment. None of this brings Marcello any happiness, and his job is equally repellent; exploiting the misery and foibles of the celebrity set he runs with.

When Marcello’s ailing father (Annibale Ninchi) from the provinces unexpectedly shows up for a night on the town, Marcello desperately tries to reconnect with him, but to no avail; his father suffers a minor heart attack, and returns home, realising that no matter how much he might wish to, he can’t recapture his own, hedonistic youth. As the film progresses, Marcello sinks deeper into the decadence of Rome’s nightlife, although even his professional rivals tell him to quit writing for the “scandal sheets” and work on some project worthy of

¹⁵ Mick Brown, “Actress Luise Rainer on the Glamour and Grit of Hollywood’s Golden Era”, *The Telegraph* 22 October 2009: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/6398728/Actress-Luise-Rainer-on-the-glamour-and-grit-of-Hollywoods-golden-era.html>.

¹⁶ See Alpert, p. 135; Solmi, p. 144.

his undeniable talents. Marcello's only true friend, Steiner, is an intellectual with a wife and two children who has nightly literary "salons" at his high-rise apartment, and also urges Marcello to quit wasting his life.

But when Steiner suddenly and inexplicably commits suicide, after killing his two infant children, Marcello feels that there is no way out. The life of throwaway pop celebrity is all he knows; it has consumed him, spat him out, left him bereft of hope and stripped of whatever talent he might once have possessed. The film's final sequence finds Marcello, drunk and unshaven, hanging out with a worthless group of "party people" at a shabby, improvised orgy, intent on momentary pleasure and nothing more. Marcello has now given up writing even for the gossip magazines; he has been reduced to being a publicist for hire, who dispenses instant, fraudulent celebrity – for a price.

La dolce vita finished shooting on 27 August 1959, and when the first cut was completed – at 18,000 ft. in 35mm – the film was more than three-and-a-half hours long. Working with the film's editor, Leo Cattozzo, with the sympathetic help of Angelo Rizzoli, and against the interference of Giuseppe Amato, who now wanted to cut the more controversial scenes for fear of causing offence (a bit late for that, it would seem), Fellini brought the film down to 17,000 ft., and then trimmed an additional 200 ft. more to bring the film to its final release time of 174 minutes; oddly enough, the US version was slightly longer, at a full 180 minutes, and contained some sequences deleted in the Italian version¹⁷.

Superbly photographed in black-and-white CinemaScope (a European variation called Totalscope), that most '60s of all cinematic formats, by the gifted Otello Martelli, and with a haunting music score by Fellini's frequent collaborator Nino Rota, the film was finally presented to the public in February 1960, and immediately became a commercial and critical sensation. It was condemned outright by the Catholic Church, but this did nothing to stop the film's success; indeed, it made it all the more scandalously successful. *La dolce vita*, of course, is deeply moral, opening with the famous shot of a huge statue of Christ being ferried by helicopter to the Vatican, with Marcello and Papparazzo along for the ride, suggesting that the hope of redemption exists, even if we seek to reject it in our search for ephemeral fame and pleasure. As Fellini said of the finished film: "I wanted to shoot with the camera a conflagration in the culminating moment of its splendor, just before its disintegration"¹⁸.

Coming as it did at the end of the 1950s, *La dolce vita* is a film that sums up the excesses and follies of that decade, and also gestures toward the onrushing 1960s. With *La dolce vita*, Fellini ended his first great decade as a filmmaker. Perhaps significantly, Fellini's next feature film, *8½* (*Otto e mezzo*, 1963), dealt with creative block, as film director Guido Anselmi (Marcello Mastroianni) can't get his new film off the ground because he's run out of material from his own life with which to create it. The sets are all built, the actors hired, the costumes prepared, and the money in place, but Guido has no idea what to shoot. The film ends with the situation unresolved, but by looking more intensively into his past, it is implied that Guido will find hope for his future work. *8½* won Fellini his third Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, and he was soon involved in a series of captivating, dreamlike projects that occupied his attention in the 1960s and 1970s.

¹⁷ Solmi, pp. 145-146.

¹⁸ Fellini quoted Alpert, p. 141.