

Federico Fellini: Between Myths and Realities

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Abstract

Having always distinguished the intense connection between myths and realities in the universal unforgettable masterpieces of the 7th art, we chose to study this duality in the three most famous feature films of the Italian director Federico Fellini.

*In **La Dolce Vita**, **Otto & Mezzo** and **Amarcord**, Fellini always sailed between the palpable and the phantasmagorical.*

In this article, we will try to decorticate this complementarity, by attempting to clarify what Fellini tries to convey to the audience as a real fantasy.

Keywords: Fellini, Italian Cinema, La Dolce Vita, Otto & Mezzo, Amarcord, Real, Evident, Concrete, Palpable, Mythological, Phantasmagorical, Oneiric, Dream.

Résumé

Ayant toujours distingué le rapport intense entre les mythes et les réalités dans les œuvres mondiales inoubliables du 7ème art, nous avons choisi d'étudier cette dualité dans les trois plus célèbres long métrages de l'auteur italien Federico Fellini.

Dans La Dolce Vita, Otto & Mezzo et Amarcord, Fellini a toujours navigué entre le palpable et le fantasmagorique.

Dans cet article, nous tenterons de décortiquer cette complémentarité, tout en essayant de clarifier ce que Fellini essaye de transmettre comme réel fantasmé.

Mots clés : Fellini, Cinéma Italien, La Dolce Vita, Otto & Mezzo, Amarcord, Réel, Evident, Concret, Palpable, Mythologique, Fantasmagorique, Onirique, Rêve...

If we compare the cinema to a mirror whose aim is to reflect the reality, we could say that the shooting's fruit, where the camera replaces the eyes, is only a duplicate truism. The oneiric trim, which is added by the director, aims only to make the viewer able to distinguish the reflexive fingerprints between an author and another, given that every one of them adds his own 'spice' to his 'dish', which makes the 'consumer', recognize its 'taste' without any doubt.

Based on *Fellini's* three headlights, namely *La Dolce Vita*, *Otto & Mezzo* and *Amarcord*, I will try to show how I can find a close connection between the myth and the reality. The cinema through the supreme beauty of these three films which are classified unforgettable, takes viewers into a parallel universe of thought, inviting them outstandingly to wonder: Is this real? Is it imagination? Or it is an oneiric reality, which takes them to immerse themselves in a phantasmagorical dream? Gilles Deleuze answers these questions by saying:

'As for the distinction between subjective and objective, it also tends to lose its importance [...]. We run in fact into a principle of indeterminability, of indiscernibility: we no longer know what is imaginary or real, [...], in the situation, not because they are confused, but because we do not have to know and there is no longer even a place from which to ask. It is as if the real and the imaginary were running after each other, as if each was being reflected in the other, around a point of indiscernibility¹

¹ *Cinema2: l'image temps*, Gilles Deleuze English Version ,Athlone Press, Edition 2005

The indiscernibility of which Deleuze talks, represents the fairy effect that the movies make the audience (whether theorists, filmmakers, critics, reporters or simple cinephile) feel. It seems like a trip, of which no one knows the final destination and goes on as well, with a deep admiration to the navigation between the palpability and the mythology which characterises the movie.

Many authors, through their cinematographic masterpieces, have made their shooting, as a kind of UFO (Unidentified Flying Object) which transports the audience on a trip between the 'Earth of real' and the 'Galaxy of oneiric'. Trying to decode this junction between fiction and effectiveness, I chose one of the most famous authors who meet this condition of movement between myths and realities: **Federico Fellini**.

Having acquired experience in his movies of the 50s', *Fellini* gave birth to an unforgettable trilogy, recognized as masterpieces all over the 7th Art's world. Through *Dolce Vita*, *Otto e Mezzo* and *Amarcord*, *Fellini* baptized the autonomous sequences which replaced the narrative continuity.

According to *Fellini*², artistic productions in cinema, poetry and painting, compose the phantasmagorical activity of mankind, reflected on screen, paper or canvas. *Fellini* also formalizes a necessary link between dreams and the

² *Entretiens Fellini* © Damian Pettigrew (adaptation : Cyrine Mamy, Subtitles: Eclair Vidéo)

unconscious, which, once united, they have no bounds. In this way, he invites artists as well as spectators to sail hugely and without borders in their imaginations.

I am going to analyze the bidimensional real-myth bond in each one of these movies in order to show how much *Fellini* has left in it his fingerprint, whether as director, writer, editor, designer or even sometimes as an actor, by dint to be integrated into his films, by showing actors how such grimaces should be associated with such a scene. By this process, I wish to make a maximum approach from his thought to the ideas and messages that he wants to convey to the audience through the roles played by actors that he chose for each film.)

The palpable axis of *La Dolce Vita* revealed in the chronicler *Marcello*, is nothing but a reflexion on the real *Fellini*, the native of Rimini, who has been a redactor during his youth. Through this autobiographic vision, *Fellini* declares that he has been journalist before becoming a filmmaker.

A second reality reflexion, through which *Fellini* aimed to highlight the oneiric link between the Christian liver and the social-economic roman revolution, triggers the movie's beginning with the helicopter's trip scene *fig. 1*. It exhibits the Majestic Christ Statue from Milan to Vatican: a stage that was taken from a newsreel³ filmed in Italy on May, 1st 1959.

³ <http://www.cineclubdecaen.com/materiel/cthistoire.html>

By integrating through an alternate mounting, his own scenes in which Marcello and his '*Paparazzo*'⁴ are -supposed- in the process of filming this movement, aren't they a '*real-fiction fusion*'?



Figure 1: Transport of the Christ statue in parallel with the new construction (real) followed by Marcello chronicler (oneiric)



Figure 2: Mythical scene of La Dolce Vita in front of La Fontena dei Trevi

Besides, *Fellini* establishes a '*comic link*' between the bourgeois ladies while sunbathing on the building's rooftop - which is nothing but a realistic illustration of the Italian socio-economic boom- and the statue of Jesus Christ '*blessing*' the young ladies' sunbathing, when passing, open-armed, above the building's rooftop.

Likewise, by passing through construction sites in several shots, *Fellini* reports the recovery of Rome. Thus Marcello is nothing but an alter ego of *Fellini* during his youth while he was a journalist. This is a '*Fellinian*' way to scandalize the Italian society's turpitude, and that is what has

⁴ This term's birth (frequently used nowadays) took place since *La Dolce Vita*'s release

taken the Vatican newspaper: *L'Osservatore Romano* to accuse that 'Fellinian' shot of blasphemy⁵.

In addition to the reflection of the Italian reality, after the Second World War, *Fellini* has attributed to his movie, an unforgettable phantasmagorical specificity through the shots of *Sylvia* (*Anita Ekberg*) with *Marcello* on 'La Fontena Dei Trevi' *figure 2*, which was so mythical that it leads the audience to imagine that they kissed each other, although no kiss took place. It is the same case on the royal social class' stage, where the audience finds some idle aristocrats funding a roman castle restoration: an oneiric and comic criticism at the same time.

'In his autobiographical films, Federico Fellini creates a "legend" of himself and films that legend' [John C.Stubbs, 2002]. Like most of his movies, *Fellini* has made from *Otto & Mezzo* a fantasized reality. In fact, he was about to start shooting a movie, whose sceneries have not been yet installed; despite he found himself blocked, not knowing what he should neither write as a script nor shoot as a stage. This situation brought to *Fellini* the idea to shoot those thoughts' deadlock situation. And as he hasn't yet decided the script title, he named it *Eight and a Half* since it was his eighth movie and the half as he gathered the sum of his short sketches.

Eight and a Half is clearly classified as a fusion between the real and the fantasy: real since Guido (*Marcello Mastroianni*), or *Fellini's* alter-ego, was hospitalized at the beginning of the film. *Fellini* in fact was really hospitalized for

⁵ *Fellini : Le Magicien du Réel*, Jean A. Gili : p.31

a specific period due to a severe fatigue he has suffered from because of his successive shootings, in full time and without rest.

And even while hospitalized, his inspiration has never stopped. He delivered his spirit to the delights of his words to write his autobiography or diary he titled *Propos*, where he was sailing in the corners of his hospitalization to describe the behavior of doctors, nurses, sisters he called "religious" or even his hospitalized neighbours and the parents who were visiting them.

The dreamlike quality contrariwise appears in the flight scene while he was fleeing from asphyxia, while locked in the car from which he freed himself by flying to the wide sky a fairytale scene imaginary cut by a friend at the seaside who pulled his foot with a rope- as if he was a kite *fig. 3*, and while returning to reality when the doctor came to examine him in his room, and apologized for having cut his concentration *fig.4* as well as while expressing the interest that the doctor reserves to his art.



Figure 3: The stage of Guido's dream to fly

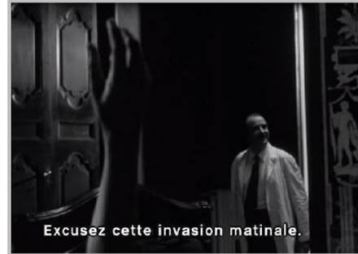


Figure 4: The doctor asks sorry for having interrupted Guido's invasion

Likewise during the scene of alternation between the beloved girl of his dreams and the one who was serving him some water or even at the end of the movie: this ending was originally designed to take place in a diner-wagon of a train. *Fellini* decided during the mounting step, to replace it with the stage that gathered together all the characters of his dreams in a large round that Guido, the alter ego of *Fellini*, has tamed by a whip, to make them dance together on the farfare music.

Isabella Conti and William A. McCormack ask: “*To what degree does the movie accurately represent his life experience?*” [Biography, 1984]. So we should answer that on several occasions, the diseased state of *Fellini* was his source of inspiration. Having written his memorandum: *Propos* while he was hospitalised before shooting *Eight & a Half*, was nearly the same like his recovery during his temporary return to *Rimini*

(his native town), where he wrote: *La Mia Rimini*⁶, and a good part of which coincides with several scenes of his movie *Amarcord* that reflects a bit of his childhood period.

After having browsed in his reminiscences; and in order to strengthen his memories by clarifying what he found dark, *Fellini* chose *Tonino Guerra*: a screenwriter and poet from *Rimini* too, so that the scenario be the most amalgamated possible between the fantastic and the real.

This is what led him elsewhere, to reap a marvellous masterpiece as *Amarcord*, that we can describe as an ‘*umbilical cord*’ linking the memory of the ‘*mature*’ *Fellini* during the seventies to the ‘*foetus*’ of his teenage in *Rimini*, that he had spent during the fascism period of the thirties.

The imaginary adventures that *Fellini* reflects in *Amarcord* were more evocative than the pale reality of his childhood in *Rimini*. He seemed to make of his memories, a playhouse of projection and staging where he reflects at the same time: madness, beauty and humor.

The crazy uncle of Titta *fig. 5* invaded by the purity of his madness while he emits a universal cry, represented the imaginary in its purest form. While the beauty appears in the portrayal of the women who is simply a sin in Catholicism: that is what *Fellini* shown in the dreamlike image of Volpina *fig. 6*.

⁶ *Le monde Magique du souvenir Fellinien : Documentary of Angela Ramboni*

However, for *Giudizio*, the *Amarcord's* phantasmagoria is mainly humorous; *Fellini* reflects in this character the innocent unconsciousness while *Giudizio* smiles when the *Gardisca* (*Magali Noël*) and her accompanying were passing in front of his eyes *fig. 7*.



Fig.5: The purity of madness in Titta's uncle



Fig.6: The Catholicism sin through the portrayal of the women in *Volpina*



Fig.7: The innocent unconsciousness in the crazy *Giudizio's* smile

During the shooting of *Amarcord*, *Fellini* went into the skin of all the roles of his script even by playing a few scenes in front of the actors, so that they identically convey his ideas.

Through these comic scenes at school, *Fellini* touches his remembrances during his teenage life. The classroom shooting stages were just some reflection axes of *Rimini's* atmosphere during the thirties.

In addition to the ten minutes of the concentrate which reflects the teachers' twitches, *Fellini* also represented through this autobiographical movie some key indicators of his native town, such as the average Italian man, the province, the family,

the country and most of all the fascism of which he mocked remotely and without sermonizing.

In this article, I concentrated on *Fellini's* three flagship movies. Nevertheless, I can clearly find that this formula of deeply linking the oneiric with the palpable is almost proved in all his twenty four masterpieces⁷.

Having started since his childhood as a scribbler of his dreams before becoming a filmmaker, greatly pushed *Fellini* in his staging, to approximate his experience in reality to what he dreamed about and translated by his drawings. In many interviews, he confessed that this passage through his dreams, garnished with his autobiography, in the eyes of the audience, produced in him a supreme sense of pride and satisfaction⁸.

By associating this '*Fellinian*' narcissism to the success of his works that are considered immortal until nowadays, I can nominate *Fellini* as a '*tightrope walker*', who keeps a supreme balance between myth and reality.

In this regard, and in an interview⁹ that was directed by *Damian Pettigrew*, *Fellini* answered his '*shipwreck-question*', by describing himself as an attentive observer, who could "*describe the Apocalypse, and put it into images in a*

⁷ 21 feature films + 3 short movies

⁸ *Le monde Magique du souvenir Fellinien : Documentary of Angela Ramboni*

⁹ *Entretiens Fellini made by Damien Pettigrew (Bonus in '8 & ½' DVD)*

movie, after having lived it " [Fellini's answer: minute 18 of the interview]. It is nothing but a declaration from Fellini about his ability to reproduce the palpable by his own fiction, through keeping it identical as if he had lived the situation in his real life then reflected it in his movies.

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