

LA DOLCE VITA AND LOST IN TRANSLATION:
FEDERICO FELLINI AND SOFIA COPPOLA TAKE ON
MEANINGFUL HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS.
CAN THEY EXIST IN THIS DAY AND AGE?

by

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Suffering from interminable insomnia, Bob (Bill Murray) and Charlotte (Scarlett Johansson) sit in a hotel room in Tokyo watching TV. As they change channels they come upon a late-night showing of Fellini's 1960 classic, *La dolce vita*. It is the famous scene of Anita Eckberg and Marcello Mastroianni bathing in Rome's Trevi fountain.

- Where the appearance of *La dolce vita* in Sofia Coppola's 2003 film *Lost in Translation* may be somewhat serendipitous and contingentⁱ, on close viewing, one comes to see how *La dolce vita* may be considered a cinematic source and subtext for Coppola's film. As through the citation *Lost in Translation* places itself in direct dialog with Fellini's film and solicits comparison. But in addition to comparison, *Lost in Translation*, itself, appears as a response to *La dolce vita* and its predictions about capitalist-consumer culture and modernity. In a way, in 1960 *La dolce vita* anticipates *Lost in Translation* in 2003. But where in many ways its predictions are confirmed and validated, *La dolce vita* fails to hit the mark on one of its most critical targets: the seeming impossibility of establishing meaningful human relationships in a modern capitalist and consumer culture.



Between 1958-1963, Italy experienced its “Economic Miracle”. Only 15 years after the Second World War, Italy had transformed itself from a “traditional agrarian country into a modern industrial state” (Sassoon, 26), ranked as “the fifth economic power in the world” (Sassoon, 81). It was during this period that Italy became known, among other things, for its cars, fashion, design and craftsmanship.

But accompanying the industrial and economic transformations, came a social transformation as well. With Italy’s “economic boom” (its “boom economico”) came “an unparalleled consumption boom” (Sassoon, 81). Italy had now become a capitalist consumer society. As such, its cultural values had been transformed as well. Consumption and the acquisition of consumer goods became the goals and objectives of good living or of “la dolce vita”ⁱⁱ. Most markedly, as Paul Ginsborg writes, Italy’s “consumer revolution” and modernization “led to increased material prosperity, to an overriding interest in consumer products, to greater individualism” (Ginsborg, 248). And as a consequence, “the ‘economic miracle’ worked to increase the atomization of Italian civil society [...] by linking rising living standards with accentuated individualism” (Ginsborg, 248). It was in this context of rapid social and cultural change that Federico Fellini produced his meditation on and critique of individualism, consumerism and modernity. Against a backdrop of pressures from the Vatican and the Italian Parliament *La dolce vita* was finally released in 1960ⁱⁱⁱ.

La dolce vita

Through the aimless wanderings of Fellini’s principle protagonist, the tabloid journalist, Marcello Rubini in his milieu—Rome’s rich, famous, glitterati and it’s paparazzi—we witness what Fellini considered “the sinking ship of our civilization [...] a time of intellectual, moral, and artistic crisis” (*Cinema*, 228). Through Marcello’s experiences we witness a society of the landed nobility, businessmen, actors, artists, poets, writers, and intellectuals, engorged with all of the trappings of



material excess—with castles, luxury cars, expensive designer clothing, and bacchinalian parties overflowing with champagne and sumptuous food. Yet, rather than celebrating this material wealth—*la dolce vita*-- Fellini uses it to underline “the emptiness of modern values and the loss of meaning in our lives [...our...] spiritual poverty” (*Cinema*, 232-233). What we discover through Fellini’s lens is how this apparent plenitude reveals itself as a mask of an existential face that is empty, bankrupt^{iv}. It is a void, that when revealed, when it stares Marcello and his friends straight in the eyes, shows them to be the “monsters” that they are. In the film’s final scene we get a glance of this image. After an all night orgy in a house by the beach, Marcello and his friends hear shouts from some fishermen hauling in a heavy net. They approach the fishermen and find in the net an unidentifiable and very large fish, which is described as a “monster”. As the scenario describes the scene: “The fish is on its back and the men are struggling to turn it over. We hear them chanting: ‘Hoo-ah,...Hoo-ah!’ They get the fish up on its side, and now it flops over onto its belly and we see it—a strange, bloated monster that stares at us with dead, accusing eyes. A repulsive little crab skitters down off it’s back and drops onto the sand” (*Dolce Vita*, 270). As Marcello looks closely in the eyes of the dead sea-monster, Marcello asks “What is he looking at?” (271). And, through a close-up, indeed, “it seems to stare back at them with its round, dead eye. Marcello still fixated on the look, repeats, [...] “He’s still staring” (272). And yet, who sees whom? Who is staring at whom? And what is being seen? This is an exercise in self-reflexivity. As Marcello looks into the eye of the dead monster, it is he who is doing the seeing. He is the one who is staring. He is the one reflected in the monsters eyes. He sees himself in the monster for the zombie--the living dead—that he and his friends have become. The emptiness of their lives has been revealed to them. And all that they can do, rather than face it, is turn and walk away.

A further sign in *La dolce vita* of social collapse in Italy during the economic miracle is the sense that human communication seems no longer possible. As Italy becomes a



modern consumer society, a strong sense of individualism develops. And this individualism has serious social consequences. Through social atomization, a sense of isolation, loneliness and alienation develops. One way that this manifests itself is in the failure of communication. Communication is no longer in dialog, but becomes monologue. It is this monologic failure to communicate that pervades Fellini's film. From the film's opening scene where sunbathing women cannot hear a word of what Marcello is yelling out of a helicopter, to the last where Marcello cannot hear the beckoning call of the angelic Paola, whose calls are silenced by the sound of wind and waves, the fact of one speaking without hearing or being heard becomes a fact of modernity. The characters in the film, at their parties, either talk across one another, or talk simply to hear themselves speak. Their discourses are solipsistic. They are meant to be spoken but not to be heard. No one listens to one another. No one hears. No one cares. This is most remarkable at the conclusion of the film. After staring at the monster, Marcello hears a voice calling from behind him. He turns to see it's the young girl who he had met earlier and whom he described as an "angel". She is calling to him, and gesturing to remind him of when they had met. She beckons to him, but he does not hear over the wind and the waves. But, here, rather than attempting to hear her, rather than walking over to her, to hear what she has to say, he simply affirms his deafness, his indifference, throws up his hands, and like he did with the monster, turns his back and walks away. Communication is impossible, he doesn't care, what she has to say doesn't matter—to him.

A consequence that follows from this individualism and monologism, is that it becomes very difficult—if possible at all—to identify with someone else, to identify with "the other". In fact other people are objectified, they appear as objects in the world. The objectification of the other, is most visible in the omnipresence of the tabloid press, the writers and photographers, the paparazzi. They see their subjects only as objects to be exploited to satisfy the most salacious of public tastes. They want the sleaziest stories and raunchiest pictures with conscious disregard for what



will happen to their subject/object once the story/picture appears in the press. This objectification of and lack of empathy for the paparazzi's prey is most striking when the intellectual, Steiner, kills himself and his two young children. After this murder-suicide, Marcello and a police inspector await the arrival of his wife to inform her of this tragedy. Behind them, as they wait for her taxi to arrive, is a mob of paparazzi who lay in wait, hungry to get pictures of her first reactions once she learns of what has befallen her and her family. And, in fact, as soon as she exits the car, she is overwhelmed by both grief and the mob that flashes pictures in her faces as fast as they can be snapped. What is most shocking in this scene is that the paparazzi show no human concern for her. They have no feelings. They possess neither sympathy nor empathy for her in her grief. Their concern is for the pictures, for the money and for the public.

Fellini's comment on modernity and its implications for society may be observed in this scene between Steiner's wife and the paparazzi. As in it we witness the merging of the private with the public. At a most private time when Steiner's wife should rightfully be allowed her privacy, she is denied this by the intrusion of the paparazzi, who ambush her upon her arrival on the scene^v. In this--as throughout the film--the distinction and line separating public and private is blurred, erased. There is nothing private. Everything is public. Everything is fair game^{vi}.

What this dissolution of private into public means for society is not of meager significance. As privacy forms the very ground on which personal intimacy depends, and it is intimacy that is the condition for loving human relationships.

Cumulatively then, in a culture that is portrayed as spiritually and emotionally empty, with the possibility for communication failing and with everything merging into the objective and public sphere, it would seem that one conclusion that may be drawn from *La dolce vita*, considered within these frames, would be the impossibility of



forming any meaningful bond with another human being, let alone ever developing a loving relationship with someone.

And, indeed, this is what we witness in and through Marcello's wanderings, principally –but not limited to—his relationships with women. Throughout his search for some direction and meaning in his life, Marcello has failing relationships with three women. First there is the wealthy socialite, Maddalena, with whom he has a sexual adventure in the basement apartment of a prostitute. Then there is the relationship with his “girlfriend” Emma whose emotional neediness and maternal attention turn him finally to reject her. And finally there is his fascination with the Sylvan Swedish/American actress, Sylvia, “whose animal energy overwhelms Marcello's jaded sensibility” (*Cinema*, 147), but this fails as well as they are—on many levels—unable to communicate. He speaks only Italian and she speaks only English. She is all raw “spontaneous and innocent sensuality” (*Cinema*, 147), and he is “spiritually impotent”(*Cinema*, 147). In all of these instances, Marcello fails to establish a meaningful bond and it is modernity and the “modern condition” which are the implied culprits. His liaison with Maddalena is limited to a strictly physical and emotionally empty consummation of their relationship through meaningless sex. His relationship with Emma fails because of his own failure for emotional intimacy. And his failings with Sylvia are due to a complete failure in communication. The only person in the film with whom he appears to establish any meaningful bond is the writer and intellectual, Steiner, who after killing his children puts a bullet through his head, for fear of the future. “Sometimes,” Steiner confides Marcello one night, “...I think of the world that my children will know. They say that the world of the future will be wonderful. But what does that mean?” (*Screenplay*, 136) As we find in the end, it means there is no hope, no redemption, no grace. It means, that in the future, there is no possibility for meaningful relationships, for intimacy, for love.



Lost in Translation

Outside of citing *La dolce vita*, *Lost in Translation* with its surreal all-night parties and wanderings, empty marriages and relationships, meaningless sex, photographer/paparazzo, failing spirituality, American movie star arriving in a foreign country. But in addition to what it actually seems to borrow from *La dolce vita*, it also seems to validate and realize the future foretold by Steiner and implicated in the film.

But in 2003, rather than restricting the critique to Rome and Italy and the transformations taking place during the economic miracle, Sofia Coppola sets her film in Tokyo allowing it to serve as a broadly iconic symbol not simply for Japan and its own economic miracle, but for the entire world of 21st century globalized capitalism and consumerism, which like in *La dolce vita*, reflects a world of material excess, plenitude and superabundance with all of its promises of fulfillment and disappointments. As Todd McGowan writes:

— As Rome served in Fellini's film as the focal point for the moral decay and material exuberance of Italian culture and society in 1960, Coppola uses Tokyo to introduce us to this on a global scale. The first theme she introduces us to is global capitalism and global alienation. As Todd McGowan writes: "In the world of global capitalism, the excess embodying pure enjoyment has become the explicit focus of our attention. We live in a world of excess because we are constantly trying to tap into the enjoyment that this excess promises. The excessive nature of global capitalism becomes visible in the sequence depicting Bob's arrival in Tokyo at the beginning of [the] film. We initially see Bob looking out a car window at the buildings and lights of Tokyo, which are blurred but visible in the background. Coppola alternates a series of traveling shots of the brightly lit Tokyo nightscape and close-ups



of Bob looking awestruck at this world of excess [...]Coppola depicts Tokyo as a city bubbling over with excess: the city overwhelms Bob because there are too many buildings, too many lights, and too many advertisements (54).

Unlike *La dolce vita*, which follows a single protagonist, *Lost in Translation* has two. First there is Bob. Bob (Bill Murray) is an aging actor who has come to Tokyo to film advertisements for Suntori Whiskey. He is alone and has left his wife and children behind him in the United States. It is Bob's initial physical displacement to a country where he knows nothing of the culture nor of the language that sets off his alienation in motion. He neither relates to the culture nor can he communicate in or with it. Further, he incubates himself from Japanese culture and increases his physical isolation by staying in an American hotel and holing up in his room, only going out so far as the hotel-lounge.

The second major protagonist is Charlotte. Charlotte is a young newlywed and recent college graduate who has followed her celebrity photographer husband, John, to Japan. He has come to Japan to shoot photos of a rock group that has come there in search of exotic locations. John leaves Charlotte alone in the hotel as he travels with the band. Charlotte, like Bob, is equally physically displaced from her home in coming to Japan. And she, as well, knows nothing of the culture and language and is thereby unable to communicate and, again like Bob, is left alone to the same hotel and its lounge. Hence, both she and Bob, are alone in a foreign land without means to access what it has to offer, outside, that is, of the promise of global capitalism and consumerism. They are each, by themselves, cultural aliens and alienated.

Each alone, Bob and Charlotte meet in the hotel lounge. And it would seem that being alone in a lounge surrounded by fellow Americans they would feel a certain comfort. Yet, what we see with both is that they are bored. The conversations seem empty. The "jazz" band, Sausalito, with its vapid cover of Scarborough Fair, only serve to



establish a further sense of alienation beyond simply what they feel by being in Japan. They feel equally detached and foreign in their own culture.

What we find, then, is that Bob and Charlotte's physical displacements establish physical alienation and isolation. But it also provides them with an opportunity for them to each develop a perspective that they would not have otherwise, on contemporary global society. They, like Fellini's character, can see the emptiness, the void, the alienation and loneliness that is the false promise of plenitude inherent in the Modern Global Capitalist-Consumerist Condition. Thanks to their displacements, they now see the Emperor's New Clothes.

But this new perspective is not limited to society. It also allows them each, individually, to develop a new perspective on their own lives and relationships. As McGowan writes:

The film shows the prevalence of [material] plenitude and the investment in it not only through the images of the prevalence of the commodity in Tokyo, but also in the relationship that Bob and Charlotte each have with their spouses. Bob's spouse maintains contact with Bob through phone calls, fax messages, and packages, and the majority of these contacts concern the choice of a carpet shade for his office in their home. She even goes so far as to send different swatches (via FedEx) to Bob while he is in Tokyo in order to allow him to choose a color. This absurd gesture indicates the extent of her investment in the idea of maximum choice, as well as that of instantaneous and total communication. Bob, however, can muster no enthusiasm for choosing from among the different colors because he recognizes that the choice is meaningless, that no matter which choice he makes, he will not discover the enjoyment that the choices initially appear to promise [...] Bob recognizes that one cannot discover enjoyment along this path [...] Charlotte's relationship with her spouse John is equally vexed and equally revelatory. In



contrast to Charlotte, John feels no dissatisfaction in his experience of excess. For John, Tokyo represents an opportunity for the kind of total enjoyment that he didn't have at home. He embraces aspects of the culture—he learns a greeting in Japanese and wears Japanese clothes—because they allow him to immerse himself in the exotic. What is most significant, however, is John's very reason for being in Japan. He is there to shoot pictures of a rock band that came to Japan in search of an exotic setting in which to be photographed. According to this vision of Japan, it is the site of mysterious plenitude in which Westerners can find the ultimate enjoyment. When she witnesses John's response to Japan, Charlotte complains that she no longer recognizes the person she married. As is the case with Bob's spouse in a different context, John accepts fully the lure of plenitude, and by exposing his banality, Coppola exposes the emptiness of [material] plenitude itself (55).

It is at this point, when both Bob and Charlotte individually recognize the personal and social depths of their alienation, isolation and loneliness that bring them together. As when looking into the eye of the monster, instead of seeing themselves, they see the monster for what it is: empty and dead. And rather than being frightened by it and turning away, each looks into the void and embraces it. And in doing so they form a common bond and are brought together. McGowan writes, “[...] Charlotte buys Bob a drink because she sees in him the same alienation that she feels [...] they seem to connect at a distance” (57). “Bob and Charlotte connect like they do because they see absence where others see excessive presence” (58).

And it is here, in the establishment of this bond between these two displaced and lonely beings, where we find a fundamental difference between Coppola's meditation on the modern condition and Fellini's. Where in *La dolce vita* when confronted with the void, the emptiness of the promises of capitalism and consumerism, there is



ultimately a sense of hopelessness, despair and dread. It's a downer. In *Lost in Translation*, however, there is a different, lighter tone. This may be because it has the advantage of historical distance behind it. That is *La dolce vita* appeared in the midst of the transformations to consumerism taking place in Italy as it happened. Whereas, at the time *Lost in Translation* was released, these transformations had long taken place and on a global scale. They are a "fait accompli".

But another way of seeing the differences in these films is in the very establishment of a common bond by its main protagonists. In Fellini's film there is the sense of the modern condition as the impossibility of establishing any meaningful human relationships. Coppola's film, in bringing Bob and Charlotte together, conveys a sense of its possibility. In short, one is an anti-romance and anti-love story. The other is the opposite.

Once Bob and Charlotte face the void, the absence of plenitude in modern capitalism and consumerism, they join together in sublimating and transcending it. They no longer look to it for their fulfillment, but rather, together, they are amused and entertained by it and by those who falsely believe in its promises. Tokyo, and the world as such, are now not to be taken seriously. They are to be laughed at and enjoyed as simple entertainments, as "divertissements". Once they get together, Tokyo is no longer a space of estrangement for them. It is an amusement park. It is, precisely, at this point in the film where they both--by themselves and together--begin leaving their hotel and exploring, in fellinièscue fashion, Tokyo's streets and night-life, its bars, strip-joints, bizarre parties and Karaoke bars.

And it is out of their shared transformational experience that they establish an unexpected and unanticipated emotional bond, which surprisingly fills the void and absence present in the modern condition. That is, the void of capitalism and



consumerism is here replaced and filled with the plenitude of human warmth, feeling and emotion.

Throughout the film, as we see their relationship develop we [the viewer] anticipate their moment of consummation. And yet, at each point we are denied satisfaction. The first denial occurs in Charlotte's room, the second in Bob's. As McGowan describes:

*After a night out in Tokyo, for instance, Bob carries Charlotte back to her hotel room. This creates the expectation of an explicitly romantic or sexual moment, but Bob simply deposits Charlotte in her bed and returns to his room. Later in the film they spend a late evening drinking and watching old movies [the scene from *la dolce vita*] while lying together on the bed in Bob's hotel room. This scene again creates romantic expectations, especially through the way that Coppola shoots it. We see a shot/reverse shot sequence of Bob and Charlotte on the bed, and then Coppola cuts to a shot looking down from above at the two of them lying on the bed. We see Charlotte curled up facing Bob, who is lying on his back. Bob says to Charlotte, 'You're not hopeless,' and immediately after this remark the scene ends with a fade to black. What is startling about this scene [McGowan comments] is not just the absence of any overtly sexual moment, but more the absence of any climax whatsoever. (57)*

What is "startling" about both of these scenes is that it is the viewer who feels the frustration of Bob and Charlotte not consummating their relationship, and NOT the protagonists. Within the traditional romantic narrative, this would be the moment of climax. And yet, after these two scenes, our/their satisfaction is deferred.

In fact, at a point towards the end of the film, it seems that the entire relationship is threatened when Bob—like Marcello and Maddelena in the prostitute's apartment—



has meaningless sex with the hotel lounge singer and is discovered in the morning when Charlotte comes to his door. As we watch the uncomfortable interaction between Charlotte and Bob at his room door as she discovers the other woman in the room, the viewer shares Charlotte's sense of betrayal and has the feeling that their brief but intense relationship is now at its conclusion. And any possibility of consummation will be deferred indefinitely. McGowan reads the scene as follows:

By having sex with the singer, rather than betraying Charlotte, Bob ensures that their relationship will remain unconsummated. That is, Bob's sex act with the singer allows his relationship with Charlotte to continue on the same terms precisely at the moment when sex was beginning to become a possibility in the latter relationship. As a result, the relationship with Charlotte will continue to revolve around their shared recognition of absence—the recognition that they are closest precisely when they lost each other. (61)

McGowan is correct in his understanding that in having [meaningless] sex with the singer Bob does not *in fact* betray his and Charlotte's relationship. And he is also correct in stating that their relationship will continue on the "same terms" as it has always been based. But he is wrong in suggesting that: 1) "sex was beginning to become a possibility" in their relationship and 2) "*their* relationship will remain unconsummated".

To begin with, in the context of a traditional love story, it would be expected that, indeed, a successful story would culminate in the physical consummation of the love relationship. But, this is not a traditional love story, inasmuch as, the "terms" of Bob's and Charlotte's relationship are not physical but are emotional. In this sense, in *their* terms, the physical consummation of their relationship, was never a possibility, as to do so would betray the very terms of their relationship. As it would re-inscribe their bond into the materialist logic that their coming together rejects. That is, they would sacrifice their emotional plenitude for the physical/material emptiness that we find in



Bob's sex with the singer. Finally, if this were the logic of their relationship, Bob and Charlotte would most probably have "sealed the deal" earlier in the film. Hence, it is fair to claim as McGowan does, that in strictly physical terms, "*their* relationship will remain unconsummated".

And yet, if physical consummation of their relationship is not possible, can *their* relationship ever be "consummated" in any sense and on *their* terms? If so what would this be? And how could this be represented in the film?

To consummate their relationship, on their terms would require them to come together, and emotionally "complete," "finish" and "fulfill"--in a non-sexual way--the bond they have established throughout the film. The question is, what would this be and how to represent it.

Borrowing from *La dolce vita* with significant variation, Coppola answers both of these in the film's final scene.

First, in *La dolce vita*'s final scene, Marcello is on the beach and opposite him and separated by a shallow stream is the young girl, Paola, who is calling to him. It is windy and between the sound of the wind and the waves, Paola's calls are inaudible to both Marcello and the spectator. Unable to hear her, he throws up his hands and turns away. By neither allowing the viewer nor the protagonist to hear what is being said, communication is objectively and publicly short-circuited. Symbolic of not only Marcello's condition but of our condition, of the Modern Condition, all we—Marcello included—hear and *can* hear is noise.

Like Fellini, Coppola uses communication and inaudibility in the final scene of her film, but to convey a different message. As McGowan describes the scene:



In keeping with the nature of Bob and Charlotte's relationship, it is appropriate that the scene depicting its end would be the most pivotal. Bob and Charlotte initially say 'goodbye' in the hotel lobby before Bob rides to the airport. Their parting, like their relationship itself, involves an absence of words [...]

As he is riding to the airport, we see Bob looking out of the car window as he rolls the window down. The next shot shows Charlotte walking away from the camera in a crowd of people. Bob then leaves the car to follow Charlotte. When he catches up to her, they appear in a long shot from the side as they are looking at each other face to face. Next, we see Bob embracing Charlotte in a closer shot from behind her, followed by a close-up of Charlotte's face. During this close-up, we see and hear Bob begin to speak, but the content of his speech remains inaudible. The subsequent close-up of Bob speaking into Charlotte's ear allows us again to see but not hear his speech. When the camera cuts back to a close-up of Charlotte's face, we can finally hear Bob end his speech with 'OK?' and Charlotte responds 'OK.'

McGowan continues,

The inaudibility of Bob's speech in this scene does not mean that a secret exists between Bob and Charlotte that we as spectators cannot access. The point is not that we can't hear what Bob communicates but that he communicates what can't be heard. That is to say, Coppola shoots the scene in this way—not allowing us to hear what Bob says—in order to emphasize the unimportance of the content of his speech [...] What Bob says is nothing to Charlotte, just as it is nothing to us as spectators [...] (61-62).

Whereas in *La dolce vita* Marcello and Paola remain and move apart at the end, in *Lost in Translation*, Bob and Charlotte are brought back together. And here, they speak to each other. Like Fellini's conclusion, the words spoken between the protagonists



remain inaudible to the spectator. But unlike, Marcello and Paola, Bob and Charlotte can hear each other. In fact, it is in depriving the viewer from hearing their conversation, while permitting them to hear it, where Coppola allows Bob and Charlotte to consummate their relationship on their terms. As, contrary to McGowan's reading, a secret does exist between Bob and Charlotte—a secret from which we are forever deprived of knowing—and, indeed, the content of their secret is unimportant, as it is the act of their denying us, the spectator, access to their conversation that has significance. Since in doing so, Bob and Charlotte, in plain sight, by denying us access to their conversation, they turn away from us and short-circuit communicating with us. In this act of refusal they reclaim their privacy—their conversation is theirs and theirs alone—and in this, and against Fellini's conclusion—they reclaim their intimacy and ultimately affirm the possibility for love.

In *La dolce vita*, it seems that all hope for communication, intimacy, love and meaningful human relationships is lost with capitalism and consumerism, in short in the Modern Condition. *Lost in Translation* 40 years later, in the age of global capitalism and consumerism, suggests that all is not lost, that there is hope, but, in all likelihood, such values and relationships are rare, difficult and fleeting. But, they are all the more, meaningful.

Notes

ⁱ Although the film was one she had thought of, it was only when she saw the film on television while in Japan that she decided to include it in her film. “Actually,” she tells an interviewer, “I saw *Dolce Vita* on TV when I was in Japan, and there was something with Japanese subtitles, and them speaking Italian, I don’t know, it had a very enchanting quality.” (greg.org-august 31, 2003-Interview with Sofia Coppola).

ⁱⁱ The significance of this transformation cannot be understated as Paul Ginsborg writes,



The years of the ‘miracle’ were the key period in an extraordinary process of transformation that was taking place in the everyday life of Italian – in their culture, family life, leisure-time activities, consumption habits, even the language they spoke and their sexual mores [....]

Urged on by the unprecedented expansion of advertising, Italian families, above all in the North and Centre of the country, used their new wealth to acquire consumer durables for the first time. Whereas in 1958 only 12 per cent of Italian families owned a television, by 1965 the number had risen to 49 per cent. In the same period the number owning fridges increased from 13 to 55 per cent, and washing-machines from 3-23 percent. Between 1950 and 1964 the number of private cars in Italy rose from 342,000 to 4.67 million, and motorcycles from 700,000 to 4.3 million. Eating habits changed radically, with more money being spent on meat and dairy products than ever before” (Ginsborg, 239-240).

Yet as Sassoon notes, “the average Italian had a diet which was poorer than that of most workers in other European countries but had the same sort of household-goods: cars, transistor radios, vacuum cleaners, television sets, and so on” (Sassoon, 30).

ⁱⁱⁱ As Peter Bondanella writes:

[...] *La dolce vita* created a scandal of historic proportions, reversing the positions of the protagonists in the polemical debate over *La strada*. Church groups, representatives of the Roman nobility, and right-wing politicians who had praised *La strada* demanded that the film be banned as morally outrageous or even obscene, while critics, intellectuals, and political parties from the center to the left of the political spectrum applauded *La dolce vita* for what they felt was Fellini’s realistic panorama of the corruption and decadence of Italy’s bourgeoisie. (*The Cinema of Federico Fellini*, 132)



A chronicle of the Italian reaction to Fellini's film when it came out can be found included in the original scenario to *La dolce vita* published by Garzanti.

^{iv} This discussion of the relationship between mask and face was developed in the works of Luigi Pirandello whose collected works are titled *Naked Mask*. Bondanella includes a brief discussion of Pirandello's concept of mask and face in Fellini in *The Cinema of Federico Fellini* (73-75), and in *Italian Cinema* (115-116). Another extensive study of the relationship between Pirandello's ideas and Fellini is found in Manuela Gieri's *Contemporary Italian Filmmaking: Strategies of Subversion, Pirandello, Fellini, Scola, and the Directors of the New Generation*.

^v The scenario portrays the paparazzi as predators. As the bus carrying Steiner's wife approaches, the scenario tells us: "The photographers stand silent, staring down the road as if they could already scent the approach of their prey" (229).

^{vi} We witness this breakdown early in the film in a cabaret when Marcello and character "Paparazzo" scheme together to get a photo of a Prince in an illicit affair. The Prince's bodyguard tells Paparazzo, "There is the right of privacy." While Marcello responds, "Excuse me, I have my public to inform—it's my job" (8-9).

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