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Fellini’s Sense of Place

John Agnew

Abstract: Notwithstanding his long popular image among film critics and the film watching public as a surrealist and/or postmodernist whose films inhabit worlds other than our own, it is precisely the immersion in specific locales that anchors the flights of fancy for which Fellini is famous. After a brief discussion of what I mean by “sense of place,” the purpose will be to review something of the director’s own thoughts as expressed by him about the role of place in his films, survey some of the particular usages to which certain places are put across a selection of his films, and discuss within this survey how Fellini integrates physical landscapes, soundscapes, social milieus, and music to convey and make use of his sense of place.

Keywords: place, landscape, postmodernity, Italy, Rome, Rimini, Cinecittà.

Introduction

There can be few film directors more associated with specific locales and venues than Federico Fellini. This is not just a question of how much Fellini’s films are quintessentially “Italian” in their celebration of *italianità* or stereotypes thereof, though there is that aspect to his films as well, but more especially the way in which specific geographical settings are themselves protagonists in his films. This is perhaps most obvious in *La dolce vita* (1960), with its use of both iconic Roman locales (such as the Via Veneto and the Trevi Fountain) and less familiar but powerfully redolent locations set clearly in the Roman periphery. But the selection of sites for filming is also central to the purported memorialization of Fellini’s youth and childhood in Rimini in, respectively, *I vitelloni* (1953) and *Amarcord* (1974) (e.g. Melandri et al. 2001).

Indeed, Rome and its surrounding countryside and the Adriatic town of Rimini (with the adjacent seacoast) where Fellini grew up figure powerfully in many of his films as protagonists and backdrops. In particular, Rome’s status as center of a once-great empire and as the contemporary headquarters of the world’s largest Christian denomination endows its landscapes with meaning for audiences worldwide that most other places lack. Rimini, meanwhile, stands in for a provincial Italy that plays against the seeming universality of a city that is much more than simply a national or imperial capital like London, Vienna or Paris. (Boccuzzi 2000, 292). Yet Rome is also in many respects a modern city in the sense that most of its built-up area is the result of disordered growth since Italian unification and more particularly since 1945 (Agnew 1995; D’Eramo 2017). Fellini thus provides a vision of a peculiarly Italian cultural imagination that, in the words of Minuz (2015, 7) is: “tottering between universal myths – the Church, the Roman Empire – and hyper-local myths (the city-states, strong regional identities, and a sense of local rather than national belonging). The universal nature of his visual creations is systematically interwoven with the particular nature of specific localities, passed on

from one generation to another. Like the effects of a spell, this cultural heritage seems to be evoked from the depths of the Italian unconscious."

Yet, counterfactually Fellini's reputation as an at least "somewhat" placeless filmmaker has deep roots that need to be exposed. To some commentators in the 1960s his engagement with *real* places is at best something of an on-again off-again characteristic. To one critic of Fellini's mid-career films beginning with *8 ½*, the older films are by comparison "obsessively preoccupied with the *sense* of place, of physical location" (Bennett, 1964, 738, author's emphasis). The success of *La dolce vita* then gave Fellini "an intellectual blank check … to indulge his whims as he saw fit" (Bennett 1964, 739). Sense of place is thereby eclipsed by self-celebration of the auteur-director. Apparently, popular success led him up the postmodern garden path, so to speak. To another critic Fellini was born fully postmodern, because Fellini often eschews "the expectations of literary narrative and psychological realism" … for it is "the language of painting that he most frequently employs" (Harcourt 1966, 9). It is thus recurring themes and images of the out-of-place (or bizarre) and purposeless meandering that give Fellini's films their "aesthetic charge" and "surrealist intensity" (Harcourt 1966, 10). The same critic later and more profitably emphasizes specific places in Fellini's films as representing the loss of community and the key roles of ritual, religious processions and the ceremonial in everyday life as recording this loss (Harcourt 1972, 3). A sense of place thus figures into the films but it involves particularly sites of Fellini's "religious impulse," as illustrated by the ultimate scene in *8 ½,* the visit to the shrine in *Le notti di Cabiria* and the Madonna sequence in *La dolce vita*, rather than in its own right (Harcourt 1972, 3).

In the case of both critics what is missing, partly because their appraisals were offered early in Fellini's career, is much sense of either continuity in sense of place across his films or that,at his most postmodern, Fellini actively privileges spatial difference over temporal narrative. In the first respect from Fellini's earliest to his last films, with a few exceptions, there is a continuing drive to provide a "counter-history" to the "monumental history" of modern Italy. In short, Fellini precludes rigid distinctions between "before" and "after." It is in the architectural relics of *Roma* (1972), the open urban spaces and beaches of *La strada*, the seascapes of *I vitelloni* and the Via Veneto, EUR and the GRA in *La dolce vita* that Fellini not only finds his inspiration but locates his demonstration of the build-up of the alternative past into the present. That he re-created many of the specific sites in the Roman film studios at Cinecittà in order "to transfigure the reality and to joke around a little – or a lot" (Mariani and Barron 2011, 314) should not detract from the fact that even as he uses his sites as a "staging ground for fantasy" (Mariani and Barron 2011, 316) he is also trying to represent the historical staging of places without depending singularly on their present day appearance.

Here I want to argue for the unfixity of Fellini's sense of place, yet its obdurate persistence. Much more than has been previously recognized, Italian folk culture is key to understanding Fellini's sense of place, and the sense of place seems to disappear for him as the force of community declines. Further, Fellini's use of place suggests alternative pasts that are camouflaged by present-day appearances. Despite the claims to the universality of ancient Rome, and the Catholic Church, Fellini's films de-universalize them. All of these aspects of place are germane to Fellini's films whether they seem to be located in one place, many places, or no place.

More radically, the postmodern element in Fellini, most evident from around 1960 – the self-consciousness of the auteur, the concern for the surfaces of life, the fragmentation of experience, and so on – leads, (about the whole notion of the postmodern), to a world in which attention to space dominates the imagination (Anderson 1998, 56). In this regard, Fellini appeals acutely to the fact that audiences are increasingly open to visual-spatial rather than to historical clues and signs in making sense of their experience and of what films offer to them. The use of CinemaScope or "widescreen" in *La dolce vita* and other films allowed for the "great horizontal extension of the frame for staging numerous scenes with secondary characters as commentators on the film's action" (Vitella 2012, 29). Of course, the "spatial turn" can be overstated, as Huehls (2009, 5-6) says of so-called postmodern literature: " a mistrust of teleological progress narratives is frequently (and accurately) cited as a dominant characteristic of postmodernism" but "just because postmodern literature fragments time and flattens history does not mean that it lacks a specific temporality or that it has rejected time as a viable mode of experience." Nevertheless, one good example of spatial command as the dominant modus operandi might be Steiner's living room (set in an apartment in the putative EUR) in *La dolce vita* where a narrative connecting "Orientalism, colonialism, Western constructions of gender and race, Oedipal family dynamics" and so on displaces the authority of the two dominant men in the room (Waller 2002, 5-6) but does so using a song sung by the African American woman in the room to entice the viewer to "look away," as the song itself intones. Another example is the camera panning a helicopter flying across the Roman hinterland towards the Vatican in *La dolce vita* carrying a statue of Christ. In this case, the film tentatively maps the terrain in which the plot, for what there is, will be spatially embedded. This is a liminal passage situating the city and its religious significance in a series of shots. In this way "the choice of locales and the sequencing of shots of travel through the city work to build a simulacrum of space" (Mariani and Barron 2011, 311).

My intention in this chapter is not to list and categorize the use of settings in either all or a random cross-section of Fellini's films. I plan on focusing in particular on *I vitelloni (1953), La strada (1954), Le notti di Cabiria (1956)*, *La dolce vita (1960)*, *Roma (1972)*, and *Amarcord (1974)* to examine evidence for Fellini's sense of place. I will also make reference to a later film *E la nave va* (1983) to suggest how much even when motion and mobility are involved as key elements in his films, Fellini uses various devices, such as the place origins of actors and the venues located on a ship, to use film as a medium to unite people with the mutable settings of their lives. Certain characters, such as Titta in *Amarcord* and Cabiria in *Le notti di Cabiria*, thus come to personify specific places as a means of stressing both the particularities of place and, on occasion, the instability of individual identity.

The filming of *E la nave va* draws attention to the longstanding role in Fellini's films of the soundstage at Cinecittà on the eastern outskirts of Rome where he crafted much of his sense of place in lieu of filming "on location" as the popular phrase would have it. Perhaps one reason why Fellini has been viewed as a "placeless" director is simply that his film sites are often studio sets for imaginary feats even as the sets ground him in discrete, identifiable places beyond the studio gates. That these places may be based more, in the case of his Rome-based films, on Fellini's "memories of old Italian films than with the monuments of the classical city" (Theodorakapoulos 2007, 354) does

not undermine the fact that their specific selection is a fundamental part of his vision as a director.

Fellini's Sense of Place

Lives, events and social situations take place. Place, as Peter Wollen (1980, 25) reminds us "is at the heart of film-making as well as film-viewing." As he argues, "Place implies memory, reverie (Bachelard's 'poetics of space' should surely be the 'poetics of place') and the imaginary. … Place also implies displacement, being elsewhere, being a stranger. Films are like imaginary journeys, the cinema is a magic means of transport to distant places." Yet, the more abstract term space is often invoked, as Wollen suggests, when the more concrete term "place" is implied. Places have specificity, in fact a singularity that the term "space" occludes in its emphasis on relative location within an overarching grid (such as latitude and longitude) (Sack 1997). Places are necessarily located somewhere of course but it is their intrinsic qualities as the sites of landscapes and the venues or locales of social interaction that bring about their overall significance for understanding social life. Space is not opposed to place as such, as in ideas such as *space* equals the global and *place* equals the local, it is rather dialectically related in the sense that place brings the universal into contact with the particular (Massey 1994).

Being sited, poverty and artistic creativity, for example, are encountered specifically in places but also betray traces of the spatially extended processes (colonialism, education, migration, institutional histories, etc.) that undoubtedly play important roles in producing them. In the movies, therefore, "places (and the images we have of them) grant us the experience of the minutiae of local life as well as a (frail, tenuous) purchase on the immensity of the global" (Rhodes and Gorfinkel 2011, xx). There are at least two consequences of this claim. One is that placing is inevitable even if only because places stand in for more abstract and wide-ranging social processes that are captured in places. Places simply cannot be avoided. The other is that any engagement with place is necessarily limited and capricious in terms of what it can capture about a place or more broadly. "Set up a movie camera in front of a place, any place (town, city, countryside). The place will be both exactly what the camera records and exactly what it cannot bear witness to. Any image of a place will be identifiable at least as *some*place, but no image can impart to us the whole place" (Rhodes and Gorfinkel 2011, xx).

Fellini seems to have been quite conscious of his sense of place and willing to opine about it, contra to the quintessential director central to the plot of *8 ½* who never had anything to say to reporters about his creativity. But it is not something "separate" from his famous self-consciousness about making films. Places are encased within the subject matter but nevertheless frequently appear relatively undisguised in his essays and interviews. In the interviews recorded by Chandler (1995, 312-13), for example, Fellini speaks at some length about how his life and career were anchored first around the Fulgor cinema in Rimini and then at the Cinecittà Stage 5 in Rome. He also recounts how much his experience with foreign filming, limited as it was, sent him back to Rome and to Cinecittà. "I found Rome and found *my* world," he says (his emphasis, Chandler 1995, 218). A sampling of his observations is worth providing to illustrate just how significant his sense of place seems to have been to Fellini.

The indelible link to the Via Veneto that Fellini established in *La dolce vita* serves as the entrée into a long essay on how he never goes there ("Well, hardly ever") but that then opens up a discussion about the intimate and emotional topography of Rome when he first arrived in Rome from Rimini as a young man (Fellini 1996, 67-83). In passing, he identifies the environs of Termini railway station (and its possibility of escape back home) with its "furnished rooms" and jumbled population of frightened immigrants" and so on) as the place against which he designed his Via Veneto based in part around his "sense of inferiority" relative to its denizens. He explores how Via Veneto has been transformed by its association with the film (tourists haunt it looking for paparazzi), how filming in situ became impossible for Fellini because one man kept cursing to disrupt filming and this is why the director ended up moving a "slice" of Via Veneto onto the Number 5 soundstage at Cinecittà, and that his association with the street was "very vague: acquaintance rather than friendship." In another essay on Rome (Fellini 2015, 226-35), Fellini reflects on such metaphors of the city as a "mother" and the "infantilization" of its inhabitants. In making a film about Rome (*Roma*), he suggests that it is as exotic as anywhere else but also intensely familiar because he lives there. The attempt at capturing it inevitably falls short. "I prepared the movie with the same enthusiasm as always, I scrutinized the city, I went to root around in the most secluded spots, but in the end those places, that humanity, those buildings, that grandiose scenery I thought I'd gotten to know well, turned out to be completely fresh, untouched. In short, Rome remained spotless, completely alien to my film about her. I feel like making another movie, additional stories about Rome" (Fellini 2015, 235).

Concepts such as modernization and globalization have often been deployed to convey the sense of increasing cultural standardization across space and over time be it at the national or global scales, respectively. As a result, different places can be seen as standing in for one another. Yet, as much research on the cultural differences between cities (Silver and Clark 2017), place and politics (Agnew 1987, 2002), and place and sexual identities (Brown-Saracino 2018) suggests, even as places change in their character and processes of constitution they persist as the settings in which much of life is lived for significant numbers of people. Places are both made by us and make us (Sullivan 2017). In one of his longest and most memorable essays, this one is about "Rimini, my home town," Fellini (1996, 1-40) uses a visit to the hospital to frame his way of thinking about a film he wants to make (but never did), *Il viaggio di G. Mastorna* (a Roman sequel to *I vitellloni*) and reflect on his hometown, the setting for *Amarcord*. He does not like going back there. But he "must go on talking about it." He refers to its history as a minor seaside resort before the Second World War, the houses, school, his friend Titta Benzi, the clothes the children wore, peasants and townies, churches, fog, bars, ads for American movies, and the Grand Hotel. He recounts the visit to Rimini of Starace, one of the Big Fascists, the railway station and trains, and the history of the town as encapsulated in the names on the tombstones in the cemetery. He left in 1939, and when he returned in 1945 much of the town was rubble. He claims that Rimini was "blotted out" for him, so that Ostia near Rome became his substitute. That is where he made *I vitelloni*. It is "an invented Rimini," he writes, "more Rimini than the real one. It suggests Rimini in a theatrical, scenic and at the same time innocent way. It is my home, almost clean, almost without its visceral moods, without aggression or surprises. In other words, it is a filmic representation of the town in my memory, into which I can penetrate

– how shall I put it? – as a tourist without being involved.” Still, Rimini is his real hometown; it speaks his dialect. Getting reacquainted with it - in 1967 - now it is a major resort, “I droned on to myself about the new form my home town had taken on, all this unknown Rimini, this strange place that appeared to me to be Las Vegas, seemed to be trying to tell me … that it had changed and so I had better change as well.”

Fellini is also well aware that there is a more micro-scale appreciation of place at work in his films. It is in landscape images associated with particular places much more than dialogue that Fellini found his métier in representing the stories he sets out to tell. In the documentary about him, *I'm a Born Liar* (2003), Fellini refers to the importance to him of the placement of objects and the vital role of light and shadow in conveying the meaning of scenes for the overall thrust of a film. Films such as *I vitelloni* and *Amarcord* rely heavily on site selections such as railway stations and country houses at crucial moments in storylines in which the effects of light and shadow demonstrably make the points more than what the actors do or what they say. Consider, for example, the beach scene in *I vitelloni* and later the “forlorn” shadow cast by a building across the railway platform as Moraldo turns toward it (Harcourt 1966, 9-10). Another example is the ritual wine bath scene in *8½.* As a self-confessed “visual person” (Chandler1995, 253), Fellini makes the images in his films central in a way they are not in films that are “talky,” organized around actors speaking rather than visual images located in particular locales. The Italian folk Catholicism that is key to understanding much of Fellini's sense of place, rests first and finally on what has been called the “cult of images” in counterpoint to the textualism and oral culture of both official Catholicism and, more particularly Protestantism (see, e.g., Carroll 1996).

More specifically, in relation to a named place, in *Fellini e l'EUR,* a documentary from 1972 by Luciano Emmer, Fellini is shown wandering around the district, originally designed for a world's fair to be held in 1942 but not finished until well after the Second World War, trying to explain why he finds it so fascinating and hence why it has appeared in so many of his films from *La dolce vita* onwards. It is provisional, rather like a film set, but also dream-inducing: “It's a district that both is and isn't there. The EUR was meant to be a certain thing…. I am fascinated by the provisional nature of the place; it's like living among the stands of a trade exhibition, say in Milan, you get the feeling you might wake up and find they've taken everything down and carried it all off” (quoted in Minuz 2015, 90). This is a place in which to confront the “horror vacui” of modernist urban space representing in this case “a symbolic syncretism between fascism and Catholicism in the myth of Rome” (Gentile 2009, 231). Alternatively, to capture the role of this place in Fellini's larger worldview, “it was a space in which to reconcile the irreconcilable tropes of progress and myth, rationalism and mysticism.” (Minuz 2015, 91). However, there is nothing nostalgic or celebratory about Fellini's sense of place, no yearning for better times or a world we have lost, rather the sense of the past is colored by a skepticism that planned interventions, such as those he associates with fascism, ever result as intended.

Fellini's Sense of Place at Work

Places figure in film plots and scripts in a number of ways. They can be the *subjects* of films, *settings* for films, *protagonists* within films, and *symbols* in which the place stands

in for a cultural process or ritual important to the plot of a film (Helphand 1996). I draw on these categories to survey how place figures in Fellini's films. They are heuristic rather than definitive; films can also show up in several categories albeit not usually in equal measure.

Places are the primary subjects of *Amarcord* and *Roma*.. The former is about Rimini remembered from Fellini's youth. The town is central to the film. The other themes that can be seen as flowing through the work are grounded in this "place." These range from the dismantling of the local social order under Fascism and the role of communal rituals (such as the witch-burning to celebrate the arrival of spring) to the male competition in the family in the memorable dinner scene and adolescent sexuality as a type of compulsion rather than free choice. The very landscape of the town - the stone buildings, streets, churches and piazzas - define a closed-in world that is being invaded by outsiders imposing a wider conformity upon it. The Lawyer figure in the film provides much of the narration about the town that then underpins the performance of the main characters: the boy Titta, his parents, his loafer uncle and his mad uncle, and his feckless grandfather. It also correlates with the film's adolescent male sexual fantasies about women, and more specifically the voluptuous Gradisca, the woman of Titta's dreams. This is not simply a realist or straightforward empirical representation of Rimini, a documentary about the town as it was. It is much more about how desire and fulfillment are finally unrelated and planned interventions do not result as intended. Many of the scenes in the film focus on how much local identities are challenged from outside (by the Hollywood films advertised on posters, the arrival of the Fascist grandee, etc.) Two scenes emphasis the surreal interpretation Fellini offers to this challenge: the townspeople rowing out to see the great fascist ocean liner the *Rex* and the sudden arrival of a peacock in the central piazza in the midst of a snow storm.

In *Roma*, Fellini portrays a city that is both sublime and decadent. While there is no leading character like Titta in *Amarcord*, Rome becomes the place in which Fellini, himself, the narrator/image-maker, situates an autobiographical encounter with the city, moving from childhood to old age (even if not in strictly chronological order). Rome becomes for him at once a love object and a city that promises a certainty and a national identity that is merely illusory.. For a filmmaker like Fellini it is an ideal place from which to select and recombine evocative images. Its past completely haunts its present. As one critic makes this point: "Rome is a city where life and death co-exist to the point of becoming non-differentiated. The city becomes a haunted place of a myriad of geological layers of history and stories, which appear as in a cross-section before us in the contiguity of peace-loving hippies sitting next to the Coliseum" (Szaniawski 2012). In *Roma*, Rome is explored as a place through a set of apparently unconnected episodes each telling a story about or taking place in the city. As much oneiric as realist in the way scenes spill or segue into one another as Fellini captures locations from his youth and after moving forwards in time later revisits them, it leaves the sense of a city's identity trapped between its layers. The surface is of a city devoted to spectacle, both mocked and celebrated, for example, in the ten-minute long clerical fashion show and in the music-hall sequence set as fascist Rome is being bombed in 1944 (Theodorakopoulos 2007, 359). Yet the myriad layers also suggest a complexity informed by its religious history and political history.

More common across Fellini's films as a whole has been the director's take on places as settings in which social relations play out without any necessary rootedness or connectedness to specific recognizable or named places. In this regard, place remains closely tied to the concept of community. If one persists so does the other. If community declines, then place disappears. The idea of "placelessness" has emerged to signal this latter condition. Thus airport terminals, fast-food restaurants and highway rest stops indistinguishable architecturally from one another are read as representing the demise of community and the death of place. The notion of community at the center of this association with place often implies a relatively closed world in which strong social ties enforce longstanding social norms and limit individual behavior. If viewed in a negative light, the relative demise of community on this model is a world we have lost, replaced by anomie and alienation. Alternatively, a positive rendering would be that liberation from community provides the wherewithal for social change and upward social mobility by individuals who have the gumption to follow through. This may require leaving town. Either way, however, the historic association drawn between place and tight-knit community is problematic. Places do not need to be essentially communal or extraordinary in any way to provide the locales and landscapes that truly inform their particularity. "Not only is there a singularity that belongs to the most ordinary and familiar of places … but even those seemingly genericized places – the shopping mall, the airport, the supermarket, the high-rise tower – whose character might seem otherwise to be erased by the globalized trappings of contemporary capitalism and its accompanying technologies, nevertheless retain their own singularity and so their own character *as places*" (Malpas 2017, 69-70, author's emphasis). Of course, the mythic loss of community can still be fervently believed. It simply does not require the corollary of loss of place.

Two caveats are important to this emphasis on the relative historical continuity of placement in the context of this chapter. The first is that places are always embedded in broader spatial framings. The most important of these in recent history has been that of the national scale. Thus, on both practical and political grounds films made about places in Italy are dubbed "Italian." The ways places are considered and represented have various common referents in cultural traditions that spread across Italy historically such as opera and commedia d'arte. At the same time, crucial historical events in the history of Italy (late and difficult unification as a single state, fascism, the "economic miracle" of the late 1950s and early 1960s, the years of protest and violence in the 1970s and 1980s) and that relate to Italy's peculiarities (such as being the seat of the Roman Catholic Church and having a long history of organized criminal groupings in some regions) pervade the places to which films must necessarily make reference (Dalle Vacche 1992). The second caveat is about the historical contingency of place. A film fixes a place. But places are always in transformation. The fixity is in fact momentary. Think of film images of Berlin with a wall through it that today, of course, no longer exists. As Rhodes (2011, 48) makes the point: "place might be a word or figure better suited to name an experience of frailty and flux than one of permanence and solidity … A single moving image will only give us evidence of how a place looked at a given moment in time. That moment in that place, seemingly fixed on film, gives us evidence of the lack of fixity. Film, however, like place is a medium of flux, in which one moment collapses into and transforms the next, no matter what place the filming camera has found or where it has

found itself." Concomitantly, Fellini's roots in the Romagna region show up in a number of his films but always in relation to the shifting relations between local/national/global influences, never in terms of an isolated and never changing world of the local (Miro Gori 2016). As with so many other Italian filmmakers of his generation there is little or no romantic nostalgia for a lost past symbolized by a "special" timeless place recalled from youth (Morreale 2009).

This framing helps us understand why Fellini loves beaches and urban open spaces presumably because they are places without clear identities but open to sudden visual surprises and [open] emotional responses that unsettle any easy definition of their meanings (e.g. Mariani and Barron 2011). Indeed, it is exactly as settings that signal individual disassociation and social dislocation that this category of place has been important, particularly in films such as *I vitelloni* and *La strada.* It is the actual or potential tenuousness of attachment to place that gives both of these films their vitality and edginess. In the first case, the film could be seen as continuation, albeit filmed years earlier, of the autobiographical *Amarcord*. It relies on characters from Fellini's own youth, a group of loafers from Rimini. Arguably, however, its main storyline rests on fusing two longstanding Italian self-stereotypes, idleness and effeminacy, in the ensemble of young males at the heart of the film. It is the character Alberto, played by the famous comic actor Alberto Sordi, who is the definitive *vitellone*, "He is a mummy's boy, petty, childish, cowardly, a mixture that Alberto Sordi would portray again and again throughout his career, earning him the reputation as the actor who best embodied the average Italian" (Minuz 2015, 40). The putative Rimini, therefore, is simply the setting in which deeply rooted stereotypes about the perpetual adolescence of Italian men are played out. The frequent use of slow tracks in the filming reinforces the sense of stasis as embodied in the *vitelloni* themselves (Bondanella 1992, 96). The place itself is incidental to their hapless behavior while at the same time reinforcing it.

In *La strada* two somewhat different aspects of Italianness, that of popular Catholicism and local folklore, are represented in events in the travels purportedly through southern Italy of two characters, the strongman-entertainer Zampanò and his purchased assistant Gelsomina. Gelsomina desires something of a home but is frustrated that this will ever happen as a traveling circus performer even as she enjoys the liberation from her impoverished home it seemingly gives her. But it is also because Zampanò is incapable of taking her seriously as a person. The film focuses on the precariousness of the life of traveling performers and the challenges of getting by on a daily basis when reliant on the reactions of their audiences. The scene settings are not that different from those of Italian neo-realist films. But as the film unfolds, there is a shift from a relatively ordered to what could be called a despairing landscape. This is where the relationship between the two main characters disintegrates. The actual places are left vague but give the impression of spatial as well as social marginality - isolated towns, a convent, and open ground. Each represents the possibility of putting down roots in a home-place. The hope is dashed. Beginning and ending as it does with deserted beaches, the film empties out the possibility of a future community bolstered by religious or social tradition. While the film's journey, as poetic as it is physical, begins on a beach where Gelsomina is bought from her mother, peaks at the convent where she sees her vocation as serving her master, and then collapses with the murder of the Fool, who has cruelly parodied

Zampanò, it ends on a beach where Zampanò finally and dramatically seems to feel remorse and loss with news that Gelsomina has not just disappeared but has died.

Nino Rota's musical score plays a crucial role in weaving together the subtext of the film. Given the punctuated character of the film's scenography this is absolutely vital. Rota's music is important to all of the films on which he collaborated with Fellini but here a single theme unites characters across disparate scenes (Bondanella 1992, 11). Akin to the fairytale "Beauty and the Beast," *La strada* uses images of marginalized places and the haunting musical motif to construct a movie about how people marginalize one another but can also achieve redemption once they recognize their role in this.

Places can also be active protagonists in that they figure purposively in films in specific ways missing when they are either subjects or settings. What I have in mind can be illustrated from two of Fellini's films *Le notti di Cabiria* and *La dolce vita.* Rome provides the general setting for both of these films but within them it is particular venues or locales that figure forcefully in the overall storylines of the films. In the first it is the waste ground and new building in the Roman periphery, plus a cameo appearance for the Via Veneto.. As in *La strada,* a circular structure governs the film. It is the tale of a small-time Roman prostitute (Cabiria) looking for love in all the wrong places. So the specific places matter inherently to the plot. The film opens with Cabiria strolling with a lover in a scene that typically might end with a clichéd kiss. Not here. Instead, the lover pushes Cabiria into the Tiber and steals her purse/handbag. Rescued by some boys, she goes on her way, excoriating them for their interference. Scenes from the Baths of Caracalla evoke the quintessentially Roman location and the sexual history connoted by bathhouses from which the group of prostitutes to which Cabiria belongs ply their trade. Picked up by a famous actor on Via Veneto, she goes with him to his apartment but must hide when his girlfriend shows up. On a pilgrimage, Cabiria prays for a change of life. In a final attempt at leaving the streets of the periphery, she sells her shanty house with the hope of marrying Oscar who has proclaimed his love. He takes her to a cliff side spot above a lake to view the sunset and promptly robs her of her life's savings. At the end, she makes her way back to the road where she joins in a musical procession. She has gone full circle. The repetition of places across the circle of her life is thus intrinsic to the film. Pasolini (1957, 233), hired by Fellini to offer advice on dialogue, argued that in this film place was connected to character explicitly by Fellini's frequently providing a silent long shot of a location followed by another long shot of Cabiria coming on scene. Cabiria's environment is thus a significant protagonist in the overall structure of the film. The varied locales evoke a heartbreaking ecology of theft and betrayal.

La dolce vita provides the view from the center of Rome outwards in counterpoint to the peripheral view inwards of *Le notti di Cabiria.* This is also filmed from the perspective of the celebrities who frequented clubs and bars on the Via Veneto in the late 1950s and who were pursued in their doings by an army of reporters and photographers one of whom provided the term *paparazzi* for posterity. The Via Veneto and, secondarily a few other sites such as the Trevi Fountain and Steiner's apartment in EUR, are central protagonists in the film, even in the former case as re-created on a massive scale in the film studio. It is with this film that Fellini begins his shift from location filming in and around Rome and in the countryside of Lazio and Umbria to studio filming (e.g. Pelliccia 2008). Ironically, then, it is moving to the studio and making a "new" Via Veneto that Fellini makes the street the protagonist in the sense that his camera now uses the set to fix

the world of the *paparazzi* and the celebrities they chase. Dozens of other locations were also re-created in this way, including the dome of St. Peter's as well as several nightclub interiors (including the Baths of Caracalla as one of the latter, recalling the different use of that locale in *Le notti di Cabiria*) . Against these active markers of environmental stimulus, the people in the film are blinded by the lights of the photographers' flashbulbs and by the meaningless of their lives. " The film's major images show us life based on public relations stunts, meaningless intellectual debates, empty religious rites, and sterile love affairs" (Bondanella 1992, 146). The main characters wear sunglasses "as if to objectify their lack of insight" and "Marcello's [the main character's] downward spiral toward absolute degradation at the film's conclusion [an orgy in a villa near the beach at Fregene] may be predicted by the presence of a stairway in virtually every episode of the film" (Bondanella 1992, 146).

Finally, illustrative of place as representing social order and its potential disruption when the normal routines of place are impossible, *E la nave va* uses a mobile place, an ocean liner, to present an operatic portrait of both the passing of ritual in modern society and the loss of a sense of collective belonging. The seeming artificiality of the ship as a container of "thin" social relationships provides the vehicle for representing challenges to the symbolic order that could not be shown so clearly by other means. An upper class coterie of friends and fans have gathered on the *Gloria N.* to accompany the ashes of the operatic diva Edmea Tetua to the island of Erimo, her birthplace, where they will be scattered. The date is July 1914. Shot entirely at Studio 5 in Cinecittà, the use of the ship forces the cast of characters, largely and unsurprisingly made up of eccentrics, to move around and collide with one another but with no escape possible. The narrator-guide, a bungling Italian journalist called Orlando, directs the camera around the ship, gossiping about those we meet, and talking right into the camera.

The characters are a set of conventional types – singers, English aristocrats, Grand Dukes, prime ministers, former lovers, and princesses. Engaging in absurd/surreal acts, they travel the ship singing in the engine room and hypnotizing a chicken in the kitchen. Surrealism liberates the characters from the confinements of place (even though as a movement it took root in 1920s Paris) and unsettles expectations of the conventional uses of spaces on the ship. Two crises threaten the ship. The first is the stink of a rhinoceros seemingly left in the hold. Once this is resolved, it is followed by the arrival of a group of Serbian refugees fleeing to Italy after the assassination in Sarajevo of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria. The social world of the ship comes unglued. After the impasse there is a moment of rapprochement between the two groups. An Austrian battleship appears and demands the return of the refugees. After the ceremony dispersing the ashes of the diva, a refugee in a lifeboat may have hurled a bomb at the battleship, and the Austrians are seen to bombard the liner. Both ships sink. In the end the precise cause of this strange outcome remains mysterious. When the rhino makes it into a lifeboat, typical assumptions about the lifeboat's functions are disrupted. The ritualistic quality of the operatic world that informs the first part of the film is undermined by the intrusions of an disorderly world that actively undermines the conventions upon which the world outside the ship rests. Even the Verdian chorus sung by the cast protesting the Austrian prospective capture of the refugees draws attention to its own anachronism. At least the rhino isn't lost because the lifeboat came to its rescue.

The ending of the film leads the audience into Cinecittà. In an allusion to the theatricality of Fellini's cinematic vision, we see the cameraman working on the slanting deck as the liner sinks. Forced to see the film's artifice, we see workers shaking gigantic plastic sheets that represent the surface of the Adriatic Sea. The re-creation of the ship as a container for expounding the passing of collective ritual bound by place is shown to be an illusion, albeit one devoted to revelation rather than recapitulation of a claimed "real" situation. The inventiveness of the film studio works better at exposing the surrealism of real life than does mere docudrama out "in the world."

In short, place in all its complex manifestations, including its presumed disappearance, is critical to an understanding of Fellini's films. It is entirely appropriate, then, that when Fellini died in 1993, "his coffin was laid out in a darkened Stage 5, where he had done most of his studio work from *La dolce vita* (1960) onward. It was guarded by Carabinieri, with a single light beamed onto it, as visitors filed past to pay respects and sign the book" (Forgacs 2008, 42). Fellini would have appreciated the placement.

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