

MY RIMINI

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARCO PESARESI

MY RIMINI BY FEDERICO FELLINI

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ederico Fellini was born and raised in the seaside resort town of Rimini. The following reminiscence, written by the great filmmaker in 1967, has been rarely available to English-speaking readers. Marco Pesaresi's photographs reveal how little Fellini's hometown has changed since the time of his writing.

Last night I dreamed of the port of Rimini opening onto a green, swelling sea, as threatening as a moving meadow, on which low clouds ran close to the surface.

Rimini: what is it? It is a dimension of my memory (among other things an invented, adulterated, second-hand sort of memory) on which I have speculated so much that it has produced a kind of embarrassment in me.

And yet I must go on talking about it. Sometimes I even ask myself: in the end, when you're bruised and weary, when you're not competing any longer, wouldn't you like to buy a small house in the port? The old part of the port. As a child I used to see it, beyond the water: I could see the skeletons of the boats they were building. The port's other arm, from this side, made me imagine a hurly-burly life that had nothing to do with the Germans who came to the coast in their Daimler Benzes.

Think of Rimini. *Rimini*: a word made up of sticks, of soldiers in a row. I cannot make it objective. Rimini: a nonsense story, confused, frightening, tender, with that great breath of its own and its empty open sea. There, nostalgia becomes cleaner, especially the winter sea, the white horses, the great wind, as I first saw them.

When I think of Gambettola, and of a tiny nun, and of the cripples by firelight, and in plank beds, I always think of Hieronymus Bosch.

The gypsies went through Gambettola too, and the charcoal burners going back to the mountains of the Abruzzo. In the evening, preceded by a terrible noise of animals, a smoky stall would be set up. We would see sparks and flame. It was the castrator of pigs. He arrived in the main street, with a big black coat and an old-fashioned hat. The pigs could tell he was coming, which accounted for their terrified squeals. This man took all the girls in the town to bed with him; once he left a poor idiot girl pregnant and everyone said the baby was the devil's child.

Romagna. A mixture of seafaring adventures and Catholic Church. A place dominated by the dark mountainous hulk of San Marino. A strange, arrogant, blasphemous psychology, mingling superstition and defiance of God. People without humor and

therefore defenseless, but with a feeling for jokes and a liking for dares. A man would say: *I'll eat eight yards of sausages, three chickens, and a candle*. Yes, including the candle. Like a circus. Then he would do it, and straight after it they would carry him off on a motorbike, purple in the face, with sightless eyes; everyone laughing at this terrible thing, death from gluttony.

In the evening we used to go to the sea, vanishing into Rimini's winter mists: lowered shutters, locked-up boarding-houses, a heavy silence and the sound of the sea.

In summer, to torment couples making love behind the boats, we would undress quickly and turn up naked, asking the man behind the boat: "Excuse me, can you tell me the time?"

(An important point: there is a sharp division between the seasons at Rimini. It is a substantial change, not just a meteorological one, as in other cities. There are two quite separate Riminis.)

In the evening, the Grand Hotel became Istanbul, Baghdad, Hollywood. On its terraces, curtained by thick rows of plants, the Ziegfeld Follies might have been taking place. We caught glimpses of barebacked women who looked marvelous to us, clasped in the arms of men in white dinner-jackets; a scented breeze brought us snatches of syncopated music, languid enough to make us feel faint.

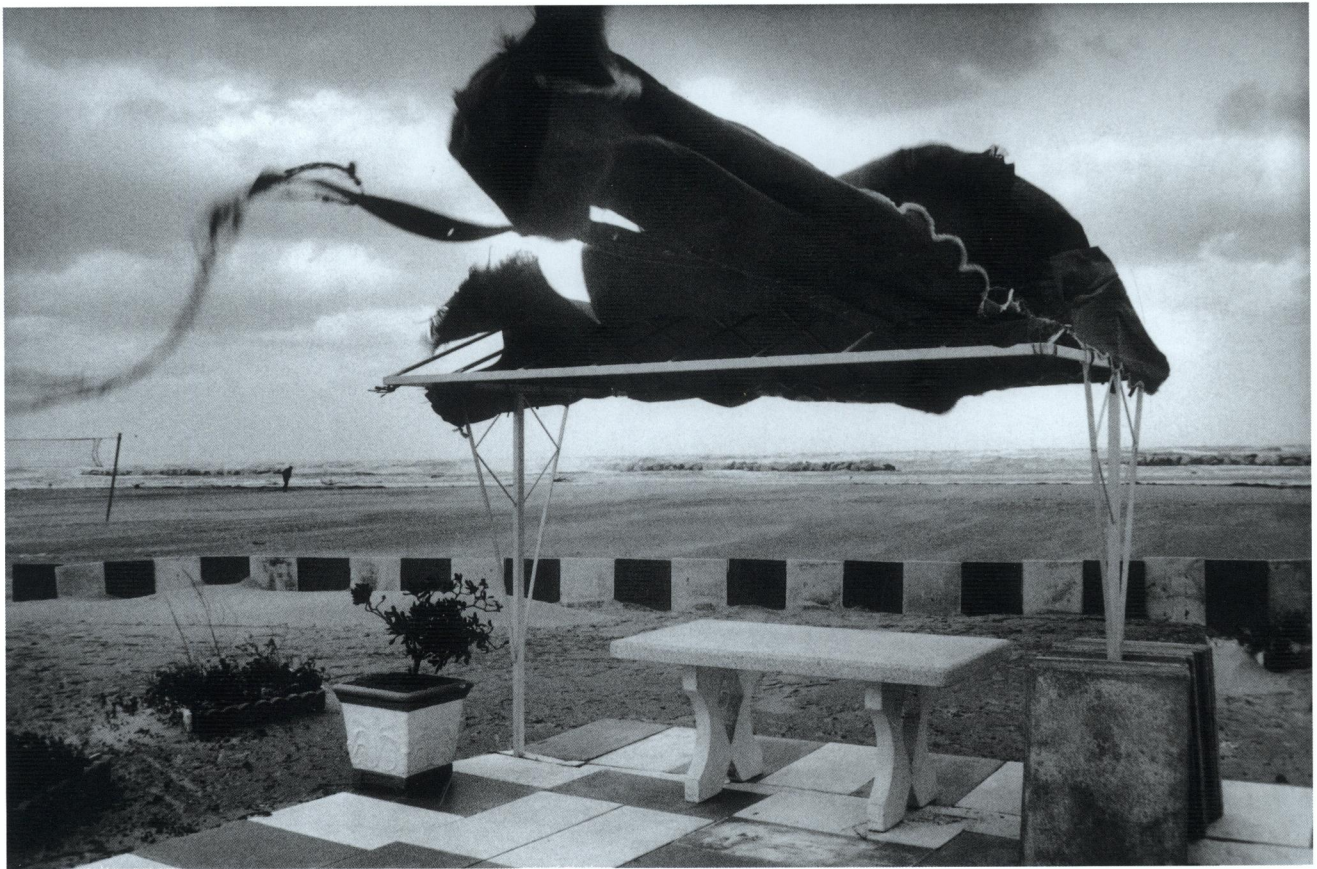
Only in winter, in the damp and darkness and fog, did we manage to gain admission to the great terraces of the rain-soaked Grand Hotel. But it was like coming to a camp where everyone had left a long time ago and the fire was out.

In the darkness we could hear the roaring of the sea: the wind blew a freezing drizzle from the waves into our faces. The Grand Hotel, closed like a pyramid, up there with its cupolas and pinacles vanishing among the banks of fog, was more foreign and forbidden and unreachable to us than ever.

I left Rimini in 1937. I went back in 1945. It looked like a sea of rubble. There was nothing left. All that came out of the ruins was the dialect, the familiar cadences, a call of "Duilio! Severino!," those strange names.

Many of the houses I had lived in no longer existed. People talked of the front, of the caves of San Marino where they had sheltered, and I felt slightly ashamed of having been out of the disaster.

I was struck by the way people were so busy, nesting in their wooden huts yet already talking of boardinghouses that must be



PREVIOUS PAGES: The sea on a snowy day, 1996; ABOVE: The sea while the winter wind blows, 1996.
BELOW: *Spiaggia*, Life on the beach, 1996.





ABOVE: The dressing rooms at the Rio Grande, the "Miss Topless" contest, 1996.
 BELOW: At a party, 1996.





ABOVE: The Fiabilandia amusement park, 1996.

BELOW: A transsexual, 1996.







The potato festival at Montescudo, a village in the hills near Rimini, 1996.

built, and hotels, hotels, hotels: the desire to rebuild houses.

“There are now 1,500 hotels and boardinghouses, more than two hundred bars, fifty dance-halls, and a beach fifteen kilometers long. Half a million people come here every year, half of them foreigners and half Italian. Airplanes darken the sky every day, from England, Germany, France, and Sweden. . . .

“A chap here has set up a chain of hotels—on the hills for springtime, and up in the mountains for winter—so that his customers won’t leave him, and he can keep them all the year round.”

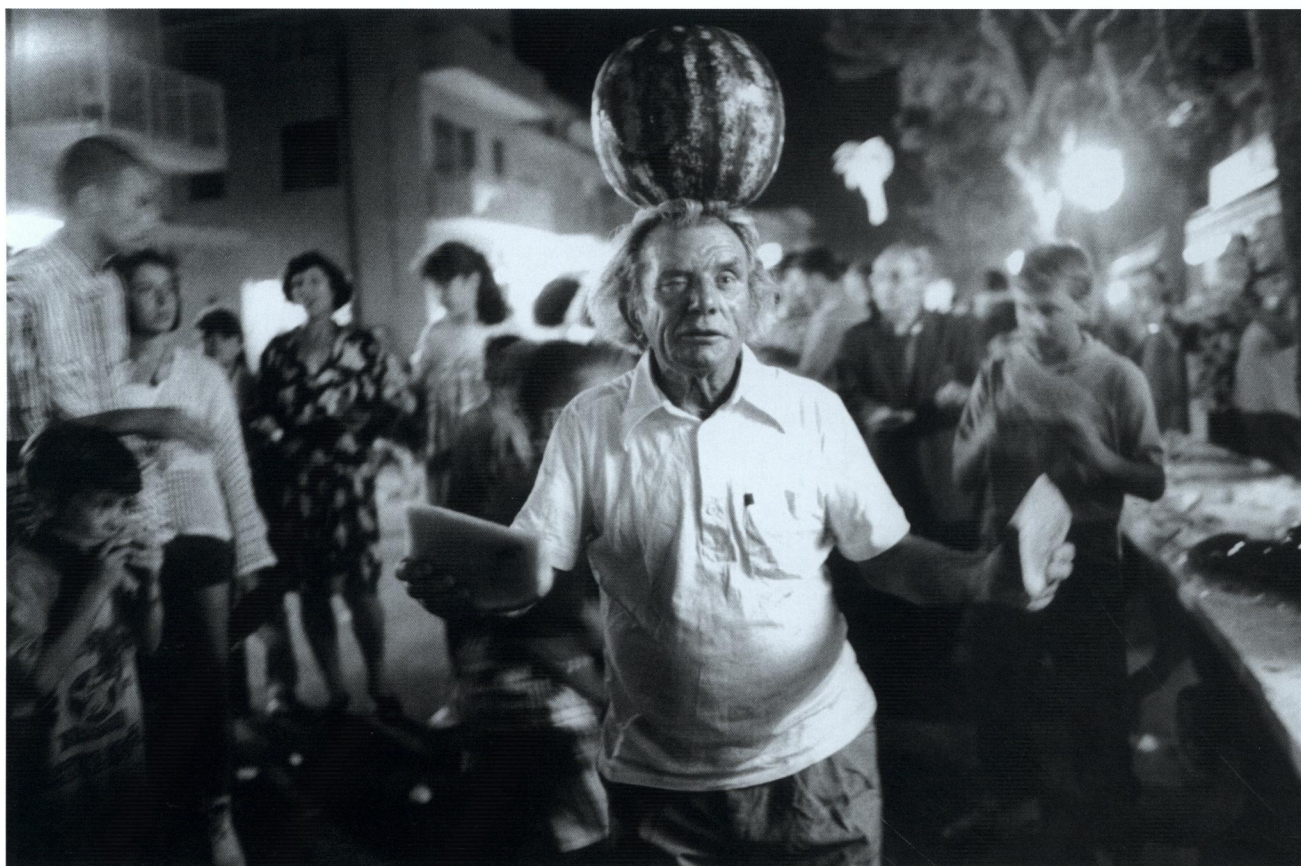
The Rimini I now see is never-ending. Before, there were miles of darkness around the town and the coast road was unused. The only thing to be seen were ghostly fascist buildings, the summer camping places. In winter, when we bicycled to Rivabella, we heard the wind whistling through the windows of these buildings, because the shutters had been carried off for firewood.

Now, there is no more darkness. Instead, there are fifteen kilometers of nightclubs and illuminated signs, and this endless procession of glittering cars, a kind of Milky Way made of headlights. Light everywhere: the night has vanished, it has fled into the sky and the sea. This has happened even in the country, at Covignano, where they have opened an extraordinarily luxurious nightclub, a kind not found even in Los Angeles or Hollywood; there it is, just where the peasants’ farmyards used to be, just where you used to hear nothing but their mongrels barking. Today these places have turned into oriental gardens, with music and jukeboxes and people everywhere, a whirligig of flashing images, a country of playthings, Las Vegas.

I saw hotels made of glass and copper and, beyond the windows, people dancing, people sitting on the terraces. Shops, enormous department stores lit by day and open all night, with all the clothes and fashions that have rolled that way from Carnaby Street, and Pop art objects; markets open at night with the most incredible canned food, pre-



ABOVE: The “Peter Pan” disco party, 1996; BELOW: A party called “Gradisca” in honor of Fellini’s film *Amarcord*.





ABOVE: The harbor in late autumn, 1996; BELOW: A Good Friday procession, 1996.





ABOVE: A rainy day, 1996; BELOW: *Spiaggia*, Life on the beach, 1996.



packaged risotto, with saffron; a false, happy atmosphere; and cutthroat competition: boardinghouses where, for just over a thousand lire, you can get breakfast, lunch, supper, a room and a beach hut—all for a handful of coins.

People get going into the shops, in the middle of the night; people who had come there from every part of the world, their faces yellow, red, and green in the light of the signs, to buy decorated ice-creams, fish from Spain, badly made pizzas; people who never slept because they had jukeboxes booming under the bed: a continual roar of shouted songs and electric guitars, uninterrupted, for the whole summer. Day enters night and night enters day, without a pause. A single long day that lasts four months, as it does at the North Pole.

I was seized by a comical form of jealousy, wanting to ask all these people—all the Swedes and Germans: “What on earth do you see in it all? What on earth have you come here *to do*?”

At this point, two boys signaled that they needed a lift. I opened the car door. They were very polite, courteous, and tactful. One of them wore his hair in big fair curls, the other had babyish bangs that reached his nose, a shirt made of antique-looking lace and orange-velvet trousers.

As they never said a word, I was unable to guess where they came from? Stockholm? Amsterdam? Or were they English? In the end I said: “Where are you from?” “Rimini,” they said. And that’s the remarkable thing: they are all the same, they all have a common country.

“May we get out here?” they asked at a certain point. When I opened the door, the music we had heard in the distance became very loud. It came from the fields, where an illuminated sign read “The Other World.” The two boys thanked me and went in. After a moment’s hesitation I got out too, and went inside myself. On one side, the place opened onto the street; on the other, it ran over a kind of large dirt courtyard that ended up in the countryside, mingling its music with the smell of hay. Under a circus tent there was a nightclub where thousands of youngsters were dancing.

Maybe it was due to the din—which might have heralded the end of the world, or its beginning; or to weariness, or to my ignorance of a Rimini I had never seen before; or to the sight of thousands of young people bursting out of the fields and the roads and the sea: whatever it was, at that moment I felt a new meaning of life in the air, as if everything was starting off at the beginning again.

In the summer, at the Chez-Vous, we used to peer through the hedge into the nightclub grounds. A woman in evening dress was enough to make us tremble. Now I saw that everyone was dancing in an intimate rhythm, a kind of trance, the boys separated from their “partners,” as we used to call them.

I was hit with a confused sort of emotion. Of course I was struck by the theatrical aspect of it all, the sound of the bands rising up into the sky, those mysterious tribes. While the sky was lightening toward dawn and the planes were passing across it, they were dancing with an unfamiliar sort of grace.

All this seemed a beautiful ending for a film. I should like such an ending to give people a feeling of hope for a better humanity. But there I was wrong again: souring it all by projecting it into the future. Whereas those youngsters ought to be seen for what they were, at that particular time. Then I felt I understood them better. But I was ashamed. What was I doing—I said to myself—thinking of using this experience in a film, like a vampire? And why was I moved? Perhaps because I sensed the presence of something I had never had in my own childhood and youth, when we were inhibited by the role of the Church and of fascism, and by our mothers and fathers, whom we venerated as if they were monuments.

I should like to be young today. The young look at things without judging them, without trying to refer them to other things. Many of them, knowing nothing, turn to Zen Buddhism, which seeks to create someone capable of living in the moment, spherically, totally.

The tendency to dominate is so profound in us that it makes us look with hatred at the symbol of freedom of these youngsters, with their bright, Renaissance-style clothes. How calm and brave they have to be, every single day, as they face the lynchmob eyes of people who would like to see their heads cropped like those of the SS!

“Life has no meaning, but we must give it one,” Chaplin said in *Limelight*.

But if the meaning we have so far given it has brought us to our present state, then clearly we must give it a new one. And in order to give it a new one we must destroy the old. To delude ourselves that we can establish a judicious connection between an old way of life and a new one, a link that can in any way be called prudent or useful, is not merely the worst form of conser-

vatism—*worst* because it is disguised as good sense—but is quite simply impossible. I believe that revolt is by its very nature intolerant of prudence and moderation, and yet every revolt that has taken place until now has always managed to lose, in some way, whatever was authentic in its aims. Perhaps the greatest lesson of every revolt, even if it is the least obvious, is a lesson in humility. To reject aberration and the mortification of feeling, in order to keep intact the false, useless dignity of an objective that has already been reached, or even overtaken, means merely to avoid the difficulty of becoming a genus rather than a species, to avoid the risk of taking a new step forward to become “history of spirit.”

Those youngsters, I believe—I want to believe—find their strength in going straight along that other road, which is only theirs and which, even if their long hair falls out, cannot be compared with our short outbursts of student bohemianism. They really have started a new era, have made a profound break with the past. The young man of 1938, faced with today’s youngsters, is like an accountant faced with a butterfly.

But what has all this to do with Rimini? Well, I felt it and thought it all there. The air was full not just of the loud, heartrending voices of the bands. There were also the voices of the waiters talking in my own dialect. It was still my hometown.

That morning I had a moment of fullness. And the wish to say: “You’ve got to do it, you’ve got to succeed.” I actually wanted to say this into a microphone. But they would have answered: “Succeed at what?” which is the right answer. Because they manage to stick together just because they are different, because they are themselves, because they have no one in charge of them.

Then, at dawn, as I droned on to myself about the new form my hometown 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, just as those young people were trying to tell me, that it had changed, and so I had better change as well. ♡



A summer dawn after a night sea storm, 1996.

