Amarcord/Am'l'arcord. Fascism, Memory, and the Visual in Federico Fellini and Renzo Renzi

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Abstract: This essay reflects on questions of visibility and invisibility in the representation of Fascism through a study of the visual memory of Fascism in *Amarcord* and the photo-essay "Il Fascismo involontario," which Renzo Renzi, Bolognese critic and longtime friend of Fellini, wrote in 1975 in direct response to the film. After retracing the roots of *Amarcord* to Fellini's collaboration with Renzi, the essay maps their contrasting stances toward memory: for Fellini, a delivery from the past; for Renzi, a practice of working-through. The essay explores the optics of Fascism in *Amarcord* through an analysis of the influence of photography and television on the filmic image and a reflection on the relation between visibility and invisibility in Fellini's cinematic spectacle. These visualities of *Amarcord* are then discussed in dialogue with the photographs accompanying Renzi's text, thus bringing to the fore the differing status of the trace in the two authors. While in Fellini's film the trace is an embodiment of cinematic pathos, in Renzi's critical reflection with photography, the trace becomes the site of what Roland Barthes defined as the "mad" encounter with the past, the site where Fascism is confronted as the "intractable," a stubborn point of (in)visibility in Italy's past.

Keywords: Federico Fellini, Renzo Renzi, memory, Fascism, *Amarcord*, photography, intermediality.

Memory looms large in Fellini. Critical studies have pointed out how memory for Fellini is more a revelation than a process, a posture toward time rather than a willful and conscious act of reconstruction. Recently Andrea Minuz (23) has described this attitude as a mixture of euphoria for modernity and nostalgia for a mythical past (at once archeological, autobiographical, and physiological). However that may be, if we are to believe Fellini when he says that "there is no past, only an effect on the present" (quoted in Rosenthal 167), this dance between temporal levels might be a deceptive ruse. So, in what sense can we say that memory looms large in Fellini? The intent in this essay is to explore the

visual memory of Fascism in Federico Fellini's *Amarcord* in dialogue with the photo-essay "Il Fascismo involontario (A proposito di *Amarcord*)" ("Involuntary Fascism [A propos of *Amarcord*]") that Renzo Renzi, Bolognese critic and longtime friend of Fellini, wrote in 1975 in direct response to the film. After retracing the roots of *Amarcord* and Fellini's 1970s "memory films" to his collaboration with Renzi, the present essay maps their contrasting stances toward memory as, for Fellini, delivery from the past and, for Renzi, a practice of working-through. In the wake of Walter Benjamin's observation that "History decays into images and not into stories" (2002: N11, 4), the essay explores the memory of Fascism through an analysis of the distinct visualities of *Amarcord* and the photographs accompanying Renzi's text. Starting with an investigation of *Amarcord*'s intermedial engagement with the optics of Fascism, the essay reflects on the ambiguous relation between visibility and invisibility in Fellini's cinematic spectacle and in Renzi's photographs. Differing attitudes toward the trace, and thus photography, the essay argues, separate Fellini's and Renzi's stance toward the past. Against Fellini's pathos of the trace as that which is on the way to disappearing – the cinema celebrating euphorically and nostalgically its visual passage and erasure – stands Renzi's critical pursuit of the trace. The stillness of photography, not tamed by power, but as the site of what Roland Barthes defined as the "mad" encounter with the past, raises the question of Fascism as the "intractable," a stubborn point of (in) visibility in Italy's past.

A Trip down Memory Lane: The Collaboration of Fellini and Renzi

Frank Burke (2002) mapped a critical arc in Fellini's cinema as a progressive movement away from reality toward an increasing concern with representation, turning in the last films into a sheer play of signification. How does memory fare within this trajectory? In Fellini's inaugural vision, defined by the nostalgia for the disappearing world of the *avanspettacolo* in *Luci del varietà* (*Variety Lights*, 1950) and his youthful Rimini in *I vitelloni* (1953), cinematic "reality" is the expression of a world remembered. In later years, reality and memory seem to wax and wane like light phases on the planet Fellini. From *La strada* (1954) to *Le notti di Cabiria* (*Nights of Cabiria*, 1957) and *La dolce vita* (1960), Fellini is not concerned

with memory, only a present occasionally veined by the dreamlike. Then, after *La dolce vita*, reality itself is progressively liquidated in favor of a world of dream and imagination in which memory again plays a large, and ambiguous role, suspended between the individual and collective, more about creation than recollection. Arguably Fellini became Fellini only when this new type of memory took over. And a special kind of memory it is, the one that grew till it peaked in 1974 with *Amarcord*. It is not an act, nor a process, not even, despite what critics have maintained, a revelation. It is not about a specific object and it does not involve an embodied subject (what Fellini called, "the irritating association with 'je me souviens'" 2015: 244). Memory, the early 1950s representation of a by-gone provincial reality, becomes increasingly unmoored from its referent and undergoes a rewiring of sorts, bypassing "what has been" (to use Roland Barthes formulation about photography's indexical relation to reality) to enter a closed circuit with the world of imagination.[1] While central to his act of filmmaking, memory figures as the humble maidservant to the major powers of dream, fantasy, and creation. Memory is an atmosphere, a rich repository of images powerfully charged with meaning, yet as anonymous as stage props.[2]

Memory starts playing a central role in the wake of the failed project, "Il viaggio di G. Mastorna," a futuristic journey in the afterlife that led Fellini to a creative crisis and a serious illness followed by an extensive convalescence at a spa. *Fellini Satyricon* (1969) and *Il Casanova di Fellini* (*Fellini's Casanova*, 1976), film adaptations of texts poised among chronicle, diary, and memoirs, bookend a run of memory-films: *I clowns* in 1970, *Roma* in 1972 and finally *Amarcord* in 1973. Renzo Renzi stands at the crossroads of this memory-turn in Fellini's cinema. "He came to see me in Manziana," Fellini remembers, "while I was recovering from an illness to ask if I'd write the introduction to a book about Rimini" (2015: 238). The encounter with Renzi in May of 1967 was more momentous than the request of a cameo appearance in a publication. Renzi's project of a collective geographical, historical, and autobiographical journey back home – what eventually became *Federico Fellini. La mia Rimini*, published by Cappelli in 1967 – opened an unexpected way forward from the wreckage of "Mastorna" by reorienting Fellini towards the past. Following their conversations, Fellini acknowledges how "the inspiration for a film

about my hometown became clearer and the ideas more precise" (238). The long chapter entitled "Il mio paese," born from a series of encounters in which Fellini answered questions put together by Renzi, became in Renzi's account "una sorta di lungo soggetto di *Amarcord*, infine realizzato nel 1972" (Renzi 1994: 28).

The relationship between Fellini and Renzi was longstanding. Deeply involved with cinema – founder in 1956 of the prestigious series with Cappelli curating the publication of film subjects and screenplays; among the founders in 1967 of the Cineteca di Bologna – Renzi was among Fellini's early supporters and one of his most subtle critics, writing the first book-length appraisal of the filmmaker (*Federico Fellini*, published with Guanda in 1956). Renzi's analyses were often hashed out with the director and embraced a posteriori by Fellini in discussing his films. This dialogue peaked as Renzi became a key interlocutor of Fellini's in the years when memory matters stood at the core of his cinema. Between the end of the 1960s and the early 1970s, Renzi followed Fellini to spas and film sets, shared car trips and sat in restaurants, prodding Fellini and faithfully recording the conversations, stories, and confessions that ensued.[3] Fellini and Renzi were drawn together by the love of cinema and their common origins: Renzi's grandparents were from Rimini. However, the temperaments of the two men could not have been more different. Renzi gives us a self-ironic picture of their encounters: he, the critic-historian, busy writing down, as a *fedele trascrittore*, the conversations that eventually converged in a series of books;[4] the artist busy drawing on scraps of paper that he then systematically tears up. "Se posso, straccio tutto," Fellini confided to Renzi, the dutiful scribe, with a touch of amused sadism. "Decine di foto di attori, appunti, non conservo nulla" (Renzi 1994: 33). Yet a few caricatures of the friend, the pestering historian, *grillo parlante*, do remain, as well as, possibly, some traits absorbed into cinematic representations, as in the figure of Daumier, the leftist intellectual advising Guido in *8½*.

Collaborations, as Federico Pacchioni has recently argued, were crucial to Fellini's filmmaking process.[5] Collaborative scriptwriting with the likes of Tullio Pinelli, Ennio Flaiano, and Pier Paolo Pasolini was marked by a sense of complicity largely due to a shared attitude toward the past, one informed by nostalgia tempered in various measures by poetic transfiguration (Pasolini and Pinelli) or amused irony and satire (Flaiano). Against a notion of collaboration

as a sharing of past experiences eventually merging into Fellini's imaginary, Renzi's idea of collaboration entailed a confrontation with memory, a sustained labor, elaboration, and working-through of a past perceived as a troubling object to interrogate. This markedly different stance toward the past and memory set the limit of their relationship. Renzi wanted Fellini to make films as acts of memory; Fellini had other plans. "I continued to feel as if I were weighted down [...] by a series of characters and situations," he later noted, "so in order to free myself from them once and for all, I had to place them in a film" (2015: 236). Memory is perceived as a threat, a hinderance. "In these last years, I have made films," Fellini says of the memory-films, "as if they were illnesses" (Riva 25). These words suggest how, far from recovering the past through memory, Fellini recovers from memory. The filming of *Roma*, *The Clowns*, and *Amarcord* is compared with a "sense of anxious clearing away." The stance toward Rimini is a revealing one. Following Renzi's suggestion to "return" to his hometown, Fellini returned only to stage a definitive flight from the shameful "warm and rather vulgar nest," "the dilapidated and always infectious little theater of Rimini" (2015: 237).[6]

> I must admit that for some time now I've been making movies with the outlook of someone who's cleaning out an apartment, auctioning the furniture, moving things and obligations out of the way (236).

Filmmaking with memory is obsessively defined by an unaccountable "urge to liquidate [...] or hold a going out of business sale." In this light, *Roma*, *The Clowns*, and *Amarcord* take on the aspect of vast and unredeemed junkyards of memory. Filmmaking is a paradoxical act of memory in the service of forgetting with no ulterior goal: "who knows what I am making room for, or what place I'm trying to make habitable" (236). The nature of this "deliverance" from the past is at the troubled heart of Renzi's "immedesimazione dissonante" in Fellini's story (Renzi 1994: 55).

It is intriguing how, notwithstanding their differences, Fellini's and Renzi's life stories mirror each other in some striking ways. Like Fellini in 1967, Renzi had a creative crisis leading to a nervous collapse in 1961. In Renzi's case as well, the crisis came in the wake of an impossible creative journey at the limit of representation; not Fellini's impossible flight forward to an after-life, but a dangerous return to the past. With Florestano Vancini, Renzi had been working on a project for a film on early Fascism, "La marcia su

Roma,"[7] but "l'eccessivo approccio alla 'scena primaria'" (Renzi 2001: 23) broke him psychologically. At that moment of hardship, Fellini wrote Renzi a supporting letter. The remedies for these crises that each man suggested to the other differed in predictable ways: memory, with a return to Rimini, is what Renzi proposed to Fellini; forgetting, "una bella culona," is the cure Fellini offered to Renzi. Both, in their own ways, followed the other's advice. Renzi got married in 1964 and Fellini returned to Rimini, but to erase it systematically film by film. Ultimately, memory and, more specifically, the memory of Fascism, looms large in both stories, although with different outcomes. What for Renzi was a crippling stumbling block, for Fellini became the occasion for creative acts of sublimation, representation, and happy deliverance. Yet, how to explain "the sense of anxious clearing away" that dominated, by Fellini's own admission, the memory films in which Fascism loomed largest? The accounts refused to be settled; something was stirred up by these movies. Fellini concludes his interview about *Amarcord*: "During the few showings I have had until now, and only for friends whom I trust, besides the fun there has always been a great deal of agitation. Now, what is it that agitates if everything in the film is ridiculous?" (Riva 26).

Well before *Amarcord* came out, Fellini and Renzi had drifted apart. The collaboration on publications fizzled out. As a final reflection on a common journey, in 1975 Renzi wrote "Il Fascismo involontario (A proposito di *Amarcord*)," an essay/open letter to Fellini in which he interrogates Fellini's act of memory. The essay is both a critical reading of the film and a reconstruction of Renzi's and Fellini's shared sentimental education under Fascism. At the same time, the short piece is a photo essay of sorts, with 25 photographs interspersed throughout depicting various Fascist events and social rituals. Freed from any direct illustrative relation with the text, the images occupy an independent space of quiet visual confrontation with the materiality of the past. Renzi's seminal, compelling reflection probes the texture of Fellini's engagement with memory – and specifically the memory of Fascism in *Amarcord* – and sheds light on Fascism and its visibility in Fellini's cinema and Italian culture at large. "Il Fascismo involontario" is animated by a sense of historical urgency (one that we might share today): that not enough had been said about Fascism, particularly at a time, in the mid-seventies, of growing neofascist violence.

Amarcord/Am'l'arcord

Fellini's liquidation of memory is encapsulated in the very title of his 1973 film, which came to him, so Fellini remembers, while scribbling little sketches and trying things out. We may well know that the word means "I remember" in local dialect, but, as Fellini tells us, that is beside the point: "you have to forget its origin" (Riva 25). Piqued that his films might be described as autobiographical, Fellini repeatedly warns his interviewer: "'Amarcord' doesn't mean 'I remember' at all; instead, it is a kind of cabalistic word, a word of seduction, the brand of an aperitif: *Amarcord* [...]" (24). A signifier detached from any signified, a spell and incantation with apotropaic powers to keep the beast at bay; a brand name that instils in the consumer promises of wealth and happiness beyond the reality of a run of the mill product. To Fellini's intransitive *Amarcord*, a memory without either subject or object, Renzi opposes the Bolognese *am'l'arcord, me lo ricordo*, I remember it – that object being Fascism and what he calls "the involuntary Fascism" that defined the lives of his generation, those who were in their twenties in 1940. For this generation the relation to memory – a private, autobiographical memory hopelessly enmeshed with history – is inescapable. The war and the end of Fascism broke their lives in two: "Cominciammo a vivere di ricordi a trent'anni" (Renzi 1975: 131). Who are after all "i vitelloni," if not exactly that youth, trapped not so much within a geographical province but a wider, more inescapable and stifling province of memory and the mind? Despite his protestations that *Amarcord* remembers nothing, Fellini was "very pleased to read in a few reviews that fascism has rarely been represented as truthfully as it was in my film" (2015: 239). Fascism and specifically, as he notes in his interview with Riva, "the fascism within us" is the "object" at the same time acknowledged and disavowed of the 1973 film. So, following Renzi's provocation, what does it mean to say that Fellini remembers/represents Fascism but does not remember IT?

What is, according to Renzi, the effect of explicitly foregrounding the object of the memory act? "It" intrudes between the self and memory, introduces a pause, an occasion for reflection; "it" is an invitation to concreteness, to focus on an object. Finally, in the form of the labial "m"/"l," the Italian letters create the feeling that one is licking memory like a wound, thus questioning any pretense

of critical detachment. The erasure of the "it," on the other hand, causes a flattening of perspective and the hurried dismissal of a past that was never put at a critical distance. Building on these considerations, the gist of Renzi's reading is the following: Fellini's 1973 remembrance of Fascism "sta dentro il grado di consapevolezza di una gran parte della gente di allora" (Renzi 1975: 142). "Il film," Renzi explains, "resta dentro – pur dilatandola, facendola diventare 'fenomeno' [...] – la (apparente) controcultura del disimpegno negli Anni Trenta" (167). For Renzi, this magnifying effect is the film's great contribution. At the same time, the consensus about Fellini's film, the immediate recognition of the world represented, suggests for Renzi a disquieting fact: that the consciousness of Fascism is still the one originally developed under Fascism itself. Additionally, the specific visibility of Fascism, the very way to look at it – think of the scene of the celebration of the 21st of April – is one inherited from the regime: a "frozen Fascism" that people carried within themselves "come l'esperienza intrinseca di un popolo intero" (177). This, Renzi concludes, redeploying a term that Pasolini was using in those years to denounce the deleterious effects of Italy's modernization, is the true "anthropological mutation," one that for Renzi takes the form of a deep and involuntary memory for their whole generation. "*Amarcord* è il film della continuità," he concludes, "un film importante almeno quanto *La dolce vita* nell'indicare una condizione sotterranea del nostro paese" (178).

The sense of entrapment in memory described by Renzi is well reflected in Fellini's stance toward the world of his youth, one wavering between distance and closeness. "In the film there is a distance," states Fellini, "a judgment and rejection, but that is not all, it's a little more complex than that, because all of this is accompanied by nostalgia" (quoted in Minuz 46).[8] Elsewhere, however, he rejects detached judgments "as a little inhuman" stressing instead the emotional closeness: "The province of *Amarcord* is a place where we are all recognizable, myself above all, in the ignorance that got us all confused. Immense ignorance, massive confusion" (Riva 20). What interests him is "an emotional manner of being fascist" (20) explained as a collective "Italian" condition of being stunted, an "arrested development in the phase of adolescence" (20). With this collapsing of Fascism and adolescence, history is subsumed in physiology, and, in the space of a page, this physiological phase turns into a collective condition, "a

permanent historical season of our lives," a national character that defies judgment and historical understanding.[9] This alignment of adolescence and Fascism, in fact the use of adolescence to explain away Fascism, is historically rooted in the project of Fascism itself: a replay of the original Fascist cooptation of youth in the service of ideology ("Giovinezza" was after all the hymn of the movement). In this play between saying "That was us" and "We are still that," Fellini is suspended in "an ambiguous adherence" to the past.[10]

The Optics of Fascism: Moving Stillness in *Amarcord*

This posture toward the past suspended between distance and closeness finds a technical formal expression in the mixed position that Fellini's camera assumes toward the memory-world of *Amarcord*: a neutral narrative distance structured on medium and long shots punctuated by recurrent still-camera close-up frames that break the narrative flow. These moments when various characters look and speak directly to the camera have been widely commented on in connection with the viewer's nostalgic involvement in the world represented. Expanding the reflection to a meta-cinematic level, James Hay has further noted how "*Amarcord* is very much about viewing (and *reviewing*) images, about image and spectator" (169). But what happens exactly in these frontal shots where movement is suspended? How do they formally and politically organize *Amarcord*'s visuality?

In a letter to the illustrator Giuliano Geleng, Fellini described his idea for the film poster in ways that exemplify the overall cinematographic effect he strove for in the film. All the characters of the film, Fellini explained, should look out of the poster, to stare at the spectators: "they should, these characters, be as if suspended in startled immobility, lovable, reluctant and shameless, just like an old image, indelible and fabulous, reflected in a cheery Sunday mirror" ("In ricordo di Giuliano Geleng").[11] The aesthetic evoked is that of the photographic portrait, a fixed stare that pins the characters like butterflies. This potentially deadening pose is corrected and transfigured by reflection in an "animating" cheery mirror, a hint of the magic of color and cinemascope. Thus, cinema and photography are simultaneously invoked. This interlacing of two image-making devices creates an effect of visual layering, an example of that pictorial duplication that creates the density of Fellini's image and the heightened effect of collective

watching. This flirtation of the moving image with the stillness of photography pervades the film, becoming a crucial aesthetic organizing principle of the visuality of *Amarcord*, one that goes to the heart of the historical and ideological make-up of the film. This interlacing of photography and cinema takes multiple forms.

Photography as a social practice and its operator, the photographer, play a large role in the telling of the story. Along with Giudizio, the local fool, and the Avvocato, resident historian, the anonymous photographer is the third chronicler/witness of the town of *Amarcord*. More than the others, the photographer is, as Hay has noted, ever-present in documenting ritual, from the school pictures, the Fascist rally, the arrival of the caliph, the passing of the Rex and Gradisca's wedding. The photographer occupies a unique interstitial position between the filmed world and the filming of the world: he is aligned with the cinematic camera like a ghostly double, an extension of the cinematic gaze, yet he is part and parcel of the comedic world of the film. Like the other chroniclers, he warrants a frontal close-up, one that reveals the mask of a pathetic and slightly sinister character, a shady traveling salesman with no standing. But the presence of photography runs deeper and broader in the film.

The episodic and fragmented narrative of *Amarcord* has been connected to the passing of the seasons, loosely marking the progression of the film from one spring to the next. However, natural time does not fragment; rather, it gives a sense of flow to what would seem fragmented. The loose string of sketches, a signature of Fellini's cinematic narrative, speaks of a modern fragmentation of experience, one that could be directly connected with the segmented temporality of photography. Such a temporality and visuality informed, most memorably, the structure of *La dolce vita*, a film that, according to Tullio Kezich, originated from a wall of cut-out pictures from illustrated magazines. Just as in the 1960 film, the logic of the photographic act that breaks up the "continuity" of life and story could be seen as the organizing principle behind the episodic narrative of *Amarcord*.[12] Thus, as in the earlier film, photography works both as a rich theme – the figure of an anti-litteram "pararazzo," events as photo-ops – and as a deep temporal structure that plays a crucial if hidden role in constructing the specific form of cinematic visuality in *Amarcord*. Let's look closely at one recurring instance: the photographic portrait.

How is the frontal photographic pose translated within the moving image? The direct address to the camera starts with Giudizio's opening presentation of the *manine* (the tree fluff that announces the spring) and returns throughout the film, eliciting the specific look that Fellini wanted Geleng to replicate in the promotional poster. The effect created is of a documentary interview take, where the character-witness speaks to the camera and the viewers.

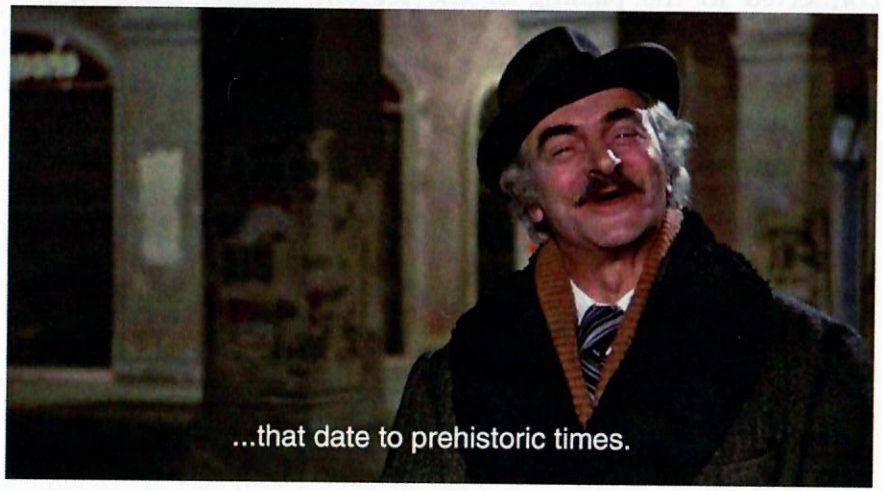

Figure 1

Giudizio's opening speech and the Avvocato's lecture.

We have been trained by TV watching to read this direct address to the camera as a kind of "real" action sequence ("Live from the Capitol"). Nonetheless what we are seeing is a sort of freeze frame, an animated photograph in the style of the early Lumière's cinema. The photographic pose becomes a vehicle for testimonial commentary, transforming the sitters into "talking heads." This form of frontal address with the straight look into the camera, very unusual in cinema, thus creates a sense of directness, life-like improvisation, and intimacy of delivery that gestures to television. In the preceding years, Fellini openly experimented with the style of television in *The Clowns*, *Fellini: A Director's Notebook*, and *Roma* as well, playing with the interview format and the mode of the documentary enquiry. The vision of *Amarcord* is informed by a complex intermediality: photography is absorbed into the cinematic vision through the implicit mediation of television. Thus, the Avvocato directly delivers to us his public history lessons, punctuated with live footnotes from an invisible diegetic audience. Then, having dismissed the professorial demeanor, he makes us privy, in a captivating confessional mode, to the spicy stories surrounding the iconic Grand Hotel. After his opening testimonial, Giudizio comments "live" to the camera on the inexplicable migration of the whole town to the sea to await the passage of the Rex: "Where are all these people going?" Finally, it is not only the chroniclers; everybody gets a chance to contribute his or her two-bits, like the moviegoer who declares directly to the camera her impressions of the film she just saw: "Era tanto bello e ho pianto tanto."

But beyond individual cameo appearances, the frontal pose structures whole cinematic sequences, giving rise to a mixed visuality of stillness in motion. The visit of the *federale* to celebrate the 21st of April, the mythic birth of Rome, is exemplary in this respect. Photography in various iterations informs its unfolding from beginning to end. As often happens in the film, the sequence opens with a frontal medium shot: a Fascist officer, looking straight into the camera, blows a whistle and thus marks the beginning of the ceremonies. Eventually we gain a wide-angle panorama of the piazza in front of the train station with the crowd in attendance and, in the open space awaiting the arrival of the federale, we spot the silhouette of the camera's tripod with its black widow-like veil.

Figure 2

The photographer waiting for the arrival of the federale.

Next, the photographer runs out from the crowd. Aligned with the point of view of the film camera and our own position as spectators, he photographs the great cloud of smoke announcing the "numinous" arrival of power. In a film predicated on the clarity and brightness of a technicolor vision, this moment of impaired, muddled visibility, offered to the photographic camera for dutiful reporting, stands out as an explicit visual representation of those qualities that Fellini recognized at the heart of the Fascist experience: ignorance, confusion, lack of vision. Following this disorienting moment, the visiting hierarch and the local Fascists, teachers and other authorities break into a run and enter the town. A stationary long shot of the main street awaits the running parade that advances toward the still film camera till the local chief, having reached a medium close-up, starts shouting to the camera the statistics of the city's stellar performance in all Fascist activities. This testimonial is followed by the ecstatic statement to the camera of the math professor, running along with her townsfolk, extolling the ambiguous rejuvenating virtues of Fascism and, finally, in an even tighter close-up, uncle Lallo, "Pataca" – also in full gallop – eloquently sums up his and the town's unconditional appreciation of Mussolini's power.

Figure 3

The testimonials to Fascism's power.

Doing his running along the side of the road behind the crowds, the Avvocato explains for the unknowing cinema viewers the historical and political significance of the day. The parade ends in a funnel in the form of steep stairs where all the authorities converge. As if poured in a mold, they pose as a human wall for a perfect photo-op (Figure 4). A photograph is not actually taken, but the arrangement of characters has all the constrictive quality of a group portrait shoot. This image is the culmination of a sequence built on poses and people both posing and strutting in front of the camera, performing their Fascism. The photo-cinematic pose coincides with the physical materiality of the autocratic ritual, the staged performance of hierarchy.

Fellini's representation of Fascism and its seemingly silly rituals has been praised for "la precisione dell'evocazione" (Calvino 54), but it is one paradoxically attained through the deformation of caricature. Most tellingly, Fellini reveals Fascism in the forms of its own visuality, its optics so to speak: power as a rigid organization of the gaze. Beyond the rituals, Fellini recreates Fascism as a way of seeing. Barthes noted that power and society love the fixity and heaviness of the photo. Fascism used this deadening quality to its best effect: in the endless statuary shots of the leader, of groups in military formations, of never-ending rituals – a multiplication of poses that fix the world in an illusion of movement.[13]

In *Amarcord*, it is hard to escape this visual cage. A jump cut takes us from the wall of saluting Fascists to the frontal shot of a solitary Aurelio imprisoned during the celebrations behind the gate of his own house (Figure 4). This image, where a flowering tree looms large in the walled garden evokes for a moment a space of air and light, a poetic realm of freedom and unimpeded movement like the one suggested by the opening and closing dance of the manine. It is an image of incarceration, yet one aligned with the freedom, no matter how pathetic and ineffectual, of being "outside," a rare moment that escapes the oppressiveness of political and social rituals and of a comedic satire heavy with intimations of oppression.[14]

The Performers/Spectators and the Circuit of Blindness

Starting with Calvino's reflection in "Autobiografia di uno spettatore," there has been recurrent insistence on the way Fellini, even while eschewing historical or economic analysis, achieved

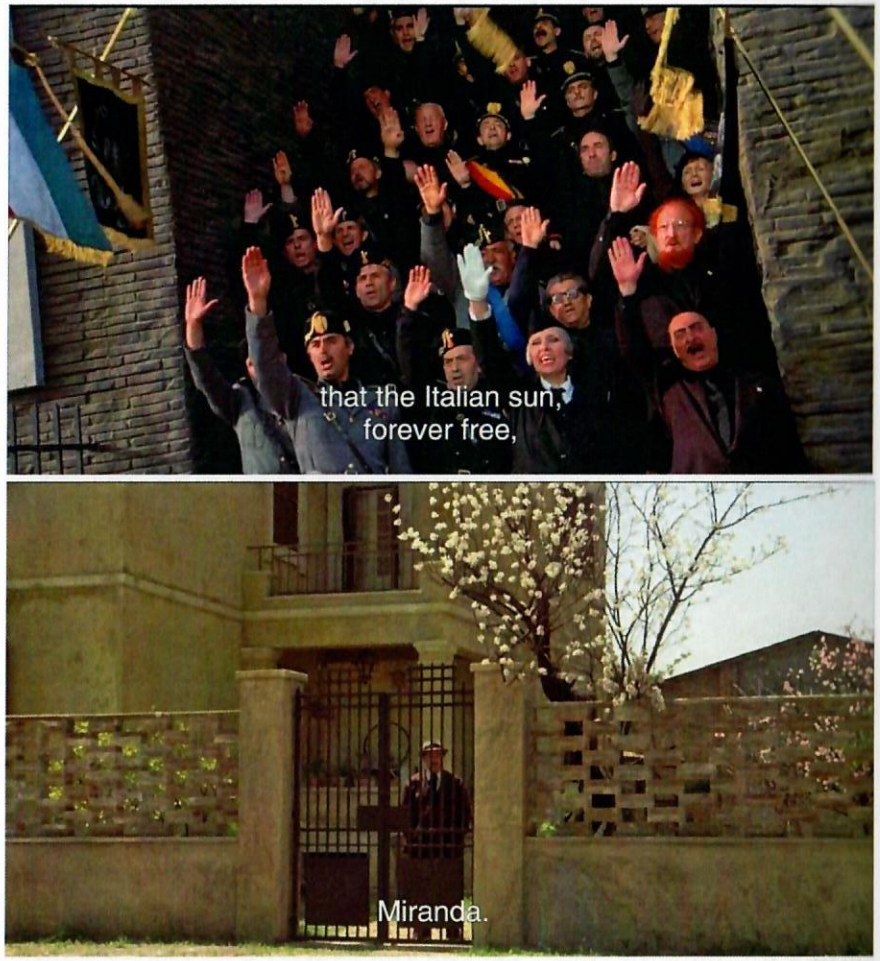

Figure 4

The stairway"funnel"; Aurelio imprisoned at home.

an accurate representation of Fascism by appropriating historical visual codes (photography, Hollywood cinema, caricature) that were operational at the time. In *Amarcord*, we see Fascism through lenses that were produced or at least filtered by Fascism. In the April 21st parade, Fellini conveyed the Fascist regimentation of vision. But how can you represent the defining features of Fascism – ignorance and blindness – through a regime of visibility and spectacle? As Muniz noted (48), in *Amarcord* the Felliniesque

spectacle is dangerously aligned with Fascist spectacularity. There are moments, with the smoke at the station or the fog enveloping the town at the end of the film, when Fellini succeeds in temporarily marring the surface of the image, thereby suggesting an impairment of vision that gestures toward a diffuse condition of blindness. But even these moments ultimately remain trapped within the perfect visibility enhanced by the color cinemascope of the film. Fellini is aware of how vision, even his own, is predicated on blindness, but this awareness, while built into the fabric of the film, for instance through the manipulation of a photographic vision, only rarely finds an explicit visual articulation.

The arrival in town of the "new girls" of the brothel is a spectacular scene that mirrors the Fascist parade, yet, unlike the parade, is built on a crisscrossing of gazes without the latter's set hierarchy between spectators and performers. This scene, which more than any other in the film is all about looking, ultimately and unexpectedly leads us to an image of blindness. It starts with the idle evening promenade of the townspeople up and down the street. Various vignettes are broken up by the eternal Avvocato whispering information about architectural details to the camera. The whole sequence is one of layered stillness and movement. A series of tracking shots frame static figures in the foreground (shadows or people lost in thought), people strolling and talking in the middle distance, and, in the background, the lighted shops and idle onlookers. Suddenly the open coach carrying the "new girls" appears down the street. Everybody's attention, in a mix of awe and excitement similar, if more contained (for public decency), to the one that will invest the arrival of the federale, is turned to the "girls." Riding with them, we and the camera pass the onlookers with a series of fluid tracking shots to the right and then to the left, lingering on the people left behind by the advancing coach. Then in a series of shots and counter-shots we see the prostitutes responding to the gazes and comments, and the townspeople gawking back at the camera in medium-close-ups.

As the coach arrives at the central avenue, a final tracking shot to the right reveals Giudizio and others in the foreground, and youths behind him, jumping to catch a glimpse of the girls. The camera stops on the Avvocato and his final commentary on the scene, a silent gesture of indulgence, as if saying: "What are we to do?" or "That is how it is." A religious articles shop has been the

background for this last shot. Madonnas and candles in the first window and in the second a crowded display of reproductions of saints set up in layers, much like the crowd scenes in the streets: three Saint Vincents in the background with lights lit on their heads;[15] six Saint Sebastians of different sizes staggered by height in the foreground and, in the middle, two big Saint Lucias, holding on uptilted trays their gouged eyes.

Figure 5

The Avvocato in front of the display of Saint Lucia's gouged eyes.

At the height of our and the town's immersion in the spectacle, Fellini's gaze insists on an allegorical icon of blindness: the displaced eyes cartoonishly look at the camera from the tray on which they rest. Vision stops with a dissolve to black on this allegory of spectatorship, the guardian saints of a town of blind people who think they see, of amnesiacs overcome by nostalgia. The spectacle remains unbroken, yet the closing image intimates something unseen, an invisibility that envelops us like a murky fog in the final dissolve. What is it that remains invisible? What is the constitutive blindness of this town predicated upon? If Fascism is defined by a visibility that amounts to blindness, what then did the world of Fascism, the experience of living under the regime, really look like?

This invisibility is one and the same for the people of *Amarcord* and for us. We are out of the picture, but the picture winks at us and ultimately lures us into its universe of colorful "blindness." As

the story of the little old world of Fascism winds down, the wily photographer with a last stunt fixes even us, its distant spectators, in an obedient pose. "Stay still! Smile!." We too become part of the picture as we enter "the spectacle as the realm of missing power" (Burke 2020: 208), swallowed up with the townsfolk of *Amarcord* in this universe of "involuntary" Fascism.

Figure 6

Fellini, *Amarcord*: The photographer photographing the audience.

The Pathos and the Politics of Traces: Renzi and the Staying Power of Photography

If it is clear how *Amarcord* affords a self-reflexive model of cinematic spectacle, in what sense does it offer "an imaginative model of historical excavation and documentation" (Hay 169)? As argued above, Fellini's use of photography reveals the formal structure organizing Fascism's vision and performance of power. However, his cinematic use of photography is predicated on a reductive understanding of what photography is, an idea that mirrors and thus reiterates Fascism's own reductive and "taming" concept of the medium. This understanding reduces the photographic experience and the ontology of the medium to an obtuse "fixing" of the world in a rigid image, the figure of the photographer to an anonymous and servile recorder of power, and thus photography to a hopelessly lowbrow and passive representational practice, long berated in Italian culture as the art of the "salumai."[16]

But next to this characterization, stands another, more complex and challenging understanding of photography. Against the image of a socially "tamed" medium, Roland Barthes evokes the notion of photography's madness, its ability to stage an anarchic confrontation with the "real." Photographic stillness enacts a powerful "arrest" (91), which gives rise not to a memory but a "counter-memory," a confrontation with history, the "what-has-been." Barthes notes how the Photograph, against the presumption sustaining both real and filmic world that "the experience will constantly flow by in the same constitutive style," breaks that style (90). From this perspective, the relation between the two media, with a slight yet crucial shift of emphasis, could be thought as one opposing (photographic) insistence to (cinematic) fluidity. Photography thus can potentially play a crucial role as the site from which to face the "it" of "am'l'arcord," the elusive object of the memory act. As counter-memory, photography intrudes between the self and memory: for Renzi it stages an encounter with the materiality of Fascism and the subjective experience of a wound. At the same time, "it" introduces a pause, an occasion for reflection, that, as Benjamin argued, affords a historical method to think about the past and interrogate it: photography as the site of a historical trial (Benjamin 2005: 527).

Fellini's *Amarcord* realizes its most compelling work of "historical excavation and documentation" in the moments in which the cinematic image, under the spell of photography, keeps on looking. Ultimately, however, *Amarcord* is not interested in recovering or photographically "insisting" on the past. Fellini's vision, hovering between distance and closeness, envelops a past that is "only dreamt, imagined, evoked" (Muniz 93). Or, even more honestly, in Fellini's own words, the past exists to be "liquidated." Photographers, Grand Hotels, the Rex, and the whole lot find a resting place in the thrift-shop of *Amarcord*.

I don't know if Fellini had occasion to read Nietzsche's essay "On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life." He would have doubtlessly appreciated Nietzsche's championing the reasons of life against the ossified traditions of nineteenth-century historicism. In any case, the three "telecronisti" embedded in *Amarcord* embody a similar set of distinct postures toward the past. The Avvocato is an unforgettable illustration of Nietzsche's Antiquarian mode; while the photographer, mediator of the Fascist vision, aligns himself

with Nietzsche's Monumental. What remains uncertain, however, is where in *Amarcord* we can locate a Critical History. Instead of that, we have Giudizio, presenting a primitive oral stance toward memory before history itself in the sense that Nietzsche means it.

Lina Wertmüller remarked how "Federico has given us the most significant traces and graffiti of our history in the last twenty years" (quoted in Bondanella: 246). The choice of words is illuminating. Perhaps it is not by chance that Fascism and ancient Rome entered Fellini's cinema at about the same time. Whether representing the Italy of Fascism or the Rome of Petronius, Fellini left us beautiful "frescoes" (another word often used by Fellini and his critics) that speak to us through a language of "traces" and "graffiti." Through an odd flattening effect, ancient Rome and the span of Fellini's life, Nero and Mussolini, stand side by side and equidistant from us. In Fellini's *Roma*, it is actually easier to unbury the prehistorical, the husk of the mammoth that appears at the beginning of the *metropolitana* sequence, or the ancient ruins hidden under the modern city, than the Fascist history stored in the mile-long shelves of the State Archives – footage of which sneaks into the sequence of the subway excavation. What separates the poster of *Amarcord* from the ruined frescoes on which *Fellini Satyricon* closes? (Figure 7). They were designed by the same artist. They both speak to the aesthetic of the trace, the fragment, the episodic, which goes to the heart of Fellini's attitude toward the past. Furthermore, *Fellini Satyricon*'s frescoes point out how the trace in Fellini is not about recovering but about loss and crumbling. Cinema is just like the liberating wind that wipes the subterranean frescoes off the ancient rooms discovered by the digging crews in *Roma*. Cinematic movement, as Fellini himself states, is about disposing of and ultimately erasing; it responds to a deep "urge to liquidate, do spring cleaning," "to make room for [...] who knows what" (2015: 237).

Renzi explicitly connects the intermediality between cinema and photography to Fellini's unresolved position toward the past.

> Tu stesso mi hai detto che, per non comprometterti sentimentalmente con quelle brevi vicende, con quella lunga vicenda, hai girato il film come una serie di quadri fissi, senza troppi movimenti di macchina allo scopo di mantenere le distanze, trasformando lo schermo in un raggelato teatrino delle marionette, posto sotto il cielo di un Potere lontano, quasi astratto (diciamo metafisico?) dove la finzione fosse spesso palese (1975: 164).

Unlike Fellini, Renzi confronts the past head on, the ambiguous and unresolved position that his generation entertains with

Figure 7

The closing frescos of *Fellini Satyricon*, depicting the protagonists of the film.

Fascism, in an entangled mix of complicity, condemnation, and shame. Photography, the modern trace par excellence, plays a crucial role in his reflection. Far from being a filter that allows a distancing and thus taming of the past, photography silently forces an arrest, uncanny and reflective, opening a space of interrogation. The photograph materializes the "it," the painful wound sitting at the core of "am'l'arcord."

"Il Fascismo involontario" is a 30-page mix of cultural criticism and autobiography interspersed with 25 images, a carefully curated photographic sequence of the Fascist Ventennio that implicitly questions Fellini's visual memory in *Amarcord*. Photography is integral to Renzi's reading, creating the critical pause that forces a confrontation with the materiality of the image that is crucial to a reflection on Fascism: "L'importanza dei particolari," he notes, "è tanto più grande quanto più in un paese la realtà effettuale è diversa dalle apparenze, i fatti dalle parole [...]." (170). Photographic insistence is instrumental to question the defining blindness of the visibility of Fascism. Ariella Azoulay (13) has theorized the presence in our consciousness of "planted images." Not necessarily real photographs, these are images that are adopted instantaneously, ruling out any possibility of negotiation, as far as their genealogy and belonging. The visibility of Fascism greatly relies on such planted pictures. While, as Azoulay notes, the broad dissemination of photography over two centuries has created a space for civic and political relations, the planted images restrict the living

space of a citizen, defining and bounding what is deemed visible. That's why photography is an embattled arena for reclaiming and understanding one's history. While the materiality of the images can be the conduit of renewed vision, in order to engage with them it is necessary to stop "looking at pictures" and, to paraphrase James Baldwin on confronting the images of lynching in the American South, start "facing" the photograph (103). From the planted images of Fascism that are amplified in Fellini's cinematic spectacle, Renzi returns to the unassuming and humble materiality of photography, photography as a trace, where the viewer can actually face the intractable "it."

The "reality" of life under Fascism (the blind field only allegorically evoked by Fellini) faces us in the photographs in Renzi's essay as matter of fact, drab and opaque. There is nothing exceptional or spectacular about the images: groups of the OND (*Opera nazionale dopolavoro*); soldiers leaving for East Africa; the Duce in Bologna; the Festival of the polenta and the grapes; "La giornata della fede" (the donation of golden rings to the homeland); and posed pictures upon posed pictures of school groups, fire fighters, summer colonies. Just like the "memorable," planted images of Mussolini speaking and visiting the provinces (those too are quoted by Renzi), these photographs were produced by power, intended as celebrative, propagandistic, and monumentalizing. Once confronted in their unassuming materiality, however, they actually speak of the lasting power of photography to simply present to our attentive and, for once, pensive gaze the "It," the "that-has-been."

With their flat and unrhetorical banality, the photographs enact a radical defamiliarization of the inherited visibility of Fascism. The images challenge identification and understanding of what Italy and the Italians under Fascism were like. What do we actually see? A sinister and ghostly appearance ushers us into this photographic world: a man in anti-gas gear (Figure 8). Coming to us wearing a mask, the past resists appropriation. The photograph attests to the documentary reality (the centrality of military exercises to civilian life under Fascism) and foreground the uncanny familiarity and the invisibility of the world depicted. Who are the Italians who stare back at us from these photographs? Fellini denounced the spectacle of life under Fascism even as he paradoxically duplicated it in the comedic and melancholic

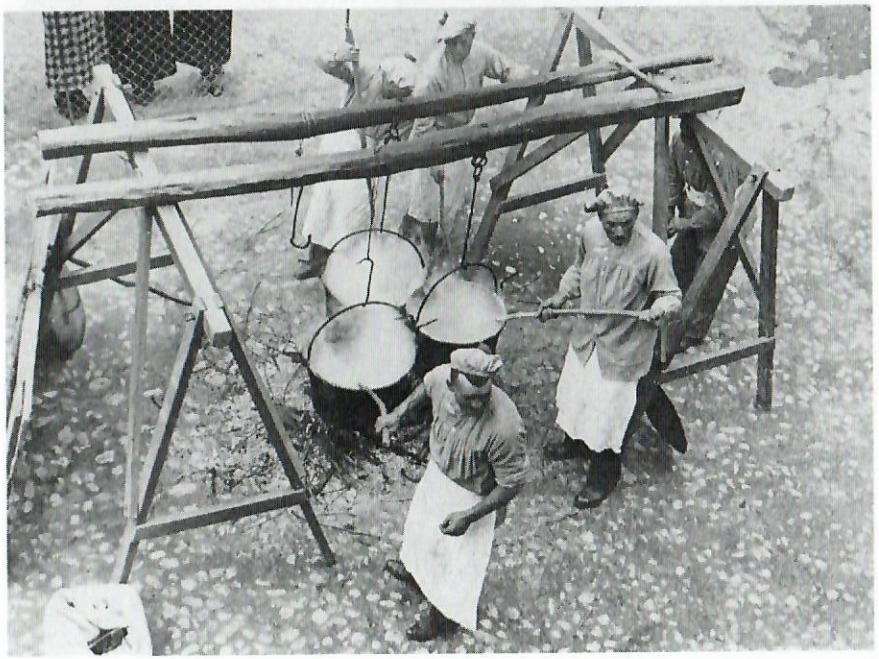

Figure 8[17]

(This page and previous page)

world of *Amarcord*. But these photographs defy the visual order of the spectacle: they are not aesthetic artefacts but anonymous archeological fragments, traces of a buried past, which evoke a confrontation with Barthes "intractable," the meaning, barren and unseductive, of the life under Fascism. A world where individuals stand around, lonely and dispirited, in a somber festival of the polenta or where a crowd queue to give up the one precious thing they own to the obscene pawnshop of the patria. These images are profoundly mournful, there is gold glittering on the table, but the people seem like displaced persons looking for a bowl of soup. And then, as Fellini did represent it, we find masses of people assembled in every possible geometrical formation for the camera and then The One standing at the top of the visual pyramid. In *Amarcord,* Fellini at once liquidates memory and makes us at home in a comedic and nostalgic memory world of implanted, anonymous memories (at once autobiographical and collective) where the ignorance of small-town life and adolescence ultimately obfuscates a system of power that corrupted and humiliated a whole people. But the greatest tension between the memory of *Amarcord* and the memory of the "it" contained in these photographs revolves around the notion of the trace. Traces in Fellini speak of erasure, they are sealed within the pathos of what is about to disappear; for Renzi traces (like these photographs) are stubborn signposts that set us on the path to confront an obfuscated past. The photographs in "Il Fascismo involontario" foreground memory, to quote Freud, as a foreign territory; you can hardly feel nostalgia for "it," a space at once drab, banal, and uncanny where we can feel the heaviness, the inescapable boredom and quiet brutality, of a twenty-year long regime.

The funereal and darker side of Fascism plays only a marginal part in the colorful world of *Amarcord*. The shot of Mussolini's flowery head at night following the purging of Aurelio with castor oil (the one act of violence in the film, it too turned into comedy) stands out as a lonely example. There is a reluctance in Italian culture to interrogate the past. In "Autobiografia di uno spettatore," solicited by Fellini as an introduction to the screenplay of *Amarcord* published by Einaudi, Italo Calvino criticizes Italian cinema for not furthering self-knowledge, noting how "guardarci direttamente negli occhi è difficile" (48). As if to prove his point, Calvino confesses his own desire to be a pure spectator, a pleasure

that Italian cinema, whether engaged (neorealism) or disengaged (the commedia all'italiana), spoils by taking him too close to home.

> Così [...] per ricrearmi il piacere del cinema, devo uscire dal contesto italiano e ritrovarmi un puro spettatore. [...] o vado a cercare i vecchi film che mi illuminino sulla mia preistoria, o quelli tanto nuovi da potermi forse indicare come sarà il mondo dopo di me (48-49).

Prehistory or science fiction, cinema is a flight from the historical. Compelled by Fellini (yet reluctantly), Calvino "faces" *Amarcord*, as a film that intends to "forzarci a vedere noi stessi" (49). Fellini, Calvino notes, is upsetting, "perché ci obbliga ad ammettere che ciò che più vorremmo allontanare ci è intrinsecamente vicino" (54). As "ciò," the "it" resurfaces in Calvino's reflection. This "ciò," left unspecified, is only defined through its qualities: the "ripugnanza visiva" that, short of becoming moral condemnation, stops "all'indulgente complicità carnale," as Calvino then illustrates with examples that steer away from the film at hand, and Fascism. "Tanto la provincia vitellona quanto la Roma cinematografara sono gironi dell'inferno, ma sono anche insieme godibili Paesi di Cuccagna" (54).

Amarcord might force the spectators to an uncomfortable closeness. Through the film, they do look uncomfortably in each other's eyes and what do they see? A mix of complicity and indulgence, ultimately the nodding look of the Avvocato in front of the gouged-out eyes of Saint Lucia. Calvino's viewer, just like Fellini, is forever held in a zone of "close-detachment" in which value judgment and understanding, operations that involve not the wise wink but a straight look in the eyes, are banned. Calvino, knowing his Freud, closes by linking this constellation of spectatorship to a "sintomatologia dell'isterismo italiano" (55). He explains how neurosis is a temporal disturbance, a hysterical attack where "passato e presente mescolano le loro prospettive." But with a last rhetorical/symptomatic deflection, Calvino pins these hysterics to the histrionics depicted in the family dinner scene of *Amarcord*. The neurosis is always of others, it is on the screen. But what to say of his own final, dispirited admission, the discovery that "il film di cui ci illudevamo d'essere solo spettatori è la storia della nostra vita" (55)?

The dialogue between Fellini's image of memory and Renzi's act of memory brings to the fore a long-established stance of disavowal toward the past, looked at, but not too closely or seriously, and thus

ultimately ignored. Through Renzi's uncompromising, ironic and yet unwinking gaze, a new field of visibility for our understanding of Fascism is opened. Renzi's text and use of the photographic image gives material evidence to the blindness that Fellini passingly evoked. Against a cinematic image that stands in the place of the act and process of memory, photography emerges as a gateway to memory beyond the fog, ignorance, and confusion that still largely envelops Italy's memory process.

Notes

[1] In this light we can read Fellini's fascination with Jungian psychoanalysis, where the past as a subjective and historical condition is contained/subsumed in the comforting grammar of the archetypes.

[2] Marcus directly engaged the question of memory in *Amarcord*. Beyond the memory content, she analyzes the filmmaking process as a memory process, a process, we could add, that ultimately stands in place of memory.

[3] In Renzi's *L'ombra di Fellini*, see specifically the chapter "Dedicato a Fellini."

[4] Beside *Federico Fellini. La mia Rimini* (1967), Renzi curated *I Clowns*, the screenplay and the set photographs by Franco Pinna of Fellini's film (1970), and *Fellini TV. Block-notes di un regista, I Clowns* (1972).

[5] See, more recently, Alonge.

[6] Recently Kilbourn compellingly compared "il ritorno in patria" in Fellini, Guy Maddin, and W.G. Sebald. In Fellini's attitude toward memory as a way to discard rather than reconstruct, we can measure his distance from the troubled and tortuous engagements of Sebald and Maddin with home.

[7] In the wake of Renzi's collapse, the film was abandoned, but Mario Cecchi Gori got hold of the concept and had Dino Risi direct it as the inevitable commedia all'italiana in 1962 with Gassman and Tognazzi. See Renzi "Al Kinoglaz in camicia nera."

[8] Originally in "Fellini: la storia di un paese negli anni del fascismo" in *Il tempo*, December 20, 1973.

[9] Following Fellini's original articulation, then developed by Bondanella, Minuz says that *Amarcord* highlights "a link between the fascist mentality and the Italian national character" (47) ultimately traceable to "the eternal adolescence of Italians" (47). This for Minuz is where the politics of *Amarcord* is to be located.

[10] Here I borrow a term Fellini used to describe his relation to the metaphysical, quoted in Pacchioni (12).

[11] For the full letter see the *La Stampa* Lo Spettacolo: https://www.film.

it/news/televisione/dettaglio/art/caro-giuliano-13723/. The translation is mine.

[12] Talking about the structure of *La dolce vita*, Costa uses the notions of "fresco," "rotocalco," and "provino" to account for the coexistence of discrete narrative elements that engage the spectator in the interpretation (89-91).

[13] Thus, what is at stake is not a binarism that opposed the fixedness of photography to the creative movement of cinema, as Hay argues (Fellini's camera's demystification of the various icons of the federale, the Grand Hotel, the Rex, etc.), but the questioning of Fascist visuality between stillness and motion.

[14] In this context, we can draw a connection between Aurelio and his insane brother Teo, permanently confined in a mental institution. In the sequence of the family's yearly outing to the countryside with Teo, we gain a similar sense of nature as a liberating dimension beyond the strictures of "normalcy," societal and political.

[15] The identification of the Saint as Saint Vincent Ferrer was suggested by a painting of Domenico Ghirlandaio now in the Museo della Città di Rimini representing San Sebastian, San Vincenzo Ferrer, and San Rocco. The painting was commissioned by the Malatesta family to honor the saints as protectors of Rimini against the 1493 plague that hit the city.

[16] Bragaglia, "Il mestiere che si esercita nelle botteghe accanto al salumaio" (18).

[17] I would like to acknowledge the Cineteca di Bologna for permission to use the photographs in Renzo Renzi's essay.

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Periph*aural* Vision: Sound and the Rhizomatic Re-tuning of Tele-vision in Fellini's *La voce della luna*

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Abstract: This essay argues that Federico Fellini's *La voce della luna* contrasts two differing modes of viewership: a dominant, commercialized mode of vision occasioned by the medium of television, and what the author calls "periph*aural* vision: a creative mode of visual perception that expands and transforms along sonically rhizomatic pathways. The essay notes Fellini's frequent late-career critique of television and identifies in Fellini's critique a kind of "tele-vision" destructive of creative spectatorship. Noting, through close analysis, the importance of the peripheral and the sonic in *La voce della luna*, and relating it to Deleuze and Guattari's notions of the rhizomatic and "far-seeing," the essay reads – and listens to – the film as an opportunity both to denounce "tele-vision" and to guide viewers toward more creative and intuitive modes of perception beyond conventionally cinematic and televisual regimes of the visual.

Keywords: Fellini, *La voce della luna*, film, cinema, vision, seeing, perception, peripheral, television, sound, music, synesthesia, rhizome, Deleuze, creativity.

Federico Fellini's final feature film, *La voce della luna* (*The Voice of the Moon*, 1990), loosely based on the novel *Il poema dei lunatici* ("The lunatics' poem") by Ermanno Cavazzoni, has been largely dismissed by certain Fellini fans and critics as a disappointing conclusion to the director's illustrious career. While, upon its release in Italy, the film was met with a "warm" reception (Kezich 385), many critics in North America and Great Britain, where the film did not receive theatrical release, have panned the film. Edward Guthmann, for example, claims that it is "a rambling, frustrating mess of a film" and "among [Fellini's] weakest." *Time Out* magazine calls the film "a noisome sprawling slab of pretentious nonsense" that is "virtually unwatchable." Federico Pacchioni writes that "*La voce della luna* may indeed demonstrate the risk of redundancy