

La Dolce Vita:

Italy and the Five Senses

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Everyone knows the picture on the cover. The black and white photo of Anita Eckberg - dressed in a low-cut evening gown and her eyes closed in rapture - standing beside the center cascade of Rome's Trevi Fountain. Even those who never see the film, or fall asleep before the television when it comes on at night or early morning, or remember certain scenes but think a three-hour movie is just too long. Or wonder why a fifty-year old film would be of interest to someone who glances at the cover of the April 17, 2009 Friday insert, *il Venerdì* of Rome's national newspaper, *La Repubblica*. So the opening text of the first article itself also begins on the magazine cover, just below the title – the only color there - in bright red capital letters: LA DOLCE VITA. “The birth of a film that prophesized the crisis of today”, the newspaper film critic Marco Cicala writes. “How we were. Actually how we are. And how is it that Fellini understands this fifty years ago”. *La dolce vita* creates one era and anticipates another, Cicala says. “Ours”. A time of dynamic entrepreneurs and innovation on the one hand, and on the other, of individualism that undercuts collective norms, of hedonism, of an ideology of success, of what Pier Pasolini calls *Sviluppo senza progresso* – development without progress – to describe this aspect of the sixties. And to many at the time, Fellini's *La dolce vita* is a faithful documentary of 1950s/1960's Rome.¹

Five years after *La dolce vita* comes out, Fellini tells an interviewer for *Pllayboy* magazine: “I intended it to be a document, not a documentary”. On the other hand, he says in this and other interviews that an artist’s intentions really do not matter, that at best they can help one get started but then they get lost in the creative process. That many works of art become great *despite* the artist’s intentions. He dismisses questions that ask him to explain the “meaning” of his own films. At times he plays with those who ask questions along these lines by giving answers that directly contradict earlier ones. For example, he has particular fun over the years when people ask about the significance of the final beach scene of *La dolce vita*, in which the young waitress/Umbrian angel Paula smiles at Marcello as he dismisses her to rejoin his comrades of the previous night’s orgy and then she turns to smile directly into the camera at us. Does this mean that Marcello is condemned to the shallow sweet life he has been chasing throughout the film or that Paula sees hope for his redemption and rebirth? When Italian film director and producer Enzo Peri asks Fellini in 1961, after *La dolce vita* wins international critical acclaim, “What will be the subject of your next movie?, Fellini answers: “It will be an attempt to study what the little girl says with her enigmatic smile at the end of *La dolce vita*”.ⁱⁱ But Fellini also uses questions about intentions and meaning in the final scenes of *La dolce vita* and other films to make a more general point about his aesthetic values. “I think it is immoral (in the true sense of the word) to tell a story that has a conclusion. Because you cut out your audience the moment you present a solution”. It denies them an opportunity to participate in and fully engage the art. But then again, when interviewers challenge Fellini’s answers that contradict earlier ones that he has given, he can respond as he has over the years: “You must never trust what I say in interviews”, “I can’t be accused of what I say in interviews”, and “I say so many things. But even though I said that, it is true”.ⁱⁱⁱ

There is a timeless quality to the film *La dolce vita* – as there is to all great art. Fellini once said it is about “Rome’s soul, a way of being of a people”. Who live in the Eternal City. One of three films in which he seeks to capture the City’s soul. A city where over the centuries people come , in

different ways and in different meanings, to be reborn. The film could have been about Bangkok (where, by the way, there is now a restaurant called *La Dolce Vita* in the Swissotel Nai Lert Park), Fellini says, or a thousand other cities if he lived there instead. Or Sodom and Gomorrah, he says.^{iv} Some of those who celebrate the enduring quality of *La dolce vita* fifty years later characterize it as a mid-twentieth century film that raises questions relevant to the being of a people in the twenty-first century. Others might be thinking beyond that.

"Your Italy is not our Italia

The title *La dolce vita* has led a separate life from the substance and art of the movie. "The title of the film came to have a meaning exactly the opposite of what I'd intended", Fellini tells the writer Charles Thomas Samuels, author of *Encountering Directors*, in 1971. "I wanted the title to signify not "Easy Life" but "The Sweetness of Life"^v Since its release in 1960, however, audiences outside of Italy – and particularly in the United States – associate the sweet life of the title with the easy life of celebrity and wealth and leisure. With the sweetness of doing nothing – a sensual dream world of *dolce fa niente* where lucky hard-working Americans and other outsiders can enjoy the fruits of their labors. So the title of Fellini's film becomes a brand name for Italy. An invitation to cruise down Rome's via Veneto as the *glitterati* do in the fifties and sixties and to indulge in a guilt-free hedonism of consumption, empty spectacle, sexual freedom (or at least, as in the film, chasing it). *La dolce vita* becomes short hand for outsiders' perception of quality of life in Italy today. An image of a country whose people have mastered the art of living as they have the other arts. . That the fabled beauty of Italy is to be found in the daily life of Italians as well as in its museums and piazzas, opera houses and landscapes. This is the *la dolce vita* favored by travel agents and restaurants. By Starbucks, Italian government offices of tourism, and romantic American films. And in the United States, *la dolce vita* becomes a brand name for selling big-brand products. "A great cup of coffee should transport you", reads a poster I see in a Los Angeles coffee shop a few years ago. "Ours could take you to Italy. Use your card often enough and you could win a Vespa tour of Italy, it says. "Another way the Starbuck's Card can help you discover la dolce vita". Or the gold letters on the cardboard carrying handle of the six-pack of beer I buy in Plymouth Massachusetts: "Discover la Dolce Vita with Birra Moretti" And Moretti's American web address, where you can click on "La Dolce Vita" (the other two options are "Italian Lifestyle" and "Italian Passion"). "Moretti embodies what we call La Dolce Vita" the website tells you. And "La Dolce Vita is all about living the good life, full of

pleasure and indulgence". A few months ago, the same website notes that "it is only natural that Birra Moretti is the official beer sponsor of "La Dolce Vita" the name of the Italian Festival in London in March, 2011.^{vi} This mandolins-and sunsets-and spaghetti image of Italy is disseminated by outside visitors to an Italy- without - Italians who are not in the country long enough or see only Central Italy and are therefore unaware of the structural problems it faces in the 21st century. The "spaghetizzazione" of Italy, critics call it.^{vii} First, you have to understand one thing, *Corriere dell Sera* journalist Beppe Severgnini says in a recent book, *La Testa degli Italiani*, in which he attempts to explain Italy and everyday Italian life to foreign readers. "Your Italy is not our Italia", he writes. "Italy is a type of soft drug peddled to the world as Italy. A predictable world of hills and sunsets, olives and lemons, white wine and girls with black hair. L'Italia, instead, is a labyrinth. Fascinating but complicated. A place one risks entering and wandering about aimlessly for years but having a world of fun".^{viii} Pier Paolo Pasolini, who worked with Fellini on *La Dolce Vita* and other projects, criticized the film for what he considered its weak ideology, arid Catholicism, and portrayal of Roman decadence. But he also said about all those people who Fellini has wander aimlessly about in circles, and then spirals that carry them deeper into the labyrinths of Rome, "I have never seen a film in which all the characters are so full of the joy of being".^{ix} Unfortunately, there is a price to pay for all of this.

The Sweet Life of *dolce fa niente*

Under the title, "Addio, Dolce Vita", Europe editor John Peet and his colleagues write an extensive review of the quality of life in early 21st century Italy in the November 26, 2005 British financial weekly *The Economist*. A dark image of Italy quite different than the "soft drug" of Severgnini's book. "At first blush, life in Italy still seems sweet enough.", Peet writes. And he pays tribute to the country's stunning landscapes and beautiful and historic city centers, great cultural treasures and wonderful food and wine. "Yet beneath this sweet surface, many things have turned sour". The text of the article points to many of same symptoms of decline seen in the 2009 article in *il Venerdì*: a slow rate of economic growth, low rank in international competitiveness, a skyrocketing cost of living, a growing budget deficit, a blocked political system, and high unemployment – particularly among those in their twenties and thirties. Their also is a subtext of the article, conveyed, for example, through speculation that the fate of 21st century Italy might resemble the decline of Venice at the end of the 18th century brought on by not taking advantage of its centuries-long monopoly in trade with the East and ends with the Venice of today: "little more than a tourist

attraction, however beguiling". The pictures that accompany the article convey this subtext even more directly. Just below "Addio Dolce Vita" on the magazine cover a marble statue stands before a washed brown stucco wall, the mouth and chin of its classical face partly hidden by a temporary screen of rough boards. Pollution and wanton neglect have darkened to nearly black the tight coils of hair and mottled the nose and brow in shades of gray. Above the opening lines of the text inside, a quarter-page photograph shows elegant couples sitting at white-clothed tables in the softly lighted warm colors of an Italian piazza. Behind them, on the awning of the restaurant is its name: "Caffe Dolce Vita Ristorante". The subtext of the article is that there is a price to pay for the sweet life. And that the meaning of the term *la dolce vita* implicit in the subtext is the sweet life of *dolce fa niente* – of doing nothing, of "the easy life" that Fellini says is the opposite of what he means the title of his film to signify.^x

"Nature's Darling and the Elder Sister of all other countries" is how a young Englishman, Roman Catholic priest, tutor of English nobles, and Italophile with five extended stays in Italy puts it. Then he qualifies it with a moral judgment about the easy life similar to the subtext of the *The Economist* article. "Receiving such gracious looks from the Sun and Heaven", he writes, "that if there be a fault in Italy it is that Mother Nature has cockered her too much, even to make her become Wanton". Lassels writes this in *The Voyage of Italy* – a book which gives birth to the concept of the Grand Tour. In 1670. This stereotype of an immoral Italy and a hedonistic indolent people "who would rather bask in the sun or play *bocce* than put in an honest day's work" is a theme that Professor A.M. Canepa finds in a survey of British travel writing across five centuries – one that is particularly strong in the course of the 17th century when Italy loses its superior economic position relative to England. An era that Canepa shows to be a long-term pattern of English stereotypes of Italians and Italian stereotypes of the English (arrogant, greedy, ambitious, overly committed to work, barbarians), which reflects the relative economic position of the two countries.^{xi}

"That Other Great Director"

In 1980 Fellini has a series of meetings in New York with C.B.S. network executives who want him to create a thirty-three program television series of Dante's *Inferno*. Fellini insists that the characters of the damned be nude, and the proposed project collapses when market surveys show the American public would not accept this. "All my life I have been pestered by these extravagant offers", Fellini says. "You can't say no; you are Italian, Dante was an Italian, and Americans appreciate your work".^{xii} But Fellini does say no. And one reason, as many Fellini scholars point out,

is that Dante's writings already infuse his body of films. A noted Dante scholar, film expert and friend of Fellini, Professor Jacqueline Risset tells of going with Fellini to hear a lecture on Dante and psychoanalysis at the University of Rome. After a while she turns to Fellini and whispers: "*Ma non senti come tutto questo ti assomiglia, Federico?*" – "Don't you find it similar to you, to your work, Federico?"^{xiii} University of California Professor Marguerite Wallers says that Dante's *Commedia* presents itself "not as a text to be submitted to, but to be walked around, lived in, interacted with" – words that apply as well to the structure of Fellini's *La dolce vita*, I believe, and good advice to those who watch the film. And years later, Fellini himself suggests that the aesthetic of *La dolce vita* takes on an ethical sense that seems closer to Dante Alighieri - "that other great director," - than to the pleasure seeking of the contemporary myth.^{xiv}

La dolce vita in Dante's Paradiso

In 1319, Dante Alighieri writes a letter to Francesco della Scala, his patron and former host in Verona. He encloses the first canto of *Paradiso* and an exegesis of the entire *Comedy* – whose purpose, he writes is "to remove those living in this life from a state of misery and to bring them to a state of happiness".^{xv} "*La dolce vita*" is how Dante three times in *Paradiso* characterizes the state of utmost bliss to be found in heaven and which awaits those who read or hear and understand the *Comedy*. "The first is *Paradiso* IV:35, in which Beatrice explains to Dante the presence in the lowest heavenly sphere of two nuns who have been forced to leave the convent and to marry - one is the Florentine Piccarda Donati, a fourth cousin of Dante's wife Gemma Donati. Although they are in the lowest heaven, Beatrice says, they "*differentemente han dolce vita*" – "share one same sweet life" as those in higher heavens. (*Paradiso* IV, 35-36). She then explains a central theme of the *Commedia*: the doctrine of Free Will, without which there would be neither narrative of nor purpose to the pilgrim's journey.^{xvi} We hear *la dolce vita* again in the sixth sphere of heaven (Jupiter) in *Paradiso* XX, where the pilgrim encounters a vision of justice in the form of a giant eagle made up of souls, including "just" pagans, who sing a song that is incomprehensible to Dante. Closest to the Eagle's beak is the Roman Emperor Trajan (A.D.E. 98-117). The pilgrim reads his story of pride and humility in the beautiful

stone carving of *Purgatorio* X:73-93. Trajan, a righteous pagan, is freed from the permanence of *Limbo* by the intercession of Pope Gregory (590-604), who is moved by the story of the Emperor, who a poor widow stops as he leads his troops to battle and begs him to avenge the death of her son. Saying that Justice wills him to comply and pity holds him to that spot, Trajan does what the widow asks. Trajan spends four centuries in *Limbo* before the Pope's intervention brings him to *Purgatory*, where he slowly works his way up the mountain to *Paradise*. And now he knows "*Quanto caro costa non sequir Cristo per l'esperienza di questa dolce vita e de l'opposta* – ""And now he knows from living this sweet life, and having lived its opposite how dear it costs a man to fail to follow Jesus Christ". Dante gives substance to the concept of *la dolce vita* through these *canti* of *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*. One in which Justice and humility are essential values.^{xvii} *La dolce vita* appears for a third time in *Paradiso* XXV: 91-93, in the pilgrim's response to St. James' question that he explain Hope, which motivates humans to love the good on earth. Dante responds with a reference to the Old Testament Prophet Isaiah (61:7, 61:10):^{xviii}

*Dice Isaia che ciascuna vestita
Ne la sua terra fia di doppia vesta –
E la sua terra è questa dolce vita*

Isaiah testifies that every man
In his homeland shall wear a double raiment,
And his homeland is this sweet life of bliss.

Canto XXV is among those Dante writes late in the ten year period he writes the *Commedia* (1310–1320) – one of the final thirteen *canti* missing at the time of his death in September, 1321. He is fifty-six years old and been in exile from Florence now for nearly twenty years. He has twice refused the City's offer of amnesty for exiles who return. The first, an amnesty of May, 1315 grants amnesty to exiles on the condition that they participate in a ceremony of penitence known as the *oblatio*, and pay a fine. When Dante rejects and denounces a second amnesty offer in October, 1315, the city of Florence confiscates his property and condemns him and his three sons to be executed by cutting off their heads.^{xix} Yet even as he nears death and after years of writing that have "made me lean from laboring so long " - as he puts it in the opening lines of *Canto* XXV:3 - Dante holds out hope that

“those cruel hearts that exile me from my sweet fold where I grew up a lamb” will change their voice. Then, “I shall return, a poet, and at my own baptismal font assume the laurel wreath”. Dante’s expresses his own hope of someday returning to the sweet fold of Florence in a *Canto* on the importance of Hope to the sweet life on earth and in heaven. Beatrice intercedes and explains to St. James that it is Hope that has made it possible for Dante to ascend to *Paradise*. The entire *canto* is one of Hope: Beatrice, in the form of a light from heaven that moves toward the pilgrim, tells St. James that there is no one “with greater hope” than Dante (52-53), the pilgrim says that “Hope is sure expectancy of future bliss” (66-67) and quotes *Psalms 9:10*: “Let them have hope in Thee who know Thy name” (73). And as the pilgrim utters the concluding last of his reference to Isaiah and the sweet life of earth and heaven he hears a choir sing to the dancing spheres the hymn of hope “*Sperent in te*”^{xx}. Although some critics of Fellini’s *La dolce vita* point to Marcello’s seeming despair and sense of hopelessness in the sweet life of the fifties and sixties at the end of the film, others (including me) see signs of hope in the young waitress/Umbrian angel Paula – in her smiles and excitement about her future when she first meets Marcello in the beachside restaurant and in her enigmatic smile in the beach sequence at the end of the film. The bright lights that both illuminate and blind in the Isaiah *canto* of Hope, *Paradiso XX*, are also a dominant visual motif of *La dolce vita*: the bursts of light from headlights, flashbulbs, torches, bicycle lights, arc lights, search lights, floodlights, candles, flashlights, and spotlights, which begins early on in the film in the sequence where the headlights of Maddalena’s car shine directly at the camera.^{xxi}

Italy and the Five Senses

“I led you here with skill and intellect,” Virgil tells the pilgrim at the end of *Purgatorio XXVII*: 130-142. – his last words in the *Commedia* and just before the pilgrim enters the Garden of Eden. “From here on, let your pleasure be your guide”. . . “Behold the sun shining upon your brow, behold the tender grass, the flowers, the trees . . . You may sit here or wander, as you please. . . Now is your will upright, wholesome and free, and not to heed its pleasure would be wrong”. And Beatrice explains to the pilgrim in *Paradiso IV*: 35 - shortly after he hears the story of Piccarda Donati and the Empress Constance in the lowest heavenly sphere - “I speak as one must speak to minds like yours which apprehend only from sense perception what later it makes fit for intellection.”^{xxii} Today, any discussion of Italy and the five senses is likely to revert to a *dolce fa niente* sense of *la dolce vita* evident in the writings of Italophiles from Longefellow to Frances Mayes. “The beautifiers”, Leonardo

Sciascia calls them, “italianizzante” outside visitors.^{xxiii} In November, 1984, Italo Calvino outlines a short story about the sense of sight for a collection of tales to be called *I Cinque Sensi*, “The Five Senses”.^{xxiv} He has already finished stories about three of the senses: smell (written in 1972), taste (1981), and hearing (1984) when he sketches a few ideas for the one on sight. But eleven months later, before he gets a chance to create a story from the outline, he dies.^{xxv} Five months earlier, Harvard University invites him to present the Charles Eliot Norton Poetry Lectures for the academic year, 1985-86. For a while, then, toward the end of 1984, Calvino outlines his ideas about the sense of sight to fit within the frame of the projected book of stories on the five senses and also starts work on a lecture on vision and visibility - one of the six qualities of value to fit within the Norton Lecture series frame: “Six Lessons for the New Millenium”. After Calvino dies at a hospital in Siena in September, 1985, his wife Esther finds five completed lectures sitting on his writing desk ready to be put in a suitcase for his trip to America – each on a particular value of literature and endangered quality of human existence: lightness, quickness, exactitude, visibility, and multiplicity; a sixth, on consistency, was to have been written in Cambridge. Three years later, the lectures are published under the title: *Lezioni americane: Sei proposte per il prossimo millenio*. The ostensible purpose of the lessons or memos is to teach what Calvino has learned in a lifetime of writing. But they are more than this, Professor Gian Carlo Roscioni says in the first edition of the book: they are also ruminations on the careless, distracted nature of human existence. Here is how Calvino begins the fourth memo, about the sense of sight and the visible world, “*Visibilità*”: “There is a verse of Dante in *Purgatorio* (XVII, 25) that says “Then poured down inside a high fantasy”. My lecture this evening will take off from this observation: fantasy is a place where it rains inside”.^{xxvi} Calvino puts visibility on a short list of human values to be saved because he believes the flood of prefabricated television, film, and computer images of modern life diminish the human faculty of seeing what is not there. The ability to evoke, with eyes shut, images that crystallize into an *icastic* form (Calvino uses the Italian adjective, *icastico*, which he points out does not exist in English) of sharp, incisive, memorable visual images. All of Calvino’s stories, he says, have as their source a visual image, charged with meaning not yet known or expressed in verbal form. For Calvino, this “mental cinema” of the imagination is a way that individuals can attain a knowledge that is outside themselves, beyond the subjective.^{xxvii} Calvino writes in the Norton lecture on visibility about a mode of vision that emerges directly and from within, but dies before he is able to write his story on sight for the book of stories on the five senses. But we see in his notes for the unwritten story on sight for “*I Cinque Sensi*,” his stories in *Palomar*, in interviews, essays, and other stories that Calvino’s philosophy of the eye encompasses all forms of

vision: corporeal vision of the senses, spiritual (or imaginative), and intellectual. Three ways of seeing, which together form the Total Vision of Dante's "The Divine Comedy".^{xxviii}

Tullio Kezich calls *La dolce vita* a second liberation. An invitation to go on holiday with eyes and ears wide open". Fellini says his films are about the process of liberation of the spectator. "white magic" when it works, he says.^{xxix} The Italian novelist Antonio Tabucchi recalls growing up in the small town of Vecchiano north of Pisa and believing that after the disaster of war, Italian life would continue to be like that of the Risorgimento. But "*La dolce vita* opened my eyes", he says. "I was wrong. I understood nothing. Fellini understood everything. He had already intuited what we were on the way to becoming: the media, the fake scoop, the spectacularization of nothing". The dark side of the boom.^{xxx}

ⁱ ("documentary of 1950s/1960's Rome"), Marco Cicala, "*La Dolce Vita*," *il Venerdì di Repubblica*, April 17, 2009, copertina e pp. 13-14, 16., (*sviluppo e progresso*), Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società, Scritti Corsari (1973-1975)*., Walter Siti (ed), Milan: Mondadori, 1999, ("modernizzazione senza sviluppo") Giulio Sapelli, *Modernizzazione senza sviluppo, il capitalismo secondo Pasolini*, Milan, Mondadori, 2005.

ⁱⁱ ("at the end of *La dolce vita*"), Enzo Peri, "Federico Fellini: An Interview" (1961), Bert Cardullo (ed.), *Federico Fellini Interviews*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006, p. 22.

ⁱⁱⁱ Federico Fellini, in Cardullo (ed.), *Interviews*, ("You must never trust"), Irving R. Levine (1966), p. 66., ("I can't be accused"), Charles Thomas Samuels (1971), (p. 94., ("I say so many things"), Charles Thomas Samuels (1971), p. 104, ("document not documentary"), *Playboy Interview* (1966), p. 36., ("Immoral to tell a story that has a conclusion"), Gideon Bachman (1959), p.13.

^{iv} ("Or Sodom and Gomorrah"), "Playboy Interview: Federico Fellini" (1966), in Bert Cardullo (ed.), *Federico Fellini Interviews*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006, p. 36. (*Playboy* 13, no. 2 (February 1966): pp. 55-66.

^v ("not "Easy Life" but "The Sweetness of Life"), Charles Thomas Samuels, "Federico Fellini: An Interview" (1971), Bert Cardullo (ed.), *Federico Fellini Interviews*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006, p. 101. (*Encountering Directors*, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1972).

^{vi} (Italian beer festival) <http://www.morettibeer.com> (accessed November 8, 2010).

^{vii} (critics call it) Fondazione Censis 36 *Rapporto sulla Situazione Sociale del Paese 2002*, Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2002, p. XVIII, (pp. XV-XVIII), Fondazione Censis, "Rapporto Censis, italiani delusi "E il paese ora rischia la deriva", *La Repubblica*, December 7, 2002, p. 18.,) Fondazione Censis 37 *Rapporto sulla Situazione Sociale del Paese 2003*, Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2003, pp. XIII-XXIII., 38° *Rapporto sulla Situazione Sociale del Paese 2004* (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2004), pp. XIII-XXIV.

^{viii} ("having a world of fun") Beppe Severgnini *La Testa degli Italiani* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2005), p. 14.

^{ix} ("full of the joy of being") Pier Paolo Pasolini, "*L'irrazionalismo cattolico di Fellini*," "*Filmcritica*", 1960, pp. 80-84, cited in Pier Marco De Santi, *La Dolce Vita Scandolo a Roma Palma d'oro a Cannes*, (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2004) p.61. and in Peter Bondanella, *The Cinema of Federico Fellini* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, (1992), p. 149.

^x (the title of his film to signify”), John Peet, “Addio, Dolce Vita,” *The Economist*, November 26, 2005, p.3.

^{xi} (“to make her become Wanton”) Richard Lassels, *The Voyage of Italy, Part I*, Paris: Vincent du Moutier, 1670, pp. 1-2. (“economic position of the two countries”.) A.M. Canepa “From Degenerate Scoundrel to Noble Savage: Italian Stereotypes in 18th Century British Travel Literature”, *English miscellany: a symposium of history, literature and the arts*, Rome: British Council, Volume 22 (1971), pp. 107-146. Fellini’s *La dolce vita* comes out during the “Economic Miracle” (1958-1963) – a period of rapid economic development and expansion spurred on by a series of reforms initiated in 1948 that includes increased government intervention in the economy as well as an easing of restrictions on private capital formation and business. The “Economic Miracle”, in turn provides the basis of Italy’s joining the short list major economic powers and *il sorpasso* of 1987, when the GDP of Italy surpasses that of Great Britain. See, for example: Mario B. Mignone, *Italy Today: Facing the Challenge of a New Millennium*, New York, Peter Lang, 2008, pp. 23, 68, 158., Martin J. Bull and James Newell, *Italian Politics: Adjustment Under Duress* (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press, 2005, Chapter 2, “The Post-War Economy and Macro-Economic Policy Making, pp. 20-38., Paul Ginsborg, *Italy and Its Discontents: Family, Civil Society, State 1980-2001*, London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 2001, Chapter 2, “The Italian Economy: Constraints and Achievements”, pp. 1-29.

Dino Risi’s film, *il Sorpasso* (1962) provides a *dolce fa niente* and tragic perspective of Italy in the fifties and sixties – Peter Bondanella calls it an Italian *Easy Rider*. Bondanella cites the English title of Risi’s film, “The Easy Life”, in which the price to pay for the sweet life in this sense is death by automobile accident of one of the two main characters and the end of the imagined sweet life of the car’s owner. “Disaster lurks beneath the surface of the newly found Italian prosperity represented by the automobile” Professor Bondanella writes in *Italian Cinema*. Fellini is certainly aware of the English title of Risi’s film when he tells Charles Thomas Samuels in 1971 that “the Easy Life” is the opposite of what he means to signify by *la dolce vita* in his own film. See Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present*, New York: Continuum, 2001, 3d edition, p. 155.

^{xii} (“appreciate your work”) Federico Fellini, in Guido Fink, “‘Non Senti Come Tutto Questo Ti Assomiglia?’ Fellini’s Infernal Circles”, Amilcare A. Iannucci (ed.), *Dante, Cinema and Television*, Toronto, Toronto University Press, 2004, p. 167., (“American public would not accept this”) Tulio Kezich, *FEDERICO Fellini, la vita e i film*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 2007, pp. 335-336.

^{xiii} (“turns to Fellini and whispers.”) Guido Fink, “‘Non Senti Come Tutto Questo Ti Assomiglia?’ Fellini’s Infernal Circles”, Amilcare A. Iannucci (ed.), *Dante, Cinema and Television*, Toronto, Toronto University Press, 2004, p. 167-168. See also Marguerite R. Waller, “Back to the Future: Dante and the Languages of Post-war Italian Film”, in the same volume, pp. 74-96.

^{xiv} (“who watch the film”.) Marguerite R. Waller, “Back to the Future: Dante and the Languages of Post-war Italian Film”, Amilcare A. Iannucci, *Dante, Cinema, Television*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2004, p. 75, (pp. 74-96). (“of the contemporary myth”.) Oriana Fallaci, *The Egotists* (Chicago: Regnery, 1968), p.196, quoted in John Welle, “Fellini’s Use of Dante in *La Dolce Vita*, in Peter Bondanella and Cristina Degli-Esposti (eds.), *Perspectives of Federico Fellini* (NY: G.K. Hall & Co. (Macmillan), 1993), n.5, p. 117.

^{xv} (“state of happiness”) Epistle to Francesco della Scala (Can Grande), quoted in Barbara Reynolds, *Dante The Poet, the Political Thinker, the Man* (Emerville, CA: Shoemaker & Hoard, Avalon Publishing Group, Inc., 2006), p. 336 and her discussion of the authenticity of the letter on p. 453 in footnote four. Scholars continue to debate the date and authenticity of this letter, *Epistola ad Canem Grande* or *Epistle X*, which is written in Latin in the formal style of a public lecture. Paget Toynbee says the letter was written not later than 1318, and Barbara Reynolds acknowledges the debate by expressing the year as 1319 in her chronology. (Paget Toynbee, *Dante Alighieri His Life and Works* (Mineola, New York: Dover Editions, 2005), p. 250, and Reynolds, p. 420. Teodolinda Barolini, in *The Undivine Comedy*:

Detheologizing Dante (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 5-10, analyzes how the long-standing debate about the authenticity of the *Epistola* is central to the fundamental question all readers of *The Divine Comedy* must face: what to make of Dante's insistence that he is telling us the truth. See also: Robert Hollander, *Dante's Epistle to Cangrande* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1993).

^{xvi} Dante and Fellini scholars, including those cited here, have written substantive and stylistic comparisons of Dante (*La Vita Nuova* and *Convivio*, as well as the *Commedia*) and Fellini over the years.^{xvi} See, for example: Gian Piero Brunetta, "Padre Dante Che Sei Nel Cinema," in Gianfranco Casadio, *Dante nel Cinema* (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1996), p. 22, and Fellini, *Block-notes di un regista* (TV, 1969) as well as the other sources noted here. So I point out some of the parallels I see between the film and Dante in these footnotes on the themes in *Paradiso* but am also aware of the risk of turning such a discussion into a "match the two categories" section of a written exam (or in the terms of pop American history: President Lincoln's private secretary was named Kennedy, and President Kennedy's, Lincoln). So here is one on Free Will. Fellini says "the necessity to choose" would be "exactly" the meaning of the film *La dolce vita*". (Federico Fellini, in Donald P. Costello, Chapter 4 "La Dolce Vita", *Fellini's Road* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1984, p. 34.). The choices that Marcello faces structure the film. See also: Tulio Kezich, *FEDERICO Fellini, la vita e I film*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 2007, pp. 200-202.). And the last words of Maddalena, who rejects's Marcello's declaration of his love for her by eagerly embracing the aristocrat Bofferio in the hidden shell -fountain chamber at the party in *Bossano di Sutri*: "One cannot have things both ways. One must choose the one or the other", she says. "And I have lost the power of choosing. . . "And then again, I was never able to choose. I'm nothing but a whore. That's all I am. I'll never be anything but a whore" (Screenplay, *La dolce vita*, translated by Oscar DeLiso and Bernard Shir-Cliff, New York: Ballantine Books, 1961, p. 194.)

^{xvii} Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio* X:76-93 and *Paradiso* XX:43-48, and *Dante, The Divine Comedy: Volume 2: Purgatory*, Mark Musa translation, New York: Penguin Books, 1985, pp. 110-111., and *Volume 3: Paradise*, 1986, p. 237. ("Justice and humility are essential values")., Cambridge University Professor Barbara provides a brief overview of Dante's much studied and debated sense of Justice in Chapter 47, "Justice Unfathomed", *Dante, The Poet, the Political Thinker, the Man*, Emeryville, CA, Shoemaker & Hoard, 2006, pp. 359-356. Fellini 's position that his films have no conclusions because it is important to leave it to viewers to draw their own and make moral judgments is evident in *La dolce vita*. And although the film is sometimes characterized as the trial of Marcello Rubini, it comes across, as Suzanne Budgen points out "not as a trial seen by a judge but rather by an accomplice" (Suzanne Budgen, *Fellini*, London, British Film Institute, 1966, p. 99., cited in Peter Bondanella, *The Cinema of Federico Fellini*, Princeton, New Jersey, 1992, p. 149.)., And Tullio Kezich discusses Fellini's intent to avoid moral judgment and portray life in the film as part of the broader human comedy in *FEDERICO Fellini, la vita e I film*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 2007, pp. 200-202. The value of humility is perhaps best represented in the film, in its negation: pride, which leads Steiner to kill his son and daughter to protect them from what he sees as the empty life of the present and future and then to kill himself.

^{xviii} ("Old testament prophet Isaiah".) *Isaiah* 61: 7, 5: ""Therefore in your land you shall possess a double portion; yours shall be an everlasting joy"., and *Isaiah* 61: 10, 10: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall exult in God; for he has clothed me with garden of salvation.". ("this sweet life of bliss"), Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso* XXV: 91-93.,and *Dante, The Divine Comedy, Volume 3: Paradise*, Mark Musa translation, New York: Penguin Books, 1986, p. 298.

^{xix} ("and pay a fine".) Barbara Reynolds, *Dante, The Poet, the Political Thinker, the Man*, Emeryville, CA, Shoemaker & Hoard, 2006, p. 380., ("cutting off their heads".), R.W.B. Lewis, *Dante*, New York: Viking, Penguin, 2001), pp. 161-163. Lewis notes the similarities between Dante's conviction and

condemnation of death in March, 1302 by the Black Guelphs who control Florence and the City's order of October, 1315 (p. 11).

^{xx} ("assume the laurel wreath"), (Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso XXV:1-9*, *Dante, The Divine Comedy*, Volume 3: *Paradise*, Mark Musa translation, New York: Penguin Books, 1986, p. 295., ("Sperent in te". Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso XXV:98*, *Dante, The Divine Comedy*, Volume 3: *Paradise*, Mark Musa translation, New York: Penguin Books, 1986, p. 298., Barbara Reynolds, Chapter 50: "Faith, Hope, and Love, *Dante, The Poet, the Political Thinker, the Man*, Emeryville, CA, Shoemaker & Hoard, 2006, pp. 377 – 383.

^{xxi} ("directly at the camera"). See the discussions about the significance of light in *La dolce vita* in Donald P. Costello, , Chapter 4 "La Dolce Vita", *Fellini's Road* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1984, p. 40., and in Peter Bondanella, *The Cinema of Federico Fellini* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, (1992), p. 14

^{xxii} (would be wrong"), Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio XXVII:130-141.*, *Dante, The Divine Comedy*, Volume 2,, Mark Musa translation, New York: Penguin Books, 1985, p. 294, ("fit for intellection"), Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso, IV:40-42*, *Dante, The Divine Comedy*, Volume 3: *Paradise*, Mark Musa translation, New York: Penguin Books, 1986, p. 45. Also see the discussions on these *canti* in John Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1986, pp. 83-4, 211-212., and Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante*, Princeton New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1992, pp277n. 30, and pp. 183-7.

^{xxiii} ("italianizzante outside visitors"). "Leonardo Sciascia, *Porte aperte* (Milano:Adelphi, 1987, p. 97. ("Simone è una francese italianizzante, . . .È una specie di repubblica, lei sa benissimo, con Stendhal primo console. Amano di noi quel che noi di noi stessi, più detestiamo. . . ." Leonardo Sciascia, *Sicily as Metaphor* (Marlboro,VT: The Marlboro Press, 1994), p. 129. Leonardo Sciascia, *L'adorabile Stendhal* (Milano:Adelphi, 2003), pp. 130, 133., and Leonardo Sciascia, *Sicily as Metaphor* (Marlboro, Vermont, The Marlboro Press, 1994, pp.97, 128-9.

^{xxiv} ("the five senses"), Italo Calvino *I cinque sensi, Romanzi e Racconti*, Voume 3 Milano, Meridiana, Mondadri, 1994., (Italo Calvino, *Lezioni americane: Sei proposte per il prossimo millennio* (Milano: Mondadori, 2005), p. 91), 65, 91-110.

^{xxviii} ("Jon Thiem, "Borges, Dante, and the Poetics of Total Vision," *Comparative Literature*, Volume 40, Number 2 (Spring 1988), pp. 97-121. St. Augustine's commentary on *Genesis* is the primary source of this typology of three forms of vision, according to John Freccero, in *Dante, The Poetics of Vision* ((Cambridge,MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 93. For another perspective see: Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 19, pp. 148-165.

^{xxx} ("spectacularization of nothing")., Antonio Tabucchi, Marco Cicala, "La Dolce Vita," *il Venerdì di Repubblica*, April 17, 2009, pp. 13-14.

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