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Outside Television: Federico Fellini on Exposure and Attention in the Age of Abundance

MATILDE NARDELLI

Abstract

Federico Fellini had a long, rich and vexed relationship with television. He famously once dismissed it as 'something that furnished a corner of the house'. Yet, as television's diffusion grew exponentially in the second half of the twentieth century, he could not himself remain untouched by its ubiquity. Though adopting an increasingly critical stance towards the medium, and its commercialization, in the course of his career, Fellini nevertheless made several films for television and even, in the last decade of his life, a number of commercials for it. This article seeks to deepen the understanding of Fellini's ambivalent position as a critic of television by looking at his late films. Less well known than his earlier works, these films crucially thematize the coincident developments of a globally plentiful televisual era – its age of 'abundance' taking off in the 1980s – and, more locally, of the commercialization of Italian broadcasting. *The Voice of the Moon* (1990) and *Ginger and Fred* (1986) in particular are intent on addressing a complex pervasiveness of television, as a form literally and figuratively 'in the air'. Rooted both in the medium's physical materiality and infrastructure and in its less palpable economic and socio-cultural machinery, this perceived – if not actual – pervasiveness of television crystallizes in these films in a quality that this article will describe as 'outsideness'. Television is not simply presented as a form that has transcended what might have been its traditional domestic boundaries and spilled out into public spaces but also, more subtly, as a form whose materiality and organization contribute to its presence and diffusion 'outside'. While Fellini's cinema is generally seen as playfully – and obsessively – self-reflexive, here it will be foregrounded as a significant site of wider media reflection and critique. By connecting his work with critical perspectives about television, as well as newer networked media, the present discussion also seeks to consider how Fellini's late films began to articulate concerns about immersion, exposure and the economies of attention that were soon to come more forcefully into the foreground of critical debates in media theory with the transition to digital, online forms. In so doing, as well as contributing to Fellini scholarship, this article also seeks to insert his work within debates on television and theories of media as, itself, a critical intervention.

Federico Fellini's *La voce della luna/The Voice of the Moon* (1990), follows the meanderings of Ivo (Roberto Benigni) and other 'lunatics' (from the Latin/Italian word for moon, *'luna'*) in a media-saturated world. About half-way through the film there is an odd televisual encounter (Fig. 1).[1] Ivo is sitting with one of his wandering companions (Paolo Villaggio's Gonnella) in a deserted field at night. They stare into the camera and their poses suggest that, however distractedly, they might be watching something. Yet, the very thing one might expect them to be watching, the giant television set in the distance, is right behind them and does not seem to be displaying anything other than the letters 'TV' in black.[2]

What makes this scene odd is not only the size of the television set, but also the pervasive sense of things being out of place. This scene is in stark contrast with the classic representation of television as a domestic technology inaugurated in the age of broadcasting. It is an image whose currency and familiarity arguably persists (and not only as a visual memory) even in an era in which 'television' may often be experienced as a non-broadcast form via mobile platforms and devices.[3] One such representation opens one of several volumes dedicated to television 'after TV' that have appeared in the last two decades. 'We have probably all seen images like this', the editors write: a family gathered in the living room, parents or adults on the sofa, children on the floor, all turned 'expectantly towards the TV'.[4] But the still familiar image evoked in this description is reversed in Fellini's scene: the characters sit outside, rather than in, and look away from the TV instead of at it.

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[1] The film is based on Ermanno Cavazzoni's novel *Il poema dei lunatici* ['*The Poem of the Lunatics'*] (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1987).

[2] In fact, the characters have just fled a firework display in the town, in whose red glow they are initially, briefly, bathed as they face in that direction. But the scene works hard at showing the characters' withdrawal and isolation from that spectacle: a wind blows in a mist (a recurrent visual motif in Fellini's cinema); the firework's noise, still logically within earshot of the characters and audible in the preceding shots, is eliminated from the scene; Ivo underlines the special kind of 'silence'. In this context, the TV set's presence seems even more significant.

[3] Juliette Gartside, 'The Living Room Makes a Comeback, and It Has Technology to Thank', *The Guardian,* 1 August 2013 < https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/aug/01/living-room-television-comeback-families-mobile-technology > [Accessed June 2023].

[4] Graeme Turner and Jinna Tay, eds, *Television Studies after TV: Understanding Television in the Post-Broadcast Era (*London: Routledge, 2009), p.1. See also: James Bennett, 'Introduction: Television as Digital Media', in James Bennett and Niki Strange, eds., *Television as Digital Media* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 1-27; Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson, eds, *Television after TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Hanne Bruun, *Rescheduling Television in the Digital Era* (London: Routledge, 2019); Amanda Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized,* 2nd ed. (New York: New York University, 2014).

The Voice of the Moon, Fellini's last film, was released in 1990. In that same year, in his contribution to the influential collection *Logics of Television,* Stephen Heath asked: 'Can anyone in our societies be outside television?'[5] The question, asked as television was entering what scholars have described as its 'phase of abundance' or 'era of plenty' was, of course, rhetorical.[6] By 1990, television was so abundant and widespread that it was hard to avoid, with its growing number of channels and its programming pushing into the night. Even if not actively watching television, one was likely, at the very least, to have been aware of its presence via social exchanges or other media. As Heath put it, the extensive availability of television had brought the medium into 'a seamless equivalence with social life'.[7] While Fellini's film and Heath's essay were not in direct dialogue, the director's scene can, here, be imagined as an answer to Heath. To the question 'can anyone … be outside television?', it visually (and figuratively), seems to say: 'no, because television is, itself, outside'. While, in the film's story, Ivo and Gonnella have just fled from a firework display in the town square, it seems that television is a form of spectacle from which they cannot withdraw or escape. In this sense, it does not really matter whether the characters are facing away from the screen, or even if the screen is on to begin with. In relation to a medium characterised by 'flow' and (near) 'on tap' availability, and which is increasingly covering the role of 'bystander' or companion in everyday life, they are still *not outside of* television.[8] Rather than watching television, they are watched over by it. The giant TV set overlooking the characters needs not even be a concrete diegetic presence. It may be a hallucinated symbolization of what, with the arguably even more deeply media-saturated landscape of the early twenty-first century in mind, media scholars have described as the 'impression' or 'effect of ubiquity' of mass media and their networks. Despite the everydayness, banality and, as Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker put it, the 'ambient' or 'environmental' distribution of mass-media

[5] Stephen Heath, 'Representing Television', in Patricia Mellencamp, ed., *Logics of Television* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 267-303, p. 283 cited.
[6] Milly Buonanno, *The Age of Television* (Bristol: Intellect, 2008), p. 21. What John Ellis, in *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty* (London: IB Tauris, 2000), describes as television's 'era of plenty' pertains in his account to the turn into the 21st century and digital services, the preceding era of channel and programme expansion he terms of 'availability' (see esp. chapters 5 and 11).
[7] Heath, 'Representing Television', p. 267.
[8] Elaborating on Raymond Williams's famous mid-1970s concept of televisual 'flow', Michelle Henning has more recently described online media such as photo streams on social media platforms as available 'on tap', see her 'Image Flow: Photography on Tap', *photographies* 11/2-3 (Summer 2018), pp. 133-148. Mauro Wolf, in 'The Evolution of Television Language in Italy since Deregulation' in Zygmunt Baranksi and Robert Lumley, eds, *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy: Essays on Mass and Popular Culture* (London: MacMillan, 1990), pp. 286-294, argues that while in the 1960s television in Italy was watched in a kind of 'social ritual', by the 1980s it had become a 'bystander in everyday life' (p. 290).

networks, their ubiquity is, at least in part, a perceptual 'effect'.[9] Networked mass media, as Patrick Jagoda has further elaborated, 'do frequently give *the impression of ubiquity*' while not actually being 'universal or evenly distributed'.[10]

Fellini had a long, rich and, as it has recently been put, 'troubled' relationship with the medium of television.[11] Though he once dismissed it as 'something that furnished a corner of the house', television features in many of his films, from relatively contained appearances in *Il bidone/The Swindle* (1957), *La dolce vita* (1960) and *Giulietta degli spiriti/Juliet of the Spirits* (1965), to the more prominent place it has in *Ginger e Fred/Ginger and Fred* (1986), *Intervista* (1987) and *The Voice of the Moon*.[12] In fact, several of Fellini's projects have been either wholly produced for television – starting with the 1969 documentary fiction *Block-notes di un regista/Fellini: A Director's Notebook*, commissioned by the American network NBC – or produced with the financial support of the television industry, including *The Voice of the Moon,* which was co-produced by the Italian public broadcaster, RAI.[13] Moreover, while waging campaigns against the interruption of films on television by commercials (and news) in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Fellini nevertheless shot a number of commercials for television in those very years.[14] Attracted to the medium and yet also repelled by it, Fellini himself could not remain outside of it: its ubiquity – perceived, if not actual – affected him too.

Fellini's late films – *The Voice of the Moon* and *Ginger and Fred* in particular – are distinctively intent on addressing the complex pervasiveness that television generates as a medium literally and figuratively 'in the air'. Rooted both in television's physical materiality and infrastructure and in its less palpable economic and socio-cultural machinery, this pervasiveness crystallizes in these films as a quality that this article will describe as

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[9] Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker, in *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p.10.
[10] Patrick Jagoda, *Network Aesthetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 193 (italics in original).
[11] Damiano Garofalo and Angela Mancinelli, 'A "Means of Distribution": Federico Fellini and Italian Television', *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies* 9/1 (2021), pp. 27-43; p. 28 cited.
[12] Federico Fellini, 'Fellini on Television' (1972), in *Fellini on Fellini*, ed. by Costanzo Costantini, trans. by Sohrab Sorooshian (London: Faber, 1995), pp. 11-16; p. 11 cited. Text originally in Renzo Renzi, ed., *Fellini TV: Block-Notes di un regista/I Clowns di Federico Fellini* (Bologna: Cappelli Editore, 1972), pp. 209-213.
[13] For a detailed discussion of this, see Garofalo and Mancinelli, 'A "Means of Distribution"'.
[14] On Fellini's television commercials and intensifying critique of (commercial) television, see: Burke, 'Biting the Hand that Feeds', and Frank Burke, *Fellini's Films and Commercials: From Postwar to Postmodern* (Bristol: Intellect, 2020), Chapter 11; Celluloid Liberation Front, 'Fellini's Commercials: Il Maestro's Misadventures (And Mischief) in Consumerville', *Sight & Sound*, 26 November 2016 <https://www2.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/reviews-recommendations/bytes/fellini-s-commercials> [accessed June 2022]. In 1991, Fellini argued with RAI against the mid-way interruption of his *Intervista* by the news. Lietta Tornabuoni, 'E Fellini cacciò il TG' [And Fellini shoed away the news], *La Stampa,* 10th July 1991, p. 1.

'outsideness'. Television is not simply presented as a form that has transcended its traditional domestic boundaries and spilled out into public spaces but also, more subtly, as a form whose materiality and organization contribute to its presence and diffusion 'outside'. It appears as a concrete (if often impalpable, invisible, or simply overlooked) technology and infrastructure in the physical environment and as a pervasive economic and socio-cultural complex. As a medium whose infrastructure, be it over-the-air or, later, cable, started to permeate the landscape from the second half of the twentieth century, television is, at least in part, constitutively outside. In this sense, outsideness is a fundamental quality of the medium – a quality with specifically environmental connotations when televisual signals travel through 'the ether' thanks to the electromagnetic spectrum. This article is concerned with outlining this layered sense of the outsideness of television made manifest in Fellini's late films, and the ways in which such outsideness changes, if not reverses, the traditional dynamics through which, as a medium bringing an audio-visual flow into the home, television was generally thought and talked about through the 1990s.

Albeit not systematically or comprehensively, the relationship between Fellini and television has been addressed by a number of Italian cinema scholars. Millicent Marcus and Frank Burke have noted either Fellini's ambivalently critical position towards the medium ('Biting the Hand that Feeds', as the title of an article by Burke on Fellini's television commercials puts it) or the director's utilization of televisual motifs in pursuit of postmodern simulation and pastiche.[15] More recently, Damiano Garofalo and Angela Mancinelli have offered an insightful discussion of Fellini's 'role' as a 'television critic'.[16] While building on this work, in this article I shift the framework and focus of analysis to put Fellini's late films in dialogue with theories of television and newer networked media, mapping connections with both contempora*neous* critiques, such as Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler's *Echographies of Television* (1993) and Guy Debord's *Comments on The Society of the Spectacle* (1988), and contempor*ary* perspectives, including Jonathan Crary's concept of 'exposure' and John Caughie's notion of 'interruptability'. In so doing, Fellini's cinema – a cinema generally seen as playfully and obsessively self-reflexive – begins to emerge not only as a site of broader media reflection and critique but also as an unexpected tool for these endeavours. The aim of this article is in fact twofold. In addition to contributing to Fellini

[15] Millicent Marcus, 'Fellini's *Ginger and Fred*: Postmodern Simulation Meets Hollywood Romance', in Frank Burke and Marguerite R. Waller, eds, *Federico Fellini: Contemporary Perspectives* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), pp. 169-187; Burke, 'Biting the Hand that Feeds'.
[16] Garofalo and Mancinelli, 'A Means of Distribution'.

scholarship through a focus on films and thematics – television, mass media – which are yet to receive full critical attention, it seeks to insert Fellini's cinema within debates on television and theories of media as, itself, a critical intervention. As it explores Fellini's articulation of the complex pervasiveness – the outsideness – of television, the present article points to how his work began to manifest concerns about immersion, connectivity, exposure and the economies of attention that were soon to come more forcefully into the foreground of critical debates in media theory with the transition to digital, online, forms. From this perspective, Fellini's late films are also somewhat anticipatory. For they adumbrate television's metamorphosis and legacy in the networked digital-media landscape 'after TV' and the debates hatching in response to these then-emerging transformations. Three decades on, questions on the possibility of being outside media are still posed, even as these questions' rhetorical futility is made more fully evident. For, as Galloway has recently asked in terms that bluntly surpass Heath's more modestly circumscribed question: 'Is there *any* outside anymore, when networks encircle the globe?'[17]

Inner and Outer Space

Television is not an intrinsically domestic medium, as Milly Buonanno has suggested. Rather, it was 'domesticated' by the marketing operations of the Euro-American consumer boom after WWII.[18] Such process of domestication can be glimpsed in Fellini's earlier films. While the TV sets featured in *The Swindle* (1957) are not quite a cosy technological new hearth (in one instance, a small device – covered by a doily – seems more of a puzzling decorative item than an object of use), in *Juliet of the Spirits* (1965), the television appears not only as a fully domestic object but also, in turn, as an object in the process of domesticating its audience. In one scene, the titular Juliet (Giulietta Masina) sits attentively in her modern living area, in obedient interaction with the presenter's suggestions for eye and lip beauty exercises. Later, her husband returns the presenter's good night before switching the TV off.

Even though the presence of television outside the home persisted (and even increased) after its domestication, its status as the quintessential domestic medium came to be

[17] Alexander R. Galloway, T*he Interface Effect* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), p. 120 (my emphasis).
[18] Buonanno, *The Age of Television,* pp. 13-17; Damiano Garofalo, *Storia Sociale della Televisione in Italia: 1954-1969* (Venice: Marsilio, 2018), pp. 25-31. See also Joanne Hollows, *Domestic Cultures* (Maidenhead: OUP, 2008), ch. 6; and Lynn Spigel, 'Installing the Television Set: Popular Discourses on Television and Domestic Space, 1948-1955', p. 7, in Lynn Spigel and Denise Mann, eds., *Private Screenings: Television and the Female Consumer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. 2-38; David Gauntlett and Annette Hill, *TV Living: Television, Culture and Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, 1999).

secured as more and more households, in the richer parts of the world at least, acquired plural TV sets in the course of the late twentieth century.[19] With this in mind, in his 1994 *Television and Everyday Life*, Roger Silverstone could declare, in the tone of a matter-of-fact observation: 'television is a domestic medium. It is watched at home. Ignored at home. Discussed at home'.[20] Even in the current age of 'platform mobility' and on-demand streaming that enable us to turn any space – including the bus or the street – into a 'TV room', the perception of television as a medium of the home arguably persists not only as a fond, nostalgic memory but also often, as Amy Holdsworth has recently shown, as an object or form which helps make a home.[21]

Implicit within this domesticity is a movement of content from outside to inside, a movement that, as I noted above, historically initially happened 'through the air'. The ethereal feature of the medium was particularly prominent in early promotional imagery of television services, which often featured aerials on roofs or skies with white, fluffy and almost heavenly clouds (Fig. 2). Indeed, it is thanks to this fundamental condition of being outside –and, impalpably, in the air – that television, as an early advert for RAI suggests, can bring 'the world' into 'your home' and even into the palm of a hand (Fig. 3). Both television's largely invisible, yet concrete, presence outside in the air and its ability to bring the outside 'in' were further enhanced by the launch of communication satellites during the 1960s. Thanks to these devices collecting – and re-transmitting – televisual and other signals while in orbit around the planet, television expanded quite literally 'out' of the realm of the Earth.[22] From this perspective, the medium's biggest historical leap was the Apollo 11 broadcast, transmitted 'from the moon to your living room'.[23] Not without a touch of paradox, this cemented television's domestic status through a sensational expansion beyond the terrestrial realm of television's outside-inside dynamics, bringing even *outer* space *inside,* so to speak, at once onto Earth and into the home.

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[19] For a study of television outside the home, see: Anna McCarthy, *Ambient Television: Visual Culture and Public Space* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).
[20] Roger Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 24.
[21] Chuck Tryon, 'Make Any Room your TV Room" Digital Delivery and Media Mobility', *Screen* 53/3 (2012), pp. 287-300; Amy Holdsworth, *On Living with Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021).
[22] Direct satellite broadcasting emerged later, in the 1980s. See e.g. Lisa Parks, *Cultures in Orbit: Satellites and the Televisual* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).
[23] Science Museum, 'From the Moon to Your Living Room: The Apollo 11 Broadcast' (July 2019), https://www.scienceandmediamuseum.org.uk/objects-and-stories/moon-to-living-room-apollo-11-broadcast [Accessed June 2023]; Michael Allen, *Live from the Moon: Film, Television and the Space Race* (London: IB Tauris, 2009).

In one of his earliest overt reflections on television, after making *Fellini: A Director's Notebook* for NBC and *I Clowns/The Clowns* (1970) for RAI, Fellini evoked both the medium's domesticity and its trajectory from outside to inside the home. These characteristics, however, are ambivalently appreciated. At one level, he considers, 'it might be very stimulating for an author to attempt to achieve a more intimate relationship with his public – in fact, to arrive at the home of that spectator, to speak right to him (you imagine him, perhaps, in bed)'.[24] Such arrival in domestic spaces – including the most private one of the bedroom – is at points evoked in vivid detail: the spectator may not even be 'completely dressed', but in 'undershorts' or 'bathrobe', 'eat[ing] his spaghetti' or 'quarrel[ling] with his son'.[25] On another level, television's arrival inside from outside does not mean that its images have a privileged status and become, without fail, the fulcrum of attention. While the notion of attention, and its capture, will return later in the discussion, what is interesting to note now is that rather than focusing on what television brings into the home and seeing this domestic arrival of 'the outside world' in positive terms, Fellini seems to be concentrating on the 'inside' that is breached. Even as he imagines himself as the author attempting 'to achieve a more intimate relationship with his public', his assessment resonates with critical positions concerned about the territorial invasion belying television's movement from outside to inside.

While this movement is implicitly acknowledged by the routinely expressed fears about forms of distraction, cognitive laziness or mental conditioning that are understood to be caused by television's occupation of the home, it finds a very explicit and dramatic articulation in the 1993 interview (recorded for television but never broadcasted) between Derrida and Stiegler, 'Echographies of Television'. [26] Derrida, more negative in his assessment than Stiegler, sees the 'home' as 'no doubt what is most violently affected by the intrusion, in truth by the breaking and entering' of television and what, including Internet and e-mail communication in the first years of their popularization, he refers to as 'telepowers', 'teletechnologies' and 'telemediatics'. As television and technological kins and heirs enter 'the home ["*le chez-soi*"], Derrida continues, 'the historical distinction … between public and private space' is also being 'violently injured'.[27]

[24] Fellini, 'Fellini on Television', p. 12.
[25] Ibid., pp. 12, 13.
[26] See for instance, Theodor W. Adorno, 'How to Look at Television', *The Quarterly Review of Film, Radio and Television* 8/3 (Spring 1954), pp. 213-35; Adriano Bellotto, *La televisione inutile* (Milan: Comunità, 1962).
[27] Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, 'Echographies of Television' (1993), in *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews,* trans. Jennifer Bajorek (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), p. 33. Derrida's linking of television and computers within a category of 'teletechnologies' or 'telemediatics' has precedents in, among others, Paul Virilio's grouping of cinema, television and computers under the concept of 'third window'. See Paul Virilio,

If in Fellini's early reflections on the medium the domestic intrusion of television was seen to offer the enticing possibility of greater 'intimacy' with the audience, by the mid 1980s his assessment had acquired wholly negative connotations, with the form literally represented as an invader or assailant. Towards the end of *Intervista* (another co-production with RAI), the shooting of a scene for Fellini's own fictional film within the film (an adaptation of Frank Kafka's *Amerika*) is disrupted by an invasion of Native Americans on horses. They are classically, and stereotypically, Hollywood-Western 'Indians' in everything but the fact that the weapons they carry are television aerials: a compact symbolism whereby America's first victims of colonization are paradoxically made the emblematic, aggressive, bearers of American visual and consumer culture into the (national) domestic Italian context of the film's story (Fig. 4). A visually resonant scene in *The Voice of the Moon,* in which Ivo loiters on rooftops crowded with an army of aerials, links television more explicitly with domestic intrusion, its form of 'breaking and entering' through the airwaves (Fig. 5a-c). Not unlike contemporaries such as Stiegler and Derrida, then, Fellini explicitly draws on an imagery of intrusion or invasion. But where Stiegler and Derrida's conceptual focus is on the domestic or private space which they feel to have been put under threat by television, Fellini's attention, in his late films, has shifted beyond the exploration of television as a medium *of* and *inside* the home. The scenes from *Intervista* and *The Voice of the Moon* briefly outlined above begin to suggest that Fellini's interest – visually, conceptually, critically – has moved towards an appraisal of television's existence *outside of* domestic space. In fact, as we now turn to consider, in Fellini's late films television is a globally expanding material and socio-cultural machinery which, being outside everywhere, affords no outside of itself.

(*Infra)Structural Outsideness*

The quality of outsideness, which stems from television's perceived (if not actual) material and socio-cultural pervasiveness, is explicitly manifest in *Ginger and Fred,* Fellini's first and most overt film about the medium. Centred on the ageing Amelia (Masina) and Pippo (Marcello Mastroianni), who are re-united – after many decades – by the producers of a commercial network's variety show to bring back their dancing performance as Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire impersonators, the film interweaves themes of televisual

The Aesthetics of Disappearance (1980), trans. Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotexte, 1991). For a fascinating study of the culturally and historically recurrent link between communication, and especially electronic, media and fears of 'intrusion' and 'control' see Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

consumption and production. The film's opening sequence gives its viewers a taste of television's ubiquity and, indeed, of the proliferation of television monitors outside the home. Outsideness here is not simply a constitutive, structural quality of television as a medium of, or in, the airwaves, but *infra*structural, at both macro and micro levels. This infrastructural pervasiveness, in turn, contributes to make television socially and culturally inescapable. As Amelia gets off the train at Rome's Termini station, and travels to the suburban hotel where the TV network (evocatively suggesting its out-of-Earth enabling apparatus in the name 'Interstellare') is hosting the forthcoming show's guests, televisual infrastructure – from transmitters to monitors – permeates the landscape. An imposing television transmitter constitutes the only view from Amelia's suburban hotel room. The distribution of television sets throughout the city and in various interior and exterior spaces is so abundant as to seem to afford almost uninterrupted consumption. They simply seem to be *everywhere*: in every space in the hotel, from reception to bedrooms; in the canteen, changing rooms and even the corridors of the TV station where the show's guests wait and rehearse; and, more remarkably, in means of transports as well as on the street itself. Just outside the train station, Amelia's attention is caught by the images coming from the monitor of a street seller demonstrating an easy-to-install micro-aerial that does not need to be out on the roof. Soon afterwards, as she gets on the mini-bus taking her to the hotel, the driver has a portable television installed on the dashboard, and starts driving while absorbed by an advert for wrist watches with in-built compasses inspired by Dante's *Divine Comedy* and its first famous lines.[28] After Amelia has returned to Termini and boarded her train home, the film closes with a shot of a television set on one of the platforms, ironically broadcasting a programme on the proliferation of TV channels and programmes. These images seem to suggest that while the film we are watching may well be ending, television, infrastructurally ubiquitous and socially pervasive, will carry on. In an intensification of this state of affairs, in *The Voice of the Moon* the machinery of television features not only outdoors in urban, public spaces but also, as we have seen in the scene with which I started, in 'nature'.

The ubiquity of the means for television production and consumption that Fellini charts in these films is partly connected to the rapid changes affecting European and, particularly, Italian broadcasting from the mid 1970s onwards. RAI, the Italian state

[28] 'Midway upon the journey of our life/ I found myself within a forest dark,/For the straightforward pathway had been lost.', Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy, Inferno* (1321), trans. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1867), Canto I. https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/1004/pg1004-images.html#CantoI.I [Accessed June 2023]

broadcaster, held a monopoly over all television transmissions until 15 December 1972 (a date arbitrarily set when broadcasting started in 1954). Taking advantage of a protractedly 'unregulated' situation when the monopoly came to an end, dozens of private, profit-driven local stations emerged, including those from which Silvio Berlusconi's media empire was to develop.[29] With the introduction of a new regulatory framework in 1975, RAI was granted a reduced monopoly over national and live transmission, and the newly formed private stations were legally enabled to continue to broadcast locally. In the market liberalization that ensued, private networks proliferated (counting to about 450 by the late 1970s) and Berlusconi's Fininvest group soon outperformed the others. Financially powerful, Fininvest (and its mass-media subsidiary Mediaset) had the means of circulating programmes on videotape to its various stations across Italy as a way of reaching national coverage, and of pursuing a strategy of acquisition of production, distribution and advertising arms within the group in addition to expanding ownership of TV channels themselves. Far from being unchallenged, however, this expansion proceeded in a context of protracted litigations. Local magistrates in various Italian regions repeatedly blocked transmission of the real-estate and media magnate's 'Milanese' channels – events perhaps in part alluded to by Fellini in the black-out that interrupts the variety show in *Ginger and Fred*. Eventually, the so-called *decreto Berlusconi* (Berlusconi decree) of October 1984 legally enabled privately-owned stations to broadcast pre-recorded programming nationwide.

By the time Fellini started production of *Ginger and Fred,* then, television in Italy (and in other European countries, including France and Spain, where Berlusconi had also expanded) had been dramatically commercialized. The changes were of such a high magnitude that, writing in 1983, Umberto Eco saw it necessary to draw a categorical differentiation between what had been 'Paleo TV' and what he called 'Neo TV', a term overtly intended to resonate with another neologism, 'neocapitalism', whose coinage he had himself also contributed to in the 1960s.[30] The rapid growth in private for-profit channels

[29] In fact, private TV stations, including, in 1974, Berlusconi's Telemilano, had initially started to transmit via cable, thus circumventing RAI's over-the-air monopoly. For this and what follows on Italian television history, I have relied on: Franco Monteleone, *Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia: società, politica, strategie, programmi 1922-1992* (Venice: Marsilio, 1992); Francesca Anania, *Breve storia della radio e della televisione italiana* (Rome: Carocci, 2004); Philip Schlesinger, 'The Berlusconi Phenomenon', in Baranksi and Lumley, *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy*, pp. 270-285; Elena Dagrada, 'Television and Its Critics: A Parallel History', in David Forgacs and Robert Lumley, eds., *Italian Cultural Studies: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 233-247.

[30] Umberto Eco, 'A guide to the Neo Television of the 1980s' (originally published in *L'espresso,* 30 January 1983), in Baranksi and Lumley, *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy*, pp. 245-255. For a discussion of the Italian coinage of 'neocapitalism', and Eco's contribution to it, see: Ara H. Merjian, *Against the Avant-Garde:*

with no revenue from public-licence fee heralded an increase in the televisual presence of advertising and commercials, as well as competition for audiences and programme acquisitions between RAI and the commercial networks, especially Fininvest/Mediaset. Despite repeated attempts at regulation and reduction, the private networks' intensive advertising strategies effectively paved the way for – in fact, necessitated – an increase of advertising on the public service channels, even though RAI remained regulated by a quota ceiling and broadcasted its commercials in blocks between, rather than within, programmes.[31] The inclusion of mock commercials in *Ginger and Fred* and *Intervista,* and the overall lurid atmosphere of media and advertising saturation in Fellini's late films, are a far-from-veiled commentary on the commercialization of everyday life in the televisual regime inaugurated in 1980s Italy – a regime whose pervasiveness seemed to leave no outside.[32] As these films suggest, commercial television not only brought the 'private' into what had until a few years earlier been a wholly public service, but it also came to physically occupy public space. What this television invades, 'breaks and enters', is not just the home but the world.

The rapidly growing outsideness of television which Fellini pursues in his films of the late 1980s and early 1990s culminates in the audiovisually intricate, preposterous, final sequences of *The Voice of the Moon.* In the penultimate sequence, a large event is taking place in the main square of the fictional Emilia-Romagna town in which the film is set. It's the middle of the night, but masses of people are flowing –not unlike water and television itself, as the dynamic montage suggests – into the town from further afield by any means possible. After a cut, a medium shot frames, from behind, a small television crew – a cameraman, with portable camera ('C.I.P. TV' branded on it) propped on his shoulder and characteristic cable trailing down over his back, and a sound assistant – as they linger at the outer edges of the town square. The camera moves forward to follow them as they start to

Pier Paolo Pasolini, Contemporary Art and Neocapitalism (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2020), esp. p. 36.

[31] RAI had partly relied on advertising for its revenue from the start, but advertising, until 1977, had been confined within a dedicated programme, *Carosello*. See Piero Dorfles, *Carosello* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998). As Giuseppe Richieri, 'Television from Service to Business: European Tendencies and the Italian Case', in Phillip Drummond and Richard Patterson, eds., *Television in Transition: Papers from the First International Television Studies Conference* (London: BFI, 1986), pp. 21-35, explains, while the licence fee remained the same (and subject to high inflation), RAI's hours of programming had to increase to compete, and therefore revenue had to be found in advertising (pp. 32-34). See also Giuseppe Richieri, 'Hard Times for Public Service Broadcasting: The RAI in the Age of Commercial Competition', in Baranksi and Lumley, *Culture and Conflict in Postwar Italy*, pp. 256-69.

[32] For a recent discussion of Fellini and advertising, see: Matilde Nardelli, 'Like a Mass Image: Fellini's *Le tentazioni del Dottor Antonio*, Advertising and Mimicry', *Italian Studies* (2022).

walk, and a suspenseful off-screen voice – a television commentator, it seems – starts to describe what film viewers, and television crew within the film, see: 'We are entering at this moment the town's main square, teeming with people…'. The voice-over continues to describe what the film, and the diegetic TV camera whose point of view the film has adopted, reveals of the location: a fully lit church, two very large screens erected to each side of the square's monument, and the presence of all sorts of local, national, secular and religious authorities at a long table underneath the screens. The reason for this gathering is, as will be explained, extraordinary.

In a scene that recalls, but greatly intensifies, the miracle sequence in *La dolce vita,* many journalists, photo-reporters and television crews (each likely to be from a different private network) are in the square, while a heavy presence of police and *carabinieri* keeps the crowd at a safe distance from the conference table. If in *La dolce vita* the large televisual event fails convincingly to capture and broadcast the awaited miracle of the Virgin's apparition (a violent storm disrupts transmission altogether), in *The Voice of the Moon* television coverage is successful. Where there are no televised images depicting the miracle in *La dolce vita,* in *The Voice of the Moon,* the 'miracle' is essentially televisual: verified and demonstrated via television for the fictional – diegetic – audiences as well as the 'actual' ones watching Fellini's film.[33]

From the moment *The Voice of the Moon*'s camera enters the square, the film also begins to absorb – or be absorbed by – the televisual view within itself. The event in the square, and the related activities which this event contains and televises, are narrated and presented, diegetically, *for* television and, at the level of the aesthetics of the film, *as if via* television. While the first TV crew (whose backs can be glimpsed at least once later) provides the initial anchoring for the point of view adopted by the film's camera, *The Voice of the Moon* does not remain wedded to its limited viewpoint. On the contrary, as customary in coverage of mass events, camera position and framing change frequently, alternating between close-ups and wider-angle shots of the crowds, the authorities, and the screens overlooking the square. As Fellini's camera 'fuses' with some of its fictional television cameras and, in a way, seems to find no outside its own cinematically-staged televisual event, the infrastructural and socio-cultural pervasiveness of television – or indeed, there being *no outside* television – finds both narrative and aesthetic articulation.

[33] There is, in fact, a public at the fictional site of the miraculous event, who is supposedly witnessing it directly.

Let me illustrate in some detail how this complex sequence unfolds. Once the film has entered the square via the small television crew mentioned above, the focus switches to a TV reporter. His image is also relayed live and larger than life on the screens above him, as he explains the extraordinary reason for the occasion: 'the moon has been captured, and by three of our own citizens', he exclaims excitedly, before adding that what renders the event even more extraordinary is 'the fact that it is our very own TV station … to broadcast it to the world with its very first live broadcast!' (Private networks obtained the legal right to live broadcasting in August 1990, eight months after *The Voice of the Moon*'s release.[34]) In fact, as one of the authorities at the conference table will later comment, the event's context is not simply 'national and international' but, by its very nature, 'inter-planetary'. Having boasted about the station's inaugural live broadcast ('*diretta televisiva'*), the reporter makes a point of emphasizing a switch to a pre-recorded interview between an 'expert' (an eminent professor) and the three moon catchers. The interview itself, appearing on the large screens, smoothly intercuts 'live' questions from the expert now sitting at the long table in the square, with the pre-recorded responses and interactions of the interviewees with the professor himself in his studio: this is an intricate – if not, indeed, intentionally disorientating – alternation in which the boundaries between the 'live' and the 'recorded' are at once elided and foregrounded. Finally, the diegetic broadcast also turns to live transmission from the site where the captured moon is being held. The TV reporter explains that this is an old farm which, while not itself far from the town, is being streamed to the crowd in the square via a satellite broadcast whose 'shocking images' (as he calls them) reveal the rounded side of a luminous sphere, secured down with ropes and poking through the arched entrance of a brick building.

As the sequence progresses, the representation of this outlandish occurrence emphasizes the presence of televisual infrastructure (from multiple cameras and crews to satellites and giant screens) to livestream the moon's capture and enhance the event through the inclusion of additional materials, such as interviews and panel discussions. Television is ubiquitous, simultaneous and able to conquer space and time: it is *here*, in the square, but also *there*, at the site where the moon is held, and *earlier*, in the professor's study where the moon thieves are being interviewed. Addressed at the level of the narrative, the pervasiveness of the physical machinery of television, and the 'impression of ubiquity' such material presence and distribution effects socially and culturally, are also folded into the very form – the aesthetics

[34] Live transmission was eventually legally granted to commercial stations with the *legge Mammì* (Mammì law) of 1990, which also ratified the 1984 Berlusconi decree.

– of Fellini's film, which, as mentioned, adopts the audio-visual language of the TV cameras in the story. The frequent alternation of views concurs to build a kind of representation that, as André Bazin had already remarked in the early years of live television coverage, may seem to offer an experience as fulfilling as 'being there' (but, as Bazin enthusiastically put it, 'without the hassle' of physically being there).[35]

If it is ultimately Fellini's *film* that gives visibility to televisual infrastructure, this task is diegetically assigned to the television crews and broadcasters in the film, who, as well as attracting attention to the event's modes of transmission (as we have seen), are not shy of revealing cameras, microphones and other broadcasting equipment. Quite on the contrary, the presence of this technology seems to be actively flaunted, from the abundance of equipment visible in the square, to the studio camera being prominently moved into position in the pre-recorded material shown on the large screens. Far from being accidental, this would constitute a key part of the strategy of what Eco had labelled 'Neo TV' a few years earlier, a phenomenon which Fellini – possibly as a result of Eco's satirical analysis – is also seeking to bring into focus.[36] It is precisely such care-free attitude to the visibility of televisual machinery which is one of Neo TV's distinctive traits, according to Eco. This is an intriguing reversal of Walter Benjamin's famous observation about the 'equipment-free aspect of reality' (in cinema) being 'the height of artifice': 'the orchid in the land of technology'. Here, paradoxically, it is precisely the *revelation* of the apparatus that has come 'to hide artifice', endowing the programme with a seeming technical roughness and spontaneity that might make it look 'live' even when it is not.[37] The visibility – the flaunting – of the apparatus also contributes to reinforce the 'effect of ubiquity' of television, the individual and social perception or impression that there is no outside of it, since its infrastructural reach is multi-tentacled and even capillary.

The sequence concludes, not unlike *La dolce vita,* with an incident (someone shoots at the screen, perhaps aiming at the moon on it) which precipitates a sudden interruption of

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[35] André Bazin, 'Television Is Unbeatable for Live Coverage' (June 1953), now in *André Bazin's New Media*, ed. and trans. Dudley Andrew (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), pp. 48-50, p. 48 cited.
[36] The resonance between Eco's text and Fellini's sequence is also in the televised mirroring of the crowd in the square. 'Paleo TV wanted to be a window that looked out from the most far-flung province onto the big wide world. Independent Neo-TV … points the cameras at the provinces, and shows the public of Piacenza the people of Piacenza', Eco writes, in 'A Guide to the Neo Television of the 1980s', p. 250. In Fellini's sequence, television makes its own viewing public, captured 'as image', part of, or even *the,* televisual spectacle.
[37] Eco, 'A guide to the Neo Television of the 1980s', p. 247-48. Eco is talking about the boom-mike in particular, but the point can be extended, I believe. Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936), in *Illuminations,* ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 211-244; p. 226 cited.

transmission and the dispersal of the crowd. But the outsideness of television returns, even more radically, in the final sequence. Here, silence and peace seem to have been restored to the town and its night. The large screen is off, the square is deserted (but for two of Ivo's eccentric friends, dancing without music to celebrate their romantic engagement), and Ivo contemplates the moon which is back in the sky. Yet, off screen, a woman is heard bursting into laughter, as the film cuts to a close-up of the moon. 'What a ridiculous face you have!', the (still off-screen) voice tells Ivo, 'It is impossible to look at you without laughing!'. After a brief exchange, the voice tells him in an amused but slightly anxious tone : 'Oh, you nearly made me forget the most important thing. Hold on a second!'. The face of Ivo's idealized love, Aldina, whose voice we have been hearing, gradually fades onto the surface of the moon, which is thus shown to have been turned into a screen. After clearing her throat, Aldina, whose face is now faintly superimposed on the moon, intones: '*Pubblicità* [Commercials!]'. Television, it seems, is not simply something that travels *through* the sky, but something whose infrastructure is so pervasively distributed at both micro and macro levels that it is *in* the sky: radically outside, using even *natural* satellites as a means of diffusion (Fig. 6).

Spectacle and Exposure

From his first criticisms of television onwards, one of Fellini's central complaints is with the medium's elimination or deterioration of 'spectacle'. Television, in the banality of its everydayness, lacks what he describes as 'the sacred aspect of the spectacle': the grandeur and, crucially, the 'ritual' of going to the forms of entertainment by which he is fascinated, cinema, above all, but also the circus and variety shows. [38] These 'rituals', as Fellini explains, contain conscious decisions, efforts and a commitment of one's time and attention – elements which he does not believe apply to the consumption of television.

The television presented in *The Voice of the Moon* and *Ginger and Fred*, however, *is* spectacular. In the different modalities addressed (news reportage in one film, entertainment show in the other), it is a television that pursues forms of opulence and ritual. In *The Voice of the Moon,* as we have seen, audiences even go *to* the televisual extravaganza set up in the square. The show in *Ginger and Fred* is a high-audience-rating Sunday-afternoon televisual fixture aspiring to the glamour of a bygone era of cinema and other forms of live entertainment, despite having to make do with a crowd of lesser stars (look-alikes, imitators,

[38] Fellini, 'Fellini on Television', pp. 12-13. Fellini returns to these points frequently in the 1980s and 1990s.

talent contestants and plain 'ordinary' people). But when, in interviews on the set of *Ginger and Fred,* journalists ask Fellini whether his film about television will tackle, and attack, the medium as a 'spectacle of spectacles' – a 'total spectacle' – and Fellini responds by saying that it would be like taking on 'the pull of gravity', something slightly different seems to be implied by the shared understanding of 'spectacle' they bring to the subject of television.[39]

When the moon is part of television, and television is equated to 'the pull of gravity', Fellini's articulation of the form's complex pervasiveness seems to come into alignment with Guy Debord's bleaker revision of his famous concept of spectacle in the late 1980s. [40] In his 1988 *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, Debord sees consumer capitalism's 'spectacle' as having advanced steadily from the 'diffuse' form he diagnosed in the late 1960s to an 'integrated' mode based on 'continuity' and 'global' reach.[41] Subsuming some characteristics of the 'concentrated' spectacle he had attributed to communist countries such the Soviet Union and East Germany, 'the integrated spectacle', he writes, 'has been pioneered by France and Italy'.[42] Even though Debord's 'spectacle' is not merely a shorthand for media forms, the rapidly changing media landscapes of these countries, and their deep entwinement with politics as well as economics, were on his mind. His last work, *Guy Debord, His Art and His Time* (1994), in which Silvio Berlusconi, as newly appointed prime minister of Italy, features briefly but tellingly, takes on the issue of television explicitly, presenting itself as an attempt to be 'anti-televisual' precisely through its use of televisual footage.[43]

The concept and exploration of 'spectacle' is a central one in Fellini's cinematic career, but I do not want here to suggest a convergence between Fellinian and Debordian spectacle. Among other things, where for Debord the newer – 'integrated' – form of spectacle is a continuation and development of the older one, rather than a break from it, in Fellini's generally nostalgia-tinted appreciation, television plays 'bad' spectacle to cinema's (and other older forms such as the circus and variety shows) 'good' one. What, however, they both – in different ways – seem to recognize in the developments of the late twentieth century is a *qualitative* transformation and reorganization of consumption and its conditions driven, in

[39] Lietta Tornabuoni, 'Fellini contro il grande sonno TV', La stampa, 26 January 1985, p. 3; Fellini interviewed in Gideon Bachmann, *FMM: Fellini, Mastroianni, Masina* (1985).
[40] Ibid.
[41] Guy Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* (1988), trans. Malcolm Imrie (London: Verso, 1990), pp. 7-8.
[42] Ibid., p. 8.
[43] For a sharp and insightful discussion of Debord's thought and work, see: McKenzie Wark, *The Spectacle of Disintegration: Situationist Passages out of the 20th Century* (London: Verso, 2013), chapters 13-15.

crucial respects, by *quantitative* changes in media production and diffusion: abundance or plenty giving shape to something that is not merely 'more' but also different.

With the 1980s era of televisual abundance partly in mind, Jonathan Crary has offered a useful perspective for assessing these changes. As he writes in *24/7*: *Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (2013), television should not be exclusively thought of in terms of watching, but also in terms of exposure. 'Television', that is, is not exclusively 'something one *watches* in some attentive manner' but also 'a source of light and sound' to which, however distracted, one 'is *exposed*'.[44] This sense of the medium as one to which people may often find themselves exposed to, without intentionally choosing to watch it, bears an important affinity with the televisual outsideness with which Fellini was concerned in the 1980s and early 1990s.

In Fellini's late films, television, in its complex pervasiveness – its outsideness – exists not as something one actively elects to watch but, as Crary suggests, as a form to which one is exposed. The unavoidability, the lack of intentionality and the very concrete sense of being routinely within the range of television's emissions of 'light and sound' which Crary's notion of 'exposure' brings into relief are emblematic of the way in which television is experienced in both *The Voice of the Moon* and *Ginger and Fred.* Only once – in *Ginger and Fred* – is a television intentionally *turned* on: generally, monitors or screens are simply *found* on, like the moon when it becomes a television.[45] If television is a medium *in* the airwaves, it is also a medium *not unlike* air; or indeed, as Fellini put it, a force like 'the pull of gravity', from which it would be futile to attempt to subtract oneself. [46]

In such a condition of complex pervasiveness and, hence, almost unavoidable exposure to television, questions of distraction and attention emerge as crucial. For, if television appears to be simply always there, its audience may be perpetually distracted by it, but it may also come to be distracted from it, as the form disappears into the environmental background of everyday life and goes unnoticed. While the very notion of an 'attention economy' shot to prominence in the mid 1990s, in tandem with the popularization of digital technologies and the internet, it first came into use throughout the 1970s and 1980s as

[44] Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London: Verso, 2013), p. 86 (italics in original). Crary also partly derives his point from a 2006 study on television and autism, see footnote 12 (p. 132).
[45] This happens when the hotel porter escorts Amalia to her room. He then turns on the television there and starts watching football, until Amalia finds a way of moving him on.
[46] Bachmann, *FMM: Fellini, Mastroianni, Masina;* Tornabuoni, 'Fellini contro il grande sonno TV'.

television channels and networks proliferated in the Western world.[47] As I go on to consider in the next and final section, Fellini's own perception of television's gradually increasing outsideness over the decades is also very sensitive to – and aware of – the problematics of distraction and attention inherent to such expansion.

Furthermore, it is in their addressing of a condition of exposure to television that Fellini's late films, together with his comments at the time, adumbrate a kinship with concerns about media immersion, information overload, connectivity and economies of attention. These worries were about to emerge more explicitly with the democratization of the new tele-technologies for online media and communication within which, as Crary argues, television itself is now 'amalgamated' and persists even in a so-called post-televisual era. If, well into a twenty-first century of platform mobility and on-tap media availability and streaming, 'a significant chunk of our 24/7 world is filled with the televisual', then Fellini's late films, in the grotesque, surreal outsideness of television they stage, show us how the current '24/7 world' was already nesting in the televisual, hatching in television's 'phase of abundance'.[48] As Crary further argues, television's 'reorganization of human time and activity', especially 'in spheres of life that had previously been subjected to less direct forms of control', contributed to 'the setting in place of conditions which would subsequently be essential for the 24/7 "attention economy" of the twenty-first century'.[49]

'A Tickle to the Eye': Distraction, Attention and 'Interruptability'

Many theories or critiques of (broadcast) television argue that television required a vocabulary of engagement different from that of other media – and different from the vocabulary of cinema in particular. In the first decade of its diffusion television was often seen as a dangerous attractor of attention, 'gluing' people to the screen with its hypnotic powers. [50] Then, as the years went on, and both channels and programming grew, the problem seemed to reverse. In the 1980s, notions such as John Ellis's 'glance' or Stanley Cavell's

[47] One of the key articles for propagating the expression is Michael H. Goldhaber, 'The Attention Economy and the Net', *First Monday,* 2/4 (1997) < https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/519 > [accessed September 2022]. But, as Yves Citton considers in *The Ecology of Attention* (2014)*,* trans. Barnaby Norman (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), this and other interventions by Goldhaber, though virally disseminated, are the superficial 'tip of the iceberg' of more critical interventions and assessments emerging from the late 1960s, on the part of, among others, Herbert Simon, Daniel Kahneman and Georg Franck (pp. 5-8).
[48] Crary, *24/7*, p. 84. Buonanno, *The Age of Television,* p. 21.
[49] Ibid., pp. 79-80.
[50] See e.g Adorno, 'How to Look at Television', Bellotto, *La television inutile,* Cesare Mannucci, *Lo spettatore senza libertà* (Bari: Laterza, 1962).

'monitoring' suggested that television could no longer sustain focused watching.[51] Rather than expecting uninterrupted, unequivocal engagement, television, routinely *on* in people's everydayness, came to be understood as a form able to rely – and, arguably, to thrive – only on peaks of attentiveness alternating with distracted, divided, semi-automatic attention. Mirroring Fellini's early assessment of televisual conditions from a viewer's perspective, Félix Guattari, in *Chaosmosis* (1992), considers the 'pulling in different directions' experienced when watching television, as televisual content competes with attention not only with 'a world of fantasms [sic] occupying my daydreams', but also with the 'lateral awareness of surrounding events – water boiling on the stove, a child's cry, the telephone ….'[52] In her essay in *Logics of Television,* Margaret Morse similarly, though more overtly, argues that television requires two simultaneous levels of attention: to the world outside the TV set as well as to the one inside it.[53] More recently, John Caughie, elaborating on Crary's extensive exploration of distraction and attention in modern culture as unstable states on a continuum, has proposed semi-distracted forms such as 'relaxed detachment' and 'interruptability' as key to television's 'terms of engagement'.[54] 'Interruptability', for Caughie, is not so much a matter of television's structural breaks or discontinuities (such as the presence of commercials or the hiatus between the end of one episode and the beginning of the next) as of 'the forms of attention' that, watching it in what he calls 'everyday space', viewers *themselves* 'bring to television'. 'What is determining', Caughie explains, 'is not the fact of interruption but the possibility' of it, since, unlike cinema, television is watched with an awareness of – and the control granted by – 'viewing as interruptable'.[55]

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[51] For the 'glance', see John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982); for 'monitoring' see Stanley Cavell, 'The Fact of Television', *Daedalus* 111/4 (Autumn 1982), pp. 75-96.

[52] Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* (1992) trans. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 16-17. Jonathan Crary quotes this passage in *Suspension of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture* (Cambridge: MIT, 1999), p. 77.

[53] Margaret Morse, 'An Ontology of Everyday Distraction', in Mellencamp, ed., *Logics of Television,* pp. 193-221; p. 193 cited.

[54] See John Caughie, 'Telephilia and Distraction: Terms of Engagement', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 3/1 (May 2006), pp. 5-18 and *Television Drama: Realism Modernism and British Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 136-140. Caughie draws on Crary, *Suspension of Perception: Attention* (p. 51 cited), and is countering John Caldwell's argument in *Televisuality: Style, Crisis and Authority in American Television* (Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995) that the aesthetically rich, style-flaunting television of late 1980s America requires absorbed and 'attentive' viewers. To this, Caughie counters a Simmel/Benjamin/Kracauer-inspired notion of absorbed – or seemingly attentive – states *as* distraction ('Telephilia and Distraction', p. 13).

[55] See Caughie, *Television Drama,* p. 136; and Jason Jacobs, 'Television, Interrupted: Pollution or Aesthetic?', in James Bennett and Niki Strange, eds., *Television as Digital Media* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 255-280, on whose insightful discussion of Caughie's concept I have relied.

As we have seen, this possibility of interruption – or of withdrawal of attention – was very much at the forefront of Fellini's preoccupations after his first experiences of making work for television. While viewers might well be exposed to television in their home, they might not necessarily be paying attention to it. As a television author, he noted that one 'must make a racket to attract attention' and – a point repeated several times – 'must immediately be very amusing or very interesting'.[56] Yet, despite this imperative to seize attention at once, distractions and interruptions must be taken into account and allowed. Television pictures, Fellini explains: 'must not … possess excessive interconnection, for if one of these spectators in his bathrobe is distracted or talks with his neighbor or his wife, or quarrels with his son … etc., you must bear in mind that each picture must be introduced with long-winded, tired, repetitive, stretched-out rhythm in order that all the possible distractions may be permitted.[57] The Mobius-strip continuity and tension between attention and distraction outlined by Crary and Caughie are also overtly at play in Fellini's assessment of television. Even though, as it becomes more negative and critical during the 1980s, his assessment may appear to configure attention and distraction in opposition to each other, a sense of their interrelation and 'flow into one another' still informs his understanding of televisual spectatorship.[58]

On the one hand, in *Ginger and Fred,* television's outsideness, and the near-seamless continuity of exposure to it that such outsideness entails, seems to suggest a condition of total attention to, and absorption by, its content. Pippo, though not himself outside television (for he both watches it, waving Amelia away at a point as she blocks his view of a mortadella commercial, and participates in it, even if only for the money) articulates this explicitly at a point, judging the viewing public as '*pecoroni* [sheep]'. An association between televisual exposure and what Crary calls 'states of … inactivation' induced by habituation – and, even, addiction – to such exposure is pursued throughout the film. [59] Pippo is horrified by the pull that television has on audiences, including himself, while Amelia is intrigued by it. In her hotel room, she switches between channels with the remote control and, not unlike Masina's character in *Juliet of the Spirits,* is briefly absorbed by a programme for facial beauty exercises. When asked why she agreed to be on television, she can't quite articulate her reason: to make her grandchildren – who are 'always glued to the TV' – happy, she says, but also simply because of the 'myth' of television that 'seduces us all'. Later, the theme of

[56] Fellini, 'Fellini on Television', pp. 12-13.
[57] Ibid., p. 13.
[58] Crary, *Suspension of Perception,* p. 51.
[59] Crary, *24/7*, p. 88.

addiction is overtly addressed and deployed as televisual spectacle, as one of the participants in the film's fictional show has earned her place on stage by agreeing to being paid to be disconnected from television for one month. Interviewed about her experience, she says 'never again': it was 'torture' of the cruellest kind.

Yet it would be simplistic to conclude that the film and Fellini himself are suggesting an unavoidable sequence from pervasiveness and exposure to habituation, then addiction onto, finally, 'inactivation' or the docility of sheep. For, on the other hand, television's public in the 1980s is increasingly described by Fellini as, yes, 'distracted' but also 'impatient', 'frenetic' and seemingly *in* control of television, rather than controlled by it. The wide choice of channels ensuing from the liberalization of broadcasting services, together with the diffusion of the remote-control device, have produced, as he puts it in a 1985 interview, 'an anthropological mutation'.[60] In a short interview filmed by Gideon Bachmann on the set of *Ginger and Fred,* Fellini laments that the 'fragmented' (or rather, 'shattered': '*frantumizzata*') image of television is 'like a kind of kaleidoscope, a tickle to the eye'. This shattered, kaleidoscopic image 'has given rise to an impatient, superficial spectator, one that believes that he is the one running the show … restlessly changing from the image of a programme to that of another', Fellini explains, mimicking with his hand the gesture of pressing buttons on a remote-control device. [61]

According to William Uricchio, in enabling a shift towards 'a viewer-dominated flow', the remote-control device was a 'subversive technology' that 'had the ability to disrupt program flow and thus the economic flow so central to commercial television'.[62] While the possibility of zapping between channels that Fellini lamented increased the 'interruptability' of the engagement with television, it is doubtful that, like Uricchio, the director saw it as disruptive of commercial television's 'economic flow'. While he was very vocal about the frequency of commercial interruptions within programmes that, in 1980s Italy, were still relatively novel, the viewing public Fellini describes is one that is more likely to be zapping in search *for* adverts rather than *away from* them. The trajectory he describes in a television

[60] Fellini in Gian Luigi Rondi, 'Sette domande a Fellini: *Ginger e Fred*', *Il tempo,* 5 May 1985, p. 14, quoted in Garofalo and Mancinelli, 'A 'Means of Distribution': Federico Fellini and Italian Television', p. 35.
[61] Fellini in Bachmann, *FMM.*
[62] William Uricchio, 'Television's Next Generation: Technology/Interface/Culture/Flow', in Spigel and Olson, eds., *Television after TV*, pp. 163-182; p. 171 cited.

interview of 1983 is 'from a film to a football match, and from a football match to a quiz, and from a quiz to a nappies' commercial'.[63]

Ginger and Fred and *The Voice of the Moon* seek both to thematize what Fellini describes as the kaleidoscopic tickle-to-the-eye effect of television and to articulate it formally, if vicariously, via cinematic works that behave televisually. A 'racket' is made 'to attract attention' by preposterous narrative motifs or events, such as the capture of the moon, or the various oddities, such as a cow with more than a dozen teats or a demonstration of edible underwear, featured in *Ginger and Fred*'s fictional TV show. 'Interruptability', Caughie's key feature of television *spectatorship*, is here woven into the content and form of the films themselves. Fake commercials interrupt the story of *Ginger and Fred*. And, implementing what Fellini had prescribed for *television* work in the 1970s, both films are sprawling and slow paced. They both consist of long sequences that thematize 'live coverage' narratively while also conveying it aesthetically, in a strange hybrid of outlandishness and uneventfulness, as in *Ginger and Fred's* almost interminable scenes of pre-show waiting and rehearsing. [64] To some extent, these films seem to want to seduce spectators into distracted viewing and divided attention. At the same time, however, they reward those who watch attentively by hiding some fleeting 'surprises' in some of the scenes.

For, as a result – or perhaps because – of his indictment of television, the Fellini of the 1980s and 1990s also sees some potential in the very possibility of interruption that television and its viewership contain. In a condition of pervasive and continuous televisual exposure, 'no outside' of television seems thinkable because the medium engulfs not only all of the 'outside' (its infrastructure far above our heads and under our feet; its images in the home, the square, and on everyone's lips) but seems also increasingly able to orchestrate and gain from *both* distraction *and* attention. If an 'exit' from such a condition seems impossible, technical glitches or disruptions may, however, become catalysts for alternative modalities or

[63] Fellini interviewed on RAI 3 programme *Processo al film* in 1983 on the occasion of the release of *E la nave va/And the Ship Sails On* (1983). The interview also features in the documentary *Fellini racconta: Diario di un film* (Paquito del Bosco, RAI, 1983).

[64] Neither *Ginger and Fred,* initially planned as an episode in a series of short films for TV by film directors including Antonioni, nor *The Voice of the Moon* had full scripts before shooting started. See Marcus, '*Ginger and Fred'*, p. 169; Mino Guerrini, ed., *Federico Fellini: Ginger e Fred, rendiconto di un film* (Milan: Longanesi, 1986), especially Gianfranco Angelucci, 'Prefazione', pp. 11-16; Federico Fellini, *La voce della luna* (Turin: Einaudi, 1990), 'Premessa dell'autore', pp. v-ix, and Gianfranco Angelucci, 'Nota', pp. xi-xii. These film's narrative looseness accentuates a trend for fragmented, episodic narratives dating back to *La dolce vita,* which in fact, as mentioned, includes a long sequence about live television. In *The Open Work* (1962), Umberto Eco had suggested that the dilution and dilation of narrative in art cinema (Antonioni in particular, in his example) might have been informed by the aesthetics of live television. Matilde Nardelli, *Antonioni and the Aesthetics of Impurity*: Remaking the Image in the 1960s (Edinburgh: EUP, 2020), esp. pp. 56-64.

deployments of 'interruptability'. The blackout in the television studio in *Ginger and Fred,* just as Pippo and Amelia get on stage for their number, is one such technical glitch that offers, both within the film's story and for the film's audience, a brief moment of suspension – an interruption. In the suspenseful darkness and silence that briefly envelopes them, Pippo whispers to Amelia that they should take the opportunity to leave. Though the lights come back on and they do perform, this interruption has offered both characters and viewers a brief moment of distance – *critical* distance, even – from the televisual spectacle that the film narrates and makes its own aesthetically.

In *The Voice of the Moon,* these interruptions or moments of suspension are more frequent, but narratively and visually less prominent and more ephemeral. They are 'blink and you miss it' moments that reward viewers' attention while thematically or aesthetically appropriating – and re-articulating – elements of televisual interruptability and distraction. The blank TV screen with which I started, despite its giant scale, falls within these 'small scale' interruptions and suspensions. Another such interruption features near the beginning of the film, as Ivo joins some fellow villagers who have gathered outside the window of a farmhouse to voyeuristically peep inside. Inside the room, in what is one of Fellini's regular motifs, a plump middle-aged woman, donning a red-checkered dressing gown with the belt undone to reveal her underwear and stockings, is biting into an apple and provocatively dancing to a seductive brassy tune. As the camera switches to her point of view, a television set becomes visible within the frame: it *is* on, but only static is on the screen (Fig. 7). In this interruption of televisual spectacle, she has stepped in with a spectacle of her own, dancing (and stripping) in her living room.[65] Where this strip-dancing woman has caught the opportunity in an interruption that presented itself to her, Ivo, the film's protagonist, is often seen loitering amidst the city infrastructure, from aerials on roofs to underground networks of pipes and cables, in active search for literal 'holes' or 'interruptions' (Fig. 8a-b). Ivo, too, tends to produce his own spectacle – of reveries, memories and hallucinations. As if to underline that these are 'internal' images available only to his eyes and mind, however, the visual content of this spectacle is never quite made fully available by the film and, in fact, often remains unseen. At a point in the town square, Ivo snatches the Polaroid camera of a tourist, but is disappointed that the instantaneous photograph has failed to capture what he

[65] Of course, albeit taking place during a technical glitch of televisual transmission, the strip tease may in turn have been inspired by existing forms of media spectacle, including the performances of scantily clad young women so prominent on, and characteristic of, programmes on the Fininvest/Mediaset network. To note, however, is that the TV set and the whole scene has a 1950s look.

describes as a multitude of silver 'discs' emanating from the tolling bell. 'Soon it will be possible to photograph even the things that others can't see', he says in a mildly hopeful tone.

Yet, the film seems overall to embrace the contrary hope in its sympathetic gaze on psychotics who, like Ivo, demonstrate how there are other *media* than media technologies through which images are produced. If *Ginger and Fred* addressed the 'anthropological mutation' precipitated by the televisual proliferation of the 1980s, *The Voice of the Moon* also seems to turn to what, in *An Anthropology of Images* (2001), Hans Belting has described as the body's capacity – or, indeed, regular function – as a 'medium for images'.[66] Even in a condition where there is *no outside* television and other emerging media networks because they *are* 'the outside', a medium we now live in, like air, our body is also, fundamentally, not only a *medium* through which we 'receive images from the outside world' but also one through which 'we give birth to inner images'.[67] From this perspective, Fellini would be in agreement with Crary's call to resist the efforts of 24/7 capitalism to push beyond the 'last frontier' – that of sleep – by defending our need for the 'remission' and the opportunity for the making of images from the inside, so to speak, that sleep enables.[68]

'Is there *any* outside anymore, when networks encircle the globe?', Galloway asks.[69] Fellini's answer, at a historical moment when our current digital-media landscape was nascent but not yet fully foreseeable, was already a 'no'. Yet, what Fellini's late films also show is that the very attributes of spectatorship that television fostered might be trained towards brief moments of interruption, when absorption by a media outsideness which cannot be altogether exited or left is somewhat suspended. The possibility of such moments of distance or withdrawal that can be glimpsed in *Ginger and Fred* and *The Voice of the Moon* may still be useful in our contemporary era where, as Crary suggests, the televisual survives and thrives in our newer digitally networked media of online, 24/7 connectivity. Even as Fellini's late cinema seems to *give in* to the televisual narratively and aesthetically, at the same time it offers not only a critique of television – or, more precisely, of a certain *type* of television that emerged in Italy in the course of the 1970s – but also ideas for small acts of resistance.

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[66] Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body* (2001), trans. Thomas Dunlap (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).
[67] Ibid., p. 19.
[68] Crary, *24/7,* pp. 126, 128.
[69] Galloway, T*he Interface Effect,* p. 120 (my emphasis).

Illustrations

Fig. 1: 'In front' of the TV, *La voce della luna/The Voice of the Moon* (Federico Fellini, 1990).

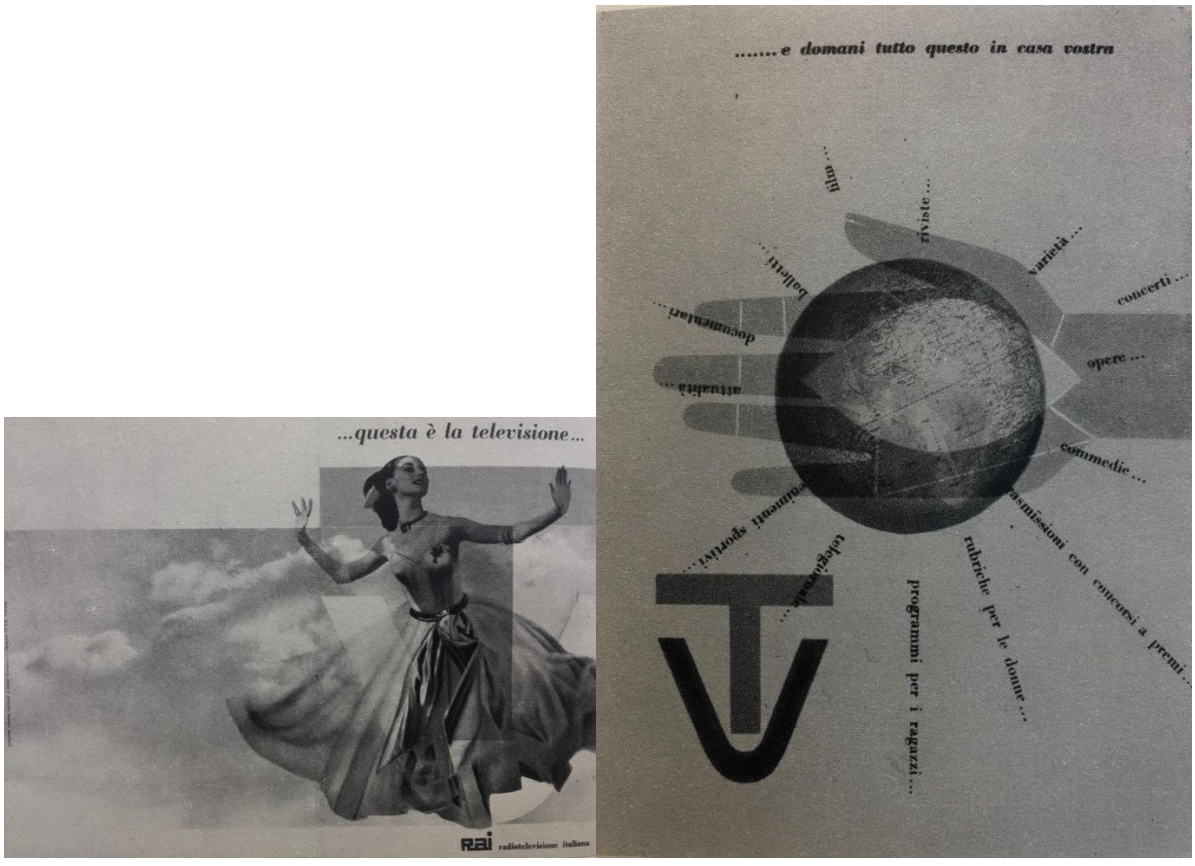

Fig. 2 and Fig. 3 Erberto Carboni, from advertising brochures for launch of RAI television services, 1953.

Fig. 4: 'Aerial invasion', *Intervista* (Federico Fellini, 1987)

Fig. 5a-c: Ivo on the rooftop amidst TV antennas, *La voce della luna/The Voice of the Moon* (Federico Fellini, 1990).

Fig. 6: The moon as television, *The Voice of the Moon* (Federico Fellini, 1990).

Fig. 7: Televisual snow, *The Voice of the Moon* (Federico Fellini, 1990).

Fig. 8: Ivo's pursuit of 'interruptions', *The Voice of the Moon* (Federico Fellini, 1990).