Like a mass image: Federico Fellini's Le Tentazioni del Dottor Antonio, advertising and mimicry

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Abstract

This article considers Federico Fellini's *Le tentazioni del Dottor Antonio/The Temptations of Dr Antonio* (1962), a fifty-minute episode in the omnibus *Boccaccio '70*. While sometimes praised for its aesthetic and stylistic significance, the film remains largely overlooked and considered a 'bagatelle' or 'break' in Fellini's career. It is its valence as a break – a promotional or advertising break, even, between *La dolce vita* (1960) and *8 ½* (1963) – and its overt thematization of the mass image of advertising, that this article explores. Unpacking the film's ostensible silliness and superficiality, the discussion is not so much focused on praising its originality, but in bringing into view its conceptual, thematic and aesthetic entanglement with mimicry and imitation. For the film does not only address the mass image of advertising, and the mimetic behaviour it relies on and encourages, but also itself enacts such mimetic behaviour in different ways. In so doing, it both taps into, and contributes to, contemporaneous concerns and debates about mass media and image culture.

Keywords

Mass Image, Media, Advertising, Television, Federico Fellini, Frank Tashlin, Milk, Mimicry.

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Federico Fellini's *Le tentazioni del Dottor Antonio/The Temptations of Dr Antonio* (1962) was made and released between what are arguably the director's two most widely known and successful films, *La dolce vita* (1960) and 8 ½ (1963). Yet, *Le tentazioni* itself, a circa fifty-minutes-long episode in the omnibus film *Boccaccio '70*, alongside contributions by Luchino Visconti, Vittorio De Sica and Mario Monicelli, is arguably one of Fellini's least known and discussed films. This is so despite the fact that it was Fellini's first film in colour and the first to introduce the supra-perceptual vision sequences –dreams, daydreams, memories or hallucinations – set to become such a signature of the director's cinema.

It is intriguing that a film generally dismissed, when mentioned at all, as a 'break' or colourful 'bagatelle' in the director's career should happen to resonate with the mass image of advertising and its eye-catching, yet also soon, or often, ignored visuality at several levels. [1] If the film seems like an intermission – a 'break' not

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Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Italian are mine.

[1]'With *The Temptations of Dr Antonio,* Fellini took a break', Giuliano Grazzini, *Corriere della Sera,* 24 February 1962. Apparently Fellini referred to it as a 'sciocchezzuola' ['silly little thing'], 'like a story in the Corriere dei Piccoli', Kezich suggests . See Tullio Kezich, *Federico Fellini: His Life and Work*, trans. Minna Proctor (London: IB Tauris, 2007), p. 228.

unlike a television commercial, perhaps – between Fellini's two widely recognized masterpieces, it is also an advertisement for both: a satirical defence against the moralistic attacks on *La dolce vita* on the one hand, and a promotion of the psychoanalytically-influenced dream language to be launched with *8 ½* on the other.[2] *Le tentazioni*'s placement within (and at the head of) one of Italy's first films in colour, an omnibus programme produced by Carlo Ponti and showcasing internationally-famous directors and cast – Anita Ekberg, Sophia Loren, fresh from an Oscar for *La ciociara/Two Women* (1961), Romy Schneider –enhances its promotional valence. The publicity intent of the anthology as a whole is evoked and underlined, visually, by the series of heavy-velvet theatre curtains, lifting open, one after the other, to introduce the opening credits as well as each subsequent episode. This is an overt allusion to what would have then been the instantly recognizable motif starting *Carosello* (1957-1977). For, introduced by opening curtains, *Carosello* was indeed a dedicated 'little theatre' of advertisements or, more precisely, of nightly changing mini-shows (each circa three minutes in length) featuring an informative talk, a song or a comedy sketch alongside the promoted product.[3] Running at three and a half hours, the colourful and sleek cinematic show of *Boccaccio '70* thus echoes, but also exceeds, the omnibus structure and high-production values of Italian television's most successful – yet, like all other broadcasts, still black and white –

[2] For moralistic attacks on *La dolce vita*, and Fellini's introduction to psychoanalysis see Kezich, Federico Fellini, esp. ch. 26. For *Le tentazioni's* introduction of visions and dream sequences, see Peter Bondanella, *The Films of Federico Fellini* (Cambridge: Cambrdige University Press, 2001), pp. 27, 96-97, and *The Cinema of Federico Fellini* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 160-178.
[3] See Bob Franklin, Mike Hogan, et al., *Key Concepts in Public Relations* (London: Sage, 2009); Stuart Moss, ed., *The Entertainment Industry : an Introduction* (Wallingford : CABI, 2009).

programme at the time (Figs. 1-2).[4] In the context of the developing competition between cinema and television, *Boccaccio '70* might indeed appear as an advert for cinema seeking to beat its main rival by mimicking, yet upping, its rival's own language.

In addition to these more or less direct promotional qualities, and perhaps more crucially, *Le tentazioni* is also explicitly a film *about* advertising. In the form of a giant billboard (with sound!) featuring Anita Ekberg promoting the consumption of Italian milk, the advertising image occupies the film narratively, thematically and visually. Its conspicuous diegetic and aesthetic presence enacts the crucial 'deal[ing] in attention' at the core of advertising itself (as the English term, from the Latin *advertere*, 'to turn [attention] to', also underlines). [5] Though *Le tentazioni* was Fellini's first overt engagement with it, advertising returns to feature prominently in his later career, when he himself directs commercials (for Campari, Barilla, Banca di Roma) and, in films such as *Ginger & Fred* (1986) and *La voce della luna*/*The Voice of the Moon* (1990), casts his disapproving gaze onto the luridness of consumer capitalism and the visual system sustaining it.[6]

In its novel address of advertising, *Le tentazioni* is nevertheless part of Fellini's existent and persistent interest in the mass image of consumer culture and its alluring power. Already with *Lo sceicco bianco/The White Sheik* (1952), centred on

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[4] See Piero Dorfles, *Carosello* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998); Daniele Pittèri, *La pubblicità in Italia* (Rome: Laterza, 2006), pp. 3-5. For a history of Italian television see: Aldo Grasso, *Storia della televisione italiana* (Milan: Garzanti, 2004).

[5] Kathleen Oswald and Jeremy Packer, 'Flow and Mobile Media: Broadcast fixity to digital fluidity', in Jeremy Packer and Stephen B. Crofts Wiley, eds, *Communication Matters: Materialist Approaches to Media, Mobility, and Networks* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 276-87.

[6] For an overview of Fellini's commercials see: Celluloid Liberation Front, *Fellini's Commercials* (London: BFI, 2016): https://www2.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/reviews-recommendations/bytes/fellini-s-commercials [accessed 17th June 2021]; Frank Burke, *Fellini's Films and Commercials: From Postwar to Postmodern* (Bristol: Intellect, 2020), ch. 11.

the photonovel magazine, Fellini had turned his own attention to mass media, and the phenomena of celebrity and fandom they fostered. And, of course, *La dolce vita*, to which, as is well known, we owe the globally used term 'paparazzo' for an often-unscrupulous, celebrity-hunting photographer for sensationalist mass media, is largely about fame, or aspirations to it, and publicity (which, as Raymond Williams noted in an essay on advertising of 1961, is the 'sell[ing] of persons' to advertising's 'sell[ing] of goods').[7] If *Le tentazioni* was, as Fellini suggested, like a strip in the kids' magazine *Corriere dei Piccoli*, then *La dolce vita* was largely based on the gossip about celebrities and sensationalized representations of real-life occurrences in mass-circulation papers and magazines such as *Oggi* and *Paese Sera*.[8] So, while constituting a first 'look' at advertising, *Le tentazioni* is also situated within this broader context of attraction to the mass image, and awareness of the interconnections between different types of mass image – of which cinema, as Fellini well knew, is one – in the director's career. The familial bond between the advertising image and the cinema image literally looms large in *Le tentazioni.* As Frank Burke has noted, the advertising poster on which the film is centred even flaunts the proportions of widescreen cinema – closer, in this respect, to those of *La dolce vita*, 2:35:1, than the more modest ones of *Le tentazioni* itself, 1:66:1.[9] As the film fosters overlaps and affinities between the advertising and cinematic image, it also articulates – or, even,

[7] Raymond Williams, 'Advertising: The Magic System', in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980), pp. 170-195, p. 183 cited. (The essay was originally written and partly published in 1961).
[8] See Richard Dyer, *La dolce vita* (London: Palgrave/BFI, 2018), esp. ch. 2; Kezich, *Federico Fellini*, ch. 25. Uliano Lucas and Tatiana Agliani, *La realtà e lo sguardo: storia del fotogiornalismo in Italia* (Turin: Einaudi, 2015), pp. 228-246.
[9] *La dolce vita* was shot in a European variation of CinemaScope, Totalscope, and was Fellini's first widescreen film. See Frank Burke, *Fellini's Films: From Postwar to Postmodern* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), pp. 113-123, for a consideration of how *Le tentazioni* may be Fellini's first overtly self-reflexive work, since the advertising billboard is like a cinema (wide)screen.

allegorizes – these respective images' porous co-existence as mass images in consumer culture.

Not unlike an advertising poster or a television commercial, *Le tentazioni* (and the omnibus hosting it) faded quickly into the background, and has largely been overlooked in criticism and scholarship. (After all, if advertising deals in attention, attention's hold is always precarious.) Even when noting, as scholars have done through an *auteurist* lens, that the film is of interest as the springboard for a new and distinctive aesthetics of supra-perceptual visions in the director's cinema, attention on the film *itself* has been scarce. [10] My aim here is not to reappraise *Le tentazioni* as something other than a colourful bagatelle but, rather, to stay with the *scherzo* (as the episodes are referred to in the opening credits of *Boccaccio '70*) and pay attention to its playfulness, eye-catchiness, and seeming superficiality. For it is in this generally hurried-over silliness that, in my view, much of the film's interest as an engagement with advertising and the (mass) image in consumer culture lies. In presenting Ekberg's advertising poster as both exemplary and allegorical of the mass image, the film both taps into, and contributes to, contemporaneous concerns and debates about mass media and a 'civilization of the image'. Discussing the film from three different, yet related, perspectives, what I aim to bring into view is precisely not the film's originality, but its conceptual, thematic and aesthetic entanglement with mimicry, as a practice of imitation and, as we will see, resemblance rather than identity, in a world of mass mediation and mass consumerism. As I hope to suggest, *Le tentazioni* does not only address the mass image of advertising, and the mimetic or imitative behaviour such image relies on and encourages – as in the case of Ekberg's

[10] In addition to Bondanella, *The Films of Federico Fellini*, p. 27ff, Burke, *Fellini's Films*, pp. 113-23, see e.g.: Vito Zagarrio, 'Fellini dal moderno al postmoderno', in Giorgio de Vincenti, ed., *Storia del cinema italiano* vol. X: 1960-1964 (Venice: Marsilio, 2001-), pp. 87-89.

endorsement of milk, ideally inspiring others to do as she does (perhaps in the hope of resembling her or her glamourous life). The film itself also enacts such mimetic behaviour in different ways, through a layered texture of citations, derivations and homages, and thus adumbrates a complex assessment of the mimicry of mass-media images.

As I consider *Le tentazioni* and its giant billboard in more detail in the next section, I start by bringing into focus how the film engages both with the mimicking *of* mass-media images and with a sense that mass-images may *themselves* be mimetic.

The Mimicry of Images

Let me go back briefly to *La dolce vita* first. When the American actress Sylvia (Anita Ekberg) arrives at Rome airport in that film, the photographers waiting for her on the runway tell her to repeat her exit from the plane because her first, spontaneous, exit was not photogenic enough – not photogenic enough, to be precise, for the kind of mass-circulation celebrity image for magazines, newspapers or TV news they are after. So, obediently, Sylvia goes back in and then comes out again, posing for the cameras in an anticipatory mimicry of, or assimilation to, the very form of representation by which she is about to be captured. A similar process is repeated soon after, when, now down on the tarmac herself, she is asked to pose biting into a slice of pizza. We could say that her compliance to the photographers signifies her attempt to try to be like an image, or to make herself, even more accurately, *like a mass image.*

Given this premise, it may not seem too surprising, then, that in *Le tentazioni* Ekberg (here appearing more or less as herself) seems to have brought the process of being like a mass image to completion. For, in the diegetic world of the film, more

than simply *being like*, she has literally *become* one, appearing as she does on a giant four-part billboard being erected outside the building block in the EUR quarter of Rome in which the titular Dr Antonio lives.

As we have learnt from the opening scenes, Dr Antonio (Peppino de Filippo) is a self-appointed morality activist. His main occupation seems to be quixotic attempts to stem the tide of cultural, social and sexual liberation in consumer-boom Italy, a tide which he knows to be significantly fostered by the mass image, as his purchase of illustrated magazines in order to rip them up suggests. The erection of the billboard outside his home, bearing an image that is for him obscene – and obscenely large – is thus particularly troubling. Dangling from a crane, the billboard's first panel, bearing a reproduction of Anita's much-larger-than-life, nearly naked feet, slowly floats behind Antonio while intent on recounting an autobiographical episode of successful resistance to naked temptation to a group of scouts. A varied crowd of onlookers and brass musicians (playing the motif from *La dolce vita*) busily gathers, and this first panel is soon followed by three others – with legs, face and bust – fixed onto a large metal scaffold by workers directed by a manager imparting instructions through a loudspeaker. This could be a building site, not unlike those then proliferating around EUR itself and other Roman peripheries;[11] or, in a quarter not far from Cinecittà, in a city then famously dubbed 'Hollywood on Tiber', it could be, if not cinema itself in action, then something for it. Operationally and dimensionally, this is certainly a step up from the poster of Rita Hayworth that Antonio Ricci glues to the wall in De Sica's neorealist classic, *Ladri di biciclette/Bicycle Thieves* (1948), just before his bike gets stolen. A young seminarian watching the goings-on timidly in *Le*

[11] See e.g. Vittorio De Sica, *Il boom* (1963).

tentazioni enquires 'Cinema?', to which one of the workers swiftly and proudly replies: 'No, not cinema: milk.'

As the installation is eventually completed with a neon sign spelling out 'Drink more milk! [Bevete piú latte!]', and a speaker from which a cheerful jingle, very quickly picked up by the brass band at the billboard's feet, urges us repeatedly to the same action, things indeed become clearer. This is advertising – for milk – by Anita Ekberg. Her fame is evident from the number of onlookers excitedly chanting her name. Towering in the middle of an otherwise empty field, she is smiling invitingly, reclined on a white sofa (or is it a bed?) in a long but low-cut and sleeveless black dress with silver sequins, holding a glass of milk. In its preposterousness, this is advertising's pattern of validation (for 'the material object being sold is never enough'): a pattern that Williams' 1960s essay on the subject described as akin 'magic'.[12] Advertisers might call it celebrity marketing or endorsement, but it is also an instance of what René Girard famously termed 'triangular' desire in his 1961 book *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*. Always channelled through an admired, if imaginary, model whom the subject seeks to mimic, all desire, according to Girard, is thus 'mimetic' and 'mediated'. Here, this happens via a (Swedish-) American star, whose own fame in real life had just dramatically risen thanks to Fellini's own *La dolce vita*, promoting, as the jingle calls it, an 'Italian product' 'for all ages'.[13]

This is a solidly propped-up image and itself strong. It is not paper-thin, as posters would normally be, but mounted on thick panels and waterproof, as a vigorous

[12] Williams, 'Advertising: The Magic System', p. 185.
[13] René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (1961), trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1965). Here, Ekberg is at once mediator ('subject' of desire) for the advertised object and, herself, 'object' of desire. As Williams notes in 'Advertising', the 'product jingle', though first emerging with commercial radio, is a feature of the 1950s and television advertising.

wash with a jet of water from a hose demonstrates (Fig. 3). It would be the kind of image that artist Mimmo Rotella might have liked to get his hands on for his *décollages* of street posters. In February 1962, when *Boccaccio '70* was released, Rotella exhibited a series of them inspired by Cinecittà, and the year later, the poster still for the omnibus, featuring Ekberg in front of the 'Square Colosseum' in EUR, will end up in – or, rather, *as* – one of Rotella's 'photographic reproductions', under the title *La diva/The Diva*.[14] Yet, unlike Rotella's primary materials, this image would not yield to laceration and theft. The scaffolding endows the billboard with ambivalence, making it seem at once provisional and holding the promise of something being built to last – like architecture or a monument.

In this respect, the visual affinity between Ekberg's billboard-sized body parts dangling from a crane and the Christ statue hovering from the helicopter in the opening shots of *La dolce vita* may not be accidental. A similar correspondence is evoked in one of Italy's earliest advertising manuals, *Come si riesce con la pubblicità* [*How to Succeed in Advertising*] (1920). According to the author, where the legacy of ancient Greece had been 'the pure white forms of its Venuses' , that of the modern era 'will be trichromatic posters illuminating with a sweet feminine smile and a lascivious cleavage the miraculous properties of our mineral waters'.[15] In the postwar years in Italy, the best known posters with 'sweet feminine smiles' and 'lascivious cleavage' were those of graphic artist Gino Boccasile – whose renewed focus on curvaceous, sometimes scantily dressed, women in the late 1940s and early 1950s constituted a presumably more neutral approach than his often overtly racist and sexist work under

[14] Mimmo Rotella – *Cinecittà*, Galerie J, Paris, 28 February-23 March 1962. See Germano Celant, *Mimmo Rotella* (Milan/London: Skira/T&H, 2007), p. 208.
[15] Egisto Roggero, *Come si riesce con la pubblicità* (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli, 1920), p. 77.

(and in support of) fascism.[16] Boccasile's posters are arguably evoked by Ekberg's image and pose but, in its arrival in pieces to be assembled, the billboard also resonates with that form of machine-age statuary, like the Statue of Liberty (famously shipped across the Atlantic in 200 crates in 1885), that Serafina Bathrick has named 'female colossus' and seen as three-dimensional pre-figurations – or parallels – of women's monumentality on advertising posters and cinema screens.[17] And if Ekberg poster's bears an affinity with architecture or monuments in spatial terms (the legs alone fill up the view from the *five* windows of his flat, as Antonio complains), there is also a temporal inflection to it. While the billboard scaffolding may ultimately be destined to host another advertisement or to be taken down altogether, Ekberg's image itself does not only have material endurance or resistance, but also psychic persistence, or insistence, in Antonio's mind. Indeed, his hallucinations about it (even such supra-perceptual visions are, it seems, ultimately imitative of, and derived from, a mass image) will lead him to the psychiatric ward by the end of the film.

When, at a point, Antonio manages to have the image hidden under large white strips of paper – which will, inevitably, quickly be reduced to pulp in the rain – his maid confuses 'pornographic' with 'photographic'. The billboard had to be covered, she explains, because it was 'photographic'. To which Antonio retorts: 'it was *pornographic*, idiot'. But perhaps the distinction that Antonio's scolding draws belies a contrary conviction that the image is pornographic – or, as he also calls it,

[16] Even some of Boccassile's women (namely, the Americanized 'signorina *Grandi Firme*'), however, fell foul of the regime. See: Stephen Gundle, *Bellissima: Feminine Beauty and the Idea of Italy* (London: Yale UP, 2007), pp. 89-91. For a discussion of Boccasile's work, see: Karen Pinkus, *Bodily Regimes: Italian Advertising under Fascism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), ch. 2; Ferdinando Fasce, Elisabetta Bini, Bianca Gaudenzi, *Comprare per credere: La pubblicità in Italia dalla Belle Époque a oggi* (Rome: Carrocci editore, 2016), pp. 80-82.

[17] Serafina Bathrick, 'The Female Colossus: The Body as Façade and Threshold', in Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog, eds., *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body* (New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 79-99.

'obscene' – *because* it is photographic, in the sense of photomechanically reproduced (even though it may look, if not quite pictorial, then more like a graphic illustration à la Boccasile and, as I have noted, cinematic and televisual rather than strictly photographic)[18]. From Antonio's perspective, the photographic brings into view, and in wide circulation through reproduction, what should remain 'off scene'. While Antonio's aforementioned magazine ripping would seem to contribute to the confirmation of this equation, his sentiment also speaks more generally of a widespread contemporaneous anxiety about image culture or indeed, as the *Almanacco letterario Bompiani* described it in 1962 – the same year as *Le tentazioni*'s release – about a shift towards a 'civilization of the image'.[19]

Even as the 1962 edition of the annual volume, dedicated precisely to such topic, is fascinated by the yet unprecedented rise of the image in mass media – 'one of the great novelties of our century', as the editors' preface puts it – the concern is palpable in almost all of the contributions to it.[20] The punny title of philosopher Gillo Dorfles's essay, 'Civilization (and *Un-Civilization*) of the Image' ['Civiltà (e *inciviltà*) dell'immagine'] is representative of the generalized ambivalence.[21] 'Might there be the risk', Dorfles asks to start, 'that ours, rather than passing to posterity as a "civilization of the image", is in fact destined to appear as an "image of barbarity [uncivility]"?' Might 'the abuse of images', Dorfles continues, 'not in fact backfire?".[22]

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[18] For a study of Fellini's intermedial, and especially pictorial, incorporations, see: Hava Aldouby, *Federico Fellini: Painting in Film, Painting on Film* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).
[19] *Almanacco letterario Bompiani 1963. La civiltà dell'immagine* (Milan: Bompiani, 1962), ed. by Sergio Morando.
[20] Ibid., p. 7.
[21] Ibid: Gillo Dorfles, 'Civiltà (e *inciviltà*) dell'immagine', pp. 67-76.
[22] Ibid., p. 67.

Dorfles, like other contributors to the volume, is particularly sensitive to those images that are part of what he calls 'urban furniture'. This includes 'park benches, post boxes, the colour of buses', but also, increasingly, 'newsagents kiosks and windows, advertising posters' and 'street signs': that visual 'universe … to which we are continuously exposed and from which we cannot escape'.[23] In *Le tentazioni*, Antonio is acutely aware of this exposure without escape, and the 'urban furniture' of Ekberg's billboard has edged in one step further than previous imagery. Filling up the view from his windows, it even impinges on his domestic space – a kind of outdoor television that, however, cannot be switched off. But Antonio's state of continuous alertness is in marked contrast with that of his fellow citizens. With regard to the latest invasion especially, for everyone else, after a brief initial moment of attention, the billboard seems to fade pretty quickly into the background of life. Somewhat contradictorily, its colourful, eye-catching, gigantic presence soon becomes all but invisible. It quickly becomes, that is, the *overlooked* – but benignly overlook*ing* – fulcrum of play, work, social gatherings and community life, as children by day and prostitutes by night spend their time under it without ever glancing up – aware of its presence, presumably, but oblivious to it, as something that has been accepted and incorporated into life or its supporting environment.

In this respect, Ekberg's monumental billboard incurs much the same fate as 'traditional' monuments, that other category of Dorfles's 'urban furniture' which, as Robert Musil provocatively put it, tend to be 'conspicuously inconspicuous'. While 'no doubt erected to be seen – indeed to attract attention', Musil explained, they also seem to be 'impregnated with something that repels attention'.[24] Musil, writing in the

[23] Ibid., p. 72.
[24] Robert Musil, 'Monuments', in *Posthumous Papers of a Living Author* (1936), trans. Peter Wortsman (Brooklyn: Archipelago Books, 2006), pp. 64-72; p. 64 cited.

1930s, thought that monuments should 'try harder', and learn from advertising.[25] But the media scholar Paul Frosh, writing in the early 21st century, underlines how even advertising billboards, like all the other mass media images in our lives, are often 'effectively "invisible" … routinely overlooked by most of their viewers, most of the time. They are the wallpaper of consumer culture'.[26]

In the Italy of the economic miracle, not unlike Dorfles and the other contributors to the Bompiani almanac, *Le tentazioni*, with its colossal Ekberg billboard, catches an important moment in the life of the mass image in consumer culture. This is a moment in which the mass image is strikingly, imposingly, visible in its rapid proliferation and diffusion. Yet, precisely because of such growth and presence, this very image is also on the verge of invisibility, of turning into 'wallpaper', as Frosh puts it, into 'an unremarkable but enveloping visual environment'.[27] Perhaps it is this paradoxical condition of *emerging invisibility* that the film looks at and wants us to see. Where Ekberg strove to look photogenic – or like an image – for the cameras in *La dolce vita*, here, literally *made image*, she is conspicuously present, yet also strangely incorporated – mimetically assimilated, even – into the surrounding environment for anyone but Antonio. Her appearance and disappearance as a mass image of advertising in *Le tentazioni*'s poster stimulates a perception of such images as themselves mimetic: something that fades or disappears into the environment. One is reminded here of Roger Caillois's famous 1930s essay,

[25] Ibid., p. 67.
[26] Paul Frosh, *The Image Factory: Consumer Culture, Photography and the Visual Content Industry* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), p. 1, emphasis in original.
[27] Ibid., p. 147.

in which 'mimicry' is described as a 'search for the similar' whose 'end would appear to be *assimilation to the surroundings'*.[28]

In a process reversing, but complementing, the 'imageification' started in *La dolce vita,* Ekberg does at a point in the story metamorphose from billboard image into flesh-and-blood body. 'Look Antonio: I'm alive!' she will enthuse, starting to roll around in the grass while the sofa (or bed) in the poster lies empty. Even though Ekberg's aliveness is ultimately revealed to be only in Antonio's persecutory yet alluring fantasy, her exit from the poster underscores, from a different angle, what *Le tentazioni* posits as the deep interconnection and ultimate inextricability between the mass image and the environment of which it is 'urban furniture'. Even if its effects may be 'only' psychological, the mass image of consumer culture, *Le tentazioni* suggests, is not simply, the 'real' world presented like or as image but rather is, in its manifold manifestations, a fundamental and enabling *part of* that very world. In other words, the film at some level displays an understanding of mass visual media in the environment, if not indeed, *as* environments.

In this respect, not unlike Dorfles's essay, it can be seen to partake of emerging 'infrastructural' or 'environmental' conceptualizations of mass media themselves, which, spearheaded by Marshall McLuhan in the early 1960s, have led more recent media scholars such as John Durham Peters to extend 'the reach of the media concept from messages to habitats'.[29] The tangibly present billboard image in *Le tentazioni,* which becomes the paradoxically ignored fulcrum of much ordinary life

[28] Roger Caillois, 'Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia', trans. John Shepley, *October* 31 (Winter 1984), pp. 17-32; p. 27 cited (emphasis in original).
[29] Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1962), and *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964). John Durham Peters, *The Marvellous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 14.

in the course of the story, does indeed chime with the extended conceptualization of media *as* habitats Peters (whose *The Marvellous Clouds* shows us how air, fire, water are 'media') advocates: for the film presents media, in the guise of billboard advertising, as – at very least – a component of modern habitats. If media, as Peters suggests punning on the title of McLuhan's 1964 *Understanding Media*, are also that which 'stands under' – supporting communication, as well as life as such – with *Le tentazioni*'s giant billboard such infrastructural, under-girding, function is captured as something that does not literally need to be below.[30]

If the film addresses the urban presence and environmental assimilation of the mass – and, here, advertising – image in 1960s Italy, it also, through Antonio's discomfort and failure to adapt to it, prevents that very image from fading into the background, from becoming unnoticed or, so to speak, invisible. In a way, the image peels off at the edges. As the film unfolds, Antonio begins to hallucinate changes to its composition, seeing Ekberg making faces or, in typically Italian fashion, 'horns' with her fingers, if not, indeed, leaving the billboard altogether and appearing reclined on his coffee table. As we will see in the next section, the acme of this is the close encounter with Ekberg 'in the flesh' around EUR. Paradoxically, perhaps it is precisely by challenging, disturbing and undoing the image-ness of Ekberg's poster that the film keeps it in view *as an image*, prompting awareness of its mediating function as 'habitat' no less than as 'message'.

If the (mass) image in consumer culture may be both – or in tension between – what Peters describes as 'message' and 'habitat', then Fellini's film presents this image as mimetic in both its ostentatious visibility and appearance (its valence as

[30] Peters, *The Marvellous Clouds*, p. 33. See also: Nina Lager-Vestberg, ' "There is No Cloud": Towards a Materialist Ecology of Post-Photography', *Captures,* 1/1 (2016) < https://revuecaptures.org/article-dune-publication/%E2%80%9Cthere-no-cloud%E2%80%9D > [Accessed March 2022].

'message') and its relative invisibility and disappearance as Dorfles's 'urban furniture' or Frosh's 'wallpaper' (its function as 'habitat'). *Le tentazioni*, that is, helps us see how mimicry includes the imitative behaviours mass images may inspire in people, but can extend to a quality that mass images themselves in turn seemingly possess. Mimicry may be a quality of mass images in this sense in so much as they cite or imitate each other. But also, just as in the animal world mimicry can be both a practice of display and ostentation (whether for attack or courting) and of concealment and disguise (for self-protection), so in the world of mass images – and of advertising images perhaps exemplarily – mimicry may be called upon to think both about their attraction and visibility and their invisibility or disappearance.[31]

In the next section, a different focus on the billboard's 'message' – that of its promoted product, milk – enables me to bring into view another aspect of Fellini's playful articulation of the relation between the mass images of consumer culture and mimicry, and of how such images are themselves mimetic. Where this section has primarily addressed the advertising or mass image in its (albeit soon fading) novelty and as a preoccupation or concern of the then 'now' of the film, the early 1960s, in the next section, we look back to the past.

Drink More Milk!

That the product being advertised through such colossal means is not simply something as ostensibly familiar and banal as milk but, in fact, unbranded or generic milk – even if, as the refrain points out, of Italian provenance – is perhaps the most curious thing about *Le tentazioni*'s billboard. Again, a tension is at play (or at work)

[31] Caillois considers this in 'Mimicry', pp. 18-19.

here. The very insinuation that milk might be the object of promotion suggests both a sense of novelty and branding of it, but the advertising poster – whose image, as I noted, is evocative of Boccasile's advertising women among other things – would seem to draw on a certain familiarity.

Thinking about wine and milk in *Mythologies* (1957), Roland Barthes noted that milk (in the mid-twentieth century France wherein he wrote at least) 'remain[ed] an exotic substance'.[32] Before the wide diffusion of sterile transportation, pasteurization and refrigeration in the course of the 1950s, milk was 'exotic' as a beverage – and certainly as a beverage 'for *all* ages', as Fellini's jingles promotes it – in Italy too. While some of the (northern and richer) European countries, such as the UK, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia had, like in the United States, embarked on industrialized milk production and its active promotion as a healthy beverage by the first half of the twentieth century at the latest, consumption data from the late 1940s indicate that Italy was just before the country with the least milk consumption in Europe, Greece. Services such as doorstep cow-milking to help reduce bacterial contamination and secure freshness might still be offered in large urban centres such as Rome into the mid of the century.[33]

Barthes not only pits milk (pure, restorative, strength-inducing) as a new 'true anti-wine' instead of water, but goes some of the way towards suggesting that milk

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[32] Roland Barthes, 'Wine and Milk', *Mythologies* (1957), trans. Annette Lavers (London: Vintage, 1993), pp. 58, 60.

[33] Giuliana Bertagnoni, 'L'industrializzazione del latte alimentare in Italia: criticità e ritardi visti attraverso un case study locale', in *Storia e futuro* 27 (November 2011), pp. 1-20, http://storiaefuturo.eu/lindustrializzazione-del-latte-alimentare-in-italia-criticita-e-ritardi-visti-attraverso-un-case-study-locale/ [Accessed March 2022]. If direct milk consumption was relatively low, Italy had been a fairly high-volume producer of milk for chees especially since the end of the 19th century. See Giuseppe Fascetti, *Caseificio. Storia, sviluppo, scienza del latte, analisi* (Milan: Hoepli, 1923). For global histories of milk and its industrialization, see e.g. Mark Kurlansky, *Milk: a 10,000-year History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019); Deborah Valenze, *Milk: A Local and Global History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

may signal Americanness. Promoted by the 'hero' of 'American films' who 'does not shrink from having a glass' of it before drawing out his gun, milk may be a national identifier in the same way in which wine is the 'totem-drink' of France and tea that of Britain.[34] The distinction broached by Barthes is curiously confirmed, by apparent negation, in a 1955 article by Carlo Levi titled 'Latte e cognac [Milk and Cognac]'. Referring to a late-1940s trip to the United States, Levi recounts how asking for *warm* milk *mixed* with cognac as a remedy for a cold is met by the scandalized opposition of the American barman: 'This beverage has never been heard of in this country'.[35] The latter will only eventually concede to serving it to a feverish Levi by bringing the two ingredients in separate vessels.[36] Where Italians or Europeans may drink hot milk with alcohol, the barman's objection suggests that for an American milk needs to be pure, fresh – and possibly chilled. This is the myth or image of milk later perpetuated, among others, in the nostalgic image of 1950s America of the sitcom *Happy Days* (1974-1984), where straight-out-of-the-fridge glasses of milk are routinely being poured in the Cunningham kitchen (Fig. 4).

From this viewpoint, and coupled with the perceived transatlantic origin of advertising itself and the consumer goods from fridges to fizzy drinks which had, by the late 1950s, gained a foothold in Italy in the wake of the financial and cultural programmes of the Marshall Plan (1948-52), *Le tentazioni's* milk billboard – where Ekberg's glass tumbler, rather than a cup or mug, suggests a chilled drink – could thus be seen to beam 'Americanness' with great intensity. Or, perhaps, where Levi, with

[34] Barthes, 'Wine and Milk', p. 58.
[35] Carlo Levi, 'Latte e cognac' (1955), in *Il pianeta senza confini. Prose di viaggio,* ed. by Vanna Zaccaro (Rome: Donzelli Editore, 2003), pp. 187-190; p. 188 cited.
[36] Ibid., p. 189. The always ambivalent and uncertain status of milk's 'purity' (e.g. the possibility of its contamination, etc.) is considered by Matthew Beaumont, 'A Psychoanalysis of Milk: The Case of Alfred Hitchcock', *Critical Quarterly* 63/2 (July 2021), pp. 50-79.

his daring un-American mixture of milk and cognac (which is, after all, a French distilled wine), and Barthes, in his sketch of wine versus milk, opt to recapitulate the perceived differences between America and Europe, if not the resistance to the cultural colonization of the latter by the former, it may be tempting to surmise that Fellini's contraption allegorizes such state of affairs in a less conflictual and conflicted tone. Yes, American cultural colonialism exports the idea of milk as a nurturing and healthy beverage, and promotes a mimetic (re)making of Italy in the image of America's own consumer society, yet this is so through encouraging the consumption of a wholly 'Italian product'.

In fact, what Fellini choreographs in this *scherzo* is hybrid and layered, and demonstrates, as well as relies on, what I have described as (mass) images' own mimetic qualities. Fellini's promotional choice mimics, but also negotiates between, at least three 'myths', to use Barthes's term, of milk. While the most obvious one, as we have just seen, has an American flavour, the other – interconnected – two are more Italian. The location of the billboard in EUR, and the move between different parts of it, is significant here.

Benito Mussolini had initiated the building of EUR – Esposizione Universale Roma – with the intention, never materialized because of the war, to host the 1942 World Fair in celebration of twenty years of fascism. In the postwar decades the quarter was expanded and converted into a middle-class residential area. Fellini's film opens with these newer residential and leisure areas, including the Basilica dei Santi Pietro e Paolo and the Parco Centrale's artificial lake, which, though started or planned before the war, were both completed in the late 1950s (the park's inauguration was timed with Rome's hosting of the Olympic Games in 1960). But when Ekberg 'comes alive', leaving the billboard to run on the street in front of the

Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, or 'Square Colosseum', EUR's historical and ideological fascist core – as well as this core's historical connection with EUR's newer residential identity, articulated by Ekberg's rapid cinematic move between the two – is more overtly evoked (Fig. 5).[37]

The film's move from the newer, residential EUR where Antonio lives to the older, monumental part, evokes a regression to the past not only for Antonio himself – who, screaming and baby-sized compared to the giant Ekberg, seeks comfort against her breasts at a point – but also with respect to the milk mythology that Ekberg's advertising image and seductive yet maternal figure embody. In the architectural context of fascist recuperation of classical antiquity and emphasis on Italian civilization, the billboard jingle's promotion of milk as an 'Italian product' takes on an additional connotation besides that of the postwar negotiation between American and European (or Italian) ways of life. Antonio's delusional regression to a kind of babyhood in the setting of the Square Colosseum contributes to show how *Le tentazioni*'s advertising billboard resonates (literally, perhaps, given its jingle) with the echo of fascism's promotion of milk as product – a promotion central to the regime's investment in both motherhood and economic autarchy.

Fascism's programmes of autarchy and social assistance, centred around food and essential items, meant that it had been keen to promote milk production and consumption, encouraging the opening of monitored municipal dairies, 'Centrali del latte', from the late 1920s, and even hosting the X Congresso mondiale del latte [10th World Congress on Milk] in Rome in 1934.[38] In fact, the encouragement of milk production was further connected to another autarchic project, that for the fibre

[37] Ironically perhaps for the moment in which Anita 'become real' so to speak, this was a miniature set built in the studio.
[38] Bertagnoni, 'Industrializzazione del latte', p. 8.

Lanital, which, in a country unable to grow cotton or produce enough wool, was placing its bets on synthetics. While short-lived because too difficult to produce, Lanital was, among other things, extolled by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in his 1937 illustrated promotional book poem *Il poema del vestito di latte* [*The Poem of the Milk Dress*], commissioned by the textile company Snia Viscosa.[39] Indeed, when Lanital is praised as a 'maternal textile' in Marinetti's visual poem (a kind of print precursors to *Carosello*), the two strands of the regime's lacteal mythology are woven together. For the fibre is not only maternal because of the animal milk from which it is directly derived, but also in virtue of the human-breast milk which initially fed the Italian workers and soldiers (overtly praised by Marinetti) making the technological, industrial and expansionist feats of fascism possible.

In addition to promoting dairy production for both food and non-food consumption, fascism extolled ideals of motherhood and breastfeeding, and fascism's nurturing of these ideals is, in turn, evoked in *Le tentazioni.* This is the case not only when Antonio, in black and white mock-documentary footage, is seen covering up the cleavage of a woman dining outdoors, but also, in relation to Ekberg's poster more specifically, when he lodges a complaint against it on the grounds that it is 'an offence to the most sacred function of maternity: breastfeeding'.

But if, as mentioned, Ekberg's abundant breasts are seductively maternal for Antonio, one of whose repressed and, in the Square Colosseum scene, hallucinated desires is to fall asleep on them, such relaxed resting on a mother's bosom would not have been encouraged by fascism itself. While the regime extolled ideals of nurturing

[39] See: 'Artificial Wool Production in Italy', *Nature* 140 (25 December 1937), p. 1090; Pinkus, *Bodily Regimes,* pp. 213-227; Michael Waters, 'How Clothing Made from Milk Became the Height of Fashion in Mussolini's Italy', *Atlas Obscura* (July 2017), https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/lanital-milk-dress-qmilch (accessed September 2021).

and self-sacrificing motherhood, it also actively sought to rationalize and 'industrialize' the role. As Diana Garvin has shown through her study of the propaganda – indeed, promotional – documentary *Alle madri d'Italia* [*To the Mothers of Italy*] (1936), childbirth and breastfeeding were recast as 'forms of mass production belonging to the state', taylorized through hygienic, medicalized procedures and strictly timetabled regimes.[40] The routine procedure of the 'double weighing' (*doppia pesata*) of infants, who had to be stripped down and put on the scales before *and* after each feed, would certainly not have been conducive to cuddly snoozing on the breast. Furthermore, such procedure enlisted mothers' breast milk, valued qualitatively but also quantitatively, within the regime's autarchic initiatives, or in fact was, as Garvin suggests, as 'the ultimate autarchic food'.[41]

Where this context contributes to bringing into view the defilement of maternity's key function and contamination of woman's essentially maternal image Antonio perceives in Ekberg's billboard, the poster's lack of specific branding also comes into alignment with Fascism's distinctive, yet generic advertising campaigns for a whole, *Italian*, industry or product category. As Karen Pinkus has discussed in her study of fascist advertising, these campaigns proliferated to support the regime's autarchic project.[42] Milk, too, was one such product – alongside rice, pasta wheat,

[40] Diana Garvin, 'Taylorist Breastfeeding in Rationalist Clinics: Constructing Industrial Motherhood in Fascist Italy', *Critical Inquiry* 41/3 (Spring 2015), pp. 655-74, p. 655 cited; Elizabeth Dixton Whitaker, *Measuring Mama's Milk: Fascism and the Medicalization of Maternity in Italy* (Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 2000). See also: Lesley Caldwell, '*Madri d'Italia*: Film and Fascist Concern with Motherhood', in Zygmunt G. Barański and Shirley W. Vinall, eds, *Women And Italy: Essays On Gender Culture And History* (London: McMillan, 1991), pp. 43-63.
[41] Garvin, p. 665.
[42] Pinkus, *Bodily Regimes*, pp. 90-92. Daniela Morsia, 'Una regione da copertina. Manifesti, fiere e prodotti nell'Emilia Romagna degli anni Venti e Trenta', *E-Review. Rivista degli istituti storici dell'Emilia Romagna in Rete* 4 (December 2016) (10.12977/ereview112) <https://e-review.it/morsia-regione-da-copertina > [Accessed March 2022].

lemons, sugar – and the focus on staple or basic foods in turn contributed to promote the model of consumerism upheld by fascism: a model, as Victoria De Grazia has described it, encouraging '*restricted*' rather than 'conspicuous' consumption.[43] While the provocatively glamorous image (as Antonio rightly detects) complicates the message, the promotion of milk as a basic, yet healthy and nutritious Italian product 'for all ages' in the jingle of *Le tentazioni* resonates with the sensible and contained consumption model of advertising campaigns such as the one presented at Milan's 1932 trade fair by the National Milk Committee [Comitato nazionale del latte] describing milk as a 'life food' (Fig. 6).

Through this lens, *Le tentazioni*'s use of location, promotion of *Italian* milk and references to breastfeeding concur to show how the billboard's advertising campaign is enmeshed in a historical and cultural past which, even if disturbing and ostensibly rejected or superseded, might in fact be what contributes to enable (in anyone but Antonio) acceptance of its newness. For, as American designer Henry Dreyfuss put it, people will 'more readily accept something new… if they recognize in it something out of the past'.[44] The film's advertising billboard is revealed as more complex and hybrid than a straightforward imitation, a mimicry, of American consumer imagery and strategies. In its preposterous, fun-poking way, *Le tentazioni* presents an image that, in being part of the environment has, perhaps even despite itself or the intentions of its makers, absorbed some of that environment and of its historical or socio-cultural residue. But, in fact, as mentioned, there is yet another, more recent myth of milk woven into these first two so far considered.

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[43] Victoria de Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy* De Grazia (Cambridge: CUP, 1981), p. 153 (emphasis in original).
[44] Henry Dreyfuss, *Designing for People* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955), p. 59.

For, just a few years before the film's release, in 1957, Emilia Romagna – politically one of the reddest regions in Italy as well as, of course, home to Fellini's birthplace, Rimini – was the centre of the first and most successful initiative of its kind: the establishment of the Bologna Consortium of Milk Producers. Soon to be branded Granarolo, from the name of the village hosting its first dairy plant, the consortium functioned as a co-operative of small-size milk producers and farmers, centred around municipal dairies, with the aim of taking control not only of milk production, but also of its processing and marketing. Materially facilitated, at least in part, by infrastructure developed during the fascist period, this co-operative enterprise was hugely successful –and kept growing through the decades.[45] While it transcended specific political allegiances, and had widespread support across the population, Granarolo cultivated an image of workers' initiative, solidarity and co-operation to the left of the political spectrum, and thus a myth of milk that, though indebted to fascist infrastructure, would stand as alternative (or even in opposition) to it. In reference to the Resistance, Granarolo's director called his workers '*partigiani*'.[46]

The resonance between the Granarolo 'myth' and the *Le tentazioni'*s billboard is evident: Granarolo *was* a wholly Italian product of the postwar boom. Indeed, Granarolo's own 60th anniversary video in 2017 underlined this resonance, using Nino Rota's 'Drink More Milk' jingle over a visual montage including a preparatory sketch for the Granarolo logo (launched only a couple of years after *Le tentazioni's* release) with the words 'Bevete + Latte' and a picture of Fellini and Giulietta Masina.[47]

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[45] The Granarolo Group is today an international joint-stock company operating in more the 70 countries.
[46] Bertagnoni, 'Industrializzazione del latte', p. 13.
[47] Giuseppe Fregni, sketch for Granarolo (1960-1970), Galleria Civica – Fondazione Moderna Arti Visive https://bbcc.ibc.regione.emilia-romagna.it/pater/loadcard.do?id_card=69521&force=1 (accessed September 2021); Granarolo Group, 60th anniversary video: https://www.granarologroup.com/our-

Additionally, in the film, the fête which takes place under the billboard – with stalls, balloons, Punch and Judy show, children choir, parading Bersaglieri (*and* Antonio trying to deface Ekberg's image with paint bombs) arguably pays homage to Granarolo's Festa del Latte (Milk Festival). Launched in 1959, this Autumn event was in turn not only cognate with other local fêtes, such as those dedicated to seasonal produce or patron saints, but also with the political Feste dell'Unità.[48] Initially organized by the Italian Communist Party (PCI) to promote and fund its official newspaper, *L'Unità*, these *feste* multiplied expanded in the decades after the war, becoming, especially in a politically 'red' region like Emilia Romagna, mass entertainment events.[49]

If the promotion of milk – despite being advertised as Italian – may at first appear as an import of American consumer culture and a manifestation of American cultural imperialism, *Le tentazioni* eventually works (or plays) to challenge this perception. While in crucial respects narratively, aesthetically and conceptually occupied with, and by, a single advertising image, *Le tentazioni* jokingly works to bring into view this single image's complexity and multiplicity. Fellini's literal (if diegetic, of course) release of the 'message' of the billboard into its 'habitat' allows significant but otherwise easily overlooked connections and dynamics between such 'message' and its 'habitat' to emerge. (Indeed, the mass image is habitat, as we have seen in the previous section, but this does not mean that such habitat is message-free.) As Ekberg leaves the poster and moves around EUR, the mimetic borrowings and

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commitment/projects-for-the-community/60-years-of-granarolo (accessed September 2021).

[48] Bertagnoni, 'Industrializzazione del latte'.

[49] Stephen Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow: The Italian Communists and the Challenge of Mass Culture 1943-1991* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 64-64, 95-96. For a history of these feste, see: Claudio Bernieri, *L'albero in piazza. Storia, cronaca e leggenda delle feste de* L'Unità (Milan: Mazzotta, 1977).

citations forming and informing this single image begin themselves to be released, and so some of the oldness of this image's eye-catching newness, and of the myths of milk behind, if not within, it become visible. In a way, Fellini's narrative trick – the film's magic – offers a glimpse of what Williams described as the 'magic' of advertising: the complex and, as Barthes's *Mythologies* had started to show in the 1950s, often ideologically biased, historical, cultural and social patterns of validation of the object promoted.

If in this section, focusing on the thematization of milk and its advertising, I have sought to nuance the film's Americanness, in the next section, moving in a seemingly contrary direction, I seek to tease it out where it has previously largely gone unnoticed. Expanding the focus onto the film as a whole and returning to my initial consideration of its promotional valence, I provide a perhaps unexpected perspective on *Le tentazioni*'s engagement with the mimicry of mass images. For, to conclude, I suggest that the preposterous narrative motifs and ostentatious aesthetics of Fellini's *scherzo* – attributes that are seen to be at the root of a cinema whose very distinctiveness will spawn terms such as 'Felliniesque' – are in fact steeped in mimicry.

The Play of Mimicry

'Mimicry is incessant invention.'

Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games* (1958)[50]

[50] Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, trans. Mayer Barash (London: Thames and Hudson, 1962), p. 23.

Made in an age of television, *Boccaccio '70* is in some respect, as I noted in the introduction, a giant cinematic *Carosello.* Released in early 1962, just a few months after RAI, Italian television, had launched its second channel (the first had started broadcast in 1954), the film would thus be facing a public, both nationally and internationally, increasingly enthralled by the small screen in the home.[51] If, like Hollywood films of the 1950s (facing television's competition a few years earlier), *Boccaccio '70* competes with its rival in spectacle, seeking to up television's ante in star presence, screen size, duration, colour, it also, as the curtains-motif suggests, models itself on RAI's then most-loved programme.[52] As a segment of the whole and arguably, even in its 'silliness', the most spectacular of the compilation, *Le tentazioni* is not only, as we have seen, overtly about advertising, but also both an advert for cinema – as well as *Italian* cinema – in general and for Fellini's own cinematic career more specifically, retrospectively promoting – and defending – *La dolce vita* and offering a taster of what will become, as it has been called, 'the Fellini brand'.[53]

This is the cinema one thinks of at the mention of Fellini's name, and that spurred the adjective 'Felliniesque'. Like *8 ½* , but also *Giulietta degli spiriti/Juliet of the Spirits* (1965), *Roma/Fellini's Rome* (1972), *Amarcord* (1973), and *La città delle donne/City of Women* (1980), this is a cinema which is loose if not fragmentary narratively, with an abundance of dream, daydream, fantasy and recollection sequences, often around recurrent motifs including, as Fellini himself put it, 'yet another big woman' (from Saraghina in *8 ½* and the tobacconist in *Amarcord* to the

[51] Grasso, *Storia della televisione italiana*; Milly Buonanno, *The Age of Television: Experiences and Theories* (Bristol: Intellect, 2007), esp. ch. 2.
[52] Karen Pinkus notes *Boccaccio '70*'s resonance with Carosello in *Clocking Out: The Machinery of Life in 1960s Italian Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), pp. 1-2.
[53] Rebecca Bauman, 'The Fellini Brand: Marketing Appropriations of the Fellini Name', in Burke, *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Fellini,* pp. 391-402.

giantess from the Veneto in *Casanova,* 1976, and the woman-shaped hot air balloon in *City of Women*).[54] It is also a cinema increasingly occupied with – and even, *by* – mimicry and imitation. From a thematic point of view, such occupation with, and by, mimicry is arguably at its most explicit in *Ginger and Fred,* in which Masina and Mastroianni play Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire's impersonators in a midst of other look-alikes on 1980s television. But the engagement with mimicry also contributes to the more pervasive aesthetic and narrative recursiveness – the self-imitation and self-referentiality through which Fellini's films also increasingly cite each other, as well as the activity of filmmaking itself – of much of the director's cinema after 1960. Fellini's consideration that, when it came to his work, he could 'not distinguish one film from the other', for he had 'always shot the same film', 'using the same materials', seems particularly suited to his post-1960 films.[55]

So, here lies a further tension, or paradox. On the one hand, sandwiched between *La dolce vita* and *8 ½* like a commercial intermission, *Le tentazioni* seems to contain the seed of the 'Felliniesque', of what are generally seen as the filmmaker's highly personal narrative motifs and original style, even if such motifs and style may then imitate and repeat themselves insistently across his work (from this perspective, self-referentiality and self-imitation might even seem to strengthen, rather than weaken, the originality of Fellini's cinema). But on the other hand, as I want to outline, this very seed of a distinctive Fellini 'brand' is also steeped in mimicry of cinema other than his own. And perhaps it is not too surprising that this cinema is, especially, American. After all, Fellini's fascination with golden-age Hollywood cinema is well known and, as key outputs of what Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer termed the 'culture industry' in the famous essay written during their

[54] Federico Fellini, *Fare un film* (Turin: Einaudi, 1980), p. 83.
[55] Ibid., p. 168.

wartime American exile, Hollywood products themselves would seem designed for 'the manipulation of repressed impulses to copy' as Adorno later put it.[56]

Le tentazioni is so densely layered with citations of Hollywood films that the 'impulses to copy' Adorno talks of would seem to have been unleashed from repression (after all, Fellini had started a psychoanalytic relation with the Jungian Ernst Bernhard at the time).[57] References to iconic films such as *King Kong* (Merian C. Cooper, 1933) and the then more recent *Attack of the 50 ft Woman* (Nathan Juran, 1958), both of which *Le tentazioni* plays in parodic key, replacing the original's drama with comedy, have been noted.[58] Yet, what I want to focus on and selectively outline in what follows is the film's all-but-neglected resonance with Frank Tashlin's comedies of the 1950s.

Tashlin, who only directed comedies (after a start in animation that bears an affinity with Fellini's own beginnings as a cartoonist), is less well known than most of his Hollywood contemporaries. If, relatively more recently, he has been re-evaluated as a 'vulgar modernist', in the 1950s he was championed, among others, by Jean Luc Godard.[59] Before a notion of the 'Felliniesque' had emerged, but in the footsteps of the 'Chaplinesque', Godard argued for the adjective 'Tashlinesque' to exist.[60] In this

[56] Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception', in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* [1944], trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 1997), pp. 120-167; Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life* (1951), trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), p. 14.
[57] See e.g. Kezich, *Federico Fellini,* ch. 26. Erika Suderburg, 'In Bed with Fellini: Jung, Ernst Bernhard, Night Work, and *Il libro dei sogni'* in Frank Burke, ed., *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Federico Fellini* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2019), pp. 79-94.
[58] Bondanella, *The Cinema of Federico Fellini*, p. 160.
[59] James Hoberman 'Frank Tashlin: vulgar modernist', in Roger Garcia and Bernard Eisenschitz, eds, *Frank Tashlin* (Locarno/London: BFI, 1994), pp. 89-94.
[60] 'Don't say it's Chaplinesque. Say it's Tashlinesque', Jean-Luc Godard wrote in his review of *Hollywood or Bust* (1956), in *Cahiers du cinéma* of July 1957, quoted by

vein, one of the suggestions I want to make as I outline Fellini's play of mimicry with Tashlin's work, is that the cinematic brand that begins to take shape with *Le tentazioni* is, at least in part, indebted to the Tashlinesque.

It is fitting that for a cinematic spectacular *responding* to television, and *about* advertising and the entanglement of mimicry and mass images such as *Le tentazioni*, Fellini should have found inspiration in Tashlin's work. For Tashlin's comedies are part of (American) cinema's responses to the threat of television, they are often, if not always, about advertising, visual mass media and consumer culture, and are themselves deeply absorbed with, and by, mimetic behaviour.

The confrontation with television's threat is often direct in Tashlin's films. *The Girl Can't Help It* (1956) starts with a standard aspect-ratio, black and white prologue in which Tom Ewell, one of the film's protagonists, snaps his fingers to command the frame to widen to the Cinemascope format and DeLuxe colour he emphatically calls out. *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* (1957) runs its opening credits over a series of mock television commercials (a motif that Fellini will use in *Ginger and Fred* and *Intervista*, 1987) and evokes American television advertising breaks again about half-way through, with an 'intermission' for 'television fans' during which the story stops and the widescreen, colour image shrinks and becomes 'snowy' and dull as actor Tony Randall literally demonstrates the differences of watching movies on a TV set.

Besides these pre- or para-diegetic inclusions, Tashlin's films are often stories *about* advertising or publicity (the advertising of people, as Williams might say.) Similarly to *Le tentazioni,* but with a product perhaps more intuitively associated with a movie star, *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* is centred on an advertising agency

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Ethan de Seife, *Tashlinesque: the Hollywood Comedies of Frank Tashlin* (Middletwon: Wesleyan University Press, 2012), p. 5.

seeking to secure celebrity endorsement for 'Stay-Put Lipstick' from Hollywood actress Rita Marlowe (Jayne Mansfield). Advertising is also prominent in *Artists and Models* (1955), which, not unlike the attention *Le tentazioni* pays to the erection of Ekberg's outlandish audio-visual billboard, starts with a scene in which an advert for cigarettes in the shape of a giant red-lipped mouth, which is in fact a bizarre contraption able to exhale actual smoke, is given the finishing touches. And *The Girl Can't Help It* features aspiring singer Jerri Jordan (Mansfield again) grappling with the requirement 'to *be* a career', rather than 'to have' one, while at the same time itself functioning as a promotional vehicle for the likes of Little Richard performing the titular song.

But it is in Tashlin's thematization of mimicry itself, and in fact, of a particular form of mimicry, that the resonance with *Le tentazioni* (and with Fellini's cinema beyond this film) is most intriguing. Tashlin's 1950s films excel at casting its female stars in roles where they are, at least in part, if not wholly, playing themselves. If, as Roger Caillois suggested in *Man, Play and Games* (1958), acting – *playing* a part – is a subcategory of mimicry because it is both an imitation of a subject (whether actual or fictive) and a disguise on the part of the actor, here we have the suggestive variation of self-mimicry, and its particular articulations of both the imitation and camouflage associated with mimetic behaviour.[61] Mansfield plays self-reflexively acknowledged modulations of herself in both *Will Success…?* and *The Girl Can't Help It.* And Tashlin also specifically cast Ekberg herself *as herself* – in both *Artists and Models* and *Hollywood or Bust* (1956), where she is the glamorous Hollywood actress Anita Ekberg, whom admirer Malcolm (Jerry Lewis) sets out on a quest to meet. 'Would Fellini's *The Temptations of Dr Antonio* have been possible if

[61] Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, p. 23.

Tashlin had not invented [Ekberg]?', a critic provocatively asked on the occasion of a retrospective of the American director's films.[62] For indeed, when Fellini has Ekberg play herself in *Le tentazioni* (as well as the star of *La dolce vita* who, as the actress Sylvia, was already a variation of the 'real' Ekberg), it is this history of self-mimicry that is invoked – if not, indeed, mimicked.

However, this self-mimicry is disturbed by a sense that Ekberg, as a curvaceous Hollywood blonde, is also already a kind of copy. As Stephen Gundle has noted, if America exported Hollywood glamour and beauty (and did so with even greater intensity in the 1950s), the widespread perception was that its stars, 'like American cars and houses … [had] been made "in series".'[63] Ekberg imitates herself, to a degree, but is also, in turn, an imitation of a succession of stars, from Jean Harlow and Rita Hayworth to Marilyn Monroe. (Ekberg-as-Sylvia in *La dolce vita* imitates Monroe when she tells journalists that she sleeps 'in two drops of perfume'.) There is, of course, as expressed in criticism and popular opinion, an implicit or explicit agreement that Ekberg (or Mansfield) are lesser instances of Monroe – almost like 'bad' copies or parodies – while Monroe was at the time perceived to be a near-perfect incarnation of a type, if not, indeed, if such a thing could exist, herself a model or prototype.[64] But the sense that acts of mimicry such as Ekberg acting herself, as well as, at same time, the incarnation of the Hollywood blonde, glamorous, curvy star, in *Le tentazioni* entail overt caricature, if not self-mockery, offers an opportunity to see such acts of mimicry in terms other than deficiency or lack. Something is gained, not lost, in this inherently approximative process of imitation. As Dorfles suggested in

[62] Mark Rappaport, 'Tashlin, *Bachelor Flat*, and Cinemascope', in Roger Garcia and Bernard Eisenschitz, eds, *Frank Tashlin* (Locarno/London: BFI, 1994), pp. 71-74.
[63] Gundle, *Bellissima*, p. 103.
[64] Stephen Gundle, *Glamour: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), esp. pp. 253-54.

1959, 'without approximation both our life and our art would become impossible'.[65] While much of life, and art, may be driven by emulation and imitation, it is approximation – the constitutive imperfection of these processes – that, rather than making us fail, may save us.

If Adorno, in his indictment of the culture industry, assesses mimetic behaviour's 'impulses to copy' negatively, as regressive, Caillois, in the epigraph above, counter-intuitively extols it as continuously inventive. Acceptance of Caillois's oxymoronic statement and of Dorfles's praise of approximation is made possible via Walter Benjamin's appreciation of mimicry not in terms of identity, but of similarity.[66] In terms germane with Caillois, who sees it as both a feature of animal behaviour, as in camouflage for defence or attack, and a kind of play, as with actors acting, or children 'pretending', Benjamin understands it as a fundamental faculty of human development. For Benjamin, it is a key mode apprehension of, and relation to, the world. As such a mode of apprehension, as Benjamin (not unlike others) notes, mimetic behaviour is, unsurprisingly, recurrently manifest in children and their play. When Benjamin observers that '[a] child not only plays at being a grocer or a teacher, but also at being a windmill or a train', he is pointing to the fact that mimicry, in this sense, must be intrinsically approximative. For Benjamin, this imitative play is a 'training in mimetic attitudes' (a work, indeed) that endows human beings with the 'capability to produce similarities', and such capability seems, for Benjamin, crucial to all of 'the higher human functions', and thus all developments in human culture.[67] The play (and work) of mimicry is fundamentally associated with similarity, rather

[65] Gillo Dorfles, *Il divenire delle arti* ['*The Becoming of the Arts*'] (Turin: Einaudi, 1959), p. 57.
[66] Walter Benjamin, 'Doctrine of the Similar' (1933), trans. by Knut Tarnowski, *New German Critique* 17: Special Walter Benjamin issue (Spring, 1979), pp. 65-69.
[67] Ibid., 65.

than identity, not because it always 'fails' (it always delivers an approximation of the identical, of the same), but because it is rooted in the ability to perceive, seek and cultivate affinities and connections between world, others, and self. As Jonathan Flatley, developing Benjamin's thinking, has put it in his book *Like Andy Warhol,* mimetic behaviour in this sense 'involves an ontological openness'.[68] Rather than being regressive, as Adorno sees it in his indictment of the culture industry as a machine motored by, and motoring, mere copying, what Flatley calls 'liking being alike' is 'an opening into the world' that indicates 'potentiality', and that may even find a redemptive possibilities in our liking of mass consumer culture.[69] From this

[68] Jonathan Flatley, *Like Andy Warhol* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), p. 99.
[69] Ibid., pp. 8, 37.

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3a

Fig. 3b


Fig. 4

Fig. 5

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perspective, the parodic presence of Ekberg *as* Ekberg that *Le tentazioni* stages and in part copies from Tashlin's films emerges not only as yet another assessment, however entangled with its subject matter, of the mimicry of mass images (and, here, of the 'dominant' American ones) but also, unexpectedly, as an allegory of mimicry's creative potential as a generative, if not, indeed, an incessantly inventive kind of play that performs the work of apprehending and relating to the world.

Such consideration of Tashlin in Fellini – of a Tashlinesque in the Felliniesque – may contribute to offer a different perspective on the Fellini 'brand' and the still largely dominant auteur-oriented bent of scholarship on his work, where Fellini is considered an auteur but, also, at the same time, not one that is taken very seriously or, especially from the 1960s (*after* films such as *La strada*, 1955, or *Le notti di Cabiria*/*The Nights of Cabiria*, 1957) considered to be very serious. Perhaps, as I hope this article's examination of Fellini's possibly least-serious film has begun to outline, silliness, complexity and significance are not incompatible. Even in its unserious mimetic entanglement with mass-media images – or, indeed, thanks to and through such entanglement – *Le tentazioni* broaches a complex assessment of the mass image and its mimicry. Paying attention to this, I hope to have pointed to the film's significance as a humorous, at times satirical, and yet rich and culturally and historically layered critique of advertising and the mass image in consumer culture, and started to suggest some of the ways in which such playful critique, while still largely unexplored *as a critique*, can be traced in a number of Fellini's films.

Fig. 5 'Bevete latte', Advertisement for Milk (Comitato Nazionale per il latte, Fiera Campionaria, Milano, 1932).