Fellini's Neo-realism:

Fellini's criticism of ideology in *La Strada* and *La Dolce Vita*

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At the 1954 Venice Film Festival, the Italian film director Federico Fellini screened his newest film *La Strada* (1954). The film divided critics but nonetheless the film won the festival's top prize, Silver Lion Award. The announcement led to a brawl on the festival floor between leftist neo-realists and people from Fellini's camp. Many of the leftist critics exclaimed, "Where was Zampanò when the partisan war was being fought?"[1] At this moment, Fellini shook the Italian neo-realist film movement. Leftists labeled him a conservative and accused him of betraying the neo-realist movement. History might look at the events that transpired at the festival as Fellini's break from the neo-realist movement. A historian might make a further claim that Fellini's break represented a change in Italian culture and society. But these historical only skim the surface of the significance of Fellini's films. Ultimately, the brawl on the festival floor represented the conflict of two different definitions of neo-realism. This study will look at Fellini's definition of neo-realism within the context of two films from different eras.

This study will create a clearer picture of Fellini as an artist through two of his most famous films: *La Strada* and *La Dolce Vita* (1960). Fellini created a film in *La Strada* that emphasized the value of love and human communication. This coincided with a period that saw a communication gap between Italian men and women. The film's emphasis on a sense of purpose and destiny became emblematic of Fellini's philosophy on life. These ideas held no meaning with a neo-realist movement narrowly tailored to represent socialist ideology. After a period of great economic growth and national modernization, Fellini made a film in *La Dolce Vita* that took a close look at this new world. This modernized Italy devalued religion and came to value celebrity and

[1] Bondanella, Peter. *The Cinema of Federico Fellini*. Princeton University Press, 1992, 108.

materialism. The film showed the difficulty to find happiness, love, and satisfaction in the modern world. Fellini argues that ideology becomes mere propaganda when compared to human issues such as love, destiny, and communication. In the historical moment, *La Strada* and *La Dolce Vita* become reminders to a European community of the value of human relationships in a time modernization and changing political climate. Fellini believes that creating a film that values love, communication, and stable relationships trump any intellectual and political message. This emphasis on human values became Fellini's definition of neo-realism.

Post-War Italy and the Rise of Neo-Realism

Italian society went through major transitions during post-war reconstruction. After World War II, the Italians removed the monarchy. Politicians attempted to move away from the fascist political history of Italy. This period saw the rise of the Christian democrats led by Alcide De Gasperi. Fearful of Communism, he excluded the Italian Communist Party from all government activities in May 1947.[2] In 1948, Italy accepted aid from the Marshall Plan and began reconstruction of the war torn country. The Marshall Plan helped the Christian Democrats win the election while at the same time continuing to suppress the Communists.[3] The country also went through a demographic change. Starting in the early 1950s, millions of Italians began to migrate inter-regionally.[4] This period saw an influx of people from rural areas in the south migrating to northern cities.[5] In 1950, forty per cent of total employment came from the agriculture sector.[6]

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[2] McCarthy, Patrick. *Italy since 1945*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2000, 71.
[3] Cohen, Jon, and Giovanni Federico. *The Growth of the Italian Economy, 1820-1960*. Cambridge University Press, 2001, 89.
[4] McCarthy, *Italy since 1945*, 13.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Cohen, *The Growth of the Italian Economy*, 87.

That number changed as the 1950s went along and the country industrialized. By the early 1960s, agriculture no longer dominated the economy.[7] The postwar period should be thought of as a period of changing national identity.

These social changes became the center of many Italian directors' imagination. Like the nation, post-war Italian cinema desired to find the 'real' Italy and move away from fascism. The previous twenty years in the film industry had been shrouded with fascist propaganda. Italian cinema existed during this time with few foreign markets able to view Italian film. The international audience assumed and labeled all previous Italian films as propaganda. Therefore, Italian directors labeled subsequent films 'new realism' (neorealismo) in an effort to move away from their fascist past.[8] Italian filmmakers such as Roberto Rossellini actually began experimenting with neo-realist themes prior to the end of the war. These subsequent films brought to light the social realities and challenges brought by the end of the war. Often they stressed social themes such as the resistance during the war, poverty, and unemployment.[9] All of these issues came from the Italian consciousness of the time simultaneously with the large demographic changes of the time. Many times directors filmed on location with unprofessional actors with a documentary style of filmmaking. Over time, the social themes of these films came to dominate the neo-realist movement.

The neo-realist movement became synonymous with socialism as more and more films dealt with socialist themes. Films such as *Ladri di biciclette* (1948) created characters defined by social identities. Quickly the measure of the critical success of the

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[7] Cohen, *The Growth of the Italian Economy*, 87.
[8] Ezra, Elizabeth. *European Cinema*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2004, 119.
[9] Ezra, *European Cinema,* 120-121.

film became tied to how well the film portrayed Italy's social problems and how closely it followed Marxist ideology.[10] Andre Bazin, a French film critic, argued that Marxists confused neo-realism with socialist realism.[11] This socialist realism looked at life through the lens of Marxist ideology. Marxist ideology and the Italian political culture of the time influenced how Italian directors made their films. For example, priests became synonymous with anticommunism because of the political attitudes of the time.[12] It was this labeling of social identity that bothered Federico Fellini.

Fellini's Definition of Neo-realism

Fellini's definition of neo-realism differed significantly from the Marxist definition. Fellini said in an interview about neo-realism:

> For me, neo-realism is not a question of *what* you show-its spirit is in *how* you show it. It's just a way of looking around, without convention or prejudice. Certain people still think neo-realism is fit to show only certain kinds of reality; and they insist that this is social reality. But in this way, it becomes mere propaganda.[13]

Fellini criticizes socialist realism significantly. He argues that socialist realism becomes propaganda because of its focus on socialist ideology. His interests lie not in the social identities of his characters but rather in the actions and mindset of his characters. In a 1959 interview he proclaimed that "[Neo-realism] is dead today as a movement which bore the stamp of social reality as an exclusive object of interest. Today the interest is drawn to man himself-his metaphysical, psychological, and total structure."[14] He argues that social reality constitutes only a small part of humanity. For Fellini, mankind's

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[10] Bondanella, Peter. *The Cinema of Federico Fellini*. Princeton University Press, 1992, 69.
[11] Bondanella, Peter, and Manuela Gieri. *La Strada: Federico Fellini, director*. Rutgers University Press, 1987, 200.
[12] Ibid., 201.
[13] Cardullo, Bert. *Federico Fellini: Interviews*. University Press of Mississippi, 2006, 12.
[14] Cardullo, *Federico Fellini: Interviews*, 19.

psychological nature becomes increasingly important as the 1950s move along. Socialist realism doesn't allow for the director to explore psychological themes. In a sense it constricts the director to telling the story through a narrow lens of Marxist ideology. Fellini's dissent from this type of filmmaking can be interpreted as moving away from an ideology that restricts the director's ability to explore thematically.

Instead of focusing on social identities and class struggle, Fellini believed in a film style that told the story of people. He explained his film philosophy in one interview: "My own personal conviction, however, is that the films I have done so far are in the same style as the first neorealist films, simply telling the story of people. And always, in telling the story of some people, I try to show some truth."[15] He argues that the story of an individual holds a certain truth about humanity that social realism fails at grasping. Social realism seeks to label the individual with Marxist identities to grasp a larger meaning. For Fellini, this does not constitute as truth. He feels that a personal story of a single person will reveal broader truths of what it means to be a part of humanity. He says in another interview:

> It's the terrible difficulty people have in talking to each other-the old problem of communication, the desperate anguish to be *with*, the desire to have a real, authentic relationship with another person...I'm completely absorbed in this problem-maybe because I have not yet solved it in my private life.[16]

Here he emphasizes the value of human communication, interaction, and sense of belonging. He even acknowledges that he struggles with these issues himself. This fascinates him. He believes that neo-realism should examine the authenticity of relationships and love. Fellini believes that these feelings and relationships are more

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[15] Cardullo, *Federico Fellini: Interviews*, 12-13.
[16] Ibid., 13.

authentic than the ideological propaganda of socialist realism. This message especially comes to fruition in his 1954 film *La Strada*.

La Strada: One Pebble

La Strada embodied Fellini's definition of neo-realism. The film tells the story of a young woman named Gelsomina who leaves home to go on the road with a strongman named Zampanò. She soon falls in love with the brutish Zampanò despite the verbal and sexual abuse he inflicts onto her. The film follows these two characters as they travel across the countryside performing Zampanò's strongman act. Gelsomina's desperation for the Zampanò's love wrecks her emotionally. From the beginning of the film Fellini creates a clear break from social realism. He does not define his protagonist, Gelsomina, by her social environment.[17] Gelsomina comes from a lower class family. Yet, Fellini does not focus on this identity. Instead, he shapes the film around her loneliness and her desire to love Zampanò. Conversely, he also tells through Zampanò a story of a man not interested of love. But he eventually realizes love, acknowledges his loneliness, and asks for redemption. Noted Fellini historian Peter Bondanella argues, "Rather than viewing the world from the perspective of class struggle or class conflict, *La Strada* embodies a profoundly Christian emphasis upon the individual and the loneliness of the human condition."[18] Fellini's attention to Gelsomina's loneliness and her need for love both counter the Marxist vision of neo-realism. Fellini reasons, "it seems to me that...there is an effort to show a world without love, characters full of selfishness, people exploiting

[17] Bondanella, Peter. *The Films of Federico Fellini*. 1st ed. Cambridge University Press, 2002, 48.
[18] Ibid., 54.

one another, and...there is always...a little creature who wants to give love and who lives for love."[19] This idea of love becomes central to Fellini's storytelling in the film.

Fellini creates a special relationship between Gelsomina and Il Matto (the Fool) that reveals a certain philosophy on life. Il Matto loves to pester Zampanò and takes a liking to Gelsomina. Gelsomina first sees Il Matto above the street on a tightrope. Following a Christian interpretation of the film, Il Matto becomes an angelic symbol while Gelsomina exhibits a Madonna characterization.[20] Il Matto takes a liking to Gelsomina and gives her advice on her relationship with Zampanò. He tells her that she has a purpose in the world and that purpose is to be with Zampanò. But he goes further in analyzing the meaning of life. In one conversation with Gelsomina, he picks up a pebble and exclaims, "I don't know what purpose this pebble serves, but it must serve some purpose. Because if it is useless, then everything is useless." In essence, Fellini argues that every person holds a purpose in the world. The Fool convinces Gelsomina that she must remain with Zampanò. This confirms Gelsomina's sense of purpose. Unfortunately, Zampanò accidentally kills Il Matto for making fun of him. Gelsomina's grief over Il Matto's death leads to her madness, her abandonment by Zampanò, and finally her death.[21] This will ultimately lead to Zampanò search for redemption.

Furthermore, Fellini creates a character in Zampanò that embodies the worse of humanity. He neglects Gelsomina when she wants only to love him and physically intimidates her throughout the film. After accidentally killing Il Matto, he abandons a devastated and despondent Gelsomina asleep on the side of the road. Years later he

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[19] Bondanella, *The Films of Federico Fellini*, 54.
[20] Bondanella, *The Cinema of Federico Fellini*, 105.
[21] Bondanella, *The Cinema of Federico Fellini*, 105.

discovers that she died. Fellini then shows an unlikely change to Zampanò. He gets drunk at a bar and exclaims: "Cowards...! I don't need...I don't need anybody!...I...I want to be alone...alone." But his desire to be alone destroys him. He ends up going to the beach and subsequently breaks down in tears. Fellini never clarifies why he is crying. Bondanella observes:

> It may be the feeling of an emotion never before experienced, such as his recognition of Gelsomina's love and gratitude for her sacrifice...There is no message to draw the film to a comforting resolution. Instead, the film concludes on a moving, poetic image-Zampanò, prostrate on the beach, grasps the sand in desperation and finally sheds a tear.[22]

Bondanella accurately grasps the ambiguity of the moment. We don't know if Zampanò cries out of regret, sadness, loneliness, or simple drunkenness. But the fact that Zampanò, a brute who exhibits no emotions throughout the film, does exhibit some emotion becomes a miracle in itself. From this perspective, Fellini targets a theme of redemption to end his film. Zampanò becomes overwhelmed by the idea that somebody loved him. Fellini stated in a 1957 letter to Jesuit priest, "My films are born not from logic but from love."[23] Instead of telling a ideological story that argues for political idealism or utopian ideal. Fellini argues that human emotions and inner goodness exist in even the most sinister of people.

La Strada: A Reflection of Fellini's Life and Italian Society

The viewer should interpret the film's meaning from both a personal lens and an historical lens. On a personal level, this film in many ways reflects Fellini's biography. He grew up with a dominant father similar to Zampanò and a mother much like

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[22] Bondanella, *The Cinema of Federico Fellini*, 107.
[23] Ibid., 103.

Gelsomina.[24] They probably influenced the film. Giulietta Masina (his wife as well as the actress who played Gelsomina) later explained that Gelsomina is Federico:

> He's the one who left his house on the sea and climbed aboard a caravan. He learned the art of clowning and decided to use it to reveal "the reality of the soul" in the face of the vastness of existence... Il Matto, transcendental clown-philosopher, is Fellini too when he says, "I'd like to always make people laugh.[25]

By allowing his personal story influence his filmmaking, Fellini distinctly separates himself from the accepted form of neo-realism. He emphasizes the importance of the individual experience. He once said, "When I was twelve, I worked with a traveling circus. I remembered incidents, fragments, and these became *La Strada*. My films are my life. I had no "schools" in mind, no theories when I first began to work."[26] He distances himself from "schools" of thought such as Marxist neo-realism. By not following a clear ideology, Fellini argues that human experiences and memories are central to life.

This focus on his personal experiences also becomes a reflection of the historical culture in which Fellini made *La Strada*. His own insecurities and beliefs on love, sense of purpose, and the inherent inner goodness reflect a questioning of Italian culture of the early to mid 1950s. Fellini recognized a culture in which men neglected woman. In preparation for the film, Fellini and co-writer Tullio Pinelli looked at Gypsies and circus life. One day Pinelli and Fellini saw a big man pulling a cart with a women pushing it from behind in the Italian countryside. This image served as another inspiration for Zampanò and Gelsomina.[27] But in an even bigger sense this image becomes emblematic

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[24] Kezich, Tullio. *Federico Fellini: His Life and Work*. 1st ed. Faber & Faber, 2007, 157.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Bondanella, *La Strada: Federico Fellini, director*, 207.
[27] Kezich, *Federico Fellini: His Life and Work*, 144.

of a certain neglect towards women. Fellini reflected on *La Strada* in a 1957 interview with George Bluestone:

> The meaning of the parable is simple. Everyone has a purpose in the universe; everyone, even this brute Zampanò, needs someone to love. Audiences haven't seen this theme on the screen in the past few years. At least not in serious films. Do you know that Giulietta has received at least a thousand letters from women who say their husbands-husbands who deserted them, husbands these women hadn't seen for years-came home after they saw *La Strada*?[28]

The film's emotional climax of Zampanò sobbing uncontrollably for Gelsomina struck a cord with Italian males. In another anecdote, Fellini recalled being approached by a man and a woman in Rome. He said, "They told us that, the week before, they had been about to separate, but they'd seen *La Strada* and that had reunited them."[29] Looking back on the film's effect on Italian audiences, the film becomes a gateway for communication between the sexes. In an interview with Gideon Bachman, Fellini described this communication struggle as thematic in all of his films: "It's the terrible difficulty people have in talking to each other; the old problem of communication, the desperate anguish to be *with*, the desire to have a real, authentic relationship with another person."[30] Fellini finds this struggle to find an authentic relationship fascinating in terms of human identity. These anecdotes show a divide formed between men and woman in post-war Italian society. For Fellini, these concerns over communication are more pressing than political and ideological concerns.

La Dolce Vita: A Rome of Celebrity and Tabloids

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[28] Cardullo, *Federico Fellini: Interviews*, 7.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Bondanella, *La Strada: Federico Fellini, director*, 217.

Six years later, Fellini made a landmark film that reevaluated Italian culture and society. Italy went through many transitions in the 1950s and early 1960s. For one, the years between 1954 and 1960 saw a wave of secularization. The number of Italians who self-reported Church attendance fell from 69 per cent in 1956 to 53 per cent in 1961.[31] This occurred simultaneously with the heavy industrialization of the country. This secularization in a midst of a historically Catholic country led to the questioning of the relevance of religion in an industrializing society.[32] Secondly, the 1950s and 1960s also saw the rise of Italian journalism into an elite profession. Journalists faced difficult entrance exams, but if they passed they received high wages. Journalism paved the way for many political careers, and therefore many politicians labeled journalism as their profession.[33] In addition, television service first began in 1954. At first the Christian Democrats imposed strict regulations that often pushed a modernization agenda. Historian Martin Clark argues that "it depicted 'modern' ways of life-the tolerant family man, the compulsive consumer, the hygienic housewife...It 'deprovincialized' Italy; it helped spread 'secular' values; it held up a 'superior' model of industrial civilization."[34] Clearly, the television became emblematic not only of popular culture but also a wave modernization in Italy. In addition, the Italian economy made a complete recovery from the war. Between 1958 and 1963 exports grew at a rate of 16 per cent per year as the economy boomed.[35] Overall, Italy entered the early 1960s a transformed country.

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[31] Clark, Martin. *Modern Italy, 1871 to the Present*. 3rd ed. Longman, 2008, 445.
[32] Ibid., 445-446.
[33] Ibid., 440.
[34] Ibid., 441.
[35] Cohen, *The Growth of the Italian Economy*, 88.

Fellini released his penultimate film, *La Dolce Vita*, in 1960. The average ticket to the film cost 1,000 lire and the film grossed a record 2.2 billion lire. The film won the grand jury prize at the Cannes Film Festival and catapulted Fellini to international stardom.[36] The film centers on Marcello Rubini, a tabloid journalist in Rome. Fellini interweaves several vignettes and episodes around Marcello's experiences in the hedonistic world of Rome. The audience witnesses his love affair with a beautiful and wealthy woman named Maddalena, as well as his tumultuous relationship with his suicidal girlfriend Emma. In another episode a famous Swedish-American actress named Sylvia travels to Rome. Marcello covers the story and eventually spends the night running around with Sylvia through the streets of Rome. In another ongoing story throughout the film, the audience meets Marcello's intellectual friend named Steiner. The film reaches its emotional climax when Steiner kills his children and commits suicide. The film also features various other episodes that include Marcello traveling to the country to cover a story of two children who claim to have witnessed the resurrection of the Madonna. The film ends in an absurd drunken "orgy" at a party followed by a discovery of a dead stingray creature on the beach.

Fellini witnessed a changing society in Italy, everything from the rise of photojournalism to new female underwear fashions. In response, he decided to experiment with a different "modernist" cinematic narrative.[37] Fellini explained:

> So I said: let's invent episodes, let's not worry for now about the logic or the narrative. We have to make a statue, break it, and recompose the pieces. Or better yet, try a decomposition in the manner of Picasso. The

[36] Bondanella, *The Cinema of Federico Fellini*, 132.
[37] Ibid., 133.

> cinema is narrative in the nineteenth century sense: now let's try to do something different.[38]

Fellini thus constructed an episodic narrative to the film. Three real life episodes involving the paparazzi from the 1950s inspired Fellini. In 1957, the actress Anita Ekberg went into the Trevi Fountain one night and was photographed. She later played the role of Sylvia in *La Dolce Vita* and recreated the Trevi Fountain scene. Another event occurred in August of 1958 in which a photographer named Tazio Secchiaroli was attacked by the former King Farouk of Egypt and Anthony Franciosa in the company of Ava Gardner. Fellini included a scene in the film in which Marcello is attacked by Sylvia's boyfriend Robert. A third event occurred in which a Turkish dancer named Aiche Nana did a striptease at a restaurant. This scene is alluded to in the orgy scene at the end of the film.[39] Fellini later explained his intentions for the film, "What I intended was to show the state of Rome's *soul*, a way of being of a people. What it *became* was a scandalous report, a fresco of a street and a society."[40]

For one, the film became a condemnation of the church. Fellini opens the film with Marcello riding in a helicopter that carries a statue of Christ. Bondanella believes that Fellini makes an argument against institutional religion. He writes:

> Religion, once offered to Fellini's characters as a possible means of escaping the meaninglessness of their anguished lives, is now represented by a series of empty images and activities and provides no solutions. The opening shot of the statue of Christ carried aloft by a helicopter finds its parallel in the dead monster fish (a parody of the traditional symbol of Christ) at the film's conclusion. Christian mythology no longer conveys any meaning in a world of press conferences where starlets have replaced priests as status symbols.[41]

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[38] Bondanella, *The Cinema of Federico Fellini*, 133.
[39] Ibid., 138.
[40] Cardullo, *Federico Fellini: Interviews*, 36.
[41] Bondanella, *The Cinema of Federico Fellini*, 147.

Bondanella argues that Fellini believed that the Christian mythology he utilized in *La Strada* no longer remains relevant in modern society. Fellini continues this theme in the religious miracle (the Madonna scene). He portrays it negatively by showing the press hound the little town. The audience sees the press set up giant lights to create a clear image for film cameras of the Madonna's resurrection. Even the return of the Madonna is not safe from exploitation by the press. Fellini shows a modernist culture that values celebrity and sensationalist journalism over the moral authority of religion.

In addition, Fellini characterizes Marcello as the intellectual version of Zampanò. Fellini says in an interview:

> *La Dolce Vita* is the private and confidential confession of a man who speaks to himself and his aberration. It is as if a friend were telling to other friends his confusion, his contradictions, and his deceptions, trying to clarify for himself his own sentimental aridity. Marcello...is from this point of view very similar to Zampanò...although the first is more cultured, and more guilty because he is more intelligent.[42]

Historian Tullio Kezich agrees with this idea. He argues that the different episodes in the film encompass a metaphor of the whole world. Marcello represents a man "living out the tension of attraction to and disgust with the world he lives in."[43] Kezich echoes Fellini's intention that Marcello is the intellectual version of Zampanò in *La Strada.* He further concludes that Marcello can be viewed as the alter ego of Fellini himself.[44] Like Zampanò, Marcello ignores the woman (his girlfriend Emma) who loves him. But in a greater sense Marcello represents a man trying to find authenticity in a superficial world.

The Danger of Intellectual Idealism

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[42] Bondanella, *The Cinema of Federico Fellini*, 19.
[43] Kezich, *Federico Fellini: His Life and Work*, 203-204.
[44] Ibid.

Fellini debunks the idea of an idealized life through the fall from grace of the intellectual Steiner. Fellini once said in an interview, "I think that the ideal, the idealized life, the idealized concepts can be extremely dangerous for our mental health, and it is what I try to express in my films."[45] Fellini introduces Marcello's friend Steiner during a meeting with Marcello in a church. Steiner remarks that he feels at home in the church. He then precedes to play the organ. Steiner seems to have everything. He lives in a mansion with a beautiful life and two children. Marcello envies his large house, his books, his friends, and his families. He views his life as a failure for his lack of ambition. Yet, on the porch of his house he reveals to Marcello, "Don't think that safety is being locked up in one's home. Don't do what I did." He then states, "A miserable life is better, believe me than an existence protected by an organized society where everything is calculated, everything is perfect." He then takes Marcello to his children's room, "I think of what my children will see tomorrow. 'The world will be wonderful,' they say. From one point of view. When one phone call can announce the end of the world." He then comes to a shocking conclusion, "One should live outside of passions, beyond emotions in that harmony you find in completed artworks, in that enchanted order. We should learn to love each other so much to live outside of time, detached…detached." Steiner ends up killing his children and committing suicide. His monologue reveals Fellini's criticism of intellectual idealism. Steiner believes that one should live in the ideology and intellectual creativity of art. Art represents an intellectual ideal to Steiner. He believes that real love comes from detaching oneself from other people. Love and emotions mean nothing to him when "one phone call can announce the end of the world." For him, this is the ideal.

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[45] Cardullo, *Federico Fellini: Interviews*, 61.

This represents Fellini's ultimate criticism of intellectual idealism. This detachment from emotions and the rest of humanity leads Steiner to murder his children. Fellini argues that this is the end of the road for ideology and idealism. Fellini writes in his autobiography *I, Fellini* on Steiner, "Steiner starts out as heroic and ends up as the worst villain of any of my pictures...I was not in any way sympathetic to him. He was a false intellectual. He did not care how much he damaged lives."[46]

Critics and Ideology: Hypocrisy on a Large Scale

The critical reaction to both *La Strada* and *La Dolce Vita* reveal the hypocrisy of ideology. The release of *La Strada* saw the condemnation of the film by leftist critics and the praise of the Church. The Marxist critic Guido Aristarco accused *la Strada* as the work of an adolescent. He writes, "[Fellini's] participation in reality is episodic, fragmentary, only sporadically enriched by realistic elements and attitudes; in Fellini we do not have the sense of our actual experiences."[47] In other words, he believed that Fellini's messages on love and communication mean nothing compared to greater political concerns told in socialist realism. On the other hand, the Church loved it for its Christian mythology and its emphasis on "Christian" themes such as love. For *La Dolce Vita*, the opposite occurred. The Church labeled it obscene while the left praised it as a criticism of bourgeoisie society. In his autobiography, Fellini recalls seeing a poster on a Church door with his picture shortly after the release of *La Dolce Vita*. It read, "Let us pray for the salvation of the soul of Federico Fellini, public sinner."[48] While the Church condemned the film, the left praised it as a criticism of the material exploitation of the

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[46] Fellini, Federico. *I, Fellini*. 1st ed. Cooper Square Press, 2001, 122.
[47] Bondanella, *La Strada: Federico Fellini, director,* 205.
[48] Fellini, *I, Fellini*, 130.

Roman upper class. Fellini debunks this as his intention in an interview, "The left-wing press played it up as a headline reportage on Rome...[but] it could of been Bangkok or a thousand other cities. I intended it as a report on Sodom and Gomorrah, a trip into anguish and despair. I intended for it to be a document, not a documentary."[49] This reveals that Fellini merely intended to show the despair created by a hedonistic world. He alludes to a modern day "Sodom and Gomorrah." He views it as short sighted to attribute it to any ideology.

Fellini: Transcending Politics

Furthermore, Fellini's cinema should be looked at as a criticism of political, ideological, and intellectual structure. Historian Tullio Kezich argues that Fellini's films and ideas transcend socio-politics. Kezich writes:

> Some people support the idea that art should be a means for teaching values, that it should come out of engagement and old-school neo-realist ideas. But the predominant theme of this moment is that all art has transcendental politics. There's no need for explicit accusations or banner waving in order for a director to prove he's on the right side, because the right side, for an artist...is fantasy, sincerity, and inspiration.[50]

Fellini should be looked at as an artist of the truest sense as his films sought to portray humanity in its truest sense. He once said, "A film takes form outside your will as a constructor; all genuine details come through inspiration."[51] An artist's inspiration produces authenticity according to Fellini. But Fellini explains that "unfortunately, we all make mistakes because education, culture, personal tics, and personal taste deform things that otherwise would be pure and instead mark them with the taints of our

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[49] Cardullo, *Federico Fellini: Interviews*, 36.
[50] Kezich, *Federico Fellini: His Life and Work*, 205.
[51] Cardullo, *Federico Fellini: Interviews*, 87.

conditioning."[52] Political ideology, intellectualism, and idealism remove one from seeing the truth in life. Fellini made films at a time in which lived in the midst of the Cold War. Fears of Marxism permeated to all countries. On the flip side, Christian democrats came to power in countries such as Germany and Italy and thrust social conservative values down its citizens' throats. Neo-realism came synonymous with these ideological ideas to the point that everything portrayed on screen needed to be interpreted within an ideological structure. Fellini argues that life in its truest sense should not be enslaved by an ideological structure. The deviation and criticism of idealism and the emphasis on human values puts Fellini on a pantheon above politics and ideology. Looking at the historical moment of the 1950s and early 1960s in Europe, it becomes remarkable that a filmmaker could make films that looked above the petty political and ideological antagonisms of the post-war period. Therefore, Fellini serves as an example of how human values such as love transcend all ideology and of the danger idealism poses to humanity's future.

[52] Cardullo, *Federico Fellini: Interviews*, 87.

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