"La Dolce Vita" Today: Fashion and Media

Nicola Certo

The Graduate Center, City University of New York

This Thesis is brought to you by CUNY Academic Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Graduate Works by Year: Dissertations, Theses, and Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of CUNY Academic Works. For more information, please contact deposit@gc.cuny.edu.
“LA DOLCE VITA” TODAY: FASHION AND MEDIA

by

NICOLA CERTO

A master’s thesis to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts,

The City University of New York

2017
“La Dolce Vita” today: Fashion and Media

by

Nicola Certo

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

Date

Eugenia Paulicelli
Thesis Advisor

Date

Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis
Executive Officer

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
ABSTRACT

“La Dolce Vita” today: Fashion and Media

by

Nicola Certo

Advisor: Eugenia Paulicelli

Federico Fellini’s La Dolce Vita is a cinematic masterpiece that has inspired nationally and internationally generations of creative people and artists because of the extent of its themes and because of the mastery in the choice of its costumes. The actuality of the director’s criticism towards the decadent society of his years, the originality of his stylistic choices, and his sophisticated taste for beauty and fashion, brought him to influence media and contemporary fashion then and now. There are numerous examples of television commercials that Fellini directs and produces for purely commercial purposes. They are all critique of his society, but yet a visible expression of modernity in their style, and an unending influence in advertising. His work expresses the desire for a national identity, the desire for a materialization of Italian Style that still today inspires designers that follow that idea of Italianism, which Fellini achieved. The inspiration has been explicit for some brands who imitated his style, words and locations, and not explicit for those artists who considered La Dolce Vita as contemporary significance in the construction of their own identity.
Acknowledgments

I wish to thank Eugenia Paulicelli, my advisor and first professor at The Graduate Center, whose support and knowledge motivated me to wisely deepen aspects of Fashion that are part of my Italian culture. Elisabetta Magistretti for introducing me to the Beauty of art and for encouraging me to discover new frontiers. I wish to thank all the amazing professors I have studied with for the past two years at The Graduate Center, such as Matt Gold and Kevin L. Ferguson, Veronica Manlow, Wayne Koestenbaum, David Halle and Giancarlo Lombardi, whose enthusiasm in his class made me investigate the relation between fashion and cinema. Thank you to Katherine Koutsis of the M.A. Program in Liberal Studies for these years of patience with me and for having an answer to all my questions; thank you to Matt Gold for believing in Fashion Studies and for giving us the chance to develop our studies through Digital Humanities.

I am grateful to my classmates in the Fashion Studies Program - thank you for supporting my ideas and creativity and for the incredible help throughout the years. Thank you to my family in Italy, Rossana and Adalberto Certo, for believing in the exact person I am, for the unending love and support. I wish to thank my dear friend Maddalena, who has shared most of my life with me - if it wasn't for you, I wouldn't be able to stick up for myself this much. And lastly, a special thank you to Vic for your constant help in reviewing this project and for your kind generosity in correcting me even when I am sure I’m right. Thank you for your patience, your strength, your motivation and your curiosity in this project.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction........................................................................................................................................1

2. Rome, the *Eternal City*..........................................................................................................................2

3. Fellini’s Innovation..................................................................................................................................4

4. Commercials and Paparazzi: Media...........................................................................................................7

   Fellini’s Reaction to Television..................................................................................................................14

   Influencing Advertising...............................................................................................................................20

5. *La Dolce Vita*: Fashion Inspiration.......................................................................................................26

Bibliography..................................................................................................................................................43
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to analyze the importance that Federico Fellini’s *La Dolce Vita* had, in the past, the years of his career, and mainly the influence that the iconic movie still has today on media and on contemporary fashion – international fashion, but mostly in brands and meta-brands “made in Italy”. As an introduction I will examine the relationship and connection that starts to be important between fashion and cinema in the 50s, especially in Rome, during the time of Hollywood on the Tiber.

The protagonist in Fellini’s work is the media. The relationship with it is prominently present in his work, and not only is this visible in the storytelling of *La Dolce Vita*, with the introduction of the term “paparazzi”; it is in fact exemplified by several commercials that Fellini directed: between ’84 and ’92 we get to know 5 spots that Fellini produces for television. The goal of Fellini’s decision was merely commercial, but he wouldn’t renounce to style, expressivity and creativity typical of his cinematic experience. Television was becoming crucial at that time as expression of modernity at the same time of the Italian society.

The trope of *La Dolce Vita* is also translated in contemporary fashion. There are numerous examples of brands *Made in Italy* that after the digital revolution started to draw inspiration from the movie itself. For example, there is the famous Italian brand Dolce & Gabbana, who in their recent campaign “Italian Family” represents the Italian family life style, with busy, dramatic, and decadent scenes. The colorful and jeweled outfits are extravagant, but are placed into an everyday setting or scenario, with portrayals of difficult
and intermingling relationships. The movie and the style that Federico Fellini brings to life are influential also for international designers. Dior, in fact, launched a fragrance in 1995 called “La Dolce Vita”, advertising it with a commercial inspired by the movie.

Concluding, Fellini’s La Dolce Vita still prevails today. His work expresses the desire for a national identity, the desire for a materialization of Italian Style that still today inspires designers and contemporary media, following that idea of Italianism that with Fellini had been achieved. My thesis will focus on the contemporary significance of the Dolce Vita in fashion and the media.

2. ROME, THE ETERNAL CITY

Fashion in Italy—it isn’t the first and it won’t be the last time we say this - is building itself a prestigious base. And if this foundation is already sufficiently solid, this is also due to other countries’ perception of the enormous prestige of our cities. Rome has an evocative appeal with ancient roots, sustained by literature, art, poetry, all over the world […] To use a modern expression in vogue with the latest generations, we might say that it is precisely the ‘direction’ of these Italian cities and islands that facilitates fashion presentations and sustains their tele-photo-cinema documentation around the world […] the concept of a unique, unmistakable ‘direction’ as in cinema, is what sets the fashion of one country apart from others. (Elsa Robiola, 1954)

The quotation, taken from the pages of Bellezza, the official magazine of Italian high fashion, founded in 1941 by Giò Ponti, shows the thoughts of journalist Elsa Robiola, who discusses the fashion’s advent in those years. It all starts in Florence when in 1951, the city hosts the first major fashion show, where Italian style and fashion are shown in front of national and international buyers for the first time. The show was held in the Sala Bianca and it marks a fundamental step towards the resumption of Italian society. It's strange
referring to fashion as one of the reasons why a change and a development were possible, yet this is what happened at that time. After this, Milan also started to be considered as a fashion capital, but Rome, the “Eternal City”, because of the deep relationship with cinema, became more than a simple fashion capital. The film industry was here, in Cinecittà, and a second wave of celebrity culture transformed Rome into a luxurious place where Italian style was celebrated and adopted by Hollywood celebrities.

The Roman success begins with the Fontana Sisters, three sisters, and all three designers, whose mother opened her own tailor shop in 1907. Their Roman clientele wasn’t enough to launch them internationally, but after the advent of *La Dolce Vita*, where a lot of garments were chosen and shown by Fellini, Hollywood had the chance to discover their design and love the collections. Here, the power that cinema had on fashion and the influence that fashion, Italian fashion, had on the Italian cinematic experience is pretty clear. One of the events that helped secure their international reputation was the marriage of the Hollywood actors Tyrone Power and Linda Christian. The Fontana sisters designed Linda’s gown. “The gown was constructed of white satin, with a five-yard train, and was covered with embroidery; it resembled a dress that might have been worn by a fairy tale princess. The international press covered the event, and photographs of the ceremony and a radiant Linda Christian appeared in papers around the world.”¹

A magazine published for foreign tourists in the 1950s proclaimed, “Rome? Twenty minutes in St. Peter's, twenty in the Coliseum, and at least two days in the Fontana sisters' studio”². One of the sisters, Micol, writes in her diary: “that day sanctioned our success as a Roman-based fashion house”: the wedding sanctioned the international fame of the Fontana sisters, and what is interesting to notice is that from that moment on, since
the direct connection with the United States and Hollywood was getting way deeper than before, all the fashion houses became “instrumental in establishing the relationship between glamour, cinema and the city.”

It was, then, the encounter between Italy and the United States that launched Italian fashion on a global scale, and it was cinema that provided the fashion industry with a sufficiently high profile, and increasingly international shop window, to promote and publicize to the world the Italian designers’ creations. (Eugenia Paulicelli, 2016)

As Eugenia Paulicelli states, between 1949 and 1951 we also have a development in the film business. Italian cinema tried to move from a status of “artisanship to that of industry”⁴. This passage is crucial in the understanding of Fellini’s work, because an element that made this growth possible was through fashion. These elements cannot be separated anymore, one needs the other, and only the collaboration between the two – fashion and cinema – can bring to the resumption of society.

3. FELLINI’S INNOVATION

In his reconstruction and analysis of Italian cinema, Gian Piero Brunetta defines La Dolce Vita as a «great social and cinematographic portrait»⁵; he states that Fellini’s film could be considered as a conjunction bridge between a specific season of the Italian cinema that ends with it, and the introduction of a new era, where the international cinema starts to take place in Italy too. It’s certain that the filmmaker puts himself far from the neorealism
that was popular at the time, with the intention to create something different, more consistent with the reality of his time⁶.

Brunetta, in his excursus, declares that Fellini’s cinematic experience belongs to two different key points. The first one regards the national production, while the second one expresses the relationship with the international context. Nationally, after the success in the Italian cinema that derived from the neorealist experience, the production level that starts with *La Dolce Vita* gathers a qualitative exceptionality never encountered before. Internationally instead, Fellini’s film is one of the first piece’s of art – cinematically speaking - that could have been collocated not only in an Italian context but, thanks to the innovation that brings, in a larger context, international, consequentially to the surprising cinematographic modernity that Fellini reached with it.

Fellini’s film is therefore the landmark for the Western cinematic culture. The movie can be considered as the portrait of the Italian society in the middle of the economic revolution, which begins through fictional films. As writer Antonio Tabucchi noticed, the film established a general fracture⁷. He says that what Fellini created can be seen as a sort of universal judgment but without any kind of salvation. Society is divided in classes and the hierarchy is clearly visible in the portrait Fellini shared with the audience. We can see the lower middle class with Marcello’s father, who comes from out of town and wants to have fun in the city and the result is a disaster because he gets sick from the wild night. We have Emma, Marcello’s girlfriend: she is the image of the “Italian wife”: she lives her life only to take care of Marcello, she always wants more than what she already has, obsessive and possessive towards her husband. Then we can see the aristocracy, the elite of Rome that finds every possible excuse to stay together and live a life of wild parties, money and
gossip, like the one at the castle in Sutri. There’s also the lower class, represented in the movie with a crowd of loud people hoping for the Virgin Mary’s apparition only for TV coverage. Tabucchi closes the circle with the intellectuals; we can see Marcello Rubini, the main character in *La Dolce Vita*. Marcello is a journalist who wants to become a great writer, and in the meantime works as columnist for a local tabloid, writing only about gossip. He believes he has aspirations in life, but Tabucchi says Marcello is actually pathetic, because in a society where all the fundamental values are lost, the desire for a better life is the last aspect individuals are looking for.

Another example is Steiner, Marcello’s friend. We see him in the film in his house in Rome, which collects together all the artists, writers, and intellectuals of the elite society. The conversations are about philosophy, truth in life, values, but only in theory because, in fact, no one lives out of their knowledge. Steiner has a family, two children and a smiling wife. Apparently this is the only family we see in the movie, and we are convinced that a glimmer of hope can come from it, especially after a conversation we hear between Marcello and Steiner about family, values, about what is worthy in life. He is the example of balance and serenity in life, but instead he fails our expectations, because his suicide changes the judgment we originally formulated looking at him. Tabucchi states that those receptions of intellectuals were actually reunions of empty and fatuous people.

As we can see, *La Dolce Vita* is the most terrible portrait of the Italian society that has ever been conceived by an artist. Prophetically, Fellini already sensed where Italy was going to go. The way the filmmaker uses to introduce mass media is revealing. We’ll see how.
4. COMMERCIALS AND PAPARAZZI: MEDIA

Paparazzo suggests to me a buzzing insect, hovering, darting, stinging.  

*La Dolce Vita* introduces another element that needs to be considered in the discussion. Fellini’s relationship with media is prominently present in his work, and not only is this visible in the storytelling of this specific film, with the introduction of the term “paparazzi”, but we can actually follow this relation looking at commercials that Fellini directed during the last few years of his work. The media factor, television, journalism, photography are expressions of the Italian society that was moving forward, becoming economically independent. This relationship can’t always be considered favorable for Fellini, since in *La Dolce Vita* the criticism towards paparazzi is present and well developed.

Federico Fellini donated the term to the popular culture lexicon when he directed *La Dolce Vita* in 1959, the first film to prominently feature the photographers who made scandal. Paparazzo is the name of the main photographer in the movie and Marcello’s close friend. They work together, reporting the scandalous lives of Roman celebrities. The characteristics that he and his colleagues exhibit made enough of an impact to permanently instill the term “paparazzi” to refer to photographers who take candid pictures of celebrities, often by relentlessly shadowing them in their public and private activities. We assist at a brutal scene in the film when we see Sylvia, the American blonde bombshell, who decides to spend the night walking around Rome and jump into the famous Trevi Fountain. Later that night, upon Sylvia’s return to the hotel, her partner slaps her. We see
the couple and several photographers around them taking pictures and recording on film
the uncomfortable situation without filter, without any kind of restrain. Celebrities became
nothing more than pictures to their adoring public. This “society of the spectacle”
demanded more visuals and more details, not realizing it was simultaneously contributing
to the growing artificially of pictorial representation.

The other side of the relationship with the media can be seen in the last few years of
his work. Television was becoming crucial at the same time as expression of modernity
and decadency of the Italian society was. Reality was asking Fellini to adapt to the new era. The love-hate relationship between Fellini and the Tv has been discussed several times by the author himself, during interviews and by the work of biographers who studied his life and work. Initially Fellini is tempted by Tv production, but after a while he will consider his experience with it as negative and against his principles, so he will dedicate all his skills in cinema only, representing on screen the moral and cultural decadency of Italian society. Disappointed by television he denounces its mediocrity and the impossibility of working for both television and cinema, because of a different audience expectation. For Fellini the main difference is quality, the ability of catching the spectator’s attention without exaggerations.

What we know is that between ’84 and ’92 we get to know 5 spots that Fellini produces for television: one for Campari, one for Barilla rigatoni pasta and three for the Bank of Roma. The goal of Fellini’s decision was merely commercial, but he wouldn’t renounce style, expressivity and creativity typical of his cinematic experience. These spot
commercials are seriously short movies; masterpieces created with the author’s usual style that recurs also in this case, even for a simple ad and not for a long film.

The Campari commercial, released in 1984, shows a woman and a man sitting on a train, with a remote able to change the landscape outside the widow while the train is running. Their clothes are wisely selected to show the high class of society exactly like the careful selection Fellini did for La Dolce Vita. The woman keeps changing the setting around, but since she is bored not finding anything that attracts her attention, gives the remote to the man, who blocks the image on Pisa, with the Tower and the Duomo up front, and a bottle of Campari that appears next to them. This is the image they select, and they celebrate with drinking Campari that the waitress brings them. The commercial is an invitation to buy and consume the product, but at the same time Fellini doesn’t hesitate to implicitly criticize the television system that created a bored and unsatisfied spectator. Society is able to manage the media, changing the “channel” whenever it wants, as the spectator now performs the role of the director.

Another Tv commercial Fellini produced is the one for Barilla, the iconic pasta brand and Italian Food Company. In 1985 Pietro Barilla managed to convince the director to work for him, probably more through the uproar that the operation would have provoked rather than the commercial’s content; his name appears in fact at the bottom of the Tv screen. The advertisement is called Alta Società, “high society”, and shows a couple at a high-end restaurant sitting at the table and ready to order. Three waiters are around them and the headwaiter starts listing food options for the night with a menu of French delicacies with their correct French names. The woman at the table with her dreamy-looking face stops the waiter with a peremptory and definitive “Rigatoni”, the name of the
product Fellini is publicizing, as she wants to eat a simpler dish of pasta. The scene ends with other guests at other tables, repeating the same “statement” turning towards the camera at the same time. What we can see from the commercial’s closing sequence is Fellini’s decision not to display a store name or a brand, but rather just several white neon circles outside the window of the restaurant that reflect on different surfaces such as the window and the television. As Burke argues, “in late capitalism we desire and consume not things but sings”, stating that the neon light is “pure meaningless display”\(^{10}\). The advertisement, radically contextualized in the years of making, is not a marketing strategy for a brand of pasta, but rather Fellini’s statement through which the director shows advertising’s absence of meaning. The audience is not interested in what the product really is; what’s important is how TV captures people’s attention.

The same thing happens in his commercials for the Bank of Rome. In 1993, a few months before his death, Fellini brought to life a series of short movies, precisely three, featuring Paolo Villaggio – who had a role in another of Fellini’s masterpiece, La Voce della Luna – and a very young Anna Falchi, a famous Italian actress still famous today. It’s late at night and the scene opens with a woman walking through the streets of the city and a voice whispers. It’s Paolo Villaggio, who speaks to the woman offering his help with something. The woman is Dutch and answers to him in her language. The audience barely knows what is happening; in fact a third voice is brought to the scene after Paolo asks for someone to translate. While the woman disappears from the street, we hear the voice of a male character entering the scene; the voice belongs to a lion – Fellini here begins to introduce the surrealism of the storytelling – that claims to be able to translate the words of the woman for him. Even if Paolo is scared in first place by simply noticing that a lion is
in front of him, after seeing that the lion is crying – and we don’t know why - he starts crying as well out of pity. What is this about? We realize that everything is part of a dream the protagonist is having. The next scene is Paolo at his analyst’s office, describing the “nightmare” and concern for his future. His doctor suggests not to worry, because the Bank of Rome can help to live better, to live easier and to sleep peacefully, offering a complete service that would possibly solve the protagonist’s nightmare. The service that the bank would provide is not displayed anywhere; there is no name and it’s not easy to connect the commercial’s content with the director’s choices. The next scene is a close up of the bank’s building and Paolo inside it getting ready for bed. Sleeping in the building, or “enrolling” to the Banca di Roma, as we would think through this commercial, is the only way to not be afraid anymore.

The second commercial for the Banca di Roma sees Paolo this time driving through a deep and dark tunnel. All of a sudden, stones and water start to fall from the roof and the car stops. And again, after we realize this is a dream the protagonist is having, the commercial sequence brings us back to the analyst’s office where the man still advises Paolo to take care of these nightmares and consider the Bank of Rome as his only solution. The final scene is identical to the closing sequence of the first commercial, and the third one will do the same as well.

For his last TV commercial, Fellini changes the setting. We are no longer in a dark background such as a tunnel or the alleys of a city at night. Here we are outside. Paolo is having lunch with a beautiful girl, a green field with poppies surrounding them, and waiters serving the dishes. All of a sudden Paolo realizes that he is actually tied to the chair, stuck on the tracks of a train that will arrive very soon. When he is on the verge of
being hit by the train, the protagonist suddenly wakes up, realizing that this is another nightmare. Again the end, for commercial purposes, sees the doctor suggesting the service from the bank as almost *providential*, the only safe choice: “follow my suggestion and your night time anguish will be over.”

We can say that these spots, after analyzing their content, scenes and choices, depict the exhortation to go and sleep in a bank in order to avoid nightmares. This is not connected to the kind of service a real bank can provide. Fellini’s relationship with advertising has always been difficult. In *Lo Schermo Manifesto: Le misteriose pubblicità di Federico Fellini*, Manuela Gieri tries to describe this difficult relationship, stating that during his career his opinion towards commercials changed within the years. In the beginning, Fellini’s first approach to it consisted in using it only as internal component to the store, just to help the full plot to make it more real, by giving a social context to the story. In this way the story was connected to the immediate portrayal of the truth. However, after La Dolce Vita, society was experiencing a different context, and his relationship with media started to change. In the storytelling there isn’t a direct and faithful connection with reality, in fact these commercials give the chance to break the conventional narrative structure sanctioning to build free images that are not portrayed in a rational way in telling the story.
Fig. 1: Campari, “Che bel paesaggio”, 1984.

Fig. 2: Barilla Group, “Alta Società”, 1985.

Fig. 3: Banca di Roma, “Sogno”, Ep. 1, 1992.

Fig. 4: Banca di Roma, “Sogno”, Ep. 2, 1992.

Fig. 5: Banca di Roma, “Déjeuner sur l’herbe”, Ep. 3, 1992.
Fellini’s Reacts to Television

Federico Fellini never had any difficulty in speaking of himself and of the conflicting relationship with Television. His passion for the cinematic experience was beyond compare and he never hesitated in condemning modern tools that were preventing the public from experiencing his art. In his own words “these strategies entail, among other things, a critique of signification itself - that is, the way in which meaning is seemingly produced but endlessly deferred and dispersed, rendering it virtually meaningless in a society of the spectacle driven by mass media with its ceaseless reproduction and decontextualization of images. […] Commercials are a powerful indictment of the very things they are presumably seeking to sell: individual products but, far more broadly, consumer society and capitalism”. Being free from structures could have helped Fellini’s art stylistically in the construction of his films for examples, especially for a man conscious of his time, but as soon as private television started to interest more his society rather than a cinematic experience, the director had to do or say something with the intent of condemning “consumer society and capitalism”.

There is another masterpiece that Fellini produces in 1986, Ginger and Fred, in which the director undertakes a long discussion against private television and the mediocrity of its fare. The movie is a French-Italian production where two dancers, a couple - whose roles have been played by Marcello Mastroianni once again, as Pippo, and Giulietta Masina as Amelia – famous for their interpretation of Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire. “The film’s main themes are those of intrusive advertising, the presence of television with identical programs, and a critique of consumer society. The adverts are
intrusive, bus so are other elements such as the football matches which are broadcast and watched at the most inopportune times, and the ridiculous entertainment shows on TV. The world of television is made up of sponsors, advertising, and everyday vulgarity, but for one brief, shining moment of magic, it all takes a back seat to the artists’ performance.”\textsuperscript{17} The situation at the time was quite changing politically; the Italian government began privatizing public channels and at the same time Silvio Berlusconi, “Cavaliere”\textsuperscript{18} – who will serve as Prime Minister of Italy in four governments after following his success as businessman – laid the groundwork of a powerful media group. Berlusconi was in fact the one arguing that films reproduced in television should have been broken up to fit in advertisements, something Fellini was completely against to. He reacts to it underlining how “intrusive” ads can be because they interrupt emotions, critically investigating the kind of messages that commercials were instilling into people persuading them that everything was available to be purchased. Society didn’t realized how illogically disconnected adverts were to what they were supposed to offer. We have seen this in the three similar spots for the Bank of Rome, where nothing actually publicizes the bank’s services.

“When we are at a movie theater, even if we don’t like the movie we’re watching, the scared but fascinated awe caused by that big screen forced us to stay seated until the end, at least for an economic coherence, since we paid the ticket; but now, because of a sort of rancorous revenge, as soon as what we are watching seems to request a different attention that we don’t want to grant, and boom! A nudge, and we remove the word to anyone, deleting images that don’t interest us, we decide. This led to a tyranny, where the
audience is the worst despot, who does whatever he wants and is constantly more convinced that he is the director, or at least the editor of the images he is seeing.”

His first reaction was to criticize society in a cinematographic way, using the filmic tools he owned, but only to underline the level of decadency society reached in those years. His first goal wasn’t to simply criticize; Fellini instead intended to “dismantle it”. Grace H. Carrier, in her *La Dolce Vita: Fellini’s Farewell to the Society of the Spectacle*, while reflecting on Fellini’s historical context suggests, “Charles Baudelaire’s treatment of Parisian *fin-de-siècle* society might serve as Fellini’s model of modern Italian and European society.”

She notices that both Baudelaire and Fellini shared an “inclination towards decadence” as the grounds or root of their work from which broader cultural criticism can depart. *La Dolce Vita* can be considered as the “return” of a taste of stylistic ideology which has characterized the European literature of *decadence*, but this return “is a strategic one, one that portrayed a society of decadence in order to dismantle it.”

Federico Fellini not only produces films; as we have seen in the previous chapter, he directs commercials as well. From the absolute absence of structures – see the three commercials for Bank of Rome – the director takes stylistic tools that belong to him, he uses a language that belongs to him but at the same time this language is synchronized with modernity, with the needs and characteristics of modernity. From the Barilla spot in which the first thing we should see is “pasta” or a logo that testifies the company who hired Fellini, we instead understand how poorly the product is publicized. His commercials use a filmic style of long takes since the goal is to communicate a message to the audience – often a critique of modernity – and not to advertise a product. Burke argues that the public “sees his commercials as themselves a form of theory and criticism of the practice of
advertising.”

“He used his knowledge of storytelling and film techniques to critique the medium and draw to the viewers’ attention everything wrong with advertising.”

Fellini wants to make it visible and public to a society that empties the object of its meaning. Today, if we look at modernity when we talk about television commercials, we rarely see the lack of meaning. We are used to short sequences, jingles, with actors trying to briefly but powerfully sell a specific product.

The issue here is that television didn’t help humanity to escape that way of looking at reality, that way of reducing the reality that challenges, because appearance and narcissism is what really matters. This condition has been well analyzed by Fellini, in fact is his film *Ginger and Fred*, a screenplay already mentioned before, the director argues that “the rise of Italian commercial TV promotes an unselfish-conscious culture of narcissism, a space that is all image and no interiority and that corresponds to a mode of desire at once subject-less and lack-less. The cinema, even in the form of Hollywood productions such as, say, the musicals of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, encourages a positive desire that originates in loss and lack; television, according to Fellini’s view, represents a realm saturated by advertising and the ambient noise of mass culture, a lack-less universe in which the subject does not desire so much as renounce any principle of identity per se in a crescendo of nihilism.”

It is clear that Fellini considers television as detriment to the cinematic experience; the chance the public has to experience art while watching his work requires an awakening in desire, but the level of nihilism in society wasn’t allowing Fellini to accomplish his *art*: “I object only to commercials that interrupt films. I have nothing against advertising in itself, that would be ridiculous…my indignation, which will continue as long as this
situation persists, is about the utter failure to respect an author’s work, the way it is hijacked and taken possession of, massacred in order to make money, stuffing it with commercials breaks in the most abject manner.”  

For him the interruption of art has to be considered as a crime; television breaks, in fact, don’t respect the fluidity of a movie, the dynamics of a movie that required a lot of work behind them. Fellini states: “I don’t like the fact that private television seeks to justify the way it treats works to which others have dedicated thought, attention, and hard work.”  

Or again, “The arrogance, the aggression and the massacre of television advertising inserted in films is like violence against the human creature: it beats the human being, it wounds the human. A movie, whatever artistic creation in which everything is calculated in order for it to have that rhythm, that breath, that musicality, if subjected to an external brutal intervention (such as a television spot), here is what I call a crime.”  

The cinematic experience needs to maintain its unity in order for the audience to experience art in his full meaning. Television is not a valid form of expression and cannot be vehicle of any meaning: “I’m not in television. It doesn’t attract me or arouse my curiosity…I don’t believe television is a means of expression; it is only a means of distribution, using films, for example, as vehicles, but cutting them, changing them, deforming them, reducing them to pictures postcards, and reaching into homes to give viewers some kind of feeling, a little dirty, smug, voyeuristic, cheap [...]”  

Fellini describes the condition of Italian mass media and criticizes the extreme power of commercials whose nature is prodigiously aggressive and intrusive. He chooses the mediums in which he had an issue with and makes versions of these commercials that are self-reflexive. As dramatic as his reactions can be towards television and spots, the director accepts these mediums. He still produces and directs commercials that made
history because of his cinematic fame. He still wants to try and build a different relationship with the audience, this time more “intimate” and personal. To do so, Fellini adapts to the reality of his time, letting the film free from any structure, free from any “sense”. Condemning his society is correct, he has the right to be against television commercials and interruptions because they all oppose to the real core of the cinematic experience. His society was a product of modernity, the world was moving forward and he had to adapt. The choice is merely commercial, but still he couldn’t renounce to creativity and art. On one hand, (Fellini) is attracted to the possibility of synthesis and immediacy of television narrative, and attracted to the possibility of a greater intimacy with the viewer as well, but at the same time (he is) more and more aware of the negative power of fragmentation within the storytelling, due to both the zapping and the constant and intrusive commercial breaks. The director is also conscious of the progressive “lowering” of the relationship between spectacle and spectator, emptied as it is of any magic and seduction in the suffocating familiarity of the environment tamed by the mass-media household.

Everything that he created still made him great and memorable. Today we are inspired by his work, even his commercials, because they are all examples and testimonies of his passion and cleverness. We look at his choices with respect even if what he did was merely a commercial move, and even if his creations were released only to go against a society that is different from him. With his mastery in rendering everything great no matter what was blocking art, he is inspiration to all of us. Today we assist to advertising masterpieces that show a dedicated and hard work behind (restructure this sentence). Well,
the same thing happened with Fellini, an artist that plays in all and for all to show his value.

Influencing advertising

Fellini’s relationship with television, in its particular declination of commercials, has been a source of inspiration for many other directors at that time and for different directors nowadays. His influence is not only visible when television spots take up themes and styles specifically from La Dolce Vita, but also in a more general level, when we have a famous and ingenious director hired to produce a commercial with the goal of getting more audience while publicizing the product. First, let’s analyze examples of other famous directors that in history had the chance to express their art through television, and then we will see how Fellini’s La Dolce Vita has been reborn for inspired-by commercials.

Before Fellini, there was another Italian director who offered his art in favor of television adverts, Sergio Leone, who in 1981 writes and directs a commercial for Renault 18, whose music is written by the memorable Ennio Morricone. In those years, there were many agencies that managed to hire famous directors, arousing everybody’s envy. No one ever thought that this practice would have become an expensive habit. Another example of it is the celebrative spot that Wim Wenders directed for Barilla and that Alessandro Baricco wrote for the occasion. At that time Barilla was celebrating a 125 anniversary. Aired in 2002 the ad was considered as extremely innovative and original because it was longer (90 seconds) and it didn’t show the product (Barilla in fact decided to do so since...
they only wanted to show the workers rather then the actual product). Over the years television spots started to change radically, turning from limited duration advertisements into short stories, often played by famous actors. We can see this process in fashion advertisement as well. Chanel for example was one of the first brands that considered commercials just like a “few seconds movies”. In 2005 Chanel entrusted the task to Baz Luhrmann, who directed the spot for the famous perfume Chanel N.5. Nicole Kidman, his muse, played the main character, and the model Rodrigo Santoro was in it as well. The spot became a cult hit among fans of the director, because of the extraordinary resemblance to the atmosphere of the film Moulin Rouge, which stars Nicole Kidman and Ewan McGregor. Another iconic filmmaker advertised the same perfume, Jean-Pierre Jeunet. This time the muse is another Lady Chanel, Audrey Tatou; she travels on the wonderful Orient Express, visiting places with a male model that follows her perfume in order to find her. Another example that is worth remembering is the famous Nike commercial directed by Terry Gilliam. We all remember the spots where the most famous soccer players in the world challenge each other in clandestine matches. Sophia Coppola instead, released a recent commercial for the Dior perfumes Miss Dior starring Natalie Portman in 2013. Here the reference to Fellini is explicit since, despite the fact that it has been filmed at the Palais-Royal in Paris, the actress dances under the water of the fountain and is successively reached by a man who drives the typical car, wearing the typical dark sunglasses.

The first example that testifies the importance of Fellini’s work in the inspired-by advertising is the creative campaign for Peroni Beer. The idea was to pay homage to one
of Italy’s most stylish creations. The Bank, a British advertising agency that recreated the famous film in every aspect except for length and the color, produces the commercial in 2006; the spot is titled Peroni: La Dolce Vita in Color since the usage of images in black and white overcame throughout the years. The muse in this commercial is the South African born model Landi Swanepoel who plays the role of Sylvia, from her arrival to the airport, to the iconic walk inside the Trevi Fountain with a back dress. The opening scene sees a helicopter that flies in the blue sky transporting the statue of Christ exactly like in Fellini’s first sequence. In the helicopter we see Marcello and Paparazzo – the names are maintained – recording and greeting a group of young women in bikini’s on top of a rooftop. This recreation is extremely faithful. In fact both Marcello and Paparazzo arrive at the airport where the plane with Sylvia lands on the airstrip. As in La Dolce Vita, the woman disembarks from the plan and a crowded group of paparazzi run towards the celebrity, taking pictures of her. The sequence is not respected since the timeframe of a commercial couldn’t have been more then a few seconds, however the spot reproduces the most famous scene when, after a dance in the heart of Rome, Sylvia jumps in the water of the fountain, while Marcello stares at her beauty. We can look at it as a more contemporary version of the film, in fact the black dress isn’t the same, it is rather a chic cocktail dress that doesn’t strike the viewer as the luxurious dress Anita Ekberg did in the original film. However, the themes are the same; Peroni’s La Dolce Vita celebrates timeless Italian glamour and the things that make Italy great through the most famous example of Italianism, Fellini’s art-piece. Tailored suits, modish scooters, Rome are key elements that could have supported a product whose roots are exclusively in the Italian culture, the premium Italian beer Peroni.
The second commercial inspired by *La Dolce Vita* stars Monica Bellucci, one of the most famous Italian actresses who had the chance to work internationally in her career. *The Passion of the Christ* and the more recent, James Bond’s *Spectre* in 2015, are some of the international movies Monica played in. In this commercial two massive brands *made in Italy*, Martini & Rossi and Dolce & Gabbana, presented to the press a new collaboration *Martini Gold by Dolce & Gabbana*, an original drink inspired by the two Italian designers, whose aroma mixes exotic spices but still contains herbs from the Mediterranean area, south of Italy. The spot is produced in 2010 and it is entrusted to Swedish director Jonas Akerlund, who decides to set it in the streets of Rome, connoting a sophisticated atmosphere similar – almost identical – to *La Dolce Vita*’s environment. In the scene, Monica Bellucci has that same typical elegance of all the women we encounter in Fellini’s film. It’s black and white, exactly like the movie, and in the visual sequence we see Monica Bellucci walking through the streets, followed by paparazzi – here is clear the cross-reference – captivating men’s attention. In her purse there’s a bottle of Martini Gold that she will happily drink with Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana, the two designers, starring in the spot too. This commercial, being more commercial and modern, doesn’t really respect *La Dolce Vita*’s shooting style, but rather we can clearly notice details that come from the film. For example the idea of a beautiful woman with a black dress worshipped and followed by paparazzi - we constantly hear the sound of the camera taking photos –, arousing the envy of another blonde woman. Another detail that recall Fellini’s masterpiece is the director’s choice to set it in Rome, with the Trevi Fountain in the background. This collaboration expresses the values and the pride of the Italian roots, it celebrates Italian lifestyle with its sophisticated and chic way of living life, fashion and
culture, values that Fellini proposed for the first time in the film. Both Dolce & Gabbana and Martini are colossal Italian brands, and there wasn’t better choice for them to be affected by *La Dolce Vita*, foundation of art where they see a distinct attempt to celebrate the tradition and the Italian culture.

The most recent advertising campaign that draws inspiration from the movie is the one released for *Persol* sunglasses in 2015, titled *Vai Paparazzo!* The brand hired Wim Wenders, German director mentioned previously, who produced the latest commercial for the celebration of 125 years of Barilla. The commercial begins with a shooting session outside Cinecittà and we see a spider car driving a diva, a gentlemen and a director, Wenders himself, who is recording the scene with his camera in the back seat, playing the role of Fellini, the director of that golden age of Italian cinema so far and so close. Everyone is wearing the sunglasses; the spot was, in fact, meant to publicize a specific kind of Persol Cellor. The storytelling, even if we see the clear similarity to *La Dolce Vita* because of the characters, or a paparazzo next to the car taking pictures of the couple, is conceived as a “behind the scene”. As soon as the director suggests to the actor who interprets Paparazzo to start to take pictures of them, the couple escapes to hide the diva from him. The model is wearing a black dress, but she is more similar to Audrey Hepburn in *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* rather than Sylvia in *La Dolce Vita*. She is wearing pearls, lace gloves and sunglasses. This commercial is interesting because even if Wenders intends to pay homage to Fellini by creating it in black and white, we notice that the characters are simply actors who are doing their job. As soon as the scene is recorded and the car drives away, we are witnesses of a change; the diva, Sylvia, jumps on Paparazzo’s motorcycle and runs away with him and not with Marcello, who in the last scene is the one taking
pictures of them. The situation changes radically. Wenders starts with Fellini, but closes as himself; “Persol asked me to evoke a certain period of Italian cinema because their glasses evoke the feel of the 50s and 60s. I liked the idea because some of my favorite filmmakers of all time are of that era – and I became friends with Fellini and even made a film with Antonioni, so I caught a glimpse of them and their work. The idea of making a little film that would evoke that classic period was a fun idea – and Cinecittà is such a legendary and mythical place in the European landscape of cinema that to make a film and to shoot there, even if it was just for one day, felt right. Cinecittà is where Fellini shot all his films so I said, I want to shoot in front of that studio gate.”

Persol is another historical Italian brand that has had a tradition rooted within an Italian identity and culture. We have seen this brand already in Fellini’s movie; in fact Marcello wears a pair of dark sunglasses during a lot of the scenes.

All these directors and agencies decided to develop their ideas, their intentions of praising Italy, its brands, products and creativity through the celebration of a masterpiece that deepened the concept of Italian identity like never before. It is evident that they are all influenced by the innovation that Fellini introduces in its variations of fashion and advertisement – often connected to each other – without questioning the social context that the director was, however, experiencing. They all interpret Fellini as the example of Italian identity and tradition; he has marked a period of radical transformation, modernity and international elegance which helped to export the Italian style and which collaborated to create a cultural image of Italy within the world and the success of made in Italy.
5. *LA DOLCE VITA*: FASHION INSPIRATION

“The marvelous sets and costumes designed by Pietro Gherardi in collaboration with Fellini are to this day the inspiration and materialization of Italian Style. Thanks to Fellini, the name *La Dolce Vita* has become a powerful trope, signifying in Italy, but even more so abroad, Italian style, fashion and glamour. No film has done more than *La Dolce Vita* to embed those images in the collective consciousness. Both as a film and as an idea, *La Dolce Vita* is a mandatory starting point when talking of Italian style.”

This quotation introduces the work of international and national designers who created collections, campaigns and beauty products - to mention a few - all influenced by *La Dolce Vita* in a pure sense; some brands’ projects in fact, make an explicit reference to specific themes, specific details, and places from Fellini’s movie.

In 1992, for example, Dolce & Gabbana proposed a new Spring/Summer 1992 collection titled *La Dolce Vita*. The title of the collection is a clear allusion to the film, but the clothes per se aren’t representative of the famous Fellini’s style. The show sees Linda Evangelista, Naomi Campbell, Carla Bruni and Cindy Crawford walking in “stockings, suspenders, black lace and roses, reminiscent of the voluptuous femininity of Italian actresses such as Gina Lollobrigida and Sophia Loren.”

Fellini is only in the background, since lingerie and corsets constitute the collection, which is not exactly what we would expect from a collection titled “Dolce Vita”, knowing what kind of garments and art the director was proposing in the movie. The connection between Fellini’s ideas and Dolce & Gabbana, however, can be found throughout the collection, since lingerie and corsets are
images of femininity and a sensuality that originally belonged to Anita Ekberg. Some of the curves from their Spring/Summer 1992 collection were cancelled last minute, but the image of the Dolce & Gabbana woman remained soft, feminine and sensual. Looking at the iconography from the show, we can admire curves of the bodies, shaped and refined by the corsets, heavy make up to highlight the eyes and the typical hairstyle from the 60s. In *La Dolce Vita*, when Sylvia starts dancing in the fountain, the iconic dress that the Fontana sisters made for Anita’s role in the movie - gravity-defying strapless dress, with a sweetheart neckline and a layered overskirt with a contrast underlay – is representation of femininity, of being comfortable in her own skin, of being confident in her curves. The result has been achieved in a more modern way by Dolce & Gabbana in what can be defined as a “new Dolce Vita”.

Also Valentino Garavani, head designer of the brand Valentino, makes an explicit reference to Fellini’s style, mood, and film, together with Giancarlo Giambetti – colleague and art director for Valentino – decides to resume those faces, those scenes, that collective desire of stardom typical of *La Dolce Vita*. In 1994 Valentino and his team conceive an ad campaign for their Spring/Summer 1994 collection. The campaign was shot in Rome, home to Valentino, but also the original set of Fellini’s movie. Arthur Elgort was the official photographer, whose concept for the shooting was inspired by the recollection of those nights and moments that were documented by paparazzi exactly as the movie. Supermodel Claudia Schiffer starred in the role of the Fellinian icon and bombshell Anita, since in the 90s Schiffer was as famous as the actress in the years of the film. Over three days of shooting, Elgort photographs the model in many of Rome’s most famous locations, such as Via Veneto, the Campidoglio, and of course, The Trevi Fountain. The images are
brilliant and are a clear homage to *La Dolce Vita*, not only because of the choices of location’s or because the protagonist of the campaign was another famous bombshell. After only a few hours from the beginning of the shooting, when only a few pictures were taken, the entire city of Rome came to know exactly where they were; everywhere the model, the photographer and the entire team were moving just to change the location of the shooting, thousands of tourists, onlookers and paparazzi started to follow them. Whenever the team moved, huge crowds moved with them, screaming, applauding and taking pictures. The situation became critical especially when the shooting moved to the Trevi Fountain, the part of the campaign where Schiffer and the Bosnian model Adrian are reproducing the cult scene. “By magic and by the power of evocation that belongs to fashion photography, Rome returns to the days of *La Dolce Vita*: paparazzi, as awakened from long slumber, cannot believe to have the chance and follow the Mercedes that drives Claudia Schiffer around the city.”  This “salute” to Anita featuring the supermodel is the successful attempt to recreate *La Dolce Vita*’s mood, considered by Valentino as the most effective way to revive the same magic of those years.

As previously said, the trope of Fellini’s film has been also translated in foreign contemporary fashion. The brand Dior, for example, doesn’t look at *La Dolce Vita* and its Italianism as something to reproduce and express in its variations and themes; a French brand takes from a movie like this not with the purpose to find and express a national identity, but rather it is inspired by *La Dolce Vita* due to the impeccable and original style that the film proposed like never before. This time, there isn’t a prêt-a-porter collection or an ad campaign with garments that refer to the Fellinian fashion. In 1995, in fact, the
creative directors of Dior decide to name their fragrance “Dolce Vita”. For the first time we have a product “Dolce Vita inspired-by”. The spot they create is short, in black and white like the movie, and sees a girl – representation of Anita - who dances with a partner, an handsome man who can be considered as Marcello, in a ball room of a glamorous castle, with chandeliers and sumptuous curtains, similar to the one where Marcello stays and parties in the last sequences of the original film. They are dancing under the notes of “E penso a te” by Lucio Battisti, a major Italian singer at that time. In the intentions of its creators, the Dolce Vita by Dior is the fragrance of “happiness”; a perfume that should recall the mood those colossal Italian movies from the sixties had.

Prada, instead, “dusts off” the film in a different way, exclusively to express the idea of Italianism that an established Italian brand needs to keep up with consistently in order to be original every time that something new is offered on the market. In 2013 Prada released a branded film, Castello Cavalcanti, to advertise another fragrance, “Candy”, from the Italian luxury fashion house, in collaboration with American film director Wes Anderson, who produced another installment with Prada for the fragrance. The short film doesn’t have a glaring reference to the perfume per se or to fashion – obviously the Prada Placement is still visible in the majority of the scenes -, but it is interesting to analyze the details that a foreign director inserts in order to celebrate the Italian style. The 8-minutes film takes place in a small town in Italy, probably around 1955, and it is the story of Jed Cavalcanti, whose role is played by American actor Jason Schwartzman, a Formula One driver racing in the Molte Miglia. The first images depict a typical situation of a small town in Italy, with old men playing cards at a café – the “bar” as Italians use to call it -, young people wearing the “coppola”– a word to indicate the Sicilian “cap” –, women
making clothes while chatting with each other and the typical priest of the town. The scene sees the car entering a traditional Italian “piazza” in the small town of Castello Cavalcanti – even if filmed at Cinecittà in Rome – and Jed crashing the car in the square and asking for help after realizing that the town is in fact the birthplace of his ancestors. A direct reference to La Dolce Vita happens to be in the middle of the short film, when we see the statue of Christ standing in the heart of the square, the same statue the helicopter carries up in the air in the first scenes of Fellini’s film. Castello Cavalcanti presented by Prada, as stated in the credits at the end of the video, is an “American empirical image written and directed by Wes Anderson”, referring to the American director’s conception of Italian style, that still maintains his own cinematic style. He doesn’t renounce to irony while describing a social context that belongs exclusively to Italy; this glimpse of society inspired by Fellini is, in fact, what allows the director to express an authentic Italian identity.

Another and more recent example that resumes one specific detail from La Dolce Vita is Fendi’s latest fashion show for the Spring/Summer 2017 collection. In 2016 Fendi pays tribute to a forgotten Italy, assaulted by restless tourists that admire quintessential Italian art pieces only through the lenses of their cameras, by financing part of the Trevi Fountain’s restoration and by putting together an amazing presentation of Karl Lagerfeld’s latest designs; the designer, in fact, decides to build a transparent catwalk inside the Fontana di Trevi and have the models walk directly on the water. Stories and tales from the Nordic culture and land are the collection’s inspiration, with resulting garments constructed by embroideries, inlays, furs, and colorful booties; even if the style achieved by Lagerfeld is functional to celebrate the ninety years of the opening of Fendi’s first
boutique, a symbol of the Italian taste in the world, the collection doesn’t belong completely to the luxury fashion house style and soul. The choice to restore the same fountain where Anita and Marcello “play” together in the film indicates, however, the attempt of using a cultural heritage in order to reclaim Italy’s soul in a period of crisis. It can be considered as a return to the origins. Lagerfeld designs fabulous clothes for the collection, where tailoring is as majestically detailed as the clothes in Fellini’s film.

One of the main characters in *La Dolce Vita* is Anouk Aimée, who stars in the movie in the role of Maddalena. She is a wealthy girl who, for both elegance and moral depravity, reminds us of Mastroianni’s female version. She always wears little black dresses with long sleeves and side-slit skirt as iconic as Anita’s dress. Fellini decides to portray her always wearing a pair of cat-eye shades, even at night, to testify a decadent society always bored and willing to hide from that kind of reality, but also to highlight sophisticated style and glamour typical of the 50s and 60s chic. These cat-eye sunglasses are an inspiration for American designer, director, and screenwriter Tom Ford, who, after Fellini’s movie reached its international fame, creates his representative retro-looking cat-eye sunglasses, which he called “Anouk”. There weren’t changes applied to this sunglasses model, indeed, other designers – Jimmy Choo for example – copied the same vintage shape that is used and purchased still today; they are obviously no longer the image of a bored society hiding from reality.
Fig. 6: Anouk Aimée at a bar in Rome waiting for Marcello Mastroianni. Scene still from the “La Dolce Vita”, Federico Fellini, 1961.
Fig. 7: Cindy Crawford models Dolce & Gabbana “Dolce Vita”, Spring/Summer 1992 fashion show in Milan. Photo by Vittoriano Rastelli, Corbis Historical.
Recently, after Anita Ekberg’s death in 2015, several international designers re-proposed the particular style of the 50s in their Fall/Winter 2015 collections. Young artists and designers such as Rochas, Monique Lhuillier, Alice+Olivia, Dior and Stella Jean rediscover *La Dolce Vita*’s signature style and try to imitate it through shapes, colors and fabrics. These reminiscences of the 50’s, of the years right after the war, of the decade that culminates in the 60’s with Fellini’s *La Dolce Vita*, are defined by a sensual and feminine style. Flared skirts, tight belts around the waist, corsets and pencil skirts for ready to wear looks, while décolleté shoes, gloves and hats for accessories are key elements that characterize these inspired-by designs. The mood of these collections and outfits inspired
by Fellini’s fashion, are anything but retro; even if the clothes are a clear homage to the post-war revival style, they still propose a modern look. The sophisticated femininity and the focus on women’s body regained from La Dolce Vita are celebrated here with strong taste.

Italian cinema by Fellini, Visconti, Antonioni, Rossellini and De Sica, just to mention a few, has given us so much; it has enabled us to dream and it has inspired our fashion and our images, which we use to recount life.

(Domenico Dolce, Vogue, October 5th, 2015)

The quotation wants to show the deep connection between Italian fashion and Fellini’s films, majestically expressed by the work of Dolce & Gabbana over the years. It is a relationship of respect and inspiration, such to lead the two designers to help financially the restoration of three of Fellini’s films, Boccaccio 70, Le tentazioni del dottor Antonio and Satyricon. Dolce & Gabbana’s passion and affection for Fellini is self-evident; they understood his ability to predict trends and his influential figure in a world that didn’t belong to him. “It cannot and should not be considered, therefore, a coincidence that the greatest designers in the world have been inspired, explicitly or not, for their runway shows or their collections.”

Numerous are the examples of this relation in which both the luxury brand and La Dolce Vita capture the acme of the Italian style, the roots of the Italian culture and soul. The first goes back to 1992 when the entire collection of lingerie is titled “Dolce Vita” to underline the classy Mediterranean femininity – mentioned at the beginning of the chapter -, but then Dolce & Gabbana, during a runway show for their 2004/2005 campaign, decide to build a replica of the Trevi Fountain and ask one of the models to get into the water exactly as the movie. And again, the creative duo produces an ad-campaign for their fragrance “The One” starring actress Scarlett Johansson and actor
Matthew McConaughey shot by Peter Lindberg in a black and white setting that resembles both Hollywood and Cinecittà. The protagonists are surrounded by spotlights and by the typical Fellinian set equipment, reminding us of the location of the Italian movie.

Fellini’s representation of the acme of the Italian glamour and style is translated into Dolce & Gabbana’s desire of reproducing the origins of their country, the Italian life with all its traditions and characteristics. The whole Dolce & Gabbana’s design concept has always been based on their origins since the beginning of their career; this is visible in their Spring/Summer 2012 advertising campaign, when they choose to name it “Italian Family”, entrusting photographer Giampaolo Sgura to capture the essence of this “family”. The campaign features several models, but mainly Monica Bellucci, again, and Bianca Balti, one of the few Italian supermodels that had international success. The actress expresses perfectly the Dolce & Gabbana woman, a true Italian icon, almost like a brunette version of Sylvia in La Dolce Vita. She is a sensual and strong woman, mother, and head of the family. Here are proposed images of people from the south of Italy in their everyday life scenarios, with busy, dramatic and decadent scenes, representing complex but human relationships. The collection is conceived as extravagant, with colors from the tradition, and with the goal of expressing realistically a national identity.
Fellini depicts Italy in a certain way, in a way through which the country is still remembered today. La Dolce Vita inspires artists and creative people of all kinds in a more explicit way by referring to a specific aspect of the film that helps to better express their ideas. For example we saw it through the name of fragrances, with a simple reproduction of an iconic location from the scenes; successful designers such as Dolce & Gabbana, instead, are more affectionate to La Dolce Vita’s soul. This is also visible in another campaign, a recent shooting they released in the neighborhoods of Naples, which shows a glimpse of the Italian society, exactly like Fellini does in his famous movie. For their “Alta
Moda” collection the design duo chooses Naples as the location for the runway show and for their advertising campaign to present the concept behind their Fall 2016 collection. Concurrently to a period of changes in the fashion affairs aesthetics, due to an economic crisis that has been influencing the industry but from which fashion seems to be recovering, designers are challenging themselves in order to bring something original and authentic in the industry. In this recent campaign for example, Dolce & Gabbana takes fashion at a level that has never been reached before, shooting models and celebrities in the alleys of the Spanish neighborhoods of Naples, representative of the city, but seedy areas at the same time. The images aren’t an expression of a social distress, but rather the representation of vitality, of a real and materialized Italianism by the highlighting of the most significant aspects of a major Italian city. The campaign, shot by photographer Franco Pagetti is full of life; impeccable female and male models captured in what seem natural poses, surrounded by cars, common people from Naples, children, smiling women, and street musicians. The colors are extravagant, and the clothes are constructed with flowers, metal pieces from the catholic religion, patches, and figures attached to the fabrics, all symbols of a southern Italian tradition. Dolce & Gabbana’s attempt wants to simply pay tribute to Italy, and the audience’s reaction isn’t part of their goal. They are trying to go beyond, which doesn’t correspond to a meaningless extravaganza typical of some innovative brands we see in the industry today, but rather to a resumption of their origins, of their culture.

As we have seen in these pages, La Dolce Vita has been a source of inspiration for many artists, designers and creative people in all fields, who have resumed in their works,
more or less explicitly, details and styles introduced and captured by the Italian maestro. However, the influence of Fellini’s masterpiece goes beyond the self-evident and declared references performed by designers in their creations. A fragrance can be called “Dolce Vita”, but it is a pure name and it doesn’t explain the scope and the importance of a film that made history; a show can be located in Fellini’s iconic settings, but it doesn’t deepen the director choice of the Trevi Fountain. La Dolce Vita has represented and continues to represent the celebration of an Italianism that is authentic and for this, always original. In a world that even at the mercy of never-ending crisis – economic, political or simply within the fashion industry - unceasingly looks towards the future, Italy’s “soul”, Italy’s identity and its recovery appears to be one of the major legacies of Fellini’s Dolce Vita.


16 Ibid., p. 174.


18 Translation for “Knight”, Silvio Berlusconi’s nickname due to his Order of Merit for Labor, which was founded as national order of chivalry in 1923 by King Vittorio Emanuele III of Italy; it is awarded to those ‘who have been singularly meritorious’ in agriculture, industry and commerce, crafts, lending and insurance. Silvio Berlusconi Premier Politico Cavaliere Pdl Milan Mediaset. Digilander.libero.it. Retrieved on 4 August 2013. Archived 29 October 2013 at the Wayback Machine.

19 Fellini, Federico, Intervista sul cinema, Roma, 1983, p. 163-4. 6

20 Carrier, Grace H., La dolce vita: Fellini’s Farewell to the Society of the Spectacle, NYU Expository Writing Program, New York City, 2015.


22 Ibid., p. 207.


25 Ricciardi, Alessia, After La Dolce Vita: A Cultural Prehistory of Berlusconi’s Italy, Stanford University Press, 2012, p. 120.


28 Federico Fellini, Ginger e Fred, Longanesi, Milano, 1986, p. 75.


34 Scene still from *La Dolce Vita*. Dir. Federico Fellini, Cineriz, 1961.


BIBLIOGRAPHY


