5. Rome: Projection of Power

A. First, Some Fellini

1. Class title 1 (Ponte Sant'Angelo)

Rome has been portrayed in numerous movies, at home and abroad. Its film industry, **Cinecittà**, was one of the first great success stories as the country picked itself up after the War. And one of the greates of those successes was *La dolce vita* (1960) by **Federico Fellini** (1920–93); I'll play the opening sequence. Like most postwar Italian films, it is basically realistic—but it is also symbolic. So as you watch it, consider two questions: what do the symbols represent and do the realistic elements undercut any symbolic meaning?

2. Fellini: *La dolce vita*, opening
3. — stills from the above

What does Fellini include that is symbolic? Clearly the Second Coming of Christ! But each of the other settings in these two stills has implications also, in terms of the power of the **State** on the one hand and the **Church** on the other. The **Roman aqueduct**, though now in ruins, is a tribute to the incredible technical prowess of the Roman Empire almost two millennia before. The aerial view of **Saint Peters** with the **Bernini colonnade**, which has been characterized as the Church reaching out its arms to sieze the world, is a portrait of another kind of power.

4. — more stills

Here are two more stills from that sequence; what do they represent? The top one is entirely realist, building works in some area on the fringe of Rome that I don't recognize. The bottom one is realist but thematic; the sunbathing women with **Marcello Mastroianni** hovering overhead trying to get their phone numbers give the first hint of the film's title, *La dolce vita,* or Rome as the height of hedonism.

5. The Forum at Night: *SS Luca e Martina, Arch of Septimus Severus, Temple of Saturn*

I'll leave **Hedonism** to the second hour. I want to spend the first hour on the other two aspects of my subtitle: **Holiness** and **Hegemony**. Here they both are, facing each other across the Forum: unambiguous secular power represented by the *Arch of Septimius Severus* and two types of sacred power, represented by the *Temple of Saturn* and the church of *SS Luca e Martina*.

6. What is Rome's dominant period?

You will remember that I prepared little charts for the three American cities, plus Bruges, Florence, and Venice. One of the questions I asked in each case was "What is the city's dominant century?" The

answer, I think, is that Rome is a kind of palimpsest, with one century written over the partially-erased remnants of an earlier one. I have visited five or six times, first as the product of a classical education touring Roman ruins, then as a first-year art history student visiting the masterworks of the High Renaissance, and then as an art history professor preparing classes on the Baroque. This finally gave me a key to understanding the city as a whole, for the Baroque is a theatrical art of light and movement, and Rome is a very theatrical city.

7. The Forum at Night (repeat, with Projection of Power title)

But only when preparing this class did I realize that I was looking at it through the wrong lens. It is not a matter of changes in style over the centuries, or even the dichotomy of Church and State. If Rome is theater, its drama has a single plot: the **projection of power**. The whole city has the sense of jostling for dominance: the might of the state, the power of the church, the sway of the fashionable life. So that's where we shall start, albeit with a video that I originally made while pursuing the palimpsest theme

B. Romanità?

8. Section title B (Romanità?)
9. Mussolini and Marcus Aurelius

The term *Romanità,* or "Romanness" was Mussolini's, and the key to everything he did in Rome during the two decades he was in power; his slogan might well have been MIRA, or Make Italy Roman Again. Now I am absolutely sure that nobody books a tour to Rome to inspect the legacy of **Benito Mussolini**, the fact is that they are seeing it whether they like it a lot. And because Mussolini's concept of *Romanità* so exactly translates into *Sense of Place*, it seems a good place to start.

10. Rudolf Wiegmann: *The Tiber with St. Peter's and the Castel Sant'Anglelo* (1834, pc.)
11. Piazza San Pietro, looking North

Look at this 19th-century painting; can you identify the two power bases? *St. Peter's* and the *Castel Sant'Angelo,* obviously: the Renaissance church and the Roman fortress. Mussolini wanted to connect them, and cleared buildings away to make the Via della Conciliazione, which is what visitors see today. But other than being symbolic, the avenue makes no sense; it does not open the view of St Peter's from the heart of the city across the river; you have to have crossed already to look down it.

12. Approaching St Peter's from the Borgo San Spirito

But isn't it implicit in what **Gianlorenzo Bernini** (1598–1680) imagined when he built the famous colonnade between 1656 and 1667? Not al all. He left the surrounding medieval streets intact, because he wanted people to come into it by surprise, as it were—a typical baroque effect; you can still experience it, more or less, by approaching from the side. But it was absolutely characteristic of Mussolini's *Romanità* to to link the historical symbols of secular and sacred power.

13. Roofs in Rome

Look at this photo of the Roman roofline. How many churches do you see?

14. Rome: Monument to Vittore Emmanuele II (built 1885–1935)

How many? My own count is 12, maybe 13. But I am really showing the slide for the one gigantic structure that towers over all of them, the **Monument to Vittorio Emmanuel II**, a tribute to the King who successfully united all the separate Italian states into a single country. It comprises numerous sculptural tributes, an altar to the country, and the tomb of the unknown soldier. Begun in 1885, it is generally known as the *Vittoriano*, or colloquially "the wedding cake." The insensitivity of the original architects to the prevailing scale in Rome and its comparatively harmonious choice of building materials blows my mind, but the Italians have always nursed a desire to go over the top. So although Mussolini was only two years old when the *Vittoriano* was begun, it was very much the sort of project he would have managed himself.

15. Demolition around the *Vittoriano*

In fact, it was not completed until 1935, at the height of the Fascist regime. But not only did he ensure that the original plans were completed, he also cleared away several blocks in front of the monument and to the sides, to create the huge **Piazza Venezia**, so that the monument could be properly seen from all sides. It is now a busy traffic circle. [I don't fully understand this map from Wikipedia, so I have added the red to make the general point.]

16. Michelangelo: *Campidoglio,* Rome

The *Vittoriano* took over the original **Capitoline Hill**, at least doubling its original height. There was already a monumental complex there, begun by **Michelangelo** (1475–1564) in 1536. Compared to the Wedding Cake next door, it is intimate in scale (though still grand) and warm in color. Mussolini, to his credit, not only left this Renaissance masterpiece untouched, but ordered its completion—perhaps because he so admired its central figure, the philosopher-soldier Marcus Aurelius. So the Emperor presides on his horse in the center of Michelangelo's intricate paving pattern, which Mussolini got reproduced from an old engraving.

17. Michelangelo's pavement at the *Campidoglio*
18. The Forum in late afternoon

Mussolini's inspiration was of course the Roman Forum, but less as the setting for civic debate and worship associated with the old Republic, than for the expressions of order and might that came with Imperial rule. The Forum was originally a place where citizens might meet to listen to speeches, debate, and join in the worship of civic gods. Successive Emperors from Julius Caesar on built larger structures, including triumphal arches, and used the Forum for staging victory parades and other impressive ceremonies. Two of the bigger buildings from the Imperial Era, the **Basilica of Maxentius** (308–312 CE) and the **Colosseum** (69–96 CE), can be seen in the background here.

19. Basilica of Maxentius

The Basilica is indeed huge; this is the ruin of just one third of it; there would have been a large covered space in the middle, and another similar arrangement of vaulted spaces on the other side. It was a meeting hall and indoor space for public ceremonies, not a place of worship—though many large Christian churches were built on the same general design, hence the ecclesiastical association of the term *basilica*.

20. The Colosseum at night
21. *Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana*, EUR

Mussolini admired the **Colosseum**. Indeed, when he was building his great World's Fair, the *Espositione Universale Romana*, planned for 1942, but shelved for the Second World War, he made its centerpiece essentially a cubical Colosseum. It was to have been an exhibition building, the *Palazzo della Civiiltà Italiana*, intended as a tribute to the superiority of Italian culture. Clearly he thought of the original Colosseum as an engineering achievement and manifestation of power, rather than a place where human beings were slaughtered simply for the pleasure of other human beings. Mussolini's *Palazzo* was redeemed for various puposes after the War, and is now the corporate headquarters of Fendi.

22. Gérôme: *Morituri te Salutant* (1859, Yale) and *Pollice Verso* (1872, Phoenix)

So what *did* happen in the Colosseum? Essentially it was an entertainment venue, devoted to large-scale spectacles like renactments of famous battles or scenes from myth. I did not know until now that these events were funded by private families rather than the state; they were an important way of demonstrating family wealth and prestige—another kind of projection of power that seems endemic to Roman life. And notoriously, many of the events involved battles to the death: by gladiators pitted against each other, by hunters against specially imported wild animals, or in the intermissions with unarmed criminals thrown to the same wild animals. The late 19th-century French painter **Jean-Louis Gérôme** (1824–1904) made quite a killing (pun intended) with these subjects, especially on the American market. There is a popular myth that Christians were also martyred in this way, though while there is no doubt they were persecuted and executed, there is little evidence that this took place in the Colosseum. Nonetheless, this did not prevent Gérôme representing it by a painting at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, *The Christian Martyrs' Last Prayer* (1883), or **Ottorino Respighi** (1879–1926) making it the first movement of his *Roman Festivals* (1923). I have put the two together, beginning at the section where you hear the prayer of the martrys against the snarls of the wild animals below. Respighi leaves us in no doubt that this confrontation has a swift and violent end.

23. Respighi: *Feste Romane*, end of *Circenses* movement, with Gérôme painting

C. Rome as Theater

24. Section title C (Sant'Ignazio ceiling with Cavalli's *Gloria*)

This is the ceiling of **Sant'Ignazio** in Rome, executed around 1690 on the by **Fra Andrea Pozzo** (1642–1709). I said the Colosseum was designed for theatrical spectacle, but the great baroque churches like this were built on theatrical lines also, using color, movement, and lighting to make their point. And if I were to repeat that the point, as so often, was the *Projection of Power*, what is the power here?

25. Rome: Sant'Ignazio ceiling

One answer is Christianity itself, or the power of the Catholic church. It presents *The Church Triumphant,* in the success of over a century of **Counter-Reformation** militance as the Catholic Church reasserted itself against threat from the Protestant theology of **Martin Luther**. The figure in grey is **Ignatius Loyola**, the founder of the **Jesuit Order** in 1540, as a quasi-military regiment of sacred shock troops, dedicated to stamping out the heresy of the Protestant Reformation, and spreading the one true Catholic faith throughout the world. Hence, besides the dynamic figure of a flying Christ welcoming Saint Ignatius into heaven, we get various references to the four continents and to the works of the Jesuit Order.

26. Gregory XV and Ludovico Ludovisi

To these two kinds of power—the Catholic Church in general and the Jesuits in particular—we may add a third. Such projects are hugely expensive, and in this case the money came from the enormously wealthy young man on the right, **Ludovico Ludovisi**, who was only 25 when his uncle made him a Cardinal only a day after his own election as **Pope Gregory XV**. Now I am not saying that Cardinal Ludovisi was motivated by anything other than his fervent faith, but we will come up against these ambiguities between altruistic and family interest again and again when dealing with the Popes. For example, when **Julius II** (Giuliano della Rovere) commissioned the Vatican frescoes from Raphael in his private apartments, was he acting as a discerning and disinterested patron, or going one better than his Borgia predecessor **Alexander VI**, who had a similar set of rooms decorated by a lesser artist on the floor below? One has only to think of recent US Presidents to realize it is not impossible.

27. Religious Service attendance, 2021

We see the Projection of Power also in church architecture; Rome is a city of churches, but not especially of church-*goers,* at least not today. Nonetheless, it is impossible to speak of the spirit of Rome without taking into account how often a visitor will pass a church, or see one in the distance.

28. Watercolors by John Warwick Smith and William Marlow

Churches on the skyline have been a feature of paintings of the city by foreign artists since the 17th century at least. These two are by English watercolorists **William Marlow** (1740–1813) and **John Warwick Smith** (1749–1831), whom I know nothing else about. It is interesting to see how undeveloped the area around Saint Peter's was around 1800.

29. St Peter's Dome, interior, with the Bernini *Baldachino*
30. Bernini: *Cathedra Petri*

The dome of Saint Peter's was designed by **Michelangelo** in 1547, at the very beginning of the Counter-Reformation, and finally completed in 1590, well after his death. It makes a statement equally of Power and Faith—always that same ambiguity; perhaps more Power outside and more Faith within. Inside, the soaring effect of the dome was enhanced by **Bernini** with a sculptural **baldachino** over the altar (1623–34) and the extraordinary ***Cathedra Petri*** (1657–66) behind. The latter is a casing for an old wooden chair thought to have been used by the original Bishop of Rome, Saint Peter himself. This last work in particular, demontrates the quality that makes the Baroque unique: its **theatricality**. Whether in painting, sculpture, or even architecture, baroque works do not just sit there saying "Here I am"; they use lighting and illusion to create a sense of movement.

31. Bernini: *Sant'Andrea al Quirinale* (1658–61)

But it is a much more modest church I want to show now, Bernini's **Sant'Andrea al Quirinale** (1658–61). He plays tricks with you before you even go in. As you are walking along the sidewalk, the wall curves back to broaden the space at one side, and then the steps come out like the cowcatcher on an old locomotive to scoop you up. Walk inside, and you get another surprise; instead of stretching in a long aisle towards the altar, the church is an oval, broader than it is wide. The effect is to make the space suddenly expand on either side of you, even as the altar itself seems to be thrust forward into your face. Above the altarpiece—a painting of the *Crucifixion of St Andrew* on his X-shaped cross—Bernini has placed a concealed skylight, with a veritable cascade of boy angels coming down on golden rays. And the whole church, which is not a big one, is covered by a single oval dome, rising to a skylight with more of those angel boys appearing like dust motes in a sunbeam. Three or four years ago, I strung together clips from several tourist videos and paired them with music from the *Vespers* by **Claudio Monteverdi** (1567–1643); you have already glimpsed a part of it; here is the full thing.

32. Monteverdi: *Vespers* (1610), "Lauda, Jerusalem, Dominum" with Sant'Andrea (2:23)
33. John Evelyn on Bernini

Bernini was not merely theatrical, but a master of all the theatrical arts, as you can see from this quotation by the English diarist **John Evelyn** (1620–1706), a contemporary of Pepys.

34. Borromini's *Sant'Agnese in Agone* and Bernini's *Four Rivers* fountain

Wikipedia calls the Piazza Navona in Rome a "theater of water." In addition to the *Fountain of the Four Rivers* (Nile, Danube, Rio del la Plata, and Ganges, 1648–51), in the foreground, there are two others at either end of the long narrow piazza. All are part of an urban renewal project by **Pope Innocent X** (reigned 1644–55).

35. Velasquez: *Pope Innocent X*, with David Roberts: *Piazza Navona*

Despite the presence of the Church of *Sant'Agnese in Agone* by Bernini's rival **Francesco Borromini** (1599–1677) in the background, the power being projected in the Pope's scheme is not that of the

Church. One has to remember that, until well into the 19th century, the Popes were essentially the Mayors of Rome, and any enhancements to the city automatically reflected on the prestige of the Church. But more relevant is the fact that the palazzo of the Pope's family, the **Pamphili**, faced onto the piazza, and the Pope wanted to make sure that *their* piazza was the best.

36. Piazza del Popolo

Pope Innocent's city planning included laying out a series of streets that would radiate out from the **Piazza del Popolo**, at the northern gate of the city, linking some major landmarks and picked out by obelisks and fountains along the way. The three streets, diverging like the prongs of a trident, were marked off by two identical churches: clearly an example of planning for effect rather than need.

37. Bernini: *Fontana della Barcaccia*, with the Spanish Steps and Santa Trinità dei Monti

Bernini's *Four Rivers* fountain is down the westernmost of these streets. A short way along the eastern one is a much simpler **Bernini** fountain, the *Fontana della Barcaccia* (1627), less significant as an artwork in itself than as marking the center of the **Piazza di Spagna**, from which an elegant set of late baroque steps lead up to the church of *Santa Trinità dei Monti* that we saw in one of those English watercolors. The Spanish Steps are a favorite location for films made in Rome; we will see one after the break.

38. Rome: *Fontana de Trevi*

But the most famous filming locale is surely the **Trevi Fountain**, the largest in Rome. Bernini also submitted designs for this, but it was not built at the time. Nonetheless, the final version, designed by **Nicola Salvi** in 1732, obviously owes much to Bernini's influence. Here it appears in *La dolce vita*.

39. Fellini: *La dolce vita*, Trevi Fountain scene
40. Class title 2

D. Rome in Motion

41. Section title D (Three coins in the fountain)
42. Rome: *Via Appia Antica*

I am mostly done with talking. The last section of the class will consist of clips from three iconic films about Rome, bookended by two pieces of music. First, another piece by **Respighi**, complete this time, and in a live performance by the Frankfurt Radio Symphony conducted by Juraj Valčuha. This is the last movement of the *Pines of Rome* suite, called "Pines along the Appian Way." The Appian Way, or *Via Appia Antica* was built in about 320 BCE to transport soldiers and supplies to campaigns in the south, including operations in North Africa. Respighi lets us hear the marching feet quite early on in the poem, but the beat comes to dominate as it goes on, to be joined eventually by fanfares involving the full brass section. This is Projection of Power, both literally and in metaphor.

43. Respighi: *Pines of Rome,* fourth movement
44. De Sica: *The Bicycle Thief,* poster

The first film is the masterpiece of early postwar Italian realism, *Ladri di Biciclette* (1948) by **Vittorio de Sica** (1901–74), translated either in the plural as *Bicycle Thieves* or in the singular as *The Bicycle Thief.* It certainly does not represent anything that contributes to the Sense of Place you get in modern Rome, but it is an important historical document. So rather than choosing a clip from it, I'll give you an online piece by New York Times critic **AO Scott** explaining its importance.

45. AO Scott on Vittorio de Sica's *Bicycle Thief*
46. Wyler: *Roman Holiday,* poster

The next film is indeed about the **hedonism** I promised at the beginning, but it has a bittersweet twist to it. It is the 1953 romantic comedy *Roman Holiday* by **William Wyler** (1902–81). **Audrey Hepburn** stars as Princess Anna, a royal heiress from some unnamed country, on a state visit to Rome. Losing patience with the planning and protocol that surrounds her, she explodes and the royal doctor gives her a sedative to calm her down. Under the influence of this, though, she wanders out into the streets and bumps into reporter Joe Bradley (**Gregory Peck**). Joe recognizes her, but thinks she is drunk and wishing to spare her from scandal, takes her back to his apartment to sober up, sleeping chastely on the couch himself. The rest of the action takes place the next day. I have strung three clips together; you can probably figure out the stor; you will certainly recognize most of the locales.

47. Wyler: *Roman Holiday*, various clips
48. Ackerman: *The Roman Spring of Mrs Stone,* poster

The third film is a 2003 made-for-television remake of the 1961 film *The Roman Spring of Mrs Stone,* which starred Vivien Leigh and the young Warren Beatty, and was based on a novel by **Tennessee Williams** (1911–83). This time, in the remake by **Robert Allan Ackerman** (of whom I know nothing), **Helen Mirren** takes the title role of a celebrated actress whose rich husband dies while they are on holiday in Rome. Realizing that she is already too old for the parts she plays, Karen Stone gives up the stage and settles into an apartment near the Spanish Steps. A Italian countess introduces her to Paolo, a professional gigolo, played here by **Olivier Martinez**. I'll play you the clip of their first date.

49. Ackerman: *The Roman Spring of Mrs Stone*, first date
50. Puccini: *Tosca* at the Met

The opera *Tosca* by **Giacomo Puccini** (1858–1924) premiered in Rome in 1900. Appropriately so, for it had a Roman story, based on real historical events from exactly a century before, and Puccini was exceptionally attentive to topographical details. The three acts are set in real Roman locales: the **Church of Sant'Andrea della Valle** for Act I, the **Palazzo Farnese** for Act II, and **Castel Sant'Angelo** for Act III. I'll start with the latter, which is also what is shown here in the current poduction at the Met. The hero, the revolutionary artist **Mario Cavaradossi**, is to be executed by firing squad. Puccini paints beautifully the coming of first light, with a shepherd boy singing in the fields which in that day abutted the fortress.

51. Puccini: *Tosca,* opening of Act III

I'm going back to end with the magnificent finale to Act One. **Baron Scarpia**, the chief of police, believes that Cavaradossi has hidden an escaped political prisoner in a side chapel of the church. Both men have gone by now, but Scarpia corners Cavaradossi's lover, the singer **Floria Tosca**, and tricks her into giving him important information. As the officiants, choir, and crowd gather for a grand mass in celebration of the—mistaken—news that Napoleon has been defeated at the Battle of Marengo, Scarpia lays his plans, realizing that in one fell swoop he can both capture Cavaradossi and possess Tosca. This production was filmed in the actual church. **Ruggero Raimondi** is the Scarpia.

52. Puccini: *Tosca*, ending of Act I
53. Class title 3 (Roman power, human lust)