Transposition

Musique et Sciences Sociales

5 | 2015

Figures du chef d'orchestre

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/transposition/1352>

DOI: 10.4000/transposition.1352

ISSN: 2110-6134

Publisher

CRAL - Centre de recherche sur les arts et le langage

Electronic reference

Malika Combes, « “Ma chi è il Direttore?” », *Transposition* [Online], 5 | 2015, Online since 10 December 2015, connection on 31 July 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/transposition/1352> ; DOI : 10.4000/transposition.1352

This text was automatically generated on 31 July 2019.

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“Ma chi è il Direttore¹?”

Conductor(s) in Federico Fellini’s *Prova d’orchestra*

Malika Combes

Translation : Maggie Jones

- 1 In the year 1979, two European films came out on subjects that both placed the figure of the conductor in centre stage: *Prova d’orchestra* (*Orchestra Rehearsal*)² by Federico Fellini, and *Dyrygent* (*The Conductor*) by Andrzej Wajda. This coincidence did not go unnoticed by film critics, who seized on the moral and political aspects of the two films in relation to the political contexts in their respective countries, i.e., the “years of lead”³ in Italy, and the rising revolt against the government in Poland, firmly labelling the films as political fables. It seemed that the orchestra conductor—as an individual in a position of power before a group—was an ideal candidate for metaphorical use in exploring the issue of power; thus, the musical context was considered a mere pretext or backdrop for addressing a completely different subject. In any case, most commentators adopted this point of view: “For Wajda, as for Fellini, music is a pretext for talking about something else”; “Like Fellini, Wajda uses the orchestra to address the issues in a society with regard to its national contradictions”; “With regard to the orchestra and the society’s real problems, we observe in both films that the merely symbolic treatment of the orchestra—neglecting the reality in its essence—in both cases places an uncontrolled limitation on the general point that is being attempted to be made through it.”⁴ Others added weight to this idea by discussing only the metaphorical aspects of the films, with no attention to music whatsoever, as can be seen and is again proven in an interview with Nino Rota, the composer of the score to Fellini’s film⁵. It is true that both directors had limited knowledge of the music world, a fact which neither tried to hide. However, while Wajda confirmed that his film had little to do with music (“For me, music was first and foremost a pretext”⁶), Fellini’s position was more complex.
- 2 The “all politics” era clearly influenced the way in which *Prova d’orchestra* was interpreted, almost never giving credence to Fellini’s repeated assertion that he “wanted to film an orchestra rehearsal.”⁷ A letter from Fellini to Georges Simenon attests to not only his concept for the film, but also his surprise at the “symbolological” readings the film had prompted:

I've made a short film; it is called *Prova d'orchestra* and I wanted to relate the atmosphere, confusion, attempts and efforts of a group of musicians in order to reproduce the moment of prodigious harmony which is musical expression.

Naturally, along with the musicians there is also a conductor who, within the difficult dialectic of this relationship, realises that the common goal of making music is mortified, misunderstood, cast aside and ignored.

Of course, there are other things, and other things that happen, in this little film; but what I didn't think I had put into it and never intended to put into it are the meanings, ideas and "symbolology" that are provoking such heated controversies these days [...].⁸

- 3 On paper, the screenplay did not presume to be seized upon with such interpretative fervour by "politicians, ministers, journalists, sociologists, and union leaders", said Fellini in the same letter.
- 4 We wish to demonstrate here that the "orchestra rehearsal" is not just a pretext, metaphor or allegory relating to politics. What Fellini saw in the unique space and time of the orchestra rehearsal, and what led him to "want to film" it, is that something exemplary surfaces therein, something to do with the creator's freedom as well as his limits. We believe that the conductor should be seen less as an allegory of the political tyrant and more as one of the possible faces of the filmmaker himself.⁹

"An Orchestra Rehearsal": genesis, screenplay and production context

- 5 To embark on a reading that does take the musical dimension of the film into account, we must first rectify the image of Fellini as someone with little interest in music. In fact, he had always shown a fondness for the songs and music of his childhood, and a curiousness about opera. Moreover, with Nino Rota (1911-1979) he developed great feeling for music,¹⁰ and it was Fellini's collaboration with Rota—beginning with his second feature film in 1952 and continuing until *Prova d'orchestra*, the final *opus*—that sparked the director's interest in symphonic music. Once he began working with Rota, Fellini always involved himself in the choice and production of the music for his films, and the soundtrack in general, sometimes even attending the rehearsal sessions before the score was recorded.¹¹ This experience fascinated him, and he said that it was his inspiration for *Prova d'orchestra*.¹²
- 6 Initially, Fellini wanted to make a documentary on an actual rehearsal, but understanding the restrictions this choice would impose, he quickly abandoned the idea: "[...] I have to give up the idea of making a realistic documentary on an orchestra rehearsal because, aside from my total incompetence in the technical and musical aspects, the project strikes me as impossible or at least incredibly difficult to realise in terms of practical organisation."¹³ Nevertheless, evidence of this initial idea for the project remains in the fact that the film was originally made for television, and in the way the fictional story is structured as a film within a film: a television crew is filming the rehearsal and interrupting the session for personal interviews conducted by the voice of Fellini himself, filmed with the interviewees directly facing the camera.
- 7 The film's genesis shows painstaking preparatory work, including interviews with orchestra musicians conducted over a two-week period at a restaurant in Rome. This approach fit Fellini's conception of cinema as "an eye that registers whatever you put in

front of it": as his biographer Tullio Kezich remarked, "the more abstract the symbol, the more concrete its screen representation must be—its gestures, words, objects. For this reason the director tries to go deeply into his subject [...]"¹⁴ The interviews focused mainly on the musicians' relationships with, first, their instrument, and second, the conductor. Fellini did not meet with any conductors, but from what the musicians told him, he arrived at a two-fold portrait of the figure of the conductor—"as seen by the musicians" and "as seen by himself"—as can be seen in the published version of his notes,¹⁵ which served as the basis for writing the screenplay. The dialogues and situations in the film retranscribe, in part, the perspectives collected in the interviews.

- 8 To make up for his lack of expertise in symphonic music, Fellini also surrounded himself with a team of consultants. Unfortunately, we were not able to gain access to certain sources that may have told us more about the film's "music team" and the precise nature of their work.¹⁶ What we do know is that the film music conductor Carlo Savina (1919-2002) not only conducted the three pieces by Rota that make up the score,¹⁷ but also led the team and played an active role on the film set. "Positioned next to the camera during the shooting, [he] was the one holding the baton," explained Kezich.¹⁸ Naturally, Rota also acted as a consultant: in addition to composing the music before filming began, it seems that he also explained how a rehearsal is conducted and helped the actors adopt appropriate attitudes with the instruments assigned to them. Thus, he was present on the set, which was unusual.¹⁹ It must be said that, by enlisting these two prominent figures in film music, Fellini stayed close to his own area of expertise—an approach for which he was sometimes criticised, but which probably offered him greater ease in his work and allowed him to create a more sincere film.²⁰ The screenplay was written in collaboration with Brunello Rondi (1924-1989), who is credited as the co-writer. Rondi studied under the composers Goffredo Petrassi and Roman Vlad and wrote several books on twentieth-century art music.²¹
- 9 It is clear, therefore, that given this collaborative approach to the project, the conditions for an orchestra rehearsal were all in place, with all the same stages as in a real rehearsal (the musicians tuning up, the conductor's arrival, a break at the bar or in the rehearsal room, etc.), and the copyist, the orchestra's managing director, and the trade union representative were all present. Moreover, if we compare the film to ethnographic studies of rehearsals, we can see that the circumstances surrounding the hostilities between the conductor and the orchestra are presented quite accurately.²² Contrary to what many commentators have written, the conflict does not erupt as soon as the conductor arrives; it develops more gradually, in a more realistic manner (although the revolt itself is exaggerated, but not as much as one might think.)²³ Sociological studies have shown that a rehearsal goes awry when the conductor arrives without greeting the orchestra and launches directly into the piece being interpreted, when he is stern and pedantic, or if from the beginning he constantly interrupts the playing of the piece without justifying these disruptions with specific instructions. The musicians respond by indulging in banter, becoming less attentive, even making gibes or becoming openly frivolous, particularly among the woodwinds,²⁴ or even skipping sessions altogether. There is all of this in *Prova d'orchestra*. The conductor's arrival goes unnoticed. The musicians only realise he has taken his position at the podium—on a raised platform surrounded by a railing (an elevated position which says a great deal about the hierarchical distance he wants to establish)—when the union representative calls for silence. The conductor's head is lowered; he does not greet the musicians, but begins by

telling them he has no time to waste. Once the orchestra has tuned, he gives the signal to begin the piece, but stops the orchestra almost immediately. Later, he asks the flutist for a B-flat that is not in the score; the conductor loses all credibility and his legitimacy is significantly compromised. The rehearsal is being held in a historic auditorium; it is said at the beginning that the most distinguished conductors have stood on its podium, and the portraits of great musicians displayed on the walls attest to its illustrious past. The obvious prestige of this setting has thus contributed to an expectation of greatness among both the musicians and the spectators, as if charismatic power was destined to unfold there. The tension mounts when a clarinetist refuses to play a passage alone as ordered by the conductor, citing a union agreement to justify his disobedience. The orchestra's union representative then calls for a break on the pretext that the musicians are too disturbed by what has just happened.

- 10 Clearly, in terms of how the film was received, this realistic musical situation was largely if not completely overlooked, eclipsed by the political interpretation²⁵ centred on the figure of the conductor.

The conductor in the political spectrum: the figure of the dictator

- 11 Based on a first degree of socio-political reading, critics initially saw the film as representing a conflict between a group (or "society")²⁶—the instrumentalists—and an individual incarnating authority—the conductor. As a situation made up of interactions between the conductor and the musicians playing out a power struggle and the dynamics of domination,²⁷ the orchestra rehearsal is an excellent choice for exploring this theme. The political theorist Antonio Gramsci has even used the example of the orchestra rehearsal to illustrate the issue of organic centralism.²⁸
- 12 The conflict first takes form in the contrast between the two parties' linguistic registers and physical appearances. In terms of language, almost every musician speaks a different Italian dialect, whereas the conductor speaks in halting Italian with a thick German accent, switching to German (his supposed mother tongue) in the last seconds of the film. This juxtaposition of dialects and languages was a deliberate choice by Fellini, decided during the dubbing process. In terms of physique, the great variety among the musicians—some are short, some are old, some are plumb, etc.—contrasts with the conductor's slim and fairly neutral physique. This, too, was a choice by the director: Fellini always took great care with the physique of his actors, looking at numerous photographs to find just the right look, or overseeing the casting himself. For this film, most of the "musicians" (some of them were real-life musicians) were recruited among the inhabitants of Naples.²⁹ The role of the conductor is one of the few to have been attributed to a professional actor, who was picked based on an agency photograph. Indeed, the acting skills of Balduin Baas (1922-2005), who was as-yet unknown to the public (this would be his first and only major international role), were not taken into account: in addition to his physique, which seemed to fit Fellini's idea of the perfect conductor, the actor's nationality was the determining factor in the decision to cast him. In the press at the time, Alberto Moravia saw the decision to make this character German as being guided by common clichés: "Just as in Aesop's Fables, the fox represents cunning, the wolf arrogance, and so on, in Fellini's

fable, the German represents order and discipline, et cetera."³⁰ A French journalist saw the film as making a contrast between Italian bad faith and German rigidity.³¹

- 13 But for many, this choice—associated with the character’s authoritarian behaviour and tone—is a clear reference to Hitler, or the Nazi forces that had occupied Italy during World War II. Film critic Paul Warren sees this character as part of a broader lineage specific to Fellini’s films, that of “domineering figures” influenced by fascism.³² The film’s ending, for which Fellini received criticism, sealed these interpretations: once order has been re-established, the now disciplined orchestra resumes the rehearsal under the conductor’s baton. He seems to be satisfied with what he hears. Then the music stops, and he again begins to yell at the musicians. The screen goes black, and before the closing credits begin, we hear the conductor’s yelling take an even harsher tone, this time in German. “As the scene goes dark, we hear the conductor switch from Italian to German, his voice rising to a hysterical pitch. We hear the stamping of boots on pavement,” wrote a French journalist,³³ as if seized by auditory hallucination. Let us make clear, however, that the conductor’s words remain music-related, which is rarely specified, and that his rant ends with a resounding “Da capo!” It is true, however, that the lack of subtitles in the English version maintains an element of ambiguity, and the tone the character takes at this point³⁴ can easily be associated with Hitler’s voice—already familiar to spectators’ ears after the caricature presented in Chaplin’s famous film, *The Dictator*. Needless to say, this ending certainly marked critics and audiences. It crystallized the controversies and set the reading of the film down a certain path: through the intermediary of his orchestra conductor, Fellini—being sensitive to the situation in Italy at the time—was announcing the return of a dictatorial regime which, depending on the commentators, he saw as either a terrible outcome or a favourable solution.

- 14 Many Italians felt that with this film, Fellini had not merely created an abstract representation of a power struggle between a group and an authority figure, that through the orchestra rehearsal, he was actually talking about Italy of the late 1970s. From the writing of the screenplay to the film’s release, *Prova d’orchestra* emerged within a troubled Italian landscape, marked by political terrorism. It shares the same pages in history as defining events of this period: the kidnapping and murder of the president of Christian Democracy Aldo Moro (killed on 9 May 1978 after 55 days in confinement) and the assassination of union organiser Guido Rossa (January 1979) by the Red Brigades.³⁵ It was also during this period, particularly after 1977-1978, that many intellectuals began to express their views publicly, taking stances first on the student movement of 1977 and then on the issue of terrorism.³⁶ Film as a medium proved highly effective as a means of documenting events as they happened.³⁷ So it is not surprising that people thought that Fellini was taking a stance in this film, especially since the “report-interview genre”³⁸ he chose fit the contemporary media landscape. One of the first ideas Fellini had for his film, taking a sort of “concrete” approach,³⁹ was to document the chaotic soundtrack to this period,⁴⁰ as he explained very clearly in his preparatory notes for the film:

We could begin our little story with the conductor, following him as he steps out of his house to make his way to the rehearsal. Rain, chaotic traffic jams: inside the cars, we can make out hardened masks of cynicism, ferocity and fear. Threatening processions of protestors, clashes, police charges, bombs...

Basically, an ordinary morning to one of our days.

Opening credits. A convulsive montage, lacerated with excerpts, passages, flashes, scraps of episodes of extreme violence, taken from the cinema-newspaper-repertoire of the past few years. A chaotic and terrifying mix of sounds of gunshots, screaming, slogans being shouted with repetitive madness, pierced and shattered

by police sirens, the screaming of ambulances, the bewildering clamour of loudspeakers, the noise and rage of Molotov cocktails and bombs.

The opening credits of the short film appear against this nightmarish backdrop, the frenzied dimension of an "absurd universe".⁴¹

- 15 What remains of this idea is a soundtrack made up of the noises of urban traffic, sirens and perhaps a bomb as the opening credits roll.

- 16 Appalled at the murder of Moro, Fellini said on multiple occasions that he wanted to speak out about the situation in Italy, but retracted considering the magnitude of the interpretations. He admitted that the orchestra, made up of musicians with varied physiques and dialects, did represent Italy: "The orchestra is Italy. It's us. The rehearsal is the one we conduct every day," he told a journalist who came to interview him on the set.

⁴² He is talking about a country that is diseased, "an organism stricken with cancer".⁴³ "[...] I just wanted people seeing my film to feel a little ashamed, as of an illness."⁴⁴ His statements always condemn the terrorist attacks and the complacency of the intellectual left in this regard; Fellini said that he for one was appalled at the killing of police officers.

⁴⁵ The problem, he suggested, was the absence of a leader: "[The "signs of death"] are confirmed every morning when the daily papers exchange news of fights, protests, acts of terrorism and deaths, all sustained by a political and moral powerlessness which instinctively brings to mind an orchestra deprived of its conductor, doomed to fall apart with the euphoric and impetuous scattering of its musicians," he said in an interview.⁴⁶ This representation appears again in the central passage of the film, when the revolt (often compared to the riots of 1968) is raging and the musicians decide to do without a conductor. Using an extremely basic musical metaphor, Fellini is essentially saying that doing away with the leader creates deadlock, shattering all harmony and leading to cacophony.

- 17 But do his expressions of fear and his condemnation of the violence being perpetrated by the extreme left mean that Fellini wanted the return of a dictator like Hitler to restore order? This is what the most radical commentators suggested, claiming that by placing the orchestra-Italy under the baton of the conductor-dictator, Fellini was showing fascist tendencies.⁴⁷ Between the violent armed struggle (represented by the musicians' revolt) and authoritarian rule (incarnated by the conductor), Fellini seems to have chosen the latter.⁴⁸ It happens that two registers often employed by fascism can be found in Fellini's own comments on *Prova d'orchestra* and in the film itself: 1) that, cited above, of disease and contagion in describing a national situation that must be remedied—and Fellini did want his film to be a "shock" that could "wake up" his contemporaries—and 2) that, which we will discuss further, of magic and magnetism in describing the power of the leader (here, the artist) over the human masses.⁴⁹

- 18 When asked very frankly about the matter of allusion to Hitler, Fellini responded with an anecdote:

I remember the crazy look of the individual I met in the cloakroom of a restaurant (yes, I think one must be incurably insane to understand the film this way) who, as I was slipping on my overcoat, whispered to me with sinister satisfaction, "I saw your film. I agree with you entirely. What we need here is Uncle Adolf!"⁵⁰

- 19 To justify the allusion, he argued that he had simply sought to represent two types of madness in a face-to-face confrontation: "The film conveys a situation of madness; this madness is frightening, so we invoke a form of organised madness: that of a dictator."⁵¹ This idea comes forth in another interview as well: "Hitler and Stalin, the great tyrants, were possessed with the powers of a collective unconscious that they incarnated; they

became the centre of obscure projections; they expressed a form of organised madness."⁵² This notion is also echoed by the second-longest passage of music played by the orchestra without interruption: the genre of work being interpreted—a galop, played in unison, with its frantic, repetitive rhythm and ascending movement—does seem to evoke a sense of all-powerfulness in the person conducting it—a feeling that tends towards general madness. This impression is further accentuated by the lateral tracking shots that sweep quickly over the orchestra and, in reverse angle shots, the conductor. Spurred on by the conductor's encouragement (at one point he even cries "Victory!"), the musicians seem caught up in a machine going too fast, that we fear could disastrously malfunction at any moment. The pace of the galop affects them physically as well: several overheated musicians remove their jackets, and it is as if the conductor's body is animated by the music. At the end of the sequence, when the conductor gives the gesture marking the end of the piece, the camera responds as well with an abrupt zoom. We encounter this galop again, in a different version, at the very end—in the longest stretch of music we hear in the film. This time, it is interpreted by the strings and alternates with melodic passages played by the woodwinds. The philosopher Deleuze observed that this dialectic between a rhythmic galop and a melodic ritornello is found in many of Fellini's films—that for Fellini, the former marked the power of death and the latter, the force of life. "For Fellini [...] the gallop [*sic*] accompanies the world which runs to its end, the earthquake, the incredible entropy, the hearse," said Deleuze,⁵³ completing his analysis with a citation of the same passage of the film that interests us here:

At the end of *Orchestra Rehearsals* [*sic*], we first hear the purest gallop [*sic*] from the violins, but a ritornello rises imperceptibly to succeed it, until the two intertwine with one another more and more closely, throttling themselves like wrestlers, lost-saved, lost-saved... The two musical movements become the object of the film, and time itself becomes a thing of sound.⁵⁴

- 20 Here again, we find a representation of madness—a schizophrenic madness that obeys the curt movements of the conductor's baton. The apparent harmony of this passage—rendered by a camera shot that, for the first time, gives a view of the entire orchestra, including the conductor—is contradicted the moment the music stops, when the conductor immediately resumes berating the musicians.

From demiurge conductor to "orchestra dictator"

- 21 If we follow François-Bernard Mâche's line of thought⁵⁵ on the galop—as a meeting point between music and myth, because of its animal origins—then the genre was a particularly favourable choice by the Rota/Fellini duo. Echoing the romantic register, it offered an effective means of presenting the conductor as a mythic figure, the demiurge, who incarnates music and controls the bodies of the instrumentalists before him. But in addition to myth—which has some relevance to the origin of the film and, as we will see, is incorporated into the various characters' speech—they also sought to evoke a historic type of orchestra conductor.
- 22 Having observed Rota and seen him in action conducting the scores to his films, Fellini saw him as a sort of incarnation of music, the first, in his eyes, to embody the myth of the demiurge: the one who brought the music to light and allowed harmony to emerge despite the disparities and the musicians' distraction. Fellini was fascinated with the transformation of not only the musicians' bodies but also their state of mind, and he

attributed this to the conductor. This impression comes across clearly in the way he describes his film:

The goal of the "special" [...] was to recount the transformation that musicians undergo during an orchestra rehearsal.

We saw them indifferent, hostile to work, numbed by routine, frustrated with a profession that throws them all together in an undifferentiated mass, troublemaking, and gossipy, stubbornly defending irreconcilable viewpoints, childishy arrogant and unresponsive. And now, through the fatigue of their profession, acceptance of the limits imposed, painstaking, meticulous and unrelenting work as a group, under the leadership of the conductor—the essential backbone and site of collective projections, viscerally tied to the orchestra he is leading, and by which he is also being led—these same musicians are transformed as if by an extraordinary spell. And now, their brow glistening with perspiration, their gaze attentive to the score and fixed on the podium, they finally seem to be truly identified with their own instrument and united in the expression of restored harmony. They seem transfigured, illuminated, consumed by the same emotion, as if they have become a single thing.⁵⁶

- 23 Fellini uses the words "extraordinary spell", and elsewhere refers to a "miracle",⁵⁷ which introduces a new figure into our analysis: the mesmeriser or magnetic healer—a role the demiurge conductor willingly assumes, in keeping with the ancient tradition of natural magic or animal magnetism, which Peter Szendy discusses briefly in *Membres fantômes. Des corps musiciens*.⁵⁸ It is not surprising that Fellini, who had a keen interest in the occult sciences,⁵⁹ accentuated this idea in defining the power of the orchestra conductor. A good conductor is capable of conveying a "fluid" with his gaze: "[...] I want my conductor to look at me; he needs to speak to me with his eyes [...]. I'd rather someone incompetent but who has charm, magnetism, authority," said one musician. The word "magnetism" appears several times (and once the word "hypnosis") in the preparatory notes and in the film itself. Fellini's published portrait of the "conductor (seen by himself)" begins with the words "Gesture, gestural expression, the magical side of the baton" which in a sense guide the following development. In the film, the idea is particularly well-supported in the "confessional" interview the conductor gives during the break. He talks about his first time at the podium and being struck by the "enormous silence that fell before [him]", continuing:

As I signalled to begin, I suddenly realised with great emotion that my conductor's baton was tied to the sound of the orchestra. Its voice came from within my hand. I would pull the orchestra out of silence and to silence make it return. This voice would rise like a sea wave together with my arm, moving through the air like a bird's wing. And when my arm lowered, this harmonic voice would fade again into silence.

- 24 Here, the conductor's baton becomes an instrument conveying an electric fluid to the bodies of the musicians making up the orchestral mass, as if by telesthesia, suggests Szendy;⁶⁰ the character also talks about "irreplaceable fluid" of the conductor. What he says next about his maestro pushes magic even closer to the sacred:

I remember Koplensky, my great maestro, [...] when he took the podium, everything was silence. He would only look around distractedly. But he already knew every line of the score in front of him. He was music personified. And we followed him happily, with absolute reverence. To enact the rite of transubstantiation...

Music is always sacred. Every concert is a Mass. We were enthralled, and we would forget all worries at the first sign of his baton. We were but one breath, and our

instruments a single vital force. He would begin! Nothing was more beautiful than his authority [...]. We trembled at the thought of a mistake in performing this rite.

- 25 Can this conductor's Polish-sounding name and the description of his power be read as an allusion to Leopold Stokowski, who died in 1977—a figure known in the world of cinema for his role in Walt Disney's *Fantasia* and his love affair with Greta Garbo? Perhaps. Remembering the elaborate introduction which sets the stage in Disney's film, Szendy sees Stokowski as an archetype of the demiurge conductor.⁶¹
- 26 The myth of the demiurge has been embodied by a type of conductor alluded to in the film, e.g., the star conductor of the day, Herbert von Karajan (1908-1989). There was a great deal in the press about the magical dimension of Karajan's conducting,⁶² and several passages spoken by the conductor-in-the film are surely in reference to him. The most obvious allusion is anecdotal, consisting of the character's mention of his various homes.⁶³ In addition to his German language, his athletic physique (suggesting that he is someone who prides himself on staying fit) and his relaxed attire can also be seen as parallels with the Austrian conductor. For many of the film's contemporaries, the comparison was very clear: "An impersonation of Karajan, to say the least!" proclaimed the journalist for *La Croix*⁶⁴. Surprisingly, little notice was taken of similarities with another star of orchestra conducting, one more remote in time but closer to Italy, Arturo Toscanini (1867-1957). Yet Toscanini is the only real conductor to be mentioned in the film: a clarinetist speaks his name, remembering fondly when the Italian maestro praised him during a rehearsal, prompting the conductor-in-the film to dub him "Toscanini's clarinetist". We also see Toscanini's photograph next to the door of the conductor's dressing room, and reflected in the character's mirror inside his dressing room—a subtle emblem of this game of identification. Toscanini's fits of rage during rehearsals are known for being spectacular, and therefore lend credit to the conductor-in-the film's outbursts with the instrumentalists. Harvey Sachs' biography of Toscanini is full of examples of his tantrums, recounted by musicians.⁶⁵ Direct evidence of his impressive rages has also survived to today on several recordings, such as that of a rehearsal with the NBC orchestra in which Toscanini can be heard shouting at the musicians, calling them idiots and amateurs, saying they do not deserve to call themselves artists, and interrupting them almost as soon as they resume playing.⁶⁶ The conductor-in-the film seems to share certain of Toscanini's behavioural traits: irritability (which led to the breaking of many a baton in Toscanini's case, and to the hurling of musical scores by both conductors), stigmatising specific musicians who are singled out and asked to play a few measures alone, and the habit of frequently interrupting the execution of the piece.
- 27 In the history of orchestra conducting, the three maestros we have mentioned herein achieved the status of consecrated figures thanks to the myth of the demiurge conductor endowed with natural authority which was propagated by the media: "the tyrannical but anti-fascist Toscanini, 'demigod' Karajan, and Hollywood star Stokowski," as Liébert refers to them⁶⁷. This aura that elevated them to star status, along with their high standards and expectations, gave them a great deal of power in the orchestras and institutions they directed. Claude Samuel called them "orchestra dictators".⁶⁸ Moreover, in the film, this is the type of conductor the copyist is referring to when he describes the rehearsals with the former conductor, who was known to make his musicians work all night and strike their hands with his baton when they made mistakes—a story which is related in front of Toscanini's photograph.

The conductor-in-the film: an inconsistent figure

- 28 How does the conductor-in-the film compare to the demiurge type? It is difficult to associate the embittered and unavailing figure we see on the screen—a conductor of “minor works” being given a rough ride by his musicians—with this lineage of historic maestros. Although Fellini’s conductor offers glimpses of their traits, he clearly does not have the makings of this brand of “musical being” who exudes natural authority.
- 29 As was his custom, Fellini began developing his character with a satirical drawing. The sketch, which appears on a page of the first draft of *Prova d’orchestra*,⁶⁹ shows a conductor behind his podium, with bulging eyes and bushy hair, his baton extending the demiurgical gesture of his right hand, his left arm raised over his head, and his feet off the ground—forging the image of a conductor animated by music, but somewhat hysterical, turning the figure of the “ideal conductor” on its head. Indeed, what comes through in this caricature is a narcissistic form of the “ideal”, as summed up perfectly by an instrumentalist: “The ideal conductor should be tall, good-looking, pale, authoritarian, an excellent actor, mysterious, magnetic, and bear the marks of noble suffering on his brow. All conductors spend ages gazing into their dressing-room mirror, hoping to find these features in themselves.” Thus, the ideal is relegated to the status of a certain look or appearance, something one anxiously looks for in one’s reflection.⁷⁰ In response to a “subtle critic’s” comparison of the “facial expressions and gestures of a conductor to a sort of initiatory ritual dance”, another musician said ironically:
- The gesture releases the sound energy, pulling the mass of bows behind it in fluctuating waves, bringing forth the powerful burst of the trumpets’ ringing, articulating the delicate phrase of the flutes. At times it seems as if he on his own—and only he—fathoms the thousand ways in which a note can resonate beneath the bow, or how with expert fingering one can modulate one’s breath in an English horn.
- With the gesture, he gives recommendations, threatens, begs, promises, creates silence, and lowers the volume by placing his finger to his lips, with distressed or mysterious expressions, as if entreating everyone to keep the secret.
- 30 This makes the figure of the conductor—as it emerged in the twentieth century based on the German model—a “dancing character, and the subject of commentary”,⁷¹ like the actor and character in the film. His image is further diminished when he takes his turn in front of the television cameras, delivering a pathetic revelation of both his body and his sentiments during the interview he finally agrees to in his dressing room.⁷²
- 31 Instrumentalists generally insist on the importance of their own role, considered fundamental to the interpretation of the work and the success of the concert. Fellini tempers the role of the conductor with the importance of the role of the musicians: the conductor is “viscerally tied to the orchestra he is leading, and by which he is also being led.”⁷³ Far from being unilateral, the power dynamic is a dialectical relationship.
- 32 Hence, Fellini partly deconstructs the myth of the absolute power of the conductor. During the instrumentalists’ revolt, after fleeting images of a violinist standing on a chair, her bow raised, “conducting” the concert of insults being hurled at the conductor, the film goes as far as to suggest the replacement or eviction of the conductor—introducing two different *topoi* that challenge his very purpose. First, a musician proposes during the break that he be replaced with a metronome, and at the height of the revolt a metronome

is indeed placed on his podium, against the musicians' cries of "Orchestra, terror. Death to the conductor!" This idea apparently came to Fellini from a memory of an educational book on the orchestra, in which the orchestra temporarily deposes the conductor during a revolution, setting a metronome in his place.⁷⁴ But he was in fact employing a theme that has existed since the invention of the metronome in the nineteenth century (the patent was registered in 1816), and especially since the introduction of the electric metronome, of which Berlioz was a great supporter—a subject often caricatured.⁷⁵ Moreover, the idea of replacing the conductor with a metronome was adopted by German choirmasters during the Baroque era, if we believe the description of a similar mechanism—a sort of mechanical arm controlled by a pedal—that appears in a treatise by Johann Beer.⁷⁶ The second *topos* the film presents is the idea of doing away with the conductor based on political ideology: the slogan "It is forbidden to conduct" can be heard—probably a reference to the slogan of the May 1968 riots "It is forbidden to forbid" ["il est interdit d'interdire"]), which can also be connected to the famous experiment by the Soviet orchestra Persimfans from 1922 to 1934, or the more recent initiative by an American ensemble, the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, created in 1972.⁷⁷

33 Nevertheless, the power of the conductor seems to elicit nostalgia, even among those who challenge it. In their interviews, the copyist, the instrumentalists and even the conductor-in-the film are constantly referring to or citing other conductors, those from "before", who were authoritarian and respected. The generational divide in the film—which oddly goes unmentioned in the critical literature (generally stating that all of the musicians rise up as one against the conductor, unlike what is shown in the film)—attests to the loss of the power of this myth over the present: the revolt mainly involves young people—the "*capelloni*" on whom Pasolini had written an article a few years before the film came out.⁷⁸ On the contrary, the older musicians separate themselves from the others and adopt a more respectful attitude towards the conductor, greeting him with "my respects, *direttore*" when he arrives, and some even remaining near him at the height of the conflict. The breaking point seems to be the "1968 moment", when the conductor complains of the contradiction in an era that forbids authority and hierarchy, making it impossible for a conductor to exercise his function, like a priest who has lost his believers

34 Here, the film sets itself within a specific historical context—a time when orchestras were becoming more professional and unions were gaining influence, representing a shift away from the all-powerfulness of demiurge conductors. Critics from more specialised fields took notice of this framework. For example, Alexandre Myrat and Jacques Pays, conductor and philosopher, wrote an article on the film which refers to another of their articles entitled "La place vide du chef d'orchestre" (The conductor's empty spot), published previously in the same newspaper (*La France nouvelle*). In this text, they relate an incident that took place on November 1st 1978 at the Opéra-Comique in Paris: the conductor Roberto Benzi had stopped conducting, set down his baton and walked out of the concert hall at the end of Act III of Massenet's *Werther*. He intended this gesture as an act of protest against "the shameful abuses and acts of sabotage" by orchestra musicians who "take the liberty of not only cutting rehearsals short, having someone else stand in for them without even informing the conductor, not tuning up properly, and talking during performances, but also intentionally doing the exact opposite of what they are asked to do." At the press conference he gave to explain himself, he went on, describing his function and his skills: "Among the musicians, he [the conductor] is the one

responsible for organising the execution of the musical interpretation, with the ensemble of each and every musician; to do this, he is equipped with a system of gestures which are designed to be functional." The two authors state that all those commentators on this incident sided with the instrumentalists, and to them, this indicated the limits of the historic myth of the conductor in our society; the musicians were rejecting the conductor and instead asserting a social and personal relationship to music.⁷⁹ Claude Samuel, in the previously cited article explicitly entitled "À propos de 'Prova d'orchestra': La race des dictateurs d'orchestre s'est éteinte" (About 'Prova d'orchestra': The race of orchestra dictators is extinct), attributed this development to the influence of trade unions, and concludes that conductors now had to rely on charm more than terror to lead their orchestras.⁸⁰ The conductor's power now had to find a way to operate with a counter-power capable blocking or overthrowing him. Not long ago, *Le Monde's* correspondent in Italy drew a similar parallel between the film and Riccardo Muti's resignation from the Rome Opera⁸¹ in protest of the repeated strikes, strained relations with the unions, and weak management of the institution.

- 35 The "revolutionary" part of the film is the story of a reversal of power, a decapitation. But at a time when the "great" conductor is already a figure of the past, this sacrilege only amounts to a mockery of the myth, his caricatural double. In a way, the conductor is already dead even before the film begins, and in this light, *Prova d'orchestra* is essentially a film of mourning. The muffled bangs we hear from the beginning and the wrecking ball that demolishes part of the auditorium, killing the harpist, all add to this atmosphere. The entire film revolves around a void, as the ritual of the rehearsal proves itself incapable of reactivating the myth of the charismatic conductor who engages the group. The repercussions of this incapacity are what eventually lead to the outbreak of violence. As Warren asserts in his analysis:

By dressing his conductor in old trousers and a wrinkled shirt, with cheap espadrilles for shoes, by showing him undress in his once-princely dressing room, displaying his scrawny chest, Fellini is playing with contrast. He shows modern idiocy pretending to take the place of ancient ritual within this decaying setting. But the attack goes even further. By choosing a foreigner who trips over the words of the Italian language to the point that he can't even make them agree to play the conductor [in his film], the trainer of his clown characters, Fellini is saying, for one thing, that leadership today no longer corresponds to reality, unless imposed on it by a dictatorship.⁸²

- 36 Hence, the present is the site of an impossible resurrection of the past, one torn apart by a painful dialectic. The physical location is the antique oratory, preserved from a threatening, dangerous and anarchic outer world.

Fellini-direttore, Fellini-dittatore?

- 37 There are several ways in which this conductor whose authority is undermined as a possible face of Fellini the filmmaker.⁸³ There are similarities in terms of character, as Fellini showed himself to be temperamental on multiple occasions in his relationships with actors and producers: "Fellini's relationship with actors was terrible. He was a corporal, a tartar, a dictator, a demon. He was almost hysterical. The first five or six weeks were hell," recalled Donald Sutherland, the lead actor in *Casanova*; "Fellini is worse than Attila," the producer Alberto Grimaldi said of him.⁸⁴ Deploing a changing world is another point they have in common: there are several reports of Fellini complaining

about changes in his working conditions—technicians who demand breaks and show little interest in the film, time taken up by technical adjustments, lack of consideration for his word, etc.⁸⁵ The conductor-in-the film's criticisms of the counter-powers represented by the unions and the orchestra's managing director could thus be seen as a reflection of the director's personal complaints. To explain the film, Jean A. Gili pointed out the circumstances on the sets of other Fellini films: strikes erupting during the filming of *Casanova*, financing delays affecting *City of Women*, etc. Thus, with *Prova d'orchestra*, which was produced while he was working on *City of Women*, Fellini took a deliberate stance against trade unions and workers, whom he accused of hindering his work.⁸⁶ It was his fast and fiery response to a crisis situation, a "mood immediately transcribed",⁸⁷ if the short time it took to make the film is any indication: "I filmed *Prova d'orchestra* in sixteen days, and I edited it in two weeks, meaning eight days of work," Fellini specified.⁸⁸ Lastly, the conductor-in-the film's response when a musician accuses him of mediocrity—"I don't have peace, calm and silence"—resonates with a remark made by Fellini on the subject of order—"I believe a person with an artistic bent is naturally conservative and needs order around him: the clamour, the chanting, the processions, the gunshots and the barricades are aggravating, upsetting. We need to close the windows."⁸⁹ Fellini needs this order and calm, he says, in order to carry out his own transgressions. Thus, for Fellini, order clearly seems to be an artistic need and not a political stance.

- 38 In the film, the conductor's role is to ensure the aesthetic quality of the work: he is the only one who seems to care about the ultimate goal of the rehearsal, i.e., to create a work of art,⁹⁰ as conveyed by several of his statements: "If I were you I'd be thinking less about trade unions and more about music"; "Do you know why you're here? I'm talking to musicians, right?"; "We are musicians, you are musicians..."; "The notes save us; you should hold on to the notes." An instrumentalist, on the other hand, compares his job to that of production workers at Fiat. We recall this theme in Fellini's letter to Simenon: "[...] along with the musicians there is also a conductor who, within the difficult dialectic of this relationship, realises that the common objective of making music is mortified, misunderstood, cast aside, ignored."⁹¹
- 39 More than just a character in the film, it is also Fellini the director who is identifying with the figure of the conductor in a general analogy between the world of cinema and the world of orchestras. Executed for their audiences in similar conditions,⁹² these two worlds are presented as a sort of terrifying machine made up of disparate components that seems to function only by some miracle. This anxiety before the cinema-machine, the tendency to want to keep it at a distance, permeates all of Fellini's work, tracing back to his days as a screenwriter for Rossellini. Of his time working closely with Rossellini, Fellini said:

For me, it was the first clear discovery that it was possible to make a movie with the same intimate, direct, immediate rapport with which a writer writes or a painter paints. The machine behind your back—this Babel of voices, calls, movements, cranes, projectors, tricks, aids and megaphones that had struck me as so tyrannical, extravagant and excessive [...]; this tedious hubbub, worthy of a manoeuvring army regiment, which had always concealed from me, as if veiling it, the direct contact with expression—with Rossellini, it disappeared, faded into the background, was reduced to no more than a noisy and necessary frame around a free zone in which the filmmaker-artist composes his images as an illustrator creates drawings on a white page.⁹³

- 40 He would have the same sentiment several years later, watching Rota conduct the music to his movies and win the musicians' approval of his interpretation: "I was so impressed to see how these disparate, mismatched, contrary and distracted individuals dissociated and separated by their different lives and personal interests could unite in the attempt to create a utopia, which is to say, the perfect execution of someone else's idea, ambition and intuition."⁹⁴
- 41 The creator must take possession of the machine. Without him, the different elements cannot come together: the "mismatched" musicians are like the cast and crew of a film, especially the cast. As Jean-Louis Manganaro says in his description of the beginning of Fellini's *8½*: "This 'working mass' is portrayed in the images of apathy in the opening sequence; all of these people, these actors, unwitting and confused, may have individual artistic knowledge and trades, but they are incapable of 'deploying' them, of using them to make a movie."⁹⁵ The film set, like the rehearsal, is where the work of creation is executed, where the spectacle is created,⁹⁶ where the interactions and negotiations between the director and the interpreters of the work play out. Yet Fellini considers that only the director holds the truth, and must therefore have greater liberty, even if this means a "fight to the death" to silence the interpreters' own artistic desires.⁹⁷ Genius—displayed excessively on the walls of the hall in the form of portraits of Mozart and Vivaldi⁹⁸—apparently excuses tantrums and quirks, as affirmed by the conductor-in-the film.
- 42 For Fellini, who often found himself in the role of a clown, the dictator-conductor (dictator-director) was an ultimate-figure representing the dream of unhindered freedom.⁹⁹ The momentary suspension of individual interests, the muting of the machinery in the name of art, opens up a possibility of utopia. But in Fellini's work, this possibility is always precarious, as if it can only be wrested from reality. There is nothing to suggest that Fellini wished to see this rare and essentially artistic regime in the realm of politics.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, extremely ambiguously, the film offers a vision of this utopia as both a dream and a nightmare. The clown is never far from the dictator, both the ridiculous double and the exorcism of the desire for power.
- 43 *Prova d'orchestra* presents itself above all as a reflection on artistic creation, not a political film making a statement against terrorism, although it does not completely eliminate this aspect either. In his film, Fellini questions any intermediary or interference that curbs his own work and his own power as an artist. He wanted this power to be total, and sees the "1968 moment" as the final blow. Therein, he joined a crucial theme of his era which indeed questioned the legitimacy of authority in every domain.¹⁰¹ *Prova d'orchestra* ultimately takes its place in the series of films that Fellini made on filmmaking itself and the various questions it raises (*The Clowns*, *Roma*, *Intervista* and *8½*, which is the most representative of these films), in which the "impossible freedom" of the conductor is the central theme.¹⁰² Within this broader context, Fellini's short film perpetuates one of the most classic genres in the history of art, that of the *paragon* between arts, propelling it into the modern age: rather than ranking arts according to how closely they mimic reality, artists are measured by the degree of freedom they have in creating their art. He envies the painter and writer, who don't need to work with other people, and in the world of music, he sees the conductor-dictator as the closest incarnation of his dream—even if it is a dream he remains wary of and himself makes fun of. As Amengual wrote about Fellini, "It is also himself he is calling to order, his own weaknesses he is making

fun of—all the wild fantasies, illusions, absurd expectations and ill-defined desires within him.”¹⁰³

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NOTES

1. (But who's the conductor?) We have taken this question as it appeared in several articles in the Italian press when the film came out
2. Before its official release in Italy on 22 February 1979, the film was presented to the government and the President of the Italian Republic at Quirinal Palace in October 1978, and at Festival dei Popoli in Florence in December of the same year. It was entered in the official competition at the Berlin film festival in March 1979 and at the Cannes festival on 18 May 1979 (*Internet Movie Database*; DE VINCENTI, Giorgio, “Prova d'orchestra di F. Fellini. Sonorità senza sacralità”, in MICCICHÈ, Lino (dir.), *Il cinema del riflusso. Film e cineasti italiani degli anni '70*, Venice, Marsilio, 1997, p.413) and broadcast on the Italian television network RAI at the end of 1979.
3. The term “years of lead” covers several time periods. Here, we use it to refer to the broadest period, from the terrorist bombing at Piazza Fontana in Milan in 1969 to the dismantling of most of the extreme-right-wing and extreme-left-wing terrorist groups in the early 1980s. On this notion, see LETTIERI, Carmela, “L'Italie et ses Années de plomb. Usages sociaux et significations politiques d'une dénomination temporelle”, *Mots. Les langages du politique*, No. 87, 2008, p.43-55, (online), <http://mots.revues.org/12032> [consulted on 12 December 2014].
4. The first quote is from *L'Humanité dimanche*, 5 December 1980, originally: “Pour Wajda, la musique est, comme pour Fellini, le prétexte à parler d'autre chose”. The other two quotes are from MYRAT, Alexandre, PAYS, Jacques, “Le chef d'orchestre. L'absent”, *Révolution*, 19 December 1980, originally: “Après Fellini, Wajda utilise aussi l'orchestre pour traiter des problèmes d'une société face à ses contradictions nationales” and “De l'un à l'autre de ces films on observe, relativement à l'orchestre et aux problèmes réels de la société, qu'un traitement symbolique de l'orchestre, qui en néglige dans sa lettre la réalité, correspond chaque fois à une limitation incontrôlée du propos général tenu à travers lui.”
5. “In browsing the many articles published in newspapers and reviews, we were surprised that there wasn't even the slightest mention of the score composed by Nino Rota. This struck us as unusual for a movie focused on the world of music”; “Scorrendo i numerosi articoli già apparsi su quotidiani e riviste, ci ha sorpreso l'assenza del benché minimo accenno alla colonna sonora del film composta da Nino Rota. E questa assenza ci pare singolare trattandosi di un film sul mondo

della musica" (ACQUAFREDDA, Pietro, "Rota ci prova", *Paese sera*, 10 November 1978. Published in *Archivio Nino Rota. Studi II: Fra cinema e musica del Novecento: il caso Nino Rota. Dai documenti*, ed. F. Lombardi, Florence, Leo S. Olschki, Venice, Fondazione Giorgio Cini/Studi di musica veneta, 2000, p.194).

6. "Pour moi, la musique constituait avant tout un prétexte" (DUMONT, Étienne, Interview d'Andrzej Wajda, "Wajda : le 'Chef d'orchestre' ? C'est Arthur Rubinstein", *Tribune de Genève*, 29 March 1980).

7. For example: "My little film is called *Orchestra Rehearsal*, and indeed it tells the story of an orchestra rehearsal. Why not be satisfied with this explanation?"; "Prova d'orchestra s'intitola il mio filmetto, e racconta appunto una prova d'orchestra. Perché non accontentarsi di questa spiegazione?" (DEL BUONO, Oreste, TORNABUONI, Lietta, "Il prigioniero di Cinecittà", in *Erà Cinecittà*, Milan, Bompiani, 1979, p.218).

8. FELLINI, Federico and SIMENON, Georges, *Carissimo Simenon, Mon cher Fellini*, ed. C. Gauteur, Paris, Correspondance Cahiers du Cinéma, 1998, Letter from Fellini, Rome, 20 December 1978, p.58-59.

9. According to the idea of perspectivism applied to self-study as defined by Montaigne (see MONTAIGNE, Michel de, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, "Of the inconsistency of our actions").

10. DYER, Richard, *Nino Rota. Music, Film and Feeling*, London, British Film Institute, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p.154.

11. Interview with Fellini in *L'Europeo*, cited by COMUZIO, Ermanno, "Fellini/Rota: un matrimonio concertato", *Bianco e nero*, Vol. 50, No. 4, 1979, p.74.

12. According to the conductor Luca Pfaff, the film is based on real events that he took part in: in 1975, a recording session for the music to *Casanova* which Pfaff was conducting, and at which Fellini was present, was interrupted by a percussionist. He and other musicians took up arms over the presence of the television crew filming a documentary on the filmmaker. In order to keep playing, they demanded an additional 50% of their "artist's fee" (*cachet*), which the producer refused to pay. Thus, the session was suspended. This anecdote was related in several press articles at the time of the premiere and subsequent performances of Giorgio Battistelli's musical theatre piece inspired by the film (*Prova d'orchestra. Sei scene musicali di fine secolo*, Strasbourg, Opéra du Rhin, 24 November 1995, director: Georges Lavaudant, conductor: Luca Pfaff): e.g., FRANCK, Erikson, "Prova d'orchestra, la suite", *L'Express*, 23 November 1995 and BELTRAME, Paola, "Un aperture di stagione che promette aria nuova", *SWI*, 6 October 2007. We did not find any mention of this supposed source for the film in Fellini's own words or in the critical literature.

13. FELLINI, *Prova d'orchestra*, FELLINI, Federico, *Prova d'orchestra*, transl. A. Buresi et al., Paris, Éditions Albatros, 1979, p.41. This idea for the project is also confirmed by Rota (see ACQUAFREDDA, "Rota ci prova", art. cit., p.195).

14. KEZICH, Tullio, *Fellini. His Life and Work*, New York, Faber & Faber, 2007, p.332.

15. We referred to the French translation of these notes for the writing of this article: FELLINI, *Prova d'orchestra*, op. cit.

16. The Fellini Foundation in Rimini is in the process of being wound up, and we did not have the opportunity to go see the collection of Fellini archives at Indiana University Bloomington in the United States.

17. Rota composed five pieces in all. The three that were used in the film are *Gemelli allo specchio*, *Galoppo* and *Risatine malinconiche*. The instructions he was given were to showcase the different groups of instruments in the orchestra and to follow the plot development (ACQUAFREDDA, "Rota ci prova", art. cit., p.195).

18. KEZICH, *Fellini. His Life and Work*, op. cit., p.233.

19. COMUZIO, "Fellini/Rota: un matrimonio concertato", art. cit., p.78.

20. Both musicians were very familiar with the world of classical music: reputed for his work with Rota, Savina was the son of the first clarinetist of the EIAR symphonic orchestra and had received classical training at the Giuseppe Verdi Conservatory in Turin and Accademia Chigiana in Siena (“Carlo Savina”, in MUSIKER, Reuben and Naomi (dir.), *Conductors and Composers of Popular Orchestral Music. A biographical and Discographical Sourcebook*, Westport, Greenwood Press, 1988). Rota was from a family of musicians; he studied privately under Ildebrando Pizzetti at the Milan Conservatory and under Alfredo Casella at the Rome Conservatory, before completing his training in orchestra conducting at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, on advice from Toscanini, a longtime family friend. In addition to his work in the field of cinema, he also had a career as a composer of concert music.

21. Such as *La musica contemporanea*, 1952; *Prospettiva della musica moderna*, 1956; *Il Cammino della musica d'oggi e l'esperienza elettronica*, 1959.

22. Such as the ethnographic study by LEHMANN, Bernard: “7. La répétition : construction sociale de l'interprétation”, in *L'Orchestre dans tous ses éclats. Ethnographie des formations symphoniques*, Paris, La Découverte, 2013, p.192-221. There is also Battistelli, who—in his opera adaptation of the film, *Prova d'orchestra. Sei scene musicali di fine secolo*—reworked the plot as the representation of a typical conflict situation between instrumentalists and conductor, adding the element of the musicians refusing to interpret a contemporary work.

23. Anticipating further development of this article, we can refer readers to an example approaching loss of control, which is cited in the biography of Toscanini: “[...] Toscanini sowed terror when Gui [the conductor Vittorio Gui] was preparing the premiere of Adriano Lualdi's *Il diavolo nel campanile*. In one passage, the instrumentalists have to play whatever they see fit—to improvise, essentially. A few jokers went as far as to add animal cries. In the first rehearsals, Gui let them have their fun, but when they repeated this at the dress rehearsal, he became purple with rage: the cloud of dust he raised by stomping his feet furiously on the podium unleashed a cacophony in the orchestra—this time, of protests. ‘Completely outraged, Gui left the platform and ran off to complain to Toscanini,’ recounted Minetti. [...]”/“[...] The maestro flew down the stairs leading to the dressing rooms like a tornado, yelling as I had never heard him yell before. There was a big, heavy table in the middle of the room. Toscanini seized one side of it and began shaking it and rocking it back and forth, all the while yelling and provoking us to fight [...]” (we referred to the French translation of this book for the writing of this article: SACHS, Harvey, *Toscanini*, transl. M. C. Cuvillier and G. Zeisel, Paris, F. Van De Velde, 1980, here p.167-168).

24. LEHMANN, *L'Orchestre dans tous ses éclats. Ethnographie des formations symphoniques*, op. cit., p.210 and 220.

25. For a complete analysis of this interpretation, see the pages on the film in MINUZ, Andrea, *Viaggio al termine dell'Italia. Fellini politico*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2012, p.172-193.

26. For example: “An obvious metaphor: the orchestra is society, the conductor is power, and rather than rebelling against him, each citizen-musician must resign himself to playing his score”; “Métaphore évidente : l'orchestre, c'est la société, le chef, c'est le pouvoir, et chaque citoyen-musicien, plutôt que de se rebeller contre lui, doit se résigner à jouer sa partition”) (GROUSSET, Jean-Paul, “Prova d'orchestra (À la baguette)”, *Le Canard enchaîné*, 13 June 1979).

27. See LEHMANN, *L'Orchestre dans tous ses éclats. Ethnographie des formations symphoniques*, op. cit., p.192.

28. As Toni Negri pointed out in an article on the film: NEGRI, Antonio, “L'orchestra di Fellini e quella di Gramsci”, *Il Settimale*, No. 18, 2 May 1979, cited in MINUZ, *Viaggio al termine dell'Italia. Fellini politico*, op. cit., p.188.

29. Mastroianni, who accompanied him, told the following anecdote (our translation from the French): “To pick the ‘faces’ for small roles, he always went to Naples. Sometimes I went with him, like for *Orchestra Rehearsal*. He ran an advert in the Naples newspaper: ‘Fellini is looking for actors. Come to the hotel, room number x, tomorrow at 10 a.m.’ For this movie, he was looking

for musicians. The first Neapolitan came in. 'What instrument do you play?' 'I don't play anything, but my brother is brilliant!' [...] Fellini hired him on the spot" (cited by GILI, Jean A., *Fellini. Le magicien du réel*, Paris, Découvertes Gallimard, 2009, p.68). We have cited this story not just for the anecdote, but also because it supports the notion of the orchestra as a representation of Italy.

30. "[...] come nelle favole di Esopo, la volpe sta a indicare astuzia, il lupo prepotenza e così via, così il tedesco nella favola di Fellini sta a indicare ordine, disciplina eccetera" (MORAVIA, Alberto, "Sul podio c'è Menenio Agrippa", *L'Espresso*, 19 November 1978, cited in *Cinema italiano. Recensioni e interventi 1933-1990*, ed. A. Pezzotta and A. Gilardelli, Milan, Bompiani, 2010, p.1170).

31. GRAND, Odile, "'Prova d'Orchestra' (Bon pour le son, bon pour l'image)", *L'Aurore*, 8 June 1979.

32. From the French "*figures dominatrices*." WARREN, Paul, *Fellini ou la satire libératrice*, Montreal, VLB, 2013, p.21.

33. "Et dans le noir qui s'installe, on entend la voix du chef passer de l'italien à l'allemand et s'enfler jusqu'à l'hystérie. On entend les bruits de bottes martelant le pavé" (SCHULL, Francis, "L'opinion de Francis Schull. 'Répétition d'orchestre' : Fellini au-dessus de la mêlée", *L'Aurore*, 19 May 1979).

34. The conductor had already taken this tone when berating the musicians, but only in Italian, which makes the allusion less obvious.

35. See LAZAR, Marc and MATARD-BONUCCI, Marie-Anne (dir.), *L'Italie des années de plomb. Le terrorisme entre histoire et mémoire*, Paris, Autrement, 2010, *passim*.

36. See ATTAL, Frédéric, "Les intellectuels italiens et le terrorisme, 1977-1978", in *ibid.*, p.112.

37. MINUZ, *Viaggio al termine dell'Italia. Fellini politico*, *op. cit.*, p.172.

38. After the term "*reportage-interview*" used by MANGANARO, Jean-Paul, *Federico Fellini. Romance*, Paris, P.O.L., 2009, p.87. Fellini first introduced this genre in *Marriage Agency* (1953), developed it in *The Clowns*, and again used it in *Prova d'orchestra* and finally *Intervista*. Interestingly, there is a similar presence of television cameras throughout Wajda's film.

39. In the sense of concrete music.

40. KEZICH, *Fellini. His Life and Work*, *op. cit.*, p.330.

41. FELLINI, *Prova d'orchestra*, *op. cit.*, p.31 and p.46.

42. "L'orchestra è l'Italia, siamo noi" (TASSONE, Aldo, "L'Italia è stonata", *Euro*, 1 June 1978).

43. We referred to the French translation of this book for the writing of this article: FELLINI, Federico, *Fellini par Fellini. Entretien avec Giovanni Grazzini*, transl. N. Frank, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1984, p.165.

44. ALPERT, Hollis, *Fellini. A Life*, New York, Marmowe & Company, 1987, p.269.

45. FELLINI, *Fellini par Fellini*, *op. cit.*, p.167. We now know that he had already wanted to make a film on this period with the television adaptation of the autobiography of police officer Nicola Longo, *La valle delle farfalle*. The film was to be entitled *Poliziotto* (CASANOVA, Alessandro, *Scritti e immaginati. I film mai realizzati di Federico Fellini*, Rimini, Guaraldi, 2005, cited by MINUZ, *Viaggio al termine dell'Italia. Fellini politico*, *op. cit.*, p.173). Longo recently wrote a book on this project: LONGO, Nicola, *Poliziotto*, Rome, Castelvechi, 2013.

46. FELLINI, *Prova d'orchestra*, *op. cit.*, p.112.

47. See an article in *L'Aurore* on different reactions to the film, which discusses those for whom *Prova d'orchestra* is "a reactionary film in which the Hitlerian voice at the end is a message of hope" (SCHULL, "L'opinion de Francis Schull. 'Répétition d'orchestre' : Fellini au-dessus de la mêlée", *art. cit.*).

48. Italians set about trying to identify this dictator, drawing parallels between the conductor and the former monarchist partisan and diplomat Edgardo Sogno, accused in 1974 of fomenting a supposed coup called the *Golpe bianco*, or the powerful manufacturer and president of Fiat, Gianni Agnelli (a friend of the former), based on a vague physical resemblance to Bass.

49. This last aspect is something the dictator and the artist have in common: Mussolini compared himself to an artist, saying that his work was the shaping of human material; along the same lines, in a letter to Wilhelm Furtwängler, Goebbels presented Hitler as an artist whose medium was the human masses. See MICHAUD, Éric, "Artiste et dictateur", in *Un art de l'éternité. L'image et le temps du national-socialisme*, Paris, Gallimard, 1996, p.18 and 22 for Mussolini, p.20-22 for Hitler.
50. FELLINI, *Fellini par Fellini*, op. cit., p.197.
51. FELLINI, *Prova d'orchestra*, op. cit., p.118.
52. FELLINI, *Fellini par Fellini*, op. cit., p.164.
53. DELEUZE, Gilles, *Cinema 2. The Time-Image*, transl. H. Tomlinson and R. Galeta, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p.92-94.
54. *Ibid.*, p.94.
55. MÂCHE, François-Bernard, *Musique, mythe, nature ou les Dauphins d'Arion*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1991, p.45 and p.53-56.
56. FELLINI, *Prova d'orchestra*, op. cit., p.39-40.
57. *Ibid.*, p.126.
58. SZENDY, Peter, "Genèse (2) : Fantasia, ou la 'plasmaticité'" and "Toucher à distance", in *Membres fantômes. Des corps musiciens*, Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 2002, p.111-114 and p.115-125.
59. On the connections between Fellini and Rota and magic, particularly with regard to *Prova d'orchestra*, see DYER, *Nino Rota. Music, Film and Feeling*, op. cit., p.176-182. On Fellini's interest in the occult, see also the introductory text written by T. Kezich in FELLINI, Federico, *The Book of Dreams*, ed. T. Kezich and V. Boarini, transl. A. Maines and D. Stanton, New York, Rizzoli, 2008. It is also of note that Fellini was friends with the "clairvoyant" Aldolfo Rol.
60. SZENDY, *Membres fantômes. Des corps musiciens*, op. cit., p.120-121.
61. *Ibid.*, p.112.
62. See LIÉBERT, Georges, *L'Art du chef d'orchestre*, Paris, Pluriel, 2013, p.III-IV.
63. "[...] [I] buy houses. [...] Two in America, one in Tokyo, in London and Berlin."
64. "C'est peu de dire que Karajan est imité !" (ROCHEREAU, Jean, "Répétition d'orchestre de Federico Fellini", *La Croix*, 14 June 1979).
65. Such as the story of a rehearsal of *La Mer* and Brahms's *Fourth Symphony* with the La Scala Orchestra in 1946: "You over there, the horn, I know you with your hand like that. Play open, open, OPEN – and if you can't figure it out, change professions! He wants to play is he sees fit... He's going to make me crazy!/[...] Always try to do better; otherwise die a miserable death./ (Fourth movement of Brahms) It says here 'Allegro energico et passionato'. *Energico* – where is the energy? *Passionato* – Where is the passion? It's written in Italian, but it's like you don't even know your own language!" (Notes taken by Lily Seppilli, in SACHS, *Toscanini*, op. cit., p.296).
66. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cxh-o9ENW5o&feature=youtu.be> Another example is the recording of a rehearsal for *La Traviata*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JY7Lk83O4Pc> [Internet links consulted on 14 December 2014].
67. "[...] du dictateur mais antifasciste Toscanini au 'demi-dieu' Karajan, en passant par Stokowski, la star hollywoodienne" (LIÉBERT, *L'Art du chef d'orchestre*, op. cit., p.CX). Liébert's list also includes Furtwängler, "the great shaman of Ur-Germanness" ("le grand chaman de la Ur-germanité").
68. From the French term "*dictateurs d'orchestre*" in SAMUEL, Claude, "À propos de 'Prova d'orchestra' : La race des dictateurs d'orchestre s'est éteinte", *Le Matin*, 19 May 1979.
69. I.e., in the version of the subject of the film contained in the script published by Garzanti and entitled *Chiacchierata sul filmetto che avrei in animo di fare* (Chit-chat on the small film I plan to make). On the cover, it also contains a blank-ink drawing of a hand conducting (Lilly Library [Indiana University Bloomington] Fellini MS. 5 [Box 1], cited by BONDANELLA, Peter, *The Cinema of Federico Fellini*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1992, p.288, note 40).

70. It should be noted that conducting in front of a mirror is an exercise that conductors practice as beginners. See "Conducting (direction)", in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 4.
71. "personnage dansant, et commenté." See BERNARD, Élisabeth, "Le chef d'orchestre", in FAUQUET, Jean-Marie (dir.), *Dictionnaire de la musique en France au XIX^e siècle*, Paris, Fayard, 2003.
72. Here Fellini uses a theme he will return to in later films, such as *Ginger e Fred* (1986), *Intervista* (1987) and *La Voce della luna* (1994), i.e., the theme of television and what it does to cinema. In *Prova d'orchestra*, this subject is mainly addressed in the instrumentalists' interviews, whether in the content of the dialogue or in the way they are filmed. Lorenzo Codelli's article for *Positif* ("Orchestre et chœur", *Positif*, No. 217, April 1979, republished in "Federico Fellini", Dossier *Positif* -Rivages, March 1988) was one of the few to take this element fully into account in its analysis of the film. On this theme, we can cite later critiques by Serge Daney (especially: DANEY, Serge, "Intervista : et vogue le cinéma", *Libération*, 19 May 1987, published in *La Maison cinéma et le monde*, Vol. 3: "Les années Libé 1986-1991", Paris, P.O.L., 2012, p.449-451; id., "Du défillement au défilé", *La Recherche photographique*, No. 7, 1989, published in *ibid.*, p.307-313).
73. FELLINI, *Prova d'orchestra*, op. cit., p.40.
74. COMUZIO, "Fellini/Rota: un matrimonio concertato", art. cit., p.75.
75. On Berlioz, see FAUQUET, Joël-Marie, "L'imagination scientifique de Berlioz", in FAUQUET, Joël-Marie, MASSIP, Catherine and REYNAUD, Cécile (ed.), *Berlioz : textes et contexte*, Paris, Société française de musicologie, 2011. See also the caricature entitled *Concert à la vapeur* (The Steam-Powered Concert) by Grandville, published in the collection *Un autre monde. Transformations, visions, incarnations, ascensions [...]*, 1844, n.p. and viewable in digital format on the Gallica BnF website: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k101975j/f30.image> Conductors' fear of "competition" in the form of a device has long existed, tracing as far back as the eighteenth century, when Rousseau expressed this concern over the "chronometre", and later taken up by Mendelssohn and Wagner (LIÉBERT, *L'Art du chef d'orchestre*, op. cit., p.XXIX-XXX).
76. See Grove, "Conducting (direction)", art. cit.
77. On these ensembles, see LIÉBERT, *L'Art du chef d'orchestre*, op. cit., p.LII-LV and p.CXIII-CXIV respectively.
78. PASOLINI, Pier Paolo, "Il 'discorso' dei capelli" (The "discourse" of hair), in *Scritti corsari*, Milan, Garzanti, 2008. This article based on the phenomenon of long hair, originally published under the title "Contro I capelli lunghi" (Against Long Hair) in *Corriere della sera* in 1973, examines the youth of the day mainly from the angle of generational conflict.
79. MYRAT, Alexandre, PAYS, Jacques, "Répétition d'orchestre sans musique", *France nouvelle*, No. 1760, 4 August 1979 and "La place vide du chef d'orchestre", *France nouvelle*, No. 1730, 7 January 1979.
80. SAMUEL, "À propos de 'Prova d'orchestra' : La race des dictateurs d'orchestre s'est éteinte", art. cit.
81. RIDET, Philippe, "Riccardo Muti lâche la baguette à l'Opéra de Rome", *Le Monde*, 25 September 2014.
82. "En habillant son chef d'orchestre d'un vieux pantalon et d'une chemise froissée, en le chaussant d'une paire d'espadrilles, en l'amenant à se dévêtir dans la loge autrefois princière et à exhiber son buste décharné, Fellini joue sur l'effet de contraste. Il montre la bêtise moderne qui prétend, dans le délabrement, se substituer au rituel antique. Mais l'attaque va plus loin. En choisissant pour jouer le rôle du chef d'orchestre, du dompteur de ses personnages clowns, un étranger qui trébuche sur les mots de la langue italienne, au point de ne plus pouvoir les accorder entre eux, Fellini nous dit, entre autres choses, que le leadership, aujourd'hui, ne colle plus guère à la réalité. À moins de s'imposer à elle par la dictature" (WARREN, *Fellini ou la satire libératrice*, op. cit., p.169-170).

83. In agreement with Pasolini, he clearly dissociated himself from the youths we have identified as being the leaders of the revolt: while discussing the film, he was asked, "Do you have the feeling that you are among the youths?" to which he responded, "I don't know who they are, what they are like. I don't know them. I don't know where they are or what they are doing" (FELLINI, *Fellini par Fellini*, op. cit., p.162-163).
84. These two quotes are from KEZICH, *Fellini. His Life and Work*, op. cit., p.322 and p.324 respectively. On Fellini's use of actors, see also MANGANARO, *Federico Fellini. Romance*, op. cit., p.46-51 and especially p.49 note 1.
85. See DEL BUONO, TORNABUONI, "Il prigionero di Cinecittà", art. cit., p.219 and 234.
86. GILI, *Fellini. Le magicien du réel*, op. cit., p.86. It must be noted that Fellini never endorsed this point of view and even rejected it: "I did not mean it as a condemnation of trade unions" ("Je n'ai pas voulu brandir une condamnation des syndicats" – We referred to the French translation of this book for the writing of this article: COSTANTINI, Costanzo, *Conversations avec... Federico Fellini*, transl. N. Castagné, Paris, Denoël, 1995, p.161). However, in this text he also denied the connection to Italy that he acknowledged elsewhere, as we have indicated.
87. From the French: "humeur immédiatement transcrite" (MANGANARO, *Federico Fellini. Romance*, op. cit., p.351). The expression is used in reference to *The Clowns* and *Roma*.
88. "Entretien avec Federico Fellini par Michel Ciment", conducted at Cinecittà on 21 December 1978, *Positif-Rivages*, op. cit., p.116. In addition to the short production time, Fellini's return to narration also makes *Prova d'orchestra* an exception among the director's work from this period (see AMENGUAL, Barthélémy, "Fin d'itinéraire : du 'côté de chez Lumière' au 'côté de Méliès'", *Études cinématographiques*, No. 127-130: "Fellini II : Aux sources de l'imaginaire", 1981, p.92).
89. FELLINI, *Fellini par Fellini*, op. cit., p.167.
90. An instrumentalist's remark ("Ah, so it's the fault of unions if nothing he writes is any good...") suggests that he is also the composer, in which case he is an artist as well as an interpreter.
91. FELLINI and SIMENON, *Carissimo Simenon, Mon cher Fellini*, op. cit., p.59.
92. Concerts, like cinema films, take place in front of spectators seated in a dimly-lit, closed space. Both gradually found themselves competing with media that modify the way they are perceived: vinyl records and cassettes for the former, and television for the latter. The way this affects cinema is a subject that interests Fellini, as can be seen in his interview with Michel Ciment: "Entretien avec Federico Fellini par Michel Ciment", art. cit., p.113. On this topic, see also DANEY, "Du défillement au défilé", art. cit.
93. Cited by MANGANARO, *Federico Fellini. Romance*, op. cit., p.26.
94. "Allora mi ha impressionato tanto scoprire come individui disparati, scompagnati, contrariati, svagati, dissociati, separati da vicende e interessi personali diversi potessero unirsi sotto la guida del direttore d'orchestra nel tentativo di realizzare un'utopia, ovvero la perfetta esecuzione di un'idea, di un progetto, di un'intuizioni altrui" (cited by COMUZIO, "Fellini/Rota: un matrimonio concertato", art. cit., p.74).
95. "Cette 'masse à l'œuvre' est campée dans les images d'apathie de la première séquence ; tous ces gens, ces acteurs, ignares, confus, disposent peut-être de savoirs artistiques et artisanaux individuels, mais ils sont dans l'incapacité de les mettre 'en œuvre', d'en faire un film" (MANGANARO, *Federico Fellini. Romance*, op. cit., p.229).
96. On this subject, see CODELLI, "Orchestre et chœur", art. cit., p.107.
97. On this point, see BOLAND, Bertrand, "Prova d'orchestra (Federico Fellini)", *Cahiers du Cinéma*, No. 304, October 1979, p.60.
98. We identified three portraits of Mozart placed around the hall, and two of Vivaldi above the podium. They are rough copies of the following works: "The Young Mozart" painted by Thaddeus Helbling, 1787, Salzburg, Mozarteum, an engraving of Mozart in profile after the medallion by

Leonard Posch, 1789, Salzburg, Mozarteum, and "Portrait of W. A. Mozart", unknown Austrian painter, 1777, Bologna, Museo internazionale e biblioteca della musica; "Supposed portrait of Antonio Vivaldi", unknown painter, eighteenth century, Bologna, Museo internazionale e biblioteca della musica, and an engraving of Vivaldi by James Caldwell. It seems to us that one of the portraits on display is of Balduin Baas wearing a wig, disguised as an eighteenth-century composer.

99. These two counterparts of the artist—the clown and the dictator—have been studied respectively by Jean Starobinski (*Portrait de l'artiste en saltimbanque*, Geneva, Skira, 1970) and Éric Michaud ("Artiste et dictateur", art. cit., p.15-48).

100. One need only recall the example of Toscanini, who was a dictator with his own orchestra, especially at La Scala in Milan where he literally had total authority, but an avowed opponent of fascism and convinced Republican in his private life. See BUCH, Esteban, "Le chef d'orchestre : pratiques de l'autorité et métaphores politiques", *Annales. Histoire, Sciences sociales*, Vol. 57, No. 4, 2002, p.1022-1023.

101. As De Vincenti points out, authority and institution were key issues in the cultural debate of the era, which also explored the question of repression. He cites the congress on these themes organised in Bologna in September 1977 by left-wing extra-parliamentary groups, as well as the new hard-line law on public order introduced by the minister of the interior Francesco Cossiga (DE VINCENTI, "Prova d'orchestra di F. Fellini. Sonorità senza sacralità", art. cit., p.415).

102. Michel Chion sees the subject of the film as the impossibility of filming an orchestra rehearsal (CHION, Michel, "Fellini et l'orchestre", in *Un art sonore, le cinéma. Histoire, esthétique, poétique*, Paris, Cahiers du cinéma essai, 2003, p.369-370). While this interpretation seems excessive, it is interesting to consider with regard to the representation of music: Chion shows that Fellini appears to be aware of the difficulty of filming an orchestra and the fact that artificially isolating the conductor or a musician leads to the atomisation of the music.

103. AMENGUAL, "Fin d'itinéraire : du 'côté de chez Lumière' au 'côté de Méliès'", art. cit., p.95.

ABSTRACTS

In the year 1979, Federico Fellini's film *Prova d'orchestra* came out both in cinemas and on television (it was originally made for the "small screen"). The film follows an Italian symphonic orchestra rehearsing under the direction of a foreign guest conductor who can only find fault with everything around him. The rehearsal is being recorded for television and interrupted by interviews, which only adds to the mounting tension and escalating power struggle, until the musicians finally turn against the conductor. Chaos ensues, until eventually the conductor regains control and is able to resume the rehearsal. As the film draws to a close, he is heard again rebuking the orchestra even more harshly, switching to German as his tone reaches a dictatorial intensity. *Prova d'orchestra* sparked considerable controversy in the politically charged context in Italy at the time, a period known as the "years of lead". Here we will attempt to show that the situation in the music world—which was the true inspiration for the film—is not just a pretext for a political fable: using the figure of the "orchestra dictator", Fellini also offers insight into his own work as an artist in a fast-changing world.

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Keywords: Orchestra Conductor, Rehearsal, Artistic creation, Politics, Fellini, Prova d'orchestra, Film, Italy

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