THE CINEMA OF FEDERICO FELLENI AND *8½*

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Sommario
L'articolo ripercorre i grandi temi del cinema di Federico Fellini alla luce della sua biografia: nel nodo tra arte e vita, l'autore vede i segni di un rapido superamento delle strettoie del neorealismo, da cui il regista era partito, e un approdo ai grandi temi di un'immaginazione, qui definita 'neo-romantica', che si muove tra sogno e realtà, tragedia e commedia. In questa prospettiva 8½ *rappresenta, attraverso la figura dell'*alter ego *Guido, una vera e propria* summa *delle ossessioni del regista riminese, un gioco di specchi in cui la ricerca dell'identità e l'aspirazione alla libertà sono fatalmente frustrate.*

Keywords: Fellini – biografia – immaginazione

Fellini and Life

I was going to begin this essay with some facts about Federico Fellini's life. But any such account, I quickly realised, must be approximate. For Fellini enjoyed obfuscation, and his own recollections about his past varied according to whim. Indeed, his enemies often labelled him a *bugiardo*, a big liar; and his wife, Giulietta Masina, herself said that Federico blushed only when he told the truth. Yet his many friends generally discerned in him a rare sincerity. Both qualities – the obfuscatory or evasive, the sincere or revelatory – course through Fellini's interviews, and these qualities are not unrelated to the intermingling in his films themselves of fantasy and verity, reality and illusion. "You could call hallucination a deeper reality," Fellini once told the interviewer Dan Yakir. "In any event, I see no line between the imaginary and the actual" (35).

Fellini even said to the novelist Alberto Moravia that he had tried to eliminate the idea of history from his *Satyricon* (*Fellini Satyricon*,1969), "the idea that the ancient world *really* existed. […] I

used an iconography that has the allusiveness and intangibility of dreams." In reply to the next, logical question, the director said that his movie dream of Petronius was a dream dreamed by himself, and then Moravia asked, "I wonder why you dreamt such a dream." Fellini replied: "The movies wanted me to" (168). Exactly, just as his alter ego Guido in *8½* (*Otto e mezzo*,1963) was begging the movies to command a dream from *him*.

Fellini's reply to Moravia's question contains all the truth and fakery and truth about fakery that have made Fellini, the artist and the man, one of the most appealing of modern film figures – one who, in his simultaneous dealing with truth-tellers and pretenders, realists and dreamers, reprised the two distinctive directions in which, from the beginning, the cinema itself had developed. Fellini's own life in art was spent in the service of both reality and non-reality largely because he knew, as one of the few film masters who also understood theatricality (perhaps since his own self was so histrionic), that theatre without artifice is a fake ideal and a naïf's idea of the truth.

To the life itself: this much is known with certainty, or a degree of certainty, about Fellini's early existence. He was born in 1920 in Rimini, a small town on Italy's Adriatic coast. (The seaside would turn out to be important in many of his pictures.) For several years he attended a boarding school, run by Catholic priests, at Fano — also on the Adriatic. During those school years, at the age of seven or eight, Federico ran away to follow a travelling circus until his truancy was discovered and he was returned (after one night? within several days?) to his parents. This incident seems to have left an indelible impression on Fellini's mind, for, even as priests, together with nuns, were to find their ritualistic place in many of his films, so too did the circus become for him a source of inspiration for his work as a movie director.

During his last year in Rimini – 1937 – which was also his last year of high school, Fellini and several of his friends were frequent truants, leading the idle, empty (but fantasy-filled) street life he was later to depict so vividly in *The Bullocks* (*I vitelloni*, 1953). Like Moraldo in this film, Fellini escaped from the hopeless limbo of Rimini shortly thereafter, making his way to Florence, where he worked as an illustrator for a comic-strip story magazine. This

experience itself would provide the background for his movie *The White Sheik* (*Lo sceicco bianco*, 1952), which chronicles a provincial bride's misadventures in Rome with the man of her dreams – not her new husband, but instead a star of the *fumetti* (enormously popular magazines telling romantic stories in photo-strip form). After six months or so, Fellini moved on again, to Rome, where he drew cartoons and caricatures for the satirical publication *Marc' Aurelio*, in addition to becoming one of the writers for a radio serial based on this magazine's most popular feature story ("Cico and Pallina," Italy's answer to Dagwood and Blondie).

Soon tiring of this work, Fellini joined his friend, the music-hall comedian (and later character actor in films) Aldo Fabrizi, on a 1939 odyssey across Italy with a vaudeville troupe for which he performed a variety of duties, such as sketch artist, wardrobe master, scenery painter, travelling secretary, and bit player. Years later, Fellini would tell Tay Garnett that this was

> perhaps the most important year of my life. [...] I was overwhelmed by the variety of the country's physical landscape and, too, by the variety of its human landscape. It was the kind of experience that few young men are fortunate enough to have – a chance to discover character of one's country and, at the same time, to discover one's own identity. (72)

Back in Rome by the early 1940s, he began not only a new career as a gag writer for comic movies, but also his courtship of the young actress Giulietta Masina. Her distinctive personality – puckish, vulnerable, yet resilient – clearly fired Fellini's imagination, and together they were to forge a unique alliance in the Italian cinema of their time: one on which he commented in a number of interviews.

Life and Art

By the end of the war, Fellini was married to Masina and working as a co-scenarist and assistant director for the leading neorealist filmmaker, Roberto Rossellini, on such pictures as *Rome, Open City*

(*Roma città aperta*, 1945) and *Paisan* (*Paisà*, 1946). Following several assignments in the late 1940s as a co-screenwriter or assistant director for Pietro Germi and Alberto Lattuada, Fellini took his first stab at directing with *Variety Lights* (*Luci del varietà*, 1951), a collaborative effort with Lattuada from Fellini's original story about a troupe of actors not unlike the vaudevillians with whom he had travelled the country a little over a decade before. Then he made five feature films on his own, all of which show two dominant influences: the neorealistic Rossellini and the re-imagined materials of Fellini's life.

These earlier films are the ones that have by far the closest relation in Fellini to the Second World War – in style, not in subject. Neorealism was a stylistic response to the war, and his early films are his response to that response. A biographical fact, as well as an aesthetic atmosphere, may be involved. Fellini was not caught up in the war. Since he was born in 1920, he was of age for military service, but, with some ingenuity, he found medical reasons to avoid the draft – whether because he was anti-fascist or non-fascist, as has been conjectured, or simply out of self-preservation. We can't say or judge. But we can hazard that his first group of films, largely concerned with people struggling to survive, was a kind of indirect acknowledgment of the sufferings brought on by the war; and may have been seen by him as a sort of expiation.

His realist's compassion for the exploited of post-war Italy is on display in both *The Swindle* (*Il bidone*, 1955) and *The Nights of Cabiria* (*Le notti di Cabiria*, 1957). Fellini's long-standing romance with the circus and the theatre appears not only in *Variety Lights* but also in *The Road* (*La strada*, 1954); as already noted, his impatience with small-town life can be found in *I vitelloni*, his comic-strip experience in *The White Sheik*. In this phase of his career, Fellini was, above all, an observer, constructing his films through juxtaposition: that is, through setting details of reconstructed reality side by side to point up a common denominator, or (more often) to expose the ironic relationship between unlike things. This method of construction is the one associated with neorealism, which Fellini himself defined in an interview with Charles Thomas Samuels as "the opposite of

manufactured effects, of the laws of dramaturgy, spectacle, and even of cinematography" (126).

Continually awaiting an answer to, or a satisfaction of, their deepest needs – as they would get it in a conventional plot or entertainment – Fellini's characters are nonetheless always disappointed; what we see of them may literally cease at film's end, but in fact they never reach their final destination. Essential stasis is thus crucial to Fellini's world. Conventional dramaturgy, by contrast, exalts the will: characters want something; they reach out for it; and they get it or don't get it. Sometimes they fail, or succeed, because of circumstances; sometimes they do so because of another character. Whatever the case, their fate becomes established in a conflict that peaks in a climax, after which there is a denouement. But such strategies Fellini either rejects or transforms. Like other directors who wish to wean the cinema from its addiction to popular fiction and melodrama, he tries to inject the bracing truth that, from start to finish, life isn't very dramatic after all.

Among the neorealists, it's true, episodic structure and open endings are also fundamental strategies. Yet the scenarios of Cesare Zavattini don't avoid narrative causality and suspense; and, although Olmi's characters seem to wander in and out of unconnected experiences, they too eventually reach a turning point, so that in retrospect their wanderings appear to conform to a dramatic pattern. At his most characteristic, Fellini eliminates such remnants of conventional dramaturgy. Scenes are related in his films, not by causality or in order to create a crisis, but as illustrations of a state of being. At his best, Fellini shows us people in several versions of hopefulness, which, because it is unchanging and unassuageable, can achieve only the resolution of the *spectator's* understanding.

This constancy, rather than any outer achievement or inner alteration, is Fellini's typical subject; and he wants us to find it both deplorable and marvellous. Not simply for defying dramaturgical artifice or for showing that perception shapes experience does Fellini deserve to be credited with having deepened cinematic realism, however. His films are especially realistic in precluding unequivocal judgment. Life, Fellini intimates, is not dramatic but repetitious, not external but mediated by the imagination, and neither to be admired

nor despised. And not wanting his audience to be partisan, he must simultaneously put us outside his characters to show their errors and inside them so that we do not dismiss them as fools. This double exposure, if you will – a subjective view laid over the objective – is the Fellinian touch that first signals the presence of a personal and incisive refinement of realism.

What further distinguishes Fellini from the neorealists is an insistence on the primary force of human imagination. His characters aren't solely motivated by externals – the theft of a bicycle, social indifference, child abandonment or neglect – as Vittorio De Sica's were. Nor, like Ermanno Olmi, does Fellini invert neorealism by studying only the human accommodation to such external circumstances. Instead, he denies the pure externality of events, choosing instead to show what he has repeatedly avowed in interviews: that reality and imagination interpenetrate. Thus Fellini's characters never face a fact without dressing it up: if, as in *I vitelloni*, they are in an empty piazza during the small hours of the night, they actively deny the implication that all human activities must pause; if, as in *The Nights of Cabiria*, they are stepping in place on a treadmill, they are nonetheless always on parade, decked out and boisterous.

The Realist and the Romantic

It is, in fact, this "force of human imagination," as I have described it, that unites what many commentators otherwise consider the two halves of Fellini's career: the quasi-realist and the baroque-bordering-on-rococo. The second half begins with his first big international success, *The Sweet Life* (*La dolce vita*, 1960), where, for the first time, his subject was upper-class, well-to-do Italy – the problems in lives of *luxe* and leisure – and Fellini's treatment of this subject was much more symbolic in method, as well as much more elegant in manner. Maturity and self-confidence had much to do with the change, of course, but so did his upward social mobility. Success had come to Fellini; and with success had come that perk so important to serious artists who succeed – the chance to see that success is hollow.

To be sure, he is still the observer here: through the eyes of Marcello the journalist (Fellini's original ambition when he arrived in

Rome), who, like Moraldo from the *vitelloni* quintet, left his hometown to seek a glorious future in the eternal city. But now the film director is like a gifted rube reporter of naughty High Life, for *La dolce vita* moves away from his early experience, out of which he had been creating, into a new social environment where he can only watch – and never actively participate or assimilate. (Consequently, the most authentic moment in the film is the visit of Marcello's father, who brings to the Italian capital the touch of the small town in which his son grew up.)

La dolce vita, then, can be called a transitional work that will be followed by, and has some connection to, Fellini's masterpiece, *8½*. The director himself intimated as much when he told Derek Prouse,

> I had a vague idea of *8½* even before *La dolce vita*: to try to show the dimensions of a man on all his different levels, intermingling his past, his dreams, and his memories, his physical and mental turmoil – all without chronology but giving the impression that man is a universe unto himself. But I couldn't resolve it and so made *La dolce vita* instead. (338)

One gets the feeling that, like Guido's artistic crisis in *8½*, Marcello's mounting spiritual crisis, which links the film's disparate incidents, might well have become Fellini's own had he allowed himself, as does his protagonist, to surrender to the frenzied Roman life around him.

After a three-year silence, Fellini made that picture about a protagonist whose crisis had become his own: *8½*, whose movie director can't settle on a subject for his next film. (Thus, in the seven years after 1956, he made only two features, having made six in his first six years.) The screenplay was written by Fellini and three collaborators, but, quite clearly, the job of these co-scenarists was to help Fellini put on paper some material from his innermost self, a script from which he could make a cinematic journey alone. The result was the film world's best work about an artist's desperation as an artist, a quasi-confessional comedy-cum-drama about the torment of the modern artist who is bursting with talent but can find nothing

on which to expend it. The result was also the revelation that Fellini was the epitome of the romantic, not the realistic, artist. Observation and synthesis were not really his mode: it had to have happened to *him* before he could transmute it into art.

It was around the mid-to-late eighteenth century that the subject matter of art became the maker himself, that the work ceased to be regarded as primarily a reflection of nature, actual or improved. The mirror held up to nature became transparent, as it were, and yielded insights into the mind and heart of the artist himself, into the artist's emotions, intuitions, and imagination. It was the authenticity and sincerity of the pursuit of inner goals that mattered. This is most evident in the aesthetics of romanticism, where the notion of eternal models, a Platonic vision of ideal beauty, which the artist seeks to convey, however imperfectly – on canvas, on the page, in sound, or later on the screen – is replaced by a passionate belief in spiritual freedom, in individual creativity. Instead of holding a mirror up to nature, the painter, the poet, the composer, and, yes, the filmmaker invents; instead of imitating (the doctrine of mimesis), they create not merely the means but also the goals that they pursue. These goals represent the self-expression of the artist's own unique, inner vision, to set aside which in response to the demands of some "external" voice – church, state, public opinion, family friends, arbiters of taste – is an act of betrayal of what alone justifies the artist's existence for those who are in any sense creative.

In sum, romanticism embodied, according to Isaiah Berlin, "a new and restless spirit, seeking violently to burst through old and cramping forms, a nervous preoccupation with perpetually changing inner states of consciousness, a longing for the unbounded and the indefinable, for perpetual movement and change, an effort to return to the forgotten sources of life, a passionate effort at self-assertion both individual and collective, a search after means of expressing an unappeasable yearning for unattainable goals" (92). Such a mode has long survived the formal romantic era, has survived realism and naturalism, has in fact become intensified in our own self-regarding twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Many films exemplify romanticism in the most serious sense – the artist as pilgrim, as both warrior and battlefield – but none more thoroughly than Fellini's *8½*.

Now the self-as-subject process of art-making is a ravenously gluttonous one and can – from time to time or even permanently – exhaust the artist, as it did Fellini. But some artists feel truthful only when they deny synthesis and deal solely with themselves. And through Fellini's career we can see this autobiographical impulse growing. As he relied more and more on his inner travails, less and less on what he had seen and could invent out of it, two things happened: the periods between his films grew longer, and Fellini's style – ornate, extravagant, flamboyant, grotesque, bizarre – became an increasingly prominent part of his work. *8½* is his first complete acceptance of the "new" Fellini, whose subject is himself and whose art lies in the transformation of self-knowledge through cinematic style.

The operative term here is "transformation," since I do not mean to characterise Fellini's use of romantic self-exploration as narcissistic or solipsistic. Indeed, a man who sees himself as a performer, which Fellini does on film as in conversation – who sees that the best of himself is in the theatricalisation of that self – may in our day be closer to authenticity than those who delude themselves into believing that they are not self-conscious. This leads me to the most significant aspect of *8½*, the aspect that individuates Fellini's use of romantic self-exploration. This film about a man's need to make a film ends up as, in effect, the very film that the man is going to make (an opus number like 8½ being the perfect working title for a film whose subject – indeed, it's very making – is in question). The artistic scion that this ambivalence suggests is, of course, Pirandello, especially *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (*Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, 1921). Here, too, there are characters that have appeared to an author and can be dealt with only be being theatricalised, *performed*. Pirandello's people were imagined, Fellini's remembered or relived, but their needs are the same: self-actualisation by any other name.

Juliet of the Spirits (*Giulietta degli spiriti*, 1965) is the second manifestation of this new Fellini, or Fellini, Part Two. Like *8½*, it explores an interior landscape, but this time of a woman, played by Giulietta Masina. This was Fellini's first use of colour – a medium that, as he indicates in several of his interviews, he had previously scorned – and *Juliet of the Spirits* was also the last film of his to win

nearly unanimous critical approval or popular success until *I Remember* (*Amarcord*) in 1973. The reasons are not hard to locate, for, visually dazzling and indirectly autobiographical as *Juliet of the Spirits* may be, it has no coherent plot. Fellini himself agreed when he told Lillian Ross in a *New Yorker* profile that

> the story of this film is nothing. There *is* no story. [...] Movies now have gone past the phase of prose narrative and are coming nearer and nearer to poetry. I am trying to free my work from certain constrictions – a story with a beginning, a development, and ending. It should be more like a poem, with metre and cadence. (64)

A *romantic* poem, one might add. The trouble with such poetry, in Fellini's case, is that the farther removed it became from his own past, his own self, the lesser it became – to the point that, in the manner of opera before the twentieth century, the story is a mere scaffolding for stylistic display or visual fireworks. Certainly this was the problem that afflicted *Satyricon* and *Casanova* (*Il Casanova di Federico Fellini*, 1976), as well as, to a lesser extent, *Orchestra Rehearsal* (*Prova d'orchestra*, 1979), *City of Women* (*La città delle donne*, 1980), *And the Ship Sails On* (*E la nave va*, 1983), and *Ginger and Fred* (*Ginger e Fred*, 1985): all of them films that, to one degree or another, depend for their being entirely on the way they are made, on their look, apart from any depiction of character or accretion of drama (more on which later).

The Romantic and the Decadent

So desperate was Fellini to return to his senses, or his self, during this period that he made two quasi-documentaries in an effort to anchor himself in some kind of reality at the same time as he tried to confront the ghosts of his youth: the circus and clowning in the case of *The Clowns* (*I clowns***,** 1970); the Italian capital in the instance of *Roma* (*Fellini's Roma*, 1972), what the city meant to him as a provincial youth, how it seemed when he arrived, and what he thought of it at middle age. On camera in *The Clowns*, Fellini even thematically

connected these two films by calling the circus, like the city and even like the cinema itself, "an old whore who knows how to give many kinds of pleasure" – and who, like women in general, represented to him not only myth and mystery but also the thirst for knowledge and the search for one's own identity.

The pleasure in *The Clowns*, for one, consists at least in part in the recognition of familiar Fellini hallmarks apart from, say, the appearance of the earth-mother whore in several pictures and the use of silent openings (as in *8½*) as well as abrupt endings (like the freeze frame at the end of *I vitelloni*). First, the lighting – theatrical as ever. Often a character is first seen with his face completely shadowed before he "enters," in a kind of visual summary of Fellini's own theatrical personality (which enjoyed attention at the same time that, as the interviews of Fellini-the-artist make clear, it wanted to guard its privacy). Then there is Fellini's relating of the human face to Daumier-like caricature, as when, after the boy Federico sees his first circus, he perceives how many of his fellow townsmen look like clowns.

And in *The Clowns*, as always, there is Fellini's eye for deep composition – a mind-screen of the imagination, as it were. One example: after some schoolboys departing on a train insult a stationmaster in Fellini's hometown, the pompous little official begins jumping up and down with rage. In a shot down the platform, as the train pulls away, Fellini shows us not only the hopping-mad midget in the foreground but also, in various planes in the background, several fat men doubling up with laughter. The sanctification of memory touches this wonderful shot – wonderful in part because the fat "pots," made to seem fatter by their multiplication and their doubling up, are calling the diminutive "kettle" black – in the sense that it is silent: the sound under the shot is the narrator's voice, accompanied by music.

The search in *The Clowns* and *Roma* for his own identity, as Fellini put it, led to his temporary recovery from our age's gravest disease for artists: the inability to synthesise new subject matter out of experience, the shattering of creative confidence by the immensity of modern consciousness. As other artists have done in other arts, Fellini finally faced matters that had been haunting him all his adult life,

nagging to get into his work, and he gave them a whole film in *Amarcord* – "whole" because his total surrender to the ghosts of his past provided him the best chance to use his supreme (and supremely unique) visual style since the monumental *8½*. *Amarcord* – a word that, in the dialect of Fellini's native Rimini, means "I remember" – is rich with memory, desire for memory, memory of desire; and the director never exhibited better than he does here his startling eye for the quintessentially right face, his maestro's ability to build and develop and finish sequences like music, his firm conviction that life is more lifelike when you touch it up a bit.

In *Amarcord*, Fellini remembered 1930s Rimini so feelingly and so well that, like all memoirs made with good art, we possess it at once. It becomes our past, too. Many of us will recognise how the people in such a town become characters in an integrated drama being performed for one's self when young, and how, for everyone, the figures of the past, pleasant and unpleasant, become rarefied through the years into talismans. In any event, the viewer recognises the fundamental verity of the film: that memory is the only place toward which life heads certainly. And he or she recognises a secondary verity as well: that, in transferring the recesses of recall to the screen with the knowledge that his past was no longer verifiable fact, it was an all-obsessing dream, Fellini established anew the primal commonwealth of cinema and dream, movies and memory, psychic exploration and filmic fabrication. As Fellini himself put the matter in a comment to his long-time assistant Eugene Walker, "Think what a bale of memories and associations we all carry about with us. It's like seeing a dozen films simultaneously!" (Prouse, 341).

That last exclamation should give the reader some idea of Fellini's sense of humour, evident (as one might guess) not only in his interviews but also in his films. Indeed, what distinguishes him from other directors of his eminence is precisely his humour. Bergman proved his short supply of it in his few comedies. Antonioni rarely even attempted to be funny. And Kurosawa had humorous touches but they were almost always grim, not high-spirited. Fellini alone of this group looked on the world's woes, on human travail, with a mischievous eye. Comedy, of course, is by no means automatically synonymous with shallowness, something the filmmaker proved in

8½, which was a cascade of bitter, funny, scintillating, sometimes deeply probing jokes on himself: for the silliness of his situation, of his century, of the plight of art, and for the absurdity of ever having been born.

Interview (*Intervista*, 1987) – Fellini's penultimate picture – has the context of *8½* without its centre. The framework is a visit to Cinecittà, the large film-studio complex outside Rome, by some Japanese television people who have come to interview Fellini as he prepares a picture based on Kafka's 1927 novel *Amerika* (a film that the director had at one time actually contemplated making). *Intervista* was thus yet another pseudo-documentary, like *The Clowns* and *Roma*, which proved how desperate Fellini was to find a film subject, a subject to film other than (literally) himself – how much in fact he had become, in a reversal of the Pirandellian scheme, an author in search of sundry characters. Fellini himself put a bold face on the picture when he described it to as "the ultimate result of my way of making cinema: where there is no longer a story or a script, only the feeling, precisely, of being inside a kind of creativity that refuses every preconceived order" (Cardullo, xvi). Nevertheless, this affectionate divertissement, which characteristically balances illusion and reality, can be seen as a self-homage from an artist who had earned the right.

Even as Fellini appeared as himself in *Intervista*, so too did Anita Ekberg, who had acted years before in *La dolce vita*. And her presence raises the subject of Fellini's view of women, here and elsewhere in his *oeuvre* – particularly in light of his famous comment to Gideon Bachmann in late 1980 that "the cinema [is] a woman," that "going to the cinema is like returning to the womb; you sit there, still and meditative in the darkness, waiting for life to appear on the screen" (7). Fellini's view of women was never as empathetic as that of Antonioni, whose moral protagonists were often females. And even when Fellini used a female protagonist, as in *La strada*, *The Nights of Cabiria*, and *Juliet of the Spirits*, she was a woman who accepted her life as determined by men. His women are figures, often secondary ones, in a man's world: Fellini's own. This quality may in time date him, but it cannot affect his magic as a portrayer of that world.

That magic has something to do with the very nature of Cinecittà, where Fellini shot his films and to which *Intervista* can be viewed as an homage as well. What moves us at Cinecittà, why it is so powerfully mysterious to see a tower of arc lights beam into life against the dark, why the immense space of an empty sound stage seems to echo even when it is silent, is that here occurs an argument with mortality. The mere fact that film can fix the moment implies that time is rushing by even when the moment is being fixed. In other words, film, with all its fakeries, understands death. And Fellini, the most honest and lovable faker who ever made a film, understood life. He understood, as he related in an unpublished 1986 conversation with me, that "I have to re-create life in a studio instead of using actuality, because I have to put myself in it."

So he did, this most naked of all film geniuses at the same time as he was the world's greatest off-screen actor, convincing us throughout his career of his showman's honesty, his genuineness through artifice, in conjuring the past and the present, the fancied, the contrived, and the true, into a glittering show of his own truth – Fellini's, not the "Fellini-esque," which is already something once removed from the real Italian thing. The final film of that career was *The Voice of the Moon* (*La voce della luna*, 1990), which may come closer to being surreal than any of his other works. The initial idea came to him after reading Ermanno Cavazzoni's 1987 novel *Il poema dei lunatici* (*The Poem of the Lunatics*), which is about mad people in Italy. He didn't adapt the novel: it simply stimulated him, particularly since, some thirty years earlier, he had spent five or six weeks with the director of a mental hospital in Tuscany, who lived on the premises.

The Voice of the Moon is not in any sense a clinical study. It's a poetical rhapsody, much more indebted to Giacomo Leopardi (who is quoted) than to Sigmund Freud. The central character, played by Roberto Benigni, is a man in a small town, lately a patient in a mental hospital, who wanders gently through that town, often at night by the light of the moon, and who thinks he hears voices from a well. But principal among his adventures are his encounters with the noise and mess of modern life – the intrusions of the media, a tawdry beauty contest – which drown out the whisperings of the soul heard by the only people still sane enough to hear them: the mad and the simple.

The Benigni character's madness chiefly manifests itself in his quest for purity and order. (In *8½* the vision in white, played by Claudia Cardinale, tells the protagonist that she has come into his life to bring purity and order.) That quest never ends, of course, and the Benigni character never quite understands the voices from the well, either. At the end the moon speaks to him, with the voice of a woman in his town whom he has worshiped from afar. She bids him to stop trying to understand those voices, to be grateful that at least he can hear them. In the middle of her remarks, she begs to be excused—a break for a commercial, she says.

Unique though it is in theme, *The Voice of the Moon* is nonetheless typical of Fellini – in its heterodoxy, its deployment of the opposite of firm structure. Rather than being programmatic narrative or drama, this film is investigation – of milieu, mood, character. Think of some of the other films Fellini made in such a free-hand manner: *Amarcord*, *The Clowns*, *Roma*, *Intervista*. True, some of his clearly structured films, *La dolce vita* and *8½*, share that freehand style to a degree as Fellini fulfils their designs; but in *The Voice of the Mo*on and elsewhere in his *oeuvre*, the style is almost the *raison d'être*. The odd aspect of these style-centred films is that, as I've suggested, in full career perspective, they seem inventions mothered by necessity.

Here is another, form-related speculation, related to my initial "romantic" speculation, as to why Fellini made these free-hand films. He had cut loose from the people among whom he grew up in Rimini, had moved from the imperatives of sheer survival to the luxury of Roman melancholy and despair. After his first two films in this contemplative vein, *La dolce vita* and *8½*, he had great difficulty – like Guido in the latter picture – in synthesising narrative out of his new social and spiritual environment. Yet he was brimming with talents that he had to use. A post-Guido Guido, he more or less gave up on constructing conventional narratives or dramas and turned to the exploration of his talents in themselves, employing them on memory, not on new experience. His new experience was not as fertile for him as was the past. The past is the real site of *Amarcord* and *The Clowns*, of *Intervista* and of *And the Ship Sails On*. A yearning for the lost orderliness of the past is the dominant key of *The Voice of the Moon*.

Out of these necessities and pressures came the new Fellini form, best described by a literary term – the personal essay. Henry Ward Beecher said that doubtless the Lord could have invented a better fruit than the strawberry but doubtless also he never did (Kains, 180). We might say, somewhat lower down the scale, that doubtless Fellini could have commissioned scripts, from others, of greater cogency but doubtless also he never did. He preferred now to make, or could do nothing but make, films out of his remembrance and his talents themselves. Indeed, the genuine *raison d'être* of these free-form pictures could be said to be in the opportunities they provided for Fellini. The reason that certain operas exist is that certain singers existed who could sing them. The prime reason for these films is that Fellini is a prodigious film virtuoso. In *La dolce vita*, for inceptive instance, there is a strong sense of theme used as opportunity rather than as concern. This sense was strengthened in his section of the anthology picture *Boccaccio '70* ("Le tentazioni del Dottor Antonio" ["The Temptations of Doctor Antonio"], 1962). It flowers in *8½*.

More than *8½*

I offer the above observation in appraisal, not derogation. Virtuosity has an aesthetic and value of its own, whether it is coloratura singing or fantastic pirouettes or *trompe-l'oeil* painting, and when it is as overwhelming as Fellini's virtuosity, one can be moved by it very nearly as much as by art that "says" something. In fact, I don't think that *8½* "says" very much, but it is breath-taking to watch. One doesn't come away from it as from, say, the best Bergman or Renoir – with a continuing sense of immanent experience; one has to think *back* to it and remember the effect. But that is easy, for the experience is unforgettable. Let me conclude the first portion of this essay by quoting Guido's line from *8½* that he has nothing to say, but he is going to say it anyway. So too did Fellini during the second half of his career. In the process he nonetheless made it a pleasure, not a lesson, to be present at his creations.

One of those creations, of course, was *8½*, which I'd now like to discuss in some detail. The title itself is a declaration. While the picture was in production, Fellini gave it the working tag *8½* merely

as an opus number, since his previous output of features (six) and shorts (three "half" segments to anthology films) totalled seven-and-a-half and he couldn't think of a title. To put it another way, the dilemma about the title fits the movie perfectly. Fellini himself said that *8½* is not autobiographical, at least no more than any of his films; that, although many of the details come from his past, it was only shortly before the start of shooting that he decided to make Guido a director. (First he had been "just anyone," then a screenwriter.) But, from the title-trouble on, it takes a considerable stretch to believe that this film about a director who cannot resolve his ideas for a film was made by a director who was teeming with ideas and just happened to choose this one. In fact, Fellini's slow progress toward making his hero a director, thus in at least some degree facing his own life, has, as we shall see, a certain parallel with the internals of *8½* – and hence makes the picture even more autobiographical.

The protagonist, Guido Anselmi (Marcello Mastroianni), is a director in his forties who has already done some pre-production work on his next film but doesn't have anything like a final script and can't clarify his ideas. He is at a luxurious spa, both resting and working. (Fellini chose the setting of *8½* while at a spa called Chinciano.) With Guido are some of his production crew, some of his associates, and various actors who are engaged for the film or want to be, because at least part of the still-inchoate picture is to be shot nearby. With him also is his writer, a fair sample of the intellectual *manqué* who clings to much European filmmaking as both a suppliant and a hair-shirt. Not far from the spa a huge steel tower, a sort of spaceship launching-pad, has been erected for use in the movie (about the escape to outer space by the survivors of World War III) – one of the few matters that, presumably, Guido is sure about.

His mistress comes to stay at another hotel in the resort town; his wife (Anouk Aimée) also comes to stay with him and is not deceived about the mistress. (One of the best moments is Guido's lying about the mistress to his wife with the face of truth and the wife's knowledge of this and her disgust – principally that her husband can sound so truthful when he lies; and, further, *his* knowledge of *her* knowledge.) His producer arrives to push Guido, after months of vacillation, to resolve the issue of the script and, partly on the basis of

screen tests previously made, to settle the casting. Paralysed by apathy and ennui, the director feels the pressure growing. At the last minute, he decides to give up trying to invent a story and to make a film about his life – out of the very elements we have been witnessing, about all the facts of his present as well as his past.

This is the surface of *8½*. But the film is carried forward in surface *and* in depth, in a tapestry of the real and the non-real (if we use real to mean the present waking moment). Three kinds of non-reality weave around and intersect the bare outline above: Guido's dreams, his daydreams, and his memories. The film is thus thickly laced with fantasy – with recollection, projection, and wish-fulfilment. Guido spends about as much time out of present reality as in it. The three currents of non-reality, controlled and uncontrollable, course around and through the dilemmas of his day, help to explain them, and help to fuse his resolution, desperate yet inspired, at the end. We see enough of Guido's past to understand some of his fixations and aversions; we see enough of his dreams to understand his fears and desires; we see enough of his daydreams to understand why he is an artist and what the solaces, as well as the limits, of his art are.

On its most accessible level, then – the biographical one – *8½* is the story of Guido, a motion-picture director not unlike Fellini himself, who has lost his source of inspiration both in his art and in his life. He invariably turns inward to examine the generative events of his personal development – his boyhood, the Church, his relationship with his parents, and the women of his life – as well as the dreams, nightmares, or visions accompanying each. It is only when Guido symbolically returns to the womb at the end of the film by crawling under the table at a gigantic press conference, where he squeezes a revolver to his temple, that he can be reborn. Declaring "Clean […] disinfect," Guido pulls the trigger. Like an artistic phoenix, he is subsequently reborn in his own creative ashes and rises to receive the inspiration that will enable him to create an entirely new kind of film from the experiences of the old.

The most striking aspect of *8½*, which is not true of every film, not even of every fine film, is the very way it looks. The richness of almost every frame comes from three factors: first, of course, Fellini's eye; second and third, the articulation of his intentions by the

camerawork and by the design of the settings, together with the costumes. The cinematographer was Gianni Di Venanzo (who died in 1966 at the age of 46), whose work on such pictures as Antonioni's *The Night* (*La note,* 1961) and *Eclipse* (*L'eclisse,* 1962) and Francesco Rosi's *The Moment of Truth* (*Il momento della verità*, 1965) helped to make the first decades after World War II in Italy a high point in cinema history. Di Venanzo's sensitive gradations of black and white here seem more colourful than many movies in colour, at the same time that the film revels in its black-and-white quality. Indeed, in terms of visual execution and ingenuity of image, I cannot remember a more brilliant picture than *8½*.

The sets and costumes, even the coiffures, were by Piero Gherardi, who had joined Fellini on *The Nights of Cabiria* and who had, on *La dolce vita*, helped transform his work from displaying the look of life to displaying the look of life-as-theatre. Women's dresses and hats in particular become a way of extending their characters, of embodying men's fantasies about them. But everything that Gherardi touches in *8½*, from a railroad station to a concrete garden seat in which a short-legged monk sits and swings his feet, creates a world that, in pure romantic process, has been seized, fondled, and given back to us in revised, personal form. Indeed, no one who has seen *8½* could ever mistake one minute of it – hardly one frame – for any other film.

Less immediately marked than the visual quality, yet pervasive, is the music by Nino Rota, who did the scores for all Fellini films until his own death in 1979. (Besides his movie work, which included the music for such pictures as Visconti's *Rocco and His Brothers* [*Rocco e i suoi fratelli*, 1960], Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* [1968], and Coppola's *Godfather, I & II* [1972, 1974], Rota was the head of the conservatory Liceo Musicalo in Bari for almost thirty years.) "Score" is rather a grand term for what amounts to a few songs, including a miniature circus march, that are played and replayed and quoted, but they are lovely and utterly inseparable from the film – partly because they help to make the whole cohesive. (See Van Order's *Listening to Fellini* [2009], in which he breaks down *8½* into a series of sequences and details their musical content – how it reflects the very nature of the film's conflict between self and other – at the same time as he describes the picture's action.) It's impossible to think of *8½*, then,

without thinking of Rota's music. We hear a musical wizard here at the height of his wizardry, and it has something of the effect, given in contemporary reports, of Liszt playing Liszt.

As for the acting, Marcello Mastroianni, wearing the big black hat, dark suit, and white shirt that Fellini customarily wore, is at his best in playing the director, which means in the upper echelon of the history of film acting. He invests the role with presence and portent. *Divorce Italian Style* (*Divorzio all'italiana*, 1961; dir. Pietro Germi) clarified to many what was apparent years ago to some: that Mastroianni is a skilful comedian. Here he interweaves that skill with his ability to touch the commonplaces of life with grave poetry. He encompasses Guido completely, to the last stab of anguish, the last hope for perfection, the last twinge of male silliness and guilt. Mastroianni first appeared as a kind of stand-in for Fellini in *La dolce vita*; he went on to perform, not only in *8½*, but also in Fellini's *City of Women*, *Ginger and Fred*, and *Intervista*.

Anouk Aimée as the wife and Sandra Milo as the mistress give complexity, with great ease, to roles that might have tended toward the monochromatic: the serious-silly, pneumatic girlfriend and the wronged yet forbearing spouse. But the hallmark of Fellini's casting is the way in which he fills even the smallest parts. (Remember that he had been a cartoonist. And that he named Guido's script collaborator after the nineteenth-century French caricaturist Honoré Daumier.) The briefest extra bit is played by a person with a face that is not only appropriate but that comments on its own appropriateness. For a special epicene (as opposed to purely homosexual) quality, he even has some of the priests in Guido's school memories played by older women.

Fellini had a certain extra freedom in his casting because, for him, film acting is divisible into body and voice; many of the parts, in the Italian *8½*, are therefore dubbed by other actors. What this means, in Fellini's unique case, is that he casts twice, perfectly. Those who know Anouk Aimée from her French films would nevertheless not know that she is dubbed here. Even those who, like me, object to dubbing on principle, couldn't object to Aimée's dubbing because they couldn't tell that it had been done by someone else.

8½ in Action

The film opens more or less silently. Guido is in his car alone, windows closed, stalled in a traffic jam in a Roman vehicular tunnel. Then we notice that the people in the surrounding cars, in a neighbouring bus, are also silent, and that they are all staring at him with hostile curiosity. In addition, we see, among other things, Guido's mistress (as yet, unknown to us) being fondled by a stranger. The sounds of breathing and a beating heart, which are all that we hear, establish that this is a dream. Guido begins to stifle in the confining car, cannot see through the breath-beclouded windshield or open the windows, and paws at the glass – as we hear the squeal of his fingers on that glass. He is trapped, suffocating, in a precise objectification of his condition: that his blockage merges professional and sexual fright is reflected by the image of a fancy automobile immobilised in a tunnel; that the woman being fondled by another man is Guido's mistress establishes his fear of losing potency.

Suddenly he floats up through the inexplicably opened sunroof of the car and is flying high in the air. He is over a beach, like a balloon, and we are with him – looking down a long rope tied to his leg, in something of the perspective of Dalí's *Crucifixion* (1954). Two men, who (as we later learn) are associated with Guido's film, grab the rope and pull him down. As he descends, he wakes up – in his bed at the spa hotel. The spa's doctor is giving him a check-up and makes recommendations about the waters he should drink and the mineral baths he should take. As the consultation proceeds, Guido's script collaborator, Daumier (played by the French film critic Jean Rougeul), sits at the side and makes sour comments about the material that the director has given him to read.

Guido then goes into a huge bathroom, shocking us with white when he switches on the neon lights against the chequered tiles. As he looks unenthusiastically at his tired face in the mirror, Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" (from *Die Walküre* [1870]) comes incongruously to our ears, and with no caesura the camera moves across the huge, real-fantastic gardens of the spa hotel. (An orchestra on the garden bandstand is playing the Wagner piece; soon it switches to Rossini's "Barber of Seville" [1813]) The camera is now – as it is

only rarely in the film – purely subjective; it *is* Guido. Flamboyantly dressed people wave to it as it passes, a nun giggles embarrassedly at it and turns aside. (Fellini loved to tease the clergy, as he does here and in other films of his.)

Next we see long lines of hotel guests waiting in the sun with parasols and umbrellas, advancing toward a bar at which mineral water is dispensed in mugs, moving slowly as with a bridesmaid's hesitation step, almost in time to the music. The camera now observes Guido joining the line. While he is waiting, he suddenly sees a vision, evidently a familiar vision, on the hill behind the mineral springs: a lovely girl (Cardinale) in flowing white, floating down the hillside toward him. Soon she is behind the bar and extends to him a mug of water – recurrently throughout *8½*, this vision offers Guido comfort, tenderness, order – and he stares, happily bemused. A sharp voice jars him, and the film cuts to the face of a real attendant, a scrawny, sweating woman holding out a mug impatiently. And, to underscore Guido's return to reality, his collaborator, Daumier, is waiting with more acerbic comments about his script ideas.

This much of the opening I have followed sequentially, but with dozens of exquisite details omitted, to suggest the texture of the film. It begins in a dream, then glides into waking, then into a vision, then back to reality, as seamlessly as well-modulated music. Even in reality there is a suggestion of dream: when Guido is going to meet his producer in the hotel lobby, for example, his descent in an elevator is staged to recall the opening dream sequence; as it passes each floor, the elevator makes a sound like that of Guido's heartbeat, and the other inhabitants of the car (a cardinal and some assistants) peer at Guido like the people in the tunnel. Arcs of movement like this, the placement of dark and glare throughout, the music of Wagner and Rossini—all combine to give *8½* a pleasurably controlled swirl of excitement, as each moment flows organically out of the last moment into the next. And, again, this much of the film sets its location for us: it takes place, subjectively, in Guido. Guido's centre of self – frightened, chafed, greedy, loving, idealistic, defensive – is where the picture flows, springing from every aspect of his consciousness.

Two pressures are constant on that self. First, there is the impending film to be made; everywhere Guido turns in the real world

he is harried – by producer, actors, assistants. Second, there is increasing knowledge of himself; he is undergoing a kind of fortyish climacteric that is exposing some truth about his sexual behaviour, his guilt, his ultra-secret cache of glee about his guilt. (At the spa he meets an unwittingly minatory figure: a friend somewhat older than himself who has left his wife for a woman young enough to be his daughter, and who has a glib, even tortuous rationale for his actions. There are other such middle-aged figures in *8½*: Conocchia, the production assistant; Cesarino, the production supervisor; the aging actress who tries to get Guido to pad her role so that she can exploit her waning sex appeal.) And Guido knows that the second pressure, the burden of his past that grows heavier as the interconnections become clearer, is hindering him from dealing with the first pressure, his film. These two forces keep battering at him, alternately and simultaneously, and there is no refuge – except with the girl in white, either in sleep or memory or daydream.

The film's telling imaginative touches nonetheless keep tumbling out, one after another. When his writer quotes one too many pearls of wisdom, the director wearily lifts a finger in command, two bravoes suddenly appear, slip a black hood over the writer's head, and hang him on the spot. When certain nonsense syllables (the magic words "asa nisi masa," a code for *anima*, Italian for soul or spirit) remind Guido of his childhood, we go back to his family's house – as spacious and safe as it seemed to him then – where he and his cousins are treading grapes in a tub, then are washed and carried off to bed in clean sheets in their nurses' arms. There is no point in a catalogue; the effects are many and marvellous. The dreams do not fade out and in: they are part of the fabric. If it takes a moment to decide whether what is happening is dream or not, the confusion is seemingly part of the design. From this coursing and eddying film, I now arbitrarily pluck some sequences to illustrate thematic development.

Soon after his mistress arrives in the resort town and is settled in her hotel, Guido and the fleshly, compliant woman go to bed together. He asks her to play a game with him, to act like a whore, and she lets him paint fierce eyebrows on her. Later he is sleeping next to the woman, who is calmly reading and eating a peach, when we see a well-dressed, elderly lady wiping a wall of the room. This woman, we

discover, is Guido's mother, and the wall becomes the marble wall of the mausoleum where his father is buried. The dead father, a well-dressed old gentleman, appears and gently complains that his vault is too small. Then the film producer and an associate come walking toward us through the cemetery, and the father asks them how his son is doing, very much as a parent might ask his child's teachers. Guido, in fact, is now wearing an adult version of what we learn is his schoolboy uniform. The film duo moves off, and Guido helps his father lower himself into an open grave. His mother suddenly kisses Guido's cheek; subsequently, with incongruous passion, she kisses him full on the mouth. Startled, he pulls his head away – and it is not his mother he is kissing but a beautiful younger woman who, as we once again learn later, is his wife, wearing the mourning hat-and-veil that his mother had on. The dream returns to reality with Guido coming down the corridor of his hotel toward his room, humming the Rossini of the bandstand and wiggling his foot in a little dance.

Guido's sexual encounter with his mistress has summoned up a dream of guilt: toward parental injunction, toward religion as exemplified in his parochial schooling, toward the pressures of his directing job and the need he still feels to please his father. At a deeper discomfiting level, the dream has stirred dark, unconscious links in Guido between mistress and mother, mother and wife. Diagnosis is not Fellini's aim, however: he is not a clinician. He is concerned with the delineation in art of the currents flooding through his protagonist, and he does it with a poetry that is so easy as almost to be matter-of-fact. A particularly neat point is that the return to reality shows how ineffective the dream of guilt has been: Guido comes down the hall in a little dance of triumph. (Every dream or fantasy in *8½* always ends at an advanced point; it never returns, like a mere excursion, to the point at which it began.)

Somewhat later Guido is in the garden of his hotel, speaking with a cardinal who is also staying there, when his eyes are distracted by the heavy legs of a woman coming down that little hill behind the springs. (Again we see the conjunction of religion and sex – with Guido, the one always brings thoughts of the other.) Those heavy legs remind him of other heavy legs. Without dissolve, simply continuing, the film is back in memory with the schoolboy Guido, about twelve or so, in

his uniform, going with classmates to a lonely beach and a concrete hut. The boys call out "Saraghina!" and out comes a large, unkempt, wild-looking whore with fierce, painted eyebrows. The boys seat themselves on the ground, throw coins at her, and the fat lady dances for them suggestively. They are clapping hands in wicked ecstasy when some priests arrive from their school. Guido flees down the beach (a moment filmed in speeded-up, silent-comedy style) but is caught and pinned down by two of the priests; and we recall Guido's opening dream in which two men pulled him down to a beach from his soaring escape.

When the boy is disciplined back at the school, his mother is summoned to the meeting, but she is the grey-haired woman of the tomb sequence, much too old to be the mother of this boy. (We have already seen Guido's young mother in an intervening recollection of very early childhood.) The whole Saraghina sequence gives the antecedents for his liking of plump women and painted faces, with further evidence as to why the present-day Guido always intertwines thoughts of sex and the Church; but the Guido of the present is evidently interfering with his memory of the discipline scene. He puts his *older* mother in it – since this is a recollection he can control, not a dream – possibly to suppress any buried sexual connection in his mind, distasteful to him, between his feelings for his lovely, buxom young mother and his impulse toward La Saraghina.

If it can be said that one sequence in the rich fabric of *8½* reveals most about Fellini's view of the relation between art and life, it is the one near the end in a film theatre at the resort town. The producer is running some screen tests that have already been shot and insists that Guido make up his mind about casting. In the cavernous theatre are the producer, Guido, and his sleek, chic wife – who continues to be bitter because she arrived to find the mistress nearby and her husband pretending that he doesn't even know the other woman. A few associates and friends are present, too. Guido is still evading decisions because he doesn't yet know what the film is – is increasingly roiled by his awareness that he doesn't know who *he* is. The tests are run, and we discover through them that Guido has already considered the use of materials from his own life in his film.

These tests are of actors playing some of the "real" people we have already met. No matter how familiar one is with *8½*, it is always a considerable shock to see the mistress, for instance, appear on the screen of that theatre in her ermine-trimmed outfit, then turn around and show us a similar but different face, or a Saraghina equally spherical and in the same dirty clothes yet a different woman. The resolution of our peculiar discomfort about this doesn't come until the end of the film when we realise (when Guido realises) what his creative unconscious has been working toward. And this dislocation of reality-levels is heightened when the girl in white appears – really appears – in that theatre. It turns out that she is an actress whom Guido knows and who has come here because he had said he wanted her in his film. He then uses the fact of her arrival as an excuse to go off with her without making the casting decisions he is still unable to make. As they drive away, it is clear that the girl is amiable enough but certainly not the Princess of Tranquillity into which his fantasy had transformed her.

The next day the producer orders the press conference, at the steel tower, where Guido must announce his plans. Again the film director fantasises – escaping decision-making by imagining that he commits suicide. When I first saw *8½* years ago, I thought that the fake suicide and the ending that follows it were palliative, that real suicide – followed by the resolved, happy ending that in reality is itself a fantasy – would have been the logical ending for this artist who thought himself creatively bankrupt. I've seen the film at least a dozen times since then and have seen how right the ending is as filmed. Guido's failure to concoct a plot for a picture is not bankruptcy, not for him, not for this moment in his life. He must go on, to realise in his conscious mind what his unconscious has been trying to tell him: that *he* is the plot. The two pressures that have been on him throughout – the need to make a film and the agony of middle-aged self-realisation – flow together to form the conclusion. *8½* thus becomes, as previously noted, the film of *8½* being made; the film that Guido is ultimately inspired to make, or *has* made, is, in fact, the film that we have been watching for 138 minutes.

Final Credits

The final sequence initiates an even more abstract level of meaning that becomes a commentary on the aesthetic of Italian film itself. The entire sequence unfolds before the enormous monolithic structure of the steel tower-cum-launching pad. In front of this structure, a large crowd eventually mills about and the whole image becomes reflective of similar scenes in the great silent epics *Where Are You Going?* (*Quo Vadis,* 1912; dir. Enrico Guazzoni) and *Cabiria* (1913, dir. Giovanni Pastrone), which represent Italy's first golden era of cinema. During this period, film manifested itself through the monumental, densely populated, and often frenzied form of such epics, as well as in the grim, suffering people and dirty streets of such forerunners of Italian neorealism as *Lost in the Dark* (*Sperduti nel buio,* 1914; dir. Nino Martoglio), *Assunta Spina* (1915, dir. Gustavo Serena), and *Ashes* (*Cenere,* 1916; dir. Febo Mari). This dichotomy is repeated in *8½* in the artistic struggle Guido has with his producer, who wants him to make an epic, and with himself in his expressed desire to make a picture that tells the unvarnished truth. Fellini resolves this struggle by merging and internalising both ideas in *8½* to create an epic of the psyche that adequately encompasses gritty realism in the scenes of Guido's childhood.

On this broad aesthetic level, *8½* is the journey of Italian cinema backward to re-establish its roots in the silent period and, forward, to regain the inspiration to create a new direction for films of the future. What, on a biographical level, had been a re-examination of Guido's childhood, becomes, at this extreme, a history of Italian cinema as it returns through neorealism and "white telephone" movies (the term applied to trivial romantic comedies set in blatantly artificial studio surroundings symbolised by the ever-present white telephone) to its beginnings, its golden era when experimental approaches to film form were daring and innovative. Fellini is thus clearing the stage for a new kind of film represented by *8½* and its successor, *Juliet of the Spirits*: an intertwining of reality and spectacle that is at the same time an internal projection of the mind, imagination, and emotion of its

director, and which liberated filmmakers everywhere in the 1960s from the conventions of time, place, and mode of experience that had prevailed in the cinema for decades.

To get back to the ending of the *8½* itself, as workers are dismantling the huge steel tower-cum-launching pad after the press conference, Guido sits in his car with his screenwriter, Daumier. The latter, in his unbearably logical way, tells Guido that he is right not to make a film, that artists must stop creating when they have nothing to say – indeed, that the imperative for all artists these days is silence. Outside the car appears a man from a mind-reading act who, in a previous scene, had provided Guido with a link to his past. The appearance of that man, together with Daumier's pronunciation of the word "silence," is Guido's command at last to himself. The explosion occurs in him: an interior voice drowns out the film critic and bids the director to express himself in continued presentations, even though he has no thesis to promulgate and can't even resolve his own personal confusion. The way now clear, Guido's creative powers surge back and he is ready to begin the film that is *8½*. Put another way, the end of the film is also its beginning.

As sunset begins to darken the great open field and as the circus march is heard, the last fantasy is enacted, a kind of pure vision that states Guido's resolution and that prophesies the film he will make. The curtains on what remains of the steel tower part, and down the steps of the abandoned movie set comes the large crowd of people, all the persons of his past and present whom we have met, all talking to one another, all dressed in white – as if sanctified now by his acceptance of them, his realisation of what he must do. Guido, whom we have seen as a ringmaster in a previous fantasy sequence, now is the ringmaster of his life as he asks all these people to parade around a circus ring. Then he takes his wife's hand – she gives it willingly – and they join the circle.

Film, *8½* in this way implies, is only honest when it is non-dramatic and anti-rhetorical: that is to say, when it seems neither to have interfered with the flow of life nor to have reduced it to statements or "messages." Hence Fellini presents an ending that is no conclusion but rather a literal parade of the human elements that have comprised Guido's life. What we are witnessing, then, is the

enactment of a vision that holds that art resembles a chemical rather than an intellectual solution, with life's components remaining in suspension. Guido himself has been seeking freedom not only from the limitations of duty and monogamy but also from the neatness of form that would falsify the inchoate grandeur of content. The last sequence announces that neither Guido nor Fellini will ever escape such stresses, except through the art of film, whose power of inclusion is greater than any yet devised.

As light gradually diminishes and night falls, the accompanying orchestra is the last to walk off-screen and we are left only with the figures of Guido as a little schoolboy, in a white version of his uniform, and four clown-musicians. The lights and the music then fade further to the boy alone in a spotlight, playing a flute. At last that light and the piping fade, too, as the boy finally leaves and darkness takes over. The show – the showing, really – itself is over, the screen has gone to black; yet the light of art, of Fellini's art, persists.

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Credits: *8½* (1963)

Director: Federico Fellini
Screenplay: Federico Fellini, Ennio Flaiano, Tullio Pinelli, Brunello Rondi
Cinematographer: Gianni Di Venanzo
Editor: Leo Cattozzo
Music: Nino Rota
Production Designer: Piero Gherardi
Costume Designer: Piero Gherardi
Running time: 138 minutes
Format: 35mm, in black and white
Cast: Marcello Mastroianni (Guido Anselmi, a film director)
Anouk Aimée (Luisa Anselmi, Guido's wife)
Elisabetta Catalano (Matilde, Luisa's sister)
Mark Herron (Luisa's suitor)
Rossella Falk (Rossella, Luisa's best friend and Guido's confidante)
Francesco Rigamonti (a friend of Luisa)
Sandra Milo (Carla, Guido's mistress)
Claudia Cardinale (Claudia, a movie star Guido casts as his Ideal Woman)
Mino Doro (Claudia's agent)
Mario Tarchetti (Claudia's press representative)
Simonetta Simeoni (Young girl)

Guido Alberti (Pace, a film producer)
Mario Conocchia (Mario Conocchia, Guido's production assistant)
Annie Gorassini (the film producer's girlfriend)
Bruno Agostini (Bruno Agostini, the production director)
Cesarino Miceli Picardi (Cesarino, the production supervisor)
Jean Rougeul (Carini Daumier, a film critic)
Mario Pisu (Mario Mezzabotta, Guido's friend)
Barbara Steele (Gloria Morin, Mezzabotta's new young girlfriend)
Madeleine LeBeau (Madeleine, a French actress)
Neil Robinson (the French actress' agent)
Caterina Boratto (mysterious lady in the hotel)
Eddra Gale (La Saraghina, a prostitute)
Eugene Walter (American journalist)
Gilda Dahlberg (the American journalist's wife)
Mary Indovino (Maya, the clairvoyant)
Ian Dallas (Maurice, Maya's assistant)
Edy Vessel (mannequin)
Yvonne Casadei (Jacqueline Bonbon)
Giuditta Rissone (Guido's mother)
Annibale Ninchi (Guido's father)
Marco Gemini (Guido as a boy)
Nadia Sanders (Nadine)
Georgia Simmons (Guido's grandmother)
Maria Raimondi (one of Guido's aunts),
Marisa Colomber (another of Guido's aunts)
Tito Masini (the Cardinal)
Frazier Rippy (lay secretary)
Hazel Rogers (Negress)
Giulio Paradisi, Mathilda Calnan, Giulio Calì, Franco Caracciolo, Elisabetta Cini, Dina De Santis, Eva Gioia, Riccardo Guglielmi, John Karlsen, Palma Mangini, John Stacy, Maria Tedeschi, Roberta Valli

Filmography: Key Self-Reflexive or Metacinematic Films

Sherlock, Jr. (1924), directed by Buster Keaton
Man with a Movie Camera (1929), directed by Dziga Vertov
Hellzapoppin' (1941), directed by H.C. Potter
Chronicle of a Summer (1961), directed by Jean Rouch
8½ (1963), directed by Federico Fellini
Contempt (1963), directed by Jean-Luc Godard

Persona (1966), directed by Ingmar Bergman
I Am Curious, Yellow (1967), directed by Vilgot Sjöman
I Am Curious, Blue (1968), directed by Vilgot Sjöman
Day for Night (1973), directed by François Truffaut
Blazing Saddles (1974), directed by Mel Brooks
The French Lieutenant's Woman (1981), directed by Karl Reisz
The Purple Rose of Cairo (1985), directed by Woody Allen
The Player (1992), directed by Robert Altman
Bob Roberts (1992), directed by Tim Robbins
Benny's Video (1992), directed by Michael Haneke
Man Bites Dog (1992), directed by Rémy Belvaux, André Bonzel, & Benoît Poelvoorde
Dear Diary (1993), directed by Nanni Moretti
Living in Oblivion (1995), directed by Tom DiCillo
Irma Vep (1996), directed by Olivier Assayas
Pleasantville (1998), directed by Gary Ross
The Truman Show (1998), directed by Peter Weir
Adaptation (2002), directed by Spike Jonze
A Cock and Bull Story (2006), directed by Michael Winterbottom
Synecdoche, New York (2008), directed by Charlie Kaufman
Be Kind Rewind (2008), directed by Michel Gondry
Tropic Thunder (2008), directed by Ben Stiller
Nine (2009), directed by Rob Marshall
Birdman (2014), directed by Alejandro G. Iñárritu
Taxi Tehran (2015), directed by Jafar Panahi