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For years now, Fellini has been fast becoming a sort of limitless, structureless commodity, like salami or pepperoni, that can be sliced into at any point, yielding pretty much the same general consistency and flavor. The limits of a Fellini film thus often become the limits of his appetites and/ or of mine, which seldom correspond precisely. I saw *City of Women* at a press show on March 5, over three weeks before I was asked to write about it; some vivid fragments still rattle in my memory, but much of the rest is dry-ice fog, as no doubt was the case on the 6th.

If *City of Women* seems to sprawl all over the place as limply as it does, this may partially be because, despite the legally demonstrable presence of Marcello Mastroianni in the central part, the film has no central character. It is like *Casanova* without Donald Sutherland, or *8½* without Mastroianni, or *Juliet of the Spirits* with or without Giuletta Masina.

Nor can it claim a subject, exactly. It has, perhaps, a little more to do with feminism than *Kagemusha* has to do with chicken farming, but not so much that you couldn't miss it if you blinked twice.

Anchorless and adrift, *City of Women* is a floating toy store that can easily be plundered by everyone to some extent; any customer can more or less count on walking away with a few indelible, irresponsible images, none of which has a particularly complex or interesting relation to any of the others. Take the best 15 minutes, combine them with the best 15 of *Altered States*, quadruple the results, and you might wind up with something that could blow most other current releases out of sight and mind. Unfortunately, the same hot air that pumps up these privileged moments of poetry and imagination can just as easily blow them away, too.