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A  
Macmillan Films Inc.  
**FILM STUDY EXTRACT**



PACIFIC FILM ARCHIVE  
2625 DURANT AVENUE  
BERKELEY, CA 94720

8½

**THE STEAMBATH SEQUENCE**

**NOTES AND ANALYSIS**



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Macmillan Films Inc.  
**FILM STUDY EXTRACT**

8½  
(Italy, 1963)

**THE STEAMBATH SEQUENCE**  
9 min.

**NOTES AND ANALYSIS**  
by Marilyn Fabe

**CREDITS**

Director .....Federico Fellini  
Screenplay .....Federico Fellini, Ennio Flaiano,  
Tullio Pinelli, Brunello Rondi  
Photography .....Gianni di Venanzo  
Music .....Nino Rota  
Editing .....Leo Catozzo

**CAST**

Guido Anselmi .....Marcello Mastroianni  
Luisa Anselmi .....Anouk Aimée  
Unknown Woman .....Caterina Boratto  
Mario Mezzabotta .....Mario Pisu  
Pace, the Producer .....Guido Alberti  
Connochia .....Mario Conocchia  
Daumier .....Jean Rougeul  
The Cardinal .....Tito Masini

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## 8½: PLOT OUTLINES AND THEMES

### Plot Synopsis

8½ concerns a world famous film director, Guido Anselmi (Marcello Mastroianni), who, in the midst of making a film, loses his inspiration and begins to fear he will never complete the project. The crisis in his career, which occurs as he enters middle age, makes him question his talent as a filmmaker and brings to the surface conflicts in his personal life. He has been advised to visit a fashionable spa to relax and, he hopes, to overcome his malaise. But Guido's troubles — in the form of his producer, co-writer, production crew, cast members and journalists — follow him to the spa. Besieged by people who continually question him about his film, he finds little relaxation. While his collaborator on the script mercilessly criticizes his ideas, his producer becomes increasingly insistent that the film get underway. The casting director demands that Guido choose his actors, but the director finds it torturously difficult to make any decisions.

Guido, moreover, is overwhelmed by emotional demands made upon him. A French actress, already selected for a role, has become an irritating burden, desperately seeking the director's attention and support. Connochia, an elderly man who heads the production staff, not realizing that Guido himself is filled with uncertainty about the film and has no orders to give him, tearfully accuses Guido of casting him aside because he, Connochia, is too old. In a perverse moment, Guido invites his wife to join him at the spa even though his mistress is already there, adding to his misery. This precipitates a quarrel which threatens his marriage. His personal and professional life seem headed for disaster.

Throughout 8½ the linear development of the plot is interrupted by Guido's dreams, visions, fantasies, daydreams and childhood memories, all of which are evoked by his present crisis and, at the same time, are an integral part of the film he is trying to create. We gradually come to understand that the subject of Guido's film, which was originally to have been a science fiction spectacular (the last remnant of which is a gigantic spaceship tower by the sea), is Guido himself, a filmmaker in a state of



crisis. His dreams, which are really nightmares, reflect his anxiety; his visions, always of a beautiful girl in white, hold out an illusory promise of salvation and release from his mental stagnation; his childhood memories enable him to relive youthful experiences which have laid the foundation for his present conflicts; and his daydreams explore his deepest desires — which reality inevitably thwarts. As an example of the last, he imagines his wife and mistress amiably meeting, complimenting one another, and dancing off together in perfect harmony. This daydream becomes a full blown fantasy production in which he imagines himself the head of a harem comprised of all the women he has ever desired.

But no amount of fantasizing can stave off a disastrous resolution to his real life problems. His producer arranges a press conference to force him to say something definite about the film. Poor Guido, unable to answer the hostile questions of the press and threatened with ruin by his producer if he doesn't, crawls under the table and shoots himself.

This dire action turns out to be only another fantasy, and Fellini at once provides us with a more optimistic resolution. As Guido drives away from the news conference, apparently having announced that he is not making his film (to the joy of his collaborator who was certain the film would have been an aesthetic disaster), his head suddenly fills with images: first he sees his magician friend waving a wand and then the beautiful girl in white. Idealized images of the people from his past and present, inhabitants of his dreams and fantasies, then appear: Carla, his mistress; the aunts who took care of him as a child; Saraghina, the prostitute who initiated him into the mysteries of sex; the ancient Cardinal of the church; his mother and father. Jacqueline Le Bon Bon, a strip tease artiste whom we recognize from Guido's harem, walks alongside a tall graceful woman, a guest at the spa who has fascinated Guido because she resembles a statue of the Virgin Mary he remembers from childhood. The director feels suddenly strengthened and renewed by these images, able to love and accept them all. As a result, he no longer is frightened by the confusions and contradictions of his life. He asks his wife to accept him as he is, and she promises to try.

His creative crisis over, Guido picks up a megaphone and begins to direct the long delayed film. He gives a signal to the image of himself as a child (the source of his poetic inspiration as an adult) to open a white curtain at the bottom of the spaceship tower and down comes a long procession of people — his producer, friends of his wife, various guests at the spa, and so forth. For a joyous grand finale (which is also a beginning), Guido directs everyone to join hands in a long line and dance around a circus ring. Soon, only Guido as a child and a small band of clowns are parading in the ring. As they march off, the scene fades into darkness and the title, *8½*, appears.

### Outline of Scenes in *8½*

- (1) **TRAFFIC JAM DREAM.** Guido, stuck in his car in the midst of a traffic jam, floats out of his car up into the sky but then falls into the sea.
- (2) **GUIDO'S BEDROOM IN THE SPA HOTEL.** Guido awakens from his nightmare surrounded by nurses and doctors. Daumier, his collaborator on the film script, is also in the room.
- (3) **THE SPA GROUNDS.** Guido, in line for mineral water, has a vision of a beautiful girl in white. Daumier criticizes the appearance of this girl in Guido's outline of the film. Mario Mezzabotta introduces Guido to Gloria, his young fiancée for whom he has divorced his wife of thirty years.
- (4) **TRAIN STATION.** Guido meets his mistress, Carla.
- (5) **CARLA'S HOTEL DINING ROOM.** Carla eats and talks non-stop about her husband.
- (6) **CARLA'S HOTEL BEDROOM.** Guido makes Carla up to look like a whore and they make love.
- (7) **CEMETERY DREAM.** Guido's father complains that his grave is too small. Pace, the producer of Guido's film and Connochia, the head of production, give Guido's father a negative report on his son's behavior. Guido helps his father down into his grave and is kissed passionately by



his mother. She, however, is transformed into Guido's wife, Luisa.

- (8) **THE ELEVATOR.** Guido shares an elevator to the hotel lobby with a Cardinal of the church and his retinue.
- (9) **THE HOTEL LOBBY.** Guido is surrounded by people who question him about his film.
- (10) **OUTDOOR NIGHTCLUB AT THE SPA.** Guido continues to be questioned about his film. A magician, who is an old friend of Guido's, and Maia, a medium, read Guido's mind, evoking the strange words, "Asa Nisi Masa."
- (11) **A FARMHOUSE.** Guido and several other children are bathed in wine lees. After his bath, Guido is wrapped in a towel and lovingly caressed by his aunts. When everyone else is asleep, one of the children tells Guido that if they repeat the magic words, "Asa Nisi Masa," the portrait of a saint on the wall will move its eyes and reveal the location of a treasure.
- (12) **SPA HOTEL LOBBY.** The French actress implores Guido to tell her about her role. Returning a call to his wife in Rome, Guido asks her to join him at the spa.
- (13) **THE PRODUCTION OFFICE.** Guido finds the production crew up late at night working on his film. Connochia accuses Guido of not confiding in him.
- (14) **GUIDO'S BEDROOM IN THE SPA HOTEL.** Guido fears his crisis of inspiration is permanent. The beautiful girl in white appears and Guido begins to fantasize about her role in the film. The phone rings. Carla, he learns, is ill.
- (15) **CARLA'S HOTEL BEDROOM.** While sitting with Carla, Guido wonders what he will tell the Cardinal the next day.
- (16) **THE GROUNDS OF THE SPA.** Two secretaries escort Guido to the Cardinal. During the interview the Cardinal

calls Guido's attention to the sobbing cry of a bird. Guido, however, has become fascinated by the sight of a large peasant woman who triggers a childhood memory.

- (17) **THE SCHOOLYARD.** Guido's friends persuade him to accompany them on a visit to Saraghina.
- (18) **THE BEACH.** In exchange for money, Saraghina dances seductively before the boys. Two priests from the school apprehend Guido and drag him back to school.
- (19) **THE SCHOOL CORRIDOR.** Guido is led past a row of disapproving portraits to the office of the Father Superior.
- (20) **THE OFFICE OF THE FATHER SUPERIOR.** Guido is told his offense is a mortal sin. His mother, ashamed of him, rejects him when he runs to her for comfort.
- (21) **A CLASSROOM.** Guido appears before his classmates wearing a dunce cap and a poster on his back reading SHAME.
- (22) **SCHOOL DINING ROOM.** While the rest of the school has dinner, Guido is made to kneel painfully on kernels of corn.
- (23) **THE DECAYING SAINT.** Guido kneels in meditation before a decaying female saint.
- (24) **THE CONFESSIONAL.** A priest in a confessional tells Guido that Saraghina is the devil.
- (25) **BEACH.** Guido returns to visit Saraghina.
- (26) **HOTEL DINING ROOM.** Daumier criticizes Guido's inclusion of the Saraghina memory in his film.
- (27) **STAIRWAY TO THE STEAMBATH.** Guido joins a long procession of people descending the stairs to the underground baths of the spa.
- (28) **PUBLIC STEAMBATHS.** Guido sits next to Mario Mezzabotta (see scene 3), but is unable to make contact



with his friend. A voice summons him to an interview with the Cardinal. On his way to the interview, members of the production staff accost him with advice.

- (29) **THE CARDINAL'S CABANA.** The Cardinal tells Guido that outside the church there is no salvation.
- (30) **MAIN STREET OF THE RESORT TOWN.** Guido encounters his wife Luisa. Later they dance together at an outdoor cafe.
- (31) **THE SPACESHIP TOWER BY THE SEA.** Pace leads a group of people up the gigantic tower. Guido, remaining below, confesses his confusion and uncertainty about the film to Rosella, a friend of Luisa's.
- (32) **GUIDO'S HOTEL BEDROOM.** Luisa accuses Guido of being unfaithful. They quarrel bitterly.
- (33) **AN OUTDOOR CAFE.** Guido, Luisa and Rosella are seated together at a table when Carla appears, infuriating Guido's wife. Guido daydreams that the two women greet one another and dance off.
- (34) **THE FARMHOUSE.** Guido imagines himself back at the farmhouse of his youth. He is the head of a harem comprised of every woman he has ever desired.
- (35) **MOVIE THEATER.** Screen tests are in progress for Guido's film. When Luisa sees an actress playing the part of herself asking her husband for a divorce, she walks out, threatening Guido with divorce. Claudia, the actress who is to play the role of the beautiful girl in white, appears at the theater and Guido leaves with her.
- (36) **A PIAZZA AT NIGHT.** Disillusioned with his star, Guido tells Claudia that there is no film. Just then, his producer drives into the square announcing that a press conference is to be held at the spaceship site the next day.
- (37) **THE SPACESHIP TOWER BY THE SEA.** Unable to answer the hostile questions of reporters, Guido crawls under the table and shoots himself. This is only a fantasy,

but he has decided to abandon the film. Ordering the tower dismantled, he drives away. Images from his imagination inspire him anew and he decides to direct the film after all.

- (38) **A CIRCUS RING.** The cast of 8½ joins hands and dances around the circus ring. Soon only Guido as a child and a group of clowns remain. The scene fades out and the title, 8½ appears on the screen.

### Theme and Structure of 8½

8½ is Fellini's avowedly autobiographical account of the forces, external and internal, that inhibit the creative genius of a filmmaker. Through the power of his artistic recollection and fantasy, Guido Anselmi (Fellini's representative in the film) uses his imagination to explore the maladies that afflict his imagination. The record of his search is the substance of the film, which, as Christian Metz has observed, is Fellini's "powerfully creative meditation on the inability to create."<sup>1</sup>

Much of the richness and fascination of 8½ results from what Metz calls its *construction en abyme* or "double mirror construction." Like a double mirror, 8½ reflects itself into infinity. Metz writes:

(8½) is not only a film about the cinema, it is a film about a film that is presumably itself about the cinema; it is not only a film about a director, but a film about a director who is reflecting himself onto his film. It is one thing for a film to show us a second film whose subject has no relationship, or very little relationship, to the subject of the first film . . . it is entirely another matter to tell us in a film about *that very film* being made . . .<sup>2</sup>

Even the film's title is self-reflecting. According to Angelo Solmi, before Fellini made 8½, he had made seven-and-one-half films. The title 8½ was a name given to the new film during production which later he decided to use as the official title.<sup>3</sup> That Fellini's 8½ is the very film that Guido Anselmi is trying to create becomes apparent when we see actresses auditioning to play characters



who play parts in the film we are presently watching. Every criticism that Guido's collaborator on the script makes about the intended film — that it lacks a philosophical premise; that it consists "merely of a sequence of fortuitous episodes"; that the childhood memories are "bathed in nostalgia"; that the symbolic appearance of the girl in white is the worst symbol in the film — could apply not only to Guido's script but to *8½* as well, obscuring the difference between them.

The critics who claim that the film's happy ending is unlikely and implausible fail to understand that the subject of *8½* is not the triumph of do-it-yourself analysis but the triumph of art. As a film within a film, everything in it takes place in the imagination (Fellini's), one step or more removed from literal reality. Fellini indicates that his protagonist's crisis could have a potentially disastrous resolution by having Guido crawl under the table and shoot himself. But the subject of *8½* is not life as is but the creative resourcefulness of the imagination which can forge a great success out of the conflicts and failures of life. If Guido's spirit had not been infused with the guilt engendered by his Catholic education, if he were not, in consequence, profoundly ambivalent about the Church, if he did not desire at once two opposite types of women — we would never have the Saraghina sequence, the meeting with the Cardinal in the steam-bath, the harem fantasy, all brilliant film episodes that grow directly out of the conflicts of the filmmaker.

The moving finale of *8½* celebrates in a frankly symbolic way the triumph of the imagination. When the director joins hands in loving acceptance with all the significant people in his life, who, for better or worse, have made conflicting demands upon his psyche — his parents, his aunts, Saraghina, the priests from his school, the Cardinal, his mistress, his wife — Fellini affirms the relation between conflict and creativity: conflicts that are irreconcilable in life can be momentarily and joyfully resolved in the charmed circle of art.

## THE EXTRACT

### Plot Synopsis of the Extract

#### (Scenes 26-30)

Guido is seated in the hotel restaurant with Daumier, his collaborator on the film script. At a nearby table are the Cardinal and his retinue, joking among themselves. Guido and Daumier are discussing a sequence concerning Guido's childhood memory of Saraghina, which Guido intends to include in his film. Daumier complains that the sequence's implied criticism of the Catholic Church is on too low a cultural level, not logically developed, too negative but also too ambiguous.

This sequence almost seamlessly merges into the next. Men and women, draped in white sheets, descend a grand stairway into the vaulted depths of the spa, the location of mudbaths, steambaths, and massage tables. Guido is among them, accompanied by his producer, Pace. More sympathetic to Guido's ideas than Daumier, Pace realizes that Guido intends his film to reflect the confusions that man has inside himself, but warns Guido that he must be clear and certain that what interests him interests everyone. Guido hardly listens, his attention caught by a stately woman, a guest at his hotel, who holds a strange fascination for him.

Guido enters a large, cavernous, steam-filled room and sits down, by chance, next to his friend Mario Mezzabotta. Guido calls to him, but the man seems exhausted, almost in a trance, and does not respond. Guido's glasses steam over, signaling a retreat into fantasy. A mysterious voice over a loud speaker summons him to an interview with the Cardinal. As he hurries to the meeting, members of the production staff approach him one by one, handing him pieces of clothing along with advice about what he should say to the Cardinal. The interview is limited to only five minutes (seventy seconds projection time), and conducted through a window that looks into a chamber where the Cardinal is taking a steambath. When Guido confesses to the Cardinal that he is not happy, he is told that happiness is not his task in life. Quoting Origenes in Latin, the Cardinal declares that outside the Church there is no salvation, and that he who



is not of the City of God belongs to the City of the Devil. The interview ends as the window squeaks shut.

In the next sequence (only the beginning of which is included in the extract), Guido encounters his wife Luisa strolling aimlessly down the main street of the resort town.

### The Context and Themes of the Extract

Shortly before Guido's fantasy meeting with the Cardinal in the steambath, he had an interview with the same Cardinal in a secluded corner of the grounds of the spa to discuss the religious themes in his film (scene 16). Prior to the interview, Guido had explained to the Cardinal's secretaries that his protagonist's Catholic education has caused "certain problems and complexes," but it (Catholicism) nevertheless continues to fascinate him. As a result, he comes to a Cardinal of the Church for help, "a revelation." In the script, Guido made the meeting unconventional, the hero encountering the Cardinal by chance in an adjoining mudbath. But one of the secretaries who had read the script advised Guido that such a meeting would be highly unlikely: "A high Church dignitary would have his own private cabana."

In the steambath fantasy, Guido imagines *himself* encountering a Cardinal of the Church. Just as Guido is a thinly disguised representation of Fellini, Guido's film protagonist is a representation of himself, with an ambivalent fascination with the Church that is like his own. The meeting in the fantasy, reflecting the advice of the secretary, does not take place by chance in an adjoining mudbath. Rather, Guido is summoned to the Cardinal's private bathing chamber. Since the Cardinal in the fantasy is the same man Guido meets with at the spa, we understand the fantasy not only as a revised version of the film script but a replay of the initial interview transformed by Guido's imagination.

Although the steambath fantasy is supposed to be a day-dream, its dynamics are very much those of a dream, especially as it dispenses with conscious pretenses to reveal an unconscious wish. In the initial interview, Guido comes to the Cardinal on the pretense of seeking advice about his film. The steambath

fantasy, however, reveals a deeper level of motivation. Guido in his time of crisis still holds to a belief that the power of the Church can help him; the source of his guilt might also be the source of his salvation.

The appearance in the fantasy of members of the film's production staff shortly before Guido meets with the Cardinal is the residue of his conscious motive to seek advice about the film. These figures, however, make no mention of the film. The first urges Guido to confess: "Tell him everything. Don't hide a thing." The second maintains that the Cardinal "can fix anything . . . even my Mexican divorce." The third, Guido's old friend Connochia, urges Guido to "be humble. Throw yourself at his feet. Tell him you've repented . . . with their backing you can get everything you need in life." Often those encountered in dreams are split representations of the dreamer's psyche, giving expression to consciously unacknowledged ideas and wishes. The men of the production staff speak for the part of Guido that still believes that the Church is an omnipotent power who can "fix anything" and provide him with all his needs in life, just as he once hoped that the eyes of the saint on the wall would lead him to a fabulous treasure (scene 11).

Hoping for a revelation that will put his life in order, Guido is humble, admitting his unhappiness to the Cardinal. But the Cardinal's words offer him no comfort. Happiness, he tells Guido, is not his task in life. At the end of the Saraghina episode (scene 24), a priest tells Guido that Saraghina is the devil. In the steambath fantasy the Cardinal multiplies the number of the damned, placing everyone outside the Church in the realm of the devil.

On the manifest level Guido's fantasy is about the Church's rejection of him — as the window shuts in his face it seems permanently to separate him from the City of God. On a more profound level, however, the fantasy is about Guido's, and hence Fellini's, rejection of the Church. The steambath sequence is rich in symbolic and satirical overtones, exposing the Church as a vestigial institution that has sealed itself off from the emotional and spiritual needs of modern man. The following section on symbolism discusses this theme in detail.



## ANALYSIS OF FILM ELEMENTS IN THE EXTRACT

### SYMBOLISM

Guido has explained to the Cardinal's secretary that he wanted the hero's meeting with the high Church dignitary in the film to be unconventional. At first it appears that Guido's mysterious meeting with the Cardinal in his private bathing chamber fits the description. But Guido is obliged to remain outside the room and speak to the Cardinal through a window that opens into the chamber, a spatial arrangement that recalls scene 24, when Guido as a child speaks to a priest through the opening of the confessional booth. By the symbolic imposition of Church ritual onto such an unconventional setting as a steambath, Fellini comically exaggerates the Church's insistence on conventions that keep it separate and aloof from those they are trying to serve.

According to Deena Boyer in *The Two Hundred Days of 8½*, Fellini chose such a frail and enfeebled man to play the role of the Cardinal that there was some concern about whether he would survive the completion of the film.<sup>4</sup> The Cardinal's advanced age functions symbolically: only a man with one foot already in the grave, Fellini seems to imply, can so easily renounce the goal of happiness and be content to follow the life-denying doctrines of the Church. Fellini, however, both undercuts and heightens the authority of the Cardinal's words through a strange juxtaposition of sound and image: while the Cardinal intones the message that there is no salvation outside the Church, a man in the foreground solemnly lifts globs of mud that ooze through his fingers (Fig. 1). The earthiness of the image contrasts ironically with the spirituality of the words, and, at the same time, invests them with a mystical sense of power.

Guido's visit to the underground vaults of the spa is a symbolic descent into the realm of the dead, which Fellini presents as a mixture of classical and Christian conceptions of the underworld. Descending the grand staircase, the sheet-enshrouded men and women seem like lost souls entering limbo, while the naked sweating steambath orderlies seem like devilish emissaries ready to whisk them off to eternal punishment. Fellini's placement of the Cardinal in an inner recess of hell is an irony that

speaks for itself. A recurrent theme in myth and legend is the descent of the hero into the underworld kingdom of the dead to seek information that will revitalize a culture or found a nation. Guido's descent into the depths of the spa is an ironic reversal of this theme. The Cardinal, seen through a diaphanous white sheet, literally becomes a shadow or a shade (Fig. 2), the form of the dead in classical mythology. His words, however, teach Guido nothing vital to bring back to the world of the living; he offers only the worn clichés of the Church, rigid formulations from the past no longer applicable to the needs of modern men.

The sequence immediately following Guido's steambath fantasy is set on the main street of the resort town near the spa. The carnival atmosphere, the many stores, and the auction make the town seem a worldly Vanity Fair, the very City of the Devil to which the Cardinal has just referred. One of the main attractions is a fakir enclosed in a glass coffin. The frail figure wrapped in white sheets is subtly reminiscent of the Cardinal, associatively linking the two sequences (Fig. 3). By connecting the Cardinal with the fakir, Fellini comments ironically on the place of the Church in the modern world: it is hermetically sealed off from the pursuits of the living.

The object of Fellini's satire in this sequence is not only the Church: he equally condemns the materialistic, desperately pleasure-seeking clientele of the spa, men and women so frantically fleeing from the specter of old age and death that their lives are devoted exclusively to prolonging their empty existence. Though physically alive, they have become spiritually dead. The octogenarian sensuality of the guests at the spa seems fully as distasteful as the smug asceticism of the men of the Church. The spectacle of the long procession down into the baths recalls some lines from Dante's *Inferno*: "So long a train of people, I had not ever believed/ that death had undone so many."<sup>5</sup> These words, echoed in T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*,<sup>6</sup> well apply to Fellini's wastelands of *La Dolce Vita* and *8½*.

A final note on the symbolism in the steambath sequence. The woman Guido stares at on his way down to the baths resembles a statue of the Virgin Mary we have seen near the end of the Saraghina sequence (Figs. 4 and 5). Earlier in the film, while Guido is nervously awaiting a call from his wife to whom



he has been unfaithful, he overhears the woman whispering into the telephone to an unknown listener: "I forgive him. I forgive him everything."

The appearance of the Virgin Mary figure in the steambath sequence gives us further insight into Guido's attraction and repulsion to the Church. He is repelled by the aspect of the Church, represented by the figure of the Cardinal, that demands human perfection and hence generates terrible guilt. But he remains attracted to the aspect of the Church symbolized by the Virgin, who compassionately forgives human sin. The contradictions within the institution are largely responsible for Guido's ambivalence.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



## PHOTOGRAPHY: THE MOVING CAMERA

Throughout *8½* the camera is nearly always in motion, restlessly exploring the world of the film. Unlike the photography in more conventional films in which the movements of the camera are subordinated to the dramatic necessity of the plot (see, for example, the discussion on camera movement in the *Notes and Analysis* of the extracts from *Notorious* or *Spellbound* in the series), Fellini's camera seems to have a life and intelligence of its own, often appearing oblivious to the story it is supposed to be telling. In the extract, as Daumier ticks off criticisms of Guido's film, the camera at first dutifully follows him as he gets up from the table and tracks with him in the direction of frame left. Then, however, it lingers on two strange women at a piano, allowing Daumier, a principal character, to walk out of its range. Following a cut to a long shot of a band, the camera begins to track left with a woman wearing a white towel who then engages a doctor in conversation. Losing interest in her, the camera rests momentarily on the doctor's face while she walks out of the frame. Some shrouded figures in white then capture the camera's attention and it is off following them until they disappear behind a man speaking into a microphone, who dominates the image. In the scene following Guido's interview with the Cardinal, the camera meanders up and down the street of the resort town, focusing on one face until its attention becomes distracted by another.

These seemingly autonomous movements of the camera over a succession of strange faces occur not only here but throughout *8½* and are an important feature of the film's self-reflecting structure: Fellini seems playfully to call attention to himself as the directing force behind the camera by freely indulging his almost obsessional fascination with faces—a hallmark of his style. According to Fellini, when he begins work on a film, "the richest part of this preparation is the choice of faces, heads, that is to say the film's human landscape. . . . During this period I am capable of seeing up to five or six thousand faces, and it is just these faces that suggest the comportment of my characters to

me, their personalities and even the narrative cadences of the film."

When the camera is not identified with Fellini, it is identified with Guido. *8½* contains numerous long, sustained, moving subjective shots which profoundly involve the audience in Guido's experience, inviting us to become subjects inside the world of the film rather than distanced outsiders. As Guido is hurrying to his meeting with the Cardinal and is accosted by the members of the production staff, we are propelled along with him. They speak directly into the camera (which is identified with Guido) and hence directly to the viewer as well. We are also closely identified with Guido at the beginning of his audience with the Cardinal, a scene in which Guido does not appear bodily at all. The camera enters a large room, is addressed by a priest, "walks" past a steaming cauldron and pauses before the window which then opens into the Cardinal's private cabana. During the meeting, the viewer is privileged, allowed to enter the chamber while Guido must remain outside. Interestingly, the Cardinal's attendants behave as if we were physically present, shielding the Cardinal's body with sheets lest we witness too much of the holy body. At the very end of the interview we are once more identified with Guido, sharing his experience when the window slowly shuts in his face.

Another prominent feature of the camera work in *8½* is Fellini's practice of editing within the camera rather than cutting to alter the perspective on a scene. Within the same shot, unexpected objects regularly move into the camera's range, capturing our attention while the previous image is obscured. A long shot of a band (Fig. 6) is partially blotted out when a woman's head suddenly surfaces from the bottom of the frame and the band members go out of focus (Fig. 7). In another instance, a long shot of the procession into the baths (Fig. 8) is replaced by a close-up of the sweating torso of a spa orderly which moves into the frame from the left (Fig. 9). By editing within the camera rather than cutting, Fellini achieves sudden and disorienting alterations in the visual field while maintaining a dream-like smoothness and fluidity. Fellini produces a remarkably dream-



like effect in the long carefully choreographed tracking shot of Guido on his way to the interview. The members of the production staff appear before him one by one, each man's entrance perfectly timed to coincide with the exit of the man before him. As a result, they seem to merge into and out of one another in the strange disorienting manner of dreams.

### *A NOTE REGARDING ASPECT RATIO*

8½ was photographed for projection in an aspect ratio of 1.75:1 (ratio of width to height). The extract (and the frame blowups in this booklet) are reproduced in that ratio. Since most 16mm projectors have an aperture plate fixed at 1.34:1, the image as projected in 16mm has a black area above and below the picture which would be masked out in 35mm projection.

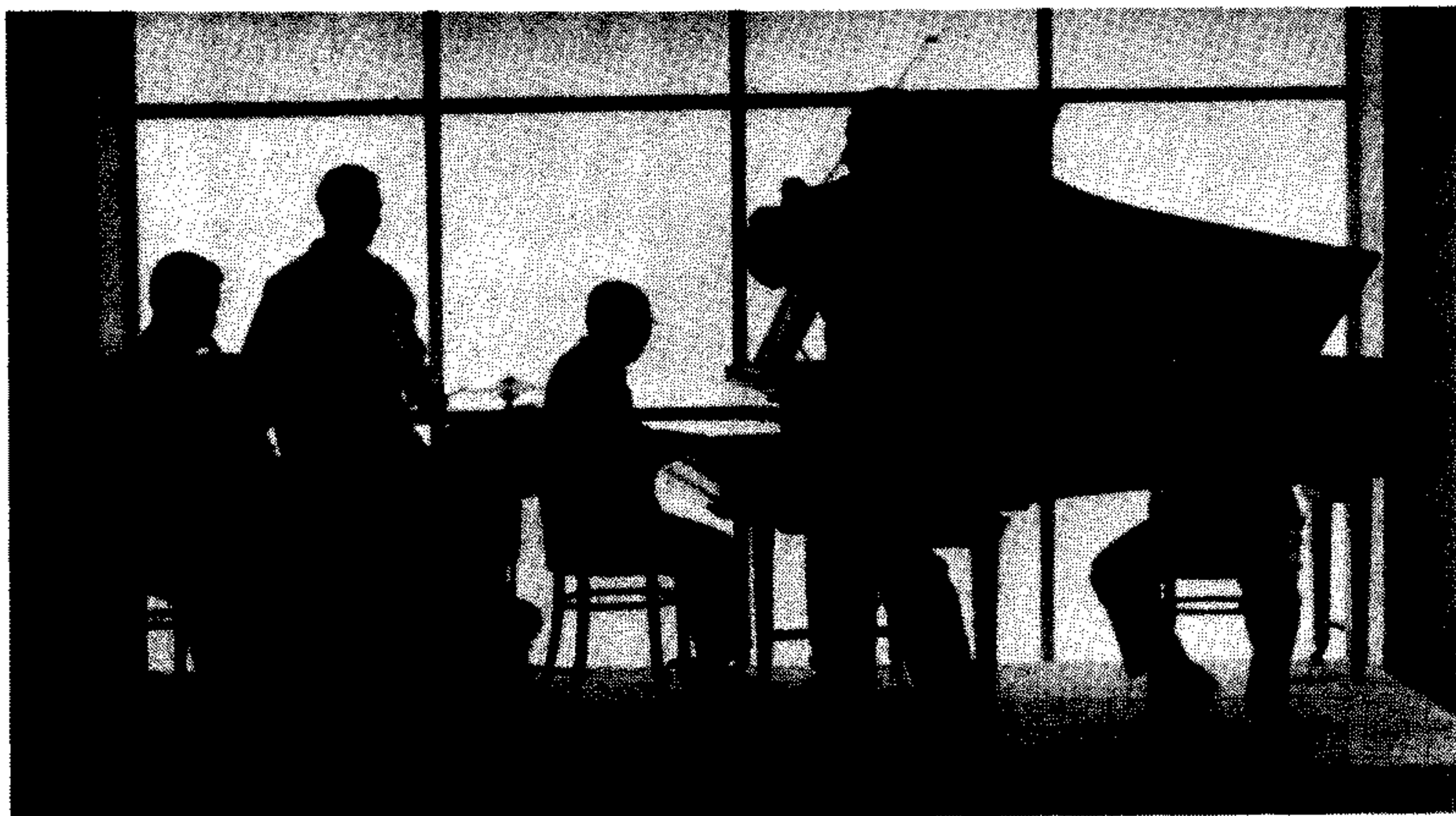


Fig. 6



Fig. 7

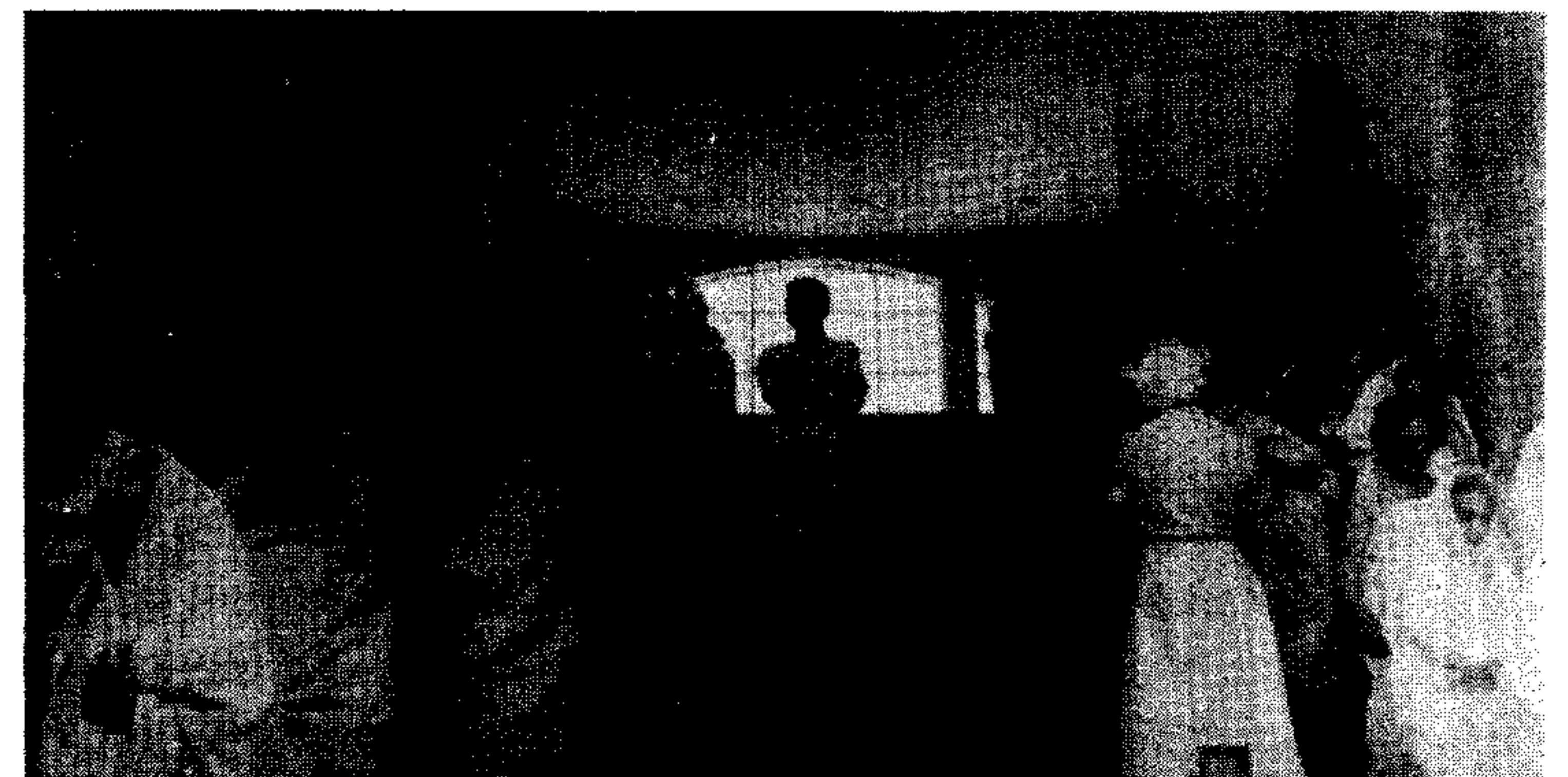


Fig. 8



Fig. 9



## EDITING

The section on photography discussed the way Fellini uses camera movement to create a dream-like merger of one image into the next. His editing also helps to create this effect. The scene in the restaurant, in which Daumier criticizes Guido's film, is made to merge seamlessly into the steambath sequence, the audience understanding only in retrospect that they have been transported to a new time and space. The jump takes place between the shot that ends on the two women at the piano (Daumier having walked off frame left) and the shot that begins with the five-man band. Usually the filmmaker indicates changes in time and space through conventional transitional devices such as fade-outs or dissolves, obvious changes in setting, or by dialogue. Fellini provides none of these signals, leaving most viewers at first to assume mistakenly that the shot with the five-man band is a continuation of the action in the restaurant. Both shots, moreover, are linked by similar visual motifs — the women and the members of the band are dressed in white; a piano appears in both shots — creating the impression of continuity between them. When the shot that begins with the five-man band ends with a man holding a microphone announcing mudbaths and massages, it seems as if the restaurant leads into the entranceway to the baths. Only when we see Guido wrapped in a sheet in the midst of the other bathers — though we have just left him sitting fully clothed at the table with Daumier — do we realize that we have been transported to a different time and most likely to a different place as well.

During Guido's interview with the Cardinal, the editing works to create a subtle sense of confusion and disorientation in the viewer, enhancing the mysterious and dream-like aura that pervades the scene. Subtle confusions in continuity, for example, create a logically impossible space inside the Cardinal's bathing chamber. The scene opens with the Cardinal, seen through the window, sitting doubled up in a chair (Fig. 10). In the process of the interview he walks across the room, in the direction of frame right, to his private steambath. It is more than a little confusing then, when the camera, focusing on the Cardinal, sitting

in the bath, pulls out from the same window through which we originally saw him on the other side of the room (Fig. 11).

A less obvious but also disorienting confusion in continuity occurs at the beginning of the scene. The Cardinal first appears fully robed sitting on the chair. Two men in white appear holding a large sheet with which they begin to surround him (Fig. 12). At this point there is a cut, apparently on movement, to a closer shot of the Cardinal from a slightly different angle as the sheet totally enfolds his body (Fig. 13). Because of various clues, the cutting on movement, the position match of the sheet, we assume that the two shots present continuous time. In the second shot, however, the Cardinal is seen naked to the waist, not fully clothed as in the previous shot, indicating that some kind of time ellipsis has occurred. Finally, the scene includes a disorienting jump cut: a shot of the Cardinal in close-up facing frame left (saying, "Who said it was your purpose in life to be happy?") (Fig. 14) is followed by another close-up of the Cardinal suddenly turned around and facing frame right. The priest on his right also changes from shot to shot (Fig. 15).

Although the viewer may not be consciously aware of the mismatching backgrounds and confusions in continuity, the mismatches create, nevertheless, a subliminal sense of confusion causing us to share viscerally Guido's disoriented dream state. The mismatching shots have one other important function: those who are aware of them are made very conscious of the nature of the film medium. The fact that a film is constructed of pieces of celluloid spliced together becomes particularly noticeable when the pieces fail to match. Since the steambath fantasy is a planned episode from Guido's film, and 8½ itself is a film within a film, Fellini's calling attention to the mechanisms of filmmaking is particularly appropriate.



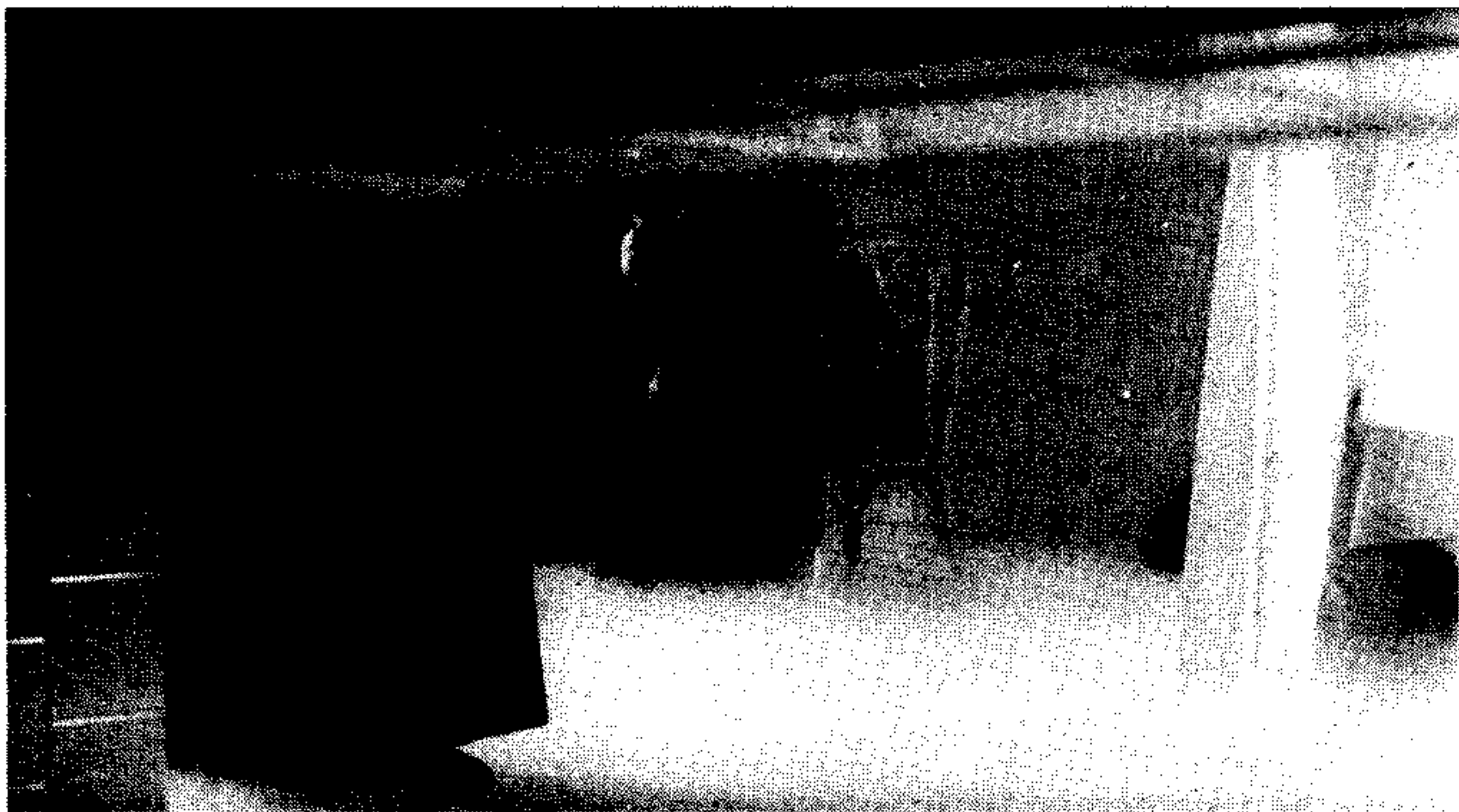


Fig. 10

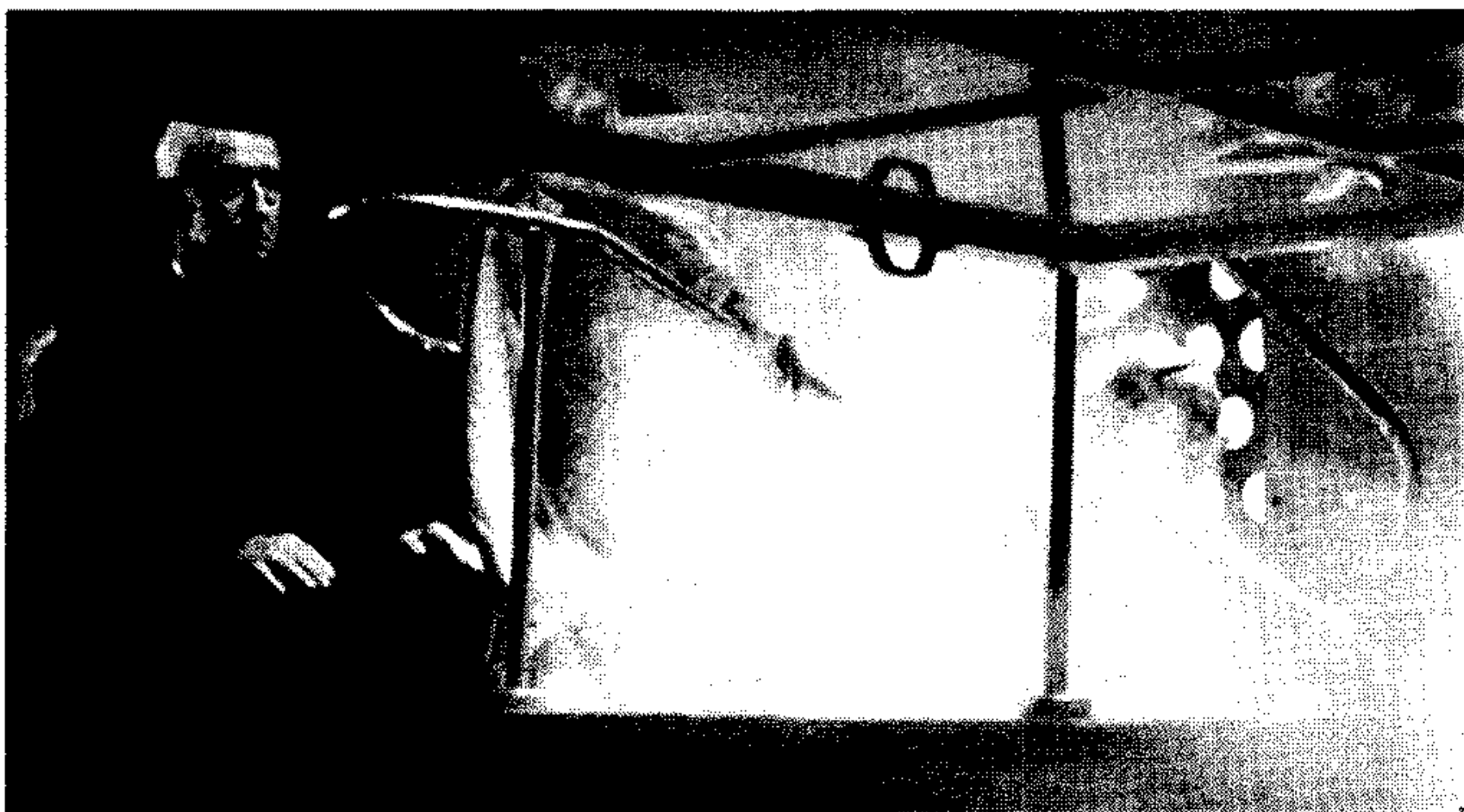


Fig. 11

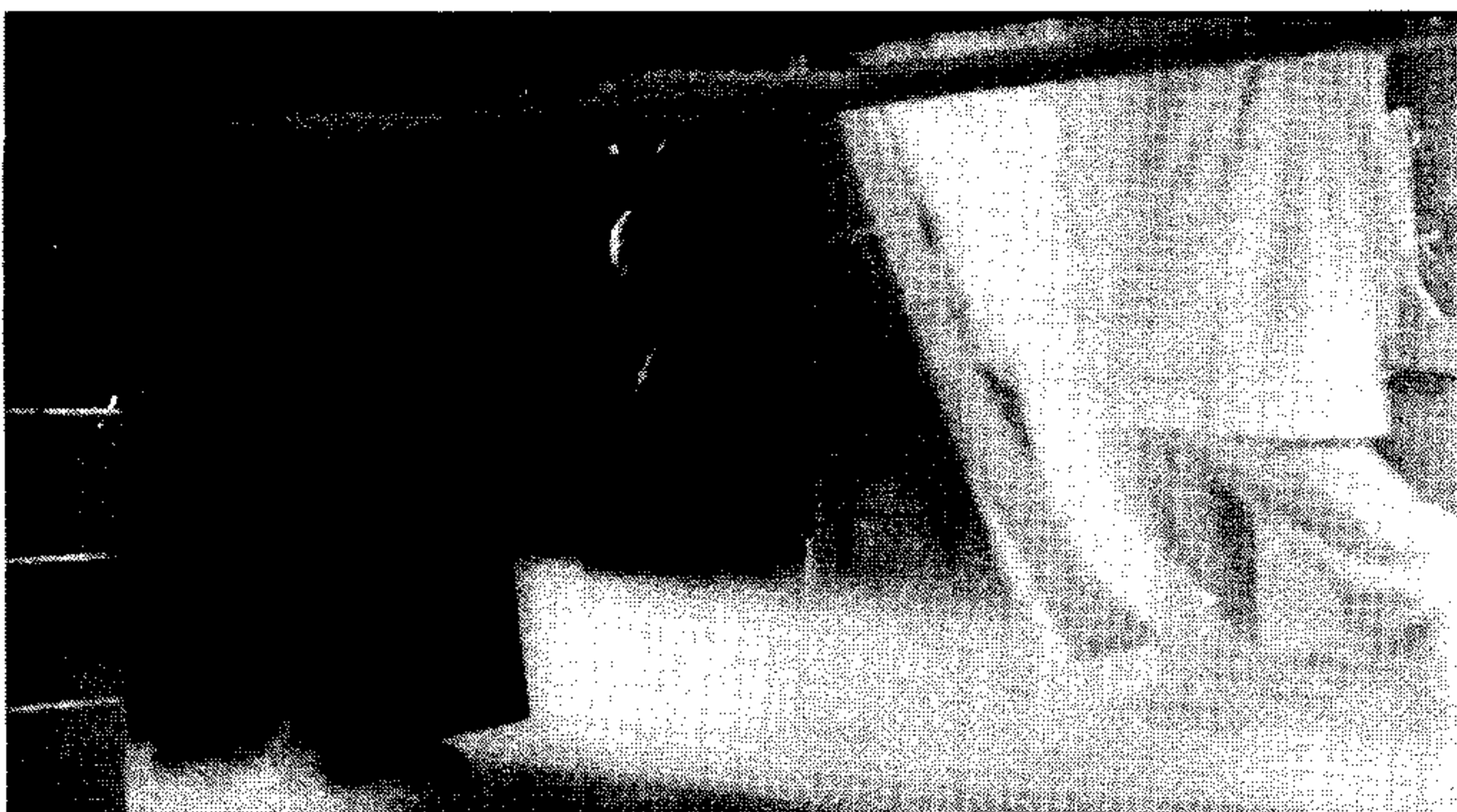


Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



## SOUND

Following the practice in Italy, Fellini post-synchronized the sound track, adding sound effects, music and dialogue only after the entire film was shot. Much of the atmosphere and mood of the steambath sequence is created through the careful combination of sound and image.

### Music

The most important element on the sound track for creating mood is Nino Rota's music. At times it is ominously portentous as when the driving rhythms of the music seem to compel the procession of people down into the vaulted depths of the spa, creating a feeling of impending doom. Then comes a contrasting passage of light, jaunty music, as if the procession of lost souls had been offered a momentary respite. The music, however, soon becomes ominous again as its rhythms slow to accompany the labored breathing of the exhausted men, creating a feeling of terrible oppressiveness in the public steambath.

Karel Reisz in *The Technique of Film Editing* distinguishes between "commentative sound" and "actual sound" in films. The former he defines as "sound whose source is neither visible on the screen nor has been implied to be present in the action . . . sound which is added for dramatic effect." Actual sound is "sound whose source is visible on the screen or whose source is implied to be present by the action of the film."<sup>8</sup> The background music in the extract, as indeed almost all the music in *8½*, fits somewhere in between these two categories.

In the hotel restaurant, as Daumier mercilessly criticizes the Saraghina sequence (which the audience has just witnessed), a piano is softly playing a theme we have come to associate with Guido's childhood innocence and creativity, the "Ricordo d'infanzia" music, which is fully orchestrated during the grand finale of the film.<sup>9</sup> The music here seems to be commentative: its sweetness gently counters Daumier's harsh intellectual words, informing the viewer that Guido does not completely accept Daumier's unkind (and uncomprehending) criticism of his re-created childhood memory. The music, however, could con-

ceivably also be actual, played on the piano that Daumier later passes at the end of the sequence. As Daumier walks past the piano and out of the frame, the voice of a woman singing at the piano, before heard only faintly, suddenly bursts into high volume, dominating the sound track as her image dominates the shot. This "Discesa al fanghi" music is then continued over into the next shot where, in a much livelier beat, it is being played by a five piece band. The music, however, does not remain "actual" for long: it becomes purely commentative as it sets the mood for the descent into the underground world of the spa.

As the window to the Cardinal's chamber shuts, the sound of its high pitched squeak blends into the notes of violins playing "Blue Moon," the casual rhythms of this low-key melody bridging the transition between the end of the steambath sequence and the beginning of the sequence in which Guido discovers that his wife Luisa has come to join him at the spa. The "Blue Moon" lyrics (which are not heard on the sound track but are familiar to most viewers) comment ironically on Guido who is left "standing alone" outside the City of God. No longer clinging to the magical possibility of salvation, he is also "without a dream in his heart." The lyrics later apply to Luisa whom Guido sees "standing alone" in the crowded street. Since her husband is unfaithful to her, she does not have a "love of her own." When the strains of "Blue Moon" are first heard, the music, of course, is purely commentative, an orchestra outside the bathing chamber of the Cardinal most unlikely. But in the next shot, which takes us to an outdoor cafe, an orchestra is soon identified as its probable source. The next shot shows a woman playing "Blue Moon" on the violin. But when the same music then continues into the next shot of the main street of the resort town, it once more becomes commentative, without a visible or implied on-screen source.

By providing the audience with on-screen sources of music that then become commentative background music and vice versa, Fellini draws our attention to the way musical conventions operate in film, encouraging us to see his film as artifact, not as life. The film's sound track, like the editing, photography and symbolism is self-reflecting, reminding us that *8½* is a film of a film.



## Dialogue

Conversations in *8½* are usually one-way affairs. In the steambath sequence, for example, Daumier, the producer, and the members of the production staff speak *at* Guido, never *to* him. He never answers them, never given the chance. Guido's confession to the Cardinal that he is not happy are his first words in the extract. The Cardinal, with a voice as frail as his body, responds to Guido directly only at the beginning of the interview when he asks: "Why should you be happy . . .?" From this point on he speaks to himself, his words recited to sound like an incantation or magic spell, not unlike the "Asa Nisi Masa" chant that Guido remembers from early childhood. Enclosed in white sheets and enveloped in an incense-like cloud of steam, the Cardinal appears like an ancient oracle or soothsayer, his words seeming all the more empty in the context of the mysterious setting.

The mechanically amplified voices that announce mudbaths and massages by numbers add a chilling sense of impersonality to the procedure; the conjunction of modern technology with the infernal setting is strangely unsettling. For Italian critic Camilla Cederna, this sequence evokes the Auschwitz showers, an all too real example of a modernized hell. On a lighter note, the husky voice over the loudspeaker that summons Guido to his interview with the Cardinal is the voice of a sexy airline stewardess who later appears in Guido's harem. The mixture of disturbing and comic elements is a hallmark of this sequence.

## Sound Effects

Sound effects are used sparingly but effectively in the extract. The sounds of coughing and heavy breathing add weight to the oppressive atmosphere of the public steambaths. The sound of the window opening into the Cardinal's private chamber resembles the sound of the opening of a vault, an aural reminder that the high Church dignitary is sealed off from the concerns of everyday life. The squeaking sound the window makes as it closes is reminiscent of the sobbing bird cry that interrupted Guido's first interview with the Cardinal. During the interview the music ceases and all we hear is the whooshing sound of

steam emanating from the Cardinal's steambath, an elemental sound like the sound of the sea that places the Cardinal outside time.

## APPENDIX

### Notes

1. Christian Metz, "Mirror Construction in Fellini's *8½*," in *Film Language* by Christian Metz, trans. Michael Taylor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 234.
2. Metz, p. 230.
3. Angelo Solmi, *Fellini*, trans. Elizabeth Greenwood (New York: Humanities Press, 1968), p. 166, p. 183.
4. Deena Boyer, *The Two Hundred Days of 8½* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964), p. 141.
5. *Inferno* III, lines 55-57:  
"si lunga tratta  
di gente, ch'io non avrei mai creduto  
che morte tanta n'avesse disfatta."
6. Lines 60-63 in *The Wasteland*:  
Unreal City  
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,  
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,  
I had not thought death had undone so many.
7. Andrew Sarris, ed., *Interviews with Film Directors* (New York: Avon Books, 1969), p. 186.
8. Karel Reisz and Gavin Millar, *The Technique of Film Editing* (New York: Hastings House, 1972), pp. 397 and 398.
9. I have identified the music as it appears on the record of the sound track of the film (RCA International FSO-6).

### Recommended Reading

The original screen play of *8½* is published in Camilla Cederna's *Fellini 8½* (Bologna: Capelli editore, 1965).

Deena Boyer's *The Two Hundred Days of 8½*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964) is a day by day account of the making of the film. An afterword by Dwight Macdonald contains a survey of the film's critical reception. It was reprinted in *Dwight Macdonald*



*on the Movies* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1969), 15-31.

For a brief but excellent overview of Fellini's style and career through 8½ see John Russell Taylor's *Cinema Eye, Cinema Ear: Some Key Film-Makers of the Sixties* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), pp. 15-51.

Three useful books on Fellini, all of which contain critical evaluations of his films (at least through 8½), interviews with Fellini, background on his life and career, and thorough filmographies are: Suzanne Budgen, *Fellini* (London: British Film Institute Education Department, 1966); Gilbert Salachas, *Federico Fellini: An Investigation into his Films and Philosophy*, trans. Rosalie Siegel (New York: Crown Publishers, 1969); and Angelo Solmi, *Fellini*, trans. Elizabeth Greenwood (New York: Humanities Press, 1968).

Finally, Ted Perry's *Filmguide to 8½* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975) contains complete credits, a Fellini filmography, an outline and analysis of the entire film, and an excellent annotated bibliography of critical writings on 8½.

### **Extracts for Comparison and Contrast**

A viewing of "The Steambath Sequence" along with "The Drunken Dream" sequence from Murnau's *The Last Laugh* provides the student with the opportunity to study and compare different ways in which the interior world of a character can be presented on film. Murnau uses superimpositions and distorted images while Fellini uses unconventional editing techniques and long, complexly choreographed camera movements.

Long, sustained tracking shots are often used in both "The Steambath Sequence" and "The Statues" sequence from Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad*. The dramatic effect of the camera movements, however, is quite different in each film. A juxtaposition of the two extracts offers insight into the expressive possibilities of the moving camera.

As suggested above, Fellini breaks established conventions of film continuity to achieve a disorienting dream-like effect. In this light, it is useful to compare "The Steambath Sequence" from 8½ with extracts from *Notorious* or *Spellbound*, films in which established film conventions are followed.



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