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Saturday Review

HAVING explored his immediate environment and its moral climate with stunning brilliance in *La Dolce Vita*, Federico Fellini has now turned inward and explored in his new film, *8½*, an individual much like himself. The subject this time is an Italian motion picture director, artistic, capable, and not uncommercial. The man, if not nervously exhausted, has reached a point of needing a rest cure. Thermal baths are prescribed. He has bad dreams, of being caught in a traffic jam in a tunnel, for instance. His producer will not wait for him to take his own good time about working out his next film project, and is already building sets, while the director searches for the film he may or may not have in him.

The setting is one of those bath resorts, with a turn-of-the-century hotel in the grand style, grounds with benches for the guest-patients, cavernous steam rooms, and massage parlors. Fellini makes marvelous use of the place, with characteristic strongly defined images, faces that emerge from halos of steam, from patterns of sunshine and shade, to face the camera eye—or the eyes of Guido Anselmi, the film director. This man, who wears a floppy hat indoors and out, who sometimes forgets to shave, who wonders if he is all or only part fraud, who searches for the sources

of his previous strength, is played by Marcello Mastroianni, a film actor of sensitivity, subtlety, and precision.

The film is a mingling of reality, dream, and fantasy. The reality is that the director has come to the resort to recuperate. Following him like pack rats are his producer, production manager, a cynical writing collaborator, and people hoping to play parts in his film. They set up a production office at the hotel, they build a monstrous set on the nearby beach, they take over a local theatre and show screen tests, begging the director to make up his mind and choose.

His dreams take the form of curious recollections. Overwhelmingly poignant is one of his dead mother and father greeting him gently in their village cemetery. A haunting sequence in itself is that involving Saraghina, a fat, gross prostitute, who rolls her hips on a forlorn stretch of beach for the enjoyment and edification of schoolboys.

His mistress joins Guido at the resort and attempts to revive his passion for her. His wife arrives, and with her some of his other relatives. Their seeming tolerance of his frailties plunges him into self-critical brooding, and he escapes into another fantasy, this time of a harem in which he is lord and master, and in which his wife gladly

cooks and scrubs for his handmaidens.

But the film's demands must be met, the inevitable press-conference must be held, and escaping from it all by a symbolic suicide, the director is at last free to see the truth. The people he has been attempting to fit into a form are real, and the artist (he now knows he is one) must express the reality he feels and sees. Dream and reality merge in one love-filled final scene. The people of his life become his performers, the performers become his people, and he joins them. The director, the artist, has made his peace with himself, and he may proceed.

Fellini has taken a personal and most difficult subject, treated it with all the imagination he is capable of, and fashioned a film of the highest distinction. He has been unafraid to confess weaknesses and reveal his privacy. His actors quiver with feeling and provide his testament with a living, breathing quality. Again, as in *La Dolce Vita*, it is hard to pick the best, because they are all so amazingly good: Anouk Aimee as the wife, Guido Alberti as the producer, Sandro Milo as the mistress, Edra Gale as Saraghina. But there are many more. Fellini is blessed with more than a touch of genius. So is his new film.

—HOLLIS ALPERT.