PLAYBOY INTERVIEW: FEDERICO FELLINI

a candid conversation with the protean creator of such trail-blazing cinematic allegories as "la strada," "la dolce vita" and "8½"

A few months ago, during the closed-set filming of "Juliet of the Spirits," Federico Fellini's long-awaited latest film, Roman TV officials congratulated themselves on what promised to be a major video coup when il grande maestro *unexpectedly rescinded his own ban on press coverage of the production in progress and acquiesced to their repeated requests for a sample snippet from the film. They were understandably baffled and bedazzled by the footage he supplied—an extraordinary comic-opera scene starring the elephantine, wild-haired whore from "8½" outrageously decked out as D'Artagnan in feathers, velvets, boots and blond mustaches, surrounded by a motley chorus of nuns, clowns and gypsies, all cavorting about to the tune of a blaring Neapolitan aria. The viewing public was equally perplexed when the scene was subsequently sneak-previewed on television, but the critics greeted it with learned interpretations of its allegorical significance—or lack of it. Not until the finished film premiered did they discover that they'd been had: Never intended as part of the picture, it was conspicuous by its absence; Fellini had dreamed up the whole thing as a put-on for symbol searchers.*

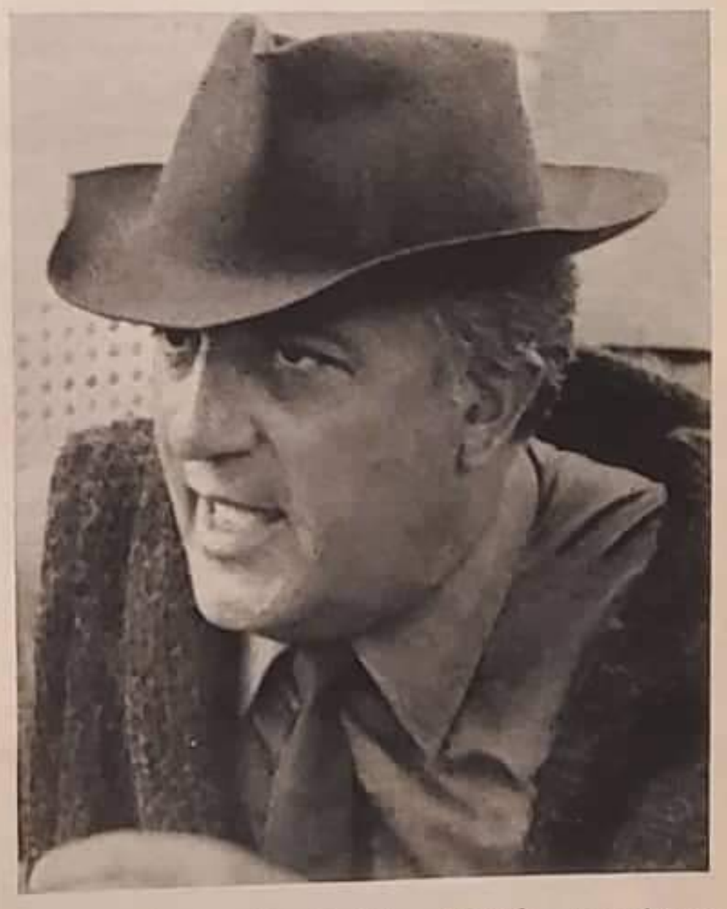
Unamused, some reviewers replied that the joke was on Fellini; though dazzling to behold, the invented scene was no more or less profound, or relevant to the story, they averred, than any given episode in the picture, which one of them contemptuously dismissed as "a fever dream with delusions of grandeur." A kaleidoscopic pasticcio *of visions, dreams, memories and hallucinations conjured up by a middle-aged housewife who takes refuge from reality in a private world of fantasy, and finds it peopled with erotic and terrifying specters, "Juliet" has been hailed by other critics (not including* PLAYBOY*'s—see review on page 33) as a phantasmagorical masterpiece of cinematic psychodrama, and a spectacular affirmation of its creator's status as a protean poet of the cinema. But acclaim or abuse—neither of which is new to Fellini—serves merely to certify his contentious world fame. And the paradoxical appellations he's earned during his 15 years as a director—genius and madman, tragedian and clown, archangel and archdemon, moralist and sensation seeker—testify not only to his defiance of definition ("Tags," he says, "are for suitcases") but also to his prodigious originality as a moviemaker.*

Even his detractors acknowledge that whatever else he may be, Fellini is irrepressibly, inimitably, eternally himself. On the visual level, all of his films bear the unmistakable stamp of a flamboyantly inventive directorial technique; and beneath the bravura façade, his protagonists all share a dual quest: for human warmth, usually from the wrong people; and for their own identities, usually in the wrong places. "Sometimes," he told one journalist, "I feel that I am all the time making the same film." By his own admission, this serial screenplay is a chronicle of his own spiritual odyssey, a search for self in a liberation from the past—a past steeped in the guilt-edged moral ideals of stern Church dogma drummed into him as a boy.

Son of a well-to-do wholesaler of wines and groceries in Rimini, a small provincial town on the Adriatic coast of northern Italy, Fellini took to neither the disciplines of parochial schooling nor the sedate comforts of middle-class home life: He quit school at 12 and ran away to join a traveling circus as an apprentice clown. Not quite ready to sever the parental ties, he was back home dead-broke a few months later; and he remained there, restlessly, until a vaudeville troupe hit town soon after his 17th birthday. When it pulled up stakes two days later, so did he—this time for good—following the show from town to town, writing comedy sketches for his keep. Drawn to the bustle and bright lights of the big city, he abandoned the caravan in Florence and decided to seek his fortune as a free-lance contributor to local humor magazines. But pickings were slim, and Fellini soon moved on to slightly greener pastures in Milan, where he turned a talent for cartooning into a modest but fairly steady living by pirating American comic strips—banned from Italy by Mussolini—for various city newspapers. Drifting on to Rome a few months later, he spent the War years

"Why not admit it? Marriage as an institution needs re-examining. Modern man needs richer relationships. He is not a monogamous animal. Marriage is tyranny, a violation of his natural instincts."

"A film never ends abruptly for me. It leaves an echo, a trail, and I live with it. When it's finally extinguished, another atmosphere enters, like the arrival of spring: It's the new film."



"I loathe collectivity. Man's greatness and nobility consist in standing free of the mass. How he extricates himself is his own personal problem and private struggle. This is what my films describe."

avoiding the draft and scuffling for bread money as a prolific gagwriter for local humor weeklies.

It was also during this otherwise bleak period that he met and married the struggling young actress who was to become world-famous as his tragicomic star: Giulietta Masina. The War's end, however, found them both pounding the pavement: she in search of movie bit parts, he as a street-corner caricaturist in sidewalk cafés along the Via Veneto —even then a watering place for show-business moguls great and small, hangers-on and has-beens—where he began to mingle and make friends with aspiring moviemakers who were just breaking into the burgeoning post-War film industry. Among them was director Roberto Rossellini, who invited the articulate, energetic young jack-of-all-trades to collaborate with him on the scenario of his first film. They did, and the picture—"Open City"—was hailed as a milestone in the Italian cinema, progenitor of a seminal new movement in moviemaking: neorealism. With "Paisan," their second joint effort, Rossellini's renown became world-wide, and Fellini was launched on a full-time screenwriting career.

A score of successful filmscripts poured from his pen in the next two years, though his income failed to keep pace with his rising reputation. Rankling not at financial frustration but at the creative confinement of the printed word, he leaped in 1950 at the chance to bring a script personally to life as both author and co-director of "Variety Lights," a poignant portrait of the melancholy faces hidden behind the masks of mirth worn by a troupe of wandering vaudevillians—and, in a larger sense, by most of mankind on an aimless road of life. Though he shared in its creation, even this first directorial effort bears the distinctive imprint of Fellini's potent personality—and of his checkered past, echoing as it does the picaresque period of his own experience as an itinerant entertainer. Then, in 1951, with his debut as a full-fledged director, came the first mature expression of the multileveled, metaphoric vision that has become the trademark of a Fellini film. A serio-comic satire on the fumetti—those far-fetched photographic comic strips in which impossibly handsome heroes perform impossibly dashing deeds of derring-do and rescue ladies in impossible extremities of distress—it was called "The White Sheik," after one of the Valentino-like paladins from this day-dream world of Italian pulp-magazine pictorials. On one level, it tells the story of a newlywed fumetti fan so steeped in rosy romantic reveries that she finds it impossible to reconcile herself to the mundane reality of marriage. On a deeper level, the picture warns of the desolation and despair that await those who pursue ideality rather than reality, who hope to hide from the harsh task of finding out who they really are.

Alienation of a more subtle and hopeless kind was the somber theme of "I Vitelloni," Fellini's next film. Outwardly, it's the chronicle of a bunch of young loafers—unemployed and unmotivated, believing in and belonging to nothing—who bum around the empty streets and beaches of a seaside resort during the dead winter months in a listless, futile search for nothing more meaningful than something to pass the time. But it can also be seen as an allegory of man's vain quest for a purpose and pattern larger than and beyond his own.

With "La Strada," his next picture, Fellini emerged, at 34, into the full flower of his creative powers as a lyrical cinematic poet. Universally applauded not merely as a tragic masterpiece but as one of the screen's authentic classics, it won dozens of distinguished film awards —including an Oscar—and earned its creator his first international recognition. It was also the picture in which Fellini's wife, Giulietta Masina, established her credentials as a Chaplinesque genius of comic pathos with her deeply touching performance as Gelsomina, a simple-minded waif whose childlike love of life is trampled and finally snuffed out by Zampano, a half-human, half-animal circus strong man (played by Anthony Quinn) who buys her, uses her cruelly and finally abandons her, sick and broken, by the roadside. Repenting later, he wants Gelsomina back and goes looking for her—only to learn that she has died. Thunderstruck, he staggers numbly to the beach in the film's final scene and falls weeping to his knees. Shaking his fists in impotent rage and grief at the indifferent stars, he is a mutely eloquent embodiment of man's loneliness, folly and despair.

Equally poetic justice is meted out to the protagonist of Fellini's fifth film, "Il Bidone" (1955), a merciless indictment of confidence men who prey on other people's illusions—and by extension, of all who knowingly exploit their fellow man. At the end, an aging swindler (Broderick Crawford) is beaten, betrayed and left to die in a ditch by his equally unscrupulous accomplices—after repenting too late, like Zampano, for the error of his ways. Seldom shown in this country, "Il Bidone" was perhaps Fellini's most humorless and least successful film, both artistically and commercially. Back at the top of his form in 1957, however, with "Nights of Cabiria," he took home a sizable sum of box-office booty and a mantelpieceful of international prizes, including his second Academy Award. Another tour-de-force vehicle for the talents of Mrs. Fellini, the film starred her as a dumpy, gullible, good-natured prostitute who unknowingly allows herself to be bilked out of her hard-earned little hoard of earnings. But no retribution, in this case, is visited upon the exploiter; the bitter lesson is that wrongdoers, in the real world, don't always pay the piper. The film's last scene, however, as a group of young musicians serenades Cabiria home after learning of her loss, sounds a final note of hope restored and faith instilled—that a crippling loss, even of a limb or a loved one, need not be as tragic as it seems; that a cruel humiliation need not breed disillusionment.

But disillusionment, abject and all-encompassing, provided both theme and variations for Fellini's next creation, in 1960, an epicurean smorgasbord of despair and degeneracy that proferred an eye-filling feast for millions of scandal-hungry moviegoers throughout the world: "La Dolce Vita," starring Marcello Mastroianni (interviewed by PLAYBOY last July). A brilliantly conceived, graphically etched, bitterly sardonic and morbidly fascinating panorama of Rome's decadent café society, it was seen by Fellini as "an attempt to take the temperature of a sick society." In the opinion of Church spokesmen, censorship groups, and even a few reviewers, however, it was little more than a sensational tabloid exposé that exploited as well as indicted the objects of its satire.

Except for his contribution of a brief segment to "Boccaccio '70" in 1961, nothing was heard from Fellini for the next three years; but then came another Oscar winner: "8½," a creation even more extravagant than the public's expectations, a radical departure from everything he'd ever done before, in a style so unconventional that it can be said to have introduced an entirely new genre of cinematic storytelling. The leading man—again portrayed by Mastroianni—is really a modified mirror image of Fellini: Guido, a self-searching 43-year-old Italian movie director with graying temples. And the story line is a highly impressionistic mosaic of larger-than-life memories, self-indulgent fantasies, bizarre dreams and idealized visions that somehow coalesce into a coherent, deeply insightful and introspective spiritual autobiography. At the end of the film, Guido finally extricates himself from the self-created labyrinth of irrational guilts, fears, hopes and expectations that has immobilized him—and learns to accept himself as he is, not as he might wish he were or hoped he might have been.

The identity crisis, and the epiphany of self-acceptance experienced by the heroine in "Juliet of the Spirits," Fellini's most recent and precocious brain child, are essentially the same as Guido's. But the dreams, fantasies and memories each summons up perform the opposite functions. In Guido's case, they're actually way stations on his search for self-fulfillment in reality; while for Juliet

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they're magic carpets of escape from the real world. Setting "Juliet" even farther apart from "8½" is the simple fact that it's in Technicolor, Fellini's first; and the further fact that it was blessed with a multimillion-dollar production budget, a great rarity in European films. Bedaubing and bedizening his cinematic canvas with giddy abandon, Fellini has created for his heroine a dreamworld of eye-drenching and Byzantine extravagance.

To the consternation of his actors, producers, technicians and almost everybody else who works with him, the process of creating these resplendent spectacles of the spirit takes place almost entirely without such traditional prerequisites as finished dialog and a detailed shooting script; Fellini considers them not only unnecessary but inhibiting to optimum creativity. The outlines of the plot and the drift of the dialog are jotted down ahead of time, mostly for the record; but all the rest—from the selection of the leading lady's shade of eye shadow to the designation of locations for each scene—is decided on the set, often on the day of the shooting only a moment before the cameras start to roll; and all of it, needless to mention, in every detail, is decreed by Fellini himself and no one else. The compleat film maker, he feels, must be not only the creator of his own heaven and earth and all the beasts thereof, but also the benevolent despot of all he surveys on set, with final and absolute authority over everything and everyone within his private realm. In the heat of this omnipotent role as god-king, amid the all-consuming throes of filming, Fellini is a man possessed—tireless, foodless, drinkless, oblivious to all else but the birth of the film as a living entity. "Though he's miraculously talented, sensitive and intuitive," says a co-worker, "Federico can also be cruel, childish and destructive to those around him at these times." Considering the issue of his prodigious labors, most are willing to forgive such moods.

When he finished filming "Juliet of the Spirits" late last year, we waited a few weeks, on the advice of friends, "for his brain to cool," then telephoned Fellini at his beach house in nearby Fregene, on the Tyrrhenian coast—where he was still recovering from "the exquisite ordeal," as he called it—with our request for an exclusive interview at his leisure. We had heard he'd be wearily reluctant to talk at first, but expansively garrulous once persuaded, which we were told would take no more than a modicum of urging. And so it proved. The following week, at his unpretentious provincial home in Fregene, he received us with warm hospitality for the first of our conversations. Later chats took place on the run, in his black Mercedes sedan en route to the studio from the beach; at his comfortably un-chic apartment in Rome's Parioli district; and at work in the dubbing room, where he supervised the lip-synching of "Juliet" into English. A rumpled, heavy six-footer with a penetrating gaze and a shaggy leonine mane of graying hair, he often wore a heavy black scarf over his shoulders—and a floppy black cloth hat of the Black Bart variety. Punctuating his every sentence with sweepingly expressive gestures and a flashing succession of pantomimic facial expressions to match, he spoke to us (in English and Italian) for a total of ten hours, his conversation alternately colloquial and poetically baroque, richly metaphorical and metaphysical, laced with a cheerful sense of irony, and marked throughout by an engaging candor about himself. We began the interview with a candid, if less than engaging, personal question.

PLAYBOY: Among your friends, you have a reputation as a teller of tall tales. One of them, in fact, has gone so far as to call you "a colossal, compulsive, consummate liar." What's your reaction?

FELLINI: At least he gives me credit for being consummate. Anyone who lives, as I do, in a world of imagination must make an enormous and unnatural effort to be factual in the ordinary sense. I confess I would be a horrible witness in court because of this—and a terrible journalist. I feel compelled to tell a story the way I *see* it, and this is seldom the way it actually happened, in all its documentary detail.

PLAYBOY: You've been accused of embroidering the truth outrageously even in recounting the story of your own life. One friend says you've told him four completely different versions of your breakup with your first sweetheart. Why?

FELLINI: Why not? She's worth even *more* versions. *Che bella ragazza!* People are worth much more than truth, even when they don't look as great as she did. If you want to call me a liar in this sense, then I reply that it's indispensable to let a storyteller *color* a story, expand it, deepen it, depending on the way he feels it has to be told. In my films, I do the same with life.

PLAYBOY: Is that how you see yourself—as a storyteller rather than as a "conjurer," "modern moralist," "social satirist" or "ringmaster of a cinematic circus," as you've been variously described?

FELLINI: Those are impressive-sounding occupations, but as far as I'm concerned, I'm just a storyteller, and the cinema happens to be my medium. I like it because it re-creates life in movement, enlarges it, enhances it, distills it. For me, it's far closer to the miraculous creation of life itself than, say, painting or music or even literature. It's not just an art form; it's actually a new form of *life*, with its own rhythms, cadences, perspectives and transparencies. It's my way of telling a story.

PLAYBOY: Most critics agree that your storytelling technique is uniquely compelling; but they disagree, for the most part, on the moral and meaning of your films. Does this concern you?

FELLINI: Do the critics have to understand my films? Isn't it enough that the public enjoys them?

PLAYBOY: Are your films intended primarily as entertainment, then, or is their box-office appeal secondary to philosophic intent?

FELLINI: I'm not concerned with popularity, and it's pointless to speak of philosophic intent. After each picture I often don't recall what my intentions were. Intentions are only instruments to put you into condition to do something, to start you off. Many great works are done well *despite* their original intent. Pascal, for example, wrote the *Pensées* to demonstrate the nonexistence of God—and ended up doing just the opposite. Take *La Dolce Vita*. What I intended was to show the state of Rome's *soul*, a way of being of a people. What it *became* was a scandalous report, a fresco of a street and a society. But I never go to Via Veneto—it isn't my street. And I never attend *festas* of aristocrats—I don't know any. The left-wing press played it up as headline reportage on Rome, but it didn't have to be Rome; it could have been Bangkok or a thousand other cities. I intended it as a report on Sodom and Gomorrah, a trip into anguish and despair. I intended for it to be a document, not a documentary.

PLAYBOY: Still, if we confine ourselves to the original impulse that inspired them, is there a common theme linking your films?

FELLINI: My work can't be anything other than a testimony of what I am looking for in life. It is a mirror of my searching.

PLAYBOY: Searching for what?

FELLINI: For myself freed. In this respect, I think, there is no cleavage or difference of content or style in all my films. From first to last, I have struggled to free myself—always from the past, from the education laid upon me as a child. That is what I'm seeking, though through different characters and with changing tempo and images.

PLAYBOY: In what sense do you want to escape your past?

FELLINI: I became burdened in childhood with useless baggage that I now want off my back. I want to *un*educate myself of these worthless concepts, so that I may return to a virginal personality—to a rebirth of real intent and of real self. Then I won't be lost in a collective whole that fits nobody because it's made to fit *everybody*. Wherever I go, from the corner of my eye I see young people moving in groups, like schools of fish. When I was young, we all moved in separate directions. Are we developing a society like ants, in blocs and colonies? This is one of the things I fear more than anything else. I loathe

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collectivity. Man's greatness and nobility consist in standing *free* of the mass. How he extricates himself from it is his own personal problem and private struggle. This is what my films describe.

PLAYBOY: Can you give us an actual example from one of your films?

FELLINI: In *8½*, society's norms and rules imprisoned Guido in his boyhood with a sense of guilt and frustration. From childhood many of us are conditioned by a similar education. Then, growing up, we find ourselves in profound conflict—a conflict created by having been taught to idealize our lives, to pursue aesthetic and ethical ideals of absolute good or evil. This imposes impossible standards and unattainable aspirations that can only impede the spontaneous growth of a normal human being, and may conceivably destroy him. You must have experienced this yourself. There arrives a moment in life when you discover that what you've been told at home, in school or in church is simply not true. You discover that it binds your authentic self, your instinct, your true growth. And this opens up a schism, creates a conflict that must eventually be resolved—or succumbed to. In all forms of neurosis there is this clash between certain forms of idealization in a moral sense and a contrary aesthetic form. It all started with the Greeks when they enshrined a classical standard of physical beauty. A man who did not correspond to that type of beauty felt himself excluded, inferior, an outsider. Then came Christianity, which established an ethical beauty. This doubled man's problems by creating the dual possibility that he was neither beautiful as a Greek god nor holy as a Catholic one. Inevitably, you were guilty of either nonbeauty or unsaintliness, and probably both. So you lived in disgrace: Man did not love you, nor did God; thus you remained outside of life.

PLAYBOY: And today?

FELLINI: In a modified form, this same ethic-aesthetic still prevails, and there is no escape from it through mere denial, though many have tried. You *can* escape very simply, however: by realizing that if you are not beautiful, it's all right anyway; and if you're not a saint, that's all right, too—because reality is not ideality. But this self-acceptance can occur only when you've grasped one fundamental fact of life: that the only thing which exists is yourself, your true individual self in depth, which wants to grow spontaneously, but which is fettered by inoperative lies, myths and fantasies proposing an unattainable morality or sanctity or perfection—all of it brainwashed into us during our defenseless childhood.

PLAYBOY: Once you've liberated yourself from the past, what then?

FELLINI: Then you are free to live in the present, and not seek cowardly flight to-

ward the past—or toward the future, either.

PLAYBOY: In what way toward the future?

FELLINI: I mean that we must cease projecting ourselves into the future as though it were plannable, foreseeable, tangible, controllable—it's not; or as though it were a dimension existing outside and beyond ourselves. We must learn to deal with matters as they are, not as we hope or fear they may eventuate. We must cope with them as they exist now, today, at this moment. We must awaken to the fact that the future is already *here*, to be lived in the present. In short, wake up and live!

PLAYBOY: Though most of your protagonists, at the end of their spiritual odysseys, do learn to live with themselves as they are and with life as it is, some interpreters have seen their awakening as little more than a fatalistic resignation to the human condition.

FELLINI: No, no! Not a fatalistic resignation, but an *affirmative acceptance* of life, a burgeoning of *love* for life. The return of Guido to life in *8½* is not a defeat. Rather, it is the return of a victor. When he finally realizes that he will never be able to resolve his problems, only to *live* with them—when he realizes that life itself is a continuous refutation of resolution—he experiences an exhilarating resurgence of energy, a return of profound religious sentiment. "I have faith," he says, "that I am inserted into a design of Providence whose end I don't and can't and will never comprehend—and wouldn't want to even if I could. There's nothing for me to do but pass through this panorama of joy and pain—with all my energy, all my enthusiasm, all my love, accepting it for what it is, without expecting an explanation that does not concern me, that does not involve me, that I am not called upon to give." He is at peace with himself at last—free to accept himself as he is, not as he wished he were or might have been. That is the optimistic finale to *8½*.

PLAYBOY: Doesn't *Juliet of the Spirits* have essentially the same moral?

FELLINI: Essentially, yes—only carried along another, deeper plane, with more decadent undertones, and told in a less realistic way. *Juliet* touches on myths within human psychology; its images, therefore, are those of a fable. But it treats of a profound human reality: the institution of marriage, and the need within it for individual liberation. It's the portrait of an Italian woman, conditioned by our modern society, yet a product of misshapen religious training and ancient dogmas—like the one about getting married and living happily ever after. When she grows up and finds it hasn't come true, she can neither face nor understand it; and so she escapes into a private world of remembered yesterdays and mythical tomorrows. Whatever she does is influenced by her

childhood, which she recaptures in otherworldly visions; and by the future, which she brings to life in bizarre and lively fantasies. The present exists for her only in the electronic unreality of television commercials. She is finally awakened from these visions by a grim reality: the desertion of her husband; but this fulfillment of her worst fear becomes the most positive episode of her life, for it forces her to find herself, to seek her free identity as an individual. And this gives her the insight to realize that all the fears—the phantoms that lived around her—were monsters of her own creation, bred of misshapen education and misread religion. She realizes that the spirits have been necessary, even useful, and deserve to be thanked; and the moment she thanks them, she no longer fears and hates them, and they turn into positive, pleasant beings.

PLAYBOY: Is there some specific message in this for all of us?

FELLINI: A lesson—a lesson we must all learn—as *Juliet* finally did: that marriage, if it is to survive, must be treated as the *beginning*, not as the happy ending; that it's something you have to work at; but that it's also not the alpha and omega of human existence; and that it must not be something you accept from the outside, like an inviolate taboo, never to be shattered. Why not admit it? Marriage as an institution needs re-examining. We live with too many nonfunctioning ideologies. Modern man needs richer relationships.

PLAYBOY: What kind?

FELLINI: Extramarital and premarital. Man is not basically a monogamous animal. Marriage is tyranny, a violation and mortification of his natural instincts. A woman, on the other hand, tends to create a world around one man. The tragedy of modern man is that he needs a multiplicity of individual relationships, whereas, at least in the culture in which I live, he is still forced into a single-mated mold. Without it, his life could develop into something interesting, into a higher evolution. Curiously enough, the multiple roles of infidelity seem to bring out the best in some men; were it not for self-negating guilt, it might in *most* men.

PLAYBOY: What you're suggesting, of course, is completely contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church. Aren't you a Catholic?

FELLINI: It's difficult biologically and geographically *not* to be a Catholic in Italy. It's like a creature born beneath the sea—how can it not be a fish? For one born in Italy, it's difficult not to breathe, from childhood onward, this Catholic atmosphere. One who comes from Italian parents passes a childhood in Italy, enters the Church as a baby, makes his Communion, witnesses Catholic funerals—how can he not be a Catholic? Still, I have a great admiration for those who declare themselves a detached laity—but I don't see how this can happen in Italy. Sooner or later, however—even in Italy—every man must take stock of himself, to determine to what point he is really a Catholic, or perhaps not one at all.

PLAYBOY: Your unsparing caricatures of Catholic clerics, particularly in *8½*, have led some Church theologians to the latter conclusion about *you*. Are they right?

FELLINI: Let them say what they want. In a noncategorized form, I think I'm *deeply* religious, even profoundly so—because I accept life's infinite mysteries without knowing its finite borders, accept them with joy and wonder. Is that being anti-Catholic or anti-religious? When I speak in a polemical manner about deforming our children with Catholic dogma, I'm speaking about an inhuman, inflexible application of Counter Reformation Catholicism. Guido's Catholic teachers in *8½* were monstrous and unfeeling, but they have nothing to do with Pope John XXIII, for example, who sought to wipe away all such ignorance and help us to rediscover the true Christian faith. If a false and misguided type of Catholic education creates guilts, inhibitions and complexes, then I say it's not only right but necessary to identify it—and, if possible, to eradicate it.

PLAYBOY: Would you include the so-called double standard of morality toward women—which divides them into "good" girls and "bad" girls—among the Church-bred afflictions that ought to be eradicated?

FELLINI: Absolutely. Particularly for us Catholics, woman is seen as either the spirit or the flesh, as either the embodiment of virtue, motherhood and saintliness or the incarnation of vice, whoredom and wickedness. Either we dress her up as an ideal, a snow-white inspiration such as Dante's Beatrice, or she becomes the lewd, laboring beast that devours her newborn son. The problem is to find the link between these opposites. But this is difficult, because we don't really know who woman is. She remains in that precise place within man where darkness begins. Talking about women means talking about the darkest part of ourselves, the undeveloped part, the true mystery within. In the beginning, I believe that man was complete and androgynous—both male and female, or neither, like the angels. Then came the division, and Eve was taken from him. So the problem for man is to reunite himself with the other half of his being, to find the woman who is right for him—right because she is simply a projection, a mirror of himself. A man can't become whole or free until he has set woman free—*his* woman. It's his responsibility, not hers. He can't be complete, truly alive, until he makes her his sexual *companion*, and not a slave for libidinous acts or a saint with a halo.

PLAYBOY: Your spectacular exhibition of Anita Ekberg's larger-than-life endowments on a block-long billboard in *Boccaccio '70* has been called a caricature of woman's role, not as man's sexual slave but as a Gargantuan goddess of eroticism. Was that your purpose?

FELLINI: Yes. In the mind of that repressed little man who spies on the billboard every night, of course, she's *anything* but a caricature; she becomes a mountainous creature of flesh and blood, a living embodiment of the grotesquely exaggerated image of female sexuality that stalks his stifled libido—that pressure cooker of puritan sexual inhibitions—and finally escapes to stalk *him*. I wanted to show metaphorically how man's imprisoned appetites can finally burst their bonds and bloat into an erotic fantasy that comes to life, takes possession of its creator and ultimately devours him.

PLAYBOY: Can we conclude, then, that you welcome as a healthy trend the increasing sexual freedom currently enjoyed by movies, magazines and night clubs—and the nudity on display in them?

FELLINI: It's all to the good, because it lifts the veil of mystery and obscurity, the clandestine aspect of sex which deforms it. Think what a woman must look like to a man in prison, how gross some parts of her body must appear to him. Set free, he hurries home to his girl with deformed visions. Ravenously, he re-explores the forgotten country of the woman's body; but the monstrous desires are soon pacified, and the female myth becomes a normality once again.

PLAYBOY: Do you agree with those who feel that a totally undraped woman loses much of her mystery?

FELLINI: Only her *visual* mystery. Inasmuch as woman represents that hidden half of us, the religious mystery of coupling in birth, the mystical, erotical fusion that integrates the whole man, it's clear she will always possess unfathomable secrets invisible even to the *inner* eye. So I see no reason to keep her covered outwardly, to keep her worldly riches buried like a pirate's treasure in the viscera of the earth.

PLAYBOY: The women in your films—whether prey or predator, saint or sensualist—all seem to be far more vibrantly and affirmatively alive than your self-immobilized male protagonists. Why?

FELLINI: I find my women figures—like Anita Ekberg and Sandra Milo—more exciting to create, perhaps because woman is more intriguing than man, more elusive, more erotic, more stimulating.

PLAYBOY: What inspired you to star Ekberg, whose career was in eclipse, as the voluptuous female in *La Dolce Vita*?

FELLINI: She embodied in every detail my mental image of the role; it's as simple as that. Her previous screenwork was irrelevant.

PLAYBOY: How did you manage to transform her with this one role into the international sex symbol she had failed to become in Hollywood?

FELLINI: I just provided her with the perfect part to elicit, perhaps for the first time, the full impact of her extravagant sensuality. I performed no mysterious alchemy. I did no more to bring out the best in her than I do with all my other actors.

PLAYBOY: And how much is that?

FELLINI: Well, once I find the flesh-and-blood incarnation of my fantasy characters—and it doesn't matter whether they're picked from the street or are professional actors and actresses—the next thing I try to do is to put them at ease, to strip them of their inhibitions, to make them forget technique, to transport them into a climate that allows them to laugh and cry and behave naturally. In other words, I endeavor to coax out the natural talents they already possess. If I have a method, it is to get their most spontaneous reaction. Every human being has his own irrevocable truth, which is authentic and precious and unique; and the truth of Anita Ekberg or Sandra Milo is no different from anyone else's. If the atmosphere is right, *anybody* can be made to express his joys, his sadnesses, his hostilities, everything—entirely of his own accord, honestly and openly. I don't ever want to make the mistake of forcing someone into a given character, or of limiting him in any way. Instead, I try to let him re-create his *own* character for the role. Because of this, I think, my results are richer and more satisfactory; the spectator finds himself in the presence of a creature of unique truth.

PLAYBOY: Most actors are trained to *create* a role, to impersonate someone else, a fictional character. Yet you say you want them to portray themselves. Doesn't this create a conflict of interests?

FELLINI: Not really. Once they get used to the idea of turning inward rather than outward, most find that it comes more naturally, that it enables them to bring far more authenticity to their portrayals. For most roles, of course, only part of the actor's own character will be germane to the character he's playing, so I ask him to be less than completely open and spontaneous, to be only selectively self-revealing. But even where there is a deep personal identification between an actor and his role, he doesn't simply play himself; he doesn't strip himself bare. Complete self-exposure can be both dangerous and irrelevant to the role. I ask him instead to expose himself gradually, layer by layer, until he reaches the level where he merges and meshes completely with the character. Though his subconscious motivations and reactions will now be those of the man he's portraying—and vice versa—the identity of player and part must remain a dramatic illusion, his seeming spontaneity must be studied, his naturalness premeditated. Despite his rapport with the role, all of his acting skills and disciplines will be necessary to bring the character believably to life. Though there may be severe labor pains, the issue of this unlikely union between instinct and technique can be beautiful, indeed. A perfect example is Marcello Mastroianni's wonderfully sensitive performance as Guido in *8½*, a part with which he deeply identified.

PLAYBOY: So did you, if one can believe reports that the picture was your own spiritual autobiography.

FELLINI: I did and it was. I wrote a story dealing with myself and my deepest secrets—or at least an idealistic approximation of me. Then I found a man who could become inhabited with all that had been inside me, and I made him the incarnation of an imaginary person closely resembling me. A mysterious air arose on the set; I found myself ordering myself around like a disembodied spirit in limbo.

PLAYBOY: Are you as close to Mastroianni in private life?

FELLINI: Almost symbiotically so. Even though we seldom see each other outside of our work periods, we have such a profound rapport that it is like a mirror before me saying, "It's me. It's not me . . ." and so on. It's uncanny. This is the basic bond of our friendship; but he's also very humanly *simpatico*. I see in him a charge of enthusiasm, innocence and charlatanry—like a smaller brother. And I'm no less an admirer of his professionalism. He's a very gifted actor.

PLAYBOY: Are you as deeply involved with any other actors?

FELLINI: Not so intensely, though I become terribly fond of all my actors, out of all proportion—because they are my puppets, creations of my fantasy. I claim they are the world's greatest actors and become ferociously defensive about them.

PLAYBOY: Your wife, Giulietta Masina, has starred in several of your films. Does your personal relationship make it easy or difficult to direct her?

FELLINI: Both. When I work with her, she seems the ideal actress: patient, docile, obedient, serious. She's not difficult—*I* am. I'm more impatient with her than with other actors. I get irritated if she doesn't immediately do what I have in mind. It seems incredible to me when she doesn't respond promptly just the way I want. You see, Giulietta is the first character I think about when I do a film with her. The others come slowly to mind, many months afterward, but always around her as the central figure. So when I get impatient and irritated with her, I feel like saying, "Giulietta! You were born first and the others came after you. You've lived in my mind so much longer than the others; why aren't you

quicker?" I know that's unjust, but somehow it always goes that way. But I do like to work with her.

PLAYBOY: Is she a good actress, in your opinion?

FELLINI: Excellent. I think that she would have interested me as such even if she hadn't been my wife. Her mimicry, for example, and that little round face which can express happiness or sadness with such poignant simplicity. That little figure, with its tenderness, its delicacy, fascinates me no end. Her type is crystallized, even stylized for me. As an actress, she represents a special type, a very specific humanity.

PLAYBOY: And as a wife?

FELLINI: So many things. I'll try to be objective, but it isn't easy. We've lived together so long. The other day on the set, we celebrated our twenty-first anniversary. Twenty-one years. It doesn't really seem that long. There are still things to discover. Where were we?

PLAYBOY: Discussing Giulietta as a wife.

FELLINI: And such a wife—tender, affectionate, eternally solicitous. She always wants to know if I feel cold or if I want to eat. When we're shooting outdoors, she asks if my socks are wet. You know how women are. But she is not only my wife; she is also the one who inspires me. Over the years, she has become a stimulant for me, a symbol of certain feelings, certain moods, certain behavior. Our life together has been sprinkled with tragedy and joy, with tears and laughter, and this has given me material, inspiration for my work.

PLAYBOY: Does she make any actual creative contribution?

FELLINI: Only in the sense that she provides the sun and the rain that warms and waters the soil in which the seeds I sow eventually sprout—and occasionally flower into films.

PLAYBOY: To continue your imagery, where do the seeds come from?

FELLINI: I don't always know, but somehow, from somewhere, an idea arrives, and I carry it within me like an embryo for weeks, months, years—until finally it reaches the fetal stage and begins to assume a vague but tangible shape. Then, very tentatively, I begin to work on the first rough pieces of a script.

PLAYBOY: You've said that looking at portrait photos of potential characters is a stimulant to the creative process at this stage. Why?

FELLINI: It's a ritual form with me, a habit, a psychological conditioning to begin work. When I'm planning a picture, I see literally thousands of people in hundreds of mass auditions, and I keep all their photographs. I'm searching for faces to fit the characters I'm creating—or may create.

PLAYBOY: You have a reputation for dragging out this preparatory period for month after month, as though it were a drug, until finally you must be pulled away and forced into actual shooting.

FELLINI: Well, it's not quite that addictive, and it's not always my fault for taking so long at it. Often these protracted preparations are caused by external factors—such as not finding a producer, or a producer who loses faith, or something else beyond my control. But postponements serve the positive purpose of giving me more time to create the right atmosphere for filming—time to create a kind of oxygen tent that will allow my creatures to live. This is made from many things—the script, costumes, photographs, a trip, a meeting with a girl, a fight with a producer, a change of office, an aimless walk around the house. All of this helps create a tent with enough air for the birth of this thing. That, for me, is the real effort: to take these steps that create the condition for the birth of the work. The film I make may not turn out to be the one I had in mind, but the main point is to see if, in the first two or three weeks of shooting, this thing is actually born alive. After that, it becomes self-sustaining—as though I were no longer directing, but rather that the film were directing me, pulling me onward.

PLAYBOY: Is there any truth to the prevalent notion that you begin shooting with little more than the outline of a script; that, in effect, you direct your films off the top of your head, improvising scenes and dialog as you go along?

FELLINI: If I wanted to commit artistic and economic suicide, that would be a beautiful and spectacular way to go. But since I don't, I arrive on the set with a script in hand—though it doesn't really mean that much, except as a pacifier for actors who fear improvisation, and for producers who crave reassurance that the structure for a film story has been created. What *does* matter is that I have a very precise idea of where I want to go in the film and how I want to get there long before the camera starts to roll. Once it does, of course, I try to remain flexible enough to amend and adorn the action as the need arises—rather than adhere blindly and fanatically to the original scenario as though it were Holy Scripture.

You can't say, "I want a baby with blue eyes, pink ears, blonde hair, that weighs seven pounds, three ounces, and with fingers just so." No, you take a woman, make her pregnant, assist in the childbirth, and the baby is what it is, and you're stuck with it. At the moment of parturition you can't say, "No, no, it doesn't have blue eyes, back it goes!" A film is the same. What does it mean to be faithful to ten pages of dialog, written five months previous, without knowing the actors or what language would be used? You don't even know where it will be shot. You might conceive of the scene in a park, but when you get there you realize your actor with his face would not have spoken that way in a park. Or the actress wears a dress that prevents her from saying a certain line. Also, instead of filming two actors talking, you may discover while you're filming that a close-up of a fountain or a panning shot of the rare furnishings in a drawing room will say more than the entire ten pages of dialog. In this sense I make myself available to adaptation; but I do not extemporize.

PLAYBOY: How do you feel after completing a film? Do you ever worry about going stale, or encountering what's called artistic paralysis?

FELLINI: What a strange question. A film never ends abruptly for me. It leaves an echo, a trail, and I live with it. Even after I've finished shooting and cutting, it's still with me, I still hear it, feel it, sense it. When it isn't with me anymore, when I feel it's finally extinguished, then another atmosphere enters, like the arrival of spring. It's the new film—with its new personages, and its undeveloped story. You see, I don't experience blank periods. It seems that ever since I started as a director, it's been the same day—the same long, wonderful day. But am I at all preoccupied with failure or professional impotence? Naturally. As you know, *8½* dealt with this preoccupation. But I don't feel the day is near when I will be empty. When it happens, I hope I'll have the humility and good sense to stop chattering. Meanwhile, I am still filled with enthusiasm and with a consuming urge to do things.

PLAYBOY: Is it true that you go to the movies hardly at all—even to see your own pictures?

FELLINI: Very true. When I finish a film, as I said, I'm possessed by the shaping vision of my next one; and it's always a jealous mistress. Besides, I want to live in the present, not linger in the past. As for other people's films, I go very, very seldom. I'd rather make films than watch them.

PLAYBOY: Surely you've seen a *few* of your contemporaries' pictures.

FELLINI: Enough to form a few impressions.

PLAYBOY: Have you seen any of Kurosawa's films?

FELLINI: Only his *Seven Samurai*, but I think he is the greatest living example of all that an author of the cinema should be. I feel a fraternal affinity with his way of telling a story.

PLAYBOY: How about Ingmar Bergman?

FELLINI: I have a profound admiration for him and for his work, even though I haven't seen all of his films. First of all, he is a master of his métier. Secondly, he is able to make things mysterious, compelling, colorful and, at times, repulsive. Because of that, he has the right to talk about other people and to be listened to by other people. Like a medieval troubadour, he can sit in the middle of the room and hold his audience by telling

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PLAYBOY: Antonioni?

FELLINI: I have respect for his constancy, his fanatical integrity and his refusal to compromise. Antonioni had a very difficult professional beginning. His films for many years were not accepted, and another man, less honest, less strong, would have made retreats. But Antonioni kept on his solitary road, doing what he believed he should do until he was recognized as a great creator. This has always made an enormous impression on me. He is an artist who knows what he wants to say, and that's a lot.

PLAYBOY: Truffaut?

FELLINI: I'm terribly embarrassed, but I haven't seen anything of his. Sorry.

PLAYBOY: DeSica?

FELLINI: Great power of achievement, and a master of his actors. He stems from our marvelous era of neorealism. He is a very good director, someone almost untouchable, because of the special place he occupied after the War.

PLAYBOY: Some critics have drawn parallels between your work and that of the neorealistic school. Do you think there's any validity to the comparison?

FELLINI: Indeed, yes. But mine is the neorealism of the Sixties—a very different breed of cat from the neorealism of the Forties, when many of us began with great ideals, but which finally tore itself apart in social polemics and drifted off into nonpolemical comedy. By the time that happened, however, neorealism had lifted film making to the dignified level of an autonomous art, freed the film maker from the enslaved conditioning in which cinema was imprisoned—a secondary art subordinate to the mood of the public. The greatness of early neorealism consisted in giving cinema liberty, so that we could finally express ourselves in films as freely as others could with a brush or a pen.

PLAYBOY: Since *La Dolce Vita*, you've been inundated with movie offers from America. Do you think you could express yourself freely as a film maker in Hollywood?

FELLINI: Probably not, but I've been sorely tempted to try it anyway. I'd love to do a film there on what caught my imagination during my visits to America. But even if I had a clear idea of what to say, the practical realization of it, the actual translation of this idea into images would embarrass and probably defeat me.

PLAYBOY: Why?

FELLINI: In Italy, I know what I'm doing. I know how to handle my actors, how to dress them, how to make them believable in the surroundings I've created for them. I know what I want them to express because I know what I am talking about myself. Even if I throw in an extra with one line, she has a reason to be there and she'll give truth to that one line and authenticity to those few seconds she's on screen. But how could I do this in a strange country with strange people? How would I know, for example, what a Boston taxi driver would wear at home on Sunday afternoon? How does a cashier from a Bronx drugstore dress, smile, or react to a man insulting her? I'd be lost a thousand times a day, and that would be fatal, because cinematography, at least in my opinion, needs an absolute mastery, complete control of everything and everyone—the female star's underwear, the leading man's mustache, the way matches are placed on the left side of the table. This is a true and deep obstacle. It's why an author must stay with the language that has nourished him since childhood, that has left with him a cultural deposit and a bagful of customs and traditions. So you see, the idea of a radical uprooting to work in America—or anywhere else beyond these borders—would be inconceivable to me.

PLAYBOY: Could the right price make you change your mind?

FELLINI: Money doesn't interest me. It's useful and good to have, but it's not an obsession with me, and it wasn't even when I didn't have it. When I first came to Rome at 18, I worked on a newspaper, and at times I didn't have enough money for lunch. But it was *food* I desired—not money. I have no money with me at this very moment; I never have. I even borrow for coffee from friends. Maybe I've been able to make money because of this. Money goes to those who don't court it.

PLAYBOY: And fame, too, in your case. Are you as indifferent to that?

FELLINI: I would be, only it's not as easy to ignore. It keeps impinging on one's time and privacy. Though I've managed to preserve a few small sanctuaries from the unblinking eye of publicity, there are more and more invasions, especially since $8\frac{1}{2}$. When I went to America, I was besieged by women who thought I had the key to happiness, some sort of recipe for joining life. They phoned at all hours and even waited for me in hotel corridors. I told them I had no answers, no amulets, no elixirs, no nothing for them, but they wouldn't believe me. I'm a director, not a seer or a psychiatrist. What I have to say, I say in my work.

PLAYBOY: And your work, as you said earlier, has been an attempt to escape from your past. Do you think you've succeeded?

FELLINI: To some extent. I feel less guilty now about the things my childhood education made me feel guilty about.

PLAYBOY: Such as sex?

FELLINI: Or any intelligent use of the senses that takes you beyond the confines of puritan morality. So I feel more robust, less defenseless. But then, it's high time for maturation, don't you think? At my age a man *should* be somewhat mature. Occasionally, though, I feel that this calm understanding could be destroyed by a single, sudden, violent, unexpected emotional confrontation.

PLAYBOY: With a woman?

FELLINI: I don't know with what or whom. But certainly it's always possible in life, and most possible when you're most sure of yourself.

PLAYBOY: Are you sure of yourself?

FELLINI: Not in an egotistical sense; but I feel less emotional, more collected, more at peace with myself than ever before. Though I've lost some of my power and potential in the process—along with my youthful pugnacity—I feel that a religious sentiment, profound but authentic, has been born within me. But I've had a rather fortunate life, so it's possible that my optimism may stem from not having known much sorrow or pain.

PLAYBOY: Do you fear growing old?

FELLINI: No—probably for the same reason.

PLAYBOY: How about death?

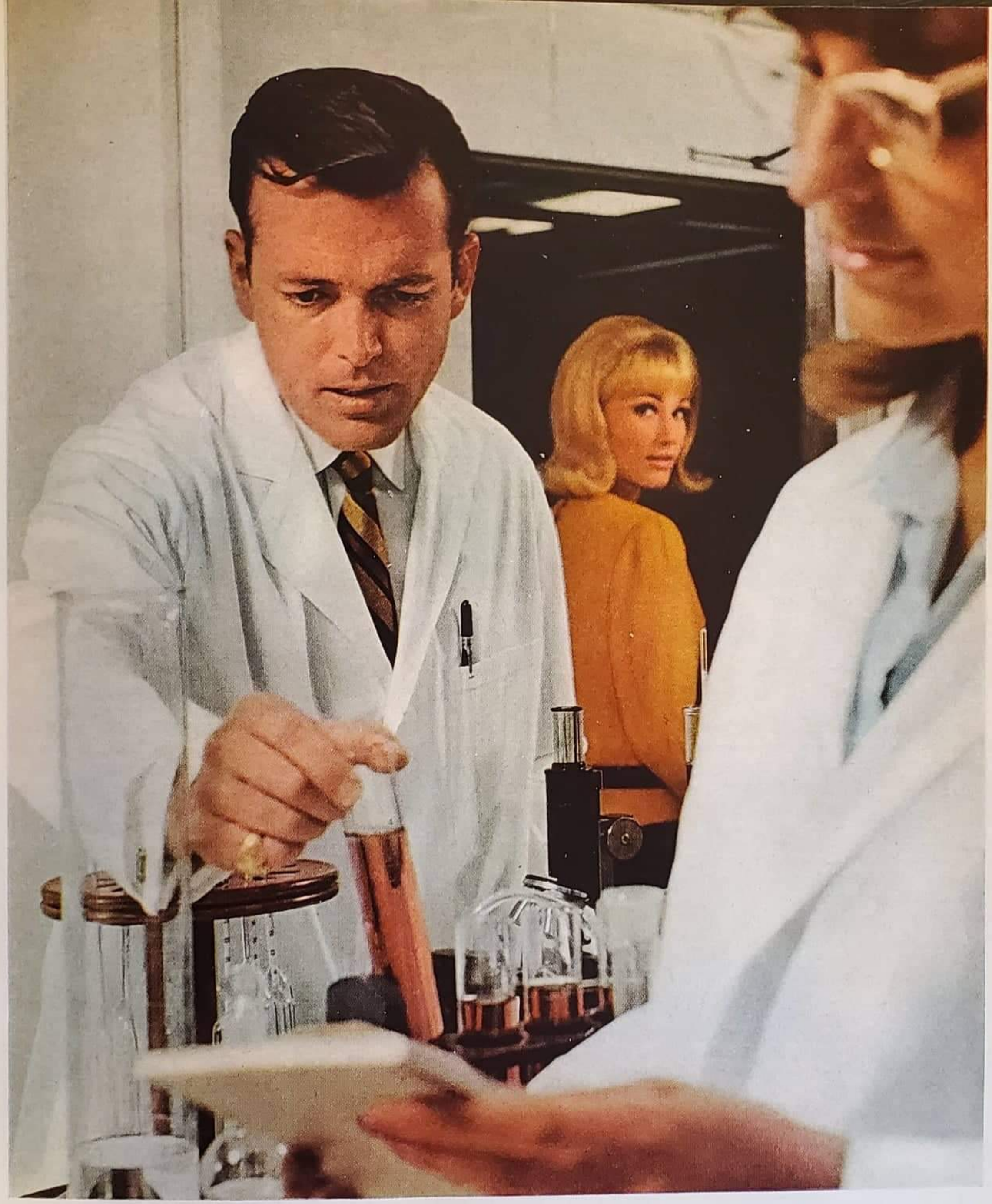
FELLINI: Death is such a strange thought, so contrary to what we think of in our physical life, that it's difficult to speak about it. We don't know what it is, so a vague terror tends to seize us. It's like a legendary continent, a faraway land that you've heard spoken about in contradictory terms. Some say it exists, others that it doesn't. Some say it's most beautiful, others that it's horrible. Some say it's better than this world, while others claim that nothing is as beautiful as life, that death is only silence and a forgetting. But let's face it: There is this country, and sooner or later we're all going there.

PLAYBOY: Do you dread it?

FELLINI: Yes. No. I don't know. One should face death as he embraces life: with a consuming curiosity—but without fear. Nor should he delude himself by approaching either with hope: for hope is a way of idealizing the other side of the coin of fear. *Faith* is what is needed, not hope. You must feel that all is sacred, that all is necessary, that all is useful, that all goes well. I can't understand an artist who seeks to show life as sterile and doomed, that we are alone and abandoned, that there is nothing left. If you deny everything, then you deny art itself, so why create it?

PLAYBOY: Are faith and curiosity, then, your prescriptions for a happy life?

FELLINI: Let's say a *full* life. Happiness is simply a temporary condition that precedes unhappiness. Fortunately for us, it works the other way around as well. But it's all a part of the carnival, isn't it?



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