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Self-Referential Cinema
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5:30

A self-referential film is one which is about itself. Unlike the traditional narrative film, which seeks to maintain the illusion that what we are seeing is reality, the self-referential film wants to show that it itself is an illusion. Consequently, one often sees the camera, the mike, the movieola, the cutting board, even, occasionally, the audience - us. In showing that it is an illusion, however, the self-referential film also suggests another reality - that, for example, of the makers of the self-referential film we are seeing. This reality is presented as a more real reality than that which the ordinary illusion-film offers. All self-referential cinema becomes, then, a search for reality, or for truth. This is one of the reasons why such films take the form of diaries or cinema journals, or of quests, or of the creation of some works ostensibly in progress. This is why the camera often appears simply to sit and record, why film-leader and bad footage are carefully included. One of the reasons that so many films are now self-referential (as a genre it did not exist until relatively recently) is that the search for real reality is so much a part of the needs of our times. One has seen this in the other arts. Drama has had Pirandello and Brecht and those many after them; the novel has had more than a few self-referential works between The Counterfeiters and, say, The Diblos Notebook; Schoenberg and Le Corbusier and their many followers made music and architecture which showed their parts in a way traditionally hidden. In modern painting - Pollack, Rothko, Reinhardt - the fact of canvas, the fact of paint, is the substance of the picture; in later art, the artist creating his work is the work of art itself. One of the attributes of the art of this century, then, is that it presents its own structure, shows its own construction, all as a part of the work of art. It does so for many reasons but among them is an impatience with façade, whether this be the front of a building or the ordinary illusion-film. Self-referential film, however, is unlike other self-referential art in that, being film, it must picture reality. Thus, in destroying the illusion of reality it must present us with another illusion. The philosophical perspective in these pictures - HELLZA-POPPIN and PERSONA alike - is that of a hall of mirrors, or more, perhaps, a vortex leading to a vacuum which is the nature of reality itself. The inability of film to escape from this portrayal of an ostensible reality is, however, also among its capabilities: it can lead us to question reality and hence, as these films indicate, force us to define that reality which will be our own.

OTTO E MEZZO $(8\frac{1}{2})$. 1964. Directed by Federico Fellini. Written by Fellini, Tullio Pinelli, Ennio Flaiano, Brunello Rondi, after a story by Fellini and Flaiano. Photographed by Gianni de Venanzo. Edited by Leo Catozzo. Sets by Piero Gherardi. Music by Nino Rotta. With Marcello Mastroianni, Claudia Cardinale, Anouk Aimee, Sandra Milo. Courtesy Avco/Embassy. 135 min.

The title of Fellini's film refers to his entire oeuvre. He had directed six features, given himself half credit for LUCI DEL VARIETA, LOVE IN THE CITY and BOCCACCIO 70; six plus three halves equals seven and one-half, plus one makes $8\frac{1}{2}$. The film itself refers to the making of this picture which is both called and to be called $8\frac{1}{2}$. During our viewing of the picture, we see what might be called the "inspiration" for this

feature-to-be. Guido, the hero-director, who dresses just like Fellini, experiences on one level the indecisions, the problems, the complications of having to make a film. On another level he continues to live various fantasies, various memories - most of which Fellini has told us have come from his own life. At the end of the picture he finds a way to reconcile these two worlds and to go on with his film. At the very end of this picture we are seeing, everything is ready for him to begin filming. Directly after the end-title, we can imagine the director shouting for silence, action, and camera. The first scene of this new 8½ will begin. What will it be like, one wonders. Well, it will probably be like the film we have just seen. If Director Mastroianni is like Director Fellini (and we are told they are almost identical) then he will show us in his film the way in which he first came to understand how to reconcile the two worlds (reality/illusion), the conflict of which prevented his making his picture, the unity of which will allow him to make it. And so it must continue, like the emblems on the arm-and-hammer soda box, one inside the other stretching into an optical infinity, all duplications referring to each other and to themselves, all rolling around inside the head of Federico Fellini; these self-referential films will be self-referring in a parade (much like the procession at the end of the film) which, tail attached to head, can continue forever.

d.r.