Faith and Spirituality in Masters of World Cinema

Faith and Spirituality in Masters of World Cinema

Edited by

Kenneth R. Morefield

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Faith and Spirituality in Masters of World Cinema, Edited by Kenneth R. Morefield

This book first published 2008

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-0009-0, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-0009-9

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

CINEMA IN THE BIBLICAL SENSE

MIKE HERTENSTEIN

"Faith" and "Spirituality" are volatile, assumption-laden terms, apt to provoke skepticism when linked to "World Cinema." Indeed, relations between religion and art (including film) remain as troubled as those between religion and science. Yet we recall that science and art have had their own stormy relationship. In other words, if "Faith" can be made to sound reactionary opposed to "Reason," so also can "Poetry." And the faith requisite to poetic experience has had its share of skeptics and unbelievers since that original fundamentalist, Plato. "Spiritual," likewise, maintains complex relations with the "Aesthetic." One critic sarcastically notes of a film discussed herein that the sensual, even sexual denouement "has nothing to do with spirituality" (Milne 13). This not only misses the point of the film, it misses the point of sex—if the implication is that sex also "has nothing to do with spirituality." Of course, if critics are confused, we shouldn't be surprised. The church has fought and split over the proper relation of flesh to spirit. The Bible, in the hands of certain interpreters, points down a road that leads at the far end to disembodied abstraction. That sort of "transcendence" is exactly what the directors featured in this collection seek to transcend—along with the opposite dead end, barren materialism.

There have always been makers and receivers of art who embraced a more sophisticated relation between flesh and spirit than simple opposition. And while this book does not limit spirituality in film to Christianity, the central Christian doctrine of the Incarnation provides the best model for the sort of "spirituality" we're after here: an interpenetration of the Divine and matter. Apprehension in this mode may be described as a kind of knowledge—though not just any kind. Contra popular usage, "knowing in the Biblical sense" is not simply a euphemism for sex. Such knowing, declares Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, is at the farthest remove from greedy, abstract possession, but rather involves an

intimate "reception into the soul" (57). It is this sense which that most supreme appreciator of cinema, André Bazin, had in mind when he praised a particular "way of regarding things" shared by select filmmakers—and select viewers, too: a vision of "reality conceived as whole by a consciousness disposed to see things as whole" (97).

The conversation in this volume on faith, film and spirituality has to do with the recovery of wholeness. Among the filmmakers in specific and the discussion in general, there is a shared sense of dividedness or fragmentation and a common longing for connection. This sense of brokenness is an entirely reasonable response to the crush of Modernity (both its brute materiality and abstract ideology), the estrangement of self under various colonialisms, the divisions between people and nations and the multiple bifurcations inherent in the human condition. These filmmakers are ever throwing themselves at barriers, straining to see through the dark glass, and persistently digging themselves out of the prison of their alienated existence. These artists are *escape artists* in what was built as an escape-proof jail; each seeks his getaway with great ingenuity using a variety of methods: story, anti-story, symbol, image, varieties of "realism," stylization or myth. Some want to engage ideas, others are more concerned with formal elements; all seek that elusive combination that opens the door of truncated being—not just from alienated Modernity to postmodern anarchy—but to *wholeness*.

Such efforts have been described as ecumenically as possible. Paul Schrader traces *The Transcendental Style in Cinema* as a quest for a particular quality or experience "not intrinsically transcendental or religious," but "a way to approach the Transcendent," a "spiritual universality" (3). And yet, Schrader can't help but speak in religious terms, of "the Holy." He's not alone in this difficulty. Bazin himself apologizes for using the term "supernatural" to name the domain or effect of certain films, offering possible alternatives as "poetry," "surrealism" and "magic" (88). More recently, Caveh Zahedi is unapologetic when he nails down Bazin's elusive *je ne sais quoi* as the "Holy Moment" (*Waking Life*). Bazin insisted (in Zahedi's terms) that cinema is a medium with a unique capacity for capturing Holy Moments—something *other* than plot, *other* than ideas, *other* than vicarious romance or adventure, Rudolf Otto's famous "wholly other." The tradition of films that carry on this quest for "the Holy," by any other name, is one of the richest, most innovative, perhaps even most indispensable in the entire history of cinema.

The business of engaging with such films, as Bazin says, involves the disposing of one's consciousness to see things as whole—a movement not unlike the leap of faith and strangely congruent with carnal knowledge,

knowing in the Biblical sense, body and soul. The business of this book is to set readers on a path on which they might discover those artists who can best repay such efforts. This is indeed a spiritual journey, a pilgrimage, and a discipline. Many of the more recent of this tradition of filmmakers are self-conscious disciples of certain of their precursors. The contributors—from academia or alternative sources, including the burgeoning online critical community—are disciples, too, and represent at some level a Great Awakening. This is an ecumenical revival, for the connection between spirituality and art is mystical and ambiguous enough to make room for true believers in one or the other or both.

At the end of an age of epistemological overconfidence, such ambiguity becomes an open door out of a closed universe.

Ingmar Bergman is the Jacob and Job of European arthouse cinema. Like Job, he stands with Modern Man in the ashes of Western confidence, robbed of his metaphysical supports yet still demanding answers from God—Who remains silent. Nonetheless, with Jacob, Bergman does not release his grip. Antonius Block in *The Seventh Seal*: "Why, in spite of everything, is He a baffling reality that I can't shake off?" Bergman commands our attention because he takes seriously the abyss others paper over with sentimental religion or sentimental atheism—and takes it *personally*. He wrestles, and provokes the viewer to wrestle, with the dark matters of life and death, suffering and evil, with questions of meaning, the brokenness of human beings and their relationships, and above all the pain of not knowing. Bergman faces the darkness and somehow finds a home there—or, at least, he forcefully suggests that another name for this place of shadows might just be "Calvary." This painful embrace of uncertainty has much to teach even believers about the nature of faith. Too often, religious faith is but another attempt at control or, rather, the illusion of it. Practitioners of such a confident faith are Job's comforters, babbling platitudes in the face of the Unspeakable. But Bergman guides us *into* the Unspeakable, leaving words behind.

The director has described his film sequence known as the "Trilogy of Faith" (*Through A Glass Darkly*, *Winter Light*, *The Silence*), as a "reduction"—a dissolution of human certainties, modes of knowledge, connections and meaning. The proper end of this reduction, however, is in a fourth film, says Bill Scalia, in an essay titled "**Bergman's 'Trilogy of Faith' and *Persona*: Faith and Visual Narrative."** Where rational or otherwise mediated methods fall short, intuition succeeds—or so the film *Persona* suggests. Interestingly enough, this film also foregrounds the process of filmmaking in such a way as to associate film itself with the

intuitive way of seeing. Cinema, hints Bergman, holds a remarkable potential for transporting viewers into the wordless dimension where speaks the still small voice.

The Swedish Bergman, following an oddly persistent correlation between geography and philosophy, neatly represents the Chilly North (abstract, Rational, Protestant)—a locale brought into frequent collision with the Sunny South (concrete, intuitive, Catholic) by **Roberto Rossellini**. This conflict, a variant on the endless "War of Poets and Philosophers," is central to Rossellini's best films. It's no coincidence that Rossellini names his characters "Joyce" in his *Voyage in Italy* (*Viaggio in Italy*), wherein Italy itself becomes a Joycean epiphany, a manifestation of the ineffable that melts cold Northern hearts. Bergman "reduced" to wordlessness; Rossellini was skeptical of verbosity all along: "I talk much but accomplish little," declares a monk in *The Flowers of St. Francis* (*Francesco, giullare di Dio*)—just as St. Francis instructed his disciples to "preach the Gospel," but only "if necessary" to use words. Rossellini was likewise known for his resistance to ideology and institution, tending always toward the intuitive and existential.

Such an approach is liable to resist analysis, yet Jason Simpkins finds an effective entrée into Rossellini's wartime and postwar efforts. In **"Roberto Rossellini and Religion in the Post-War Era,"** Simpkins emulates the director in eschewing analysis of ideas in favor of a confrontation with concrete realities. In this case, the realities are church buildings and religious figures as depicted by Rossellini. The sheer materiality of Rossellini's approach resists moral abstractions and conceptual systems, yet somehow maintains its hold on humanity, morality, even religion. As Simpkins notes of Rossellini's film, *The Miracle* (*Il Miracolo*, a segment in the longer work, *L'Amore*) the protagonist is rejected by official religion but finds "a way into the church through a side entrance…." Rossellini was ever drawn to outsiders, to Holy Fools who shatter the piety of plaster saints, leaving decent people terrified. In his *Europa '51*, a modern-day Francis of Assisi is ostracized as a madwoman for wanting to love her neighbors. Rossellini's "neorealism" was a Kierkegaardian re-appropriation of the scandalous paradox of the Incarnation; it became one of the most fruitful streams in film history.

Along with inspiring Andre Bazin to an entire theory of film criticism, Rossellini's work inspired generations of filmmakers. The first of these New Waves was propelled by a group of French critics-turned-artists, including **Eric Rohmer**, whose encounter with Rossellini's *Stromboli* facilitated his conversion from atheistic existentialism. Yet Rohmer's

work remains existential, if not in the final triumph of experience than in the embeddedness of the spiritual in the temporal and material, as well as in the everyday. Rohmer's focus came to rest at the crossroads of flesh and spirit in a relentless scrutiny of everything that goes by the name of "love." In a multitude of settings, the director explores the games of love, of courtship, jealousy and flirtation; he weighs "real" love against imitations, probes matters of fidelity and compatibility, stages conflicts of desire against will and choice against chance—or destiny.

This conversation is conducted at a strikingly high level: Rohmer's films are peopled by intellectuals, philosophers, artists and students, jabbering in cafés, bookshops and late-night talkathons. Yet the talk is far from abstract: could anything be less abstract than a discussion of chastity with a beautiful nearly-naked woman, as in *My Night at Maud's*? And if ever there was talk that could refute Francis on the relative value of words, Rohmer's mastery of the Fine Art of Conversation would almost be it—*almost*. For these very smart people are inevitably and incredibly obtuse about their own hearts, which (to cite one of the director's favorite thinkers) have reasons their reason cannot know. All these characters have something to learn, something that does not reduce to syllogism or proposition. In fact, knowledge "in the Biblical sense" seems to be what they're after—even if a character in *Maud* rather conspicuously dismisses that formulation. The director takes the opposite view, since he opens his most famous all-nighter on carnal knowledge with the Eucharist, the sacramental interpenetration of Divinity and matter, body and soul, self and Other. In the essay, **"Cinematic Epiphanies: Eric Rohmer and the Transcendence of the Ordinary,"** John Caruana surveys the sacramental nature of Rohmer's work, in which the Eternal is hidden from all but those with eyes to see.

Meanwhile, the treacherous chasm between flesh and spirit persists; not everybody makes it across. In fact, those absurd leaps of Kierkegaard are blamed as the cause of madness in a film by a countryman of that melancholy Dane, a director similarly concerned with bridging the most notorious gaps in the Western condition. The career of **Carl Theodor Dreyer** ran from the silent era into the 1960s, like John Ford's—but Dreyer was much less popular or prolific. Due to a variety of difficult circumstances, his efforts were painfully intermittent, yet he produced nevertheless an impressive if compact filmography. The work generally recognized as the purest fulfillment of Dreyer's vision is *Ordet* ("The Word"). In this film, the characters can be plotted on a continuum spanned by the usual extremes: matter vs. spirit, idealism vs. practicality, mind vs. body. Thus Dreyer engages all the old disputes over which end of the

spectrum is the most "real," and highlights the loss in wholeness as each character moves away from the center. At that center we find the winsome figure of Inger, who miraculously embodies all the oppositions, and so holds things together and mediates the conflicts. When *Ordet* brings these conflicts to simultaneous climax in an explosive mismatch of categories, it provokes for some viewers a frustrating cognitive dissonance and generates for others the *frisson* of the Uncanny, a glimpse of unity or the Whole.

For obvious reasons, Dreyer's work has been both critically acclaimed and marginalized, not least because the films, especially *Ordet*, defy conventional genre categories. **Kenneth R. Morefield** speculates about the effect of Dreyer's boundary problem on his critical reputation in **"Carl Theodor Dreyer and the Problem of Christian Realism."** The Western church, as noted earlier, has always had similar boundary problems, tending to find the occasional balance only passing from one extreme to the other.

The Eastern Church, on the other hand, sees both Catholics and Protestants as two sides of the same Rationalistic coin. **Andrei Tarkovsky** shares with Bazin and Rossellini their faith in the power of the image and in cinema's special facility for tapping into it. Yet perhaps the Russian merits particular authority in this discussion, given the more central place of the image in the theology of the East. In Orthodoxy, the icon is a window through which the Eternal shines into time. Such images are crafted deliberately as non-representational and two-dimensional, into containers or conduits for a Real Presence which cannot be represented, but only experienced. Tarkovsky adapted the iconic mode for moving, photographic images. His cinematic icons are more naturalistic, but he's no less concerned with achieving an inner, rather than outer, perfection. Elemental visions abound in his films: of water, rain, fire, wind in grass and trees—as if these had their own message which could be received only by gazing at them long enough.

The director's second major feature honored his country's most famous icon painter. Yet to say *Andrei Rublëv* is *about* its title character is to miss everything. For if there's one thing this and other directors in this volume have resolutely set themselves against, it is "about-ness"—the analytical, detached stance. This film and especially this director are concerned with "is-ness," something unparaphrasable, irreducible, an existential fact. Tarkovsky's epic is not a theological biopic, but rather a fevered quest to encounter the same transcendent Other which the artist-monk Rublëv sought in his life and work. Tarkovsky might also describe himself as an "artist-monk," perhaps even "martyr" or "saint": his personal

identification with his character is seen in the original title, *The Passion of Andre*. That he pursued his calling under a totalitarian Soviet regime backs up such presumption. Tarkovsky dissented in his very form with the rejection of Bolshevik film theory, its violent cutting and ideological manipulation. Like another of his characters, Tarkovsky is the Stalker who leads us into "The Zone" of Mystery. Ingmar Bergman said he hammered his whole life on doors through which Tarkovsky seemed to move effortlessly—into "the room of dreams" (73). Terence McSweeney maps Tarkovsky's dreamscape in the essay **"'A State of Mind, Not a Way of Thinking': Spirituality in the Films of Andrei Tarkovsky"**

Spirituality, of course, is hardly limited to Christianity, nor cinema to what used to be called "Christendom." Even so, given its own particular issues with the image and the outside world, Iran seems an unlikely home for one of the most celebrated national cinemas in recent decades. Yet as far back as the rule of the Shah, Iranian filmmakers began mastering the delicate negotiations between art and dictatorship that Tarkovsky well knew. More surprising, it was under the Islamic Republic that this cinematic renaissance blossomed, both because of and in spite of a regime which subsidized the enterprise and provoked artists to a singular ingenuity. The most critically-admired and influential of Iranian filmmakers is Abbas Kiarostami, whose interrogation of reality at the frontier of fact and fiction has been subversive of official realities and a wellspring of Holy Moments. Among the holiest is the climax to his film *Close-Up*, when a lonely nobody finds forgiveness and acceptance in his confrontation with the celebrity he's been impersonating. It is that celebrity, though, who may turn out to be the most interesting of Iranian directors—if only because of his own struggle to find his real self. **Mohsen Makhmalbaf** set off as a true believer, house propagandist to the regime. Growing disenchanted with ideological art, he drew upon the ancient poetic sources of Iranian culture to remake himself into a cinematic poet. Between those phases, Makhmalbaf became a champion of the disenfranchised, which made him a hero to the lonely nobodies.

Gilda Boffa, in her essay **"From Dogmatism to Mysticism: The Evolution of Faith in Mohsen Makhmalbaf's Cinema,"** charts Makhmalbaf's evolution across his filmography, "as an artist and as a Muslim." Makhmalbaf had always been known for his striking images. Boffa argues that the director's breakthrough to a more mystical, universal and tolerant (she calls it "relativistic") cinema occurred as he stopped trying to *use* images in the service of an ideological message and *surrendered* to them, letting the images speak for themselves in their own ways. This turn from the Word need not take the bitter and even nihilistic

tone it often has in the West. If Bergman's *The Silence* was an anguished, if mute, cry, Makhmalbaf's film of that name involves quieting distractions to encounter the goodness of creation. In Makhmalbaf's journey one finds hope for a future in which People of the Book find a way to embrace the image, the poetry of ear or eye and most particularly—as these directors keep reminding us—the poetic possibilities of cinema.

The rejection of official realities makes for a common theme in recent non-Western films, and is an essential part of the post-colonial experience. When in mid-career he took up directing, Senegalese novelist **Ousmane Sembène** asserted Africa's right to speak for itself in the language of film. His depiction of African culture from inside a whirlwind of change is a quest for an anchor beyond both tradition and ideology—thus a universal ethic, based primarily on the unrelenting assertion of the essential dignity of man. In Sembène's case, this comes typically via an assertion of the essential dignity of woman, in a patriarchal society. Yet Sembène's narrative films and documentaries are "anti-colonial" or even "anti-patriarchy" only inasmuch as those terms embrace *any* relationship characterized by an exploiter and an exploited. These films offer stinging critique of asymmetric power relations in all forms: marriages, families, local communities, as well as within the colonialist or neo-colonialist settings. And Sembène is never shy about calling religious authorities and even the authority of religion itself to account. Unlike other directors who concern themselves with religion and spirituality, he seems uninterested in metaphysics, but as a Marxist rather with the practical consequences of religious beliefs. Yet corruption, hypocrisy, selfishness, petty cruelty and mindless assent seem to be much the same in any institution in which they lodge. Thus, Sembène's even-handed tone in an ecumenical censure, one bracing in its moral vigor and inspiring for what it throws thereby into such sharp relief.

This director's resistance to colonialism extends to conventional Hollywood form. Austere in both style and attitude, Sembène's work recalls that of the postwar neo-realists, including their sense of mission to reclaim human dignity from the rubble. The African is perhaps less idealistic and might have argued *more* realistic than the neo-realists, inasmuch as martyrdom is not an option; Sembène is hard-bitten and defiant. Despite the critical bent and Marxist orientation, the director models the respect and tolerance he demands of others—not least, as Patrick L. Day shows, in his approach to religion. In **"Beliefs of a Non-Believer: Spirituality and Religion in the Films of Ousmane Sembène,"** Day gives special attention to the director's persistent

interaction with religion, directly and indirectly, with both the established and folk varieties.

In his own age of violence, upheaval and change, Andrei Rublëv created his most celebrated icon, "The Trinity," depicting the Three-Person'd Godhead in perfect harmony; in our time, Polish director **Krzysztof Kieslowski** has sought unification for a divided Europe in a post-Soviet, post-Christian, and post-Modern world with triptychs, multi-film series, and double-lives. Kieslowski's ten-film sequence *The Decalogue* opens with a gut-punching meditation on the limitations of exact science, or any system which presumes to calculate morality on base ten. Here, an over-confident philologist muses that a big enough computer might even be able to compose poetry. The scientist gets his tragic comeuppance when he's confronted with the utterly Unspeakable. This makes for a rather stunning introduction for a film series devoted to ethical inquiry, and underscores the evolution of Kieslowski from documentarian to poet. This director's struggle with form and content culminated in a remarkable decade of masterpieces, films of high artistry and moral depth. Kieslowski wove together integrated wholes which can be fully appreciated only by that consciousness disposed to receive thusly. *The Decalogue*, the "Three Colors Trilogy" (*Blue*, *White* & *Red*) and *The Double Life of Véronique* interlace not just moral, metaphysical, and political threads, but also key formal constituents, not least including music and color.

The director's best efforts were collaborative: he worked with a rare creative intimacy with his longtime screenwriter Krzysztof Piesiewicz as well as composer Zbigniew Preisner, who helped Kieslowski to apprehend film score as virtually another character in the story. As *place* was for Rossellini, so became music and color for Kieslowski, not mere backgrounds, not "It" but rather "Thou"—living Presences which invade the consciousness of characters either blind or deliberately trying to close themselves off from wholeness. Also like Rossellini, this director found himself amid the rubble of one world and seeking to reappropriate traditional moral sources in building a new one. In **"Music, Light, and the Kierkegaardian Instant in Kieslowski's *The Double Life of Véronique* and *Blue*,"** Isil Ozcan examines the director's use of formal elements to effect an epiphany along the lines of what we have already referred to as the "Holy Moment." Kierkegaard was father to many existentialisms, from the religious to various atheistic varieties—though, as Ozcan notes, he was only trying to be a good Christian. Krzysztof Kieslowski may well have just been trying to be a good existentialist, but

ended up creating films that have been embraced for their deep religious insight.

Several of these directors wear their particular theological traditions on their sleeves; the French Catholic **Robert Bresson** offers a less explicit but perhaps even more concentrated adaptation of iconographic style. The icon is "anonymous and impersonal," removed from history and nature, transformed by a rigid formalism into a liturgical device—an image made abstract in some ways to make others more concrete. The formal approach in the cinema of Bresson is quite similar: non-professional actors, flattened expressions and performance, minimalist and stylized compositions and dialogue, languid plotting and editing—all serving together a larger purpose. "What purpose could be left after such a radical reduction?" some might ask. Yet by so ruthlessly stripping down the film experience, Bresson eliminates what he calls "screens" which block viewers' access to a more immediate contact.

Strangely enough, some viewers seem to *prefer* their screens; they are reluctant to give up spoon-fed visions, and react in frustration to attempts to flush them out of their hiding places. And so Bresson can be challenging, since he divests us of our usual methods of avoiding confrontation: identifying with characters to experience vicarious adventures, our stock responses to spoon-fed meanings, pat resolutions and defanged mysteries. Those who step away from these things in faith (and no little courage) will find in Bresson's disciplined pruning of what is generally thought to be the central ingredients of film a new center, a true Center. Joseph Cuneen explores this director's work by means of what he calls Bresson's "most perfect film"—one he also admits is not the easiest to connect with for beginners. Fortunately, **"The Sacred in Bresson: *Au Hasard Balthazar*"** offers a gentle and knowing introduction to this director and his work. Balthazar is simplicity itself—he's a donkey. He's also a (mostly) mute witness and a victim to a catalogue of human cruelties and sins. In short, Balthazar is a saint. Through changing owners and circumstances, we follow the donkey on his Via Dolorosa to glory—yet without any overdetermined piety or resolution or even meaning. As usual, Bresson wants us to learn to receive on a wavelength most films don't even broadcast, and on one that filmgoers must develop certain atrophied muscles of perception to pick up: "to feel the presence of God in ordinary life…."

It's too not much of a stretch to consider *Balthazar* an art house exemplar of the postwar "Troubled Youth" genre: protagonists Marie and Gérard are rebels without a cause—like Bresson's title character in his next film, *Mouchette*, who seems likewise to have aged prematurely or

been robbed of innocence. All three could be younger siblings to Rossellini's tormented rubble-child Edmund in *Germany Year Zero*, that self-described "model" film for **Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne**. These Belgian directors depict contemporary rubble children in a still-shattered Western world. Understanding her lineage in Rossellini and Bresson, we see the clear resemblances in the Dardennes' *Rosetta*, whose blind fury drives her to escape the rubble, but also threatens to hold her back. But where poor Edmund and Mouchette surrender to the depths, Rosetta wills herself out—the question becomes whether she'll ever trust anyone but herself. *The Son*, set amid family ruins, similarly concerns the loss of and need to regain trust—though young Francis at least has something Edmund was doomed without: a father-figure. This possibility of redemption from human rubble distinguishes the cinema of the Dardennes.

Doug Cummings also notes the influence on the Dardennes of philosopher Emmauel Levinas, who emphasized the irreducible mystery of the individual. In his essay **"The Brothers Dardenne: Responding to the Face of the Other**," Cummings considers how this spiritual irreducibility translates to cinematic form, for example, in the Dardenne's acknowledgement of the ultimate inadequacy of film to capture fully the "face-to-face" encounter. Following Bresson, the Dardennes believe "less is more," and so seek to provoke a deeper connection by the use of formal distancing devices: we get lots of tight shots of hands and feet. We also get necks and backs running from something at a frantic, un-Bressonian pace—the characters are chased relentlessly by the filmmakers, who burrow into their being, pulling viewers along for the ride. We experience with them a mostly-corrupt world with rare but real flashes of goodness, and a weight of moral choice that bathes everything in deep significance. The happy ending is not guaranteed, but there is every possibility of a turning away from a fatal closing-off and an opening toward grace—a chance to be *in* a shattered world without being *of* it.

Portuguese filmmaker **Pedro Costa** is also a disciple of Robert Bresson; but where the French director removes "screens" which obscure authentic experience, Costa speaks of closing doors to keep viewers from entering his films in quest of ill-gotten pleasures. Such efforts are aimed at more than just our appetite for false immediacies and facile trancendents. Something about the human gaze actually seems to turn image and narrative itself into stone, transform icons into dumb idols. Artists are forced into ever-more drastic measures to foil viewers' worst tendencies, to keep ahead of inevitable and relentless co-option and domestication. In his "Vanda Trilogy," Costa emulates Bresson in many ways (not least in employing his cinematographer). He peels back to bare bones, beginning

with a film of that name, set in a world stark and redolent of death. The non-professional actors he'd worked with in a previous film lead him home to their slum neighborhood, where he loosens the constraints of Bressonian form in a film that "wants to be a documentary," straining at the edges and spilling out categories in either direction toward fact and fiction. Subsequent films in this series continue to evolve a distinctive neo-neo-realist hybrid mode, especially as Costa scraps the bulky, noisy circus that is professional filmmaking for the hand-held intimacies of a digital camcorder.

The neorealist instinct to live with the marginalized and outcasts has always resonated with the Gospel's "preferential option" for the poor. Filmmakers who take us to such places imitate the Incarnation—provided they are truly incarnate, and not voyeuristic. Costa practically becomes one of his subjects, taking us much too close for superficial comforts into the lives of junkies and whores. But he disallows the gratifications of either gawking abstractedly at suffering, exotic Others, nor living exploitatively through them. We are witnesses to privileged moments that Kieslowski abandoned documentary for fiction to find, recorded here because a director has gained trust in an astonishingly unobtrusive, non-judgmental—but hardly amoral—way. Indeed, Costa's searching vision refuses to exploit but in his very form defends the dignity of survivors among the rubble. In this, Costa presents "a useful test case" says Darren Hughes in his essay **"Pedro Costa's 'Vanda Trilogy' and the Limits of Narrative Cinema as a Contemplative Art."** The context of spirituality and film, asserts Hughes, raises questions about moral responsibility with regard to film form, narrative and image. Without claims to faith, Costa bears witness to "the least of these"—both in terms of his content and in consciousness of formal concerns that are usually ignored, even in films more ostensibly "spiritual."

Most of the directors included in this book are picked out from among the usual suspects typically gathered under such a heading, with a few added candidates for canonization. **Guillermo del Toro** is perhaps a not-so-obvious choice. Yet his presence in the discussion raises significant questions otherwise neglected, and keeps the conversation fresh, suggesting an ongoing tradition of such films, moving in ever-new directions. Del Toro is subject to the same problems of genre expectation as Dreyer. The Mexican is generally classed a "horror" director, despite his project (similar to Dreyer's, actually) of bringing together otherwise mutually exclusive realms—in this case, the fantastic and the realistic. Dreyer worked within and against that same airtight Western dualism that shows up in his fellow European directors' efforts to break through their

various barriers. Del Toro's work, on the other hand, draws upon traditions associated with (though is broader than) Latino literature, and follows the same basic longing right over the rainbow.

"Magical Realism" is less a matter of throwing oneself against the dividing wall than simply walking through it as if it weren't there. This relaxed transit between worlds—fantasy/realism, inner/outer, figurative/literal—is a wondrous enchantment indeed and has proven a balm to many a weary gringo soul. At the same time, the subtext ideologies of European realisms—including positivism and colonialism—make Magical Realism a form subversive on multiple counts, not least in the assertion that the mythic realm is every bit as important a source of reality as the historical, economic and/or scientific. Sibohan O'Flynn, in **"The Fragility of Faith in the Films of Guillermo del Toro,"** argues that del Toro's films "chart an increasing shift to the realm of the mythic as the solace and counter to a contemporary loss of spiritual values." Del Toro moves freely between realisms and fantasies to leverage expectations of both and resonances between "real world" horrors and fantastic truths. Typically, it is a child who passes between realms: thus an association of childlike innocence with moral wholeness is contrasted to the calculating and "monstrous" brutality of adults. The underlying question is whether goodness, beauty and love—even meaning itself—are so many fairies—which drop dead in the face of doubts regarding their existence. Depending on one's perspective, the answer is an echo in the abyss or an opening into human possibility.

"I talk much, but accomplish little," confesses the Holy Foolish monk. One more reason for skepticism in this enterprise: this book about cinema may only add to the sum total of dancing about architecture. If it helps the reader to see differently and deeper, that will be because he or she has stopped reading about seeing and started to see. At some point, you either leap or you don't. The means (for want of a better word) remains faith, and the end (there is no better word) is salvation. There is, of course, a better word for "knowledge in the Biblical sense," and that word is "love." Contrary to popular usage, love is not a euphemism for a superficial preference, but a deep, penetrating mode of communion. "In my opinion," said André Bazin, "the cinema, more than any other art, is particularly bound up in love" (72). Bazin found this kind of love to be the *modus operandi* of filmmakers who were characteristically "disposed to see things as whole." Rossellini found it in St. Francis, whose childlike wholeness he offered as an example to a world that had been blasted back to Year Zero.

All the filmmakers discussed in this volume are seeking the same thing, and finding it in varying degrees. Bergman agonized about seeing "through the glass darkly" but never gave up straining to see "face to face." Andrei Rublëv overcomes his own blockage when he learns that speaking in even angels' tongues is worthless without love. The same passage from First Corinthians is the libretto for Kieslowski's "Song for the Unification of Europe," with the implication that for this civilization, even more key than Enlightenment values are those of faith, hope and love—the last "the greatest of these."

To be a *cinephile* is to be a *lover*; likewise an *amateur*. Seeing wholly, with a sympathetic imagination, receiving otherness without using the other just to see oneself, honoring an essential dignity and mystery, these are rare and enviable skills. If this way of seeing must and can be acquired to make and view particular sorts of films, who knows what additional possible applications there may turn out to be.

Works Cited

Bazin, André. What is Cinema? Trans. Hugh Gray. Vol. II. Berkeley: U of California P, 1971.

Bergman, Ingmar. *The Magic Lantern: His Autobiography*. Trans. Joan Tate. New York: Penguin, 1988.

Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *The Prophets: An Introduction*. 1962. Harper Torchbook Edition. New York: Harper, 1969.

Milne, Tom. *The Cinema of Carl Dreyer*. The International Film Guide Series. New York: A. S. Barnes, 1971.

Schrader, Paul. *The Transcendental Style in Cinema: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer*. New York: Da Capo P, 1972.

Waking Life. Dir. Richard Linklater. Perf. Caveh Zahedi. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2001

CHAPTER ONE

BERGMAN'S TRILOGY OF FAITH, *PERSONA*, AND FAITH IN NARRATIVE

BILL SCALIA

Ingmar Bergman wrote about his early interest in filmmaking, "I was suddenly able to correspond with the world around me in a language spoken literally from soul to soul, in phrases which escaped the control of the intellect in an almost voluptuous way." ("Each Film" 88-89) *Persona* (1966) demonstrates Bergman's desire to communicate from "soul to soul"; Robin Wood writes that *Persona* "compels us to feel what we are shown with unusual intimacy, as if naked experience were being communicated direct, instead of being clothed with the customary medium of characters-and-narrative." (65) Bergman moves in a determinable pattern, from concretion to abstraction, through the course of his "Trilogy of Faith"—*Through a Glass Darkly* (1960), *Winter Light* (1962), *The Silence* (1962)—along with *Persona* removing narrative convention from his films. If we may agree that faith is "man's response to God, who reveals Himself and gives Himself to man, at the same time bringing man a supernatural light as he searches for the ultimate meaning of his life," then we might think of the "Trilogy of Faith" films, plus *Persona*, as a progressing investigation of the aesthetic connection between God and man. As Bergman moves from *Through a Glass Darkly* to *Persona*, he reveals in each film how a different human formulation fails, until finally, in *Persona*, he arrives at intuitive religious experience. Bergman does not remove God from the world, but shows us "God's silence." The conventional institutions through which "God" is mediated—family, church, language—are removed in order to reveal faith as aesthetic experience. Bergman achieves the poetic imagery to speak "from soul to soul" in *Persona*, but he must move through the "Trilogy of Faith" to do it.

Persona resists conventional narrative analysis; formally, the film communicates (in the sense that communicants experience transcendence

through faith) through associative, rather than narrative (prose) logic. Susan Sontag writes that "*Persona* is constructed according to a form that resists being reduced to a 'story'. . . . The reason is that reduction to a 'story' means, in the end, a reduction of Bergman's film to the singular dimension of psychology . . . . But a correct understanding of *Persona* must go beyond the psychological point of view" (58). This resistance, as Sontag notes, suggests the film is a "body of material" or "subject." Sontag significantly asserts that the film is not merely psychological, but is more deeply concerned with aesthetic experience. Also, the unusually self-reflexive nature of the film invites a critique of the medium itself. That is, the object that is the film, and the process by which the object is constituted and exists for the viewer, is under examination. This process has its genesis in the "Trilogy of Faith" films.

Bergman expresses the thematic unity of the trilogy on the title page of the published screenplays: "The theme of these three films is a 'reduction'—in the metaphysical sense of that word. THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY—certainty achieved. WINTER LIGHT—certainty unmasked. THE SILENCE—God's silence—the negative impression." The "faith" Bergman calls attention to we might think of as the meaning-making process. Reduction in this sense is a reduction of this process. Thus, the characters in these films experience crises of faith. For Karin in *Through a Glass Darkly*, this condition is manifest as schizophrenia; for Father Tomas Eriksson in *Winter Light*, it is an awareness of not only the absence of God, but a realization that God's presence or absence may be inconsequential; for Ester and Anna in *The Silence*, language itself has failed. However, each film offers the promise—or at least the possibility—of redemption, through love and relationship, demonstrated by the reconciliation of Minus and his father in *Through a Glass Darkly*, Tomas and Marta in *Winter Light*, Thomas' decision to hold communion for an empty church, and in the symbolic value of the language Ester and Johan come to understand in *The Silence*.

The series shifts focus away from more conventional social institutions toward intuition, toward aesthetic conditions of faith. This is demonstrated by the fact that Bergman originally intended *The Virgin Spring* (1959) as the first film in the trilogy. This film too ends with the promise of God's redemption for human suffering. Gene Phillips writes, "After this strong affirmation of God many thought that Bergman would now begin to examine the more positive aspects of religious belief. Instead Bergman next mounted a trilogy which shows how people who fail to reconcile themselves with other human beings cannot reconcile themselves with God." (48) The thematic shift of the trilogy from the religious

affirmation of *The Virgin Spring* toward the more abstract examination of communication and experience in *The Silence* suggests that Bergman is, in a sense, abandoning the question of institutions in favor of a more universal examination of faith as a process for making meaning of the world and for maintaining human relationships, which echo the divine/human relationship. Our relation to God brings us into relationship with each other, and this relationship is based on the kind of faith that is the subject of Bergman's interest.

Through a Glass Darkly centers on Karin, a young woman suffering from schizophrenia. Her father, a novelist, is exploiting her condition for material for his new book; Karin's husband, a doctor, realizes that his wife's condition is incurable, but is patient and sympathetic. Karin is drawn to a second storey room, where she can "see" through the pattern of the wallpaper into another world; there, she awaits God's arrival. Karin's passage back and forth through the pattern is an apt metaphor for her condition, which suggests Bergman's desire to reconcile the physical and spiritual worlds. However, when "God" finally appears to Karin it is a monster, a "spider-god" that tries to attack her.

In *Winter Light*, Father Tomas Eriksson begins to lose faith in his calling; early in the film he believes that Holy Communion is a ritual, and ultimately a false one. Tomas realizes that God's existence is incidental to the world. Thus, his faith cannot sustain his skepticism or his despair. Like Karin, Tomas has seen through the mask of reality, but he finds nothing beyond. That is, Tomas senses that the rituals (and relationships) we create to sustain our sense of significance in this world are, ultimately, empty. At the end of *Winter Light*, Tomas travels to a nearby town to conduct a service. When no one comes to the church, Tomas is confronted with the decision to continue or cancel the service. Tomas decides to hold the service, and the last scene of the film depicts Tomas beginning the communion service for an empty church. Tomas' choice is one of redemption, but also of surrender; the pale winter light of the church and Tomas' demeanor imply that there is little physical change from the conditions at the beginning of the film. However, his crisis of faith has been resolved by his reconciled relationship with Marta, as Phillips suggests.

Taken together, these three films—*The Virgin Spring*, *Through a Glass Darkly*, and *Winter Light*—constitute meditations on faith. All three place God at the center of the character's actions or maladies. Bergman's struggle with God is central to these films; he seems concerned with the process of maintaining faith, if not in God, then at least in love. In *The Virgin Spring*, the father's faith in God is redeemed by the miraculous

appearance of the spring and his promise to build a church where his daughter was murdered. In *Through a Glass Darkly*, as Karin's faith is diseased, so too is her vision of God nightmarish; it might be said that her unhealthy faith produces an unholy god. However, the revived relationship between Karin's brother Minus and his father as a result of their suffering offers the possibility of redemption. In *Winter Light*, Tomas' faith in God has failed, but his faith in "faith"—that is, the necessity of religious ritual for finding significance in the universe—lives on, in the performance of a religious service that is, for him, suggestive of his own redemption. Bergman says of Father Tomas, "The mirror is clean. There stands a newly scoured vessel that can be filled by mercy. By a new image of God" ("L136" 238). This cleansing of the vessel would not have been possible without Thomas' revalued relationship with Marta.

Bergman's next film, *The Silence*, moves away from the area of a specifically religious faith and more toward faith as a condition of existence that sustains human relationships. Communication is the central theme in *The Silence*. Two sisters, Anna and Ester, along with Ester's young son Johan, arrive by train in Timoka, a foreign city besieged by war, where they know neither the customs nor the language. Almost the entire film takes place in the hotel where the two women are staying while Alma, a translator by trade, rests from an undefined illness. As in *Through a Glass Darkly*, the disease is inevitably fatal. Bergman's placement of the women in this culture, and their inability (and unwillingness) to communicate with each other, suggests an isolation that is perhaps inevitable in human relationships. By the end of the film, Alma has picked up two words of the language, which she passes on to Johan. These words—"hand" and "heart"—suggest the dual aspect of the world Bergman is contemplating and perhaps is trying to reconcile--the physical and the emotional. *The Silence* moves away from religious faith to an understanding of faith as the basis for human communication; in this film, the faith Bergman contemplates seems to be that which is necessary to maintain relationships, or to produce the salvation that is possible only through love, as suggested in *Through a Glass Darkly* and *Winter Light*. The unintelligible language in *The Silence* is an appropriate metaphor for this lack of understanding.

The thematic shift from *Winter Light* to *The Silence* is significant; again, it is important to note that Bergman decided against *The Virgin Spring* as the first film of the trilogy. The themes of *Through a Glass Darkly* and *Winter Light*—the transgression of borders, the characters' failure to realize God behind the mask of a world sustained by faith, and the possibility of redemption through love—shift from religion to a

critique of communication, in *The Silence*. The "silence" of the film, as Bergman writes in the screenplay, is "God's silence." Thus, the trilogy as it stands moves from a critique of personal interpretation of God to a realization of the absence of God and the necessity of ritual, and finally to a critique of existence itself, allegorized in *The Silence* as a wasteland where only two words—hand and heart—cross the gulf of non-communication. This theme will find its most significant development in *Persona*.

Bergman calls *Persona* "a poem in images" (Bjorkman 202). Though it followed *The Silence* by three years, *Persona* is an extension of *The Silence* as an expression of an inability to sustain relationships through language. The two sisters of *The Silence* seem to be represented in *Persona* by Elisabeth Vogler, an actress who has suddenly stopped speaking, and Alma, the young nurse assigned to her care. However, unlike *The Silence*, *Persona* is concerned with the process of making film and meaning, and in that way, the process of "making" visual communication. To this end, Bergman's original title for *Persona* was *Film*, and when the film was initially distributed and promoted, Bergman insisted that each still photograph, frame enlargement, and poster promoting the film include film sprocket holes at the right of the image.

Considering the four films together—*Through a Glass Darkly*, *Winter Light*, *The Silence*, and *Persona*—we may see how the narratives of each film become increasingly abstract as conventional social formulations—family, church, even language—fail. Bergman moves from fictions contained within the narrative framework of the film (*Through a Glass Darkly* and *Winter Light*), to a self-reflexive meditation on communication enclosed in a fictive setting (*The Silence*), to a film that is a meditation upon itself as a film, as a visual act. That is, the framework of the fiction in each case is made more and more apparent until, in *Persona*, Bergman breaks the framework not only of the story, but the "frame" of the film itself.

Persona, like *The Silence*, utilizes a conspicuous framing device. The framing device of *The Silence* serves to locate the story in a foreign hotel. In *Persona*, however, the framing device works to establish the film *as* a film. The opening image, coming slowly into focus, is the carbon arc of a projector. We see and hear the film beginning to run. The "film" we see is a quick succession of images, many from (or reminiscent of) earlier Bergman films. Finally, a young boy who has just awakened in a bare room sees the large, softly focused image of a woman's face appearing; Bergman reverses the shot to show the boy approach and reach out to the camera in an attempt, perhaps, at recognition. Here the story of the film

begins: Elisabeth Vogler's doctor explains her case to nurse Alma, and suggests that the two move into the doctor's beach house to facilitate Elisabeth's treatment.

Bergman's framing of the film makes the story necessarily self-reflexive; the elements of the story are not, nor can they be, disconnected from the medium of film. This separates the framing device of *Persona* from that of *The Silence*; the train serves to move the characters of the film into a physical (and narrative) place, and take them away when the story is over. The opening of *Persona* establishes that the film is connected fundamentally with the materials of its production.

This essential connection between a film as story and film as a means of its own production seems to be the natural evolution of the ideas Bergman began exploring thematically in *Through a Glass Darkly*, if we read Karin's schizophrenia—the breakdown of her ability to tell the difference between illusion and reality—as a metaphor for the way we resist the indifference of the world and the ways we integrate ourselves meaningfully into the world. Thus, *Persona* examines explicitly the connection between the story in the film as well as the ability of the film to tell its story and, in a larger sense, the means by which relationships are sustained through intuition, through an experiential faith without the mediation of ideas exchanged through language.

The specific conditions unique to film that Bergman questions directly in *Persona* are addressed by Stanley Cavell in his book *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*. Cavell writes that "Photography overcame subjectivity in a way undreamed of by painting, a way that could not satisfy painting, one which does not defeat the act of painting as escape it altogether: by automatism, by removing the human agent from the task of reproduction" (23). Cavell terms the material basis of film "a succession of automatic world projections," emphasizing the removal of the audience from the condition of viewing the world; this is significant because, as Cavell suggests, we establish our connection to the world by our view of the world (meaning both perspective and process). Here, the term world covers "the ontological facts of photography and its subjects"; projection refers to "the phenomenological facts of viewing, and to the continuity of the camera's motion as it ingests the world" (73).

Bergman's film is, by necessity, a photograph; that is, it separates itself consciously from the world it cuts out, a world that has a continual, temporal existence beyond the isolation of Alma and Elisabeth at the beach house. However, that world, too, is implied within the framework of the film; we have seen it in the hospital, and we assume we will, at some

point, return to it. But, the film goes further, examining this process of cutting, or screening, the world. Cavell writes,

> The world of a moving picture is screened. . . . What does the silver screen screen? It screens me from the world it holds—that is, makes me invisible. And it screens that world from me—that is, screens its existence from me. That the projected world does not exist (now) is its only difference from reality. (24)

Persona is concerned with "screening," both as the subject for a film and as a process by which film itself happens. This idea of screening, or masking (or "persona"), is multilayered in *Persona*; we are screened from the world by the screen of the film, which is inherent in the material process of the cinema; Elisabeth and Alma are screened from the world inside the frame of the screen; and Elisabeth's silence effectively "screens" Alma.

Bergman interrupts this condition by breaking the frame. The frame of a film may cut out the rest of the world, as Cavell suggests, but it includes the entire world inside its frame. The significance of this for *Persona* is that the world inside the frame of the film is not linear. The story has a depth that is revealed when Bergman "breaks" the frame. We might say that Bergman breaks the frame within the frame, since the break in the film reveals yet another "film," or at least a series of filmic images. The medium might be necessarily artificial, but it is false to itself; the images projected by the film do not, or perhaps cannot, constitute a consistent worldview, even to the characters within the film who are, in effect, screened from it. The frame of the film loses its integrity. But the frame—the rational support for enclosing meaning—must break down to reveal the abstract, intuitive (as opposed to linear, rational) experience of faith.

Bergman breaks *Persona* halfway through the film (a decision made either in shooting or editing; in the published screenplay, the break occurs closer to the end of the film). Bergman's description of the break suggests his concern with "the sequence of pictures [that] plays directly on our feelings without touching the mind" (Steene 93). The screenplay reads:

> At this point the projector should stop. The film, happily, would break, or someone lower the curtain by mistake; or perhaps there could be a short circuit, so that all the lights in the cinema went out. Only this is not how it is. I think the shadows would continue their game, even if some happy interruption cut short our discomfort. Perhaps they no longer need the assistance of the apparatus, the projector, the film, or the sound track. They reach out toward our senses, deep inside the retina, or into the finest recesses of the ear. Is this the case? Or do I simply imagine that these

> shadows posses a power, that their rage survives without the help of the picture frames, this abominably accurate march of twenty-four pictures a second, twenty-seven meters a minute. (93-94)

Undoubtedly, Bergman intends the break to reveal something about the story; the interruption (in the film, not the screenplay) comes just after Elisabeth realizes that Alma has injured her intentionally, her revenge for Elisabeth's perceived manipulation. The images we see during the break, running "underneath" the film, are from Bergman's 1949 film *Prison*, and represent a "magic lantern" show featuring the Devil and Death as prominent characters. *Persona* changes at this point; on the story level, it is as though the stress between Elisabeth and Alma cannot be sustained further, and the film itself breaks under the strain. Structurally, the film is divided into two sections by the break: the very real tension between the characters in the first half, and the more abstract confluence of the two in the second half. The theme of the film is revealed by the placement of the break. In the first half of the film, the two women are separated by the mask of Elisabeth's silence. In the second half, they are more connected, but still separated from the world; in the end, we are aware of our separation from the world of the film itself, a world Bergman has demonstrated to be false on its own terms. Our awareness of *Persona* as a film, as well as the film's consciousness of itself, is made clear by the interruption of the story within the frame.

The break in the film is necessary for Bergman to show the characters alone in the presence of unmediated faith, the faith required to sustain sanity and significance. In this sense, Bergman's purpose for the trilogy is to remove, in each film, barriers to the direct perception of faith. In *Persona*, Bergman's characters can exist naked in the presence of faith as an intuitive, rather than mediated, experience. He can then rebuild the world of the film, as well as the means by which this world is mediated. Now, though, this world as reconstituted shows an integration of faith and meaning. After the break, the frame of the film slowly begins to reassert its integrity. The promise of redemption offered at the close of films of the trilogy become real possibilities. As language returns to Elisabeth, we may assume that family and religious significance will return as well.

Two brief but important shots in *Persona* require examination in this regard. Toward the end of the film, when Elisabeth and Alma are preparing to leave the house, we see a shot of cinematographer Sven Nykvist, and the camera, on a crane photographing the actress Liv Ullmann, not as "Elisabeth" but as herself. This shot occurs within the frame of the film, but explicitly points to the film's artificiality, as though the film is photographing itself. This echoes a shot earlier in the film, in

which Bergman begins a scene by having Elisabeth rise into the frame in a medium shot and take a photograph of the viewer, rather than of Alma and the seascape behind her. These two shots indicate the acknowledgment of the audience, while at the same time removing the audience from its view; that is, in the first instance, the film we are seeing is being photographed as we are seeing it, a process that is repeated whenever the film is seen, a process Cavell terms "automatism."

Cavell defines "automatism" as "the wish for the magical reproduction of the world by enabling us to view it unseen. What we wish to see in this way is the world itself—that is to say, everything." (101-2) Bergman is interested in this condition as well; *Persona* is concerned on one level with the subjective nature of experience and the dividing line between personalities. Also, the film is concerned with the act of viewing. That is, the audience is always aware of the condition of seeing, and more specifically, the act of seeing a film. Cavell writes:

> To say that we wish to view the world itself is to say that we are wishing for the condition of viewing as such. That is our way of establishing our connection with the world: through viewing it, or having views of it. Our condition has become one in which our natural mode of perception is to view, feeling unseen. We do not so much look at the world as look out at it, from behind the self. (102)

This condition of viewing is certainly the condition we find in watching *Persona*. It is also the position in which Alma and Elisabeth find themselves inside the frame of the film. Thus, the film reflects itself, as Bergman demonstrates by showing us the film being filmed, and specifically by showing us this as part of the film. Bergman foreshadows this in the first half of the film with Elisabeth photographing (taking a still photo) of the audience. In the second half (and only possible in the second half), it is not Elisabeth photographing, but being photographed—she is no longer agent, but subject—and the film, with her inside it, is again in motion.

Cavell writes of the condition of the camera that

> it recognizes the hard Berkeleyan—Kantian truth that an event in which we participate is not knowable apart from our participation in it. Yet it neglects the Hegelian truth that the actual consciousness of our participation is not assured á priori, but can be won only through the paths over which we have arrived at this event, and at this specific placement toward it. (128-9)

This is critical to *Persona*. Thus, the shot of the audience being photographed, and the shot of the camera photographing the film, is significant. The film is exposing itself to us as an experience not apart from the experience of seeing it. This is the condition of viewing the world from behind the self, and in *Persona*, the stability of that self is in doubt, as Bergman suggests in the shot of both women's faces coming together to form one, ill-fitting mask. In fact, Bergman so distorts the self as to destabilize the self as well as the medium (again, the condition of seeing) that reveals the self to us. And, if the self is instable, that which the self sees, or perceives, is distorted. The condition of viewing is at once inescapable and unstable. Cavell suggests that "mere declaration of your presence is specifically called for in cases of physical concealment or of emotional withdrawal; there your acknowledgment is a revelation of your mere presence" (129-30). Certainly *Persona* is concerned with emotional withdrawal; in fact, it is this quality it most explicitly shares with *Through a Glass Darkly*, *Winter Light*, and *The Silence*. But *Persona* offers, in the end, emotional and spiritual reassertion.

Robin Wood says of *Persona*, "The film is not so much an exchange of identities on the personal level, as about a merging of two representative consciousnesses, or the process whereby the protective facades people erect to defend themselves from reality are broken down" (58). Just as the theme of *Persona* is concerned on one level with the doubling of the two women, the film doubles itself; it is a film that watches itself as we watch, as though the film is filming itself. Thus, Bergman comes to a unity of theme and form, but this process of investigation begins with *Through a Glass Darkly*. With that film, Bergman begins examining the ways faith operates to sustain our significance, as well as to sustain itself. Bergman is concerned with the condition of viewing: how we come to have views of the world, and how unreliable this condition may potentially (or inevitably) be. For Bergman, this series of films closely examines the conditions of faith—formal, verbal, narrative, and poetic—that allow God and man revelation to each other.

Works Cited

Bergman, Ingmar. "Each Film is My Last." *Ingmar Bergman: Essays in Criticism*. Ed. Stuart M. Kaminsky. London: Oxford University Press, 1975. 88-97.

—. *Persona and Shame*. London: Marion Boyars, 1972.

—. *Three Films by Ingmar Bergman: Through a Glass Darkly, Winter Light, The Silence*. New York: Grove Press, 1967.