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Ingmar Bergman
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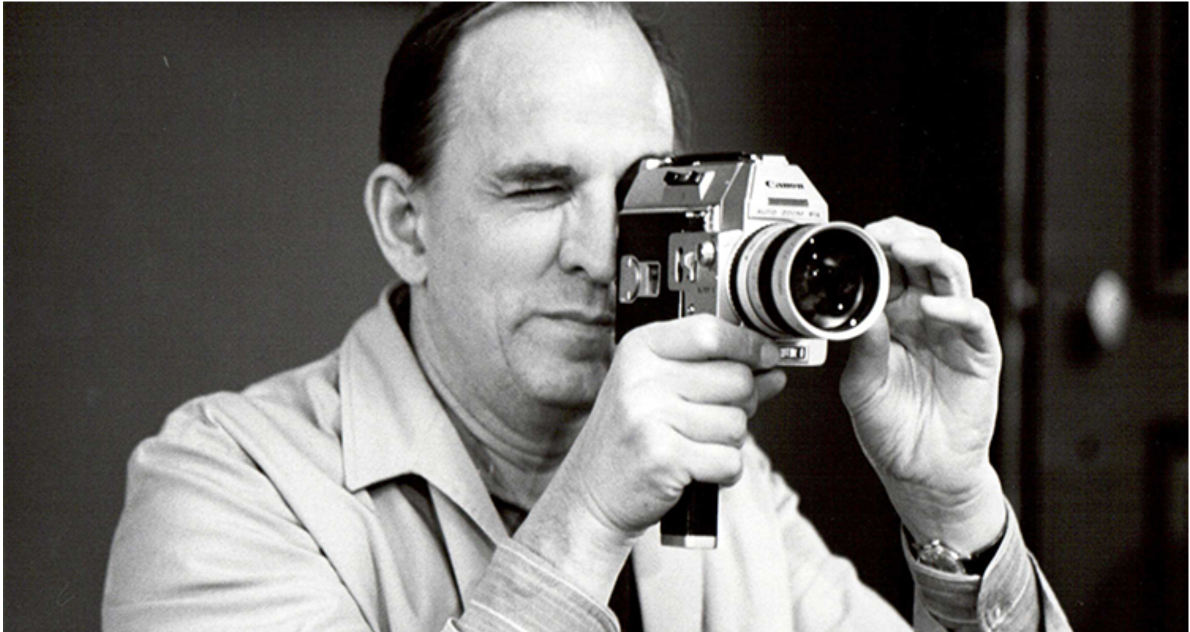

Ingmar Bergman

Hamish Ford • December 2002

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b. July 14, 1918, Uppsala, Sweden
d. July 30, 2007, Fårö, Sweden

The radical intimacy of Bergman

Prologue: facing the void

> *I came out of that movie house reeling like a drunkard, drugged speechless, with the film rushing through my bloodstream, pumping and thudding*.
>
> Gunnel Lindblom, star of *The Silence*, describing her first experience of a Bergman film in 1949

Ingmar Bergman's mature cinema provokes the viewer into an intimate engagement in which a range of uncomfortable feelings are opened up, shared and laid bare. And this often occurs, quite literally, face-to-face.

An encounter with Bergman's seminal 1966 film *Persona* is exemplary here. The film's original title was *Cinematographet*, Swedish for 'cinematography'. But either name is appropriate for a work that enacts inquiries into cinema *and* the subject in states of fecund but disturbing ontological breakdown. And this can perhaps most clearly be seen in Bergman's extraordinary use of the close-up, which Gilles Deleuze described as enforcing a coalescence of the human face with the void. The relentless close-up of the face is a useful formal and thematic key to Bergman's work. In these frequent, almost embarrassingly close and radically elongated moments the viewer can *see*, *think* and *feel* existential sureties in different states of crisis – as we watch subjects reduced to pure flesh, bones, mouth, nose, hair and eyes.

The detail of this fine-focus dissection forces us to confront both the inscrutable materiality of the face, and its role as the communicative nerve centre of the individual subject's investments. The camera moves in uncomfortably, almost seeking to go inside – until a giant abstracted face fills the frame, stopping the zoom dead. The viewer is confronted with a close yet also alienating proximity to such a large expanse of human exterior, while we watch our enormous diegetic companion ask of itself 'what' it is, as it faces a very personal void.

A dual gaze of inquiry takes place here, whereby the onscreen subject's gaze of self-conscious crisis meets the viewer's implicated looking upon – and participation in – that image. Both face and viewer seem to *feel* the intermixing and breaking down of diegetic and meta-diegetic space, and intensities of looking. This is sparked and enforced by Bergman's tight use of a 1.33:1 frame which often excludes any clear glimpses of the world beyond a face which finds no up, down, left or right in which to direct its gaze.

Imprisoned in its relentless close-up, the face seems to search beyond the dimensions of the frame only to find a black-hole space immune to cinematic life. Shut in on all four sides, the face then looks to the one direction not limited by the screen's graphic dimensions, into a space that is much more than a black hole.
This final movement where the giant face gazes straight out of the screen, visually exploring a world beyond that in which it traditionally exists, connects the space of the diegetic subject to *my* space. And here I sit, troubled yet also thrilled by this uncomfortably intimate experience.

Where is Bergman?: the problem of (a) demonic authorship

The central presence of Bergman's films in my own experience and personal cinema history contrasts strongly with their position a propos of revisionist film histories. Bergman's work was totally unmentioned during my undergraduate studies in the early/mid-1990s, and I only developed a relationship with the films through auto-didactic means. In many ways, of all the renowned filmmakers from the past, no-one's reputation seems to have fallen so

far from international deification to obscurity.

Bergman has written and directed around fifty feature films, and for over twenty years from the late-'50s his work was canonical to 'art-house' movie culture, academic cinema studies and film clubs all over the world. Today, a young film enthusiast or student is most likely only to have seen *The Seventh Seal* or perhaps *Wild Strawberries* (both 1957), or in some countries, *Persona*. However, they are just as likely to have seen no Bergman at all.

Taking nothing away from the '50s hits that made Bergman *the* cult director of art cinema's pre-nouvelle vague heyday, I would contend that the key to his work for the serious contemporary viewer potentially lies with this filmmaker's unique modernism, most notably found in the '60s films.

Unsurprisingly, the apogee of Bergman's idiosyncratic modernist explorations also comprises the work in which his particular authorial intensity is at its strongest. In an ambivalent article in the January 2002 issue of *Sight and Sound*, Peter Matthews suggests Bergman's critical fate rests on authorial markers that are almost uniquely "overdetermined". All Bergman's mature work exhibits what is both the most appealing and disconcerting about his films; no one has enunciated a clearer and more intimate authorial voice through cinema's mass-produced, industrial medium.

At the time of release, Bergman's most important work was often received as a 'personal cinema' of virtually unparalleled strength. There was something very exciting about images that could generate such feelings of raw, complex subjectivity. Yet reading some of the critical work from the 1960s and '70s there also seemed something worrying about this cinema's power, especially as enunciated and shaped through the figure of a demonic author-subject.

By the 1980s and into the '90s, the kind of excessive authorial stamp Bergman's films so powerfully rendered sure enough became increasingly suspect. As Matthews tells it, once authorship and the film 'masterpiece' came to be broadly critiqued and the deified film artist was downgraded to make way for genre valorisation amid revisionist histories of cinema, Bergman became a target of attack or was deemed an irrelevancy. Surveying the impact a changing view of authorship has had on Bergman's reputation, Matthews concludes he must be "denied the foremost rank among the auteurist seraphim."

Yet Matthews' essay itself illustrates that ultimately Bergman's work cannot really be accounted for within the criteria of auteurism, which was originally designed as a polemical means to unearth authorial traces and visual artistry in Hollywood cinema, (and which Truffaut, among others, declared by the early-'60s to be outdated). The excessively foregrounded appearance, or 'function', of Bergman's authorial signature – in late modernist tradition, to the point of extreme auto-critique and crisis – that Matthews highlights, is precisely what makes an attempt to try judge the films in auteurist terms unconvincing.

Nowhere in Bergman's most important films is there the energising tension between 'content' and 'form' that auteur criticism saw in select Hollywood films. Bergman wrote the majority of his screenplays alone, and at the height of his

career experienced an unparalleled creative freedom. As read into the films, author 'Bergman' feels the existential *weight* of expressive responsibility, as he revels in modern cinema's aesthetic and philosophical potential while also asking what relevance and ethical effect the culturally-encoded author has within modernity's social real. Some mythically inscribed author-function is both demonically *felt* by the viewer in engagement with these films, and always *in crisis* as a performatively exaggerated and disturbing modern subjectivity exploring vertiginous freedoms of address through cinema's plastic expression.

After marking him an also-ran auteur, Matthews' article changes tack for the final sentences, saying:

> *Bergman's guilt-ridden desire to crack open the narcissistic shell and face reality strikes a distinct chord in our newly troubled times. Perhaps he is only just beginning to speak to us.*

This undeveloped point adds to broad questions of late which ask whether recent global events might contribute to a realignment of what strikes us as relevant and worth facing in contemporary art, discourse and everyday experience.

So 'apolitical' and self-obsessed to his detractors, Bergman's most difficult work forces us to ask of ourselves who and *what* we are, and *how* we live with others – hardly questions outside proper contemporary ethical, political and social considerations. Cocooned in social networks and watching a new global war slowly gestate on television, the freshly darkened skies bring such basic, yet hard and disturbing engagement to the forefront of our difficult thought and action in the only sphere over which we have any real control, daily experience.

But where *is* the quintessential writer-director of what Matthews calls "the hard stuff" (the title of his Bergman article)? Where is the figure that at one time in the 1970s was the subject of more book-length studies than any other filmmaker? Important here is the recent availability of Bergman's films on DVD.

With their abrasive intimacies, there was always something a bit too public, too 'shared', about watching films like *Through a Glass Darkly* (1961), *Persona*, or *Scenes from a Marriage* (1973) with strangers *or* friends in the cinema. At home, with a film preserved in almost hyper-real fidelity, one has the undistracted opportunity to experience and reflect upon the awkwardly close power of our singular encounter – face to (onscreen) face.

Perhaps most importantly, DVD allows Bergman's peak modernist work, in which the thorny issues of demonic subjectivity and authorship are most thoroughly explored and intertwined, the possibility of a fresh position within contemporary film discourse and history. In his excellent 1982 book *Ingmar Bergman and the Rituals of Art*, Paisley Livingston hones in on the problem of Bergman's particular modernism, saying that already:

> *[t]he filmmaker who still best exemplifies to a large part of the public the*

serious and difficult artist is often ignored by critics whose stated concern is the art of film. To them, Bergman represents only a stage in film history that has been bypassed in the inexorable progress of the avant-garde. As a modernist who is no longer new, Bergman falls prey to the danger identified in one of Oscar Wilde's sayings: "Nothing is so dangerous as being too modern; one is apt to grow old-fashioned quite suddenly."

Livingston counters what he saw at the time as a fashionable view that the questions Bergman's cinema asks have been answered or overcome. Twenty years later, the kind of linearity avant-garde discourses may have privileged in the past now seems emblematic of modernism's ideology of forward thrust. Removed from their role as a stretch of road in modern cinema's relentless progress, Bergman's films can today be looked at through new eyes and re-thought, to see what they might now say in newly troubled times.

It may be that the problems Bergman's most challenging cinema so powerfully and disturbingly raises have not only not been answered; looked at afresh, they could be more pressing than ever. Rather than experiments overcome by newer progressive models, now that the era of modernism is deemed to have passed, this work seems more daringly etched and radical then ever.

The high modernism of films like *Persona* is not the beginning of the Bergman story. Yet some of the problems viewers and critics have had with his mature work stretches right back to the beginning of this filmmaker's massive corpus.

Stylistic diversity, nihilism and comedy: early work (1945 – 1956)

The fifteen feature films Bergman directed between 1945 and 1954 received very mixed reactions in Sweden. A review of *Crisis*, his first film as director, argued:

there is something unbridled, nervously out of control in Bergman's imagination that makes a disquieting impression. He […] seems to be incapable of keeping a mental level of normalcy. What the Swedish cinema needs in the first place are not experimenters, but intelligent, rational people…

Such criticism exemplifies problems Swedish film writers would intermittently continue to have with Bergman's work throughout his career. This quote and the copious writing that followed over forty years (perhaps most notably the criticism he received from the Swedish Left in the 1960s) suggests this filmmaker's position as a pebble in the shoe of a hyper-Enlightenment culture, loudly articulating repressed aspects of a highly rationalist modernity.

Bergman's 1940s work, to which domestic criticism responded so

unenthusiastically, is drenched through with a pessimistic existentialism. The protagonists of these films are young disaffected figures that dwell on the social and economic margins of contemporary life in Stockholm, outraged at the inevitable failure of their attempts to find a niche in the daily modes of a tedious and conservative socio-economic real.

If there is a consistent thematic of youthful existential despair, these early films also show Bergman trying out diverse formal techniques to fit his thematic concerns. Hence we can see the clear influence of Rossellini in the gritty mise-en-scene of the films right after the war, and Hitchcock (with *Rope*) around 1948 with a move towards long takes and tracking shots.

The '40s work comes to a peak with what now seems the clearer early formal-thematic Bergman signatures of 1949's *Prison*, with its nihilistic brooding and harsh expressionism. However, it is with *Summer Interlude* (1951) that we find the filmmaker's first wholly masterful utterance. This film goes beyond a precious youthful cry at the abyss, and adds rich layers of memory and projection to the portrayal of a thirty-something woman as she looks back on the choices made when she was young enough to not feel the weight of time. In the final scene we watch realistic yet at the same time highly oneiric images of the central character confronted backstage at the theatre by a man in grotesque clown make-up, as she is forced to 'confess' her chilling and vertiginous freedom and responsibility.

The newly mature existentialist quandaries of *Summer Interlude* clearly states the modern subject's situation which one can discern in every Bergman film of the 1950s: how to sustain a life without real belief – in human good, in society, in God, or even in the self.

Finnish writer and filmmaker Jörn Donner described Sweden in 1972 as the most secularised country in the world, and hence the furthest down the road of a crisis related to the disappearance of belief. Continuing this line in 1995, Swedish Bergman scholar Maaret Koskinen argues that as new secular forms "did not succeed in filling the void and replacing the old norms, a spiritual unrest emerged in Swedish society." Koskinen and Donner both argue Bergman's films are a reflexive symptom of this crisis, awkwardly and noisily playing it out. In this way, the religious element in Bergman's films is really an image of *lack* rather than belief – as Koskinen says, rendering the "void that 'has remained' after material welfare has been taken care of. Or, as Bergman himself is supposed to

have said, ‘When all the problems seem to be solved, then the difficulties come.’”

In contrast to influential Scandinavian and Anglo-American thematic analysis, it was the formal aspects of Bergman’s films which first attracted French critics, whose response (starting with Bazin in 1947) really kick-started Bergman’s international success in the 1950s. In Godard’s overview on the occasion of a hugely successful 1958 Bergman retrospective in Paris, there is a rapturous discussion of a shot in *Summer with Monika* (1953).

In the film, a fantastic summer-idyll has been terminated by chilly reality for the teenage Monika (played by Harriet Andersson, an icon of unbridled ‘natural’ Swedish beauty, and of whom Antoine’s friend in *The 400 Blows* [Truffaut, 1959] steals a publicity still) and her boyfriend. Having returned to a drab rational civilization from paradise gone sour, Monika rejects her lover and father of her child, motherhood and family life. Amid this rebellion comes Godard’s moment of fascination. In a grimy cafe Monika slowly turns to face the audience to stare out without reservation at us, in a then remarkable meta-diegetic excursion in narrative cinema – a sober and reflexive marking-off of illusion through a young woman’s ‘no’.

Monika enacts here a typically Bergmanesque moment of ambiguous negativity (is she an existentialist hero, or moral villain?). Her actions both question the metaphysical investments of a culture and its control of individual subjects, while also forcing us to consider the dissenting individual’s ethical impact on others. These gestures will be played out in even more violently ambivalent ways through other Bergman films.

Released the same year, *Sawdust and Tinsel* is the expressionist correlative of *Summer with Monika’s* gritty realism. Here Bergman uses circus performers to exaggeratedly portray an everyday life where bodies are always in the service of others – in ritualized daily employment and in interpersonal relations, where abject humiliation and emotional violence are the result of a crisis-ridden subjectivity’s impact on the immediate world. Slated upon release for its harsh images and portrayal of debased personal and professional relations, the film was later seen as a quantum leap for Bergman’s formal-thematic inventiveness.

But films like *Sawdust and Tinsel* were commercial disasters, so in an attempt to keep working Bergman also made a series of comedies at this time for

his studio, Svensk Filmindustri. These more commercial efforts like *Waiting Women* (1952) and *Lessons in Love* (1954) show Bergman's unease with the comic idiom. But their tensions between comedy's normal function and Bergman's more typical inclinations also create a fascinating conflict, something self-consciously developed in the final (and finest) of these works, *Smiles of a Summer Night* (1955).

Winning a major prize at Cannes in 1956, and setting Bergman off to international success, *Smiles of a Summer Night* now looks atypical of Bergman's brooding philosophical cinema. Yet despite its air of French farce, its primary mood is Mozartian comedy with a dark underbelly, energized by a dialectic of humor and rancid truth beneath the veneer of self-conscious laughter. This is a comedy about the failure of comedy to fulfill its promise of cathartically laughing away the horror and absurdity of human emotions and the pathetic farce of subjects attempting to satisfactorily *live* by ridiculous societal rules. *Smiles* deals with the problems of how human beings behave when belief lies in shreds – something Bergman's next films more directly and seriously pursue.

With the Svensk Filmindustri phones ringing hot for sales of Bergman's international hit comedy, the filmmaker slipped his most personal script yet onto the producer's desk. Drunk with the success their Cannes-crowned auteur was bringing the company, a cheap shoot was approved. The outcome was *The Seventh Seal* – a genuine landmark in film history that would exemplify 'art cinema' the world over for years to come.

Belief in crisis: The Seventh Seal & halcyon art cinema (1957 – 1960)

The Seventh Seal is Bergman's most famous work, much pastiched by Monty Python, Woody Allen, and in David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001, via a metaphysical cowboy, one of his many Bergman references). Starring Max von Sydow, Gunnar Björnstrand and Bibi Andersson, this story of a Knight who plays a game of chess with Death as he returns from the Crusades, made Bergman *the* cult director of the late-'50s. Its beautiful high-contrast images of medieval Sweden and von Sydow's anguished performance made for icons of a new existentialist cinema that resonated deeply with a world at the height of the Cold War. To late-'50s audiences it asked what metaphysical schemas and values humanity can possibly live by in a time when apocalyptic death is a daily threat, and when structures of belief seem to bring only regression, blindness and servitude.

Like *Rome, Open City* (Rossellini, 1945) and *Rashomon* (Kurosawa, 1950) before it, *The Seventh Seal* was a watershed 'foreign film' in its critical and audience impact around the world. It became perhaps the central work in a halcyon period for 'art cinema', opening the way in the US and Britain for the early-'60s successes of Fellini, Antonioni and the nouvelle vague. Stamping its images into the cultural memory of world cinema, *The Seventh Seal*'s aesthetic and thematic richness also hugely influenced the development of film societies

and then academic cinema studies in North America.

Also like *Rashomon*, when looked at today *The Seventh Seal* is partially a victim of its success. It has been held up as exemplary prosecution *or* defense witness for 'art cinema' *per se* and is hence frequently over-praised or unfairly dismissed. But like all seminal texts, this film must be approached both through an appreciation for its historical importance, and yet also by striving to really *watch* the film without letting the parodies and pastiches with which we are familiar dictate our engagement. Only then perhaps can one truly appreciate Bergman's astonishing achievement with this film: a compacted, logical and linear, yet crystalline and endlessly refractory tragi-comic parable, the aesthetic-conceptual density and genuine cultural universality of which is truly Shakespearean.

Today we hardly know how to approach something so serious and philosophically 'big-picture' yet also so accessible and burlesque as Bergman's most famous film. This is at least in one sense odd: for all its preposterous thematic reach and blatant theatricality, the film achieved its immense cultural impact (still being shown twice daily somewhere in the US four years after initial release) through a reflexively coded intertextuality – something not so unfamiliar to attuned postmodern minds after all.

The Seventh Seal works like a prism and entry point of a monster oeuvre, laying out trajectories more confrontingly explored in Bergman's 1960s work in which (unlike at the end of *The Seventh Seal*) no-one really escapes the horrific *and* liberating negativity that lies beneath the modern world's veneer. But first, other late-'50s films would continue to mine a mid-century crisis of belief through varying subjects, discourses and lenses.

Wild Strawberries, another big worldwide hit, is a very different film to its predecessor. Here the crisis of belief is entirely immanent (the God debate's only appearance is through a quaint argument between teenage suitors), in the form of a longing for personal self-acceptance and reconciliation with others and one's past. The film influentially renders the achronological affectivity of time and memory as seen in old age. Victor Sjöström, Sweden's most important director of the silent era (who then went to Hollywood), stars in the film as a crotchety old professor who travels south from Stockholm with his daughter-in-law to receive a career award from his alma mater. *Wild Strawberries*' realist address is punctured throughout by the rich expressionist imagery of its famous dream sequences/flashbacks, the crystalline temporal layering and confusion of which was revolutionary at the time (clearly

influencing Tarkovsky's work).

So Close to Life and *The Magician* followed in 1958. The former, a clinical study in close-up of three women in different stages of pregnancy and abortion (which I have not been able to see), reminded viewers that Bergman refused to stick to one style as he explored what seem like characteristic themes. By contrast, *The Magician* is a very densely layered, baroque work. Set mostly in mid-19th Century Stockholm, this complexly ironic and expressionist film enacts classic Enlightenment quandaries, playing off science-reason and art-magic. Dismissive yet also frightened of each other, these binary discourses emerge as similarly ritualised performances maintained *through* and *for* the personal sustenance of their adherents. Desire and anguish are here spread out into broadly painted figures – and portrayed as inextricably allied with regimes of belief central to an emergent modernity.

The Virgin Spring (1960) is a gruesome tale set in medieval Sweden when Christianity was just in the ascendancy over Paganism, about the rape and murder of a girl and her father's quest for revenge. A huge success, winning the first of Bergman's three Academy Awards for 'best foreign film', it is nevertheless in many ways his least interesting work from the period. However, it does mark the beginning of the filmmaker's collaboration with cinematographer Sven Nykvist, replacing Gunnar Fischer (whose richly textured, densely lit images were so important to Bergman's '50s work). This would turn out to be one of world cinema's most important and productive director-cinematographer partnerships, continuing to the end of Bergman's filmmaking life.

1960 also saw *The Devil's Eye, which*, like its predecessor, Bergman also regrets making. This take on the Don Juan story is a kind of filmed version of one of Bergman's stage adaptations (its theatricality is hyper reflexive), which again shows the filmmaker's uneasy hand with comedy. After two films he deemed artistic failures (despite the critical and commercial success of the former), Bergman went about reinventing his cinema. The change was extraordinary.

Metaphysical reduction: the 'faith trilogy' (1961–4)

"The more mature Bergman becomes as a filmmaker, the more caustically and inexorably he focuses on the destructive forces that flow beneath harmonic culture." So writes Swedish film scholar Mikael Timm. This is true of Bergman's thematic and hermeneutic explorations in the 1960s, and equally so of the films' formal developments. In his most radical decade, Bergman increasingly made films that attack modern culture and its various investments from beneath, in dissonant terms, developing a new, much less tonally 'centered' cinema in which violent engagements with alterity, doubt and negativity seem to prevail. As a result, this period of Bergman's work tends to either radically repel or attract viewers and critics alike.

In his 1999 book *Ingmar Bergman: Magician and Prophet*, Marc Gervais sees Bergman's films as a struggle between the 'life force', an affirmational

humanistic pole, and abstract negativity, a bleak engagement with nihilism and hopelessness. He sees the best films as balancing the two, and while Gervais doesn't really like the apparent trajectory of Bergman's '60s films (his dialectic now supposedly drowned by the negative pole), still admires them for their multi-faceted subversions. What became known as the 'faith trilogy' – *Through a Glass Darkly*, *Winter Light* (1962) and *The Silence* (1963) – set the tone for these increasingly harsh explorations.

The first thing one notices about *Through a Glass Darkly* is that it *looks* remarkable. There is a new kind of complex realism and clarity to the image; the viewer can almost smell and feel the film's rendered world, the infinite shades of gray and semi-audible sounds of a remote Baltic island off the Swedish coast in summer. (This is Fårö, which would provide the sparse setting for many Bergman films to come, and which from 1966 would be his home). Opaque dawn skies, a rocky shoreline and a pre-industrial house dominate the mise-en-scène, along with only four humans we first glimpse emerging out of a primordial sea.

With this film, the viewer confronts images of a bare world where those who survive are the rational men of a cold modernity, while those who flounder might have been its best hope. In a protean performance as Karin, Harriet Andersson dishes out both emotional warmth *and* shards of negativity in her sublime but fragmented engagements with others and the world. Her subjective focus is insufficient to consistently master linear demands, and religious belief is a kind of madness taking her away from reality rather than means to a centering affirmation, when her ethereal fantasies turn to revulsion. (Karin's sensuous wait for God in the attic culminates when she sees him as a spider that tries to penetrate her body.)

On the surface, her father (Gunnar Björnstrand) and husband (Max von Sydow) have adapted to a chilly reality with more success. Karin is most at home with her teenage brother Minus who is engulfed in his own identity crisis as he gallivants around the island rocked with doubt, not at home inside himself or his culture.

Following her breakdown in the attic Karin is penetrated again, by the all-too-real cold fluid of science as her doctor/husband calmly applies a sedating needle, to which she responds with only marginally more displeasure than to the benign and genuine (but to her, meaningless and perfunctory) words of love he offers throughout the film. Meanwhile, outside awaits the giant spider shape of a helicopter in which von Sydow will accompany her to his secular sureties of institutionalised care.

Framed by the setting sun through a window, for the first time alone (and indoors) together, at the end of *Glass Darkly* Minus asks his father how they can help Karin, and receives a 'God is love' lecture. Like earlier declarations of love for his family (to whom he gives Stockholm airport trinkets as presents after arriving home from a trip to central Europe), this man's attempt at a didactic humanist faith here seems extremely forced and tenuous. Yet Minus responds positively to this perfunctory communication in the final line of the film, "Papa

spoke to me". And in previously admitting the desire to chart his own daughter's schizophrenia so as to provide stimuli for his writing, the father also exhibits (as throughout the film) here a raw, contradictory kind of honesty typical of Bergman's dark renderings of human desire.

In *Winter Light* the surface freezing of Gunnar Björnstrand's character is just one component of austere images below which the tension of a barely repressed apocalypse is sustained for less than eighty minutes. Shivering a cold sweat of flu and doubt, he plays a priest who suffers 'bad faith', and in the face of his anguish struggles to retain belief through ritualized performance. Even when the only person attending the service is his agnostic lover (Ingrid Thulin) who suffers her own – purely secular – kind of abject love.

Yet somehow Max von Sydow's brief appearance in *Winter Light* seems the epicenter of it all, as a man worried about 'the Chinese' with their rumored nuclear weapons. In so much of Bergman's cinema, anxiety has broad social as well as existential resonance, and here it is through fear of global apocalypse (the film was made during the Cuban Missile Crisis). What is most personally *and* culturally striking is this almost mute man's total incapacity to go along with even a threadbare performance of hope – in ourselves and in this world, both physical and metaphysical. From the first time we see him, he seems on the other side of an important line to the others. Yet they themselves barely sustain their veneer. Von Sydow's terminal condition is reinforced when his priest's council slips from unhelpful insistence (replying "we *must* live" to von Sydow's query, "why must we live?") into a self-obsessed monologue betraying his own private horror.

Rather than philosophical explication, *The Silence*'s almost wordless images generate our experience and reading of a very open film, concluding the loose trilogy in an unexpected way. The complex combination of an uneasy realism with stark formalism makes for clean and complex deep-focus shots matched with an immaculate hyper-diegetic soundscape. So little is literally said here that the formal affect and hermeneutic generativity of Bergman's sound-image compositions are given space to speak louder than ever.

Through *The Silence's* aesthetic matrix we sensuously, yet uncomfortably, watch and feel two sisters and a young boy as they have experiences in the hotel of an alien city. When Gunnel Lindblom combs her hair and washes her clothes

and body before one of many solo excursions into the world, the tactile and emotional intimacy is both warmly human and erotic, and like cold machine-like fingernails on chalkboard. Meanwhile, during her own body's eruption in the throes of serious illness, the older sister (Ingrid Thulin) articulates her repulsion – "it's all just erectile tissue and bodily secretions" – in a hateful sputtering at the corporeal (and hence for her, meaningless) nature of existence.

Thulin plays *The Silence*'s only real 'believer' – in truth, reason, knowledge, meaning – and is here a decaying figure associated with death. The sheer sensuality of Lindblom's performance might comparatively offer corporeal affirmation, but the very empowerment of this very 'alive' woman can seem reactionary in its binarism (the revenge of the body, against Thulin's hegemonic, rancid Cartesianism). It is ultimately the small boy as a nubile, amorphous figure (without any conventional patriarchal model) that provides the real sense of future possibility in the film, as he bears witness to the enactments, investments and dysfunction of his elders.

The Silence enjoyed substantial international success (Bergman's last for ten years), in no small part due to its then-controversial nudity and explicit sexuality (the film was censored in many countries). Meanwhile, Bergman became director of the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm in 1963. The one film shot during this tenure was *Now About These Women* (1964). Co-written under a pseudonym with lifelong friend and star of later Bergman films, Erland Josephson, this theatrical and ill-tempered comedy was time-out from the political and workload crisis endemic to being in charge of Sweden's premiere theatrical institution, and interrupts his otherwise deadly serious film work of the period.

Limit-point negativity & modernism: Persona & beyond (1966–9)

Bergman resigned from the Royal Dramatic Theatre mid-contract an exhausted man. He booked himself into a psychiatric clinic in 1965, and after a while started working on an idea based on a physical similarity he had noticed between Bibi Andersson and Liv Ullmann when the former had introduced her young friend in the street. He invited the two actors to visit him in hospital and explained his idea for a film. They agreed to star in the project, and a few months later what would become probably Bergman's supreme achievement was in production.

Persona in many ways leads on from *The Silence*, as Susan Sontag argues in her famous 1967 essay on the former. In both films our engagement is with the multiple thematic trajectories of an ambiguous psychic war between two women, as rendered through the most radical aesthetics Bergman was ever to explore. If the first films of the '60s increasingly marked him as a difficult filmmaker, *Persona* offers greater challenges.

Out of a genuinely avant-garde prologue emerges a story in which an actress refuses to speak, while a nurse is assigned to her 'recovery'. Most of the film takes place in and around a beach-house on the windswept coast of Fårö.

But the women's experience of space and time, along with the viewer's grasp of these forms and *Persona*'s narrative, suffers increasing interruptions as fragmenting layers of formal-thematic stimuli build into one of the most difficult, open and generative feature-films ever made.

Liv Ullmann's silent portrayal of an artist confronting *and* performing her own ontological lack is dominated by twitching lips, ambivalent gazes and vampyric desire. Bibi Andersson plays the chatty state carer whose perfectly adaptive nature leads to being sucked into her companion's showdown with negativity – so that she too is made to examine what, if anything, lies behind her own socially-ordained mask.

As these dual gazes and subjectivities develop and cannibalistically intermix, halfway through the film the celluloid appears to rip and burn up in the projector. Diegetic space and cinema's sheer materiality here intermix, and we are left to work out what has become of a film whose plastic essence either violently asserts itself to *crush* the metaphysics of a fictional world – or whose fragmentation is remarkably *generated by* the psychic dissonance and heat of the diegesis. Regardless of our desire to explain the film's material violence and reflexivity, *Persona*'s formal-thematic mutation is ultimately then brought to full fruition and complexity when the famous hybrid gaze – half of each woman's face grafted to the other – stares out of an amorphous gray void, and into the viewer's own unstable space.

From the vantage point of thirty-six years, *Persona* can be seen as a standout film in terms of Bergman's oeuvre and cinema history. The essays in *Ingmar Bergman's Persona,* a 2000 compilation volume edited by Lloyd Michaels, position the film as a cinematic work of high modernism par excellence. And it is the sort of artwork about which those who have experienced it feel the *utmost* emotional and intellectual commitment.

Bergman's next film continues the highly personal relationship the viewer is forced into with *Persona*'s interior gaze. In *Hour of the Wolf* (1968) we *enter* the protagonist's gaze through a more clearly expressionistic form. Like *The Magician*, this film makes explicit what can be said of Bergman's most intense cinema – it is like an esoteric horror movie. This is perhaps one reason for the film's lesser art-house reputation – though more importantly, its proximity to its illustrious predecessor disadvantages the film, despite Bergman's stated desire that *Wolf* continues *Persona*'s innovations. But perhaps the film is ultimately less appealing because we are faced with, and *enter*, an even more demonic

protagonist. Here we are immersed in – uncomfortably seeing and feeling – the vertiginous, vampyric mind of a *male* artist (Max von Sydow), through images that seem like shards of his fracturing psyche.

Wolf does feature perhaps Bergman's single most disturbing sequence, a wordless interlude with enormous symbolic refractions featuring high contrast images shot on degraded stock. Here a young boy attacks/seduces von Sydow on jagged fishing rocks, and after a struggle where this 'little demon' bites his victim bird-like, the boy is violently beaten with a large stone and drowned in the murky water. Here and throughout, we are intimately engaged with a more directly horrific artist-subject even than that of *Persona*. We uncomfortably think *and* feel the protagonist's interior fall, through some of Bergman's most oneiric and strikingly gothic images, a terrible maelstrom around which floats the organic but increasingly nervous performance of Liv Ullmann.

Von Sydow and Ullmann are again the couple in 1968's *The Shame*. Sometimes seen as concluding a trilogy about the artist's ethical relationship to social reality with the previous two films, it also takes a step back in formal complexity. This is a war film without action, heroes or oppositional clarity, concerned with the basic responses of the human subject – in this case, two naïve ex-concert violinists – to the sheer existential un-understandability of war.

The Shame was often seen as a commentary on the conflict in Viet Nam and Bergman was attacked for not coding the film morally or politically, criticism that misunderstands what kind of film this is. *The Shame* would be as controversial today in its probing of 'engagement', and its take on the absurd affectivity of war – how such operatic violence never 'makes sense'. One can sympathise with the central characters as passive victims of a war they can't do anything about, and/or criticize them for a lack of political understanding. Their performances offer pity, resentment and pathos in turn, through the alien perspective they have on the real world outside. This makes the film (and its title) a chilling evocation of both civilian confusion/casualties *and* cultural disengagement, while grimy materiality goes on unchecked – just as it highlights that reality's being fuelled by the opaque metaphysics of ideology and politics.

War of a more purely cultural kind dominates Bergman's short TV film called *The Ritual*, released theatrically in 1969. This nasty little work features three actors who are forced to demonstrate their troupe's 'obscene' act for a civil judge/critic, a performance that in the

event kills him. They also behave violently (psychically and physically) towards each other in tableaux set in sterile hotel rooms and office spaces. The mise-en-scène is purely made up of the interiors of an affluent and powerful modern state, a surface beneath and above which these aggressive outsider figures paint a repressed metaphysical scream of gothic proportions with their grotesque rubber masks and costumes (featuring oversized dildos), and their masochistic behavior – as they voice the cry a rationalist modernity tries to paper over with material comfort.

The Ritual works like a sharp concluding jab in Bergman's treatment of the artist as exaggerated, at times monstrous modern subject. Bergman confrontingly evokes this subject's distance from bourgeois normality and assurances, and their facing *and* enactment of kinds of negativity usually hidden or smoothed over in conventional society. The artist in Bergman's films feels only ambivalence about their modernity, a subject who both yearns for and detests the surety and structure of mainstream cultural forms, sadistically undermining these structures and vampyrically turning them into material on which to feed – even as it leads to a gnawing terror and self-conscious entropy.

A Passion (1969) returns us to the culturally removed space of Fårö. Despite a muted palette, Bergman's first serious colour film looks like science fiction (one shot appears to show three suns). Here the epistemological surety of characters – and viewers watching them – unravels as we sometimes see desired or feared events actually occurring, before an unstable reality is restored. This acts like a seldom carried-through but constant threat, a sense that subject, image and world always have something horrible straining at the edges of the frame.

A Passion is a loose and very open film in which Bergman experiments with both improvisation and (scripted) out-of-character monologues by the actors, as we follow the story of a hermit (von Sydow) who starts a relationship with a woman (Ullmann) who has probably killed her husband, then another (Bibi Andersson) who is desperate for contact of any kind. They are threatened from the inside as the past hangs about their necks like a noose, in danger of being horribly replayed through regressive and destructive psychological processes. And these possibly dangerous people are themselves in danger from the outside as well (the island's animals are being mysteriously slaughtered).

Like a limit-point rendering of *The Seventh Seal*'s thematic trajectory, *A Passion* seems to posit belief *per se* as a conduit of violence, as well as encouraging a dangerously passive relationship to time and history. And the closest the film has to an artist figure is Andersson's husband (Erland Josephson), an ice-cold nihilist who collects and records images of people in moments of terrible suffering. Asked the reason for his collection, Josephson articulates what seems a central idea in Bergman's most negativity-charged cinema, when he tells von Sydow: "I'm under no illusion I'm capturing the essence of things; I am merely recording the interplay of small and immense forces. Everything is useless."

A Passion completes a remarkable and quite unique decade's work. In general, the dissonant rendering of modernity that characterises these films becomes partially submerged in Bergman's post-'60s cinema. Besides, *Persona* and other late-'60s work brought diminishing commercial returns, receiving nothing like the wide distribution of his '50s hits. So, like Kurosawa and so many of his peers, Bergman had to look outside normal channels of funding to continue working in the '70s.

Difficult humanism: international & TV work (1970 – 1983)

The 1970s was a more successful decade for Bergman in terms of both commercial and critical consensus than the '60s, even if it was also a period of intermittent creative decline. The decade certainly started off horribly when the filmmaker signed a US co-production deal in 1970 with Dino de Laurentis for *The Touch*, to be set in Stockholm but shot in English, and starring Elliot Gould and Bibi Andersson. Bergman is here clearly uncomfortable outside his own language and the film is another curious periodic low point in this workaholic's otherwise high-achieving oeuvre.

Burnt by how a new language and foreign co-producer so easily put Bergman off form, his next film was produced largely by himself along with the film's actors and Sven Nykvist, investing their work for a percentage of the film's profits. The US distribution problem was also overcome through the unlikely figure of Roger Corman, who committed to releasing *Cries and Whispers* without even seeing it. With a triumphant (and rare) 1972 appearance at Cannes to accompany the film (screening out of competition), Bergman was welcomed back into world cinema's main spotlight, as critics and audiences embraced this story of a woman who slowly dies in a country house surrounded by cold and selfish sisters and her maid/companion/lover at the turn of the century.

Maintaining the intimacy and close-ups of Bergman's '60s work, with this film décor has an added role too, thanks to Nykvist's Oscar-winning wide-screen cinematography in its rendering of a red-saturated mise-en-scène. The film was deemed harrowing at the time, yet the period setting and poetic tone also bring a movement towards grace. His biggest hit since *The Seventh Seal*, the film's heavily symbolic color scheme and mise-en-scène would influence Peter Greenaway and countless other 1980s and '90s art-house directors.

If *Cries* was the lush color masterpiece for those who found Bergman's more radical (and monochrome) '60s cinema too extreme, like *Seventh Seal*, the film is also one of his prism works. It looks back at themes more thoroughly essayed in earlier films, and glancing toward a more accessible – though difficult – humanist tonality. Yet despite its more prosaic form and thematic concerns, it is the following *Scenes from a Marriage* that more relentlessly and radically continues Bergman's diverse engagement with modernity's crisis of belief.

As Maaret Koskinen says of the "metaphysical problems in Bergman's films […], they express not so much belief, as doubt, perhaps an eternally human

and existential state of crisis, a revolt against an absolute authority who might be God, fellow human beings, or marriage." Shot cheaply on 16mm and first screened in six fifty-minute episodes on Swedish television, despite its plain appearance *Scenes from a Marriage* is as 'metaphysical' as *Cries and Whispers*. Without the previous film's elegiac notes of a decaying culture, this work is more tied to the surface minutiae *and* investments of late modernity's secular world. And with its banal setting, the piece's investigation into what lies beneath the visible plane of suburban domestic space and its epicenter of the heterosexual couple is all the more bracing.

Featuring the milieu and personas (husband and wife, played by Liv Ullmann and Erland Josephson) of Sweden's affluent bourgeoisie – a culture beamed back into its own space, as large mainstream audiences engaged with Bergman's work for the first time – the film violates the sacred ontology of those formations. Starting with a sequence in which a TV-style crew interviews the couple, this reflexive journey into the heart of a personal relationship is in many ways as thematically disturbing as *Persona*, but literally closer to home. *Scenes* may *look* less radical, but the apparent safeness of its form and setting allows for a rare intersection between television and popular culture's traditional domestic space and a more modernist insistence on the various forces of repressed negativity that flow beneath the surface of everyday life.

Rather than succumbing to its more conservative traditions, Bergman utilizes television's formal limitations so as to pursue a more extreme manifestation of his confronting close-up technique. "The human face," Truffaut says of this period in Bergman's cinema, "no one draws so close to it as Bergman does. In his recent films there is nothing more than mouths talking, ears listening, eyes expressing curiosity, hunger, panic."

The face of Ullmann, anguished performer of so many Bergman subjects, has never been more chillingly open than in *Scenes from a Marriage* as we almost embarrassingly watch it up close for v*ery* long periods without a cut. Forced upon us through such extended looking, the face has never been more confrontingly interior, our relationship with it more disturbingly intimate – as we watch the material communicative nerve ends of our giant onscreen companion as it seeks to look 'inside' itself, by means of a gaze ultimately directed straight out at us.

Television seemed the best means through which to fund new projects, and in 1974 Bergman staged, directed, and filmed a version of Mozart's *Magic Flute*. The film recreates a 17th Century Swedish theatre in which a modern audience watches the opera. The camera also shows us behind-the-

scenes moments during the performance, amid a subtle essay on the mediation of art forms and the constant presence of other textual realities (perhaps no less revealing) beneath that of the 'primary' text/performance.

Another multi-part television project followed in 1976. While I have only seen the shorter (and English-language) cut of *Face to Face*, here Bergman's detractors seem right: the film, about a psychiatrist who has a nervous breakdown, seems a hermetic and cloying work, a case where Bergman repeats and makes too literal more successful past ideas. Rather than repeating himself, another US co-production called *The Serpents' Egg* (1977) is problematic for opposite reasons. Shot in Germany and filmed in English, starring Ullmann with David Carradine, the dying days of late-Weimar Berlin is Bergman's uncharacteristically large canvas. The skills that forged his unique intimate cinema are entirely opposite to those required for this historical drama, and Bergman's lack of overt political analysis for once does make the work superficial. Like *The Touch*, the film was a commercial and critical disaster.

Filmed in Norway, *Autumn Sonata* (1978) seems a reaction against *Serpent's Egg*. This film about a celebrity concert pianist and her daughter's brief reunion, brings back Bergman's trademark 'chamber cinema' with a vengeance. Starring Ullmann and Ingrid Bergman (who developed cancer during shooting, and retired from the cinema immediately afterwards), the film also seems softer, more conciliatory, and after a harrowing night's interaction, recognizably humanist. Depending on the viewer, the film is either a more approachable chamber drama, or repetitive filmmaking with the harder edges rounded off.

Certainly *From the Life of the Marionettes* (1980) cannot be accused of humanist warmth and reconciliation. More than the epic family melodrama *Fanny and Alexander*, the critical and audience adoration of which in 1983 celebrated Bergman's whole career as he moved into retirement, *Marionettes* is a fitting coda to this filmmaker's modernist trajectories. Filmed for German television, it is the hardest and bleakest work of Bergman's final decade. A very idiosyncratic take on German enunciation and filmmaking, the film stands as a powerful continuation – a coda, really – of Bergman's almost career-long focus on the doubt-ridden confrontation with a very immanent and personal abyss, and the aesthetic rendering of subjective crisis that generates a horrible kind of intimacy for the viewer.

Marionettes' long confessional monologues in part tell the story of a man who has killed a prostitute, and in fake 'investigation'-style flashbacks, partakes in murderous games with his wife – with whom he seems to share a horrible grafting beyond love or hate. Though usually compared to *Scenes from a Marriage*, with its airless interiors rendered through spare monochrome images without a hint of sunlight or nature, and in which a violent interpersonal life nastily plays out amid the clean modernist designs of Munich, the film seems just as linked to the hard lines of *The Ritual*.

Bergman decided to retire from commercial filmmaking with a return to Sweden. With long-time friend, filmmaker and writer Jörn Donner acting as

executive producer for this Swedish/West-German/French co-production, *Fanny and Alexander* was Bergman's (and Sweden's) most expensive film, with lavish set design and cinematography winning two of the film's four Oscars. Yet despite its ostentatious scale, the film's best scenes still feature intimate spaces and interactions, and the extended television version in particular is much more Bergmanesque than the work at first appears.

The full five-hour cut of Bergman's last official film includes some of this filmmaker's clearest, most mature working through of age-old concerns, in the guise of a warmer, more accessible address. For casual viewers *Fanny and Alexander* is Bergman's most attractive film, while for connoisseurs it is a massive crystalline prism text that refracts the central concerns of a forty-year oeuvre.

Coda: an epilogue and film history

Bergman immediately followed the huge success of *Fanny and Alexander* with a much more characteristically small film called *After the Rehearsal* (which I have not been able to see). Like *Marionettes*, it was intended only for TV, but was nonetheless then sold for theatrical release. This was the last film written and directed by Ingmar Bergman to be commercially distributed – although in late 2002 he has completed shooting a new film possibly to be released in 2003.

Bergman spent the late 1980s and '90s writing screenplays (the most recent of which was *Faithless* [1999], directed by Liv Ullmann), novels and two autobiographical books. *The Magic Lantern* (1987) is Bergman's much-lauded work about his own life, the address and thematic texture of which is uncannily like a superb Bergman film. And *Images* (from 1991) is a fascinating contemporary reappraisal of his work amid extracts from original workbooks kept during production.

He has also been intermittently directing (and sometimes writing) TV productions like 1997's *In the Presence of a Clown*, and more consistently still works in the theatre (from which he also 'retired' many times). But Bergman spends most of his days writing and looking out on the mise-en-scène of his most radical and characteristic work – the violently sublime rocky shoreline and seas of Fårö.

During this very active twenty-year epilogue to one of the most remarkable careers in world cinema, Ingmar Bergman has been a specter haunting film history. Although not often invoked in film culture, he is still in some quarters thought of as an important figure that asked of cinema what it *is* – and what *are* the beings that invent it. During Ullmann's press interviews for *Faithless*, half the questions were about Bergman. There was curiosity about his script for the film, as well as his personal and creative relationship with Ullmann. But there were also questions about Bergman *per se* as if to simply acknowledge one of the not so often mentioned masters of world cinema, and to gesture towards the corner that shrouds an already dark oeuvre.

Today's film students are often more likely to have seen *Imitation of Life* (Douglas Sirk, 1959) than any Bergman. While the revisionist approach to history and culture has been necessary, there is a real danger of writing out figures, films and bodies of work containing some of cinema's really important achievements, like *The Seventh Seal* or *Persona*. Perhaps the same people for too long said the same things about Bergman, while others saw him as personifying a cinema that had to be overcome – so students and readers understandably went off in search of new interests within film history's then neglected corners. "Yet there is no body of work of the caliber and integrity of Bergman's since the war," argued Truffaut in 1973, protesting at Bergman's decade of critical obscurity prior to *Cries and Whispers*. For me, Truffaut's considerable claim still stands. In terms of an oeuvre, the equation is daunting: around fifty films of remarkable reach, at least a third of them genuine masterpieces.

A long period away from Bergman's cinema should allow serious film culture to look afresh at a body of work that is today one of film history's best-kept secrets. Faced with new uncertainties and doubts about a turn-of-the-century world, our role in it and what we want out of images, as well as perennial problems of subjectivity that are far from overcome, fresh eyes and minds could really open up Bergman's most challenging work.

For the very first time these films can be liberated from a historical position within teleological modernism, or as components of an authorially overdetermined oeuvre. Some dense life and difficult pleasure would be generated from a brand new encounter with Bergman's very modern cinema and the radical intimacy it engenders.

Filmography

Below are all the films Ingmar Bergman has directed to date. The list omits only theatre productions of other writers' work that Bergman directed straight to television. All the films below were commercially released Swedish language productions, unless otherwise noted. The dates given pertain to when the film was first released, theatrically *or* on television. Bergman's films were often released outside Sweden with various titles. The films are listed below with the most generally well-known English translation alongside the original Swedish (allied with a general preference for the UK release titles, which are usually more accurate than the US versions).

- ***Kris*** **(*Crisis*)** (1945) also writer (adaptation)
- ***Det regnar på vår kärlek*** **(*It Rains on Our Love*)** (1946) also co-writer
- ***Skepp till Indialand*** **(*A Ship Bound for India*)** (1947) also writer (adaptation)
- ***Musik i mörker*** **(*Music in Darkness*)** (1948)
- ***Hamnstad*** **(*Port of Call*)** (1948) also co-writer
- ***Fängelse*** **(*Prison*)** (1949) also writer
- ***Törst*** **(*Thirst*)** (1949)
- ***Till glädje*** **(*To Joy*)** (1950) also writer
- ***Sånt händer inte här*** **(*This Can't Happen Here*)** (1950)
- ***Sommarlek*** **(*Summer Interlude*)** (1950) also co-writer, synopsis
- ***Kvinnors väntan*** **(*Waiting Women*)** (1952) also writer
- ***Sommaren med Monika*** **(*Summer with Monika*)** (1953) also co-writer
- ***Gycklarnas afton*** **(*Sawdust and Tinsel*)** (1953) also writer
- ***En lektion i kärlek*** **(*A Lesson in Love*)** (1954) also writer
- ***Kvinnodröm*** **(*Journey into Autumn*)** (1955) also writer
- ***Sommarnattens leend*** **(*Smiles of a Summer Night*)** (1955) also writer
- ***Det sjunde inseglet*** **(*The Seventh Seal*)** (1957) also writer
- ***Smultronstället*** **(*Wild Strawberries*)** (1957) also writer
- ***Nära livet*** **(*Brink of Life*)** (1958) also writer
- ***Ansiktet*** **(*The Magician*)** (1958) also writer
- ***Jungfrukällan*** **(*The Virgin Spring*)** (1960)
- ***Djävulens öga*** **(*The Devil's Eye*)** (1960) also writer (adaptation)
- ***Såsom i en spegel*** **(*Through a Glass Darkly*)** (1961) also writer
- ***Nattvardsgästerna*** **(*Winter Light*)** (1963) also writer
- ***Tystnaden*** **(*The Silence*)** (1963) also writer
- ***För att inte tala om alla dessa kvinnor*** **(*Now about**

***these women*)** (1964) also co-writer

- ***Persona*** (1966) also writer
- ***Daniel*** (1967) also writer, photographer, narrator; short episode in the compilation film *Stimulantia*
- ***Vargtimmen* (*Hour of the Wolf*)** (1968) also writer
- ***Skammen* (*The Shame*)** (1968) also co-producer, writer
- ***Riten* (*The Ritual*)** (1969) also co-producer, writer, actor; television mini-feature, followed by theatrical release
- ***En Passion* (*A Passion*)** (1969) also co-producer, writer
- ***Fårö-dokument* (*The Fårö Document*)** (1970) also producer, writer, performer; television documentary
- ***Beröringen* (*The Touch*)** (1971) also co-producer, writer; Sweden/USA, English language
- ***Viskningar och rop* (*Cries and Whispers*)** (1972) co-producer, writer
- ***Scener ur ett äktenskap* (*Scenes From a Marriage*)** (1973) also producer, writer; 300-minute television version in 6 parts, 168-minute theatrical cut
- ***Trollflöjten* (*The Magic Flute*)** (1975) also writer (adaptation); television production, theatical release
- ***Ansikte mot ansikte* (*Face to Face*)** (1976) also co-producer, writer; Sweden/USA; 200-minute television version in 4 parts, 136-minute theatrical cut
- ***Das Schlangenei* (*The Serpent's Egg*)** (1977) also writer; West Germany/USA, English language
- ***Herbstsonate* (*Autumn Sonata*)** (1978) also producer, writer
- ***Fårö-dokument 1979* (*The Fårö-document 1979*)** (1979) also co-producer, writer, narrator; television documentary
- ***Aus dem Leben des Marionetten* (*From the Life of the Marionettes*)** (1980) also co-producer, writer; West Germany; television feature, theatrical release
- ***Fanny och Alexander* (*Fanny and Alexander*)** (1982) also co-producer, writer; Sweden/West Germany/France; 312-minute television version in 5 parts, 183-minute theatrical cut
- ***Efter repetitionen* (*After the Rehearsal*)** (1984) also producer, writer; television mini-feature, theatrical release
- ***De två saliga* (*The Blessed Ones*)** (1985) television feature
- ***Dokument Fanny och Alexander* (*Documentary of Fanny and Alexander*)** (1986) also producer, writer; television documentary
- ***Karins ansikte* (*Karin's Face*)** (1986) also producer, writer; short television film
- ***Larmar och görsig till* (*In the Presence of a Clown*)**

(1997) also writer; television play
- ***Bildmakarna*** (2000) also writer (adaptation); television feature
- ***Anna/Saraband*** (2002/3, in production) also writer; shot for theatrical release
- **OTHER CREDITS**
- ***Hets*** **(*Frenzy*)** (1944) Dir: Alf Sjöberg (co-writer)
- ***Kvinna utan ansikte*** **(*Woman Without a Face*)** (1947) Dir: Gustaf Molander (co-writer, synopsis)
- ***Eva*** (1948) Dir: Gustaf Molander (co-writer, synopsis)
- ***Frånskild*** **(*Divorced*)** (1951) Dir: Gustaf Molander (co-writer)
- ***Sista paret ut*** **(*Last Couple Out*)** (1956) Dir: Alf Sjöberg (writer)
- ***Lustgårde*** **(*The Pleasure Garden*)** (1961) Dir: Alf Kjellin (co-writer)
- ***Reservalet*** **(*The Reservation*)** (1970) Dir: Jan Molander (writer) television feature
- ***Den goda viljan*** **(*The Best Intentions*)** (1991) Dir: Bille August (writer) television series
- ***Söndagsbarn*** **(*Sunday's Children*)** (1992) Dir: Daniel Bergman (writer)
- ***Enskilda samtal*** **(*Private Confessions*)** (1996) Dir: Liv Ullmann (writer)
- ***Trolösa*** **(*Faithless*)** (1999) Dir: Liv Ullmann (writer)