March 27, 2018 (XXXVI:8)
Ingmar Bergman PERSONA (1966), 83 min.

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DIRECTED BY Ingmar Bergman
WRITTEN BY Ingmar Bergman (story and screenplay)
PRODUCED BY Ingmar Bergman
MUSIC Lars Johan Werle
CINEMATOGRAPHY Sven Nykvist
FILM EDITING Ulla Ryghe

CAST
Bibi Andersson…Alma
Liv Ullmann…Elisabet Vogler
Margaretha Krook…The Doctor
Gunnar Björnstrand…Mr. Vogler
Jörgen Lindström…Elisabet’s Son (uncredited)

INGMAR BERGMAN (b. July 14, 1918 in Uppsala, Uppsala län, Sweden—d. July 30, 2007, age 89, in Fårö, Gotlands län, Sweden) was an undisputed colossus of world art cinema. He was chosen the world's greatest living filmmaker by "Time" magazine (11 July 2005). He astonished people with his willingness to recognize cruelty, death and, above all, the torment of doubt. From the late 1950s to the late 1970s, Bergman would have been on any film buff's list of great movie directors. Similarly, no critics' poll would have omitted from their list of greatest movies either Wild Strawberries or The Seventh Seal, which, with Smiles of a Summer Night (1955), made up a dazzling hat trick produced in under three years. According to the Guardian: “His work was in severe contrast to the neo-realist school that dominated postwar cinema, employing a surgeon-like precision to analyze the intellectual disquiet that seemed at odds with the hedonistic nature of the times.” When Seventh Seal was released, Bergman was so revered that the editors of a Swedish film magazine declared they would print only negative criticism about the director and his movies. Bergman was amused by the ploy and, using a pseudonym, penned an attack on himself. His films often have a grim obsession with physical confrontation; he once remarked that he would like to have made a film entirely in close-up. At times Bergman seems unable to forget that he was examining a theme or topic, rather than creating a film where the medium itself can unwittingly reveal—in the hands of a great artist—an inner truth. In his native Sweden, Bergman was also a prolific theatre director; from 1963 to 1966 he was the head of the Royal Dramatic Theatre, Stockholm. The job would prove to be too demanding for Bergaman with the entire company in need of reorganization, he found himself in an ‘insoluble and incomprehensibly chaotic situation.’ Against his better judgement, he did not cut back on his film work and ended up paying the price: double pneumonia and acute penicillin poisoning. In the spring of 1965 he was admitted to a local hospital where he began to write the screenplay for Persona, “mainly to keep my hand in the creative process.” In poor shape, both physically and psychologically, he started to question the role of art in general, and his own work in particular. At this time he won a prestigious award, but hampered by illness he could not attend the ceremony. Instead he penned an essay entitled, “The Snakeskin”, summarizing his broodings during his stay in hospital and his feelings about art. In many ways, Persona became an illustration of this essay (or vice-versa, perhaps), to the extent that “The Snakeskin” was published as the preface to the American version of the screenplay. Persona has often been regarded as a watershed in Bergman's career, a new start, just as he had prescribed for himself. Bergman mostly stuck to Sweden for his films, however, when he did dabble with American finance or other influences, the results were nearly disastrous, as in the case of The Touch (1970) and The Serpent's Egg (1976).
Happily, when he finally worked with Ingrid Bergman in *Autumn Sonata* (1977), the film was in Swedish and helped his return home. Following on that fame and comparative fortune came a long period of self-doubt and seeming decline. In March 1983, after a return to form with *Fanny and Alexander*, he announced that he would not direct again. “I want peace. I don’t have the strength any more, neither psychologically nor physically. And I hate the hoopla and the malice. Hell and damnation.” Of course, other works followed, some for television, *After the Rehearsal* (1983), *The Blessed One* (1985), a documentary about *Fanny and Alexander* (1986) and *Karin’s Face* (1986), a short film about his mother. And there were works from his novels and screenplays, *The Best Intentions* (1991) and *Sunday’s Children* (1992). Plus his autobiography, *The Magic Lantern* (1988), and the intriguing *Images, My Life in Film*. Bergman once said, “I try to tell the truth about the human condition, the truth as I see it.” As he used cinema to examine—strip bare—life, he used life to examine cinema. Few directors have interwoven their persona and inner turmoil so powerfully as Bergman. His cinema was truly autobiographical, not simply in details and drama, but in its spiritual and artistic responses to marriage, the church, duplicity, illness, the nature of women, and death. Often seen as a vanguard feminist, Bergman created female characters who were strong, patient and innately wise, while his male characters were usually selfish, self-indulgent or intolerant. Bergman has often made use of musical metaphors when describing *Persona*. The two women in *Persona* have sometimes been regarded as one and the same person. This analysis does have some validity, as Bergman himself implies: ‘Could one make this into an inner happening? I mean, suggest, that it is a composition for different voices in the same soul’s concerto grosso?’ The director considered tonight’s film and *Cries & Whispers* (1972) his best movies. He won Oscars three times for best foreign-language film for *The Virgin Spring* (1960), *Through a Glass Darkly* (1961) and *Fanny and Alexander* (1983) and received the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Irving J. Thalberg Award in 1970 for his body of work.

**SVEN NYKVIST** (b. December 3, 1922 in Moheda, Kronobergs län, Sweden—d. September 20, 2006, age 83, in Stockholm, Stockholms län, Sweden) perfected the art of cinematography to its most simple attributes, giving films the most natural look imaginable. Nykvist used light to create mood and, more significantly, to bring out the natural flesh tones in the human face in order to evoke the emotion of the scene without the light becoming intrusive. Nykvist entered the Swedish film industry when he was 19 and worked his way up to becoming a director of photography. He first worked with the legendary Swedish director Ingmar Bergman on the film *Sawdust and Tinsel* (1953), but his collaboration with Bergman began in earnest with *The Virgin Spring* (1960). From that point on, Nykvist replaced the great Gunnar Fischer as Bergman’s cameraman, and the two men started a collaboration that would last for a quarter of a century. The switch from Fischer to Nykvist created a marked difference in the look of Bergman’s films. Fischer’s lighting was a study in light and darkness, while Nykvist preferred a more naturalistic, more subtle approach that in many ways relied on the northern light compositions of the many great Scandinavian painters. For *Winter Light* (1961) Bergman toured the churches of northern Sweden. He and Nykvist, would sit in the hard pews from 11 in the morning till 2 in the afternoon, watching the light change. In the Swedish winter, there is no sun. A dim grey illumination came from the clouds, casting no shadows. The subtleties of the shifting light entranced Bergman, who decided that his whole film should be lit that way. Having studied the light in a real provincial church carefully, Nykvist then recreated the subtle changes in the light on a Stockholm sound stage. It’s hard to believe that the film was shot on a stage and not in a real church in northern Sweden. Working together on *The Virgin Spring* Nykvist and Bergman arrived at the conclusion that medium shots were ‘boring and unnecessary’, yet this was not nearly as radical as *Persona*. For tonight’s film there are only a few wide-angle long shots, hardly any medium shots and most of all long, intensive close-ups. It was probably *Persona* that firmly established the ‘Nykvist style’, summed up rather facetiously as ‘two faces and a teacup’. During the late 1970s, Nykvist began making films elsewhere in Europe and in the United States, working on such films as Louis Malle’s *Pretty Baby* (1978), Philip Kaufman’s *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1988), Bob Fosse’s *Star 80* (1983), Nora Ephron’s *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993), Woody Allen’s *Another Woman* (1988) and *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989), Richard Attenborough’s *Chaplin* (1992), and fellow Swede Lasse Hallström’s *What's Eating Gilbert Grape* (1993). Although Nykvist is well-known for his distinctive black-and-white cinematography his two Oscars victories for *Cries & Whispers* (1972) and *Fanny and Alexander* (1982) and one more nomination for *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1988) were all color films.

**BIBI ANDERSSON** (b. November 11, 1935 in Kungsholmen, Stockholm, Stockholms län, Sweden) made her cinematic debut in *Dum-Bom* (1953), playing against Nils Poppe. She then attended Royal Dramatic Theatre’s acting school in 1954. A brief relationship with Ingmar Bergman made her quit school and follow him to the Malmö city theatre, where he was a director, performing in plays by August Strindberg and Hjalmar Bergman. Bergman also gave her a small part in his comedy *Smiles of a Summer Night* (1955), and larger roles in his *Wild Strawberries* (1957) and *The Seventh Seal* (1957). The roles she had played up to this point were important yet relatively minor; *Persona* was to be her tour de force. On one occasion Bergman said of Andersson that she needed to believe in something before she
could act it. This might sound like a limitation, yet in Bergman’s eyes it was a sign of integrity. One example of this in Persona is Alma’s famous monologue about a sexual adventure she once had on a beach with another woman and two young boys. During the shooting Bergman wanted to scrap the scene, perhaps because he thought it was too explicit. But Andersson insisted that they keep it in. Reminiscing in an interview in American Film: “I said, ‘Let me shoot it, but let me just alter certain words [that] no woman would say. It’s written by a man, and I can feel it’s a man. Let me change certain things.’” Bergman kept her version on the final cut. Andersson was also romantically linked to Bergman from 1955 to 1959. The two made 13 movies together: The Magician (1958), The Touch (1971), The Devil's Eye (1960), All These Women (1964), Brink of Life (1958), Mr. Sleeman Is Coming (1957), The Passion of Anna (1969), Persona (1966), Scenes from a Marriage (1973), Rabies (1958), The Seventh Seal (1957), Wild Strawberries (1957) and Smiles of a Summer Night (1955).

LIV ULLMANN (b. December 16, 1938 in Tokyo, Japan) lived as a child in Tokyo, Canada, New York and Oslo. In the mid-’50s she made her stage debut and in 1957 made her film debut. Her real success came when she began to work for Bergman in such films as Persona (1966), The Passion of Anna (1969) and Face to Face (1976). For tonight’s film, Bergman decided that the principal roles should go to Bibi Andersson and the highly-praised young Norwegian actress, Liv Ullmann. He had never actually seen her act, but he had been at the home of Gunnel Lindblom looking at slides taken during the shooting of Pan, in which Andersson and Ullmann both took part. Struck by how similar they were, this initial impulse eventually led Bergman to the idea for Persona. For Ullmann, a few years younger than Andersson, this was her first Bergman film. The most famous image from the film is that of an extraordinary face, half Ullmann’s and half Andersson’s. According to Bergman, “In most people one side of the face is more attractive than the other, their so-called good side.” The two images that Nykvist spliced together “showed their respective bad sides.” When the film came back from the laboratory he asked both the actresses to come to the editing room. Recalls Bergman: “Bibi exclaims in surprise: ‘But Liv, you look so strange!’ And Liv says: ‘No, it’s you Bibi, you look very strange!’” Bergman and Ullmann have one child together, Linn Ullman, born when Bergman was still married to his fourth wife. Linn, who played a child in several of her father’s movies, became a literary critic and novelist.


from World Film Directors, V. II. Ed. John Wakeman. H.W. Wilson Co. NY 1988 entry by Dennis DeNitto

Director, screenwriter, and playwright, was born in Uppsala, Sweden. His father, Erik, was a Lutheran pastor; his mother, Karin (née Akerblom) was the daughter of a prosperous businessman. From birth Bergman was a sickly, high-strung child, with an intensity that disconcerted adults. An instinctive independence and stubbornness laid the foundation for the rebelliousness of his adolescence.

At an early age he became fascinated by the two performing arts to which he has devoted his career. By six years of age he was a motion picture devotee making his own film loops for a primitive projector. He attended his first theatre production in 1930—a dramatization of a Swedish fairy tale. With his usual energy and ambition, he built a puppet theatre and began to produce his own plays.

Many of the characters and situations that Bergman has depicted in his screenplays and dramas originated in his experiences as a child and youth. “I take up the images from my childhood, put them into the ‘projector,’ run them myself, and have an entirely new way of evaluating them,” he once told an interviewer. By the time Bergman reached his early teens, he had rejected the moral certitudes of his parents and he bitterly resented the humiliating punishments imposed on him whenever he rebelled. Yet as with many artists haunted by an unhappy childhood, he saw when middle-aged that there were positive aspects of his early years. The walls his parents built around him gave the youngster something to “pound on,” requiring that he become independent emotionally and intellectually if he was to mature with integrity.

In 1937 Bergman entered the University of Stockholm, where he majored in literature and the history of art. He never completed the degree requirements but did write a thesis on August Strindberg, the writer who more than any other influenced his attitudes and beliefs. While still an undergraduate, he began directing plays for amateur groups.

His professional theatre career began in 1944 when he was appointed director of the Helsingborg City Theatre and later of the Malmo Municipal Theatre. The climax of his theatrical career was appointment (1963-1966), as Chief Director of the Royal Dramatic Theatre, Stockholm, the most prestigious theatre in Sweden. The dramatists whose works he has presented on the stage comprise a wide range that includes Shakespeare, Moliere, Strindberg, and Chekhov, with an emphasis on twentieth-century playwrights such as Jean Anouilh, Bertolt Brecht, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, and Peter Weiss. The most acclaimed characteristics of his directing style have been his imaginative staging, carefully controlled dramatic pacing, and ability to elicit outstanding performances from actors. Five of the plays he directed during the late forties and early fifties were his own.
Bergman’s film activities have always been juxtaposed to his work in the theatre. In 1943, one year before being appointed Director of the Helsingborg City Theatre, he was offered a contract as a scriptwriter at Svensk Filmin industri, the largest and most active film company in Sweden. His first project was the screenplay for Torment, the story of a student hounded and abused by a strict, “old-fashioned” teacher, who is gradually revealed to be a fascist, a sadist, and the murderer of the young man’s sweetheart.

The director of Torment was Alf Sjöberg, the outstanding Swedish filmmaker active at the time. He was not only a mentor to Bergman, but also a living reminder of the impressive heritage of Swedish cinema. During the silent era, the films of Mauritz Stiller, Victor Sjöstrom, and others had achieved international renown for their psychological perceptiveness, awesome portrayals of nature, and visual beauty. The late twenties and thirties had been a period of decline. A resurgence, however, was in motion when Bergman joined Svensk Filmin industri. Under the guidance of Carl Anders Dymling, the company supported such prominent directors as Sjöberg and actively recruited young apprentice filmmakers.

Bergman was influenced in the development of his cinematic style not only by his countrymen, but also by Carl Dreyer, the German expressionists, the French surrealists, and the Italian neorealists (particularly Rossellini). He has always been chary of offering opinions on other filmmakers; however, he has mentioned with approval the works of Michelangelo Antonioni and Federico Fellini; Jean Cocteau, Robert Bresson, and Jean-Luc Godard; Akira Kurosawa and Kenji Mizoguchi; Charles Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Erich von Stroheim, Alfred Hitchcock, Orson Welles, Arthur Penn, Michael Curtiz, and Raoul Walsh.

Torment revealed Bergman’s abilities as a screenwriter, a talent that he would exploit and develop throughout his filmmaking career. Of the forty-two features he directed between 1946 and 1982, he wrote original screenplays for thirty-one (in addition to two documentaries) and was co-writer on five others. He also contributed scenarios to six films by other directors. The most prominent trait of his screenplays is their essentially cinematic nature; that is, even with pithy dialogue and expressive verbal images, the words Bergman writes convey only intimations of the texture and tone of the films he finally releases and he may extensively revise a work during editing.

Within two years of joining Svensk Filmin industri, he was offered the opportunity to make his first film, Crísis (1946). It was neither a critical nor a box-office success, but it proved that Bergman could work with efficiency and effectiveness, and his career as a film director was launched.

Between 1946 and 1955 Bergman directed sixteen features, in most cases writing the screenplays as well. During this decade, which constituted an apprenticeship period, he learned his craft, developed a unique style, and introduced many of the themes that he explored with greater insight in later years. In addition, he established himself as an innovative figure in Swedish filmmaking.

The Naked Night (1953) is a dramatic discourse on humiliation, one of Bergman’s most personal themes. He once said, “One of the wounds I’ve found hardest to bear in my adult life has been the fear of humiliation and the sense of being humiliated.”

In 1956 Bergman at thirty-seven years of age had a successful artistic and fulfilling personal life....Bergman had gathered around him a team of filmmakers and actors who admired him and were capable of projecting the subtle overtones he demanded. There had been filmmaking teams of this sort in the past, but none included so many members working so frequently together.

The Seventh Seal (1957) inaugurated the next stage in Bergman’s career. The jury’s special prize at the Cannes film festival was an official commendation; more important was critical acclaim throughout the Western world and a box-office success unequaled by any of the director’s previous works. Not since Akira Kurosawa’s Rashomon in 1950 had a single film caused such a sensation in the cinema world. The film is set in fourteenth -century Sweden.

The plot centers on the journey of the knight Antonius Block (Sydow) and his squire (Bjornstrand) from a shore of Sweden ravished by the Black Plague, to which they have returned from the Crusades, to the knight’s castle. In the first sequence, Death (Ekerot) comes for Block, but is persuaded to play chess with the knight and to allow him to live until the game is concluded. In the penultimate sequence, Death, the victor, claims the knight and his companions.

Of the nine films Bergman directed between 1957 and 1964, six deal directly or indirectly with what one writer called “the God quest.” Basically the artist during this period is asking a series of questions: Does God exist? If He does, can we come in contact with him in tangible ways? If he does not exist or is silent, can life have meaning?

The Seventh Seal premiered in February of 1957. By the end of that year Bergman had completed his next film, one that many critics place among the half dozen of his masterworks. Wild Strawberries presents the events of a crucial day in the life of Isak Borg (Victor Sjostrom), a seventy-eight-year-old professor of medicine. There is a continual intermingling of two journeys. Physically he travels from his home in Stockholm to the University of Lund, where he is to receive an honorary degree. Incidents during the trip trigger dreams that constitute a psychological journey into his past and subconscious.

Borg is a rigid, selfish, emotionally cold man on the night that he has a frightening dream about his death. At the end of the film, in Lund, he dreams again, only this time it is of reconciliation and contentedness. He has been changed through experiences with various people—including his daughter-in-law (Thulin), mother (Wifstrand), and a young woman, Sara (Bibi Andersson)—and two additional dreams in which he confronts the failures and humiliations of his youth and adulthood. His
guide and adviser is a Sara of the past, his first love (also played by Andersson).

A chastened Borg has changed, but not everyone responds to his psychic transformation. Though he establishes contact with his daughter-in-law and the contemporary Sara, his estranged son and strait-laced housekeeper preserve their distance. More important, he is at peace with himself, as revealed in the dream with which the film ends.

Bergman had projected the dreams of characters on the screen in earlier works. Never before, however, had such dreams been so pivotal to an understanding of the inner world of a fictional individual nor had he made them so real and lucid to his viewers. A rich cinematic lode had been discovered by the director, and he was to mine it in a series of films that include *Persona, Hour of the Wolf, Cries and Whispers, Face to Face, and From the Life of the Marionettes.* Even in other films, dreams play a significant role in presenting us with insights into his characters. This technique is so central to Bergman’s work that all his films could be explicated by this means.

Unlike *The Seventh Seal,* the overt religious element in *Wild Strawberries* is minor. Yet both films are variations on the question and tentative answers that constitute the major comprehensive theme of Bergman’s work. In a modern world of violence and uncertainty how can the individual find “peace and clarity of soul” (Bergman’s phrase)? A word from God would be reassuring, but Bergman reaches the conclusion that He is silent. A more viable answer involves two stages.

The individual must face the truth of his or her past and present. This can be achieved by what Carl Jung called “the night sea journey”: an excursion into the personal subconscious and collective unconscious, the only repositories of the essences of self. Dreams and hallucinations are the most accessible vehicles of this type of psychic trip; the proximity of death (as in *Wild Strawberries, Face to Face,* and *Cries and Whispers*) can provide an impetus. The journey is dangerous and not everyone can survive it (Johan in *The Hour of the Wolf* does not). Those who do, however, can find the courage to attempt to establish connections with others—in a word, to love.

This is the thematic pattern that structures *Wild Strawberries.* The film would not be so praiseworthy if the cinematic techniques were not equal to the challenge of the content. Form and feeling reinforce each other. It is not perfect (for example, the character and speeches of the contemporary Sara are unconvincing), but it remains, with *Fanny and Alexander,* the most moving and organically unified of Bergman’s works.

From 1966 to early 1977, when he left Sweden, new emphases and themes occupied the director. Furthermore, he went even further than previously in developing new cinematic techniques. He continued probing nonrational levels of the human psyche with the concomitant manipulation of symbols and archetypal patterns, but in addition to a definite lessening of religious overtones in his work there appeared a notable shift in content.

Women had always been crucial figures in Bergman’s film world and he had created many mature, self-sufficient female characters. Their typical role, however, was a conforters of men, giving emotional support to their husbands and lovers or guiding a male to his personal redemption (as in *Wild Strawberries*). In contrast, women and the female psyche are the main objects of the director’s attention and men are subordinate in most of the films of his third period. Night sea journeys are often undertaken by these women, and for the successful ones there is the reward of a new confidence in themselves, in integrity independent of men and children.

Bergman initiated this new stage with a work of stunning originality and one of the most challenging motion pictures of our time. *Persona* (1966) delves into the interrelations between two women. The actress Elisabet Vogler (Ullmann) becomes mute for a few moments during a performance of *Electra* and after refuses to speak. At a hospital, her female doctor recommends that she stay in a cottage by the seashore with the nurse Alma (Bibi Andersson). At first the younger woman attempts to persuade her patient to talk; however, gradually the roles are reversed and Alma confides her innermost thoughts and secrets to Elizabet. A turning point in their association occurs when Alma reads a letter written by the actress to a friend in which she describes the nurse as a “real diversion” who is “amusing to study.” Alma is outraged, and an altercation between the two, including small acts of violence, ensues. They finally leave the cottage and go their separate ways.

We never learn what originally instigated Elisabet’s decision not to speak and to reject her husband, son, and the theatre. The doctor’s diagnosis is that the actress can no longer tolerate the abyss between the truth of herself on one side and on the other the roles she plays and masks (personae) she wears before others. Revulsion caused by contemporary violence may also have influenced her, for she reacts strongly when looking at a Buddhist monk setting fire to himself on a television screen or a photo of Jews rounded up by Nazi soldiers. Her withdrawal seems to involve also a rejection of her son, an opinion elaborated on by Alma in the nurse’s lengthy dream. There are clues to Elisabet’s character, then, but no whole picture, like a puzzle with pieces missing.

That the actress’s motivations are unclear is not a major flaw in *Persona* if we take the position that Elisabet is essentially a touchstone for examining the inner world of Alma. When we first meet the nurse, she believes herself secure in knowing who she is and what she wants from life: to marry her boyfriend, have a family, and serve with complete commitment like the old
nurses she admires. As she reveals herself to Elisabet, however, we come to realize that she is wearing a mask and must learn the difference between her essential self and her persona. She is ready for a night sea journey and embarks on one.

The majority of critical controversy evoked by Persona concerns the bizarre events of the last third. Some critics argue that these events are explicable if it is accepted that from the time Alma goes to sleep after an argument with Elisabet to just before the final sequences when she awakens, all that takes place— including the arrival of Elisabet’s husband, a scene in which Alma explains that what has caused the actress’s withdrawal is denial of her son, and another in a hospital room—is Alma’s dream. A creative force from her unconscious constructs dramatic situations in which the young woman either becomes Elisabet or assumes roles that are different from and more honest than those of her normal, conscious state. These situations give viewers—and perhaps Alma—insights into repressed desires and guilt about her abortion. Whether this journey into self through a dream with multiple settings leads to the nurse’s psychic transformation is left ambiguous at the end. The cottage is put in order and Alma leaves on a bus for a reality and destiny that is beyond the confines of Persona.

Whatever an individual’s interpretation of the content of the work, no fair-minded viewer can deny the boldness and artistry of Bergman’s innovative techniques. The most prominent departure from standard cinematic narrative is to force on the audiences a Brechtian “distancing” from the plot by periodically shattering the illusion that the film is a self-contained, self-sufficient entity. It opens with a series of images unconnected on a narrative level. They are related together solely by associations with death, fear, pain and frustration or film projection as a mechanical process. In the middle of the work, at an intense moment, we see a single frame of the print burning. During the final sequence, there is a brief insert of Bergman and his crew operating a camera.

The demarcation between concrete reality and the realm of illusion and dreams is less clear in Persona than in earlier Bergman dramas. After the opening montage of images, we appear to be in the real world, but there are repeated moments when that reality is askew, such as a room appearing phenomenally large, no natural source for lighting, and a television set turning off with no one touching it. After she prepares to leave the cottage, Anna looks in the mirror and Elisabet’s face appears, recalling for us one of the dream images. Bergman seems to be saying that in both life and artistic recreations of reality, artificial though the latter may be, our inner and outer worlds echo and seep into each other.

Bergman has had his critics, both professional and in general audiences. With some justification he has been accused of being pessimistic, obscure, melodramatic, dour, unconvincing, nonpolitical, tiresome, obsessive, perverse. On the other hand, only a mentally stultified, obstinate critic could deny the positive qualities of Bergman as a filmmaker. He has a vision of human nature and the human situation that is definite and consistent, and he expresses that vision in a unique, personal, unconventional style. If the term auteur has any meaning, Bergman is the personification of that accolade.

While he can accurately and convincingly portray a milieu and the everyday world of men and women, as evident in his historical films, Bergman’s forte is exploring the subconscious and unconscious levels of the human psyche and the ways in which irrational forces influence our emotions and actions. He has few equals in cinema in persuading an audience that a dream projected on the screen, though inevitably an artificial construct, is believable, actually might have occurred. If the symbolism is enigmatic and at times less than coherent, these qualities are inherent in the dream world. There is justification also for ambiguities and perplexities infused by the director into the fibre of entire films. Probing the recesses of an individual’s psyche and the complexities of human relationships cannot be done clearly and methodically without oversimplification, and Bergman has never been reproached for this fault or for providing neat, pragmatic solutions to questions involving God, death, love, art, and human salvation.

In your films you often confuse reality and dreams, and I wonder if you feel that they are of equal importance?

BERGMAN: You know, you can’t find in any other art, and you can’t create a situation that is so close to dreaming as cinematography when it is at its best. Think only of the time gap: you can make things as long as you want, exactly as in a dream; you can make things as short as you want, exactly as in a dream; you can’t create a situation that is so close to dreaming as cinematography when it is at its best. Think only of the time gap: you can make things as long as you want, exactly as in a dream; you can make things as short as you want, exactly as in a dream; as a director, a creator of the picture, you are like a dreamer: you can make what you want, you can construct everything. I think that is one of the most fascinating things that exist.

I think also the reception for the audience of a picture is very, very hypnotic. You sit there in a completely dark room, anonymous, and you look at a lightened spot in front of you and you don’t move. You sit and you don’t move and your eyes are concentrated on that white spot on the wall. That is some sort of magic. I think it’s also magic that two times every fame comes and stands still for twenty-four parts of a second and then it darkens two times; a half part of the time when you see a picture you sit in complete darkness. Isn’t that fascinating? That is magic. It’s quite different when you watch television: you sit at home, you have light around you, you have people you know around you, the telephone is ringing, you can go out and have a

cup of coffee, the children are making noise, I don’t know what—but it is absolutely another situation.

We are in the position to work with the most fascinating medium that exists in the world because like music we go straight to the feeling—not over the intellect—we go straight to the feeling, as in music. Afterward we can start to work with our intellect. If the picture is good, if the suggestions from the creator of the picture are strong enough, they’ll give you thoughts afterward; you’ll start to think; they are intellectually stimulating.

You use women as your main characters quite a lot, and I was wondering how you relate to them, how you identify with them? Your male characters aren’t very much in the foreground.

B: I like more to work with women. I have many good friends who are actors and I like tremendously to work together with them, but in filmmaking it’s a job for good nerves and I think the women have much better nerves than the men have. It’s so. I think the problems very often are the common problems. They are not, on the first hand, women; they are human beings. And God forgive me, but I have the feeling that the prima donnas always are male. I think it has to do with out whole social life and the male part and the female part they have to play, and it’s very difficult to be an actor; it’s not so difficult to be an actress in our society.

Roger Ebert: “Ingmar Bergman: In Memory”

Interview with L. Ullmann (1975)
Interview with L. Ullmann (2001)

The solitary, poetic, fearful, creative, brave and philosophical mind of Ingmar Bergman has been stilled, and the director is dead at 89. Death was an event on which he long meditated; it was the subject of many of his greatest films, and provided his most famous single image, a knight playing chess with Death in “The Seventh Seal.”

The end came Monday on the remote island of Faro, off the Swedish coast, where he made his home and workshop for many years. During a long and productive career, he made more than 50 films, some of them in longer versions for television, and directed more than 200 plays and operas.

Woodrow Allen, who made some films in deliberate imitation of Bergman, said he was “probably the greatest film artist, all things considered, since the invention of the motion picture camera.”

And David Mamet has just written me: “When I was young the World Theatre, in Chicago, staged an all-day Ingmar Bergman Festival. I went at ten o’clock in the morning, and stayed all day. When I left the theater it was still light, but my soul was dark, and I did not sleep for years afterwards.”

Provided with a secure home for decades within the Swedish film industry, working at Stockholm’s Film House, which his films essentially built, Bergman had unparalleled freedom to make exactly the films he desired. Occasionally they were comedies, and he made a sunny version of Mozart’s “The Magic Flute,” but more often they were meditations on life and death, on the difficulties of people trying to connect, and on what he considered the silence of God. In a film like “Wild Strawberries (1957), however, he imagined an old man terrified by death, revisiting his memories, and finally finding reconciliation.

The son of a strict Lutheran minister, Bergman remembered such punishments as being locked in a cabinet and told mice would nibble at his toes. He resented his father for years, returning to that childhood again near the end of his career in “Fanny and Alexander” (1982) one of his greatest films.

What he saw as God’s refusal to intervene in the suffering on earth was the subject of his 1961-63 Silence of God Trilogy, “Through a Glass Darkly,” “Winter Light” (a pitiless film in which a clergyman torments himself about the possibility of nuclear annihilation) and “The Silence.” In his masterpiece “Persona,” (1967), an actress (Liv Ullmann) sees a television image of a monk burning himself in Vietnam, and she stops speaking. Sent to a country retreat with a nurse (Bibi Andersson), she works a speechless alchemy on her, leading to a striking image when their two faces seem to blend.

So great was the tension in that film that Bergman made it appear to catch in the projector and burn. Then, from a black screen, the film slowly rebuilt itself, beginning with crude images from the first days of the cinema. These images were suggested by a child’s cinematograph which his brother received as a present; so envious was Ingmar that he traded his brother for it, giving up his precious horde of 100 tin soldiers.

In the fullness of his career, the director settled into a rhythm. “We’ve already discussed the new film the year before,” Sven Nykvist, his longtime cinematographer, told me in 1975. “Then Ingmar goes to his island and writes the screenplay. The next year, we shoot - usually about the fifteenth of April. Usually we are the same eighteen people working with him, year after year, one film a year.”

Of the 18, one was the “hostess,” hired to serve coffee and pastries and make the set seem domestic. “How large a crew do you use?” David Lean asked him one year at Cannes. “I always work with 18 friends,” Bergman said. “That’s funny,” said Lean. “I work with 150 enemies.”

In 1975 I visited the Bergman set for “Face to Face.” He took a break and invited me to his “cell” in Film House: A small, narrow room, filled with an army cot, a desk, two chairs, and on the desk an apple and a bar of chocolate. He said he’d been watching an interview with Antonioni the night before: “I hardly heard what he said. I could not take my attention away from his face. For me, the human face is the most important subject of the cinema.”
Nykvist was his collaborator in filming those faces, and in “The Passion of Anna” (1969) did something unprecedented: filmed a conversation by the light of a single candle. “He said it could be done, and he was right,” Bergman said.

Bergman was married five times and had eight children, including Liv Ullmann’s daughter, the novelist Linn. He was not proud of how he behaved in some of those relationships, and in an extraordinary late film, “Faithless” (2000), written by Bergman and directed by Ullmann, he imagines a director (Erland Josephson) hiring an actress (Lena Endre) to help him “think through” an unhappy affair. It becomes clear that the actress is imaginary, that the affair has some connection with Ullmann and other women, and that the film is a confession. It is all shot on Faro, in Bergman’s house.

Other filmmakers spoke in awe of Bergman’s methods, which had the luxury of time and complete independence. Haskell Wexler, the great cinematographer, has just written me: “I was good friends with Sven Nykvist, who told me stories about Bergman. They sat in a big old church from very early in the morning until as black as the night gets. They noted where the light moved through the stained glass windows.

Bergman planned where he would stage the scenes for a picture they were about to do. This had the practical advantage of minimizing light and generator costs. Sven said sitting alone with Ingmar in the church had a profound effect on him. I asked him if it made him more religious. He said he didn’t think so but it did give him some kind of spiritual connection to Ingmar which helped him deal with the times Bergman became very mean…”

There are so many memories crowding in, now, from the richness of Bergman’s work, that I know not what to choose. A turning point in his despair occurred, perhaps, in “Cries and Whispers,” a chamber drama in an isolated Swedish estate where Harriet Andersson is dying painfully of cancer and her sisters have come to be with her. After she dies, they find a journal in which she recalls a perfect day in the autumn, when the pain was not so bad, and the women took up their parasols and walked in the garden. “This is happiness. I cannot wish for anything better,” she writes. “I feel profoundly grateful to my life, which gives me so much.”

When “Faithless” played at Cannes in 2001, Liv Ullmann told me this story: “When he was 60 years old he celebrated his birthday on his island, on that beach. And my daughter was there; she was five years old. And…he said to her, ‘When you are 60 what will you do then?’ She said, ‘I'll have a big party and my mother will be there. She'll be really old and stupid and gawky but it's gonna be great.’ And he looked at her and said, ‘And what about me? Will I not be there?’ And the five-year-old looked up at him and she said, ‘Well, you know, I'll leave the party and I'll walk down to the beach and there on the waves you will come dancing towards me.’”

Persona (Ingmar Bergman website)
About the film
In January 1963 Ingmar Bergman was appointed head of the Royal Dramatic Theatre. It was to prove a very demanding job indeed: with the entire company in need of reorganisation, he found himself in an ‘insoluble and incomprehensibly chaotic situation.’ Against his better judgement, he did not cut back on his film work and ended up paying the price: double pneumonia and acute penicillin poisoning. In the spring of 1965 he was admitted to Sophiahemmet, the royal hospital, where he began to write the screenplay for Persona, mainly to keep my hand in the creative process.’

In poor shape, both physical and psychological, he started to question the role of art in general, and his own work in particular.

Bergman writing in Images:
My Life in Film:
It was not a case of developing an aversion to my professional life. Although I am a neurotic person, my relation to my profession has always been astonishingly non-neurotic. I have always had the ability to attach my demons to my chariot. And they have been forced to make themselves useful. At the same time they have still managed to keep on tormenting and embarrassing my private life. The owner of the flea circus, as you might be aware, has a habit of letting his artists suck his blood.’

During the same period Bergman was awarded the Erasmus Prize (which he shared with Charlie Chaplin). Prevented by illness from attending the ceremony, he wrote an essay that was read out in Amsterdam by the head of SF, Kenne Fant. Entitled The Snakeskin, the essay summarised Bergman’s broodings during his stay in hospital and his feelings about art. In many ways, Persona became an illustration of this essay (or vice-versa, perhaps), to the extent that The Snakeskin was published as the preface to the American version of the screenplay.

The first notes for what was to become Persona were written on 12 April 1965:
Dejection and sorrow and tears – which change to powerful outbursts of joy. Sensitivity in the hands. The broad forehead, severity, eyes survey the [unreadable] childishness.

What is it that I want from this, yes, to start from the beginning. Not to contrive not to incite not to cause a fuss but to start from the beginning with my new – if I have one.

So she has been an actress – –is that acceptable, perhaps And then she fell silent. Nothing unusual about that.

These early notes constitute a unique summary of the film. Persona has often been regarded as a watershed in Bergman’s career, a new start, just as he had prescribed for himself. The subsequent writing appears to have been swift. A few pages...
The two women in *Persona* have sometimes been regarded as one and the same person (rather like the sisters in *The Silence* and *Cries and Whispers*). This analysis does have some validity, as Bergman himself implies: 'Could one make this into an inner happening? I mean, suggest, that it is a composition for different voices in the same soul's concerto grosso?'

Bergman has often made use of musical metaphors when describing *Persona*. At a later date he would refer to it as a sonata for the instruments Andersson and Ullmann. Asked whether the sonata should be in a major or minor key, he replied that it should be neither, 'the way it is in modern music.'

Keeping his hand in the creative process started to pay off, and it became clear that a film might be forthcoming, after all. Having thought about casting, Bergman decided that the principal roles should go to Bibi Andersson and the highly-praised young Norwegian actress, Liv Ullmann. He had never actually seen her act, but he had been at the home of Gunnel Lindblom looking at slides taken during the shooting of *Pan*, in which Andersson and Ullmann both took part. Struck by how similar they were, this initial impulse eventually led Bergman to *Persona*.

Later he would be asked how he could be so sure that Liv Ullmann would cope with such a demanding role when he had only met her once, and then on the street: 'I wasn't. I just thought so.' He received a visit in hospital from Kenne Fant, and together they left Sophiahemmet on a visit to the Thielska Gallery on Stockholm's Djurgården. 'Now listen, Kenne, do you think you could put some people aside for me until the end of July. And we could sign up Liv Ullmann and Bibi Andersson, and you could put up the money and maybe debet what it costs to my next film, if there is one?'

Reasonably enough, Kenne Fant wondered what the film would be about, to which Bergman replied: 'Well, it's about one person who talks and one who doesn't, and they compare hands and get all mingled up in one another.' 'Oh, really,' said Kenne. I said: 'It'll be a very small film, so it needn't cost much.' Kenne put up the money wholeheartedly. And that's something I'll never forget.'

Fant's willingness to finance such a risky project should, however, be seen in the context of *The Silence*, which two years earlier had been SF's greatest ever box office success. This may go some way towards explaining his ready generosity. The finished screenplay is not dissimilar to the random jottings in Bergman's workbook, yet although it may appear somewhat improvised, it was 'painstakingly planned.' Nonetheless, it is prefaced by the reservation that much of the film will be determined once shooting is underway.

**Sources of inspiration**

Of the much fêted opening scenes in the film, Bergman has said that he wanted to make a poem in images. Writing in *Images:*

'I reflected on what was important, and began with the projector and my desire to set it in motion. But when the projector was running, nothing came out of it but old ideas, the spider, God's lamb, all that dull stuff. My life then consisted of dead people, brick walls, and a few dismal trees out in the park.'

The first of these images came to him early on in the creative process. In his *workbook* he wrote that he imagined a white, washed-out strip of film: 'It runs through the projector and gradually there are words on the sound tape (which perhaps runs beside the film strip itself). Gradually the precise word I'm looking for comes into focus. Then a face you can barely make out dissolves in all that whiteness. That's Alma's face. Mrs. Vogler's face.'

The words in this early draft are basically the same as those of the *finished screenplay*: 'I imagine the transparent ribbon of film rushing through the projector. Washed clean of signs and pictures, it produces a flickering reflected light from the screen.'

Bergman has often, especially during the 1960s and 70s, been accused of being unworldly. In Sweden in particular, his unwillingness to get involved in the debate surrounding the Vietnam War was widely regarded as a kind of implicit support for the USA. *Persona*, however, gives the first glimpse of a political reality outside Bergman's own universe. The film contains two images which invoke a strong reaction in Elisabet Vogler: a Second World War photograph of a young boy in the Warsaw Ghetto, and television pictures of one of the Vietnamese monks who set fire to themselves in protest against the war. In his *workbook* Bergman wrote:

'My art cannot melt, transform, or forget: the boy in the photo with his hands in the air or the man who set himself on fire to bear witness to his faith. I am unable to grasp the large catastrophes. They leave my heart untouched. At most I can read about such atrocities with a kind of greed – a pornography of horror. But I shall never rid myself of those images. Images that turn my art into a bag of tricks, into something indifferent, meaningless.'
Many have seen August Strindberg's one-act play The Stronger, in which one character speaks and another remains silent, as an important source of inspiration. Yet once again, as with Wild Strawberries almost a decade previously, the influence of same writer's A Dream Play can clearly be discerned. (Bergman produced the play for television in 1963 and later for the stage in 1970, 1977 and 1986). The free structure of Strindberg's play, in which 'time and space do not exist', has often been cited as a precursor of the dream-like form of Persona.

Shooting the film

A few days before shooting began a press conference was held with all the pomp and circumstance which was 'only normally reserved for royalty or heads of state', according to one reporter.

Having assured himself that everyone could hear properly, Bergman went up to a blackboard and wrote: PERSONA. 'Does anyone know what this is?' No answer was forthcoming from the press. 'You see', Bergman went on, 'the film might not have a name at all. First of all I suggested to Kenne Fant (at SF) the title Cinematography? but that made Kenne sad. 'Terrible name', thought Kenne. So I came up with this title, 'Persona'. 'Any name's better than cinematography', said Kenne, and approved my proposal. Bergman then went on to explain that 'Persona' is the Latin name for the face masks worn by actors in antiquity. 'It's an amusing title, a good name, an apt name. The film will be about people's masks and attitudes.' Bergman also mentioned that the film would be shot in standard format in black and white, 'which I think is the most beautiful.'

Most of the shooting took place on Fårö but began with some work in the studio, Filmstaden, starting on 19 July 1965. 'The first days were nightmarish. All I felt was: 'I can't manage this!' and one day after another went by, and all the time we got only bad results, bloody awful results. And Bibi was angry and Liv was nervous, and I was paralyzed with fatigue.' When they arrived at Fårö, the atmosphere was much improved and work proceeded more smoothly.

Sven Nykvist was faced with new challenges. The close-up in the opening sequences of an old film projector with carbon rods that meet together was not an easy shot to achieve. While Nykvist was shooting Mai Zetterling's Loving Couples he worked on this sequence in his spare time: 'the studio manager was annoyed because I was using up so much raw film outside the regular budget even before shooting had begun.'

Working together on The Virgin Spring Nykvist and Bergman had arrived at the conclusion that medium shots were 'boring and unnecessary', but few films are so pictorially radical as Persona: a few wide-angle long shots, hardly any medium shots and most of all long, intensive close-ups. It was probably Persona that firmly established the Nykvist style, summed up rather facetiously as 'two faces and a teacup'.

Bibi Andersson had acted in most of Bergman's films since Smiles of a Summer Night, with the notable exception of the 'trilogy' (Through a Glass Darkly, Winter Light and The Silence). The roles she had played were important yet relatively minor. Persona was to be her tour de force. On one occasion Bergman said of Andersson that she needed to believe in something before she could act it. This might sound like a limitation, yet in Bergman's eyes it was a sign of integrity. One example of this in Persona is Alma's famous monologue about a sexual adventure she once had on a beach with another woman and two young boys. During the shooting Bergman wanted to scrap the scene, perhaps because he thought it was too explicit. But Andersson insisted that they keep it in. Reminiscing in an interview in American Film:

'I said, 'Let me shoot it, but let me just alter certain words no woman would say. It's written by a man, and I can feel it's a man. Let me change certain things. ' He said, 'You do what you want with it. We'll shoot it, and then we'll go and see it together.'

Shooting the scene was embarrassing, yet Bergman was pleased with the result. There was just one thing, though: 'something's wrong with the sound', he claimed. He asked Andersson to speak the monologue again alone in the mixing studio. The sound would be synchronised afterwards. The sound problem was probably just a ruse: originally she had spoken in a high, girlish voice and been satisfied with that, but when she subsequently dubbed the scene alone she used a much lower tone, something she only dared to do when nobody was watching or listening. Later she expressed the view that the intimate quality of the scene was largely destroyed. For Liv Ullmann, a few years younger than Andersson, this was her first Bergman film. Many more were to follow: she played leading roles in nine films up to and including Autumn Sonata. The largely silent role of Elisabet also marked the start of a highly successful international career.

The most famous image from the film is that of an extraordinary face, half Ullmann's and half Bibi Andersson's. According to Bergman, 'In most people one side of the face is more attractive than the other, their so-called good side.' The two images that Nykvist spliced together 'showed their respective bad sides.' When the film came back from the laboratory he asked both the actresses to come to the editing room. 'Bibi exclaims in surprise: 'But Liv, you look so strange!' And Liv says: 'No, it's you Bibi, you look very strange!''

The film's unit manager, and the photographer of a number of remarkable stills from the shoot, was Bo Arne Vibienius. Some years later he directed a film that was banned in Sweden: Thriller: a Cruel Picture, recently released as an important source of inspiration for Quentin Tarantino's Kill Bill.

The original score was by the composer Lars Johan Werle, best known for his operas including Dreaming About...
Thérèse (Drömmen om Thérèse, 1964) and The Journey (Resan, 1970). His previous film scores included the music for Alf Sjöberg’s The Island. He had also composed the music for Sjöberg's Royal Dramatic Theatre production of Euripides' Hippolytus, where he first met Bergman, then head of the theatre. Bergman's brief was precise: he knew exactly what he wanted. These limitations on his artistic freedom did not trouble Werle, who was extremely positive about working with Bergman and did not feel unduly restricted by his demands.

Epilogue

Shooting came to an end on 15 September 1965. The next day, Bergman wrote in his diary that now the filming was over, Bibi was off to America, Sven to Zurich and Liv to Oslo, he was left alone, depressed and self-pitying. 'On Monday the endless saga at the Royal Dramatic Theatre begins again. How will I put up with it?' A few months later he resigned his post as head of the theatre.

Persona was premièred at the Spegeln cinema on 18 October 1966. The editor Ulla Ryghe has described how the famous scene where the film burns up, often interpreted as if the actual celluloid cannot stand the friction between the two main characters, caused a number of problems at the initial screenings. After a number of projectionists had stopped the film, the film cans themselves had to be marked with red labels assuring them that the actual film does not catch fire, even though it appears that way.

The Stockholm press was largely respectful and appreciative, yet almost unanimously perplexed by a film, the content of which, symbolic or otherwise, was shrouded in mystery. Dagens Nyheter's Mauritz Edström wrote a long review (most of the reviews were unusually long) under the heading 'Bergman's victory over silence' (most probably a reference to the earlier film The Silence, at the same time as conveying a view that many critics have subsequently repeated):

'Ingmar Bergman's new film 'Persona', as I see it, is a reminder of our proximity to the ultimate borderline, where language breaks down, images are rent asunder and reality dissolves. It touches me as a personal confession, a howl of despair or a cry against darkness and silence [...] A defiant cry, an attempt to ward off the threat that lies in this despair.'

Edström's words bear an uncanny similarity to those of the director himself. He could hardly have known that on 24 July – just before he started to write Persona – Bergman had written in his workbook almost exactly the same thing: 'Even if prayer is just a cry into an empty space, we should not desist from that cry.'

The editor of Dagens Nyheter, Olof Lagercrantz, who both panned Bergman (his review of Smiles of a Summer Night is legendary), and praised him in equal measure, wrote a cutting yet amusing reflection in response to the film under the heading "Person(a)cult": 'The halo has been pressed down to the level of the sweat band of the world famous director's beret. The head of SF, Kenne Fant, can once again proclaim with a tremor of idealism in his voice that it is a great honour to lose money on a film like 'Persona'. He said the same thing about the box-office hit 'The Silence'.'

France was the country where Bergman reaped his first major successes at the end of the 1950s. Yet during the 60s his star had been on the wane. Persona helped to restore his reputation: Les cahiers du cinéma called Persona his most beautiful film, and one daily newspaper declared that sixty years after its birth, the cinema had now found its most promising form. Reactions in America were mixed: Susan Sontag's famous essay in the magazine (albeit British) Sight & Sound is an example of praise, whereas the short notice in Films in Review is the opposite: 'a film about lesbians and lesbianism'.

Bergman insisted that all marketing material for the film, including stills, should feature the perforated edge of the film strip in order to emphasise the markedly filmic quality of the work.

If Wild Strawberries is Bergman's most plagiarised film, and The Seventh Seal his most parodied, then Persona is certainly the most written about. No other individual Bergman film has generated such extensive critical and academic attention. One of the latest works on the subject is an anthology in the Cambridge Film Handbooks series edited by Lloyd Michaels, entitled simply Ingmar Bergman's Persona. Widely regarded as his most important film, this view of Persona is shared by Bergman himself. Writing in Images:

At some time or other, I said that Persona saved my life – that is no exaggeration. If I had not found the strength to make the film, I would probably have been all washed up. One significant point: for the first time I did not care in the least whether the result would be a commercial success. The gospel according to which one must be comprehensible at all costs, one that had been dinned to me ever since I worked as the lowliest manuscripts slave at Svensk Filminustri, could finally go to hell (which is where it belongs!)

Today, I feel that in Persona – and later in Cries and Whispers – I had gone as far as I could go. And that in these two instances, when working in total freedom, I touched wordless secrets that only the cinema can discover.
COMING UP IN THE SPRING 2018 BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS XXXVI

April 3 Ousman Sembène, *Black Girl* 1966
April 10 Sidney Lumet, *Dog Day Afternoon* 1975
April 17 Robert Bresson, *L’Argent* 1983
April 24 David Lynch, *Mulholland Drive* 2001
May 1 Martin McDonagh, *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* 2017
May 8 Jacques Demy, *The Young Girls of Rochefort* 1967

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