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**THE TRANSPOSITIONS OF A FILMMAKER
— Ingmar Bergman at Home and Abroad**

Let me begin with a metaphor. I construct it with the help of Ingmar Bergman. In Bergman's film *Cries and Whispers*, Agnes, a woman dying of cancer, glides into the unknown. Like her namesake, Indra's daughter in Strindberg's *A Dreamplay*, Agnes is asked to transmit the voice of human suffering to the spiritual powers in an afterlife. But before that, she has returned for a moment to call on those who are left behind, her two sisters Karin and Maria, and a faithful housekeeper, Anna, all of whom have kept vigil at her deathbed. At the end of the film, after having been put to final rest, Agnes' disembodied voice returns once more to life, as her housekeeper opens and reads her mistress' diary. Voice, text and memory conjure forth a different image of Agnes' past than what we have seen before, depicting for us a moment of epiphany as the sick woman is seen strolling in the park of her small estate and sits down peacefully with her two sisters in a hammock rocked by Anna, the housekeeper.

And now for the metaphor. The story of Agnes, her short life, her demise, her return or resurrection can be compared to the fate of many of Bergman's films, especially before his international breakthrough in 1956-57. Loved by some and spurned by others, his films were often treated as sickly; at times, they were laid to rest prematurely after having met the ritualized bows or funereal headshakes of critics and general public alike. *Port of Call*, *Prison*, *The Naked Night*, even *The Seventh Seal* seemed at one time headed for entombment in the mausoleum of film history.¹ But like the dying Agnes they have

¹One of Sweden's major film reviewers at the time wrote the following critique of *The Seventh Seal* after its release in early 1957: "When leaving Ingmar Bergman's new film *The Seventh Seal*, one is depressed and brooding. One remembers the artistic photography of Gunnar Fischer, the superior perfor-

refused to go away for good, as if they possessed an inner power that demanded attention once more. So strong has Bergman's filmmaking persona been that its spirit has continued to rekindle his works, nota bene, as long as there has been a viewer to confirm and respond to them. Agnes' diary would have remained sealed to us without Anna, its reader. Bergman's films only live on as long as there is a public to recognize them.

We may then ask: Who constitutes this public? Again, there is a metaphorical link to *Cries and Whispers*. In the film *Anna*, the housekeeper, is central only to Agnes while she remains a marginalized figure to the others in her circumscribed world. Likewise, in the five target areas I have chosen for a study of the public response to Bergman's filmmaking — Sweden, France, Brazil, India and the United States² — the respondents often viewed themselves as a fringe

mance of Gunnar Björnstrand and the novel pleasure of seeing Max von Sydow. But apart from that, everything is a failure. And one feels sorry for the director who apparently wished to return to the tragic genre after his last few years of mishmash; and one must ask why one is so untouched. (H. Hjerten, *Dagstidningen*, February 19, 1957).

²Each national group consisted of between fifty and several hundred people attending repeated showings of Bergman's films, who responded to a questionnaire. Among these a small percentage, chosen according to the age and gender composition of the returned questionnaires, was selected for interviews. These respondents constitute the representative target groups. The interview method used originated with American broadcast scholar Herta Herzog. In an attempt to break with the tendency to rely on quantitative figures in public reception research (e.g. Gallup polls) Herzog, aiming at qualitative responses, devised an interview method based on so-called *Uses and Gratifications* criteria. In applying this method to the Bergman project, respondents were asked to talk about the role of Bergman's filmmaking in their personal, professional and social lives, and to specify what aspects of his films they had found important and which aspects had seemed less relevant. In interpreting the responses, equal weight was given to esthetic and moral evaluations, but the predominance of one or the other within a given group was also used as a basis for structuring the material pertaining to that group. Each target group had its special reception persona, defined by such factors as cultural circumstances, ideological climate and range

group, sometimes relegated to such a status by vocal anti-Bergman voices in their environment, sometimes defining themselves as counter-culture by choice. The Swedish target group, for example, had found little positive response to Bergman's filmmaking among their peers in Sweden and considered themselves a minority in seeking out his works.³ The American respondents tended to see Bergman's filmmaking as a confirmation of their own need to disassociate themselves from the popular culture of their country, while many in the Brazilian target group dated their interest in Bergman back to the late sixties and early seventies when such films as *The Hour of the Wolf*, *Shame* and *A Passion* served as camouflaged allegories for the isolated Brazilian intellectual or artist who lacked a voice in an increasingly repressive dictatorship. The Indian reference group on the other hand, seeing Bergman as a colleague of Calcutta filmmaker Satyiat Ray, an emblematic figure in Bengali film culture, regarded Bergman's work as an alternative to the so-called Bollywood film, i.e. the commercial Indian cinema produced in Bombay. The French viewers, finally, emerged as a clique of film connoisseurs, an intellectual minority and cineastic elite who 'discovered' Bergman as an auteur and accepted or rejected his filmmaking in accordance with their own fluctuating film aesthetics.

Through these audience responses, juxtaposed to professional reviews and critical articles in the target areas, it is in fact possible to construct a generic Bergman viewer in each of the five cultures. What dominates in France is a *formalist* approach to Bergman's filmmaking, while in the United States it is Bergman the *existentialist* who reigns supreme. In Brazil we find the *subversive* and politicized Bergman, while in India his films become emblems of *artistic* filmmaking,

of exposure to Bergman's filmmaking.

³A 63-year retired waitress expressed her sense of alienation in her own society with regard to Bergman's filmmaking: "My family laughs at my interest in Bergman's films. They say: Well, perhaps *Fanny and Alexander* is OK, but the rest is too gloomy, too difficult. They don't understand how I can go down to that movie house voluntarily and see his films. So sometimes I've been thinking: Couldn't we form some kind of Bergman club?"

challenging the native film industry. In Sweden, finally, the generic viewer sees Bergman in a much more controversial light: on one hand, provocative and self-absorbed, on the other hand artistically undervalued.⁴

These generic viewers are also reflected in the following chart, based on collated figures from fifty randomly selected answers to a question asking the attending public to select the most important aspect of Bergman's works according to the five choices listed below.

Most Important Inroad Into a Bergman Work:

Sweden USA Brazil France India

Existential or Religious 13 25 10 8 10

Theme

Psychological Conflict 13 15 12 14 10

Socio-political Impact 0 0 14 19

Cinematic Art 14 5 10 25 20

Performance 10 5 4 21

The Swedish Response to Bergman's Films: Ambiguity and Slow Recognition

⁴In the limited space here, it is impossible to historicize the cultural contexts that support my nomenclature. Suffice it to say, using the U.S. as a condensed example, that in the United States the impact of Bergman's films seems to have rested on a need for artistic articulation of a postwar spiritual crisis that led a generation of college-age students to question the religious beliefs of their elders; Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* was introduced by American critic Andrew Sarris, who also launched the auteur concept in the U.S. and introduced *The Seventh Seal* as "the first truly existentialist work in film history." (*Film Culture* 19, 1959:51-61). One reason Bergman's impact in the United States has penetrated deeper than other non-American filmmakers of his generation may be due to the fact that his major films of the fifties are quite story-oriented and in this respect they reminded viewers of the American emphasis on narrative.

In studying the reception of Ingmar Bergman's works for the screen, a distinction should be made between a world-wide recognition of him as a famous Swedish filmmaker whose name is associated with a number of distinguished awards,⁵ and the more limited appeal that his films have had to the general movie-going public. Every Swede travelling abroad knows by now that Ingmar Bergman's name serves as a social code, a conversational contact point with people from other cultures. But what does Bergman's impact represent? There is obviously a difference between Ingmar Bergman as a cocktail party subject and the role he plays to people who might attend a retrospective showing of his films. The purpose of my study is to give visibility and identity to the latter kind of interest in Bergman's work for the screen, but in doing so it often becomes necessary to deal with Bergman's public persona and the mythos surrounding his artistic contribution. Behind the personal responses by members of the different target groups loom the views transmitted on the cocktail party circuit. In a way this interplay between a small nucleus of Bergman viewers and a broader but often less informed body of people who are surface consumers of his works, reflects Ingmar Bergman's lifelong but self-chosen dilemma as an artist. He decided early to express himself in a mass medium that tended to promote personalities and rely on trendiness rather than artistic merit and depth. Bergman's refusal to attend film festivals may be seen as a symbolic attempt on his part to disassociate himself from this aspect of popular culture, while still maintaining his loyalty to a popular medium.

He may in fact have faced a blessing in disguise when he arrived as a total newcomer in a commercialized industry and felt "like a cat in a ball of yarn". For in not mastering the rules of the game he was

⁵The earliest international award dates back to 1954 when *Gycklarnas afton* (*The Naked Night/Sawdust and Tinsel*) received a prize in Sao Paulo, Brazil. The latest award is the 1997 Cannes recognition of Ingmar Bergman's life work in the cinema. For a fuller list of awards, see my reference work *Sources and References. A Guide to Ingmar Bergman*. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1987.

challenged to define his own artistic catechism.⁶ Recognizing the entertaining aspects of the film medium and the economic basis of film production as private enterprise and money-making business, Bergman formulated a counter-creed that stressed his own need of artistic integrity. As an artist he participated in the major cultural paradigm of the 20th century — the rapid rise of the visual mass media and the questioning of traditional forms of culture as the sole criterion of good taste and esthetic accomplishment. Though Bergman remained firmly embedded in the world of the classical theatre, culminating with his years at the Royal Dramatic Theatre, he made his major contribution, in international terms, to the popular art of the movies. In his own bourgeois background, there were however clear demarcation lines between these two artistic activities, where the stage represented high culture and the movie screen low culture — even after Swedish filmmaking had established open channels to the theatre. In terms of social status the theatre continued to define high bourgeois taste, while the cinema, especially in the 1930s and 1940s, was associated with popular taste.

This is reflected in the early Swedish response to Bergman's films. The public came to see his comedies and early women's films: *Summer Interlude*, *Dreams*, *Waiting Women*, *A Lesson in Love*. But they refused to underwrite such works as *Prison* and *The Naked Night* — somber, modernist, experimental works, art films rather than popular movies. At the same time, Bergman gained increasing visibility as a cultural rebel through his script to Alf Sjöberg's film *Torment* (*Hets*, 1944) and through his years as head of the Hälsingborg City Theatre (1944-46) where he declared the stage to be "the city's turbulent corner". Ingmar Bergman's voice was the impetuous voice of an angry young man, coupled with the enthusiasm of a mind totally

⁶Bergman articulates his professional creed in a number of shorter essays. During his formative years, the most important one seems to be "Varje film är min sista film" (Each Film is my Last One), in which he lists his three "commandments". See *Filmnyheter* 14, no. 9-10, pp. 1-8. This essay appears in translation in a number of non-Swedish publications, for instance in *Films and Filming* 5, no. 10, 1959, pp. 8, 28.

committed to the performing arts. This created an ambivalent attitude among his reviewers, especially with regard to his authored work — his film scripts and his stage plays. In 1949 the Swedish critic Ebbe Linde wrote in a theatre chronicle in the literary magazine *BLM* (1949:4):

Every time I see a new Ingmar Bergman "morality play", such as *Kamma noll* (Coming up Empty) at HÄLSINGBORG (8 dec.), the same thing repeats itself. There is so much to be considered good, even more to be viewed as clever, even more to be deemed just right. And yet, I am on pins and needles, for at the same time there is something irritating, something false, something inhuman and not genuine, something that does not gel, and it pains me beyond words. In my irritation I write an unfavorable review which I regret the next day, for by then all that was well structured and right out ingenious in the play stands out in my memory.

Linde's reaction is instructive in this context, for it mirrors, on a professional level, the emotional tone and irritation that was part of the Swedish response to Bergman at the time. He became known as "the phenomenon Ingmar Bergman".⁷

Personal temperament and early media hype, which also dubbed him "literary writer of trash" and "demon director", reinforced negative feelings of him as an artist who seemed to articulate, above all, a *discourse of challenge*. Many older members of the Swedish target group remembered their first encounter with Bergman's filmmaking as part of a youthful rebellion. His works were simply considered taboo by their parents. A psychoanalyst in his late fifties recalled:

I began to see X-rated films around age 13. Some time later I became engaged in questions of a philosophical nature. My

⁷Bergman contributed freely to such a portrait in both words and action. "Always crazy" he wrote on the back of a photograph of himself taken in the 1940s. See Steene. "Gossen Ruda eller svensk ikon" in *Ingmar Bergman. Film och teater i växelverkan*. Ed. by Margareta Wirmark. Stockholm: Carlsons, 1997, p 190.

parents probably found me a bit odd then. It was at that time I began to see Ingmar Bergman's films. They did not belong to the fare recommended me by my parents in my youth. On the contrary, they had a solidly cemented reputation of being difficult and dangerous, and Bergman himself was considered a suspect figure. (interview, October 11, 1993)

In Sweden the young Ingmar Bergman became an easy object of public mythmaking. Such mythmaking requires a charged meeting between an artistic psyche and commentators who set the tone at the time, formulating and mirroring dominant cultural norms, what Kant called a *sensus communis*. The Swedish target group in my project definitely assumed the existence of a normative *sensus communis*, which they tended to define as anti-Bergman and which they related either to a parental bourgeois establishment of the 1940s and 1950s or to the cultural watershed of the 1960s when focus shifted to social and political issues in art.

Bergman's films from *The Seventh Seal* and on were to disclose a spiritual void. Though recognized by many Swedish film critics as a first rate image-maker, his general public dubbed him — in the words of humorist Kardemumma — "Head of the Swedish Angst Union"⁸. By the 1960s his films were labelled Bergman's 'Christian hangover'⁹ and frequently targeted for being too personal and too out of step with contemporary Swedish culture. By the time Bergman's foreign breakthrough gave echo at home, i.e. around 1960, a new estheticism in the cinema and a new filmmaking policy were under way in Sweden. Within a few years, a national film school would be established and the film industry would be subsidized through a taxation system funnelled through the Swedish Film Institute. A new cadre of filmmakers would emerge, rallying around the views articulated by the filmmaker Bo Widerberg. It was a young, vigorous and social-conscious generation

⁸*Svenska Dagbladet*, April 6, 1949, p. 8. For the Swedish response to Bergman's films, see my study *Måndagar med Bergman*. Eslöv: Symposion, 1996.

⁹Torsten Bergmark. "Ingmar Bergman och den kristna baksmällan." *Dagens Nyheter*, October 6, 1968, p. 4.

with little sympathy for Bergman's introverted and Angst-ridden works. Inspired by the French new wave and the *cinéma vérité* type of filmmaking, this influential group dismissed Bergman's work as obsolete. A rather typical reaction is the following comment after the premiere of *The Hour of the Wolf* (1968):

He who has had his views on the cinema liberated by Truffaut Godard and Widerberg has increasing difficulties in making contact with Bergman's film language. No new elements have been admitted into his universe. But time has not stood still, and the wider the areas embraced by the cinema, the more narrow his universe has become. (*Svenska Dagbladet*, February 20, 1968).

One way of explaining Sweden's somewhat stepmotherly treatment of Bergman's filmmaking, compared to the success and nearadulation he has received abroad, may be to compare his standing to Strindberg's. Strindberg too was a highly controversial figure in Sweden, more actively embroiled perhaps than Ingmar Bergman in the current debate. But both Strindberg and Bergman established a very strong presence in Swedish culture. Foreign observers, on the other hand, viewing these same artists from a distance, can see them as abstracted representatives of a culture or of an art form.

The only time Bergman has been popularly acknowledged as an important voice in his society by the Swedes themselves was in 1974 when he invaded their living-room with a refined soap opera, *Scenes from a Marriage*, and during his debacle with the Swedish tax authorities in 1976, for in terms of taxes all Swedes can presumably bond as equal victims. When Bergman returned to Sweden from his exile in the early 1980s and offered *Fanny and Alexander*, televised during the prime time Christmas season, as a conciliatory gesture between a filmmaker and his native public, he also paved the way for the Swedish recognition of his memoirs *Laterna magica* as a truly literary event. By contrast, the foreign reception of *The Magic Lantern* showed a great deal of disappointment in the book's focus on biography and its neglect to discuss Bergman's contributions to the cinema.

But its publication was a very important closure in the Swedish reception of Ingmar Bergman. It eradicated Bergman's deepest rancunes, which stemmed from his formative years in the film industry when he faced repeated ridicule as a scriptwriter and was considered devoid of any literary talent.¹⁰

After Bergman's return from exile and the release of *Fanny and Alexander*, Swedish reviewers were in a quandary, for here was a film that had all the familiar trappings of a Bergman bourgeois saga, coupled with the repressive Lutheran lifestyle of yesteryear. The following comment is typical of the critical browbeating that now occurred in Sweden: "It would be a poor and mean show — not to say a cheap one — to view this glorious work as only a hymn to consumerism and bourgeois reason."¹¹ As a final approval the reviewers now linked Bergman for the first time with such (other) great filmmakers as Fellini and Buñuel who were already admitted into the Swedish version of a filmhistorical canon. The Swedes finally gave Bergman a spot in the cinema's Pantheon.

Establishing the Bergman Image Abroad — A Filtered Cultural Process

In examining Bergman's reputation in the foreign countries selected for this study, it has seemed important to focus on his earliest reception which lays the foundation for the emergence of a Bergman filmmaking persona. There is another reason as well for such an emphasis: Once Bergman's name and work become recognized the world over, there has been much more prepublicity connected with the launching of a

¹⁰To exemplify one might choose from Artur Lundkvist's review of the film *Eva*, scripted by Bergman: "Eva is a frenzied, uptight product, a serial story with action and boldness on the surface, but banal and untenable underneath. . . . In this film too, people talk a lot of pathetic nonsense that gives me the creeps." (BLM 1949:1).

¹¹Stig Larson in *Stockholms-Tidningen*, December 20, 1982.

new film by him. This has frequently affected reviewer responses and has sometimes created a certain sameness in the presentation of a film. In other words, the first discovery of Bergman's filmmaking by an individual culture is a better measure of the impact of his works than a response recorded when his name has become cemented in the world of filmmaking.

The earliest responses to Bergman in a given country may be considered cultural *history* but these responses have no doubt filtered down to new generations of viewers. When two cultures meet, as in the case of Bergman's films seen by a foreign audience, but also when encounters with his work occur within one and the same society but at separate points in time — say a Swedish viewer response in the fifties versus one today — contextual differences are bound to exist. But when coupled with earlier reception patterns, later responses form layers in a collective view of Bergman that become available as a kind of cultural residue to new groups of moviegoers.¹²

In his native country Bergman's films were first exhibited as mainstream cinema and shown in theatres owned by the major production companies in the industry. In almost all countries outside of Sweden, on the other hand, Bergman's films have been regarded as

¹²This idea is derivative of an axiom in cognitive theory put forth by Frederick Bartlett in his discussion of mental schemata, which appeared in a 1932 study titled *Remembering*. According to Bartlett, our present perceptions are colored by the way we store our memories, which we do in a highly selective way, so that our recollection of an event is never an exact photographic rendering of that event. Schemata have their internal priorities in our minds. If we use our response today to a Bergman film as an illustration, we bring to that viewing a set of recollections of earlier viewings or of hearsays about the film or of our stored conception of Bergman as an artist and cultural personality. Our mental storage room is more or less cluttered with paraphernalia we have collected over the years, and since we start collecting very early in life, even a fairly young respondent to a Bergman film today, will bring some stored experiential data to bear on his or her viewing of that film. There is no completely "blank" previewing stage. We watch a Bergman film filtered through our personal and limited perception apparatus, which is shaped by the intellectual and cultural context in which we live and have lived.

exclusive fare and have frequently been distributed to special art houses or film society facilities, i.e. to exhibition locations that attract a particular cineast clientele, predisposed to accept qualities of Bergman's filmmaking that a general audience, seeking mainstream products might not care for. My research indicates in fact that the Swedish target group was much more socially and intellectually heterogeneous, but also more polarized in its attitudes towards Bergman's filmmaking, than the different foreign groups. In its social and educational diversity the Swedish group came closer to constituting a general audience than the foreign target groups. There is some evidence of this in the following chart, based on a question asking the selected respondents to indicate their personal assessment of Bergman's filmmaking in terms of the impact that his works had had on them. The chart also suggests that the most positive response was found in the American target group and that the least impact was noted by the Swedish respondents.

Personal Assessment of Bergman's Filmmaking

| | Sweden | Brazil | France | India | USA |
|--------------------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-----|
| Crucial Impact | 5 | 7 | 5 | 2 | 14 |
| Important Impact | 10 | 12 | 15 | 15 | 10 |
| Not very important | 10 | 7 | 10 | 9 | 4 |
| Very minor impact | 5 | 4 | 0 | 4 | 2 |

Ingmar Bergman and the 'Multi-Channel Universe'

What has been postulated traditionally in cultural studies is the presence in a society of a controlling or at least strongly directive kind of megastructure of morality and taste. In the present study the Swedish target group definitely assumed that such a view existed and felt that it had dictated a native, largely critical response to Bergman's filmmaking. But today, in the wake of multimedia decentralization and fractionalism — what might be called 'the multichannel universe' — another communications and reception approach favors the idea of a national culture made up of various coexisting moral and esthetic choices, available to a segmented population. Thus British

communications scholar David Morley sees a country's culture composed of a great number of different consumer groups who are not necessarily fighting each other for dominance, but whose members have found a cultural identity through what Morley calls "a set of shared orientations". Such groups possess their own inner dynamics that might be socially, economically, politically or esthetically conditioned. Using Morley's concept, one might focus attention on the commonality within a target group and examine what might predispose such a group to respond to Bergman's filmmaking in a particular way.

As examples, given my limited space here, I shall single out the American and the Indian target groups. The U.S. respondents followed a Bergman retrospective in New York in 1995. Approximately 10 % of the total of 523 people who responded to the questionnaire hand-out were young film students who had very little previous experience of Bergman's filmmaking but brought with them an abstracted notion of his role in film history. They expressed impatience with the frozen image of a canonized filmmaker and frequently spoke of the Bergman film they had just seen as a product that might be changed or improved, were they themselves to tackle it. They were more interested in technical methods and solutions than moral content or performance. Not surprisingly, *Persona* was their first choice among Bergman's works for the screen.

While the film students came to the retrospective out of a certain curiosity about a filmmaker with a reputation as big as Bergman's, other, mostly middle-age, respondents attended the event as a sacrosanct moment that enabled them to revive an earlier acquaintance with Bergman's films. Though the retrospective was confined to New York, the respondents were from all parts of the United States. What they had in common were memories of seeing Bergman's films for the first time in college. This confirms an overall Bergman exhibition pattern in the United States. Apart from New York and other major cities, the majority of showings of his films, after their first initial commercial run, have been confined to university campuses, which have frequently served as local cinemateques, with a legacy of showing film classics on a relatively regular basis. This has created a unique exhibition pattern for

Bergman's films in the United States and may help explain his having become a household concept to a great many Americans with a college education. His average viewer has seen his films at a young and receptive age, and in a milieu socially geared to discussions of matters of concern to people during their formative years.

Many of the older respondents¹³ in the American target group were both proud and self-defensive about their Bergman interest and eager to protect it, as if they had opened a precious diary that should not be defiled. Often the interview became a kind of relived memoir moment, where the initial catalytic impact of Bergman's films allowed the respondent to both remember the past and view it in a fresh perspective.¹⁴ Occasionally during such Proustian moments of Bergmanian *déjà-vus*, respondents would become very emotional and reveal strong personal attachments to films that had simply become part of their life story. The group frequently deplored the lack of visual artists of Bergman's quality in their own society.

Bo Widerberg once tried to explain the success of Bergman's films abroad as a foreign preference for works that simply confirmed already existing myths and prejudices about Swedish culture:

Bergman's export items are far-away legends, mystical light, unabashed exoticism [...]. He obliges the crudest myths about us and our society; he underlines the type of misconceptions about us that foreign countries love to hold on to. He turns away from questions that occupy most of his colleagues in the world; his films have only one perspective: inwardly, toward the North.¹⁵

This quote was presented to the Indian target group. In their response to Bergman a distinct split was noticeable between politically leftist

¹³The interview group, selected in accordance with the age, profession and gender of the questionnaire respondents, consisted of 30 interviewees. 70% were people above age 50.

¹⁴The most frequently discussed films were *The Seventh Seal*, *Wild Strawberries*, *Through a Glass Darkly*, and *Cries and Whispers*.

¹⁵Bo Widerberg. *Visionen i svensk film*, Stockholm 1962, p. 29.

participants whose favorite film was *Summer with Monica* and non-leftist respondents who spoke most highly of *The Seventh Seal*, *Wild Strawberries* and, especially, *The Virgin Spring*. Neither faction shared Widerberg's interpretation of Bergman's success abroad, which relies on a common concept in movie-making mythology: the audience expectation syndrome. Nor did the Indian target group see Bergman's films as reinforcements of existing prejudices about Sweden. Instead they pointed to the presence of a number of transcultural items. The selection of *The Virgin Spring* as a central Bergman work constitutes a clear example of how the reception of a film is colored and determined by its juxtaposition to indigenous cultural patterns in the receiving country. Thus *The Virgin Spring* was considered the only Bergman film with a potential commercial market in India.¹⁶ The reasons given were its distant (in time) setting, its dichotomous conflict of crime and revenge, reminiscent of old Hindu myths, and its spiritual ending depicting a miracle. *The Virgin Spring* was recognized for its schematic moral structure and a narrative pattern common to one of the most popular of Bollywood's genres, the mythological action film.¹⁷

To leftist Indians responding to *Summer with Monica*, the film, which depicts a young couple's escape into the Stockholm archipelago and the heroine's eventual abandonment of married family life, presented a working-class Nora who refused to buy into traditional middle-class values. Unlike the response to *The Virgin Spring*, genre and recognition played no role in the Indian assessment of *Summer with Monica*. Instead, the film served a political and social purpose.

¹⁶Only two Bergman films have had a commercial distribution in India: *Autumn Sonata* and *Fanny and Alexander*.

¹⁷Indian respondents who singled out other Bergman costume films found that these too transcended national boundaries. *The Seventh Seal*, telling the story of a medieval Knight's encounter with Death, was considered archetypal rather than national in its dramatic juxtaposition of quester and destroyer; *Wild Strawberries* was seen as an old man's gradual achievement of peace of mind through self-contemplation and resignation; a development with parallels in Hindu philosophy.

Monica became in fact a rebel incarnate.¹⁸ In the words of Gautam Gosh, president of the film club Eisenstein in Calcutta:

Summer with Monica has a trait that is rare with Bergman, namely a sympathy with the lower social classes. To give so much support to a girl of the working-class and pinpoint her as the most important person in the film and to do so with so much sympathy simply explains why so many of us like the film.

Ingmar Bergman, the Gloom and Doom Prophet

Indian respondents also turned the tables on Swedish audiences whose voice they identified as Widerberg's by charging them with failure to recognize the spiritual emptiness of their own society. To them Bergman depicted a reality that the builders of the welfare state had ignored. Far from being irrelevant, Bergman's images of anxiety were representations of deeply repressed concerns in the Swedes themselves. A leading Indian film critic, K. M. Amladi, put it this way:

You may say that Ingmar Bergman projects an obsolete world to the Swedes, but what you ignore then is both the intensity in his depiction, which may very well stem from his own private anguish but also, by necessity, from a wider cultural context, and the Swedish response to that anguished voice. Why is there such a need to deny the lost state of mind he depicts? Why all these protests directed at a spiritual void? To me, it all suggests the desperate attempts by souls who sense and fear their own desolate state and therefore try to deny it.¹⁹

¹⁸Audiences elsewhere have tended to see Monica in a much more negative light, as an escapist and irresponsible mother figure. Cf. discussion of French and American responses to film below.

¹⁹The Finnish filmmaker and Bergman biographer Jörn Donner expressed similar views in his book *Djävulens ansikte* (1962,1972), translated into English as *The Personal Vision of Ingmar Bergman* (Univ. of Indiana Press, 1964).

Indian respondents recognized a Nordic Hamlet syndrome in Bergman's films of the fifties and sixties, but saw it as symptomatic of a society that had lost its spiritual footing. In a different, American context the same phenomenon was viewed as a form of ethnic brooding, a constitutional feature typical of the Scandinavian race. In a March 1960 feature article in *Commonwealth Magazine*, Arlene Croce painted Bergman's arrival in New York as an invasion of gloomy Otherness:

Ingmar Bergman, as almost everybody knows by now, is the hottest director on the international scene today [...]. In New York for example, his conquest is as complete as it is sudden. It was only last winter that Manhattan began to look like an Island entirely surrounded by Ingmar Bergman [...]. But there is a curious phenomenon in this: The Swedes, unlike the Anglo-Saxon and the Latin temperament, see themselves as up against it. (March 11, 1960)

Ingmar Bergman became indeed a Swedish gloom-and-doom prophet in the United States, someone whose filmmaking reflected a somber Swedish life style. His films proved his country's inability to make "happy films". In a *Time* cover story of Bergman in October 1960, he was referred to as "the Icebergman" and this persona was reinforced by the portrait of him on the front cover, looking into the distance with melancholy eyes, his hand formed as a camera lens ready to define the motif, while the background consisted of a gloomy virginal forest populated with a seductive *huldra* and a black-clad figure sneaking forth behind dark tree trunks. In the *Time* article, analysis and gossip mixed, but the article's thesis rests on the assumption that the Icebergman is consumed by a burning and violent inner Angst. Details from this Gothic depiction of Bergman's Nordic persona seem to have circulated around the world. They surface for instance four years later in Japan when that country's Bergman boom reached its peak and he was chosen Foreign Artist of the Year. Thus Widerberg's concern was not totally unfounded. The American portrayal of Bergman developed,

in fact, into a case of cultural transmigration that reinforced a foreign "Nordicness" myth.

Reception Stages

The different assessments of Ingmar Bergman's films in the targeted areas might be juxtaposed to a continuous, step-by-step reception phenomenon, where one can differentiate three sequential stages — the *transmittance*, the *annexation* and the *assimilation* of his work. During the transmittance stage, when the initiative lies with the marketing and distribution forces, a stereotyping of the film product frequently takes place. Young Bergman worked within an industry where the basic selling points were not to promote an up-and-coming director but to capitalize on the projection of film stars. When Bergman had his breakthrough as a filmmaker in America in 1958-59, he was introduced in the *New York Times* as "the other Bergman"; i.e. his identity was linked to film actress Ingrid Bergman. One reason for his high visibility in American and similar cultures has to do with the publicity attraction of his performers, many of whom have pursued international careers.²⁰

One could in fact claim that actress Harriet Andersson was one of Bergman's early main promoters through a famous décolletée sweater photo that identified the title figure in *Summer with Monica*, a photo that circulated as a poster all over the world and eventually found its emblematic way into Francois Truffaut's film *The 400 Blows* where it could function both as an intertextual greeting to an admired master — Truffaut was the one who launched Bergman as the epitome of the auteur²¹ — and as a symbolic sign for the main character, Antoine. In the interval between the first launching of *Summer with Monica* in France under the title *Monique ou le désir* and Truffaut's referential

²⁰Among them are Bibi Andersson, Liv Ullman, Max von Sydow, Ingrid Thulin.

²¹"Bergman is a person who has done all we dreamed of doing. He has written films the way a novelist writes a book. Instead of the pen he uses the camera. He is an auteur de cinéma." Francois Truffaut. "The Lesson of Ingmar Bergman." *Take One* 3, No. 10, 1973.

use of Harriet Andersson's pouting sweater girl lies a piece of reception history, where Ingmar Bergman moves from an anonymous status to an auteur figure and where his film undergoes a metamorphosis from an alien product to cultural annexation and final assimilation.

But the image of Harriet Andersson's sweater girl had already moved out of the film's Swedish context the moment the photo was released. It helped launch the film as a soft-porno product in what was then a growing market for the European film. This coincided with another significant trendmaker in film marketing at this time: Giving the product a *genre* identity. Genre tends to make a film function on an archetypal rather than national level. The first foreign recognition of Bergman as a serious filmmaker had important genre implications. In 1956 SF chose to present *Smiles of Summer Night* (1955) as the only Swedish entry at the Cannes film festival. Other Bergman films had circulated earlier on the film festival circuit, for instance *A Ship to India*, which received an honorable mention at Cannes in 1947, and *Thirst* at Venice in the same year, while *The Eve of the Clowns* won first prize at a regional film festival in Sao Paulo in 1954. But none of these films led to an international breakthrough. What did *Smiles of Summer Night* have to make it arouse the interest of the Cannes jury? SF's producer Carl Anders Dymling was taken by surprise and seems to have been unaware of the fact that unlike the earlier festival entries, *Smiles of a Summer Night* combined two aspects to give it an almost fool-proof entry-way into the international cinematic realm in the mid-fifties: *genre identity* and *exoticism*, i.e. a recognizable pattern set in a different milieu.

Smiles of a Summer Night captured the exoticism of Nordic summer. In that sense, the international success of both Sjöberg's *Miss Julie* from 1950 and Arne Mattsson's *One Summer of Happiness* from 1951 had paved the way for *Smiles of a Summer Night* in a manner that Bergman's own earlier attempts in the genre, *Summer Interlude* (1950) and *Summer with Monica* (1952), had failed to do. In addition, *Smiles...* was a costume film, i.e. removed from any claims of contemporary verisimilitude, and most important in a French context, it had a *jeu d'esprit* reminiscent of René Clair's comedies. Thus it was both "foreign" and continental, provincial and sophisticated. *Smiles of*

a Summer Night no doubt succeeded in France because it reinforced cinematic criteria already established. It answered to certain pre-conceived notions about romantic screen comedy but it was not in any way considered a revolutionary work. It did not establish Ingmar Bergman as an *auteur du cinéma*. But it made the French curious about him.

What we can observe in terms of the French reception of *Smiles of a Summer Night* is actually the first two steps in the cultural transference process I outlined above: the launching or transmittance phase — i.e. Dymling's and SF's presentation of the film in Cannes, a presentation that took place without Ingmar Bergman being present — and the annexation phase — i.e., a foreign culture accepting a product from another culture because of its combined "otherness" (exoticism) and familiarity (romantic comedy). Annexation however is a phase where the receiver is still an onlooker, a voyeur, and the product is still a foreign product. Annexation implies that the receiving culture is not in any way changed by the cultural newcomer. On the contrary, reviews during this phase in the reception process are often anxious to point out the alien nature of the foreign piece. This aspect of annexation is more obvious when the recipient culture considers its own values to be, not only axiomatic but very different from those projected in the foreign product. French critics responded in their reviews of *Smiles of a Summer Night* with positive delight to the film's flirtatious badinage. A culture like the North American on the other hand, whose more Puritan values have been reflected in the self-imposed moral criteria of Hollywood filmmaking, was cautious about praising *Smiles of a Summer Night*. American advertisers warned potential viewers that this was a film for adults only, in and of itself a typically titillating form of advertisement, but also in line with the established American image of Swedish filmmaking as questionably risqué.

Such soft porno marketing of many of Bergman's early films is reflected in the translation of film titles. *Ship to India* circulated in England as *Ship of Desire*; *Thirst* was changed in the United States to *Three Strange Loves* while *Prison* became *The Devil's Wanton*; *The Eve of the Clowns* was shown in Italy as *Una vampata d'amore*, and

Summer Interlude was given the American title *Illicit Interlude*. In several of these titular changes lies a vulgarization of a native Swedish film genre, *the summer picture*. The genre has a long history in Swedish (and Nordic) filmmaking and, at the time of Bergman's debut in filmmaking, it had come to represent a set of demographic, social and moral dichotomies in a nation that was moving quickly from a basically agricultural to an urban way of life. However, in its foreign circulation, the summer genre was defined by an exotic landscape that allowed for nude swimming, body exposure and explicit sensuality. This affected the foreign reception of such Bergman films as *Summer Interlude*, *Summer with Monica*, *Waiting Women*, and in the United States and Canada, *Smiles of a Summer Night*. It is not unusual to find critical comparisons between for instance *Summer Interlude* and Gustav Machty's *L'Extase*, the first artistic film relegated to the sex-ploiter genre. In both France and the United States, *Summer with Monica* was first displayed in so-called adult or art theatres. The French title of the film makes Monika an explicit object of desire. This designation was given a prudish and moralistic twist in America where the film circulated under the name *Monica or the Story of a Bad Girl*.

What we can begin to see in the early American reception of Bergman's films is a process of annexation of the original work, using the norms of the receiving culture. This is related to what communications scholar Elizabeth Ellsworth has called *context activation*. That is, the recipient culture presupposes a native axiom — in the American case, for instance, a set of moral concepts and representational forms already defined by Hollywood — and then directs the attention at ways in which Bergman's films deviate from the norm. Such an approach implies no esthetic evaluation of the work, for it is assumed that a film that departs from the established pattern is of no interest to the native viewer, no matter how visually remarkable it might be. The reviewer of such a film often assumes an ironic tone, as if to establish a further distance to the subject presented. An illustrative example is a brief review of *Summer Interlude* in *Newsweek* in 1954, titled "Splash in Sweden" which ends:

Ingmar Bergman does nothing to dispel the belief, now widely accepted by American movie audiences that whenever Lars and Ingrid have time on their hands, it's off for a cooling dip in nature's own costume.

A critical source that established this kind of approach as a norm was the trade magazine *Variety*. Typical is its dismissal of Bergman's *Ship to India* as "a slow murky film with no appeal for U.S. market" (August 31, 1949).

Variety's recommendation of a film is usually based on a combination of commercial and moral criteria, the latter formalized in the Hays Act. In her book *The Wages of Sin*, Lea Jacobs has outlined the complicated system of mediations and compromises that was established in the U.S. filmmaking industry in the 1930s and 1940s and which were still in operation when Bergman's films appeared in America. Specific rules were established for nudity — no naked part of the female body below the shoulders was to be exposed on the screen — but the code also prescribed that certain ideals affecting women could not be violated unless the offender be punished. Among these ideals were Motherhood and Homemaking. *Summer with Monica* did not fare well in such a context.

The Hays code argued for the right to censorship of morally offensive products by singling out the generic viewer as the wronged party: "[...] the thing has its EFFECT upon those who come in contact with it." *Monika or The Story of a Bad Girl* was confiscated in Los Angeles on such grounds and the American distributor was sentenced to a steep fine and 90 days in jail. In presiding judge Byron J. Walters' summation of the *Monica* case, it was made clear that the film was a dangerous product and the public had to be protected from its potentially dire impact: "Monica appeals to potential sex murderers [...]. Crime is on the rise and people wonder why. This is one of the reasons." (*LA Examiner*, 26 april 1954).

The stigmatization of *Summer with Monica* as a sexexploiter and the perception of Harriet Andersson's emblematic breasts as a danger to law and order is an excellent example of (a) the impact that Bergman's iconography could have in a foreign context without any reference

whatsoever to the director's name; and (b) the impact that the moral norms in a given society might have on the reception of a Bergman work. When Bergman's film was released again in the U.S. four years after its initial showing in Los Angeles — this time under the original title "Summer with Monica" it was still treated as an erotically suspect product. The journal *Films in Review* dismissed it as "a clumsily and carelessly directed sexploiter about a stupid teenager." (March 1960).²² The Swedish summer as primordial and mythic — in Bergman's iconography frequently symbolized by the wild strawberries — became, in the American context, a piece of porno titillation. Marketing agents and reviewers alike made it more difficult for U.S. audiences to enter into the phantasmagorical dimensions of the Swedish summer mythos.²³

Transmigration and Transposition of a Filmmaker

²²Despite its confiscation in Los Angeles, *Summer with Monica* circulated for five years (1954-59) as a mutilated sex movie in drive-in theaters in the American midwest.

²³'Exoticism' and 'mythos' are not to be confused, though both concepts refer to abstracted cultural phenomena. Widerberg, who objected to Bergman's use of 'Swedish exoticism' as an effort to reinforce preconceptions of Swedish culture among foreign viewers, defined 'exoticism' as 'Swedishness' romanticized by foreigners. Mythos on the other hand rests on a residue of native cultural norms that help define the ethnic parameter of a native audience response. Widerberg used it in his own filmmaking in depicting the summer landscape in such films as *Elvira Madigan* and *Ådalen 31*. By the time Ingmar Bergman made his summer films, the Swedish genre had developed what American communications scholar James Carey has called "a ritual model", i.e. a symbolic sphere within a given culture or ethnic group where common norms are represented and within which people sharing this model recreate, preserve or challenge their reality. When Bergman arrived at filmmaking in the mid-forties, the ritualized summer model was as ripe with meaning and fixed expectations to Swedish audiences as the Western was to American filmgoers.

In discussing the reception of a work of art, George Poulet of the Geneva School of Consciousness and translation theorist James Clifford both assume an ideal situation where recipient and artistic product engage in a mutual transference of experience and culture. Poulet, the phenomenologist, has described such cultural transmigration as a *transcendental* encounter. Through a kind of metamorphosis the work ceases to be an autonomous object and becomes what Poulet calls "a subjectified object." The work reveals "a transparent consciousness" which touches the recipient and invades his psyche. Poulet's description corresponds in many ways to my suggested third phase in the transcultural process: the assimilation stage, when a foreign mind absorbs a cultural product so totally that its foreignness disappears. In such a moment Ingmar Bergman's creative persona, embedded in the work itself, communicates directly with another human being. Such assimilation may have a deep emotional impact on the recipient, as was indicated in my 1995 American audience study. But it can also take on a humorous overtone, based on the familiarity of a Bergman persona that has infiltrated the respondent's own culture. When Bergman appears as an insomniac's specter in a David Horsey cartoon — a light-hearted retort to *Time's* portrait of Bergman — he is transformed from a brooding Swede to a domesticized Ice-bergman who has taken up his symbolic abode in the hub of America's middleclass universe: the kitchen refrigerator. (see illustration on next page)

But as this essay has attempted to illustrate, assimilation is only a small part of a much more ambivalent and complex reception process.

