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**The pleasure of non-existence: Persona/Bergman**

In an interview made in 1970, Ingmar Bergman states that after being under the effect of anaesthesia for several hours, found this experience of non-existence to be freeing. Opposing this state to the one in which human condition struggles with its many sufferings, including dealing with the alleged presence of a Perfect God to whom human beings cannot but feel inferior and sinful, Bergman describes this new awareness as a feeling of inner whole(holi)ness and affinity to all beings in their equality. This revealing experience is connected to the making of *Persona* (1966) which represents a turn in Bergman’s cinematography regarding the way the questions on the nature of reality and being are explored.

*Persona* is one of Bergman’s films in which the opposition of a non-illusionist approach to film is combined with diegetic emotional intensity. These oppositional forces shape an ambiguous territory where truth and the illusory, being and appearance co-exist side by side. In it, screen (cinema), face (persona/character) and mirror (relationship film/spectator) are equivalents which provide this cinematic experience with self-reflexivity and the deepening of consciousness.

In *Persona,* this tension is put into play by the presence of silence, embodied in one of the protagonists of the film, Elisabeth. It is both a device which marks the emptied value of language/communication and the space left open to be fulfilled by whatever arises, such as identity disintegration resulting from the inner questionings of another protagonist, Alma. Moreover, acknowledging that without a voluntary withdrawal from using language other revelations could not unfold, and that these are ultimately a reflection of that silence, Bergman’s film offer a poetic gesture of suspension which encompasses the deconstructive tendencies in the arts of the sixties in which strategies of withdrawal emerge as critical tools to question representation, as well as representational reality. It will be argued that silence, like other strategies of withdrawal, serve to evade dualistic thinking such as the concepts of representation/reality, outside/inside, one/multiple or meaning/absurd.

It is our aim to assert that, standing as a film which eludes univocal interpretation, and where meaning is elusive, the possibilities for nothing to be embrace unlimited possibilities within representation. Also, if what is represented is (means) nothing the chance for representation to collapse increases. Both are views which hint at reality and film as sites of illusion where the problematic of film and emotional dramas as objects of artifice being “an exercise in futility, signifying nothing” (Marc Gervais) come into sight. Furthermore, they might be the mirror of Bergman’s own non-judgemental awareness deriving from what he called his pleasurable state of non-existence while under the effect of anaesthesia.