



**EXPLORING EXISTENTIALISM AND
ABSURDISM IN THE FEMALE GAZE OF
INGMAR BERGMAN'S FILMOGRAPHY**

Yüksek Lisans Yeterlik Tezi

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ABSTRACT

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This research explores the intersection of existentialism, absurdism, and the female gaze in the works of Ingmar Bergman, focusing on his films "Persona," "Cries and Whispers," and "Autumn Sonata" (Bergman's trilogy). Employing feminist film theory and analyzing themes from existentialist and absurdist philosophy, the study examines how Bergman portrays female characters grappling with isolation, the search for meaning, and the precariousness of existence. This analysis, informed by the works of Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Simone de Beauvoir, illuminates the existential and absurdist dimensions of the female experience as depicted through Bergman's lens. It also contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities of the female gaze and its application in film analysis. This interdisciplinary approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of how Bergman's cinematic language intersects with these philosophical underpinnings.

As a complementary element, the research will be complemented by the creation of a short film script that embodies the theoretical insights gained from the analysis. This script will serve as both a creative expression of the explored themes and a tool for applied understanding. Ultimately, this research aspires to challenge gender stereotypes and broaden our comprehension of Bergman's cinematic vision, offering a valuable contribution to film studies and feminist discourse.

Keywords: *Ingmar Bergman, Existentialism, Absurdism, Female Gaze, Feminist Narratives, Gender Stereotypes, Philosophical Exploration, Narrative*

ÖZET
INGMAR BERGMAN FILMOGRAFISININ KADIN BAKIŞINDA
VAROLUŞÇULUK VE ABSÜRDİZMİ KEŞFETMEK

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Bu araştırma, Ingmar Bergman'ın eserlerindeki varoluşçuluk, absürtlük ve kadın bakışının kesişimini, "Persona", "Çılgınlık ve Fısıltılar" ve "Sonbahar Sonatı" (Bergman'ın üçlemesi) filmlerine odaklanarak araştırıyor. Feminist film teorisini kullanan ve varoluşçu ve absürt felsefeden temaları analiz eden bu çalışma, Bergman'ın izolasyonla, anlam arayışıyla ve varoluşun istikrarsızlığıyla boğuşan kadın karakterleri nasıl canlandırdığını inceliyor. Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus ve Simone de Beauvoir'ın çalışmalarından yola çıkan bu analiz, Bergman'ın merceğinden tasvir edilen kadın deneyiminin varoluşsal ve absürt boyutlarına ışık tutuyor. Aynı zamanda kadın bakışının karmaşıklığının ve bunun film analizindeki uygulamasının daha derinlemesine anlaşılmasına da katkıda bulunur. Bu disiplinlerarası yaklaşım, Bergman'ın sinema dilinin bu felsefi temellerle nasıl kesiştiğinin kapsamlı bir şekilde araştırılmasına olanak tanıyor.

Tamamlayıcı bir unsur olarak araştırma, analizden elde edilen teorik bilgileri içeren bir kısa film senaryosunun oluşturulmasıyla tamamlanacaktır. Bu senaryo, hem araştırılan temaların yaratıcı bir ifadesi hem de uygulamalı anlayış için bir araç olarak hizmet edecektir. Sonuç olarak bu araştırma, toplumsal cinsiyet stereotiplerine meydan okumayı ve Bergman'ın sinemasal vizyonuna ilişkin kavrayışımızı genişletmeyi amaçlayarak, film çalışmalarına ve feminist söylemlere değerli bir katkı sunmayı amaçlıyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ingmar Bergman, Varoluşçuluk, Absürdizm, Kadın Bakışı, Feminist Anlatılar, Cinsiyet Kalıp Yargıları, Felsefi Keşif, Anlatı

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11/03/2024

STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL PRINCIPLES AND RULES

I hereby truthfully declare that this thesis is an original work prepared by me; that I have behaved in accordance with the scientific ethical principles and rules throughout the stages of preparation, data collection, analysis and presentation of my work; that I have cited the sources of all the data and information that could be obtained within the scope of this study, and included these sources in the references section; and that this study has been scanned for plagiarism with “scientific plagiarism detection program” used by Anadolu University, and that “it does not have any plagiarism” whatsoever. I also declare that, if a case contrary to my declaration is detected in my work at any time, I hereby express my consent to all the ethical and legal consequences that are involved.

Carla Gabriela JINES MUÑOZ

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INTRODUCTION

Thesis Overview

In the extensive art of film storytelling--themes, narrative arcs and characters are present but invisible to the audience--few directors have managed to create stories as introspective and philosophically deep. Swedish cinema's Ingmar Bergman was an introspective, philosophical filmmaker who concerned himself with both cities of the mind, the human psyche and the existential problems facing humankind. Luminary of Swedish cinema, renowned for his introspective and philosophical approach to storytelling as well as his portrayal of the Human Psyche and existential dilemmas that define our existence. Bergman's films are an intricate work of art, living from which the life and meaning together with its absurdity are skillfully expressed. This thesis begins a study of the films of Ingmar Bergman from Sweden, centering on how existentialism and absurdism merge within a female perspective which sees ascents in light its other half descent.

Existentialism¹, examining individual consciousness and searching for meaning in a universe which appears indifferent, is a major theme running through Bergman's work. At the same moment, absurdist overtones inspired by thinkers such as Albert Camus add incomprehensible elements to the narratives. These absurdist tropes in turn offer interesting reading, and a new dimension of interpretation, or what it all adds up to: an approach to existentialism quite distinctly different from what has gone before. By offering a glimpse into the female gaze, I believe that we are unraveling in one important

¹ "The return to consciousness, the escape from everyday sleep represent the first steps of absurd freedom"(Camus, 1955) In "The Myth of Sisyphus," Albert Camus explores existentialism by presenting the idea of the absurd, where life lacks inherent meaning. He suggests that individuals can find meaning by rebelling against the absurdity, embracing the act of living itself as a conscious choice in an indifferent universe.

respect an aspect of storytelling completely unexplored by Bergman, a dimension which gives further layers and directions for absurd and existential themes, providing yet again the human condition.

This analysis brings to the fore the female gaze, which is often marginalized or overlooked in cinema. We will explore Bergman's portrayal of female characters with an introspective understanding of existential and absurd philosophies. This approach not only enriches our comprehension of Bergman's artistic vision but also prompts a broader reflection on the role of gender into shaping philosophical narratives in the cinema. Particularly noteworthy is the resonance with feminist existentialism, a perspective pioneered by thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir.

By examining Bergman's cinematic narrative with insights into feminist existentialism, we aim to illuminate how the female characters in his films serve as powerful conduits for challenging societal norms, questioning traditional gender roles, and ultimately embodying a form of existential agency that echoes the philosophies articulated by de Beauvoir and her contemporaries. This intersection not only magnifies the significance of the female gaze but also underscores its potential as a catalyst for redefining existential and absurd themes through a distinctly feminist lens within Bergman's cinematic universe.

This thesis is a journey through the enigmatic landscapes of Bergman's films, where the existential and the absurd converge, and the female gaze² serves as a guiding light, illuminating the intricacies of human existence. As we navigate this exploration, we invite readers to engage with the profound questions that arise at the intersection of

² *"The female gaze is that point at which woman in particular forms a disturbance in the visual field, and this chapter shows quite how important that female gaze is in complicating epic."* (Lovatt, 2013)

philosophy, cinema, and gender studies, unraveling the threads that bind the narratives of life and film in the evocative works of Ingmar Bergman.

It's important to address in this research the significant impact of Ingmar Bergman on cinematic history. The Swedish director (1918-2007), left a permanent mark on the world of cinema, shaping the landscape for filmmakers today. In words of John Orr, Bergman's death in 2007 marked the end of an artist who, like Joyce, Picasso, Stravinsky, Eliot, or Brecht, profoundly influenced the twentieth century. Meanwhile, for Koskinen, Ingmar Bergman employed diverse forms of art and media to advocate for what is occasionally described as 'the tools of self-expression.' Yet, Ingmar Bergman not only grasped the impact of mass media exposure in shaping an alternative public image but, notably, demonstrated a unique ability to integrate this persona into his fictional creations. In a sense, he adeptly incorporated elements of himself, akin to vaporizing on his own identity, within his works³.

The thesis focuses on a comprehensive exploration of existentialism and absurdism⁴ as philosophical topics within the realm of cinema. Recognizing the profound impact of philosophical discourse on cinematic narratives, the research aims to delve into the ways in which filmmakers employ these philosophical frameworks to interrogate the complexities of the human experience.

³ “Thus we are reminded of the fact that autobio-graphy is basically a literary genre, belonging to fiction just as much as to some ostensible truth.” (Koskinen, 2010)

⁴ “*Absurdism, instead of establishing a new philosophy, denies philosophy and expresses its ideas through the Absurd Man as exemplified by Sisyphus*” (Melcher, n.d.). This means that Absurdism rejects the possibility of finding inherent meaning in life and encourages creating individual meaning to existence.

Thesis Focus:

The central objective is to dissect how existentialism and absurdism, as philosophical concepts, find expression in cinematic storytelling. Through a careful analysis of selected films, the research seeks to unravel the thematic threads, narrative structures, and character developments that embody and articulate existential and absurdist concerns. The overarching goal is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the interplay between philosophy and cinema, elucidating how these existential and absurdist ideas shape, challenge, and transcend traditional storytelling conventions.

The study traces the historical evolution of existential and absurdist themes, as well as, the interplay of these concepts in cinema, identifying shifts in emphasis, reinterpretations, and adaptations over time. This historical contextualization contributes to a nuanced understanding of how philosophical ideas intersect with the evolving landscape of filmmaking. Also, this thesis delves into the labyrinthine world of Ingmar Bergman's post-war films, specifically focusing on six key works. By employing the transformative lens of the Female Gaze, it examines how Bergman portrays the existential and absurdist struggles of his female characters. Through a multifaceted approach that includes in-depth analysis of philosophical themes, film techniques, and the creation of an original short story, this research argues that Bergman challenges traditional narratives and offers a profound exploration of the female experience. The analysis will explore how these women grapple with alienation, freedom, and the relentless search for meaning in a seemingly meaningless universe.

The overarching thesis of this research is to unravel how Bergman's films, through the eyes of female characters, capture and express the existential and absurdist dilemmas inherent in the human condition. The female gaze, often marginalized or overlooked in cinematic discourse, emerges as a compelling vantage point to dissect the complexities

of existence within Bergman's narratives. Lovatt suggests, in her studies about the female gaze, that in epic narratives, women are not the primary focus; instead, the "epic gaze" predominantly revolves around the depiction and exploration of men. This perspective implies a historical and cultural tendency within epic storytelling to center on male characters and experiences, potentially sidelining the roles and perspectives of women within the narrative. Thus, Bergman introspective exploration of feminine existential realities is important in building a milestone in the female gaze perspective in cinema.

The research objectives are structured to comprehensively investigate specific elements of Bergman's films, focusing on the thematic nuances of existentialism and absurdism within the female gaze. The methodology employed is rooted in qualitative research, emphasizing a nuanced analysis of selected films and a deep dive into philosophical frameworks. Additionally, the crafting of an original short story serves as a unique approach to understanding Bergman's influence. This creative endeavor involves qualitative research in the form of narrative development, showcasing how existential and absurd elements can be woven into a modern cinematic narrative. The objective is to illuminate the interplay between philosophy, cinema, and gender studies through both analytical and creative lenses. In essence, this research strives to contribute to the understanding of existential and absurdist themes within cinema, specifically through the lens of the female gaze in Bergman's oeuvre of selected films,

Thesis Methodology

This project embarks on a qualitative exploration to delve into the intricate depths of the female portrayal in Ingmar Bergman's films. By merging existentialist and absurdist ideologies with Simone de Beauvoir's feminist viewpoint, the goal is to shed light on the psychological complexities of Bergman's female personas. The outcome of

this investigation will be the development of an original screenplay titled "Reflections," which will serve as a creative manifestation of the insights gained from my research.

The cornerstone of this project lies in establishing a solid foundation in existentialism and absurdism. We will delve into the works of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, dissecting themes of alienation, freedom, the existential quest for meaning in a seemingly meaningless universe, and the inherent absurdity of existence. Simone de Beauvoir's influential work, particularly "The Second Sex," will be crucial in understanding the specific challenges faced by women within the framework of existentialism. Her exploration of "the Other" and the societal constraints placed upon women will be instrumental in understanding how these concepts manifest in the experiences of Bergman's female characters.

Following the philosophical grounding in existentialism and absurdism, we will shift our focus to the concept of the Female Gaze, meticulously examined by Laura Mulvey and other feminist film theorists. This framework will serve as a lens through which to analyze Bergman's films, paying particular attention to how he constructs the female experience. Central to this examination will be the analysis of character development, narrative structure, and the portrayal of female subjectivity. However, before applying the Female Gaze, it's crucial to acknowledge the burgeoning field of philosophy of cinema. This area of study explores the relationship between philosophical concepts and how they are conveyed through film. By understanding this connection, we can gain a deeper appreciation for how Bergman utilizes existentialist and absurdist themes to portray the female experience. For instance, the concept of alienation, a key theme in existentialism, might manifest in the isolation or lack of agency experienced by his female characters. Similarly, the absurdity of existence might be reflected in their struggles to find meaning in a seemingly meaningless world.

With this philosophical grounding in place, we can then utilize the Female Gaze to analyze how Bergman depicts female desires, fears, and perceptions of the world. Do his films offer a perspective that challenges the traditional male gaze in cinema, where women are primarily objects of desire? Are there instances where female characters actively influence the narrative or contest societal norms? By delving into these elements, we aim to achieve a multifaceted understanding of how Bergman situates his female characters within the existential and absurdist landscapes of his films.

Furthermore, with the theoretical framework established, I will convey a close textual analysis of six selected Bergman films within his artistic style and influences. These will include "Persona" (1966), "Autumn Sonata" (1978), "Cries and Whispers" (1972), and Bergman's acclaimed God's trilogy: "Through a Glass Darkly" (1961), "The Silence" (1963), and "Winter Light" (1963). Each film will be subjected to a meticulous examination of narrative structure, cinematography, and character development. Our primary focus will be on how Bergman portrays existential and absurdist themes, with a particular emphasis on how these themes manifest in the lives of his female characters. The examination will delve into how the films express the emotional fluctuations and existential uncertainties experienced by the female protagonists. It will investigate whether the storylines depict the female characters as actively wrestling with existential dilemmas or as passive bystanders ensnared in what appears to be a purposeless existence. Additionally, the analysis will consider how the films depict female relationships, especially within the framework of societal norms and the existential uncertainties prevalent in Bergman's oeuvre.

The culmination of this research will be the creation of an original screenplay titled "Reflections." This short film will serve as a practical application of the research findings, allowing us to explore themes of the female experience through an

existentialist and absurdist lens. The screenplay will draw inspiration from Bergman's artistic style and the concept of the Female Gaze. In developing "Reflections," we will grapple with several questions: Will the protagonist be a singular character, or will the concept of fragmented identity be explored? How will the themes of existentialism and absurdism be woven into the narrative to highlight the protagonist's struggles with meaning and existence? Finally, how will the screenplay utilize cinematography and character development to create a distinct perspective that reflects the Female Gaze? By answering these questions and translating our research findings into a creative format, we aim to not only illuminate the complexities of the female experience in Bergman's films but also offer a nuanced exploration of these themes through a new and original lens.

This project, by combining philosophical inquiry with film analysis and culminating in a creative project, aspires to provide a multifaceted exploration of the female experience in Bergman's universe. By examining how Bergman portrays women grappling with existential anxieties and the search for meaning in a seemingly meaningless world, we aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of his artistic vision and the complexities of human existence, particularly for women navigating the labyrinthine realities presented by Bergman's films.

Chapters Outline

The initial part of the thesis serves as a theoretical foundation, navigating through existentialism and absurdism, guided by the philosophical perspectives of Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Simone de Beauvoir's feminist outlook. This chapter is crucial for comprehending the philosophical complexities within cinematic narratives. It also immerses us in the recurrent themes of Ingmar Bergman's extensive filmography, exploring individual existence, freedom, and the perpetual quest for meaning, with a

specific focus on the female characters that define his works. As a unified entity, this chapter acts as a philosophical canvas, intricately blending existentialism, absurdism, and feminist philosophy to deepen the understanding of these profound intellectual currents.

The aim of the second chapter is to unfold the cinematic philosophical landscape that explores the intersection of metaphysical ideas with the art of filmmaking. Starting with an exploration of existentialism and absurdism, influenced by Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, it delves into the interplay of these philosophical currents within film narratives, examining how philosophy can be found in any manifestation of cinema and audiovisual art. The chapter culminates in an analysis of philosophical cinematic narratives through the feminist perspective, enriching the understanding of gender dynamics in cinematic philosophy.

This third chapter explores the definition of the Female Gaze in Cinematic Narratives, establishing the concept's significance. It then delves into the historical context of the male-dominated film industry and emphasizes the importance of the Female Gaze as a transformative cinematic lens. The chapter further explores the intersectionality of the Female Gaze and existential themes, revealing how this perspective challenges traditional narratives.

This fourth chapter provides a concise exploration of Ingmar Bergman's life and influential career as a filmmaker is presented. Key biographical elements, including his artistic influences, major works, and the impact of his cinematic legacy, are touched upon. The objective is to set the stage for a comprehensive understanding of Bergman's contribution to cinema. The subsequent section outlines the thesis focus, emphasizing the exploration of existentialism and absurdism in the realm of cinema. This chapter provides a roadmap for the ensuing examination of these philosophical themes within the context

of Bergman's unique storytelling approach. It also focuses on Bergman's engagement with existential and absurd ideas throughout various films, scrutinizing motifs, dialogues, and narrative choices that reflect his philosophical inclinations. Additionally, critical perspectives on Bergman's portrayal of female characters deepen the understanding of the filmmaker's artistic choices.

The fifth chapter focuses on a detailed analysis of selected films from Bergman's repertoire, aiming to identify recurring motifs and themes. The scrutiny extends to variations in the portrayal of the female gaze across different films, providing insights into Bergman's evolving cinematic approach. The chapter also offers comparative insights into the evolution of Bergman's exploration of existential and absurd themes, examining character-driven dilemmas and existential aspects unique to women. female subjectivity and authenticity, The chapter further explores interpersonal dynamics within Bergman's films, investigating the portrayal of existential feminist relationships taking accountability of Simone de Beauvoir⁵ perspective on Feminism and Existentialism.

In the sixth chapter. Additionally, the subsequent chapter takes a creative approach, crafting an original narrative inspired by Bergman's themes. It explores the incorporation of existential and absurd elements, paying homage to Bergman's influence while presenting a distinct storytelling approach. Emphasis is placed on the role of the female gaze within the crafted narrative, adding depth and complexity to characters and themes inspired by Bergman's cinematic legacy.

⁵ Simone de Beauvoir was a French feminist philosopher that explored and redefined the term “woman” by explaining the “feminist” notions of “the self”, clarifying that Enlightenment and postmodernism are two opposite concepts to conceive Feminism, because one delves into reason and the second one offers critical understanding to modernism. “Postmodernism offers valuable techniques to feminism”. (Kruks, 1992)

CHAPTER I: THE PHILOSOPHICAL CANVAS: EXPLORING EXISTENTIALISM, ABSURDISM AND THE FEMENIST PERSPECTIVE

In this pivotal chapter, we lay the theoretical foundation for our cinematic exploration, unveiling the intricate interplay between Existentialism, Absurdism, and the transformative lens of the Female Gaze. As we construct this theoretical framework, we delve into the profound philosophical currents that have shaped existential inquiries and absurd reflections throughout history. Simultaneously, we introduce the concept of the Female Gaze, a lens that reframes cinematic narratives, challenging conventions and illuminating new dimensions of storytelling. Join us as we navigate the complex intersections of philosophy and cinema, weaving together existential and absurdist threads with the distinct perspective of the Female Gaze on the grand canvas of cinematic artistry. Furthermore, in the aftermath of World War II, Europe grappled with a profound sense of disillusionment and loss. The war shattered previous notions of order and meaning, leaving individuals questioning the very purpose of existence. This existential crisis fostered the rise of existentialism and absurdism.

Ingmar Bergman, a Swedish filmmaker deeply affected by the war, explored the *Zeitgeist*⁶, these philosophical currents in his films. His characters' grapple with existential questions of alienation, freedom, and the search for meaning in a world seemingly devoid of inherent purpose. It is important to embark on a philosophical journey that lays the groundwork for this research. Understanding Existentialism and Absurdism is crucial for exploring Bergman's main themes within his cinematic narratives. These profound philosophical movements have left an indelible mark on

⁶ “Zeitgeist” is a German word that literally translates to “time-spirit”. Defined by Oxford Dictionary). It refers to the dominant mood or general outlook of a particular period in history. This prevailing spirit is often reflected in the ideas, beliefs, culture, and creative works of that time.

human thought. This introduction serves as a compass, guiding us through the core tenets and existential inquiries that define these philosophical landscapes. There are two main figures that will help us to understand this philosophical trends, as we navigate the existential ideas of Sartre and his literary work, such as “Nausea” and “Being and Nothingness”, as well as, Camus and his ideas of the Absurd in existence, in works like “The Myth of Sisyphus” and “The Stranger”. All of this, to grasp a better understanding of their cinematic manifestations (Existentialism & Absurdism) in the chapters to follow.

1. Overview on Existentialism according to Sartre

Existential philosophy is based on the idea that our existence is the starting point of everything. It emphasizes individual experience, freedom, and the search for meaning in life. In other words, it focuses on each person's unique journey, their ability to make choices, and the quest to find purpose and significance in their existence. As we can appreciate in the novel “Nausea” by the French philosopher Sartre, existentialism suggests that we create our own meaning in life through our actions and choices, rather than relying on external sources or predetermined meanings. Existentialism encourages us to confront the challenges of life with courage and take responsibility for shaping our own destiny.

Sartre's existentialism is a philosophical approach that emphasizes the individual, their emotions, actions, responsibilities, and thoughts. It is based on the premise that "existence precedes essence," meaning that individuals are not born with a predetermined nature or purpose, but rather, they create their own essence through their actions and choices. In this philosophy, the individual is seen as an "existence that chooses," and must navigate through a world filled with possibilities and uncertainties. This gives rise to a state of radical freedom and responsibility, with individuals constantly

aware of their freedom and the burden of making choices without predetermined guidelines. Consequently, they are responsible for the outcomes of those choices.

Existentialism gained prominence as a cultural phenomenon in Postwar-Europe during the 1940s, capturing global interest. The impact of existentialist concepts extended beyond philosophical figures to encompass artists and writers of that era (Durmus, 2015), and including filmmakers as well. Although, this movement was adopted as a novelty method to deepen into philosophical thinking, it wasn't until around the second wave of Feminism in the 1970's that scholars started questioning the ethics of Existentialism for base its core elements in some sexist elements found in Sartre's writings.

However, the labeling of existentialism as anti-feminist is often rooted in the sexist elements found in Sartre's writings. There has been an appropriation of common misconceptions, such as considering Beauvoir a mere follower of Sartre, leading to the belief that her account of existentialism is merely a reaffirmation of Sartrean sexist existentialism. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that Beauvoir's philosophical perspective simultaneously aligns with and diverges from Sartre's, offering a nuanced and independent approach within the realm of existentialist thought. As Durmus (2015) points out, various scholars tended to diminish Beauvoir's writings as a mere follower of Sartre's school of thought, instead she is considered to be one of his main influence to switch his perspectives on the Existential thought of later years.

Nevertheless, Sartre has various elements that shape into the artist impression of the post-war Europe. He emphasizes in the idea that existence as a whole, and humanity specifically, is unnecessary, absurd, contingent, and challenging to navigate. In his novel "Nausea", Roquentin, the main character, usually presents the existential quest in his reasoning, as follows:

*“My thought is me: that's why I can't stop. I exist because I think... and I can't stop myself from thinking. At this very moment - it's frightful - if I exist, it is because I am horrified at existing. I am the one who pulls myself from the nothingness to which I aspire.”*⁷ (Sartre, 1938/2020)

Sartre delves into existential philosophy through fiction, much like Bergman does with his films. Sartre also communicates the idea that existence, both in a general sense and for individuals, is unnecessary, absurd, dependent on circumstances, and characterized by a sense of weariness. Altogether, existence is in the dualism of presence and essence (Sartre, 1943/1956), Sartre theorizes that the being-for-itself defines itself by recognizing what it is not, entering a state of nothingness with absolute freedom. This introduces a sense of absence and lack into the world, signifying the unattainable synthesis of the for-itself and the in-itself. The being-for-itself's knowledge of what it is not constitutes its unique form of being, despite its inability to grasp true being. It intuitively grasps the world through the absence of what is not present, showcasing its inherent freedom and imaginative power. Recognizing absolute beauty through absence, as felt in the void left by a departed loved one, becomes its own truth.

According to Jean-Paul Sartre, existence, particularly human existence, is characterized by a state of radical freedom and responsibility. In Sartrean existentialism, existence precedes essence, meaning that individuals are not born with predetermined natures or purposes. Instead, they must create their essence through their choices and actions. Existence, for Sartre, is marked by the constant awareness of one's freedom, the

⁷ This statement reflects the existentialist idea that self-awareness and consciousness are central to one's existence. The speaker suggests that their continuous thinking is a confirmation of their own existence. However, this existence is marked by a profound sense of dread and horror, as they grapple with the overwhelming nature of being. The act of thinking, in this context, becomes both a source of existence and a response to the unsettling awareness of existing. The reference to pulling oneself from nothingness implies a constant struggle to give meaning to one's own existence in the face of the inherent challenges and anxieties that come with it.

burden of making choices without predetermined guidelines, and the consequent responsibility for the outcomes of those choices. The individual is seen as an "existence that chooses" and must navigate a world filled with possibilities and uncertainties.

The philosophical framework of Sartrean existentialism⁸ provides a rich foundation for interpreting films. It's important to endure the relevance of this philosophical movement, especially during the 1940s in France, as a valuable lens for interpreting the contemporary world. It asserts that film, through depicting characters' actions and choices, perpetuates a tradition where art serves as a medium for embodying philosophical concepts. Consequently, the book aims to reaffirm the significance of the Sartrean philosophical endeavor by applying it to the realm of cinema.(J. P. Boulé & Tidd, 2012). Sartre's existentialism is often explored in various art forms, including literature and cinema, where it serves as a medium for embodying philosophical concepts. In the realm of cinema, for instance, filmmakers like Ingmar Bergman have used Sartrean existentialism to navigate the complexities of the human condition, focusing on themes of freedom, responsibility, and existential struggles. In this context, Sartre's philosophical concepts are brought to life, inviting audiences to reflect on their own lives and the existential choices they make. This intersection of philosophy and cinema offers a compelling exploration of human existence, emphasizing the role of individual choices in shaping our lives and identities.

As Boulé & Tidd point out, Sartrean existentialism has left an enduring imprint on cinema, resonating notably in the works of filmmakers like Ingmar Bergman. With its emphasis on the radical freedom⁹ inherent in human existence and the consequential

⁸ Boulé mentions that Sartre manifests that there is no predetermined path that takes human beings to salvation. People have to invent their own path. So, it's one of the various interpretations that adds up to the endurance of philosophical thinking in cinema as art.

⁹ In the book "Existentialism and Contemporary Cinema: A Sartrean Perspective" Boulé & Tidd analyze that according to Sartre, we possess radical freedom and accountability for our actions, yet this doesn't

responsibility it entails, Sartre's philosophy provides a profound lens for navigating the complexities of the human condition on the cinematic stage. The intersection of Sartrean existentialism and Bergman's cinematic artistry offers audiences a compelling exploration of human freedom and responsibility, as well as the existential struggles that define our lives. Through Bergman's lens, Sartre's philosophical concepts come alive, inviting viewers to reflect on the intricate interplay between freedom and responsibility in their own lives within a world shaped by existential choices.

2. What is Absurdism? Albert Camus and the Absurd

The philosophical ideas presented by Albert Camus, particularly his concept of absurdism, are indeed complex and thought-provoking. Absurdism emerges from the confrontation between human beings' search for meaning and the apparent meaninglessness of the universe. This confrontation leads to a sense of absurdity, a feeling that life lacks inherent meaning, which can sometimes lead to contemplating suicide. However, Camus argues that acknowledging this absurdity should not necessarily lead to despair or the conclusion that life is not worth living¹⁰.

Albert Camus ideas on Existentialism derives onto another philosophical theory known as Absurdism, which grapples with the challenge of confronting the unpredictable aspects of existence by seeking clarity through lucid truth. Thus, absurdism addresses the struggle of countering the unpredictable nature of existence with lucid truth. The sense of absurdity arises from the notion that life lacks inherent meaning, and the contemplation

imply unrestrained possibilities. As specified in the aforementioned definition, our freedom is restricted to the circumstances at hand. Regardless of our situation, we consistently confront choices, and it is our responsibility to account for the decisions we ultimately make.

¹⁰ In his book *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus argues that the inherent discrepancy between our desires for the universe, such as seeking meaning, order, or reasons, and the reality of the universe, which often appears as formless chaos, creates a fundamental conflict. Camus affirms that "there is an inherent discrepancy between our desires for the universe, like seeking meaning, order, or reasons, and the reality of the universe, which often appears as formless chaos. This creates a fundamental conflict. However, despite life's apparent lack of inherent meaning, it remains valuable and worthwhile to live."

of suicide is connected to the belief that life holds no value. In essence, the central inquiry of this essay revolves around whether the perception of life's meaninglessness necessarily leads to the conclusion that life is not worth living. Camus challenges the simplistic binary of life versus suicide, emphasizing that many individuals persist in living without definitively answering this existential question. He cautions against oversimplification, highlighting the contradictions between people's professed beliefs and their actual behaviors. Some who take their own lives may harbor a conviction that life possesses meaning, while others who express a belief that life is devoid of worth continue to endure its challenges. (Camus, 1942/1955)

The concept of absurdism, as explored in Albert Camus's essay "The Myth of Sisyphus," revolves around the recognition of the absurdity of the human condition. Camus presents the myth of Sisyphus, a figure in Greek mythology condemned to endlessly roll a boulder up a hill, only for it to roll back down, as a metaphor for the futility and meaninglessness inherent in life. In the face of a seemingly indifferent and absurd universe, Camus argues that individuals must confront the absurdity of existence and make a conscious choice to rebel against it. The act of embracing and acknowledging the absurd, without succumbing to despair or seeking false meaning, constitutes a form of rebellion. The essay explores the tension between the desire for meaning and the apparent meaninglessness of life, urging individuals to find purpose in the act of living itself, despite the inherent lack of inherent meaning in the universe.

On the other hand, in Albert Camus's novel "The Stranger," the theme of the absurd is a central philosophical concept. The protagonist, Meursault, embodies the philosophy of the absurd through his detached and indifferent attitude toward life. The absurd, in Camus's terms, refers to the inherent lack of meaning or purpose in the

universe. Camus reflects his ideas of an absurd existence in order to understand why we do exist and to accept to exist even without meaning (Camus, 1942/1955).

Camus introduces his concept of the Absurd:

“...In a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life ... is properly the feeling of absurdity”¹¹

Payne points out, Camus’ concept as of, when an individual acknowledges the Absurd when they become aware of the meaninglessness of their existence in the world and the insignificance of their daily actions. As a person grows weary of the repetitive mental and physical routines in their life, they start to observe the Absurdities inherent in their existence. These moments of stark reality manifest unexpectedly, occurring in peculiar places and at unconventional times. Additionally, the recognition of the Absurd arises when an individual perceives the world as unfamiliar and inhuman. Nature's beauty eludes them, and they see the world as it truly is—strange and disjointed. Albert Camus, in his philosophy of absurdism, rejects the idea of literal suicide. However, he does propose a concept of "philosophical suicide." This refers to attempts to escape the inherent meaninglessness of life by clinging to false comforts or pre-defined purposes. For Camus, blind faith in religion or rigid ideologies that claim ultimate meaning are examples of this philosophical suicide. Instead, he argues for confronting the absurdity head-on. By

¹¹ This concept of The Absurd discuss by Camus in his essay “The Myth of Sisyphus” (1942), where embracing the absurd as a small concept, Camus encourages individuals to recognize and confront the inherent contradictions in life. It involves an acknowledgment that the pursuit of meaning is a continuous struggle, but in this struggle, individuals can find a certain authenticity and freedom by accepting the absurdity and choosing to live with a conscious rebellion against it. The small concept of the absurd, as presented by Camus, invites individuals to find purpose and create meaning in their lives despite the overarching meaninglessness of the universe.

acknowledging the lack of inherent meaning, we embrace the freedom to create our own purpose through authentic choices and actions. Physical suicide, in this view, is simply another way of denying this freedom and the responsibility to live a meaningful life, even in an absurd world.

Additionally, in the cinematic canvas of Ingmar Bergman's own existentialism, there is a strong discussion of absurdist topics among his most iconic cinematographic pieces, as is, "*The Seventh Seal*" (1957), this classic Swedish film delves into existential themes. While not directly inspired by "The Myth of Sisyphus," it explores the search for meaning in a world filled with suffering and death. The absurdist draws upon human experience to make sense of the world, acknowledging that religion suggests the existence of something the absurdist recognizes as unreasonable to embrace. For Camus, religion is too appealing and relies too heavily on speculation for him to subscribe to it. Consequently, the absurdist must relinquish the comfort provided by faith in favor of a more rational approach (Payne, 1992). As is written in "*The Stranger*":

*"It's better to burn than to disappear..."*¹² (Camus, 1946/1989)

Camus' exploration of absurdism in these texts challenges traditional notions of heroism and offers a critique of society (Alves, 2015). Camus' exploration of absurdism challenges traditional notions of heroism and critiques society, Ingmar Bergman's characters in his films often grapple with similar existential themes. Bergman's works frequently delve into the complexities of human existence, morality, and the search for meaning. The characters in Bergman's films can be seen as embodying variations of the

¹² This statement emphasizes the importance of living a life of passion and engagement, even if it involves struggle and suffering ("burning"). Disappearing, on the other hand, symbolizes fading into obscurity or going through life without purpose or meaning. This is a fate considered worse than experiencing the intensity of life, even with its hardships. Also, is an interpretation as active rebellion against meaninglessness. Like some of Bergman's films, it allows to navigate the complexities of existence within a world devoid of inherent meaning.

absurd hero (Widding, 2008), confronting the inherent challenges and uncertainties of life. Bergman's characters often face existential crises, questioning the purpose of their actions and the meaning of their lives. Their struggles parallel Camus' exploration of absurdity, as they navigate a world that may seem devoid of inherent meaning (Payne, 1992). The characters' quests for understanding and authenticity echo the absurdist theme of creating meaning in the face of life's inherent lack of meaning.

In essence, both Camus and Bergman contribute to an existential dialogue that questions established norms, morality, and the nature of human existence. Camus' philosophical underpinnings find resonance in the cinematic narratives crafted by Bergman, where characters become vessels for the exploration of absurdity, heroism, and the complexities of the human condition. Together, their works invite audiences to reflect on the challenges of finding meaning and purpose in a world that often appears indifferent or absurd. (Smuts, 2009).

In this exploration, getting to understand the beauty of absurdism, lies in its invitation to confront the inherent contradictions of life without succumbing to despair. It encourages individuals to find purpose and create meaning through their own choices and actions, despite the apparent lack of cosmic significance. Absurdism, in both philosophical discourse and artistic expression, serves as a poignant exploration of the human capacity to rebel against the absurd and construct personal meaning in a seemingly chaotic and indifferent universe.

3. Feminist Philosophy: Simone de Beauvoir on Existentialism

Feminist existentialism, particularly as articulated by Simone de Beauvoir, offers a compelling lens through which to explore the intersection of existentialist philosophy and gender issues (Quinan, 2016). Beauvoir, a prominent French existentialist

philosopher and author, significantly contributed to existentialist thought through her groundbreaking work, "The Second Sex." This influential text not only delves into the existentialist themes of individual freedom and responsibility but also critically examines the ways in which women's existence has been defined and constrained within societal structures (Patterson, 1986).

At its core, feminist existentialism challenges the traditional existentialist perspective, which often centered on the experiences of male individuals¹³. Beauvoir, however, extended existentialist principles to scrutinize the unique challenges faced by women in a patriarchal society (Durmus, 2015). Her philosophical inquiries encompass the examination of women's "otherness," societal expectations, as is established in her famous essay "*The Second Sex*", and the ways in which women navigate existential questions of authenticity and freedom. Beauvoir conceptualizes gender as a physical space where cultural potentials, both inherited and newly created, converge. In her perspective, the gender theory she proposes involves reinterpreting the existential idea of choice. In this context, 'choosing' a gender is seen as the embodiment of possibilities within a complex network of deeply ingrained cultural norms, aligning with the existential philosophy associated with Sartre (Butler, 1986).

Simone de Beauvoir explores Existential freedom and responsibility, as key concepts influenced by existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. She argues that women, like men, must actively engage in defining their own existence. However, she contends that women have historically been treated as the "Other" in relation to men, leading to a sense of alienation and restriction in their freedom (Beauvoir, 1949/1956).

¹³ As we explained in the first pages of this chapter, Existentialism tends to embark the masculine gaze regarding philosophical insights into literature, cinema and other kind of arts. But, Simone de Beauvoir, a disciple of Sartre, turns these ideas into the world of feminism and how we can use Existential philosophies to explore the antagonism of society towards the female gaze on arts.

Furthermore, a deeper understanding of this “otherness” is described as and the implications of women being perceived as the "second sex.", and how this notion affects women's self-perception and societal expectations (Le Doeuff, 1980). Le Doeuff's commentary also addresses Beauvoir's examination of women's lived experiences, the impact of motherhood on women's identities, and the ways in which women navigate existential questions of freedom and authenticity.

In other note, Beauvoir critiques the pervasive societal myth of the "Eternal Feminine," an essentialist notion that reduces women to a fixed, timeless essence. She rejects this idea, asserting that women are not born but made, shaped by societal expectations and cultural norms. This challenges the existentialist concept of personal agency and self-creation, as women are often confined by external expectations (Butler, 1986). Also, according to Le Doeuff, has broadened the scope of feminist philosophy and highlights the complex interplay between existentialist philosophy and feminist thought in Beauvoir's work. These authors contribute to the concept that Beauvoir introduced, women are defined in relation to men and how societal structures contribute to the perpetuation of gender inequalities.

Building on existentialist themes of ambiguity, Beauvoir explores the ambiguous nature of women's existence. She discusses the tension between immanence (associated with women's roles in reproduction and nurturing) and transcendence (linked to individual freedom and self-realization). This ambiguity, Beauvoir argues, has led to women's subjugation and an existential conflict between their personal aspirations and societal expectations ¹⁴. According to de Beauvoir and fellow existentialists, true

¹⁴ In "The Second Sex," Simone de Beauvoir intertwines existentialist philosophy with feminist analysis, providing a comprehensive exploration of the complexities surrounding women's existence. The work remains influential in feminist theory, inviting continued discussions on gender, freedom, and the quest for authentic selfhood.

liberation comes from transcendence, which contrasts with immanence and alienation (Quinan, 2016). For women, this means consistently surpassing the confines of their material circumstances to attain new freedoms. Throughout de Beauvoir's philosophical and literary works, she explores the role of others in this process and how recognizing their existence impacts individual reality. The connection to and interaction with others imbue our lives with value. Others serve as a path to self-awareness, but genuine freedom is only achievable through the liberation of all human beings. In essence, the presence of others is an indispensable—albeit both advantageous and challenging—aspect of human existence.

Moreover, several concepts linked to Beauvoirian existentialism, including ambiguity, gender-based alienation, situated freedom, the portrayal of women as the absolute Other, and the interconnected relationship between embodiment, temporality, and agency, offer rich possibilities for interpreting screen culture (Falzon, 2014). As an interlude into feminist conceptualization, Beauvoir proposes the existence of female societal outlooks within the female body and objectification, where feminist existentialism in "The Second Sex" scrutinizes the relationship between women and their bodies. Beauvoir critiques the objectification of women, arguing that societal attitudes reduce them to objects of desire, limiting their ability to transcend societal expectations and live authentically. On a further note, Beauvoir refers almost constantly in her work to the demystification of motherhood, questioning stereotypes, debunking unrealistic expectations, and highlighting the diverse realities of motherhood, which can encompass a range of emotions, experiences, and circumstances (Patterson, 1986).

The key concepts of feminist existentialism in Beauvoir body of work, rely on defying societal expectations, such as motherhood and *true femininity*¹⁵. Such concepts gain cinematic prominence in Bergman filmography, expressing similar themes through visual storytelling, both converge in their exploration of existential questions, gender dynamics, and the pursuit of authentic existence. Together, they provide a subtle perspective on the human condition and the complexities of gendered experiences (Wilkinson, 1998).

Simone de Beauvoir's contributions to feminist philosophy within the framework of existentialism have been instrumental in reshaping our understanding of gender, identity, and societal expectations. Rejecting essentialist notions of femininity, Beauvoir argued for the socially constructed nature of gender roles and emphasized the need for women to transcend societal constraints to achieve authentic selfhood. Beauvoir suggests that women can achieve authentic freedom through solidarity and collective action. By recognizing shared experiences and challenging societal norms together, women can transcend the limitations imposed by the "myth" of femininity and actively participate in shaping their destinies.

Furthermore, Beauvoir highlighted the interconnectedness of women's struggles, emphasizing solidarity as a powerful force in challenging patriarchal norms. Her ideas have significantly influenced feminist thought, providing a foundation for subsequent generations of scholars and activists. The legacy of Beauvoir's feminist existentialism resonates in ongoing discussions about gender equality, the deconstruction of stereotypes, and the continual pursuit of genuine freedom for all individuals, irrespective of gender.

¹⁵ Beauvoir's conception of "true femininity" rejects essentialism and encourages women to actively engage in their own self-creation. It involves breaking free from imposed roles, embracing freedom, and recognizing the importance of solidarity in the ongoing struggle for women's rights and equality. Beauvoir's ideas have significantly influenced feminist thought, shaping discussions on gender, identity, and societal expectations.

Beauvoir's work serves as an enduring source of inspiration, urging us to critically examine and dismantle oppressive structures while fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.



CHAPTER II: PHILOSOPHY IN CINEMA

In the enchanting realm of cinema, the silver screen becomes a canvas upon which profound philosophical inquiries unfold. This chapter delves into the intersection of philosophy and cinema, exploring how filmmakers navigate existential and absurd themes to provoke contemplation, challenge preconceptions, and mirror the intricacies of the human condition. Through visual storytelling, directors intertwine narratives that tackle questions of existence, freedom, morality, and the absurdities inherent in life.

The scholarly examination of philosophical themes in cinema has been a topic of considerable discussion and exploration in recent times. Researchers have scrutinized the interplay between film and philosophy, pondering whether films possess the capacity to actively participate in philosophical discussions and be deemed as philosophical works. While some assert that films can, at the very least, introduce philosophical questions, there exists a divergence of opinions regarding the extent to which films can thoroughly explore complex philosophical concepts. The historical association between film and philosophy has also undergone examination, encompassing debates on the artistic merit of film and its connections to photography and technological reproduction. Furthermore, a distinction emerges between continental philosophy and analytical philosophy in their approaches to film, with the former concentrating on the philosophical implications of cinema and the latter utilizing film as an instructional tool for teaching diverse philosophical disciplines (Brown, 2023).

We attribute a philosophical quality to certain filmmakers, including Ingmar Bergman, Sergei Eisenstein, Jean-Luc Godard, Eric Rohmer, Wim Wenders, and Richard Linklater, suggesting that their works grapple with profound philosophical questions (Smuts, 2009). Similarly, we characterize many films as philosophical, implying that they, in some way, engage in philosophical exploration. However, the precise manner in

which a film can "do philosophy" remains somewhat unclear. The interpretation of "doing philosophy" hinges on the specific meaning we assign to the term. It seems plausible that engaging in philosophy entails presenting arguments related to philosophical inquiries. However, understanding the subjectivity as an influencing force for the creation of the film is to allow the viewer to shape their own experience and interpretation.

Filmmakers, as artists, bring their unique perspectives, biases, and philosophical inclinations to the creative process. This interplay of subjectivities in cinema underscores the richness of the medium as a tool for philosophical exploration. It prompts us to acknowledge the diversity of perspectives, fostering a dialogue between the creator's vision and the viewer's personal lens. In this dynamic exchange, films become not just vessels for philosophical ideas but living expressions of the intricate interplay between subjectivity and shared human experiences.

1. The Cinematic Philosophical Landscape

In the twenty-first century, there has been an increasing acknowledgment among both philosophers and scholars in film studies that numerous films spanning various genres and time periods merit, and in certain instances, require philosophical scrutiny. This recognition has, in part, emerged from the rising tendency to use films as a means of introducing students to philosophical concepts (Wartenberg, 2009). There are at least two reasons that warrant an examination of the interplay between philosophy and film. Firstly, in recent years, cinema has evolved into a highly significant cultural phenomenon, serving as both an art form and a catalyst for social change (Gill, 1977). Film as philosophy is a topic that has been extensively explored in the last few decades. Scholars have proposed different strategies to show that film can function as philosophy, including developing theories of film philosophizing and presenting philosophical interpretations of movies (Baracco, 2017).

Films have the capacity to introduce and explore into intricate philosophical concepts, touching on themes such as the essence of personhood, morality, and epistemological skepticism. The notion of film serving as a medium for philosophy prompts inquiries into how films can contribute to philosophical discourse and why one should seek philosophical insights through this art form. Scholars have scrutinized the historical interconnection between film and philosophy, delving into the philosophical significance of specific films like Alfred Hitchcock's "Rear Window". The concept of film as a philosophical entity boasts a lengthy history, with pivotal figures in early film theory, including Stanley Cavell and Gilles Deleuze (Keskin, 2022), engaging in discussions about it. In essence, the ongoing dialogue on film as philosophy explores the transformative relationship between the realms of philosophy and cinema.

“One line of response to this objection points out that a film narrative can be an instance of a general truth” (Wartenberg, 2009). It is understood that film narrative cannot convey philosophical truths often highlights that a film narrative can indeed serve as an instance of a broader, general truth. In essence, this perspective argues that while the specific events and characters in a film may be fictional, symbolic, or constructed for dramatic effect, they can allegorically represent universal themes or truths that hold philosophical significance. By interpreting the film narrative as a symbolic reflection of broader human experiences, emotions, or ethical dilemmas, proponents of this response contend that films can encapsulate and convey general truths that resonate beyond the particularities of the narrative itself.

2. Interplay of Existentialism and Absurdism in Film

Existentialism and absurdism, as philosophical currents, have left an indelible mark on the tapestry of cinema. In exploring existentialist themes, filmmakers delve into the nuances of individual freedom, responsibility, and the relentless pursuit of meaning

in an ostensibly indifferent universe. Iconic works such as Ingmar Bergman's "Wild Strawberries" and Jean-Pierre Melville's "Le Samourai" bring characters to the forefront, grappling with the consequences of their choices, navigating isolation, and embarking on quests for authenticity and self-discovery. Through thought-provoking narratives like Michelangelo Antonioni's "Blow-Up" and Bergman's "The Seventh Seal," existentialist cinema prompts audiences to confront the profound uncertainties inherent in the quest for meaning.

Simultaneously, the realm of absurdism in film revels in the inherent irrationality of existence, infusing narratives with humor, surrealism, and a resistance to societal norms. From the whimsical absurdity of Charlie Kaufman's "Being John Malkovich" to the satirical critique of conformity in Terry Gilliam's "Brazil," filmmakers challenge audiences to reconsider conventional perspectives. Embracing the absurdity of life, works like "Synecdoche, New York" and "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind" by Charlie Kaufman explore the intricacies of human relationships, while films like Harold Ramis's "Groundhog Day" unravel the philosophical dimensions of rituals and the repetition of existence. The interplay between existentialist and absurdist themes in cinema serves as an invitation for contemplation, inviting audiences to explore the complexities, uncertainties, and absurdities that shape the human experience (Wartenberg, 2009).

Existentialism and absurdism are themes that have been explored in film. Simone de Beauvoir's writings have been analyzed in relation to Film d'auteur, such as Bergman, drawing from Beauvoir's key works such as *The Second Sex* and her contribution to Existential thinking (J.-P. Boulé & Tidd, 2012). Also, as important as feminism, monotheism interplay an important role into this philosophical journey through the eyes of cinema, especially those of Bergman and his work. The relevance of Sartrean existentialism in interpreting the world today is highlighted, with film reflecting

philosophical concerns and exemplifying existentialist philosophy. However, it is noted that Sartrean existentialism is limited to its own ideas, and the potential relevance for film studies are partially obscured (J. P. Boulé & Tidd, 2012). Thus, the importance of interplaying both absurdism and the feminist perspective to its principles.

Moreover, existentialism and absurdism exhibit a profound interconnection with monotheistic traditions, particularly Christianity, and this symbiotic relationship is characterized by a shared thematic resonance and mutual concerns. Within the intricate tapestry of existentialist thought, one finds a confluence of ideas that not only align with but often draw inspiration from the philosophical underpinnings embedded in monotheistic ideologies, notably Christianity. Key among these shared concepts are the notions of freedom and authenticity, which serve as focal points in both existentialism and monotheistic belief systems (Casewell, 2022).

In exploring existentialism's intersection with Christianity, it becomes evident that the emphasis on individual freedom and the quest for authenticity finds resonance in Christian theological tenets. Thus, the importance of the rising question in Camus works, such as, “The Myth of Sisyphus”, where he states as follow: *"There is only one truly serious philosophical problem: suicide. To say whether life is or is not worth the effort to live it is to answer the fundamental question of philosophy"* (Camus, /1942/1955). Camus addresses the real philosophical problem that interplays with the ideas of monotheism and the constant search for truth and forgiveness. It appears that Camus adeptly captures the interplay between life's impermanence and death, the contrast of light's brightness and shadow's darkness, the juxtaposition of the familiar and the distant, and ultimately, the balance between sources of joy and elements that evoke fear and a feeling of solitude (Błaszczuk, 2020)

3. Exploring philosophical cinematic narratives through the feminist perspective

The feminist philosophy of film encompasses diverse methods for examining gender identity, portrayal, and storylines in the realm of cinema. It scrutinizes conventional depictions of women, aiming to challenge and critique the perspective often dominated by the male gaze (Yu, 2023). Feminist film theory scrutinizes the representation of female subjectivity and desire in cinema, incorporating psychoanalytic frameworks derived from philosophical explorations derived from Beauvoir's line of work. Additionally, it delves into the examination of female consciousness within the context of narrative structures to challenge patriarchal norms and explore the female condition (Feng, 2023).

The feminist gaze scrutinizes not only the explicit portrayal of female characters but also the underlying power dynamics, symbolism, and cultural messages conveyed through film. By applying feminist philosophy to cinematic narratives, this examination aims to uncover the ways in which philosophical ideas are interwoven with issues of gender, providing a nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between philosophy and storytelling in the cinematic realm. Also, is used as an instrument to defy gender roles and the inherit male gaze that precedes the narratives of traditional cinema.

This thematic emphasis on the dilemma of women in Bergman's films aligns with broader discussions in cinematic philosophy, particularly the exploration of the female gaze, as we are going to explore in further chapters. The female gaze challenges and diversifies the traditional cinematic perspective dominated by the male gaze. By foregrounding the experiences, perspectives, and narratives of female characters, filmmakers like Bergman engage with the philosophical dimensions of gender, power dynamics, and the human condition. The female gaze, in this context, becomes a lens

through which to examine existential questions, societal norms, and the profound impact of alienation and suffering on individuals within the cinematic narrative (Mellen, 1973).



CHAPTER III: THE FEMALE GAZE

The notion of the female gaze in cinema originated with Laura Mulvey, who scrutinized the objectification and sexualization of women through the lens of the heterosexual male perspective, commonly referred to as the male gaze. Mulvey's theoretical framework sparked dual waves of feminist movements in both European and American societies, contributing to advancements in the social standing of women. However, a precise definition of the female gaze remains elusive (Diefenthaeler & Cerqueira, 2022). This concept emerges as a critical lens in cinematic discourse, offering a distinct perspective that challenges the traditionally male-dominated gaze prevalent in the history of filmmaking. Coined as a counterpart to the male gaze by feminist film theorists, the female gaze provides a fresh and nuanced viewpoint that seeks to reframe how women are portrayed, experienced, and understood on screen (Feng, 2023).

The concept of the male gaze, characterized by the objectification and sexualization of women, extends beyond cinema to social media, giving rise to an assertive female gaze that assesses men based on their appearance and social standing. However, this forceful female gaze is not necessarily a solution or a form of rebellion against the male gaze. The theories of the male gaze and female gaze serve as tools to depict the status of women in patriarchal societies, with the female gaze offering a means for women to reclaim autonomy over their bodies. That is why, this chapter aims to examine the roots of this phenomenon in feminist film theory and its contemporary implications, with works of Laura Mulvey, Lisa French and Marilyn Johns Blackwell, feminist critics that explore the male gaze in cinema, as well as, Bergman involvement into feminist narratives. It explores how filmmakers, artists, and storytellers have embraced the female gaze as a means of dismantling stereotypes, challenging patriarchal norms, and contributing to a more inclusive and representative cinematic philosophy.

From its theoretical underpinnings to its practical applications, the female gaze stands as a pivotal concept in the ongoing conversation about gender, identity, and power dynamics within the realm of cinematic storytelling.

1. Defining the Female Gaze in Cinematic Narratives

Feminist film theory emerged along with the feminist movement, critiquing the stereotypical portrayals of women in classical cinema and delving into the exploration of female subjectivity and desire in film. Recent trends in women's film production include depicting female characters as narrative subjects, challenging patriarchal norms, and examining female consciousness within the realm of feminist cinematography. In a world structured by sexual inequality, the enjoyment derived from looking is divided into active/male and passive/female roles. The influential male gaze imposes its fantasies onto the female form, shaping it accordingly. Women, traditionally placed in an exhibitionist role, find themselves simultaneously being observed and showcased, with their appearance designed for a potent visual and erotic impact, effectively signifying a quality of being looked at (Mulvey, 1989).

In the height of the post-war movements in Europe and America marked a transformative period in which the female gaze emerged as a critical response to the dominant male gaze. This shift influenced both cinema and philosophy, contributing to a broader reevaluation of gender dynamics and representations of women in cultural narratives. The female gaze as a post-war concept, started to influence European and American cinema and philosophy, was also propelled by the transformative influence of feminist movements during this era. As women's voices gained traction in societal discourse, the cinematic and philosophical landscapes underwent significant shifts. The feminist movements of the post-war period not only challenged existing norms but also paved the way for an increased emphasis on women's perspectives in film, acting as a

catalyst for the emergence of the female gaze. This shift represented a critical reevaluation of visual and narrative representations, countering the longstanding dominance of the male gaze and fostering a more inclusive exploration of female subjectivity in both cinematic and philosophical realms (Wei et al., 2023).

In the essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"¹⁶ by Laura Mulvey, one of the ground breaking works for feminist theory in the arts, the psychoanalytic perspective examines how film techniques construct a 'gaze,' a cinematic world, and an object by manipulating time and space dimensions within the film. While not delving into specific details, it is apparent that Mulvey contends the male gaze hinders the representation of women on their own terms. She asserts that the male gaze perpetuates a patriarchal perspective, portraying women as submissive entities designed to evoke desire and pleasure for the male protagonist and, by extension, the male spectator (Ghoreshi, 2023). Additionally, opinions on the existence of a female gaze are often sharply divided. Some assert the presence of a discernible female gaze, while others, particularly filmmakers, vehemently reject the notion of a distinct female gaze or any binary framework that suggests only two distinct perspectives. Consequently, the question of identifying whether a film is created by a woman remains a contentious and divisive issue (French, 2021b). However, acknowledging the existence of a female gaze is supported by the understanding that the feminine experience differs significantly from the masculine one.

¹⁶ This essay takes part in Laura Mulvey's book "Visual and Other Pleasures," where she extends her analysis beyond cinema to consider various forms of visual culture, including art, advertising, and photography. She continues to examine how visual forms contribute to the construction and reinforcement of gendered identities and power dynamics.

2. Historical context of the male-dominated film industry and the importance of The Female Gaze

Historically, the issue of a male-dominated perspective has persisted, shaping an idealized portrayal of the feminine figure that strips away her inherent human nature and flaws. Throughout the epochs of narratives, whether literary or cinematic, the male gaze has wielded considerable influence, constructing an image of women that aligns with societal ideals but often neglects the complexities and imperfections inherent in their lived experiences. This pervasive idealization has not only perpetuated gender stereotypes but also hindered a more authentic and nuanced representation of women and the female experience. The film industry has traditionally been characterized by male dominance, with decision-making influenced by male perspectives, leading to the constriction of women's representation on screen. Nevertheless, recent research contends that the presumption of a singular male gaze in film theory has prematurely limited valuable avenues of exploration. It becomes crucial to explore the female gaze, presenting aesthetic perspectives uniquely shaped by a woman's gender and lived experiences (French, 2021a).

The idea of the "male" gaze tends to dominate and assert control, while the "female" gaze is characterized as a mindset where the engagement with the subject and material is more emotionally driven and respectful (French, 2021b). Mulvey uses the gaze to examine male pleasure in narrative cinema (Manlove, 2007). She argues that the cinematic experience is often structured to cater to a "male gaze," where the audience, assumed to be predominantly male, identifies with the male protagonist, objectifying and finding pleasure in the female characters on screen. Mulvey's analysis scrutinizes both the visual and narrative strategies employed in cinema that reinforce traditional gender roles, emphasizing how the act of looking becomes a powerful tool for perpetuating

societal norms and power imbalances. The emergence of post-war cinema has seen a rise in narratives that seek to portray a more diverse range of experiences, perspectives, and gaze orientations. This evolving cinematic landscape signifies a departure from the rigid constraints of the male gaze, reflecting a broader cultural shift towards inclusivity and a redefinition of pleasure within the cinematic realm. However, the female perspective operates centrifugally, acting in opposition to power, authority, and the structures of societal expectations. The female gaze becomes the locus where women, in particular, disrupt the visual field, and this chapter demonstrates the significant role the female gaze plays in adding complexity to the epic narrative (Lovatt, 2013).

The traditional male gaze in cinema often perpetuated the portrayal of women as ethereal creatures, seemingly flawless and relegated to the role of mere additions to male-driven narratives. This reduction of women to idealized and often one-dimensional representations reinforced societal expectations and contributed to a skewed understanding of their multifaceted nature. In post-war cinema, there has been a growing awareness of the limitations imposed by such stereotypical depictions. Filmmakers and scholars are actively challenging the notion of women as mere adornments or ethereal beings, working towards more authentic and complex portrayals that reflect the diverse realities of women's lives. The evolving cinematic landscape acknowledges the richness of women's experiences, moving away from the perpetuation of unrealistic ideals to embrace narratives that explore their agency, struggles, and contributions independent of male-centric frameworks. This shift signifies a crucial step towards dismantling the ingrained biases within cinematic storytelling and fostering a more inclusive and representative portrayal of women on screen.

In the post-war era, European cinema, particularly in Sweden, underwent a transformative period marked by significant shifts in thematic content, narrative styles,

and cinematic techniques. Swedish post-war cinema was characterized by a departure from traditional storytelling and a willingness to explore more nuanced and socially relevant narratives. Directors like Ingmar Bergman emerged during this period, contributing profoundly to the global cinematic landscape. The post-war era in Sweden also saw the rise of the Swedish New Wave, a movement that embraced a more naturalistic and socially conscious approach to filmmaking, challenging societal norms, addressing taboo subjects and reflecting the changing cultural and political climate (Cook & Sklar, 2023). Overall, European post-war cinema, and specifically that of Sweden, played a pivotal role in shaping the evolution of film as a powerful medium for cultural expression and societal reflection.

3. Intersectionality in Cinematic Narratives: Female Gaze and Philosophy

Both Mulvey and Beauvoir are key figures in feminist theory, and their works share common themes related to gender, identity, and the representation of women. Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex," published in 1949, is a foundational text in feminist philosophy. Beauvoir explores the social, cultural, and existential dimensions of womanhood, discussing issues of oppression, objectification, and the construction of femininity in a patriarchal society. Examining intersectionality in cinematic narratives delves into the dynamic concept of the female gaze and its interplay with philosophy. The female gaze stands as a counterpoint to the prevailing male gaze in film, offering women the agency to reclaim their bodies and present their experiences through an authentic female perspective. This perspective, rooted in intersectionality, not only challenges traditional gender norms but also contributes to a broader philosophical discourse on representation, power dynamics, and the nuanced complexities of lived experiences (Feng, 2023).

The female gaze is centered on narrating stories through a distinctly female lens, addressing issues that significantly affect women. It serves as a means for women to assert control over their bodies and challenge established patriarchal norms. While the utilization of the female gaze in feminist films holds dominant importance, it is frequently misconstrued. Some films merely switch the gender of the protagonist without genuinely delving into the intricacies of female experiences, while others, despite incorporating feminist themes, persist in adhering to a male gaze. (French, 2021a). For the effective deployment of the female gaze, characters must exhibit awareness of and resistance to the gaze, fostering an equitable vision that concentrates on the emotions and experiences of the characters. Thus, is irrelevant if the creator is a woman, the female gaze needs to be understood from introspectiveness, leaving the shallow consequences of female freedom that usually hoards “feminist cinema”.

Furthermore, feminist existentialism within the cinematic realm delves into the intersection of feminist ideologies and existentialist philosophy as portrayed in film. This exploration scrutinizes how filmmakers, particularly women in the industry, navigate themes such as power dynamics, adolescence, love, trauma, and motherhood, drawing inspiration from the philosophical insights of Simone de Beauvoir (Cunliffe, 2019). Beauvoir's concept of ambiguity stands as a fundamental pillar of her philosophy, reshaping our understanding of freedom. The application of ambiguity in film examines tumultuous emotional experiences, highlighting the significance of confronting and embracing challenging situations for the attainment of genuine freedom. Additionally, feminist philosophy of film critically evaluates mainstream cinema, analyzing depictions of women, the dynamics of spectatorship, audience-text negotiation, cognitivism, and ideology critique (J.-P. Boulé & Tidd, 2012). This approach aims to uncover how mainstream films can actively contribute to the development of a constructive feminist

philosophy of film, fostering the subversion of patriarchal norms, cultivating a resistant imagination, and expanding the realms of feminist creativity.

Besides, existentialism, encompassing the philosophies of Sartre and Beauvoir, wielded a substantial impact on various European cultural domains, notably in literature and cinema. Despite a recognized necessity for a more methodical exploration of a Sartrean perspective on cinema, the essays compiled in this collection exemplify the enduring pertinence of Sartre's concepts in the analysis of contemporary films. This is achieved by adopting Camus' theory of absurdism and existentialism as a comprehensive theoretical framework. In essence, these scholarly works underscore the intersections between feminist existentialism, absurdism, and cinema, offering valuable insights into the philosophical underpinnings and artistic expressions associated with these profound concepts. Alongside The eroticization of women in cinema arises from the structural dynamics that revolve around three distinctly male gazes. Firstly, there's the gaze of the camera capturing the pro-filmic event, which, although technically neutral, inherently takes on a voyeuristic and typically 'male' quality, given that filming is commonly undertaken by men. Secondly, there's the gaze of the men within the narrative itself, deliberately framed to objectify women as subjects of their observation. Lastly, there's the gaze of the male spectator, mirroring or inevitably aligning with the first two gazes, creating a dynamic where the male audience assumes a position akin to the camera and the male characters within the story (Dirse, 2013).

Overall, the exploration of the female gaze in film, intertwined with philosophical underpinnings, represents a profound and evolving discourse within the cinematic landscape. As filmmakers challenge traditional perspectives and societal norms, the female gaze emerges as a potent tool for reclaiming women's narratives, experiences, and bodies. This cinematic lens not only dismantles the objectification embedded in the male

gaze but also serves as a philosophical instrument, questioning power dynamics, representation, and lived experiences. The intersectionality of the female gaze with existentialism, feminism, and other philosophical frameworks enriches the cinematic narrative, offering a nuanced and empowering alternative. This ongoing dialogue fosters a deeper understanding of gender dynamics, contributing to a broader philosophical discourse within the realm of film.



CHAPTER IV: THE ARTISTIC EVOLUTION OF INGMAR BERGMAN

Ingmar Bergman's artistic evolution unfolds through his exploration of diverse themes and cinematic techniques across his films. In his early works like "Torment" and "Smiles of a Summer Night," Bergman delves into the intricacies of father-child relationships, offering nuanced portrayals of filial bonds. Progressing in his career, he takes a deeper plunge into existential themes, employing cinematic techniques to craft atmospheric and introspective narratives. Iconic films such as "The Seventh Seal" and "Persona" demonstrate Bergman's prowess in visual storytelling, showcasing his ability to evoke profound emotions through meticulous mise-en-scène¹⁷ and camera techniques. Moreover, Bergman's films draw inspiration from various art forms like theater and painting, resulting in a unique amalgamation of influences and styles [5]. In essence, Bergman's artistic evolution is marked by his profound exploration of human relationships, contemplation of existential questions, and innovative use of cinematic techniques.

Ingmar Bergman (1918-2007) is undoubtedly a revered figure in the realm of cinema, yet his name is sometimes unfairly associated solely with a sense of unrelenting darkness and despair. While it is true that all of his films, even the comedies, grapple with profound themes such as faith, morality, and mortality, the remarkable wit and vitality inherent in works like "Wild Strawberries," "Scenes from a Marriage," "Fanny and Alexander," and numerous others often go overlooked by both audiences and critics. Bergman's cinematic oeuvre extends beyond a one-dimensional portrayal, revealing a richness and diversity that transcends the somber reputation often attributed to his name

¹⁷ Mise-en-scene refers to the arrangement of visual elements in a film, including set design, props, costumes, makeup, lighting, and the movements and actions of actors. It plays a crucial role in creating the overall atmosphere, mood, and meaning of a film. *Definition taken from Cambridge Dictionary Online* <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/mise-en-scene>

(Bergman et al., 1973). His narrative milestones coincided with a societal shift marked by evolving perspectives on philosophy, arts, gender roles, and societal expectations. Bergman's films, spanning from the mid-20th century onwards, mirrored and, in some instances, influenced the changing dynamics of the world around him.

In the post-World War II era, existentialism, later on absurdism, gained prominence in philosophical discourse, and Bergman's exploration of existential themes in films like "The Seventh Seal" resonated with the intellectual currents of the time. The questioning of faith, morality, and the human condition found a poignant expression in Bergman's narratives (Ford, 2012). As societal norms underwent transformations, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, Bergman's films like "Persona" and "Scenes from a Marriage" engaged with shifting perspectives on identity, relationships, and the roles of men and women. These narratives were not only reflective of societal changes but also contributed to discussions on the complexities of human existence (Hubner, 2021).

Bergman's ability to capture the zeitgeist allowed his work to serve as a mirror to the cultural and philosophical shifts occurring during his career. His films became touchstones for audiences grappling with their own questions about life, love, and meaning in a changing world. In this way, Bergman's narrative milestones not only marked cinematic achievements but also served as cultural landmarks embedded in the fabric of societal evolution.

1. Brief background on Ingmar Bergman and his cinematic legacy

Ingmar Bergman stands as a towering figure in the realm of cinema, renowned for his profound cinematic explorations and philosophical insights into the human experience. Born on July 14, 1918, in Uppsala, Sweden, Bergman's upbringing in a family deeply rooted in religion, with his father serving as a Lutheran minister, laid the

foundation for the thematic richness that would characterize his later works. Over a career spanning more than six decades, Bergman directed over 60 films, showcasing a mastery of storytelling and a commitment to probing existential questions. His cinematic legacy is marked by several key elements, including a penchant for exploring profound existential themes. In films like "The Seventh Seal" (1957), Bergman engaged with matters of faith, mortality, and the relentless quest for meaning within the framework of a medieval allegory (Brooks, 2001).

Ingmar Bergman was the middle child and did not pursue formal education and never completed a university degree. Despite this, his mother, Karin Bergman, expressed a sense of sad resignation upon realizing that her younger son had chosen an artistic career and a lifestyle she perceived as bohemian and disorderly. Reading Karin Bergman's diaries reflects her disappointment in Ingmar's chosen path. (Steene, 2005)¹⁸. These early details of Ingmar Bergman's life, including his complex relationship with a maternal figure and the criticism from his mother regarding his career choices, serve as foundational elements that reverberate throughout his later narrative themes. The intricacies of his interactions with maternal figures become central motifs in his stories, shaping the psychological landscapes of his protagonists. The constant critique from his mother not only influenced his artistic preferences but also fueled his exploration of the female psyche in his later works. This intimate connection between personal experiences and artistic expression underscores the profound impact of Bergman's upbringing on the thematic richness of his cinematic oeuvre (Livingston, 2009).

This familial dynamic, combined with Bergman's political complexities, from early admiration of Hitler to later anti-Nazi activism, forms a backdrop to his cinematic

¹⁸ This information and all of Bergman's details about his life and style, is to be found in the book by Brigitta Steene "Ingmar Bergman: A Reference Guide"

evolution. Despite personal challenges, Bergman's films exhibit a distinctive style marked by symbolism, dream sequences, and intimate character studies, making him a significant contributor to European cinema. His nuanced exploration of the female psyche and engagement with feminist themes adds another layer to his intricate artistic legacy. However, despite his progressive ideas towards gender roles and philosophy in general, some of his perspectives aligned with the sociopolitical context of his time (Orr, 2014). Nevertheless, he

Ingmar Bergman, raised in a religious family with his father serving as a Lutheran minister, was exposed to existential questioning from an early age. This upbringing laid the foundation for his continuous exploration of profound themes, including matters of faith, mortality, and the relentless pursuit of meaning in his cinematic works (Orr, 2014). The inherent tension between religious influences and existential questioning became a defining aspect of Bergman's narrative landscape, adding layers of complexity to his films. Although he was not religious, he went through a "traumatic conflict" over religious beliefs, destroying God's image but holding to a "perception of Man as the bearer of holy purpose" (Quart, 2004). This interplay between faith and existentialism, evident in works like "The Seventh Seal," showcases the enduring impact of Bergman's early experiences on his philosophical inquiries and cinematic legacy.

Bergman's cinematic innovation is another hallmark of his legacy, with a distinctive style characterized by symbolism, dream sequences, and stark visuals. His films are revered for their intimate character studies, delving into the complexities of human relationships. example, offering an unflinching exploration of the intricacies of marital life. Ingmar Bergman's films enjoyed a diverse and substantial relationship with the broader landscape of European cinema, challenging the misconception that Bergman existed as a culturally and aesthetically isolated figure on the periphery (Orr, 2014).

Contrary to this myth, Bergman actively engaged with and contributed to the European cinematic discourse, establishing connections that transcended national and cultural boundaries. Furthermore, his thematic explorations, visual style, and narrative innovations made a significant impact on the evolving tapestry of European cinema, where he was able to bridge cultural gaps and offer a universal resonance that transcended geographical boundaries (Orr, 2014).

Bergman's films intricately navigate the complexities and ambiguities of his own existence, steering clear of intellectual constructs in favor of emotional nakedness. Unlike trends that may perceive exultation in an artist's unique vision as unfashionable, Bergman's case stands as a deserving exception. His cinematic works delve into the profound realms of human experience, offering an emotionally charged exploration rather than relying on cerebral abstractions. This approach not only sets Bergman apart but also underscores the enduring significance of his unparalleled artistic vision (Quart, 2004).

2. Examination of Bergman's engagement with existentialism and absurdism in his cinematic narratives

While exploring existentialist themes can deepen our understanding of Bergman's films, it's important to acknowledge the debate surrounding his direct engagement with these philosophies (Livingston, 2009). There's no clear evidence that Bergman actively studied existentialist thinkers like Sartre. This raises the question: Do his films resonate with existentialism due to some unconscious influence or simply because they reflect the anxieties of the post-war zeitgeist? Despite this ambiguity, analyzing his work through an existentialist lens remains valuable because of the rich thematic connections we can draw. Nevertheless, Bergman's involvement with existentialism and absurdism in his cinematic narratives becomes apparent through the portrayal of philosophical issues within the lives and decisions of his characters. His films serve as a reflection of the

principles of existentialist philosophy, delving into themes such as authenticity, bad faith, and the inherent absurdity of human existence. Alongside artists like Michelangelo Antonioni, Bergman contributes to the exploration of the tragic and anguished dimensions of Existentialism in their respective works (Cooper, 2014). Bergman's stories contemplate the contrast between inauthenticity and authenticity, underscoring his involvement with existentialist concepts. In his cinematic works, Bergman illustrates a grasp of existentialist philosophy and its applicability in deciphering the contemporary world. His narratives explore the intricacies of human existence and the irrationality of life, aligning with the existentialist and absurdist themes found in the works of his peers (Stanton, 2014)¹⁹.

Bergman's cinematic narratives engage deeply with existentialism and absurdism, delving into the opposing realms of bad faith and authenticity, thereby echoing the philosophical themes prevalent in the works of thinkers like Sartre and Camus. Bergman's philosophical narrative in cinema resonates with Albert Camus' idea that the absurd can be rationally accepted, particularly in the aftermath of the demise of the concept of God (Plascencia, 2018). Both Bergman and Camus share the perspective that there is no higher power that imparts inherent meaning to human life, and the search for purpose becomes a daunting challenge. In this existential vacuum, empirical science fails to provide solace, as the world lacks intrinsic meaning. Bergman's films reflect this existential dilemma, exploring the complexities of existence in a universe devoid of inherent purpose or divine guidance. The convergence of their ideas underscores the shared belief in the absence of transcendent meaning, inviting viewers to confront the absurdity of human existence and

¹⁹ Taken from the book "Existentialism and Contemporary Cinema" edited by Jean-Pierre Boulé and Ursula Tidd.

grapple with the responsibility of creating their own meaning in a seemingly indifferent world.

Intrinsically, Camus' assertion that happiness can be chosen in a meaningless world becomes impractical when considering the human need for meaning and purpose. His concept of the absurd, centered on the individual's relation to the world, overlooks the crucial social dimension of human existence (Plascencia, 2018). However, recognizing the inherent social nature of humans and emphasizing interactions with others becomes essential. In the realm of human connections, meaningfulness emerges, providing a foundation for a life worth living. This perspective acknowledges the importance Sartrean existentialism into the cinematic realm of Ingmar Bergman. Sartre emphasized the individual's freedom and responsibility in creating their essence through choices.

A point of convergence between Camus' absurdism and Sartrean existentialism lies in the acknowledgment of human freedom and the responsibility that accompanies it. Both philosophical perspectives emphasize the individual's agency in shaping their existence through choices. Camus' notion of the absurd recognizes the lack of inherent meaning in the world, leaving individuals free to create their own meaning in the face of this existential void. Sartre, on the other hand, underscores the absolute freedom of individuals to define their essence through conscious decisions. In this shared emphasis on freedom, both Camus and Sartre highlight the centrality of human agency and the burden of responsibility in navigating a seemingly indifferent or absurd world. Bergman's cinematic narratives often echo these themes, portraying characters who grapple with the profound consequences of their choices and the existential weight of their freedom.

Bergman's cinematic style seamlessly integrates with existential and absurdist philosophical themes, creating a visual and narrative synergy that reflects the human condition. His approach aligns with the Sartrean emphasis on individual freedom, showcasing characters who confront the responsibility of their choices. Moreover, his narratives resonate with Camus' notion of the absurd, portraying the search for meaning in a world that inherently lacks it. In terms of cinematic aesthetics, Bergman's use of stark visuals, dream sequences, and introspective character studies complements the existential and absurdist themes in his works. The visual metaphors and symbolic elements in his films contribute to the philosophical depth, inviting viewers to contemplate the profound questions of existence. Bergman's ability to translate complex philosophical concepts into evocative visual language sets his cinematic style apart, making his films a rich and immersive exploration of existential and absurdist themes. In essence, Bergman's cinematic achievements serve as a testament to the powerful intersection of philosophy and film, offering audiences a thought-provoking journey into the complexities of the human experience.

3. Critical perspectives on Bergman's portrayal of female characters

To comprehend Bergman's stance on feminism, it is essential to delve into the perspectives presented by scholars such as Steene and Blackwell. While Steene acknowledges Bergman's commendable portrayal of women in his chamber films, emphasizing an increased focus on female subjectivity, Blackwell contributes to the discourse with a monographic study on gender in Bergman's cinema (Sánchez-García, 2020). Blackwell's assessment, though not categorizing Bergman as a feminist, highlights the significance of his films in challenging traditional norms. She argues that Bergman's cinematic women possess an independent interior life, distinct from male realities. Moreover, Blackwell contends that Bergman's works contribute to raising awareness

about oppressive patriarchal structures, particularly through the recurring theme of discrediting patriarchal authority in his films. Therefore, the question of whether Bergman is explicitly labeled as a feminist remains nuanced. While he may not align with the feminist label, the scholars acknowledge the progressive elements in his portrayal of women and the contributions of his films to challenging gender norms and oppressive structures.

Marilyn Blackwell analyzes Bergman influence on feminism and The Female Gaze. Blackwell's argument, particularly the application of film spectatorship theories inspired by Jacques Lacan's seminal essay "The Mirror Stage," proves to be especially productive. This approach sheds light on how Bergman's films intricately construct and occasionally challenge traditional gender distinctions, offering a nuanced exploration of gender dynamics within his cinematic narratives (Wilkinson, 1998). Additionally, Blackwell's examination of the relationship between Bergman's films and literary modernism adds another layer of depth to the understanding of his work. By considering this connection, the analysis extends beyond the visual aspects of cinema to explore the broader cultural and intellectual currents that influenced Bergman's artistic expression. This dual approach, incorporating both film spectatorship theories and a connection to literary modernism, enriches the understanding of Bergman's films, emphasizing their complexity and engagement with multiple intellectual (Blackwell, 1997).

Bergman's relationship with feminism is complex, evolving over the course of his career. His films have been subject to diverse interpretations, and contemporary feminist scholars continue to engage with the nuances of his portrayal of women. Bergman's impact on feminist discourse in cinema adds a layer of complexity to his cinematic legacy, inviting ongoing dialogue and exploration of gender dynamics within his body of work. Although, it is contradictory to place Ingmar Bergman as a referent for the Female Gaze,

it emphasizes the importance of inclusivity in storytelling, suggesting that for the Female Gaze to be impactful, it is crucial to narrate stories from both sides of the gender spectrum. This perspective underscores the idea that diverse and varied perspectives contribute to a richer and more nuanced exploration of gender in film. As Liv Ullman²⁰ stated in an interview for Cinéaste:

“We talked about experiences. Men are sometimes better directing women, because they have a certain openness and can make themselves naked in ways women can't” (Ullmann & Porton, 2001)

In this statement, Ullmann appears to express a perspective on gender dynamics in the context of directing and filmmaking. This suggests that, according to the speaker, men might excel at directing women due to a perceived openness and an ability to reveal vulnerability that may be attributed to them. The notion of making oneself "naked" in this context likely refers to a metaphorical openness or emotional transparency rather than a literal interpretation. It's important to note that opinions on this matter can vary widely, and perspectives on gender roles in filmmaking have evolved over time. While some may hold the view expressed in the statement, others emphasize the importance of diverse voices and experiences in directing, irrespective of gender. Filmmaking is a collaborative and creative process, and the effectiveness of a director may depend on various factors beyond gender, such as empathy, communication skills, and an understanding of human experiences.

²⁰ Liv Ullman is a Norwegian actress, most known for having starred in 10 of Bergman's films and for directing 2 of his screenplays. We can't talk about Bergman without recognizing his muse and main inspiration through his cinematic narrative. From an interview for **Little White Lies**, a British, internationally distributed, movie magazine and website. <https://lwlies.com/interviews/liv-ullmann-ingmar-bergman/>

Moreover, Bergman's assertion that women have more talent for acting and are less ashamed of looking at themselves in the mirror could be viewed as a reflection of the societal norms prevalent during his time. While this perspective may seem outdated and gender-stereotypical today, it is crucial to consider the historical context and prevailing attitudes toward gender roles. Bergman might have been influenced by societal expectations that placed a higher emphasis on women's appearance and grace. However, it's essential to approach this statement critically, recognizing the potential limitations of Bergman's viewpoint and acknowledging the evolving understanding of gender dynamics. Additionally, his comments might also be interpreted as a reflection of the cultural norms that shaped his worldview rather than a deliberate attempt to exalt his own narcissism. Bergman's legacy should be assessed comprehensively, considering both his contributions to cinema and the socio-cultural context that influenced his perspectives on gender (Bradshaw, 2018).

While the concept of the Female Gaze is debated in the context of Bergman's works, his films offer rich character studies and thematic explorations that contribute to a broader understanding of the human experience. The intimate connections between Bergman's personal experiences, particularly his complex relationship with maternal figures, and his artistic expression underscore the depth and authenticity of his cinematic contributions. Similarly, within the framework of idealism, women were considered the primary carriers of human sexuality, accentuating the significance of idealizing female sexuality (Cohen, 2000). In Bergman's works, he reflected this idealistic approach by presenting physically "perfect" women who grappled with internal struggles and complexities, challenging the superficial portrayal of perfection. Moreover, Bergman's influence on European cinema highlights the universality of his themes, bridging cultural gaps and contributing to a collective cinematic discourse. Overall, Bergman's legacy

stands as a testament to the intricate interplay of philosophy, gender, and narrative in the cinematic realm.



CHAPTER V: THE FEMALE GAZE IN BERGMAN'S FILMOGRAPHY AND THE EXPLORATION OF EXISTENTIALISM AND ABSURDISM

Ingmar Bergman's filmography explores existentialism and absurdism through the female gaze. His films, such as "Cries and Whispers," delve into existential questions, family conflicts, mortality, femininity, and incommunicability (French, 2021b). Bergman was influenced by the European cultural movement of Existentialism, which had a significant impact on literature and cinema (French, 1988). Through his close-up shots, Bergman establishes a connection between the face and death, analyzing the themes of existentialism and absurdism in his work (Russo, 2020). The female gaze in Bergman's films offers a unique perspective on these philosophical concepts, as female directors express themselves from a female point of view and explore issues that particularly impact women (Meadows, 2014). By examining the female gaze in Bergman's filmography, we can gain insights into the intersection of existentialism, absurdism, and femininity in his work.

1. Female Subjectivity and Authenticity

The authenticity of female subjectivity in Bergman's works extends beyond mere representation; it involves a profound exploration of women's emotional landscapes and the authenticity of their responses to life's challenges. Whether through intimate close-ups or evocative dialogue, Bergman captures the essence of female experiences, inviting audiences to engage with the authenticity and complexity of his female characters. In essence, Bergman's films serve as a testament to the richness and depth of female subjectivity, challenging conventional norms and contributing to a more authentic representation of women in cinema (Sánchez-García, 2020).

The central focus on female subjectivity and authenticity in Bergman's films is underscored by Steene's appreciation of the director's depiction of women in chamber

films, particularly noting an increased emphasis on female subjectivity, in "Persona", Bergman explores the complexity of its narrative and the relentless pursuit of an elusive perspective, which may be considered inadequate or a refusal to conform to conventional storytelling norms. Specifically, when examining the film's treatment of female subjectivity, the challenges become even more pronounced. The film's protagonists, representing a merging of identities (either one), defy easy categorization, rendering them essentially unknowable in traditional senses.

Bergman's insistence on intertwining the real and the fantastic, the subjective and the objective, adds layers of complexity to the exploration of female subjectivity in "Persona" (1966). The film questions the very nature of human identity, particularly as it pertains to women. The pursuit of an individual's personality, encapsulated in the term "persona," challenges the established notions of female identity as a distinct and easily fathomable quality (Barr, 1987). In the context of female subjectivity, "Persona" raises poignant questions about the expectations placed on women to conform to predefined roles and identities. The refusal to adhere to conventional narrative structures or present easily discernible characters invites an examination of how Bergman uses the film's form to comment on the limitations of societal constructs around femininity. The film's exploration of the fluidity and complexity of female subjectivity becomes a central aspect of its difficulty, challenging viewers to confront and reconsider established norms surrounding women in cinema. Bergman's refusal to provide easy answers aligns with his exploration of existential themes, emphasizing the struggle to define oneself authentically in a world that imposes limiting expectations. In the realm of female subjectivity, the film becomes a profound meditation on the intricacies and challenges faced by women in navigating societal constructs and defining their identities beyond conventional boundaries.

In "Persona," Bergman's masterful use of close-up shots intensifies the emotional landscape of the film. These close-ups magnify facial expressions, particularly of Elisabeth and Alma, allowing viewers to witness the subtle shifts that reveal their inner struggles and the ambiguity surrounding their identities. Furthermore, the technique blurs the lines between the women by mirroring their close-ups, visually emphasizing the merging of their personalities. This focus on the female face also disrupts traditional notions of femininity. Instead of passive objects, Elisabeth and Alma become complex individuals with hidden depths, all brought to light through the power of the close-up. This technique goes beyond aesthetics, serving as a tool to delve into the film's core themes of identity, performance, and the complexities of the female gaze.

On the other hand, Bergman often utilizes women in his films not merely as individual characters but as symbolic representations of the broader human condition marked by alienation and suffering as we see in "Cries and Whispers". These female characters, in a sense, become spokespersons through whom Bergman articulates his personal worldview. Central to this worldview is the profound impact of the traumatic absence and silence of God, depicting a universe where a cold abandonment leaves humanity to grapple with the harsh realities of an inherently cruel world. Also, In Bergman's cinematic narratives, women serve as conduits for expressing the director's anguish over the fundamental human predicament—our inherent inability to extract meaningfulness from life, except for fleeting moments of sensual ecstasy, where this rare moments of bliss are quickly tainted by a subsequent sense of revulsion, reflecting Bergman's exploration of the visceral and bodily aspects inherent in all human experiences. The characters of "*Cries and Whispers*" (1972) accompany the paradox of seeking meaning in the transient pleasures of life, only to be confronted by the inevitable

disgust rooted in the physical processes of existence, becomes a recurring theme in Bergman's portrayal of women in his films.

Bergman likely utilizes his cinematography in "Cries and Whispers" to amplify both female subjectivity and existential anxieties. The stark black and white palette could emphasize isolation and bleakness, while symbolic colors in set design or costumes might evoke emotions like illness or purity. Camera angles could play a role as well, with low angles portraying vulnerability and high angles creating a sense of detachment mirroring the characters' struggles. Framing could isolate characters or use close-ups to reveal their inner turmoil as they grapple with existential questions under harsh or low-key lighting. Finally, camera movement could depict stagnation or follow their journeys through slow tracking shots, emphasizing their internal struggles within the film's stark landscapes. By potentially employing these techniques, Bergman's cinematography goes beyond mere visuals, working in tandem with his exploration of female subjectivity and existential themes.

However, Blackwell argues that the cinematic women in Bergman's works possess an independent interior life, distinct from and not merely reflective of male realities, challenging traditional cinematic norms. Despite refraining from explicitly labeling Bergman as a feminist, Blackwell highlights the significance of Bergman's films in raising awareness about the oppressive structures of patriarchy. This recurring theme in Bergman's work involves a nuanced exploration of female subjectivity and authenticity, emphasizing the disruption of traditional gender roles and the assertion of women's independent interior lives in his cinematic narratives. Blackwell explains that:

...for Bergman, as for many feminists, socially imposed roles undermine subjectivity and lead to a loss of selfhood, at the same time that human

interaction seems predicated upon some roles. Thus, representations of masks, role-playing, power, and authority figure prominently in Bergman's depiction of gender issues (Blackwell, 1997).

Despite the opposite views of Blackwell towards Bergman's role into feminist exploration, Bergman achieves to continuously disrupt within the cinematic frame, stemming particularly from the subversion of male voice and narration, signify a gradual departure from the conclusiveness and theological undertones associated with male discourse. Bergman's divergence from conventional religious and patriarchal structures consequently leads to a simultaneous departure from traditional cinematic narration. This shift in focus aligns with the exploration of female subjectivity, emphasizing the destabilization of established gender norms and the departure from classical cinematic storytelling within Bergman's works (Sandberg, 1991).

Therefore, it is not plausible to categorize Bergman into the typical "male gaze" of filmmakers of that time. His work usually unsettles societal expectations, and it is a piece of self-reflecting narratives that allows to engage with the female gaze. As we can see in "*Autumn Sonata*" (1978), the intricacies of female subjectivity and authenticity, weaving a cinematic narrative that explores the depths of the human psyche. The film revolves around the reunion of a mother and daughter, portrayed by Ingrid Bergman and Liv Ullmann, after a prolonged separation. The nature of their relationship is inherently problematic, marked by unresolved issues and emotional complexities. The reunion becomes a pivotal moment in the narrative, prompting an exploration of the dynamics between the characters and shedding light on their shared history. This allows to explore the consciousness of the characters, and to understand the female experience that characterizes Bergman cinematic style.

Bergman's portrayal of women stands out not in terms of the philosophical roles assigned to them in his films but rather in the nuanced depiction of their characters. The distinctiveness lies in Bergman's explanation for why his female characters, in contrast to their male counterparts, struggle to find purpose in a seemingly directionless universe. Unlike his male characters who may fail due to unanswered pleas or a lack of capacity for caring, Bergman's female characters' cope with challenges rooted in a more fundamental level of human development (Mellen, 1973).

2. Deconstruction of Gender Norms and Societal Expectations

Bergman's cinematic works defy societal expectations and dismantle conventional gender norms, exploring the philosophical underpinnings of contemporary Swedish society. The films portray a nuanced artist navigating feminist concerns across a span of decades. Bergman employs satire to critique figures like lecherous doctors and malevolent social workers, challenging established societal norms (Blackwell, 1997). Marilyn Johns Blackwell's analysis of five key Bergman films underscores the filmmaker's embrace and validation of feminist concerns, challenging earlier critiques from feminist perspectives. Bergman's contribution lies in fostering female autonomy and subjectivity, liberating female characters from traditional expectations. Studying instances of gender norm transgressions in Bergman's films offers insights into how societal expectations are influenced by gender and the varied reactions to disruptions of these norms.

Most of Bergman's filmography addresses this dichotomy of gender roles and expectations, but, is specially in his acclaimed God's Silence trilogy²¹ "*Through a Glass*

²¹ In Bergman's perspective, the God's Silence trilogy portrays a world dominated by men, where women are either silent or compelled into submission, ultimately finding their voices through the subversion of social norms. By accentuating the subversive actions of women in these films, Bergman underscores the dual nature existing between patriarchy and ontology that women must navigate. This exploration reveals the inherent inadequacy of what a patriarchal society imposes on women (Boyles, 2014).

Darkly", *"Winter Light"* and *"The Silence"*, where we can appreciate these themes. In this trilogy, is often discussed the contradictory views on gender embedded in societal roles. Despite the prominence of female characters in each part of the trilogy, *"Through a Glass Darkly"* (1961), stands out as particularly significant. The film's narrative revolves around Karin, a woman who is portrayed simultaneously as powerless and powerful. The core essence of the film lies in the duality of Karin's existence: in the eyes of the men in her family, she is perceived as an object catering to male desire; however, within the film's narrative, she emerges as the autonomous catalyst for male redemption (Boyles, 2014). Bergman intentionally emphasizes the dual nature of women as both objects and autonomous beings in *"Through a Glass Darkly,"* By highlighting Karin's duality, Bergman exposes how her ontology is disregarded by the men in her family while being embraced by the film's narrative. Bergman aims to underscore how women, within the patriarchal world depicted in his films, function simultaneously as subjects and objects, shedding light on the complex dynamics of gender relationships (Boyles, 2014).

Following Bergman notable dichotomy in his portrayal of male and female characters, he portrays his male figures navigate ethical quandaries and moral challenges, while his female characters seem confined to a biological realm. (Mellen, 1973). As we can see, in *"Winter Light"* (1963), the main female character, Marta, undergoes suffering and subversion within the main male character, Thomas's world by continuing to love him even when he distances himself. We can see a biblical context, also, where female submissive female characters, are full of complexities and they are their own person. The comparison highlights the complexity of Marta's character in *"Winter Light"* and adds layers of interpretation to her actions and Thomas's response. It intertwines the biblical narrative with Bergman's exploration of love, suffering, and the dynamics between characters in the film (Kaminsky, 1974).

These unmistakably characteristics are a frequent topic in Bergman's filmography, as we explore his female portrays of "tragi-sexual goddesses"²² that unlike the men, whose moral shortcomings are not inherently tied to their physiological nature, Bergman's women face limitations associated with their intrinsic connection to the act of procreation. The representation suggests a distinction, where the men, despite their moral failings, hold the potential for redemption and change. On the contrary, Bergman implies that women, burdened by inherent limitations attributed to their biological roles, may face a more entrenched struggle. This deliberate differentiation serves a crucial purpose, emphasizing the nuanced differences between genders and challenging conventional expectations, contributing to a broader discourse on gender roles.

For instance, in *"The Silence"* (1963), we see two sisters, Ester and Anna, who travel with Anna's young son, Johan, to an unnamed foreign city. The film explores the strained relationship between the sisters, their contrasting personalities, and the challenges they face in a foreign environment. Bergman delves into the theme of silence, both in interpersonal relationships and the broader existential sense. The dichotomy of gender roles is evident in the characters of Ester and Anna. Ester, an intellectual and emotionally complex woman, grapples with illness and seems to seek solace in intellectual pursuits. On the other hand, Anna embodies a more sensual and liberated approach to life. The tension between their contrasting attitudes and lifestyles adds depth to the exploration of female realities. Bergman's treatment of female realities in *"The Silence"* reflects his nuanced approach to portraying women in cinema. The film delves into the complexities of womanhood, exploring themes of desire, intimacy, and societal

²² Bergman tends to, through his lens, create female characters that transcend mere mortal dimensions, becoming symbols of profound existential and sensual experiences. Bergman's exploration of the human psyche, intertwined with the complexities of sexuality, elevates his female protagonists to a mythical plane, where they embody both the tragic and the sensual aspects of existence (Bradshaw, 2018).

expectations. Through the characters of Ester and Anna, Bergman offers a profound examination of the multifaceted nature of female experiences within the context of the film's broader existential themes.

Basically, Bergman's cinematic lens is a product of his perspective, inevitably influenced by his own experiences and worldview (Mellen, 1973). While his portrayal of women may be subject to the potential distortions inherent in any artist's viewpoint, it's essential to acknowledge the distinctiveness of women's existential questioning. Bergman, recognizing the multifaceted nature of their inquiries, goes beyond the metaphysical and acknowledges the biological dimensions unique to women. This departure from a purely metaphysical exploration underscores his recognition that women's existential struggles are intricately woven into their biological and societal contexts, distinct from the experiences of men. Bergman's perspective, though shaped by his male nature, aligns with the belief that understanding women's existential dilemmas requires a nuanced consideration of their distinct biological and existential challenges.

Complementing the thematic exploration, Bergman's distinctive aesthetics in each film further emphasize these complex narratives. "Through a Glass Darkly" utilizes stark black and white cinematography and expressionistic techniques to mirror the characters' psychological turmoil. *Winter Light's* bleak landscapes and minimalist sets visually depict the spiritual barrenness and communication breakdown tormenting the characters. Finally, "The Silence" employs a muted color palette and dreamlike sequences, reflecting the sisters' confrontation with mortality and the fading boundaries between memory and reality. These aesthetic choices elevate Bergman's "God's Silence" trilogy beyond mere storytelling, creating a unique cinematic experience that intertwines visuals and themes to explore the complexities of human existence, particularly the struggles and agency of women within a world grappling with faith, silence, and existential anxieties.

Arguably, Bergman's treatment of women in his films calls for careful examination, avoiding hasty judgment and recognizing the diverse intentions underlying his work (Boyers, 1978). The complexity of Bergman's cinematic narratives demands a nuanced approach that respects the multitude of themes and emotions he explores. It emphasizes the importance of approaching films with a discerning mindset, acknowledging that the interpretation of a film is intertwined with the questions and perspectives brought to it. While a specific angle, such as a feminist lens, may not have been initially explored in-depth, it doesn't diminish the overall appreciation of Bergman's cinematic craftsmanship. This reflection underscores the need for viewers to engage with films openly, considering the intricate layers of emotions and intentions that shape the cinematic experience.

However, the exploration of interpersonal dynamics and existential feminist relationships within Bergman's cinematic realm, as observed by Blackwell, introduces a complex interplay of gender representation. Blackwell's analysis challenges earlier feminist critiques that viewed Bergman's representation of women negatively. Blackwell contends that Bergman's female characters possess their own interior lives independent of male realities, challenging traditional gender roles seen in cinema. While she does not explicitly label Bergman as a feminist, she argues that his films contribute to raising awareness of the oppressive structures of patriarchy, especially in how his works consistently question and discredit patriarchal authority. Despite some criticisms, Blackwell offers a more positive appraisal of Bergman's depiction of women, urging a nuanced understanding of his treatment of female characters within the context of feminist discourse (Wilkinson, 1998).

The ambiguity in Bergman's narratives allows for multiple interpretations, prompting a nuanced discussion about the potential utopian elements embedded in these

films, Also, the complexity of Bergman's films invites ongoing discussions and diverse perspectives, illustrating the rich tapestry of interpretations that can emerge from the interplay of gender dynamics and existential themes within *cinematic narratives* (Quinan, 2016). In his renowned works like "The Silence" (1963), "Persona" (1966), and "Cries and Whispers" (1972), there is a deliberate emphasis on female relationships, often sidelining male roles. In "Persona," for instance, both protagonists are women, and even the primary authority figure, represented by the physician in the film, is portrayed as female. This intentional focus on female characters and relationships characterizes these canonical films, contributing to a distinct gender dynamic in Bergman's cinematic narratives.

Additionally, in the context of deconstructing gender roles, this interplay between film and music, present in "Autumn Sonata", holds significance. The emotional resonance conveyed through the dynamic flow in both film and music serves as a potent tool for challenging and subverting traditional gender norms (TÖRNQVIST, 1995). The visceral and emotional nature of these art forms can contribute to breaking down established stereotypes and expectations associated with gender, allowing for a more nuanced exploration of characters and their narratives. By recognizing the emotional impact of visual and auditory elements, one can appreciate their role in deconstructing conventional gender roles within the cinematic realm.

3. Absurdism and Existential Feminist Relationships

Bergman's films contemplate existentialist motifs like anxiety and the absence of God, along with exploring the experiences of women and domestic life (Sánchez-García, 2020). Ingmar Bergman's cinematic oeuvre and Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist philosophy share intriguing intersections, especially concerning themes of existentialism, gender, and the human condition. Bergman, known for his profound

exploration of existential concerns in films like "The Seventh Seal" and "Persona," delves into the complexities of existence, faith, and the search for meaning. Similarly, Simone de Beauvoir, a prominent existentialist philosopher, examined the existential struggles of individuals, particularly women, in a male-dominated society. Both Bergman and Beauvoir engage with the idea of authenticity and the quest for selfhood. Bergman's characters often grapple with questions of identity and the authenticity of their existence, mirroring existentialist concerns. Beauvoir's groundbreaking work, "The Second Sex," challenges traditional gender roles and delves into the existential aspects of women's lives, emphasizing the importance of women's self-determination.

Bergman's connection with Beauvoir's feminist existentialism is not explicitly outlined in the provided abstracts. However, the abstracts do acknowledge Existentialism's impact on various cultural domains, including literature and cinema [1]. Additionally, there is a recognition of the intersection between phenomenology and feminism, emphasizing the need for existentialism and phenomenology to acknowledge the centrality of feminist theory in their philosophical frameworks [2]. While these abstracts offer insights into the broader influence of Existentialism, they do not delve into the specific relationship between Bergman and Beauvoir's feminist existentialism. Further investigation would be necessary to explore this particular connection (Russo, 2020).

As we can see, in the cinematic tapestry of "*Persona*", Bergman crafts an intricate exploration of feminist existentialism through the dynamic interplay between Alma and Elisabet. The film's narrative complexity serves as a canvas for delving into the challenges women face in defining their identity within societal constructs (Michaels, 2000). The blurring of boundaries between nurse and patient becomes a metaphorical journey

through Beauvoir's philosophy, where the quest for authenticity and self-discovery unfolds against a backdrop of existential questioning.

Other films like *"Cries and Whispers"* further immerses viewers in the profound and intimate worlds of its female protagonists, navigating the complexities of love, death, and sisterhood. Bergman's lens captures the existential angst of the sisters, providing a nuanced portrayal of their inner lives. The film becomes a poignant exploration of Beauvoir's feminist insights, depicting the struggles women endure in reconciling societal expectations with their individual quests for authenticity (Mellen, 1973). Through the lens of mortality, *"Cries and Whispers"* invites contemplation on the existential dilemmas that shape the female experience within the confines of familial bonds. Additionally, the film *"Autumn Sonata"*, portrays the tension between societal expectations and individual aspirations, providing a canvas for the examination of existential themes through the female gaze (TÖRNQVIST, 1995). The emotional intricacies of *"Autumn Sonata"* echo Beauvoir's insights into the challenges women face in negotiating their identities within the context of motherhood and societal roles. Bergman's cinematic narrative becomes a contemplative space where the duality of Bergman and Beauvoir's philosophies converges, offering viewers a profound exploration of the female experience within the existential framework.

"While 'Autumn Sonata' doesn't explicitly confront the absurdity of life head-on, it subtly weaves in existentialist questions through the lens of a dysfunctional family. Charlotte's relentless pursuit of artistic achievement, ultimately leading to a hollow personal life, embodies the absurdity of sacrificing authenticity for societal expectations. The silence of God offers no solace in the face of Eva's illness and the characters' emotional turmoil, highlighting the pointlessness of suffering in an indifferent universe. Furthermore, the film resonates with Beauvoir's existentialist feminism. Charlotte's

struggles to reconcile her career success with her role as a mother reflect the challenges women face in defying predefined societal roles. The film's focus on intimate dialogue and raw emotions underscores the characters' grappling for meaning and connection, ultimately revealing the absurdity of communication breakdowns within a family unit."

Moreover, both Bergman and Beauvoir engage with the inherent absurdity of human existence. As demonstrated, Bergman's cinematic narratives, informed by his male perspective, intricately interweave with feminist existentialism. His films often portray characters grappling with the unexplainable and absurd facets of life, but through the lens of the female experience, thus resonating with existentialist themes. Similarly, Beauvoir, within her existentialist philosophy, acknowledges the inherent absurdity of the human condition. She underscores the individual's responsibility to forge meaning in a seemingly indifferent world. Additionally, Beauvoir characterizes women as a social construct, emphasizing that the male perspective often distorts the reality of the female experience, neglecting its multifaceted dimensions. This convergence highlights the shared exploration of existentialist ideas in the works of both Bergman and Beauvoir, although from distinct perspectives.

it is crucial to acknowledge the inherent sensitivity of women in this existential exploration. Bergman's recognition of this natural sensitivity becomes pivotal in crafting strong female characters capable of delving into their inner worlds with introspection. By understanding and valuing the innate sensitivity of women, both Bergman and Beauvoir contribute to the creation of characters who navigate the complexities of existence, forging their own paths amidst the absurdity of life. This emphasis on recognizing and embracing the unique qualities of women adds depth to the characters, enabling them to confront existential dilemmas with authenticity and resilience.

Additionally, Beauvoir's feminist existentialism posits that women, although shaped by societal constructs, fundamentally differ from men. In her perspective, she emphasizes the distinct individuality of women and men, stating that when two separate beings, each existing in different circumstances, come together in freedom, they embark on an adventurous journey marked by both risk and promise. This recognition of the unique experiences and identities of women, apart from societal expectations, aligns with Bergman's exploration of female subjectivity in his films. Both Bergman and Beauvoir contribute to the narrative of women as individuals with their own agency, navigating existential challenges in a world that often imposes predefined roles.

According to Beauvoir, men and women are different but society prefabricates their specific roles, cutting off the essential freedom of humans and the existentialist philosophy. She mentions:

"Two separate beings, in different circumstances, face to face in freedom and seeking justification of their existence through one another, will always live an adventure full of risk and promise." (Beauvoir, 1956) (p. 248)"

Therefore, the essential understanding of women introspection, is to understand that when two individuals, each with their own unique circumstances and perspectives, come together in a relationship characterized by freedom and the search for meaning, they embark on a shared journey filled with both challenges and opportunities. The phrase "an adventure full of risk and promise" implies that such a relationship involves uncertainty and potential, emphasizing the dynamic and evolving nature of human connections. Overall, Beauvoir is highlighting the complex and transformative nature of relationships between individuals, particularly in the context of existential freedom and the quest for self-justification. Beauvoir's exploration of expected femininity becomes a crucial lens

through which to analyze Bergman's perspective on the female experience. In challenging societal norms, both thinkers highlight the absurdity inherent in confining women to predefined roles based on outdated and restrictive expectations.

“To be feminine is to show oneself as weak, futile, passive, and docile. The girl is supposed not only to primp and dress herself up but also to repress her spontaneity and substitute for it the grace and charm she has been taught by her elder sisters. Any self-assertion will take away from her femininity and her seductiveness.” (Beauvoir, 1956)

This mirrors the societal constructs that Bergman's films often critique. The cinematic narratives become a mirror reflecting the absurdity of imposing uniform expectations on diverse, inherently complex individuals, we can apply the concept of the absurd, which involves recognizing the inherent absurdity in the societal expectations and stereotypes imposed on women. The absurdity arises from the contradiction between the complexity of human nature and the oversimplified, rigid roles assigned to women. It questions the notion that femininity is synonymous with weakness, passivity, and docility. The absurdity lies in the absurd expectations imposed on women to conform to a narrow and unrealistic standard, suppressing their authentic selves.

The intersection of Bergman's cinematic narratives and Beauvoir's existentialist philosophy weaves a compelling narrative that delves into the intricacies of authenticity, gender dynamics, and the inherent absurdity of existence. This dialogue between the realms of existentialism and cinematic expression provides a distinct perspective to scrutinize the profound inquiries that shape human existence. This convergence of Bergman's cinematic artistry and Beauvoir's existentialist philosophy provides a nuanced exploration of authenticity, gender dynamics, and the absurdity ingrained in societal

expectations. Through their collaborative dialogue, they invite us to question and transcend the limitations imposed by predefined gender roles, fostering a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of human identity.



CHAPTER VI: INNOVATING NARRATIVES: CRAFTING AN ORIGINAL STORY

In this chapter, the focus revolves around the intricate process of crafting an original story inspired by the profound themes found in Bergman's cinematic legacy. By exploring the deliberate incorporation of philosophical elements, particularly the existential and absurd, the narrative pays homage to Bergman's distinctive motifs. A notable emphasis is placed on the role of the female gaze in shaping the story, adding a contemporary perspective to Bergman's existential and absurd exploration.

This creative exploration, presented as the short film screenplay "Reflections" serves as a distinctive methodology within the thesis. Guiding the development of a narrative that draws inspiration from Bergman's thematic elements, the methodology involves a step-by-step process of conceptualizing a story that not only honors Bergman's existential and absurd motifs but also injects a fresh and contemporary viewpoint. The deliberate inclusion of these elements, coupled with a dedicated focus on the female gaze within the narrative, results in a unique and nuanced exploration of Bergman's enduring influence on storytelling. (see Appendix),

Furthermore, it's important to note that the developed story in "Reflections" is rooted in the in-depth analysis of key Bergman films, including "Persona," "Autumn Sonata," "Through a Glass Darkly," "Cries and Whispers," "Winter Light," and "The Silence." These cinematic gems serve as a wellspring of inspiration, guiding the narrative crafting process in "Reflections" and allowing for a thoughtful integration of Bergman's profound cinematic legacy into a new and original storytelling venture.

1. From Theory to Narrative: Creating a story

"Reflections" draws inspiration from the rich cinematic legacy of Ingmar Bergman. Like Bergman's films, the screenplay grapples with existential questions about life, purpose, and mortality. Delmira's fragmented reflections in the mysterious house mirror Bergman's use of mirrors as symbolic tools to explore characters' inner selves. Each reflection, representing a facet of Delmira's personality and past choices, echoes Bergman's focus on psychological complexity and the struggle to confront repressed desires. Furthermore, the film's exploration of silence as a defense mechanism and the breakdown Delmira experiences connect to the raw emotional intensity characteristic of Bergman's work. Through these thematic and stylistic connections, "Reflections" pays homage to Bergman while crafting a story of self-discovery and the transformative power of introspection.

Logline:

When Delmira, a woman seeking solace, stumbles upon an abandoned house when she wakes up puzzled in some strange forests, she discovers a surreal world, a house with very peculiar mirrors that reflects different aspects of herself. As she interacts with these alternate versions, she embarks on a journey of self-discovery, questioning her life's purpose and unraveling the mysteries within.

Synopsis:

Delmira, dealing with a recent loss and seeking solitude, stumbles upon a seemingly deserted house when she suddenly wakes up in an unknown forest. Intrigued, she enters and finds in this house various rooms with a very peculiar object in all of the rooms, an old, ornate mirror in a dimly lit room. To her surprise, the mirror reflects not

just her physical appearance but various versions of herself, each representing different facets of her personality and life choices.

Characters:

The fragmented reflections Delmira encounters in "Reflections" are not merely echoes of her past; they represent a powerful exploration of existential themes, her internal struggles, and the limitations placed upon her by societal expectations. Each reflection, through the lens of Bergman's influence, existentialist philosophy, and the concept of the Female Gaze, unveils a facet of Delmira's complex identity and the anxieties she grapples with.

The Carefree Delmira:

The Carefree Delmira embodies a yearning for a simpler time, a sentiment that resonates with characters in Bergman's films like "Fanny and Alexander" who seek solace in childhood memories. However, this reflection also highlights the societal pressures placed on women to maintain a youthful appearance and carefree demeanor. Through the Female Gaze, we can see how Delmira's present anxieties might stem from a perceived loss of that carefree persona, a societal expectation that can be limiting and contribute to feelings of self-doubt. Existential questions about purpose and the passage of time are further emphasized by Delmira's inability to recapture this carefree state.

The Hopeful Delmira:

The Hopeful Delmira personifies the dreams Delmira once held close, mirroring the characters in Bergman's "Persona" and "Through a Glass Darkly" who grapple with the fragility of hope. This reflection serves as a stark reminder of the dreams that may have faded or been abandoned along the way. The Female Gaze can be

applied here to explore how societal expectations or external pressures might have influenced Delmira's choices, leading to the disillusionment and "dead dreams" this reflection embodies. The existential struggle to find meaning is further accentuated by the unfulfilled aspirations this Delmira represents.

The Vulnerable Delmira:

The Vulnerable Delmira embodies Delmira's suppressed emotions, a theme central to Bergman's films like "Winter Light" and "The Silence" where characters struggle with emotional repression. This reflection's encouragement to confront grief and loneliness highlights the societal expectation for women to suppress their emotions and maintain a stoic facade. The Female Gaze in this scene can be used to analyze how societal pressures might have conditioned Delmira to silence her vulnerabilities, leading to the emotional turmoil this reflection represents. The existential question of authenticity and the search for connection are further emphasized by Delmira's feelings of isolation.

The Adventurous Delmira:

The Adventurous Delmira urges Delmira to explore and seize new opportunities, mirroring the rebellious female characters who challenge societal norms in some of Bergman's films. This reflection can also be seen as a manifestation of the desires and ambitions Delmira might have suppressed due to societal expectations placed on women. The Female Gaze here allows us to explore how societal constraints might have limited Delmira's sense of agency and adventurous spirit. The existential question of freedom and the desire to break free from predetermined paths are further highlighted by this Delmira's adventurous spirit.

As Delmira, interacts with each reflection, she begins to question her choices, her purpose, and the path her life has taken. The reflections engage in conversations, offering insights and posing thought-provoking questions. Ultimately, Delmira realizes that her journey is about embracing the complexity of her identity and finding a balance between different aspects of herself. The film concludes with Delmira leaving the house, carrying newfound clarity and a sense of purpose. "Reflections" is a contemplative short film that explores the multifaceted nature of personal identity, self-discovery, and the transformative power of introspection.

2. Writing a story: "Reflections"

"Reflections" is a screenplay deeply inspired by the cinematic legacy of Ingmar Bergman. Like many of Bergman's masterpieces, the story grapples with profound existential questions about life, purpose, and the fleeting nature of existence. This thematic connection is evident from the very beginning, as the protagonist, Delmira, experiences a disoriented awakening, mirroring the dream-like quality and fragmented memories that plague characters in films like "Persona" and "Wild Strawberries." Both these films, and "Reflections," portray individuals grappling with existential anxieties and the elusiveness of meaning in a seemingly indifferent universe.

The screenplay's exploration of identity is further enriched by its connection to Bergman's use of mirrors as symbolic tools. In "Reflections," Delmira's fragmented reflections in the mysterious house serve as a powerful metaphor for her own fractured psyche. Each reflection represents a different facet of her personality and the choices she has made along the way. This echoes Bergman's focus on psychological complexity, seen in films like "Persona," where characters confront repressed desires and grapple with their inner selves reflected back at them.

Beyond the thematic connections, "Reflections" also pays homage to Bergman through its stylistic choices. The story delves into the raw emotional intensity that characterizes many of Bergman's works. Delmira's breakdown and her use of silence as a defense mechanism resonate with the emotionally repressed characters in films like "Winter Light" and "The Silence." These moments of emotional vulnerability and the struggle to confront inner demons are hallmarks of Bergman's style, and "Reflections" skillfully integrates them into its narrative.

The exploration of self through fragmented reflections takes center stage in several key scenes. The "First Reflection" introduces the Adventurous Delmira, embodying Delmira's suppressed desires. This moment resonates with the themes explored in Bergman's films like "Wild Strawberries" and "Scenes from a Marriage," where characters confront the choices they've made and the paths not taken. Similarly, the Carefree Delmira evokes a yearning for a simpler time, a sentiment shared by characters in "Fanny and Alexander" who seek solace in childhood memories. Delmira's preference for silence in this scene also reflects the emotionally withdrawn characters Bergman often portrays.

As the story progresses, the reflections become more complex. The Hopeful Delmira represents Delmira's fading optimism, a theme prevalent in films like "Cries and Whispers" and "Through a Glass Darkly," where characters grapple with the fragility of hope and the ever-present shadow of mortality. The "Confronting Mortality" scene further strengthens this connection, as Delmira's fear of nothingness and questioning of purpose mirror the existential anxieties Bergman explores in films like "The Seventh Seal" and "Hour of the Wolf."

The story's climax, where Delmira confronts the multiplicity of her selves, is a powerful tribute to Bergman's exploration of fragmented identity in "Persona." The various reflections represent the different facets of Delmira's personality, forcing her to confront the complexities of her being. This intense moment, mirroring the emotional breakdowns experienced by characters in "Cries and Whispers" and "Persona," culminates in Delmira's symbolic act of smearing blood on the veil. This gesture signifies her willingness to face her inner turmoil, a powerful expression of emotional catharsis reminiscent of the raw emotions displayed in Bergman's films.

Overall, "Reflections" is not simply a film inspired by Bergman; it is a cinematic homage that pays respect to his thematic depth, psychological exploration, and masterful use of symbolism. By weaving together existential themes, the exploration of fragmented identity, and evocative visuals, "Reflections" stands as a testament to the enduring influence of Ingmar Bergman and his timeless cinematic legacy. (see Appendix)

3. Scene Breakdown and Bergman Connections: "Reflections"

This section delves deeper into the screenplay, "Reflections," included in Appendix. We will explore a scene-by-scene breakdown, analyzing how each scene contributes to the overall narrative and reflects the influence of Bergman's cinematic themes. This breakdown will allow for a closer examination of how philosophical elements, the female gaze, and inspiration from Bergman's films are woven into the narrative tapestry.

Scene 1: "Disoriented Awakening,"

The opening scene of "Reflections," establishes a clear connection to Bergman's cinematic universe. The scene's disorientation and dream-like quality mirror the fragmented realities often explored in Bergman's films, particularly in "Persona"

and "Wild Strawberries." This shared element sets the stage for a narrative that delves into Delmira's inner world, potentially grappling with repressed memories, existential anxieties, or a blurring of the lines between reality and perception, themes Bergman masterfully explored in his works.

Scene 2: The First Reflection - Adventurous Delmira

This scene establishes a two-pronged connection to Bergman's work. Firstly, the presence of a mirror directly references Bergman's recurring motif. Similar to how mirrors in "Persona" reflected characters' inner selves and mortality, here, the mirror could serve as a gateway to Delmira's subconscious, revealing a hidden aspect of her being. Secondly, the character of Adventurous Delmira herself embodies a connection. Her presence as a representation of Delmira's suppressed desires mirrors Bergman's exploration of such themes in films like "Wild Strawberries" and "Scenes from a Marriage," where characters confront long-held, unspoken yearnings.

Scene 3: The Carefree Delmira

This scene weaves a connection to Bergman through nostalgia and emotional repression. Delmira's yearning for a carefree past resonates with characters in "Cries and Whispers" who find refuge in the innocence of some past memories. This shared theme highlights the human desire to escape present difficulties by seeking solace in a seemingly simpler time. Additionally, Delmira's preference for silence mirrors the emotionally repressed characters Bergman often portrays in films like "Winter Light" and "The Silence." This connection suggests Delmira might be utilizing silence as a defense mechanism, potentially against confronting painful realities or expressing unspoken emotions.

Scene 4: The Hopeful Delmira

This scene deepens the film's connection to Bergman's existential preoccupations. The Hopeful Delmira embodies Delmira's fading optimism, mirroring characters in "The Seventh Seal" and "Through a Glass Darkly" who grapple with the impermanence of hope and dreams. This shared theme underscores the human struggle to maintain a sense of purpose and meaning in the face of life's uncertainties. Furthermore, Delmira's fear of nothingness and her questioning of purpose resonate deeply with Bergman's exploration of existential anxieties in films like "The Seventh Seal" and "Hour of the Wolf." Here, "Reflections" delves into the human condition, mirroring the anxieties characters face as they confront their own mortality and the vast unknowns that lie beyond.

Scene 5: Confronting the Fragments

This scene intensifies the film's dialogue with Bergman's work. The presence of multiple reflections directly references "Persona," where the film explored the fractured nature of identity. Here, the fragmented reflections could represent the various facets of Delmira's being, hinting at a complex inner world. Furthermore, Delmira's emotional outburst and questioning of self-mirror the intense emotional journeys undertaken by characters in "Cries and Whispers" and "Persona." This shared element suggests a potential turning point in Delmira's narrative, a moment of raw vulnerability as she grapples with her fragmented identity. Finally, the act of smearing blood on the veil adds another layer of connection. This symbolic action of confronting pain resonates with the raw emotions Bergman often portrayed in his films. The veil, potentially representing a barrier between Delmira

and her true self, is stained, signifying a willingness to confront her inner turmoil and potentially break free from emotional repression.

Overall connections to Bergman

"Reflections" stands as a compelling tribute to the cinematic legacy of Ingmar Bergman. The film delves into the profound existential themes that permeate Bergman's work, grappling with questions of mortality, the purpose of life, and the struggle for meaning. This focus on the human condition echoes the anxieties faced by characters in films like "Winter Light" and "The Seventh Seal." Furthermore, "Reflections" mirrors Bergman's signature style of psychological exploration. By utilizing reflections as a visual metaphor for the protagonist's inner conflicts, the film delves deep into Delmira's psyche, reminiscent of Bergman's introspective approach seen in "Persona" and "Cries and Whispers."

Beyond thematic echoes, "Reflections" pays homage to Bergman's cinematic techniques. The film incorporates symbolic elements like mirrors, the veil, and the forest, reminiscent of Bergman's use of symbolic imagery in works like "Through a Glass Darkly." Notably, "Reflections" adds a contemporary layer by emphasizing the female gaze. This fresh perspective broadens the exploration of existential themes, offering a unique lens through which to view the anxieties and desires traditionally unseen in narratives. Ultimately, "Reflections" transcends mere inspiration, weaving a tapestry of connections that honors Bergman's legacy while injecting a contemporary voice.

CONCLUSION

This comprehensive inquiry has explored how existential and absurdist themes intertwine with the female gaze within the cinematic universe of Ingmar Bergman. Employing a qualitative analysis, we have delved into Bergman's films, revealing how these philosophical concepts illuminate the complexities of the female experience. By examining how female characters navigate existential anxieties and confront the absurdity of their situations, the thesis sheds light on how Bergman utilizes the female gaze to portray their unique struggles and perspectives. This exploration not only offers a deeper understanding of Bergman's work but also contributes to the ongoing dialogue on the complexities of female subjectivity within film. Furthermore, the creation of the original story "Reflections" served as a creative companion piece, offering a fresh lens through which to consider these themes. By delving into Bergman's work and crafting a complementary narrative, this exploration has enriched our understanding of the female experience and the enduring power of philosophical inquiry in film.

Through this exploration of Ingmar Bergman's filmography, we have witnessed how existential themes, particularly Sartrean notions of radical freedom and responsibility, grapple with the absurdities of life as explored by Camus. This framework illuminates the complexities of the female experience in Bergman's films, where characters confront these anxieties and societal constraints. Furthermore, Simone de Beauvoir's feminist existentialism sheds light on how female characters assert agency and challenge these norms. By delving into the female gaze, both within Bergman's work and the original narrative of "Reflections," this thesis offers a potent instrument for understanding female subjectivity and its interplay with existential themes in film. "Reflections," conceived as an integral component of this thesis, not only synthesizes philosophical threads but also showcases the adaptability and enduring relevance of

Bergman's themes in contemporary storytelling. Through this original story, narrative power becomes manifest, bridging the chasm between philosophy and creative expression. "Reflections" stands as a testament to Bergman's cinematic vision, demonstrating its profound impact on the ongoing dialogue between philosophy and narrative.

In essence, this comprehensive exploration significantly deepens understanding of Bergman's artistic evolution, nuanced engagement with philosophical concepts, and the enduring significance of the female gaze. As we traverse Bergman's cinematic oeuvre and the newly forged path of "Reflections," we encounter a rich tapestry of existential reflection, absurd contemplation, and feminist assertion. This exploration underscores the timeless resonance of Bergman's cinematic and philosophical contributions, leaving an indelible imprint on the discourse surrounding the convergence of philosophy and narrative in cinema.

In the grand tapestry of this extensive dissertation, we deciphered the intricacies of existentialism, absurdism, and feminist thought, illuminating their dynamic interplay within cinema. From Sartrean existentialism to Camus' reflections on the absurd, and Beauvoir's feminist philosophy, each chapter unfolded a philosophical odyssey. The cinematic voyage began with an examination of the philosophical underpinnings in film, unraveling the dance between existentialism, absurdism, and the feminist perspective. Bergman's exploration of these themes, especially his portrayal of female characters, added nuanced layers, challenging gender norms on screen. The chapters on the female gaze within Bergman's filmography revealed complexities of female subjectivity, authenticity, and societal expectations. The exploration of interpersonal dynamics within existential feminist relationships shed light on Bergman's unique contribution to challenging gender norms on screen.

The comparative study across cinematic narratives provided insights into the enduring relevance of philosophical concepts in storytelling. This comparative lens offered perspectives on universal themes, emphasizing the timeless nature of existential and absurd themes in cinematic expression. The dissertation reached its pinnacle with an innovative chapter crafting an original story, "Reflections." This creative endeavor demonstrated the adaptability of Bergman's thematic elements in contemporary storytelling, illustrating the enduring legacy of philosophical concepts in shaping narrative structures.

The selection of specific films within Bergman's extensive filmography for a comparative study stems from a deliberate choice to dissect the nuanced interplay of existentialism, absurdism, and the female gaze. Each chosen film is a lens into Bergman's exploration of these philosophical themes and their intersection with the female perspective. The films selected offer a comprehensive view of Bergman's evolving cinematic style and thematic concerns.

Persona (1966): Often considered a seminal work, "Persona" serves as a starting point for understanding Bergman's exploration of identity, existential crises, and the blurred boundaries between self and other. The film provides a foundation for dissecting the complexities of existentialism and the female gaze in Bergman's oeuvre.

Autumn Sonata (1978): This film delves into familial relationships and the existential complexities of motherhood. By examining the portrayal of women in intimate familial settings, the study can unravel Bergman's treatment of female subjectivity and the authentic portrayal of women's experiences.

Cries and Whispers (1972): Known for its intense exploration of existential suffering, mortality, and the search for meaning, this film offers insights into how Bergman conveys the human condition. The study can explore how the female characters in this film navigate existential crises and contribute to the overarching themes.

Winter Light (1963): This film can be crucial for understanding Bergman's engagement with existentialism in the context of faith and spirituality. Examining how female characters grapple with existential questions within a religious framework adds depth to the exploration.

Through a Glass Darkly (1961): By focusing on themes of mental illness and the subjective nature of reality, this film provides an avenue to explore Bergman's treatment of female characters facing existential challenges. The study can delve into the portrayal of female subjectivity in the context of mental health.

The Silence (1963): This film, known for its exploration of isolation and breakdowns in communication, can be instrumental in unraveling Bergman's treatment of the female gaze in situations of existential alienation. Examining how female characters navigate a world of silence adds a unique dimension to the study.

These films collectively offered a spectrum of Bergman's thematic concerns throughout the analysis of female subjectivities, philosophy in film, gender expectations and feminist existentialism intertwined in absurdism; ranging from personal identity and familial relationships to existential crises and societal breakdowns.

In conclusion, this thesis embarked on a profound exploration of Ingmar Bergman's cinematic legacy, navigating existentialism, absurdism, and the powerful lens

of the female gaze. Bergman's films, can be known as “cities of the mind”, where the landscapes wove existential themes into storytelling, probing the human psyche and confronting existential dilemmas. The juxtaposition of existentialism and absurdism in Bergman's narratives presented a unique reading, offering a perspective distinct from traditional interpretations. The exploration of the female gaze added layers to the understanding of existential and absurd themes, enriching our comprehension of his artistic vision. The resonance with feminist existentialism showcased the transformative potential of philosophy in shaping cinematic narratives. As we conclude this exploration, we recognize the lasting legacy of Ingmar Bergman and the enduring relevance of philosophical discourse in shaping cinematic narratives that resonate with audiences and filmmakers alike.

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APPENDIX



"Reflections"

by

Carla Gabriela Jines Muñoz

1. EXT. THICK WOODS - DAY

1

Delmira opens her eyes, greeted by the dappling sunlight filtering through the towering trees. The woods seem to cradle her in. She sits up, bewildered, wearing a pristine white dress and a delicate lace veil fluttered gently in the breeze (Her clothes hint that she was at church in the Sunday mass, but doesn't know how she end up in this place).

The delicate veil on her head dances in the gentle breeze, casting fleeting shadows on her puzzled expression.

The tall trees like ancient Greek columns, make rumbling sounds with the wind hitting the leaves. Delmira's confusion is palpable as she examines her surroundings. The forest floor is adorned with a carpet of fallen leaves, a mosaic of gold, amber and earth.

The distant sounds of soft murmurs of the wind, whispering mystifying music, adds up to Delmira's sentiment.

Her eyes wide open, an expression of awe and confusion stares at the camera for a long time.

CLOSE UP on Delmira's face reveals the intricate details of her character.

CUT TO her lips. Her mouth opens like she wants to talk but no sound comes out of her.

CUT TO her eye, it closes and opens rapidly and it shy away from the camera.

CUT TO her hair, showing delicate drops of water pouring on her.

CUT TO Delmira rising to her feet, the white dress dancing gracefully around her. She moves quickly as it started to rain. She disappears from the frame.

SUBTITLES. Reflections
FADE OUT

Delmira found herself in an abandoned house, in the middle of unknown woods. After the rain Delmira cautiously enters the dimly lit room, scanning her surroundings. Dust particles dance in the muted light filtering through the cracked windows.

DELMIRA

(whispering to herself)

I must be losing my mind

She scans the whole room, her hands on her arms to denote caution and desperation. Her gaze falls upon an ornate MIRROR, standing mysteriously in the corner.

DELMIRA (CONT'D)

(curious)

A mirror?

It looks like this mirror has prevailed the test of time. Everything in this houses seems to be more than 100 years old, covered in dust and mold, but this mirror...

What am I saying, this is so stupid, what is this place, I must have fallen somewhere in the...

(with her mouth open and uncertainty)

She approaches the mirror, glancing at her own reflection. Her eyes met those in the mirror but there is an eerie feeling about her own reflection.

DELMIRA (CONT'D)

(to her reflection)

Who are you?

I can't recognize you

You are a liar. You are not me

What do you want from me?

CLOSE UP to her eyes in the mirror

REFLECTION (just her eyes) - ADVENTUROUS DELMIRA

(intriguingly)

You know who I am

You think you killed me a long time ago, but here
I am, waiting for you

OPEN TO Reflection- Adventurous Delmira who's wearing
a short black dress.

REFLECTION - ADVENTUROUS DELMIRA

(whimsically)

Why do you hate me? We used to have fun together.

DELMIRA (CONT'D)

I don't trust you anymore. You are just a
reflection of someone that never existed.

REFLECTION - ADVENTUROUS DELMIRA

Oh, I exist. You are just a coward. You can't
accept your own voice; you prefer to be silent
than to be alone.

DELMIRA

You are a selfish creature. No one has more
thirst for blood and for ferocious sexuality than
the creatures who inhabit cold mirrors.

REFLECTION - ADVENTUROUS DELMIRA

(calmly)

Maybe it's my own fault. I wanted so many things
and perhaps, when we want everything we are
dangerously close to wanting nothing, to be a
void.

DELMIRA

(clearly upset)

I know what I want, I want peace of mind. To
disconnect myself from my own voice. I can't
sleep if you are haunting me in the depths of my
mind!

Adventurous Delmira wants to say something else but Delmira storms out of the room. Leaving her veil behind on top of the mirror, trying to cover that reflection who haunts her mind.

FADE OUT.

3. EXT. ABANDONED HOUSE -COURTYARD - DAY

3

Delmira steps out into the courtyard, clouds dissipated and the sun is casting long shadows. Delmira contemplates the revelations from the mirror, her mind a whirlwind of thoughts.

DELMIRA

(still upset)

I don't understand why I am here, why all of this thoughts are coming to my mind. They were hidden, they were dead.

Delmira keeps walking through the courtyard where she glances at a very shallow pond of water that collected rain from earlier that day.

She steps onto it and stares at another strange reflection, it was all of her features but her smile was different. The reflection is wearing a crown of flowers.

CUT TO Delmira also wearing that crown of flowers. She doesn't realize this change but she stares firmly at her reflection that echoes some words. She approaches the reflections and sits near to the pond of water.

REFLECTION - CAREFREE DELMIRA

Melancholia is, I believe, a wonderful curse. It helps you to cling to a memory that would never be true.

DELMIRA

(teary-eyed)

I have no good memories, all of the happy memories are an illusion. I was never truly happy. I was just oblivious to the reality.

REFLECTION - CAREFREE DELMIRA

(calmly)

It's so easy to just be quiet, stay serene on the outside to avoid confrontations, to avoid your own true feelings.

DELMIRA

(with tears in her eyes)

It's better to be silent. Nobody can understand what I'm feeling and if they try to do it, they just get bored and leave.

REFLECTION - CAREFREE DELMIRA

(calmly)

When you shut your eyes all the world drops dead; you lift your eyes and all is born again. You just have to see what is in front of you.

DELMIRA

(with tears in her eyes)

I want what I was, I see it in you. Life is just too long, too exhausting; everyone expects me to be something, but I don't know what is that something.

I pray to God but the sky is always empty, I have no answer, words are empty. I know there's nothing on the other side. Nothing awaits for me.

Delmira stands up and starts walking in circles in the courtyard, gently caressing the flowers.

DELMIRA (CONT'D)

(to herself)

I don't want to know; I don't want to know.

I want to love people that never existed.

I want to live in my dreams. Dreams full of wonderful things, full of happiness.

But I know; I know that the world exists outside my head, that the world is cruel with the ones that love.

I know that there's nothing for me in this life, that's why I wanted to end it but something stopped me. A vague thought of guilt, guilt for people that are strangers to me. I don't recognize them anymore.

Who are they?

While Delmira is walking around the courtyard, puts her hands on her face and takes her flower crown off.

She feels tired and goes inside the house to search for a bed or some place to rest.

ZADE OUT.

4. INT. ABANDONED HOUSE -BEDROOM - DAY

4

Delmira cautiously enters a dilapidated bedroom within the abandoned house. Dust dances in the silvers of the dim light from the sun that managed to penetrate the wooden plans that covered the window. The air seems to carry the scent of forgotten memories, memories that seem strange to Delmira.

The room is sparsely furnished, dominated by a creaky bed adorned with white sheets, where Delmira's white dress seems to harmonize with the space.

A hand mirror rests on the white pillow, its ornate is similar from the one in at the entrance of the house. In this reflection Delmira sees herself with a different shine in her eyes. Her eyes seem youthful and unaware.

Delmira sits on the bed and stares into the hand mirror. She starts to smile and caresses her reflection, her fingers delicately tracing the contours of her features.

DELMIRA

(calmly)

Who am I?

She frowns her forehead but keeps smiling

Who am I?

CLOSE UP to her reflection only to her mouth

REFLECTION - HOPEFUL DELMIRA

(smiling)

You exist. You live. Your memory is a place for a safe mind, you can't replace my memories.

CUT TO Delmira on the bed looking at her reflection on the hand mirror.

DELMIRA (CONT'D)

(confused)

I only contemplate suicide now, I want to disappear and find myself in the sea. How do I disappear in front of a mirror?

REFLECTION - HOPEFUL DELMIRA

(whispering)

If you contemplate the beginning, you already had contemplated the end. Your dreams cannot longer exist if you disappear into nothingness. You can't make MY dreams disappear. I deserve to have them. Why are you pushing me?

DELMIRA

(with tears in her eyes)

I'm not you anymore. I just remember my childhood but I'm already old. Flowers die in my hands; my heart doesn't beat anymore. I died a long time

ago. You died a long time ago. You are just a stranger to me.

REFLECTION - HOPEFUL DELMIRA

(upset)

You are me! You have always been me! You want a lot of things. You can't stop dreaming about them. I love to be with me and my dreams. Don't take that away from me!

Delmira clearly upset by those words throws the mirror to a wall and it breaks. Her hands are shaky and gets up to look for something.

She approaches a night stand and takes a piece of a paper and a pen. Delmira sits down on the floor and starts writing down all of her thoughts.

DELMIRA

(thinking)

Who am I? Who am I? Who are these people that claim to be me? They don't know me; they don't understand that I am not longer them.

I died a long time ago, I am alive but I don't know who she is anymore. The people around me don't recognize me anymore. They don't know me; they don't know what happened to me.

I wanted a lot of things but I can't find the purpose of all of it anymore. It's disgusting for me. I don't know if my hands or my eyes are mine anymore. Whose eyes are these that tearing, whose hands are these that write all of this nonsense.

I want to know if there is a light at the end, I want to know, I don't want to wait or guess. I don't want to be disappointed.

As Delmira was writing she cuts her finger with the paper, as she bleeds, she stands up and close the door of the bedroom. Standing in front of the door she puts her forehead on the door and hits the door strongly while crying.

CUT TO BLACK

Delmira is out in the woods, she is wearing her white dress and the delicate veil covers her head. She is standing in front of a tall tree.

She stares at the tree; her hands are on the bark of the tree. Feeling its rough surface.

She listens to a familiar whisper but doesn't turn around.

CUT TO Adventurous Delmira, she is in the forest as well wearing the same black dress. She is staring at Delmira and smiles.

ADVENTUROUS DELMIRA

(gently)

Delmira?

Delmira ignores her.

ADVENTUROUS DELMIRA

(gently)

Delmira

Delmira, you can't ignore me. You are part of me.

DELMIRA

(still facing the tree)

You ARE part of me. You are nothing.

ADVENTUROUS DELMIRA

(smiling)

You are nothing without me. Look at you now. You can't even stand your own thoughts, your own dreams?

Who are you? You are silent and distant. Do you really think that the people around you care about you?

They don't even know you. You don't show them who you really are.

DELMIRA (CONT'D)

(closing her eyes)

I prefer to be silent than be lonely, I can't be alone, I go crazy if I'm alone. If I stay alone I start to remember that I died a long time ago, even before you existed. You are not me; you don't know what I want.

CUT TO other of Delmira's reflections, now outside in the woods with them. It's Hopeful Delmira, still wearing her crown of flowers.

Delmira slowly turns around and sees a different version that didn't see before. She is apparently naked, we can only see her shoulder, she is smiling.

All of Delmira's reflections start talking and Delmira just stares back and forth at them.

VULNERABLE DELMIRA (naked)

(smiling)

You can't let yourself go. You are part of me. All of us are a part of yourself.

ADVENTOROUS DELMIRA

(urgently)

You are blind, you can't longer see the magic of words and the blood that runs through your veins.

HOPEFUL DELMIRA

(calmly)

You are tired of waiting for a dream.

VULNERABLE DELMIRA (CONT'D)

You are tired of longing the love that never happened.

ADVENTOROUS DELMIRA (CONT'D)

You are tired of your own body that only breathes and does nothing to feel pleasure.

HOPEFUL DELMIRA (CONT'D)

You are tired of open your mouth and only whisper.

VULNERABLE DELMIRA (CONT'D)

You just want the love that you are longing for

ADVENTOROUS DELMIRA (CONT'D)

You want the world to see you but...

HOPEFUL DELMIRA (CONT'D)

You want to dream again...

Delmira just looks at them and starts laughing.

DELMIRA (CONT'D)

(laughing hysterically)

I died a long time ago!

(pointing at them)

I was buried in your mind, and your mind, and your mind.

I closed the door to my face, so people can't see who I really was.

I don't know who I am!

I am just somebody's daughter, somebody's sister, somebody's lover. I am nothing to myself. I got lost in my own mind. I was living for somebody else, and when I wanted to live for myself it was too late. I didn't know who I am when I was alone, when I wasn't somebody's someone.

And all of you are not really me, you ARE part of somebody's idea of me. I am nothing and nothing is part of me.

CUT TO Delmira alone in the woods.

Delmira surrounded by the mystical ambiance of the woods, lifts her gaze towards the whispering leaves.

Her eyes reflect a mixture of confusion and determination.

DELMIRA (CONT'D)

(whispering)

Who am I?

Suddenly, a surge of anguish grips her. In a moment of desperation, she raises her hand, covered in blood, and smears it across her face. The white veil absorbs the crimson stain.

The atmosphere thickens as Delmira confronts her pain, the symbolic act mirroring her inner turmoil. The woods, once serene, now bear witness to her struggle.

DELMIRA (CONT'D)

(whispering)

I lost...

The echoes of her own voice blend with the murmurs of the woods. Delmira's haunted gaze pierces through the camera, capturing the raw vulnerability of her soul.

FADE OUT

THE END