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# ***Persona* Revisited: Filling in the Gaps via the Original Script**

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## **Abstract**

In this article, I compare Bergman's original script of *Persona* with its final film version and discuss several differences between the two. I focus on three larger alternations, namely on omitting several of Elizabeth's replicas or transferring them to Alma as well as on a complete change of the ending scene. I speculate on how the dialogue and the scene would have changed the film if the director had not decided to modify or omit them, suggest possible reasons for such steps having been taken, and present arguments for how Bergman shifted to cinematic modernism and turned away from psychologizing during the process of making *Persona*. Furthermore, I breakdown and analyse the script version of the middle sequence of *Persona*, using positioning theory to uncover the motives behind Alma's and Elizabeth's verbal actions, and respectively the refusal of such action.

## **Keywords**

Ingmar Bergman, *Persona*, script, alternations, positioning, psychologizing

Even though it has been more than fifty years since *Persona* premiered in Swedish and American cinemas in 1966, it is still one of Bergman's most analysed and discussed films not only due to its ambivalence in meaning but also as the starting point of a new phase in his directorial and artistic career. The film, employing meta-cinematic techniques such as breaking the fourth wall and the usage of visually overt references to the director's previous works, has been described as 'modernist' with regards to its aesthetics (ŽENKO 2014), as 'enigmatic' when referring to its content (BRADSHAW 2017), and at numerous times it has been labelled as one of Bergman's masterpieces (HOLMBERG 1973: 66). In the period between 1967 and 2005, there were written eleven academic papers studying psychological motifs in *Persona*, nine reviewing the meta-cinematic aspects of the motion picture, and a sheer number of works focused on other topics (see STEENE 2005: 272–275). However, possibly due to Bergman's own rejection of the written form,<sup>1</sup> few studies consider the original script, published in Swedish in the second part of the Bergman's book series called *Filmbestättelser* (*Film Stories*). Nevertheless, there are some informative discrepancies, gaps, and shifts between the final cinematic product and its script version, although it is, at least formally, a very unusual film script.

The original 'script' is a fragmented short story rather than a traditional film script, as acknowledged by Bergman in the preface when he writes: 'I have not produced a film script in the normal sense' (BERGMAN 1972: 21). In its original Swedish publication in *Filmbestättelser*, unlike the English translation, there is no labelling of the speaker and there are none of the usual stage directions marked. Instead, the reader is given a fluid text in the form of a short story with the narrator describing the environment, the actions and perspective of the characters, and occasionally using also internal focalization depicting the imperceptible. For instance, in this passage the reader is informed about Elizabeth's sensations and emotional state:

Elisabeth Vogler presses her head back against the hard pillow. Her injection is beginning to afford her a dozy sense of well-being. She listens in the silence to her own breathing and finds it alien but agreeable company. (BERGMAN 1972: 31)

Here is the reader given an insight into Alma's verbally unexpressed view of Elizabeth:

Mrs Vogler sits leaning slightly forward, with her arms on the table. Her gaze is fixed unblinkingly on Alma's face. To Alma this is fascinating, disturbing. [...] [Alma's] thinking approxi-

<sup>1</sup> As Bergman states in the introduction to *Four Screenplays of Ingmar Bergman*: '[A] script is a very imperfect technical basis for a film. Film has nothing to do with literature; the character and substance of the two art forms are usually in conflict. This probably has something to do with the receptive process of the mind. The written word is read and assimilated by a conscious act of the will in alliance with the intellect; little by little it affects the imagination and the emotions. The process is different with the motion picture. When we experience a film, we consciously prime ourselves for illusion. Putting aside will and intellect, we make way for it in our imagination. The sequence of pictures plays directly on our feelings.' (BERGMAN 1960: 17)

mately: I don't care what the actress is sitting there thinking. Of course, she doesn't think the way I do. [...] She doesn't know what word to use. (BERGMAN 1972: 48–49)

Again, the reader is given an insight into Alma's mind and emotional state:

Alma sighs, tries to speak, but abandons any idea of finding words. [...] She finds it very difficult to collect her thoughts. Also, she is extremely tired and excited. (BERGMAN 1972: 57)

On this occasion, the reader is informed about Alma's unexpressed estimation of Elizabeth's letter sent to her psychiatrist:

Alma has been reading [Elizabeth's letter] slowly, jerkily, with long pauses. [...] Such a treachery. (BERGMAN 1972: 66)

In this passage, the narrator presents Alma's emotional state in detail and comments on Mr Vogler's psychological processes:

[Alma] bears inside her a rough desire for vengeance and a powerless anxiety; she feels listless, slightly sick, and goes to bed without eating. [...] After a few hours of heavy sleep, she is awakened by a feeling of paralysis – a stiffness seeking its way in towards her lungs and groping at her heart. [...] She hears someone talking behind her back and turns around with a feeling of bad conscience. [...] [Mr Vogler] is still embarrassed. Alma experiences a crawling sense of anguish at this humiliating piece of striptease. [...] He is collecting his courage. (BERGMAN 1972: 82–84)

According to Barbara Young, Bibi Andersson claimed the script was written in just fourteen days and that the duo of lead actresses later helped the director to shape the dialogue and the scenes while shooting (ANDERSON 2015: 118, 123). This is also acknowledged by Bergman in the preface, though somewhat poetically:

What I have written seems more like the melody line of a piece of music, which I hope with the help of my colleagues to be able to orchestrate during production. On many points I am uncertain and at one point at least I know nothing at all. (BERGMAN 1972: 21)

Indeed, in the video featurette *Persona: A Poem in Images* (2004), Andersson states that after a discussion with Bergman, she omitted a few words from the famous Alma's sex encounter monologue: she describes that in the original script, there was a 'colourful' expression she would never use when describing another woman. In the published script, there is stated that Katarina, Alma's female counterpart in the orgy, had 'little breasts and thick thighs and great bush of hair' (BERGMAN 1972: 54), while in the film, Alma mentions only that Katarina had '*sina bröst och sina tjocka lå'r*', i.e. 'her breasts and her thick thighs'. This presents a small, hardly deeply meaningful shift; however, Andersson in *Persona: A Poem in Images* also claims that Bergman suggested

that they could take the whole monologue away if Andersson did not like it, which she denied. Similarly, the reader of the script encounters several other alterations or omissions if comparing it with the film, and some of them are, indeed, of such a big character as Andersson illustrated when talking about this Bergman's suggestion.

## Not only nothing

On the first look, the biggest change regards the patient: Elisabeth Vogler has more dialogue in the original script. First, at the end of the dreamlike scene when her husband comes to visit the two women isolated on the island, Elisabeth, when looking into the camera, should according to the script offer a comment on the whole situation and state with a rough, nearly hoarse voice: *'Det har gått inflation i ord som tomhet, ensamhet, främlingskap, smärta, hjälplöshet.'*<sup>2</sup> (BERGMAN 1973: 55) This is an essentially deconstructive statement, doubting the character of language, indicating that its power to address and depict both objective and subjective reality is a phantom one. And yet, self-ironically and completely in the vein of modernism, the deconstruction of the concept is done by its own means – it is performed discursively. Consider the term 'inflation', respectively 'inflation of words', and all those emotionally strongly tinted nouns as 'emptiness', 'loneliness', 'strangeness', 'pain' and 'helplessness' standing in contrast with it.

According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, the word 'inflation' has these meanings:

- 1: an act of inflating: a state of being inflated: such as
  - a: distension
  - b: a hypothetical extremely brief period of very rapid expansion of the universe immediately following the big bang
  - c: empty pretentiousness: pomposity
- 2: a continuing rise in the general price level usually attributed to an increase in the volume of money and credit relative to available goods and services. (MERRIAM-WEBSTER 2018).

In other words, if 'money and credit' were replaced with 'words', as Elizabeth does, we arrive at the meaning given above in 1c. i.e. empty pretentiousness. Simply put, the more words are said, the smaller their meaning. Such conclusion, moreover, supports also the speech of the narrator, stating that Mr Vogler mumbles 'meaningless words that have lost any truth' (BERGMAN 1972: 90). Also, earlier in the script, the

<sup>2</sup> In the official English translation (BRADFIELD 1972), the rather free translation does not use the key phrase **inflation of words**: 'Words like emptiness, loneliness, strangeness, pain and helplessness have lost their meaning' (BERGMAN 1972: 91). For example, in the Czech translation done by Zbyněk Černík, the term is, in comparison, used: *'Nastala inflace slov jako prázdnota, samota, cizota, bolest, bezmoc'* (BERGMAN 2000: 28).

narrator claims that Elizabeth hears ‘meaningless words, fragments of sentences, syllables, mixed together or dropping at even intervals,’<sup>3</sup> while she is crying (BERGMAN 1972: 32).

If used in the film, this might present a rationalization of Elizabeth’s perspective; it might even serve as a logical argument and reasonable explanation of her resignation on verbal communication and decision to remain silent.

Another dreamlike scene in which Alma claws her forearm and offers Elisabeth her blood, plays out in ‘a room [in the beach house that Alma] has never seen, a sort of a built-in glass verandah with a sleepy paraffin lamp in the ceiling’ (BERGMAN 1972: 91). The scene is unlike in the film set before Alma’s monologue about Elisabeth’s motherhood, is a little longer and the rather incoherent monologue about inner subjective perspective and incapability to talk it features, presented by Alma in the film, is uttered by Elizabeth herself in the script (BERGMAN 1972: 91–93; 1973: 56–57). This suggests that even in the film, Alma might mediate Elizabeth’s perspective, similarly as in the scene with the double monologue about Elizabeth’s motherhood. However, in the film, the boundary between Elisabeth and Alma is again overlapped by the decision to let Alma present the monologue instead of Elisabeth.

Even the ending itself plays out differently here: in the script, the return of Elisabeth Vogler to her family and profession, happening supposedly sometime after the blood drinking scene, is mediated through a story account of the psychiatrist who breaks the fourth wall by looking straight into the camera, states for the spectator that Mrs Vogler returned home at the beginning of December, expresses her own rather cynical and reductive thoughts about the whole affair, and generalizes a little bit about artists.<sup>4</sup> The reader is then given one last scene, featuring again the psychiatrist’s beach house, in which we are informed that Alma is still staying there, alone, although the furniture is covered and the carpets are rolled-up, and she is disturbed in her isolation only by an old man who has come there to saw down the trees (BERGMAN 1973: 25–26). Meanwhile, in the film, Alma cleans up the house after Elisabeth has packed her things and then simply leaves by bus. However, in the script, Alma presents a short monologue using the figure of speech of apostrophe to address someone gone and states that she is writing a letter to that person, that she knows she will never finish. After the monologue, the narrator describes a visual mingling of her face with Elisabeth’s. Again, this is different to that seen elsewhere in the film, because Elisabeth’s face is symptomatically depicted as ‘[a] howling wide-open face, distorted by terror, with wild wide-open eyes

3 Note that in the English translation it is used the collocation ‘even intervals’, whilst in the Swedish original are those intervals described as ‘empty’: ‘*Det är betydelselösa ord, fragment av meningar, stavelser, sammanblandade eller liksom droppande med tomma mellanrum*’ (BERGMAN 1973: 18).

4 ‘Early in December Elisabeth Vogler returned to her home and to the theatre, both of which welcomed her with open arms. I was convinced all along that she would go back. Her silence was a role like any other. After a while she no longer needed it and so she left it. It is difficult, of course, to analyse her innermost motives. With such a complicated mental life as Mrs Vogler’s. But I would put my money on strongly developed infantility. And then of course all the rest: imagination, sensitivity, perhaps even real intelligence. (*Laughs.*) Personally I would say you have to be fairly infantile to cope with being an artist in age like ours.’ (BERGMAN 1972: 99)

and furrows of sweat running through her theatre make-up' (BERGMAN 1972: 101). Whilst in the film, her face which is visible only briefly and covered in theatrical make-up, looks rather startled but not deeply terrified and is not merged with Alma's face.

This might suggest that even after her return home, Elisabeth is still suffering among others, resuming her role of a *persona*,<sup>5</sup> whilst Alma stays alone on the island in her place, although the house is ready to be left and seems now somewhat unwelcoming and abandoned.<sup>6</sup> And as in a tragic opposite to all of this, in her last replica, when looking at the old man from a window, Alma states:

I really do like people a lot. Mostly when they are sick and I can help them. I'm going to marry and have children. I think that is what going to happen to me here in life. (BERGMAN 1972: 100)

Interestingly, this is not addressed by the narrator as a monologue, but as 'Alma's little conversation', which is 'interrupted by Mrs Vogler's face, filling the picture' (BERGMAN 1972: 101). The whole scene is then finished with a meta-cinematic epilogue, which is also different than that seen in the motion picture:

The screen flickers, white and silent. Then darkness – letters flutter over the picture, the end of the film running through the aperture.

The projector stops, the arc lamp is extinguished, the amplifier switched off. The films are taken out and packed into its brown carton. (BERGMAN 1972: 101)

## What if it all remained in the film?

In summary, if the film proceeded completely according to the script on these occasions, its message and final impression might be quite different – in fact, clearer, and maybe even too clear. Firstly, if Bergman did not decide to remove the above-presented replica of Elisabeth posing a comment on the encounter of her husband with Alma, the reasons behind her silence and thus the message behind one of main themes of the film – the problem of impossibility of an authentic, completely and unapologetically truthful communication between people and a representation of one's identity through it – might be too clear, less ambivalent and less open to interpretations. According to Young, Bergman was himself unsure about the meaning of the film and decided to leave 'his audience free to make of it what they would' (YOUNG 1972: 118). He himself acknowledges this in the above-mentioned preface by stating:

5 As David L. Vierling summaries: 'the word *persona*, originally referred to an actor's mask, his role; later it came to be identified with the actor himself'. In psychoanalysis, however, the term has gained another figurative sense, with '*persona* being the mask we all wear in social contexts, our role and identity at the same time' (VIERLING 1974: 50).

6 Alma moves through the dim rooms, among covered furniture and rolled-up carpets. She stops by one of the big windows and sees the man and his horse down on the terrace. The snow is falling in great white flakes. (BERGMAN 1972: 100)

I discovered that the subject I had chosen was very large and that what I wrote or included in the final film (horrid thought) was bound to be entirely arbitrary. I therefore invite the imagination of the reader or the spectator to dispose freely of the material that I have made available. (BERGMAN 1972: 21)

That would explain why the replica, perhaps too concrete, too prompting and leading to a particular interpretation, happened to be eventually omitted. Such an assumption can be even supported by D. L. Vierling, who reasons about Bergman's 'affinity with emotion rather than with intellect' and claims that '[o]n Bergman's level, intellectual responses [...] on the part of his audience would not only preclude seeing any fusion of Alma/Elizabeth in the film; they would prevent the film from communicating – defining itself – as Bergman would wish it to' (VIERLING 1974: 51).

Something similar can be seen in the decision to let Alma speak for Elisabeth again in the blood drinking scene. If Elisabeth spoke for herself, the ambivalence, stemming from the fact that the audience is unsure about whom Alma is talking, would not be possible. By changing the speaker, Bergman promotes another important theme of the film – the merging of opposites. This is presented through the two women's identities. Vierling interprets this scene as a manifestation of the collapse of verbal communication between the two women, which means that Alma's options to demarcate her identity are also painfully compromised. As Vierling puts it: 'communicating is, for Bergman, the means of asserting [...] identity and it is only in failing to communicate at all, or in misunderstanding communication, that identity fails both for Bergman and his characters' (VIERLING 1974: 51). However, Vierling interprets this scene on the basis of premises resulting from a scene later in the film, and thus this seems like a blind spot of his argumentation.<sup>7</sup>

Also, if Elizabeth had more dialogue before the penultimate scene of the film, in which she obeys Alma and finally mutters the word 'ingenting' (nothing), it would not have the same impact on the audience. In the film, the moment is significant since up to this, she has said only a very few words – those two fired in shock and panic and in self-defence, when attacked by Alma ('No, don't!') and the instructions whispered to her when she was drunk ('You'd better get off to bed, otherwise you'll fall asleep at the table.'). which she later denies that has uttered.

Partly for this and partly for the way it is written, even the ending would pose a different message. In the film, after the 'nothing' scene, Elizabeth is shown simply packing her things, preparing to leave the beach house for good. With regards to the previous scene, it leads to the conclusion that she has finally 'recovered' – she has started to talk. There is no indication if she is happy about the departure from the island or not,

7 'Finally, in surrealistic sequences reminiscent of Buñuel, Alma succeeds in having Elizabeth utter a word: the word is "Nothing". Verbal communication, then, collapses, and with it Alma's ability to define herself. "Many words and then nausea," she says during a breakdown scene with Elizabeth in which her words and phrases become incoherent sounds.' (VIERLING 1974: 50) Vierling here changes the order of the scenes – the scene with 'many words and then nausea' happens in the film before the scene when Alma makes Elizabeth to utter the word 'nothing'.

or who exactly had decided so, she herself, or possibly the psychiatrist, either on Alma's recommendation or completely on her own. The same can be said for Alma who only sorts things in the house and goes away, too. The scene seems rather neutral than melancholic or in any way emotional, with only associative glimpses reminding of Elizabeth, as a frame zooming to the statue of an oversized classically looking face, followed by a close-up of startled Elizabeth in Electra's make-up, or an impossible upside-down reflection of her lying on the beach in the filmmakers' camera hanging above the set. Indeed, on the surface, distorted only by these glimpses, the scene is so emotionally detached that one can agree with Vierling who claims that at the end of the film, Bergman simply 'dispenses with [Alma in the point when] she has fulfilled her functional role by suggesting her variation on the theme of doubling and [the ties and unity between communication and identity]' (VIERLING 1974: 50). For Vierling it is indicative that after the nothing scene, there is no other outspoken word in the film – he justifies this by argumentation claiming that from the director's point, there is simply nothing else to say. The characters have fulfilled their function and the spectator has noticed that this was a film. In other words, there is no point in further psychologizing.

However, in the script, the depicted longer close-up of Elizabeth's face in the make-up, mirroring deeper emotions, indicates that Elizabeth's return home might not become as neutral. What regards to Alma, the whole setting of the situation, portraying her being left in the forsaken house, not actually going away and breaking the isolation, and talking, moreover about a letter to someone, a letter that will be never finished, symboling a need for an impossible contact with someone distanced, seems quite hopeless too. As it is therefore clear from this, the first written version of *Persona* did not handle the characters in such an alienated way as the final film does: there was still psychologizing going on, mediated through the narrator. Moreover, the door to interpretations and questions about the future of the characters was not left so open because the scenes lead to rather concrete conclusions about their emotional state.

## Smaller shifts

When comparing the script with the film, there are also a few smaller shifts. Except for the previously mentioned example with Bibi Andersson omitting only a couple of words from Alma's sex encounter monologue, one can find many other similar occasions of:

1. omitting several words or sentences<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> In the script, for example, the letter written by Elizabeth to the psychiatrist, in which Elizabeth is describing Alma, is longer and offers more information about Elizabeth's perspective on her own mental state: 'I am beginning to get back elementary but forgotten sensations, things like a ravenous hunger before dinner, a childish drowsiness in the evenings, curiosity in a fat spider, the joy of going barefoot. I am blank and obstinate. Floating as it were in a mild semi-slumber. I am aware of a new health, a sort of barbaric cheerful-

2. adding several words or sentences<sup>9</sup>
3. changing some nonverbal communication, in the tone of speech and facial expressions, interpersonal dynamic or appearance of the characters<sup>10</sup>
4. changing scene order<sup>11</sup>
5. omitting entire scenes<sup>12</sup>
6. changing meta-cinematic references, their visual content, and symbolism.

## The film breakdown shift

One of the most poignant smaller shifts I will discuss belongs to two categories above: it is a change in the scene order and at the same time a change in meta-cinematic references, its visual content and symbolism. In the motion picture, after the scene in which Alma makes Elizabeth step on a piece of glass, there is a meta-cinematic sequence with breaking and then burning film. However, in the script, there is no meta-cinematic montage placed in this particular point; a similar sequence occurs elsewhere, though as Bergman states:

At this point the projector should stop. The film, happily, would break, or someone lower the curtain by mistake; or perhaps there could be a short circuit, so that all the lights in the cinema went out. Only this is not how it is. I think the shadows would continue their game, even if some happy interruption cut short our discomfort. Perhaps they no longer need the assistance of the apparatus, the projector, the film, or the sound track. They reach out towards our senses, deep inside the retina, or into the finest recesses of the ear. Is this the

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ness. Surrounded by the sea, I am cradled like a foetus in the womb. No, no longing, not even for my little boy. But of course, I know he is all right and that makes me calm.' Also, regarding Alma, the readers is told here that Elizabeth thinks about her that Alma is 'rather "knowing", has a lot of opinions on morals and life, she's even a bit bigoted' and she adds that she 'encourage[s] her to talk, it's very educational'. (BERGMAN 1972: 61–63)

9 Though these occasions are rare, there can be found at least two instances in which Alma says more in the film than in the script. One of them happens in the scene when the two women are lying on the beach and Almas is reading aloud for Elizabeth from a book. After finishing reading a paragraph about life forlornness, she looks up and asks: '*Tror du att det är så?*' (Do you think it is like that?) When Elizabeth slowly nods, Alma flinches and refuses it with: '*Jag tror inte på det här.*' (I don't believe it). In the script, however, the scene ends right after Alma finishes reading the paragraph.

10 In the script, for example, in the scene when Alma is reading aloud the letter to Elizabeth sent her from her husband, the reader is told that Alma 'breaks off and looks at Mrs Vogler in dismay', who is 'sitting up in bed, her face distorted'. Alma then asks if she should go on with reading, whereupon Mrs Vogler simply shakes her head (BERGMAN 1972: 35). In the film, Elizabeth is shown grabbing the letter from Alma, shaking and heavily breathing.

11 For instance, the scene, in which Elizabeth is silently screaming in horror when watching news from Vietnam, happens in the script later than in the film (see BERGMAN 1972: 35).

12 According to the script, in the film should be a short scene picturing Alma going to 'a little local cinema, which is showing a film several years old with Elizabeth Vogler in the main part' (BERGMAN 1972: 35). In the film, however, this happened to be only mentioned, not shown. Also, scene 10 of the script, depicting another meta-cinematic sequence, was taken away (see BERGMAN 1972: 42).

case? Or do I simply imagine that these shadows possess a power, that their rage survives without help of the picture frame, this abominably accurate march of twenty-four pictures a second, twenty-seven metres a minute. (BERGMAN 1972: 93–94)

There has been an ongoing on a discussion about the function and message of the meta-cinematic sequences in *Persona*. Vierling claims that (according to Bergman): ‘film is to be experienced; it is not *thought about* (at least while the viewing occurs) (VIERLING 1974: 51)’. Vierling thinks that: ‘the film breakdown that occurs after Alma places a piece of glass in Elizabeth’s path [...] cannot be confused in any way with Brechtian alienation’ (VIERLING 1974: 51) and it seems that Vierling has picked up here on Robin Wood, who claimed that Bergman, as opposed to Godard, ‘draws the spectator into the film, demanding total emotional involvement’ (WOOD 1969: 145). Susan Sontag, too, insisted that: ‘Bergman’s intention, in the beginning and end of *Persona* and in this terrifying caesura in the middle, is quite different from [...] Brecht’s intention of alienating [...] Rather, he is making a statement about the complexity of what can be represented’ (SONTAG 2000: 78). On the contrary, as Christopher Orr summaries, Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni would both argue that such devices as the film breakdown in the middle or the double monologue about Elizabeth’s motherhood allow us ‘to recognize [the] subject, but at the same makes it seem unfamiliar’ and thus become, indeed, an instance of Brechtian alienation effect (BRECHT 1964: 192). Orr consequently concludes that: ‘Bergman’s self-reflexivity is open to both political and expressive readings’ (ORR 2000: 102) and analyses each meta-cinematic sequence in *Persona* separately, to distinguish between those which in fact cannot create an alienation effect and those which can. In the case of the film breakdown in the middle of the film, he argues that this is an instance of the Brechtian approach. Orr aptly points out that this meta-cinematic sequence interrupts a heightened situation, which is a basic premise for alienation effect – the spectator is given a silent, but highly emotional conflict between Alma and Elizabeth, during which Alma purposefully creates a trap on Elizabeth and, as a nurse who should help her to heal, she hurts her. After this, the film breaks, and the audience is distanced from the characters. In this case, however, not to isolate herself or himself from emotions, but to have an opportunity to realize all what might be here psychologically happening at once: outrage, sadness, pain, guilt, satisfaction, shock, fear, indignation etc. The sequence, presenting another set of pictures following the explosion of the film, is, except for showing other aspects of a film breakdown, even inciting such emotions. After a short white frame accompanied by a couple of incoherent sounds, backwards played pieces of broken words uttered by the psychiatrist, and a rapid reference to a grotesque sequence used in Bergman’s film *Prison* from 1949, there is another white frame, this time accompanied by a human woe and a painful scream. In that is audible the word ‘*naj*’ (a dialectal version of ‘*nej*’, meaning ‘no’ in Swedish). Then the audience is given a frame with a well-known Bergman’s theme, a hand being crucified, and after that the montage is finished with an extreme close-up of human eye. Also, it needs to be noted that the background music here is very unsettling: the used track is full of detached tones, sounds, and slams; there is no unifying melody, harmony or rhythm. In other words, Bergman does create

an alienation effect here by showing the film breaking, but he lets the spectator breathe out only very briefly; then, he serves her/him another deeply unsettling sequence to lead her/him to emotions he wants to incite to describe what is psychologically happening between Alma and Elizabeth and in each of them separately. This time, however, he does that with help of associations and visual illustrations instead of showing us the actresses playing it.

If the viewer is during the film breakdown sequence called by the director to deploy all his insight into human psychology and is led to imagine all the possible emotional involvement in such a situation – in other words, as Bergman imagines, ‘the shadows would continue their game [... p]erhaps they no longer need the assistance of the apparatus, the projector, the film, or the sound track[... t]hey reach out towards our senses, deep inside the retina, or into the finest recesses of the ear’ (BERGMAN 1972: 93–94), the call remains and endures also after such a sequence is finished. The narrative and its identification illusion was disrupted; there is no coming back, although the director briefly plays with the anticipation and lets Elizabeth’s ‘figure suddenly come[...] into focus, signalling the continuation of the diegetic narrative’ (ORR 2000: 103) after he is done with the above described meta-cinematic sequence. However, that is only a directorial trick; the film is not so psychologizing or descriptive anymore as it has been and with every other scene it takes on an increasingly surreal quality. However, there is also another possible reason to place an alienation effect particularly in this place of the film, even though Bergman originally did not intend to have a meta-cinematic sequence right here. In the script, the meta-cinematic sequence above occurs after the blood-drinking scene with the incoherent monologue, presented by Elizabeth herself. Why redeploy it a move it to a place a couple of scenes before?

It seems that during work on the film, Bergman must have changed his perception and/or intentions with the scenes in the middle, i.e. the scene with the piece of glass and the following scene in which Alma begs Elizabeth to start to talk to her and when she refuses, Alma attacks her. When we look to the script at the scene with the piece of glass, one aspect of it is especially distinctive – although the scene is full of peculiar details, as a magazine ‘greasy from sun-tan lotion’, the internal focalization is, unlike in the previous scenes, suddenly not used here at all – instead, this scene is symptomatically depicted via camera eye:

An autumn morning, with clear air and the warmth of summer. [...] Sister Alma wakes up early as usual (her room faces east). She goes to the kitchen, squeezes herself a glass of orange juice, takes the glass in her hand and pads out barefoot into the brilliant sunlight. [...] She puts the empty glass down beside her, then knocks it over [...] She stiffens, in a gesture of annoyance. Then rises muttering to herself, gets a brush and pan, carefully sweeps up all the broken glass, meticulously and laboriously. [...] Suddenly, she sees a large, irregularly shaped piece of glass shining among the stones on the path. [...] She reaches for it, then stops her hand in mid-movement. She hears Mrs Vogler moving in the house. After a moment’s thought she gets a magazine, puts on her wooden shoes and opens out one of the reclining chairs on the terrace [...]. She flips through the magazine, which is greasy from sun-tan lotion and

contains colour supplements. Elisabeth Vogler emerges onto the steps with her little coffee tray. [...] Every now and again her feet come close to the spear of glass. [...] Sister Alma gets up and goes to her room to put on her bathing suit. When she comes out again, Elisabeth Vogler is standing crouched forward on the step, pulling the piece of glass from the arch of her left foot. The blood wells up from the clean-cut wound. Sister Alma stands absolutely still for a moment taking in the scene, meets Mrs Vogler's look without blinking. (BERGMAN 1972: 67–68)

Even in the film, Alma is at least in half of the scene unusually presented via a long shot, and significantly, those moments when she breaks the glass and decides to leave the piece of it on the patio are shown in this very distanced way. That suggests that the director/narrator does not want the audience to know precisely what is going on in her mind (note, for example, that in the script, the reader is told that Alma is 'muttering for herself', but the reader is not told what she is actually muttering). This is unlike, for instance, the scene shown before with her sex encounter monologue. The scene culminates, the film breaks, a short alienation effect is created, and the psychologizing process is thanks to it corrupted. The message is clear, especially when one considers the relocation of the film breakdown sequence and the call for imagination on the audience side it presents: the director is done with thorough psychologizing. For any following scene, he urges the viewer to fill up the gaps by herself/himself. And gaps do emerge.

## The post-film breakdown positioning

One of my intentions is to analyse and interpret the gaps in the scene following the film breakdown with regards to the written material available in the script. The premise behind the decision to analyse this particular part is that fact that in the script, the film breakdown sequence occurs later, and that means that in the script version, this scene was still intended to present reliable and thorough the psychologizing of characters. My research questions are:

- RQ1: What can the script indicate about the interpersonal dynamic between Alma and Elizabeth and about Alma's motives and reasons for her verbal attack on Elizabeth?
- RQ2: Why it is so important to her to start a conversation?
- RQ3: Why is she so offended when Elizabeth refuses to talk?

To answer these questions, the positioning theory will be used. The theory is an interpretation method intended to analyse both oral and written communication and its means how 'humans make sense of themselves and construct their (and others') identities' (BAMBERG 2005: 445).

Positioning theory is a construct, introduced first by Wendy Hollway in 1974 and later elaborated by Rom Harré and Luk van Langenhove, which allow us the identify

so-called positions, a metaphorical concept for products of communication strategies used to demarcate how a speaker relates herself/himself to her/his counterpart in communication. The construct suggests that: ‘one can position oneself or be positioned’ to various ‘places’ in relation to the other one, as ‘powerful or powerless, confident or apologetic, dominant or submissive, definitive or tentative, authorized or unauthorized, and so on’ (LANGENHOVE and HARRÉ 1999: 15). The advantage of this concept, when compared to the concept of role used within the social sciences, should be its greater dynamic – role is a more static concept, which cannot easily caption the situational aspect of developing relations during a concrete piece of communication. Langenhove and Harré therefore put forth positioning distinctions to recognize certain types of positioning. Among other things, they propose using the terms:

1. self-positioning,
2. positioning of others,
3. deliberate positioning (happening when one willingly positions either oneself or others),
4. forced positioning (happening when one is making or made to position either oneself or others),
5. moral positioning (happening when someone positions either oneself or others with regards to a certain moral order),
6. personal positioning (attributing certain characteristics to either oneself or others).

The excerpt from the script that will be analysed is a beginning of the scene following the film breakdown sequence. All the spoken lines belong, naturally, to Alma, who is sitting on the terrace outside the beach house and is approached by Elizabeth, who sits down to read a book near to her:

1. – I see you’re reading a play. I’ll tell the doctor. It’s a good sign.
2. Elisabeth looks up at Alma, enquiringly.<sup>13</sup> Then she returns to her reading.
3. – Perhaps we can leave this place soon. I am beginning to miss town. Aren’t you, Elisabeth?
4. Elisabeth shakes her head.<sup>14</sup>
5. – Would you do something for me? I know it’s asking a lot, but I could do with your help.
6. Elisabeth looks up from her book. She has been listening to Alma’s tone of voice and, for a moment, there is a trace of fear in her eyes.
7. – It’s nothing dangerous. But I do wish you would *talk* to me. I don’t mean anything special. We could talk about the weather, for instance. [...] Or you read me something from your book. Just say a couple of words.

13 In the film, Elizabeth gently smiles instead before she returns to her reading.

14 In the film, Elizabeth smiles while shaking her head. Alma gazes at her for a short while, then gets up, goes to a door and angrily slams it, by which she distracts Elizabeth from reading.

- [ yorick ]
8. Alma is still standing with her back to the wall, her head leaned forward, the black sun glasses on her nose.
  9. – It's not easy to live with someone who doesn't say anything, I promise you. It spoils everything. I can't bear to hear Karl-Henrik's voice on the telephone. He sounds so artificial. [...] You hear your own voice too a *no one* else! And you think 'Don't I sound false'.
  10. [-] All those words I'm using. Look, now I'm talking to you, I can't stop, but I hate talking because I still can't say what I want. But you've made things simple for yourself, you just shut up. No, I must try not to get angry. [...]
  11. [-] But just now *I need* you to talk to me. Please, please, can't you talk to me, just a bit! It's almost unbearable.
  12. A long pause. Elizabeth shakes her head. Alma smiles, as if she were trying not to cry.
  13. – I knew you'd say no. Because you can't know how I feel. I always thought that great artists had this tremendous feeling of sympathy for other people. That... they created out of sympathy with people, from a need to help them. Silly of me.
  14. She takes off her glasses and puts them in her pocket. Elisabeth sits there, anxious and immobile.<sup>15</sup>
  15. – Use it and throw it away. You've used me – I don't know what for – and now you don't need me anymore you're throwing me away.  
Alma is about to go into the house, but stops on the threshold, and gives a subdued howl of desperation.
  16. – Yes, I know, I can hear perfectly well how artificial it sounds. 'You don't need me anymore and you're throwing me away'. That's what's happened to me. Every word. [...] (BERGMAN 1972: 72–74)

To grasp fully what motivates Alma here, intentionally or unintentionally, and how positioning works in this piece of conversation, one must bear in mind several premises presented earlier in the plot. Alma thinks highly of Elizabeth; for example she tells her: 'my life can't be of any interest to you' and 'people should be like you' (BERGMAN 1972: 57). She also mentions that Elizabeth: 'wouldn't have any difficulty, of course, turning into [Alma]', although '[Elizabeth's] soul would stick out a bit everywhere, it's too big to be inside [Alma]' (BERGMAN 1972: 59). On the contrary, Elizabeth never provided Alma such appreciation; in a day-to-day sense, she treats her nicely, but since she does not talk, she cannot praise Alma in such manner. Already in these premises, in the quote 'my life can't be of any interest to you', is present personal positioning, both of oneself and the other one. Alma is saying by this she does not take herself for being such an interesting person as she thinks Elizabeth is and by this, she is degrading herself, putting herself into a submissive position. Elizabeth does not oppose her in this; in the script it is stated that she reacts to this with 'a surprised smile' (BERGMAN 1972: 57), which cannot be taken either for any kind of contradiction or confirmation and in fact, it is Elizabeth's way how to avoid positioning as a discursive practice con-

15 In the film, Elizabeth is shown to cut a page from her book instead.

veying identification. However, she writes later in her letter to the psychiatrist that she thinks Alma 'is rather attached to [her], actually a little in love [with her], in an unconscious and charming way' and that it is 'extremely amusing to study [Alma]', because 'she's rather "knowing", has a lot of opinions on morals and life, she's even a bit bigoted', so Elizabeth encourages 'her to talk, [because] it's very educational', and moreover, '[s]ometimes [Alma] weeps for past sins (some sort of episodic orgy with a completely strange teenager, plus subsequent abortion)' and 'complaints that her ideas about life fail to fit her actions' (BERGMAN 1972: 64–65). Elizabeth, from Alma's perspective – who fails to see that the letter was addressed to someone else – arrogantly confirms this positioning, and besides that, betrays her as a friend by letting on about her in this way. In other words, she reduces Alma to 'a real diversion', as she describes her only a few rows above (BERGMAN 1972: 64), she objectifies her; she does not talk about her as a real friend would and puts her by this into a very lowered position.

Alma, hurt by this, strikes back in a need for vengeance: first, she hurts Elizabeth physically by letting her cut on the piece of glass and then she tries to hurt her also emotionally by starting to play a game with her – a positioning game. Positioning is a way how to discursively demarcate someone's identity, and as we know, Elizabeth is trying absconding from such an activity by her denial of usage of language and decision to remain silent. However, when Alma approaches her, she tries to lure her and then force her into talking – and positioning – anyway.

First, in line 1, she personally positions Elizabeth by saying that it is a good sign that she is reading a play – she is making a statement about her and waits for her reaction to it, and as anticipated, Elizabeth does not react. By only looking up 'enquiringly' (2), Elizabeth neither confirms or contradicts the statement, which means that she kept herself aside from the positioning process.

Then, Alma proceeds to put herself into opposition to Elizabeth, when she claims that she is 'beginning to miss town', and knowingly suggests that Elizabeth is not feeling in the same way. Elizabeth's nonverbal confirmation of this guess creates for Alma an unpleasant condition: if she genuinely misses 'town', i.e. social life, Elizabeth's refusal to leave the island means that she must stay there nevertheless as her nurse, and since Elizabeth does not talk, she would not help Alma in her loneliness. Indeed, Alma, therefore, can see Elizabeth as her oppressor. However, Alma might be also trying to manipulate Elizabeth by using this kind of personal self-positioning and positioning of her counterpart: she might be only creating a false argument why Elizabeth is *shown* as her oppressor. As we know, the real reason why she feels this way about her – because she has read the letter, in which Elizabeth did not portray Alma in a favourable way – she admits only later after everything preceding it fails in its purpose to make Elizabeth talk.

Alma then tries a more straightforward approach: she asks for help (5 and 6). This cry, clad in loneliness, is actually an instance of forced positioning of Elizabeth, in which Elizabeth again refuses to participate by not doing anything. If Elizabeth started to talk to Alma, as she wishes her to, she would do something for her as a friend – she would prove that she is willing to make an offer for her and by this, she would appreciate her as a person, in Alma's words, 'stoop to [her] level' (BERGMAN 1972: 81)

– indeed, she would reposition their whole relation by this, in this way she would state they are equal. However, Elizabeth is not willing to give this to Alma – Alma is ‘asking a lot’, ‘just a couple words’. Even the writing, using such juxtapositions, is constantly suggesting oppositions.

When Elizabeth remains obstinately silent, Alma continues with her positioning efforts, and she only intensifies them. In line 7, she creates via moral positioning a judgment about the hardness of living ‘with someone who doesn’t say anything’ and demonstrates the social consequences of such a situation. In line 8, she presents another moral positioning, this time putting into contrast her own efforts with selfishness attributed to Elizabeth, selfishness of making ‘things simple for [one]self, [as when the other one just shuts] up’. In line 10, she comes forward with yet another judgment via moral positioning, this time claiming that Elizabeth is not sympathetic enough, contrary to what Alma would expect from her, just because she is an artist. And yet, even after this, Elisabeth, just sitting, ‘anxious and immobile’, is rejecting to participate in any of these positioning schemes, because besides the fact that she does not do anything to please Alma, she does not even anyhow react to all these accusations.

## Conclusion

*Persona* is an internally contradictory film, constructed to prevent the audience from coming to a final and limited logical interpretation. One of the main themes of the motion picture – merging of opposites, often despite the logic and reason – is deeply ingrained even in the structure of the narrative. To confront the film with its original script is a step that can, as shown above, help to find verbal logic in a few places where it purposefully resigns from this; and in other places, it can bring up even more contradictions and questions, as a different version of the work, presenting, for instance, an Elizabeth, who voluntarily tries to speak after symptomatically drinking Alma’s blood, but fails in this efforts and utters only an incoherent monologue. If a stage version of *Persona* were to be produced, which version should be followed and why? This is a highly adequate question, especially with regards to scenes order and changes in nonverbal communication, in the tone of speech and face expressions, interpersonal dynamic or appearance of the characters. These aspects are often thoroughly described in the script and performed in a different manner on the screen. To better understand all the possibilities to approach the material posed by Bergman, which he himself regarded as arbitrary, even more future analytic work focusing on the script could be helpful.

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