

"RELATIONSHIP," INGMAR BERGMAN'S EXPLORATIONS OF
in *Scenes from a Marriage*.....Elliott #943

1. Loree and I having seen the cut movie version when it first came out in theaters, we were eager to see the uncut television six-part original which began last night [9Mar77]. This thinksheet is comments toward individual-and-group discussions, some using my usual media-event group process: stage one, *What are my feelings not about, but after, the event?* stage two, *What ideas am I working on in consequence of the experiencing of the event?* stage three, *what effect(s) in my own behavior do I, should I, anticipate?* and stage four, *my comments as a nonprofessional media critic.*
2. I continue to be saddened by how much antigod shit the preacher's-kid author-director is still full of. It can't be passed off with "Well, that's the way modern Scandinavians are" or, as is chic, "It's the gray, cold climate there." There is in his soul a God-emptiness that squirts out as a reverse-romantic sourness perpetually on the verge of turning vicious. His genius relates to, without promoting, human values--as it were, one foot in the world and one foot in the church basement.
3. "Relationship" here means that the sphere of ultimate value--therefore, of highest heaven [romanticism] and lowest hell [nihilism]--is the human:human relationship. Since age 12 I've found the divine:human relationship more interesting, so that sucking of the divine/demonic into the human:human relationship I tend to find, betimes, boring, amusing, irritating, maddening, but always unsatisfying to me as theologian, Christian, human being. In the seminary's "inductive Bible study" tradition, two early questions in the inductive process are *What does the passage stress?* and *What does the passage omit?*--and, of course, in each case, *why/not?* What's omitted entirely from the movie and from the first of the six television segments [and probably from the remaining five also] is positive religion. Negative attitudes toward religion we get, of course, aplenty--from Johan's treating it, in the first few minutes of the first segment, as *passe nonsense*, onward. Compare instances of the spoken absence of religion as positive resource, as in the closing moment of the first segment: Marianne's statement that she is utterly alone in facing her post-abortion depression.... a scene that reminded me of the lacrymose asanguinity of the closing scene of Eric Segal's *LOVE STORY*, the anti-commitment story of a couple as much at the mercy of emotions-flow [from lack of common goal beyond the "relationship"] and as much in a contextual desert [a dyadic isolate floating in a society-less and God-less limbo].
4. Glorious is glorious and sick is sick, and we should thank God for and enjoy and meditate on and discuss the sick glorious while preferring--and less often getting--the healthy glorious. My theory about this "less often" is that the esthetic genius tends to double schizoidness [from society, which in its inferior sensitivity caused the artist perpetual pain; and from God, whom the artist generally experiences as society's ally if not even in society's pocket]--and perhaps also to schizoidness from his/her own "soul" or part thereof. These multiple deprivations are, pathologically viewed, so many malnutritions--i.e., diseases. Bergman is sick sick sick, thus also will be his relationships and works, some of the latter of which are silent prayers for health and [to use one of his film titles] "cries and whispers" for "God" (and wholeness and peace and joy)--and thus reverse-image honors paid to positive religion, marital fidelity, and a long list of human values and virtues. As the old saw says, "You don't appreciate your health till you get sick." Thus Bergman may have a more than soap-opera effect for the good: I believe he has.
5. Strong women [to take another Scandinavian, Ingrid Bergman] appeal to my healthy side, and weak women [especially the early-damaged, as was Liv Uhlmann by her father's death when she was six] suck me in from my sick side. In Liv, Ingmar found just what he needed--a tough, weak, emotional volcano.