

Haunted Screens and Spiritual Scenes: Film as a Medium in the Cinema of Carl Theodor Dreyer

Rebecca Harrison
University College London

Abstract

In exploring the nature of cinematic self-reflexivity, this article investigates the relationship between the medium of film and Dreyer's interest in the spiritual and religious experience. It draws upon Freud's concept of the 'Uncanny' to determine the boundaries of cinematic space and time in relation to the transience of life and death, as represented on screen.

Drawing on recent reconsiderations of the ontology of film, including Laura Mulvey's *Death 24x a Second* (2006) and Mary Ann Doane's *The Emergence of Cinematic Time* (2002), as well as classic texts by Bazin and Cavell on the nature of the photographic image, the article discusses the self-reflexive gestures in Dreyer's cinema towards the indexical marking of the film stock, its exposure and projection, and its investment in the tension between stillness and movement. In particular, it is argued that those moments when the materiality of the medium is rendered most tangible explore the threshold between life and death, between the animate and inanimate, in, for example, *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (1927), *Vampyr* (1932) and, most crucially, *Ordet* (1955).

Keywords

Carl Th. Dreyer, the Uncanny, film ontology, spirituality, Danish cinema.

Haunted Screens and Spiritual Scenes: Film as a Medium in the Cinema of Carl Theodor Dreyer

Rebecca Harrison
University College London

If Dreyer's films are concerned with painterly aesthetics and theatrical stagings, his work is also concerned with the space and time of the film medium. The aesthetics and theatricality of his films have been widely explored: Kaston notes, for example, that in his films Dreyer uses the 'traditions of painting to evoke the distinct realities and mise-en-scène' (1988: 73) that suggest an aesthetic and atmospheric link between Dreyer and his painterly predecessor Hammershøi. So strong is the relationship between Dreyer's cinema and Hammershøi's art that Fonsmark claims the 'filmmaker takes over where a painter left off' (2006: 12). Analysts address the similarities in interior composition and use of light, as well as the fascination with perspective that dominates the work of both artists. In focusing on the ways in which Dreyer's films make use of theatrical staging, a spatial element in his films can be seen in *Mikaël* (*Michael*, 1924) and *Ordet* (*The Word*, 1955). Both films are represented as 'staged,' due to the positioning of the camera as a fourth wall, inhabiting that space reserved for theatrical audiences in front of a proscenium arch. *Mikaël*, especially, is framed by the Gothic archways and doors of its grand old house. In *Ordet*, meanwhile, the profilmic action takes place in front of a static camera, a strategy that alludes to the way in which drama might be acted out in a theatre.¹ Thus Dreyer's films are inflected with a formal understanding of the plastic and staged arts, which manifest themselves visually, in terms of composition and framing, and spatially, in terms of choreography and camera movement.

Another element to Dreyer's cinema, that to date has been of lesser interest to scholars when engaging with his films, is the self-reflexivity and uncanny awareness of film as a medium – and of cinema as an art – within the context of the films themselves. Indeed, Sandberg argues that 'The best way to characterise Dreyer's use of the film set is to call it an ongoing

1. 'The screen,' writes Perez, 'then becomes, like the stage, a space of representation closed off from the rest of the world' (1998: 84).

ontological experiment' (2006: 24), suggesting that there is a consistent and motivated referentiality not only to the formal demands of the medium, but to the medium itself. I propose that while painting and theatre can inform the cinematic, it is in the analysis of the film as film, and in this case, the revelation of film *on* film, where emerge the greatest interests and questions for debate.

The self-reflexivity of Dreyer's cinema appears throughout his work, spanning his distinct but varied stylistic guises and invading his most realist, or even naturalistic texts. Carney foregrounds the significance of 'the bizarre camera angles and movements in *Vampyr*,' and 'the protracted panning and tracking movements of the camera in *Ordet*' (1989: 21), the camera serving in both films to draw the spectator's attention to the fundamental workings of the film itself.² Similarly, editing techniques draw the quality of the cinematic to the surface of the screen. The iris, for example, reminds the audience of the apparatus through which the narrative of the film is caught, captured and projected (think in particular of *Præstanken*, or *The Parson's Widow*, 1920, which utilises a cross-shaped iris for a graveyard scene, breaking entirely with expected cinematic convention). 'We hear the screech of the moving camera in *Ordet*,' Schamus argues, and 'account for the constant mismatches in *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (*The Passion of Joan of Arc*, 1928) as a deliberate deconstruction of filmic space.' This results in an acknowledgment of filmic space that is 'politically liberating and ideologically progressive' (1988: 60).

It is worth thinking about the nature of ideology in Dreyer's films, for certain repeated social and political themes are invested by a multitude of his texts: gender, nature and landscape, servitude, and loyalty are but a handful of examples. What concerns me, however, is the constant return to the spiritual or transgressive in Dreyer's cinema, for his films evoke fascination in religious belief, faith in a higher being, and redemption in death.³ *Vredens Dag* (*Day of Wrath*, 1943), for example, charts the denunciation and trial of a woman accused as a witch in a Christian Danish town; *Mikaël* shows Michael tying his Master's shoes in a scene reminiscent of Jesus washing his disciples' feet, and throughout the final

2. As Cavell notes, if 'there is always a camera left out of the picture,' Dreyer is certain to call up and flag with gusto 'the one working now' (1979: 126).

3. Derrida claims that 'spirit is not the thing', and the 'spirit is not the body' (1989: 421): thus it is difficult to determine the slippery nature of spirituality. It oscillates between two poles – being and non-being – in much the same way as film. I use the notion of spirituality to refer to religiosity *and* what we would now (in the twenty-first century) distinctly define as 'ghosts'. While these two concepts (religion and the presence of ghosts) might now be considered separate, they have throughout history been connected and used interchangeably (Buse and Scott 1999: 4).

scene on the Master's deathbed, a cross hangs forebodingly overhead. In *Ordet*, religious beliefs divide the townspeople, and both Johannes and Inger assume the roles of Biblical figures (Johannes as the prophet John, and Inger at her resurrection as the crying Madonna). Explaining Dreyer's obsession with spirituality, O'Brien asserts: 'No previous medium having so vividly intimated the disappearance of God – there are sacred books but no sacred movies – it stood to reason that film would overcompensate by the systematic cultivation of visions, icons, exorcisms, martyrdoms, paradisiacal landscapes, and sacred rituals' (1993: 109). As Brakhage notes, Dreyer exposes 'Christianity's witch-tricks... and the magic spell of Christian see-er' (1972: 72) while simultaneously exposing the machinations and movements of the cinematic medium. But why this double exposure? 'The camera cannot in general merely declare itself; it must give at least the illusion of saying something,' argues Cavell (1979: 129). Then what does Dreyer's visible camera have to say? Through a brief ontological study of cinema and the uncanny, this essay seeks to answer this question. Using scenes from three of Dreyer's most famous texts (*La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, *Vampyr*, 1932, and *Ordet*), I focus on the ways in which cinematic self-reflexivity and filmic self-consciousness haunt the screen in Dreyer's cinema, particularly at moments of intense spiritual experience.

Haunted Screens

'Now for the first time,' Bazin states, 'the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, change mummified as it were' (1967: 15). He is speaking here of the 'phantom-like' shadows that constitute the makeup of film. Film offers something that is there and yet not there. It is constantly effacing visual and spatial boundaries, marginalised somewhere between darkness and light, stillness and motion, dream and reality, life and death. Bazin's 'mummy complex,' suggests that film is death, for it involves the continuing animation of subjects that once were alive and yet now, rendered on film and represented on screen, have disappeared. Stewart also recognises this quality in cinema, asking 'what is this "semblance of life" but a form of nonlife, another mode of death, a phantasmal perpetuation, wrested from and spun out of its own time into another?' (1999: 37). Mulvey simultaneously cites film as consisting of 'death twenty-four times a second' (2006). And yet, it is perhaps more fitting to assume that film – resting uneasily between a complex catalogue of binaries – can be *either* life or death. After all, film gives the illusion of life even where none is present. Further more, one has to remember film is as much a summation of what is fixed in light, as what is rendered in darkness. Film

gives life and takes it away. In Mulvey's words, it 'revolves around the fundamental, and irreconcilable, opposition between stillness and movement that reverberates across the aesthetics of cinema' (2006: 67). In Nead's description, it is an 'oscillation across states of animation and petrification' (2007: 69). Film challenges ontological definition because 'movies arise out of magic; from *below* the world' (Cavell 1979: 39). In short, film is almost unknowable in its changeability and demonstrative illusion. Even those figures represented on screen are subject to the shifting, ephemeral quality of film, for the characters the spectator sees before him are displaced by not only the time and space of the movie set, but the time and space of the movie's setting, and the time and place of the screening. O'Brien describes how 'The figure on screen belonged to a different order, odourless, and beyond touch: he was a phantasm, a trick of light' (1993: 114). Film plays with and distorts temporal logic, for it is both passive and aggressive in its functionality, storing and unleashing time with every passing frame. Doane recounts how 'Film was perceived as the imprint of time itself... a time unharnessed from rationalization, a nonteleological time in which each moment can produce the unexpected, the unpredictable, and temporality ratifies indeterminacy' (2002: 22). In film, it is frequent that 'We see something that does not really exist, and believe that it does exist' (Allen, 1995: 98). In their self-reflexive acknowledgment of their own medium, Dreyer's films surpass this illusion and allude to film as film, a concrete and physical entity indexically marked with an actual image. In recognising the presence of the film stock, its exposure and projection on screen, one is forced to recognise the reality of the images before them: no longer are they just the brief, flickering shadows of the in between, but real celluloid imprints of what was once really there. The self-reflexivity of the cinematic medium thus works to expose the fantastical and fictional as a planned construct that existed in a temporal and spatial reality.

These complex and fluid features of film also render it 'uncanny,' according to Freud's psychoanalytic logic. In his 1919 essay, he describes the uncanny as 'that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar' (1919: 340). Such a view allows us to understand the medium as a temporal store, or archive, following Doane's argument that 'film is the imprint of time itself.' Thus films are 'inevitably stained with their own historicity' (Doane 2002: 143). Film offers an experience of the old and long familiar in every frame that passes the light of the projector. Given its oscillation between life and death, film can also create 'Uncertainty whether an object is living or inanimate' (Freud 1919: 351), one of Freud's prescriptions for recognising the uncanny. Film gives motion to still images, and with a degree of reciprocity, makes still sequences of images that one feels should have motion: for example, the

static and motionless images of people in *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* pertain to the qualities of popular nineteenth-century *tableaux vivants*, described by Nead as having 'created a magical, haunted gallery that played across the borders between art and life' (2007: 75). The uncanny is thus a useful tool in analysing the medium of film, because it allows for a direct and constructive analogy to be made between the cinematic and the psychological (psychology being in turn related to the spiritual). Kaston asserts the significance of this spiritual phenomenon, as 'Dreyer explores the mystery surrounding characters who somehow cross back and forth between the spiritual and material world' (1988: 67). Just as Dreyer's characters transgress the boundaries between the material and the spiritual, so films transgress the boundaries between life and death (the physical/material world and the unknown/spiritual other), and the self-consciousness of film within film transgresses the boundary between belief in reality (the material presence of the film) and the fantastic (the sequence of images that exists only as a phantom, or spirit). The uncanny nature of film is thus absolutely suited to the exploration of both physical and spiritual worlds.

Spiritual Scenes

The spiritual is, of course, the main concern of the physical world in *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, which represents the trial and execution of the young, zealously religious martyr. The whole film consists of portrait-like, photographic close-ups of people's faces: the narrative is claustrophobically related through scenes of human expression in a visual style that, as I have already noted, calls to mind the uncanny motionlessness of the *tableau vivant*. The camera is visceral – if not visible – throughout the entire film, thanks to its insistence on exploring profilmic space, and to the use of the iris (the camera's eye made physical) for framing the character's faces – most famously that of Jeanne, whose tears roll down porcelain cheeks in startling close-ups. Schamus describes how 'The cinematic close-up, however, gave us the human face in such detail and with such power that old-fashioned, theatrical forms of facial gesturing could be thrown aside' (1988: 63), suggesting that film, and film alone, could render such images honestly to a spectator. Despite Dreyer's portrait-photography style of framing, this is a film that retains a certain degree of self-consciousness throughout. Even on the rare occasions that the camera moves, there is always duplicity in its spatial presence that informs the spectator of the irrational, cinematic nature of the journey through time and space. The cavernous, arched, gothic set is traversed by a camera that never tells you where it is going or how it reached its

destination: the camera's movement 'abstracts it from all spatio-temporal co-ordinates' (Deleuze 2003: 98). Prison bars, shadows, closed doors and brick walls dismantle the construction of perspectival space that one would usually expect, thereby eliminating any sense of passing, linear time. So insular is the world of Jeanne that for the cinema spectator, the only time to exist is that within the film. The real revelation of the filmic medium occurs, however, at the moment of greatest visual and spiritual anxiety, as Jeanne is marched out before the town to be burnt at the stake. The soldiers on the path appear before us upside down (in a motif recurring throughout Dreyer's films), birds fly manically through the sky, light and dark are effaced by storm effects and fire, spears are raised in patterns across the screen which again serve to break up or delineate the space. As the smoke and fire rage on, the shot length becomes shorter and the pathos more intense (noticeable thanks to the juxtaposition between this and previous, much lengthier sequences). Here, Dreyer materially makes visible the medium through which the images on the screen are captured, for in the frenzy of movement and objects in the final scene, there can be no accounting for a physical human presence in either temporal or spatial logic: the cuts between different spaces, the impossible angles (of the upside-down soldiers) and the marriage of light and dark (through the darkening sky, dazzle of fire and blanket of smoke, which reflects the in betweenness of film amidst these two binary opposites) all serve to remind the spectator that it is the camera's gaze that controls their understanding of the events on screen. Thomsen describes how:

Dreyer challenges the modern idea of narration, where seeing a film is a matter of decoding it in the process of seeing. He uses film as a miraculous medium where the spirit of Jeanne can become actual and be sensed by a modern audience. (2006: 46)

Film is used as a medium to expose the spiritual crisis of the protagonist: throughout the final scene, the revelation of self-reflexivity is symptomatic of the revelation regarding Jeanne's spiritual fate and religious fervour. Just as the film becomes 'actual,' denuded of its fantastical grip on the spectator's disbelief, so Jeanne's spirit becomes 'actual,' literally recounted and made visible through close-up.

Vampyr, Dreyer's dark and gothic homage to Expressionism, is of equal spiritual and material interest to *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, despite its stylistic and thematic differences. This vampire tale is not so much concerned with Christian beliefs and the Church, as it is with folklore, blood-letting and the spiritually undead, however it relies on the juxtaposition between a pagan belief system and faith in the Holy to convey its story. The exposition of the film follows its protagonist, David Grey (an acknowledged 'dreamer and a fantasist,') to the outskirts of a

village, where he enters a hotel. The camera is at first effaced by Grey's apparent point of view, for the spectator believes he is seeing through Grey's eyes as the interior of the bar comes into view. In what Rudkin describes as an optical 'kick' or 'dislocation' (2005: 34), Grey, however, comes into the shot. This is a disfigurement of spatial and temporal logic that exceeds even that of *Jeanne d'Arc*, for the discerning spectator will at once acknowledge this inconsistency. This first self-reflexive commentary occurs at the moment when Grey transgresses the boundary between the ordinary, physical world of light, and enters the spiritually inhabited ghost town of darkness, and this foray is but the first of many in the film. Light itself is a source of medium-specific enquiry here, for it is a continuous and obliging reference to film as film in its enervating insistence. Even in the darkness there is light, for Dreyer shot this film entirely on location, and entirely during the day.⁴ Brakhage comments on this when he talks of 'there being no absolute dark anywhere throughout *Vampyr*... only tendencies toward such-shades of photo-smoke, mists, blacks-of-dress, underexposures of all object[s]' (1972: 68). This describes poetically the unreal quality of stylistic aesthetics that can only be attributed to the use of film. Our vision is distorted and disfigured by trees, fences, shelves in the old mill, walls, mists and silhouettes that carve up the filmic space and allow for only sporadic visual notification of detail.

This frequent blindness, or at least lack of vision, is personified on screen by Leone's father, whose eyes stare unseeing out of the filmic frame at the moment of his death. Freud, in his essay on the uncanny, suggests that 'A study of dreams, phantasies and myths has taught us that anxiety about one's eyes, the fear of going blind, is often a substitute for the dread of being castrated' (1919: p.352).⁵ In the case of *Vampyr*, blindness can be equated with robbing someone literally of life. Cinema spectators see very little; in fact they only see what might equally be seen by Grey, who is 'little more than a consciousness wandering around as a double of our own' (Perez, 1998: 128). Perez goes on to describe the protagonist as 'an introspective abstraction of the fear of death – which is always a fear of our own death' (1998: 128). In a world of undead creatures whose disembodied silhouettes have no eyes, this fear of castration, or death, runs counter to the ability of cinema to preserve and even eternalise life, trapping its characters (and subsequently its audience) in a between – or 'other' – space that reflects the very nature of the film as a medium. Grey has every reason to fear death, for in the most intensely bizarre and fantastical sequence in the film, he dreams his own death and burial. His

4. Providing adequate lighting at night was a costly and inadequate operation, as Murnau would find in the making of his vampiric drama *Nosferatu* (1922).

5. Freud is here referring to the E.T.A. Hoffmann story 'The Sandman'.

head is at first surrounded by thunderous lightening. A skeleton's hand reaches for a bottle of poison in a scene that not only indicates the dream-like quality of the action, but also implies the dream-like quality of the cinema. We know that these aberrations do not really exist in the diegetic world of the film, they are psychological constructs existing only in the mind of the character. When the action cuts to an outside bench, two Greys exist side by side, and one steps away from the other; the 'invention of doubling,' here acts in Freud's words as a 'preservation against extinction' (1919: 356). This doubling is a necessary invention for the ghosted, transposed image of the 'real' Grey as he comes face to face with his dead self, lying in a coffin (an irony, really, considering the filmic self-reflexivity of image transposition and, in this case, the insistence that we believe the ghosting to be a physical, not spiritual presence). Grey's doubling works on three visual and formal levels. First, it makes very little spatial or temporal sense to have the same character exist twice within the same frame; and thus within the context of a dream serves to highlight the power of the cinematic medium to create visual impossibilities. Second, the transposition of one Grey into the same space as another also formally acknowledges the cinema's technical ability to distort and fracture physical reason. Third, the ghostly manifestation of the dream, with its deathly and corporeal tendencies, situates this sequence in both the spiritual and material realms. Here, cinematic revelation does not tend so much to reveal the actuality of a personal spiritual crisis, as it exposes the crisis between two spiritual embodiments: the faith of the living and the transient spirit that inhabits the undead (as Grey's faith in rationality and Christian ideology is tested against his dream-like voyage into the realms of folklore and impossibility). It is certainly true that as Rudkin claims, 'In *Vampyr's* world, there is neither life nor death. There is only the cold, unremitting estate of the Undead' (2005: 18). Indeed, while Dreyer effectively uses film to emphasise the spiritual crisis of his characters, he leaves the characters forever suspended in an eternal light that hovers precariously in that 'other' space that within cinema avoids definition.

The fragile, precarious and intangible nature of film is perhaps most obviously explored in one of Dreyer's much later films, *Ordet*. This film, like *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* and *Vampyr* before it, deals unashamedly with issues concerning spiritual and religious belief: Johannes (a misunderstood social outcast apparently blinded to reality by his religious fervour) claims to be a prophet of God; his younger brother is denied marriage because of differing religious beliefs; and Inger, their sister-in-law, is quite literally raised from the dead. Religious faith informs both narrative and style: it determines communities (the Lutheranism of the family versus the Indre Mission teaching of the village), it consumes lives (as in the case of Johannes, whose own personality has apparently disintegrated), and it

offers comfort and support (to Inger's daughter at her mother's death). As in its predecessors, *Ordet* features a curious mix of uncanny *tableaux vivants*, which maintain an absence of motion in the animated (exemplified by the portrait shots of the villagers at prayer), and uncanny resurrection, which creates life in the inanimate (specifically, Inger's return to life from her coffin). Places are once more traversed with peculiar irregularity. The juxtaposition between the static camera and the moving camera is greater in this film due to the technical mastery of the optical apparatus, as Rudkin argues:

Long passages of narrative are distilled within a single, often motionless frame. But the 'simplicity' is complexity made invisible. Almost invisible, even, is the film's one overt manifestation of technique, a breathtaking 360-degree tracking shot of immense physical difficulty and immaculate execution. (2005: 15)

The camera revolves fluidly around Johannes and Inger's young daughter at a moment of intense spiritual discursivity. But its movements occur in such a way that the spectator cannot help but feel physically dislocated and thus disoriented. A similar effect develops from the unexpected upside-down shot of Inger's face (as she lies dying in her isolated and dreary room), a shot evocative of the upside-down soldiers at Jeanne's death, or the face of Marguerite as she lies in her coffin in *Vampyr*. Dreyer, it seems, invests particular resonance in this expectation-altering and spatially-disorienting trick: it draws attention to the camera, and thus its medium, at the exact moment of transgression from life to death, at the interchange between animate and inanimate.

Ordet's most poignant scene is not, however, that of Inger's death, but rather of her resurrection, a scene that takes place in an entirely 'other' space and time, so fragmented is it from the constant linear progression thus anticipated. As Inger lies enshrouded in her coffin, the clock on the wall is stopped by her grieving husband. It is worth noting that until this point in the film, the ticking of the clock has been audible in nearly every interior scene. With the stopping of time, we thus enter a temporal and spatial unreality, a place not only outside of the spectator's time, but outside that of the diegetic time of the film, for it is only within this fantastical place that miracles can occur. Johannes, returned from his unexplained disappearance, calls on his faith to restore life to the consumed body of Inger. Inexplicably, she is resurrected. Life returns to her statuesque, inanimate body to the delight of her family and the villagers: at this point, the clock is restored as well, and begins once again its inevitable measuring of eternity. This 'other' space, the one in which life can so easily be given and taken away, is a purely cinematic one, for the stopping of the clock quite literally connotes a digression into the medium of film – offering a declaration of faith in the power of cinema. Film might

be 'the imprint of time itself,' but it is also outside of time, preserving and storing time, capturing and reanimating life, determining the spiritual through the materiality of its physical indexicality. 'The promise of indexicality is, in effect, the promise of the rematerialization of time' (2002: 10), argues Doane, implying that with the physical imprint of an image on celluloid comes the mastery of temporal logic. In this case, as Dreyer refers the spectator to the medium's functionality in an 'other' space, the film gains a degree of control over time that enables it to resume as well as reverse the effects of life and death, a manoeuvre that is of course film's greatest uncanny trope. Death in this film really does occur twenty-four times a second, for the quiet and unassuming ticking of the clock is in fact the ticking of the frames passing through the projector. It is a testament to the power of cinema that it can stop, reverse and play again its flickering and translucent representations of shadow and light. The revelation of film as film in *Ordet* is perhaps the most striking example of Dreyer's self-reflexivity, for while in both previous examples this has precipitated a revelation of spiritual crisis, in this film it exposes spirituality as a sham, negating its importance (Johannes has, after all, assumed an air of normality upon his return, and shirked his prophet-like persona) in favour of that of the cinema, the most superior and elusive of spirits.

Conclusion: Life After Death

Dreyer's use of film as a tangible and qualitative medium to expose the trappings, idiosyncrasies and shortfalls of spiritual experience offers a pertinent treatment of aesthetic consideration. Film, with its uncanny attributes of stillness and animation, shadow and light, capture and release of stored time – and of course its modal, as well as narrative fixation with life and death – renders it the medium *par excellence* to deal with the spiritual and transcendental. If, as Schrader claims, 'The Transcendent is beyond normal sense experience' (1972: 5), cinema qualifies as transcendental within its realms, for to experience a film is to experience a temporal and spatial dimension outside that of our concrete, everyday reality. Carney explains that 'Dreyer's style is not merely a kind of illustration of his narrative. His style is at odds with the commonsense understandings of space and time and history and human experience that we have before we come to film' (1989: 51). For Carney, Dreyer's style not only affects the way in which the spectator watches and deconstructs the language of the film; it offers a completely self-oriented and sufficient construction of space and time so that prior understandings of the world are rendered obsolete. To enter the world of a Dreyer film then is to leave

the world behind: in a sense, this is what Dreyer's characters do in order to evade and escape death. Inger only cheats death because she has already been encapsulated within the framework of the film. Her indexical image on celluloid preserves her life so she can never truly die (and it is only during the brief lapse into cinematic, versus linear, time that her resurrection can take place). 'Imitation' according to Arnheimer, 'permits people to cope with significant experiences; it provides release, and makes for a kind of reciprocity between the self and the world' (1958: 132). If one understands film as an imitation, or representation of life, one can easily identify this need to 'cope,' and desire for 'release' with the fear and denial of one's own death (personified by *Vampyr's* Grey), which is transgressed by the promise of eternity substantiated by the qualities of cinema. On this subject, Freud claims that:

Religions continue to dispute the importance of the undeniable fact of individual death and to postulate a life after death; civil governments still believe that they cannot maintain moral order among the living if they do not uphold the prospect of a better life hereafter as a recompense for mundane existence. (1919: 365)

Dreyer's cinema has answered the calling of those beleaguered civil governments, for it irrefutably denies any redemptive quality to spiritual belief: faith and spiritualism may 'postulate a life after death,' but they cannot offer any material manifestation of hope. To be caught in a spiritual crisis is to remain forever trapped in an abyss of inexplicable 'otherness,' which, like film, cannot be easily defined or represented. And yet, film is capable of knowing itself, and of exploring its own powers. Cinema is the offer of 'a better life hereafter,' for it can make tangible time, make impossible space, and, at least in Dreyer's films, give life to spirits whose deaths will forever be evaded.

Filmography

La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc (*The Passion of Joan of Arc*, Carl Th. Dreyer, France, 1928)
Mikaël (*Michael*, Carl Th. Dreyer, Germany, 1924)
Nosferatu (F.W. Murnau, Germany, 1922)
Ordet (*The Word*, Carl Th. Dreyer, Denmark, 1955)
Prästänkan (*The Parson's Widow*, Carl Th. Dreyer, Denmark, 1920)
Vampyr (Carl Th. Dreyer, Denmark, 1932)
Vredens Dag (*Day of Wrath*, Carl Th. Dreyer, Denmark, 1943)

Bibliography

- Allen, R. (1995) *Projecting Illusion: Film Spectatorship and the Impression of Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Arnheimer, R. (1958) *Film as Art*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Bazin, A. (1967) 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image,' in Grey, H. (ed.) *What is Cinema? Volume 1*. California: University of California Press, pp. 9-16.
- Brakhage, S. (1972) *The Brakhage Lectures*. Chicago: The GoodLion.
- Buse, P. and Stott, A. (1999) 'Introduction: A Future for Haunting' in Buse, P. and Stott, A. (eds.) *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History*. London: Macmillan. pp. 1-20.
- Carney, R. (1989) *Speaking the Language of Desire: The Films of Carl Dreyer*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cavell, S. (1979) *The World Viewed*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Doane, M. A. (2002) *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, The Archive*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1989) 'Of Spirit' in *Critical Enquiry*, Vol. 15, No. 2, Winter 1989. pp. 457-474.
- Deleuze, G. (2003) *Deleuze on Cinema*. London: Routledge.
- Fonsmark, A. B. (2006) 'The Link from a Painter to a Filmmaker,' in Hvidt, A. R. (ed) *Hamersøil/Dreyer: The Magic of Images*. Copenhagen: Orupgaard, pp. 11-26.
- Freud, S. (1919) 'The Uncanny' in *The Penguin Freud Library Vol 14: Art and Literature* (1990). Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp. 339-376.
- Kaston, C. (1988) 'Faith, Love and Art: The Metaphysical Triangle in *Ordet*,' in Jensen, J. (ed.) *Carl Theodore Dreyer*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, pp. 67-78.
- Mulvey, L. (2006) *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Nead, L. (2007) *The Haunted Gallery*. New Haven, Conn. and London: Yale University Press.
- O'Brien, G. (1993) *The Phantom Empire*. London: W.W. Norton.
- Perez, G. (1998) *The Material Ghost: Films and their Medium*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Rudkin, D. (2005) *Vampyr*. London: BFI.
- Sandberg, M. (2006) 'Mastering the House: Performative Inhabitation in Carl Th. Dreyer's *The Parson's Widow*' in Thomson, C. (ed.) *Northern Constellations: New Readings in Nordic Cinema*. Norwich: Norvik Press, pp. 23-42.
- Schamus, J. (1988) 'Dreyer's Textual Realism,' in Jensen, J. (ed.) *Carl Theodore Dreyer*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, pp. 59-66.
- Schrader, P. (1972) *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer*. New York: Da Capo Press.
- Stewart, G. (1999) *Between Film and Screen: Modernism's Photo Synthesis*. Chicago, Ill.: Chicago University Press.
- Thomsen, B. M. (2006) 'On the Transmigration of Images: Flesh, Spirit and Haptic Vision in Dreyer's *Jeanne d'Arc* and von Trier's *Golden Heart Trilogy*' in Thomson, C. (ed.) *Northern Constellations: New Readings in Nordic Cinema*. Norwich: Norvik Press, pp. 43-58.