

A Cinema of Dust

On the Ontology of the Image from Dreyer's Thorvaldsen to Ordrupgaard's Dreyer

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Dust can be both an essence of things and the best way of getting at the essence of other things.
(Amato 2000: 9)

'If cinema does not give us the presence of the body and cannot give it to us, this is perhaps also because it sets itself a different objective: it spreads an "experimental night" or a white space over us; it works with "dancing seeds" and a "luminous dust"; it affects the visible with a fundamental disturbance, and the world with a suspension, which contradicts all natural perception. What it produces in this way is the genesis of an unknown body.' (Deleuze, *Cinema 2*)

I: Ordrupgaard, 2006: *Hammershøi > Dreyer. The Magic of Images*

In Autumn 2006, Ordrupgaard Museum in the northern suburbs of Copenhagen hosted an exhibition entitled *Hammershøi > Dreyer. Billedmagi (Hammershøi > Dreyer. The Magic of Images)*. The exhibition explored the influence of one of Denmark's most significant painters, Vilhelm Hammershøi (1864-1916), on the nation's most lauded filmmaker, Carl Theodor Dreyer (1889-1968). This influence had already been treated in some depth by the Danish Hammershøi expert Poul Vad (d. 2003), who saw Dreyer as Hammershøi's one true heir. Therefore, while it was not a new idea to link the two artists, whether circumstantially or via a relationship of stylistic filiation, this exhibition did break new ground in bringing together and juxtaposing images and artefacts from the works and lives of the two men.

The intimate exhibition space of Ordrupgaard was the ideal venue for an 'encounter' between Hammershøi and Dreyer, who never met in real life. The museum building was designed and constructed in the early twentieth century for the Danish collector Wilhelm Hansen; it had a dual purpose – a family home with gallery attached, that would house the Hansen family in the summer, as well as their growing collection of French impressionist art. The idiosyncratically

Danish architectural details of Ordrupgaard thus echoed the interiors painted and filmed by Hammershøi and Dreyer, so that the visitor had the impression of both walking around in, and gazing into, the same domestic spaces, in a way that reminded me of the multiple doorways in one of Hammershøi's most famous paintings. Walking from room to room, one moved thematically between the shared tropes that characterise the work of both artists: faces; interiors; bodies; exteriors; and light and lines, each theme playing out in its own more or less intimate space within the museum.

In her introduction to the exhibition catalogue, the curator, Anne-Birgitte Fonsmark, touches on what she calls the 'scenographic' problem of exhibiting painting and film alongside each other, within the same 'exhibition universe'. There is a danger that film as a 'strong' and 'attractive' medium might steal attention away from the paintings, for example. However, the exhibition, as she says, chooses to sidestep the problem of what we might refer to as the ontological differences between painting and film; its purpose is simply to explore the thematic parallels mentioned above. I have brought a copy of the exhibition catalogue along, in case anyone would like to learn more about it. I only want briefly to zoom in on the figure of the visitor, or, rather, the spectator in this exhibition, in order to introduce certain notions which are central to my paper today.

The first spectator I would like to consider is, I suppose, me. I am concerned here with the curators' sticky problem: how to exhibit Dreyer's films. Their solution was to play five-minute segments of several of his best-known feature films on a loop: Inger's funeral and resurrection in *Ordet* (The Word, 1954), for example, and the young apprentice's painting of the model's eyes in *Mikaël* (Michael, 1924). These were projected onto a screen separated from the rest of the room by a thin curtain of white muslin. The effect was, actually, entrancing. I had moved from gazing at a Hammershøi interior, into a soft, light viewing space in which well-known and, indeed, beloved sequences were repeating themselves, compulsively, it seemed, over and over, as I had done on my laptop, whether for the purpose of preparing classes or (in the case of Inger's resurrection) for pure compulsive pleasure; indeed, even as a coping mechanism at a time of mourning. Returning to London, I happened to buy Laura Mulvey's recent book *Death 24x a Second* (2006), and my affective response to the curator's strategy began to make sense. Mulvey's essays explore how, and I quote,

at the end of the twentieth century new technologies opened up new perceptual possibilities, new ways of looking, not at the world, but at the internal world of cinema. *The century had accumulated a recorded film world, like a parallel universe, that can now be halted or slowed or fragmented.* The new technologies work on the body like mechanisms of delay, delaying the forward motion of the medium itself, fragmenting the forward movement of narrative and taking the spectator into the past. (Mulvey 2006: 181, my emphasis).

Towards the end of her book, Mulvey goes on to suggest that the possibility of selecting, stilling, and compulsively replaying segments of a film re-invests the mass-produced medium with the aura which Benjamin thought photography and film had banished (193); and this new form of spectatorship also conjures up new experiences of time, space and narrative whose echo can certainly be heard among and between the constellations of paintings, photographs, film stills, documents and looping film clips in the *Hammershøi > Dreyer* exhibition:

the different attributes of film and photography are now producing new relations and connections to each other, sequentially or simultaneously, out of which new oscillating, shifting, representations of time may be experienced. Immobility mutates into movement that merges with the register of narrative time only to fragment again with a return to stillness and the register of the index. (Mulvey 2006: 196)

I will come back to some of these ideas – in particular, indexicality – in a few moments, but I would first like to linger a little on a second, and much more illustrious, visitor haunting the exhibition: Carl Dreyer himself. We must, in fact, walk with him into and around the second museum on my itinerary today.

II: Kunstforeningen, Copenhagen, 1916: *Hammershøi retrospective*

The Ordrupgaard exhibition is not content to posit a stylistic or thematic intertextuality between Hammershøi and Dreyer. Instead, it fleshes out one documented encounter between the two artists, or, rather, between Dreyer and Hammershøi's art. This is the major retrospective of Hammershøi's painting, which opened a few months after his death in early 1916, at Kunstforeningen in Copenhagen. It is known from Dreyer's notes that he visited this exhibition (and had kept an eye on the development of Hammershøi's art); Poul Vad makes, in particular, the link between Dreyer's participation in the Hammershøi-Boom of 1916, and his stylistic strategies in his first film *Præsidenten* (The President, 1918). What interests me here is how the Ordrupgaard exhibition dramatizes Dreyer's encounter with Hammershøi's art:

Træder vi nu ind i kunstforeningens udstilling, med Dreyer, åbner der sig en verden af en forfinet, gråstemt melankoli [...] Her mødtes den unge Carl Theodors blik af nærgående og følsomme portrætter (Billedmagi 2006: 19, my emphasis)

and so on, picking out key works – the masterpieces canonised in the course of the century – which the twenty-seven-year-old Dreyer would have seen. If we can play this catalogue at its own game for a moment, I would like to pick out one such masterpiece, which really was canonised in 2005 by the Danish government's Kulturkanon, no less, as one of the twelve most important Danish paintings of all time. This is the painting you see here [PPT], and probably recognise: 'Støvkornenes dans i solstrålerne' (The Dance of the Dust Motes in the Sunbeams), 1900. Now, this painting, according to Ordrupgaard, started life with

the much more prosaic title 'Solskin' or 'Solstråler' (Sunshine or Sunbeams), and was only renamed later. I have not yet been able to find out when or why the title changed. However, I suspect that my first-year Danish students were on the right track [PPT] when they noted that the new name re-focuses the spectator's (perhaps Dreyer's) gaze towards something that is both 'usynligt' and 'livligt' (invisible and lively). This is of course the 'dust motes' which are purportedly 'dancing' in the sunlight. It may only be circumstantial that the first commercial domestic vacuum cleaner was invented and patented around the turn of the century, but the invisible dance of Hammershøi's dust motes choreographs the early twentieth century's obsession with dust as a cipher for other, even more minuscule and newly-discovered worlds:

With so much known about the invisible, dust can never again be ordinary [...] After 1900, control of the small and the invisible became vital matters of individual rights and national well-being. The history of public health and medicine reveals how peoples of the West in the first half of the twentieth century came to adapt their lives to a new order of small and invisible things. (Amato 2000: 109-111)

Mary Ann Doane (2002) and many others have explored the role of cinema around this time in re-thinking time, space, movement, and so on, in modernity; as Doane insists, cinema is 'not merely an effect or a symptom of epistemological development' but also a 'crucial participant' (17-8) in negotiating and imagining such concepts. But this is not my focus here. **Rather, I would like to try to filter ideas about the ontology of the image in cinema, with special reference to Dreyer's cinema, through - dust.** An ontology of dust, if you will. If this sounds like a strangely specific and contingent choice of focus, we might consider that without the 'refracting power' of atmospheric dust, human perception of light, and therefore visual technologies, would be very different (Amato 2000: 5). In what follows, it is the materiality of dust which I will dwell on in connection with Dreyer; thinking about the ontology of the image from a dusty perspective helps illuminate not only certain aspects of his cinematic practice, but also helps us to understand the relations between certain of his films and the museum spaces in which they unfold.

What *is* this dust which floats in its Brownian Motion in Hammershøi's stately, deserted parlour? It could be the 'dancing seeds' and the 'luminous dust' that is the stuff of cinema, according to Deleuze. Or not. To quote Amato's book again, 'ordinary house dust is a mixture of dead insect parts, flakes of human skin, shreds of fabric, and other unpleasing materials' (ix). Elsewhere, I have read that around 90% of house dust consists of skin particles. Coincidentally, just before I left London, my University was advertising a new art installation highlighting the dangers to health posed by dust mites [PPT]. But we are also surrounded by dust from inorganic matter: rock, sand, chalk, metal..... Quite simply, 'dust is a result of the divisibility of matter' (Amato 2000: 3), and it is also therefore caught up in **time**; it 'forms the ceaseless tides of the becoming and

dissolution of things. Out of it things are made; into it they dissolve' (5). This includes our human flesh and bone. As Catholics are reminded every year on Ash Wednesday, 'Remember, man, that thou art dust, and into dust thou shalt return'.

Nevertheless, civilisations have striven in vain in various ways, not least through art, to resist the return of their flesh to dust. Indeed, according to André Bazin, the very origins of the plastic arts lie in the desire to preserve the body. In the first lines of his essay 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', he muses that:

If the plastic arts were put under psychoanalysis, the practice of embalming the dead might turn out to be a fundamental factor in their creation. The process might reveal that at the origin of painting and sculpture there lies a mummy complex. (Bazin 2005 [1967]: 9)

For the ancient Egyptians, Bazin goes on, the corporeal bodies of the dead must be preserved at all costs; as extra insurance, terracotta statues were placed in the sarcophagi, lest the mummified bodies were destroyed or stolen. This was a Plan B, we might say, being only a 'preservation of life by the representation of life' (10). Bazin goes on to show how mummification and the terracotta statuettes stand for two strands of art's reponse to the real through the ages: on the one hand, 'the *duplication* of the world outside' (the mummified bodies), and, on the other, 'the expression of *spiritual reality*' (the terracotta statues)(11). Cinema and photography have freed the plastic arts from the first of these tasks, leading to a crisis of realism in the plastic arts in modern times (12-13). It is the technology associated with photography that makes the difference, says Bazin, and here he, too, appeals to a build-up of dust on the world to make his point:

For the first time, between the originating object and its reproduction there intervenes only the instrumentality of a nonliving agent. For the first time an image of the world is formed automatically, without the creative intervention of man [...] Only the impassive lens, stripping its object of all those ways of seeing it, those piled-up preconceptions, *that spiritual dust and grime with which my eyes have covered it*, is able to present it in all its virginal purity to my attention and consequently my love' (13-15, my emphasis).

It is interesting that the same 'dust and grime' from which digital restoration, these days, is meant to save long-forgotten film reels, is here associated with the eye, not the film. Roland Barthes, in his last book, *La chambre claire* (*Camera Obscura*, 1980), was adamant that the same quality of objective indexicality could not be attributed to the cinema – only to still photography. But for Bazin, the 'impassive lens' can capture the duration of things (15), such that the cinema can be described as 'objectivity in time' (14) and 'change mummified' (15).

Painting is the 'plastic' art on which Bazin draws in order to emphasise how different is the mechanical, nonhuman genesis of photographs. While the essay *mentions* sculpture as one of the plastic arts, the Egyptian terracottas are the

only sculptures actually discussed by Bazin. However, in an intriguing little footnote, he compares the indexical quality of photography to that of the moulding of death-masks: both art forms, he says, 'involve a certain automatic process' and 'the taking of an impression' (12). Photography, then, is the inheritor of the art of the embalmer. The mould as a metaphor for the action of the camera comes up again in Bazin's later essay 'Theater and Cinema - Part Two':

The photograph proceeds my means of the lens to the taking of a veritable luminous impression in light - to a mo[u]ld. As such it carries with it more than mere resemblance, namely a kind of identity [...] The cinema does something strangely paradoxical. It makes a mo[u]lding of the object as it exists in time and, furthermore, makes an imprint of the duration of the object. (Bazin 2005: 97)

As Gilles Deleuze comments on this passage, this is a strange sort of mould: it must be a 'variable, continuous, temporal mould' (Deleuze 1986: 25). How are we to understand such a mould? We might think of the writings of one filmmaker who saw cinema as a temporal sculpture, Andrey Tarkovsky, whose memoir is entitled in English *Sculpting in Time* (2005 [1986]). He asks 'What is the essence of a director's work?' and answers:

We could define it as sculpting in time. Just as a sculptor takes a lump of marble, and, inwardly conscious of the features of his finished piece, removes everything that is not part of it - so the filmmaker, from a "lump of time" made up of an enormous, solid cluster of living facts, cuts off and discards whatever he does not need, leaving only what is to be an element of the finished film, what will prove to be integral to the cinematic image. (Tarkovsky 2005: 64)

However, the metaphorical freehand sculpting of which Tarkovsky writes here may produce a variable, continuous, temporal 'statue' - that is, the film as a re-worked lump of time - but this is not the indexical moulding in which Bazin is interested. Tarkovsky's time-sculpture is formed from the hands, chisel and imagination of the sculptor, not from the direct imprint of the thing it records; while the 'lump of time' which is the starting point of Tarkovsky's allegory is indeed a result of the film's indexical relation to what the lens registers, it constitutes raw material which is then shaped according to the filmmaker's wishes and skills.

In fact, Tarkovsky's vision of the work of the filmmaker-as-sculptor reflects working practices in a modern sculptor's studio, but the methodology of nineteenth-century sculptors was quite different. Their works were largely produced using processes more closely related to the indexical death masks and moulds of which Bazin writes. This was certainly the case with the sculptures and reliefs which appear in Dreyer's short film on the world-renowned Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen - to which I will now turn.

III: Thorvaldsens museum, 1948: Dreyer's *Thorvaldsen*

In summer 1947, Dreyer wrote to the head of Dansk kulturfilm, Ib Koch-Olsen, to suggest a short film about the sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770?-1848). Dreyer's rationale was to film Thorvaldsen's most popular and most 'accessible' works, so that the man in the street would be better able to appreciate what was special and unique about Thorvaldsen's art. Incidentally, this motivation corresponds to André Bazin's argument for the importance of the art film: 'to bring the work of art within the range of everyday seeing so that a man needs no more than a pair of eyes for the task' (2005: 167). The arguments raised against Dreyer's proposal amongst the committee that evaluated the project, and, later, in the popular press once the film was made, are also echoed in Bazin's discussion: that film as a medium 'does violence to' (166) the plastic arts, and that the 'artificial and mechanical dramatization' that film can impose on a work of art might 'give us an anecdote' and not a painting or sculpture (169). On the other hand, the strange fusion of the two art forms can provide the work of art 'with a new form' of existence, making an 'aesthetic symbiosis of screen and painting' (168). Ultimately, Bazin makes the point that the aesthetic success of art films is dependent on how well informed and sensitive the filmmaker is.

Dreyer was certainly well-informed about Thorvaldsen. In her archival research, Britta Martensen-Larsen outlines Dreyer's preparatory research for the Thorvaldsen film, and brings to light some of the contents of his original manuscript for the commentary. This was eventually trimmed by around 50% on the insistence of the co-credited producer, Preben Frank, and so the public was never exposed to Dreyer's complex and fascinating narratives around Thorvaldsen's sculptures (to which I shall return in a moment). The Thorvaldsen film had to stand or fall on the basis of the cinematography. Dreyer himself was never happy with the finished result, feeling that too many cooks had spoiled the broth.

Dreyer and his collaborators filmed at the Thorvaldsen museum in the heart of Copenhagen in summer 1948, and the project was more or less complete by the time of the museum's centenary celebrations in mid-September. The museum [PPT] had opened around the time of Thorvaldsen's death in 1848; its layout and the works exhibited remain even today more or less as they were in the nineteenth century. The weight of the sculptures necessitates a concentration of exhibition space at ground level, with smaller spaces upstairs and in the basement, all arranged around a central courtyard where Thorvaldsen is buried. For Dreyer's film, those statues that were to be filmed had been moved from their plinths and into the front hall (in blue). There, a grey curtain had been hung as a background, and the works were mounted on a revolving plinth and lit by spotlight. This was intended to maximise the space around the sculptures - necessary in quite a compact museum - which, as Martensen-Larsen puts it, 'forstærkede den plastiske virkning' (1995: 118). It also enabled the camera to get

close up to the sculpture and move over its surface, lingering on 'de væsentlige detaljer af den menneskelige anatomi'. Other works, such as reliefs, were filmed in situ.

The particular symbiosis of sculpture and film here is not as strange a coupling as Bazin and the Danish critics suggested. In this museum, two sculptural traditions coalesce, both of them involving a kind of indexicality that prefigures the simultaneous emergence of photography. Thorvaldsen was so famous, in fact, that more than a century before Dreyer's short film on Thorvaldsen, the sculptor had actually been immortalised in a photograph – more precisely in the first known Danish daguerrotype – from 1840.¹ But more importantly, this museum could only have happened in the Danish Golden Age, and Thorvaldsen was the only possible candidate. From the beginning of recorded history, sculptors seem to have had a lower status than painters or architects. HW Janson (1985: 12) argues that this was because sculpture involves much routine, physical labour. Another factor that has always encumbered the sculptor is the sheer cost of the raw materials (13), and the consequent dependence on wealthy patrons or commercial work such as carving gravestones. Between 1750 and 1800, the practice of modelling in plaster emerged amongst sculptors in Europe as a solution to these problems. This was not just a matter of cost, although this was crucial; working with plaster rather than expensive bronze or marble meant that the sculptor could display his own original work to potential buyers, who would then commission copies in more prestigious materials. Paradoxically, however, the use of plaster by contemporary sculptors also placed their creations on a par with the classical works of art they were trying to emulate. The art historian Janson explains that

many of the surviving masterpieces of classical sculpture were themselves copies of lost originals, often with a change of materials (e.g., marble copies after bronzes), and because of their fame as embodiments of an aesthetic ideal these copies, in turn, were constantly reproduced as plaster casts for the benefit of students and connoisseurs (Janson 1985: 13)

The difference between these two related practices is essentially a temporal one; the nineteenth-century original plaster gave a 'preview' of a possible sculpture, while the craze of the time for plaster casts of ancient originals made immediate otherwise inaccessible works of art.

¹ According to Marie Louise Berner's book on this daguerrotype (2005), the photograph was initially rejected by the Thorvaldsen Museum when offered for purchase in 1894, and only bought and put on display in 1909. This may have been because the Thorvaldsen we see in the image does not live up to the self-portrait [PPT IMAGE] he himself bequeathed to eternity, in which he towers over a half-finished version of his favourite sculpture, *Haabet*. This is in any case how Mikkel Bogh reads the photograph:

Den hvidhårede, 70-årige billedhugger er mærket af sin alder, i hvert fald langt mere end de samtidige portrætfremstillinger lader ane. Sky ser han væk fra linsen, og med venstre hånds pege- og lillefinger afsværger han dette djævlens onde øje. Men måske afsværger han også hele den tid, epoken står på tærsklen til (Bogh 1997: 56-7)

To be clear, two different practices are in play with these plasters. Firstly, we have plaster casts of existing (often ancient) works of art. This involves taking plaster moulds in many separate pieces from the surface of the artefact, so that a 'negative' mould is formed [PPT]. To make a copy, wet plaster is poured into the completed mould and when it dries, the mould is cut away, revealing a perfect model of the original.² The V&A Museum in London has the world's finest collection of these, in specially-built courts.

The second practice – the type of plaster sculpture with which Thorvaldsen and his contemporaries established their careers – was a stage in the journey of an original sculpture towards its eventual manifestation in marble or bronze. Usually, the initial idea for the design was sketched as a drawing, or modelled directly in clay under the hands of the artist. For the World Fair at Crystal Palace in 1851, this stage is romantically described as follows:

As soon as the artist has conceived his subject, and made his drawing upon paper, a model in clay, or some soft material, is executed in little. In the production of the model it is that the artist-mind is displayed; if *that* be true and natural, its transference to stone or bronze is a matter of comparatively minor importance (quoted in Janson 1985: 10)

These small models are usually called *maquettes*. A full-scale and detailed model is then made in clay on a frame of wood and wire. When the clay is dry, a plaster cast is taken of the clay sculpture, again, producing a 'negative' mould from which the clay inside is then removed. The negative plaster mould is filled with gypsum plaster and left to harden. Then the mould is removed. As Janson puts it (10), the clay model is thus replaced with its 'ghost'. If a marble copy is eventually commissioned by a customer, the 'plaster original', as it is called, will provide the measurements for blocking out and carving the marble. This last stage, according to the World Fair leaflet, is 'a matter of mechanical rather than inventive skill' (10). Or, if the statue is to be cast in bronze, this will be done in a foundry by specialists, not involving the sculptor at all.

If we think of these 'original plasters' as the 'ghosts' of the figures produced by the sculptor's 'artist-mind', then the studios and museums of nineteenth-century sculptors were filled with the ghosts of sculptures yet to be made, and the ghosts of other sculptures copied, completed and removed by

² This was a practice recorded as early as the sixteenth century in private collections, and by 1800 apprentices and students in major art academies were able to experience a range of the world's classical and medieval treasures through plaster casts. By the 1870s, the enormous cast courts of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London boasted the largest and most impressive collection in the world, and still offers an awe-inspiring experience to the visitor. The Kongelige Afstøbningsssamling in Copenhagen is another leading collection. In the mid-1860s, fifteen European leaders signed up to an agreement entitled 'International Convention of promoting universally Reproductions of Works of Art', aimed at securing the international exchange of plaster copies of art treasures, for the education of the general population. The practice of casting fell out of favour by the end of the nineteenth century, not least because it was suspected that the objects from which casts were taken sometimes suffered damage; conversely, the plaster casts of the nineteenth century have in many cases outlived the originals, which have been destroyed by war, accident or pollution (Baker).

their buyers. These plaster originals were not destroyed, for they might be needed again, and they served as records of the sculptor's genius. In Thorvaldsen's case, such was his renown that by 1820 there were plans in Denmark to make plaster casts of his oeuvre and ship them to Denmark. This did not come to pass; instead, towards the end of his life, the plaster 'ghosts' of his life's work followed him home to Copenhagen.

Thorvaldsen's tomb is located in the centre of the museum, which Bogh thinks indicates a change in the public conception of art: 'at kunsten ikke længere skabes til Guds og kongens ære, men derimod til folkets' (Bogh 1997: 61). I would go further: that the sculptor's bodily remains are positioned amongst his works imbues those same works with the mortality of their subjects. If it does not sound too fanciful, this museum for me is a space where stone and flesh grow into each other – I mean this metaphorically, that is, in the imagination of the visitor, for the reasons just described. But I also mean it quite literally. One way to tell the difference between the plasters and the marbles in this museum is that the plasters look dirty. According to the museum's own website, plaster is difficult to clean without damaging it; some of the discoloration is due to long-term building works nearby, but some of it is due to ordinary dust and dirt and handling, that is, due to the traces of the bodies of visitors and staff. While bronzes are given a patina at the behest of the sculptor, these plaster originals have a patina of skin. The museum's users have thus left their own indexical trace on the museum.

The ongoing, shifting physical presence of the museum's visitors is recognised in an interactive film made for the museum, which is available online [PPT]. The film is meant to evoke the visitor's own sensory – even sensuous – response to the sculptures, focused through a weary visitor making a connection between the statue of Venus with the Salve to her own pleasantly-scented handcream. She then appears to have a potentially romantic experience, too. There is an interesting tension between the online film's emphasis on sensory experience, and the curiously sterile experience of streaming video. Still, the democratic symbolism which Mikkel Bogh sees as invested in this museum is echoed in the site's invitation to its viewers to interact with and re-organise the now virtual museum space, here fragmented into a range of video clips.

I was not able to find any mention online or in the museum shop of Dreyer's film, which seems to have been jettisoned as a marketing tool. A pity, for Dreyer's mediation of the sculptures he films goes beyond the pedagogical function of the film – art for the ignorant masses – and establishes a sensory relationship with the works which gestures to Bazin's idea of the art film as symbiosis. What I like about Bazin's metaphor for the 'aesthetic symbiosis' of the art film is its organic-ness: he compares it to lichen, which is the symbiosis of algae and mushroom.

In coming back to Dreyer's short film, now, I would like to suggest that we can understand it as appealing to a sense of touch – or rather the missing

sense of touch that film cannot provide. This is a key idea in Laura Marks' book from 2000, *The Skin of the Film*. Some films, usually minor, experimental, and intercultural works, radically dislodge vision as the reigning sense. They 'appeal to the sense that they cannot technically represent' (Marks 2000: 129), such as touch, taste and smell, in order to find ways to express experience and memory that are not completely encoded in the dominant narratives and images of Western culture. Memory, after all, as Bergson tells us, resides in all the senses, and how it is organised is culturally contingent. What film can do is gesture to what it cannot do; it can approach touch asymptotically, and evoke 'tactile forms of knowledge' (132). Here, we have to think of the viewing experience – of both sculpture and film – as embodied. Amongst others, Marks and Vivian Sobchack regard the viewing experience as not purely visual but as 'an extension of the viewer's embodied existence' (Marks 2000: 149). The senses, and sense memory, help to create the meaning of the film.

In the case of these sculptures, of course, one is generally not allowed to touch, so what is being evoked is perhaps, rather, a longing for tactility, wrapped up in the sensory experience of being in the museum. Indeed, the synthesis of film and sculpture activates a sensory experience of Thorvaldsen's sculpture which may not be available in the museum. This is perhaps what the art critic Sigurd Schultz meant when he commented that Dreyer's film 'viser plastikken i Thorvaldsens værker bedre end på Thorvaldsens museum' (Martensen-Larsen 1995: 120).

Indeed, Thorvaldsen's weakness is usually regarded to be his 'coldness'. For example, the art historian Licht, reviewing Thorvaldsen's influence in nineteenth and twentieth century sculpture, comments:

Thorvaldsen is far more anonymous [than Canova] in his treatment of surfaces and masses. The perfection of a composition, the utmost clarity of design, the scrupulous exclusion of private, idiosyncratic emotional responses make the sheerly sensuous appearance of his sculptures a matter of indifference. One is often tempted to caress a Canova, but rarely does one care to come too close to a Thorvaldsen, whose even surfaces and slightly flaccid volumes never appeal to a muscular, haptic or visceral response on the part of the spectator. (Licht 1967: 34)

This difference in style between Canova and Thorvaldsen has, notably, been attributed both to the generational and religious chasm between them (Canova was 13 years older) and to the latter's national origin: "[Canovas] værker havde dog til stadighed rokokkens sensuelle kendemærke, en vis let og pikant tone, en vis taktilt appellerende slikkethed i overfladebehandlingen, som var den puritanske nordbo fremmed" (Bogh 1997: 13). But it seems that Thorvaldsen was consciously and determinedly resistant to the Baroque practice of establishing an erotic and affective connection to the beholder.

Thorvaldsen ønskede bestemt ikke at hidse beskueren op og interesserede sig slet ikke for det svimlende blik og det bankende hjerte. Tværtimod, beskuelsesakten kunne ikke blive fredfyldt,

kontemplativ og idyllisk nok [...] Thorvaldsen ville [...] gerne fuldstændigt undgå den begærlige relation til skulpturen. Nej, det mest nærliggende var faktisk at forestille sig skulpturen som alene med sig selv, helt hinsides ethvert samvær af nogen art. (Bogh 1997: 31).

The figures seem to be alone in an untouchable “intimsfære” or zone of intimacy (Bogh 1997: 32). This has been argued to herald the coming of a “borgerlig subjektivitet” (ibid.), in which the boundaries of the individual subject stopped at the skin, and identity turned inwards.

In his original script for the Thorvaldsen film, which was, as noted previously, radically trimmed down by Dansk Kulturfilm, Dreyer also acknowledged this apparent coldness, but saw in some of Thorvaldsen’s masterpieces the sublimation of just that ‘private, idiosyncratic’ emotion which Licht and others miss in his sculpture. Echoing his own idiosyncratic vocabulary in his writings on film, Dreyer reads ‘rhythm’ in certain of the sculptures, a rhythm which, he thinks, releases the feelings which Thorvaldsen worked into his sculptures and reliefs.

For example, in the part of the original manuscript that deals with the sculpture of Priamus, Dreyer wrote the following:

I dette Værk som i al Thorvaldsens Kunst er det Rytmen man glæder sig over. Han havde en egen Evne til at bygge Figurernes Bevægelser op til rytmiske [...] Harmonier. Den rytmiske Musikalitet er den inderste geniale Evne hos Thorvaldsen. I sin klareste Form har han vist den i Relieffet med Priamus. Ansigternes Udtryk siger som sædvanlig ingenting – de må ikke drage Opmærksomheden bort fra den talende Rytme. Fra Venstre er der i Slavernes nedbøjede Holdning en faldende Bevægelse ned til de knælende Konge, så vi føler hvor dybt han ydmyger sig for sin Fjende, den siddende Achilles, Sejrherren. Så glider Blikket videre til Achilles’ to Venner bag Bordet, hvor Stemningen klinger ud i deres sørgmodigt hvilende Holdning. Rytmen tvinger uvilkaarligt Opmærksomheden til at samles om de to Hovedskikkelser i Midten. (Martensen-Larsen 1995: 123)

And on another sculpture, Achilles og Penthisilea:

...så føles det ikke blot som en fin Musik, men ud af disse Rytmer stiger en dyb og ung Sorgmodighed. Men sådan får man ikke Rytmer til at tone uden personlig Oplevelse, uden at skjulte Følelser gør sig gældende. I værket har kunstneren fundet Udløsning for en Sorgmodighed for ham selv, befriet sig for en Sørg, der tyngede ham. (125)

In several of the commentaries, Dreyer reckons that Thorvaldsen was working his way out of a melancholic mood. This is not just ‘Billedhuggerlyrik’, he insists: these sculptures are ‘menneskelige Dokumenter’ (125). If Dreyer sees a rhythm in the sculptures themselves, though, others have seen in film the possibility of ‘reanimating’ the ‘stillness’ of statues, as Mulvey puts it in connection with Roberto Rossellini’s footage of classical sculpture in his *Viaggio in Italia* (1953). Rossellini releases the sculptures from the ‘frozen moment’ that they capture. In Dreyer’s film, this is not the case; he sees rhythm and movement already in the sculptures – both in their composition AND in the bodily work that was put into

the reliefs – and works to release it for the viewer. His film creates movement by, firstly, substituting camera movement, interacting with the movement of the turntable, and thus animating the sculptures; and, secondly, by moving the viewer.

This second task, as I suggested a few moments ago, depends not so much on telling stories about Thorvaldsen as a human being whose veins run with ‘varmt levende Blod og ikke Fiskeblod’ (125), though this is certainly part of Dreyer’s strategy. It is more a matter of encouraging what Donna Haraway has called ‘fingery eyes’ with the camera, and what Laura Marks develops at some length in her notion of haptic cinema. Arguably, the film switches between haptical and optical visibility in its oscillation between establishing shots of the work as a whole, and its extreme close-ups of only-just-identifiable body parts; what is also interesting is the almost complete absence of any texture on the surface of the sculptures. The perfect smoothness is in itself a haptic field. To create these effects, the film has to enter the *intimsfære* (Bogh) of the sculpture and break through its self-contained composition to linger closely on limbs and breasts and necks – not so much on faces, because, as Dreyer repeats insistently, the emotion is not in the faces. For example, in *Venus*, ‘vil vi se, at der absolut ingen Elskovsfølelse er at spore i hendes Ansigt. Men så meget mere er der i Torsoen, der er fuldendt, dejlig og bag Blufærdigheden ligefrem sitrer af indre Varme og Liv.’ (122)

As we saw earlier, there is one sculpture in the film whose personal space is respected: The Christ sculpture is probably the most famous one in the Protestant world, and Dreyer’s short film, accordingly, concludes with a relatively thorough consideration of it. In the course of its exposition of this statue, the film also moves from the space of the Thorvaldsen museum into Vor Frue Kirke, to show the group of statues in the commanding space for which they were conceived.

The distinctive composition of Thorvaldsen’s statue of Christ, on which the final seconds of *Thorvaldsen* lingers, is echoed – indeed, closely imitated – when we first meet Johannes in *Ordet* (1954) [PPT slide of both], one of Dreyer’s most lauded feature films, finished five years after the short film on Thorvaldsen. It is to this film, *Ordet*, that I now turn, before closing.

IV: Kongenshus Mindepark, c. 1950: *Ordet*

In the making of *Ordet*, Dreyer can be linked – more circumstantially – to another kind of Danish museum: Kongenshus Mindepark [PPT], the open-air memorial to the workers who rendered the Jutland Heath cultivable over the course of the century from 1850 to 1950 or so [PPT]. I do not have time to dwell on this museum, but I think it is worth mentioning briefly as a counterpart to Thorvaldsens museum.

Kongenshus Memorial Park commemorates a fight against dust; the struggle to make the land cultivable, to hold back the sand dunes and the heath.

Ironically, the park itself is the one remaining stretch of heathland that was left uncultivated as a memorial, an irony not lost on younger Danish writers and cultural commentators. The park is a simulacrum of the landscape of the Danish Golden Age, which must be preserved at all costs (at great cost!), against ecological transformation. The establishment of the park in 1950 speaks to the popular wish, in the wake of WWII, to preserve a national landscape and way of life, a more innocent time. In a way, *Ordet* is also a historical document in this sense, because its set features many examples of north Jutland furniture, décor and implements of the 1920s – we might describe them as auratic objects -- loaned to the studio by local inhabitants. This, as is well known, was a typical working method of Dreyer's: fill the space with authentic props based on painstaking historical research, then remove all but the most essential (Rukov). As Mark Sandberg (2006) has argued, Dreyer's sets were spaces that had to be *inhabited* by his actors; they had to develop a corporeal relationship with their diegetic environment.

Here at the end of my paper, I would like to return, as I myself have often done, to the end of *Ordet*, played over and over in Ordrupgaard Museum last Autumn. Weeping at his wife's coffin, Michael refuses to be comforted by the thought that her soul has departed; he cries 'But I loved her body too!'. Soon after, the dead Inger is resurrected bodily, apparently through the faith of her brother-in-law Johannes and that of her daughter. Inger's spirit, her life, is returned to her corporeal body, which in the normal order of things would soon have turned to dust. This event fulfils, in a way, the hopes of the ancient Egyptians, mentioned in the first lines of Bazin's ruminations on cinema's defiance in the face of time and death. *Ordet* performs and flaunts this same cinematic defiance. But Inger is also embalmed in another way, in Ordrupgaard's bringing together of Hammershøi's still, quiet rooms and Dreyer's *moving* images. As Mulvey writes (2006: 66), it is the 'relentless movement' and rhythm of cinema that robs it of the potential of the still images, of the photograph, to reveal its indexicality and therefore its direct, almost tactile, relationship to the dead one. And though this musealized sequence on a loop is not quite a still image, it nevertheless, again in Mulvey's words, 'restores to the moving image the heavy presence of passing time and of mortality' (66) – and here I would add: of their reversal. The aura, she says, is returned to these 'mechanically reproducible media through the compulsion to repeat' (193).

Why, then, 'a cinema of dust'? Hammershøi's room with the invisible, dancing dust seems to speak to what Dreyer shares with Bazin and with Barthes and indeed with the fundamental remit of the museum: the persistence and the mutability of matter. In this respect, the Thorvaldsen film can be seen as a lodestone for all Dreyer's work. Just as Barthes writes of the photograph that the presence of the dead loved one 'touches me like the delayed rays of a star', Dreyer tries to re-activate in Thorvaldsen's marble and plaster sculptures the sculptor's fleshly desires and the dust and sweat of his work, in order to move

the spectator – resurrecting the studio space in which flesh becomes stone and stone becomes flesh, creating dust of both.

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