

Teaching Nordic cinema: Perspectives and possibilities

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Abstract

For the tenth anniversary issue of *JSCA*, C. Claire Thomson reflects on fifteen years of teaching Nordic cinema at UCL (University College London). The essay outlines the teaching and learning contexts in which the subject is taught, and how teaching has been transformed by developments in scholarship in the field and online resources. The constraints and opportunities offered by the pivot to remote teaching during the 2020 pandemic are also considered. Three extracts from essays by students are offered as illustrations of how students from different disciplinary backgrounds and different parts of the world engage with Nordic cinema.

Keywords

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Imagine that you were born in 1900. As an eighteen-year-old, you happen to see the debut film by Carl Th. Dreyer, Præsidenten (The President) (1918). Through your twenties, as a keen cinema-goer, you enjoy a steady flow of dramas and comedies by the same director. At twenty-eight, you are delighted to hear that La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc has premiered to great acclaim in Paris. In your early 30s, encumbered now with children, you eagerly anticipate a rare trip to the cinema to see — and hear! — Dreyer's first sound film, Vampyr (1932). And then — nothing. You are a full decade older, 43, when the long years of war and occupation are punctuated by a new historical drama by Dreyer: Vredens Dag (Day of Wrath) (1943). Through middle age, you must make do with occasional glimpses of educational short films written and directed by Dreyer to make ends meet, and rumours of an ersatz film noir made in Sweden. The years glide past; you have several grandchildren by the time Dreyer's Ordet¹ premieres in 1955. They have grown into teenagers when, at 64, you find yourself absorbed in the final shot of Dreyer's final film, Gertrud, in which the camera lingers for a full 40 seconds on the closed door from which the eponymous heroine has just waved farewell, perhaps, you think, on Dreyer's behalf.

I sometimes use this little thought experiment in seminars introducing students to the *oeuvre* of the great Danish director Carl Th. Dreyer. The exercise is not just an attempt to synchronize the slow pulse (see Thomson 2015) of Dreyer's career with the ebbs and flows of the historical era it spans, or an example of how films are received by contemporaries and later re-evaluated, or an attempt to problematize the concept of the auteur more broadly, though it is all those things. It can also generate classroom conversations about cinema-going practices, or fandom, or the pleasures of film spectatorship; can we, here and now, in the age of Netflix and TikTok, grasp how cinema shaped lives in the previous century? Can I, as tutor, find ways to articulate the weighty cultural import of paradigm shifts and gradual evolutions in the institutions and technologies of cinema? As (mostly) twenty-somethings, my students locate themselves amid Dreyer's prolific 1920s rush of genre films and are hard-pressed to imagine a lifetime stretching before them, punctuated at decade-long intervals by longed-for Dreyer premieres. For my part, age-wise, I am currently adrift in the twelve-year hiatus between *Day of Wrath* and *Ordet*. But, to stretch the chronological metaphor, I have been teaching Nordic cinema at UCL (University College London) since just before *Vampyr* premiered, or more prosaically, for about fifteen years. This essay offers some reflections on how teaching has changed in that time, and what awaits us in the near future.

Nordic cinema at UCL

Based in one of the UK's very few Departments of Scandinavian Studies, now a constituent part of the School of European Languages, Cultures and Society at UCL, I teach Scandinavian cultural history and translation from the Scandinavian languages into English, as well as modules in film and media history and theory more generally at Bachelor's and Master's level. Around half my teaching is for UCL's large MA in Film Studies, of which I was director in 2008-09 and am again from autumn 2020. My teaching in Nordic cinema fits into two contexts at UCL: first, as an option module² for the MA Film Studies, which has an annual cohort of around 80. Since 2006, my MA option module in Nordic cinema has run every year, interrupted only by a research sabbatical in 2013; this module attracted 25 students this year, about a third of the total MA Film Studies cohort. And second, most years, I also teach a BA-level module in Nordic cinema, typically with around a dozen students. This module attracts undergraduate students from across UCL, but primarily it serves our undergraduate and graduate programmes in Scandinavian Studies. Despite sharing a title, the two modules are necessarily different: the BA-level module is designed for students of Scandinavian Studies who have little or no knowledge of film and media studies, whereas the MA module is for film studies specialists with little or no knowledge of Scandinavia. Both modules, then, integrate the study of Nordic cinema into broader curricula.

Students taking a BA in Scandinavian Studies or Icelandic specialize in one language and study the history and culture of the region, often in conjunction with the study of other languages or subjects ranging from management studies to history of art. Cinema is an integral part of their programme, with the first-year BA core course encompassing seminars on, for example, cinema and the welfare state, while other modules centring on Scandinavian literature and Nordic landscapes also draw on cinematic case studies. Film is taught as an important aspect of Nordic cultural history in its own right, but also a medium that has intervened in history. For example, one seminar considers Norwegian statehood in light of the *actualité* recording the arrival of the new Norwegian king in 1905 (*Kong Haakon VII og Dronning Maud ankommer Kristiania* ('King Haakon VII and Queen Maud arrive in Kristiania') (1905), and the cultural politics of the remediation of similar film fragments on the Norwegian royal family's website (www.kongehuset.no). Another seminar examines historical representation and collective memory through the optic of recent cinematic treatments of World War II and the occupation, such as the Danish film *Flammen og citronen* (*Flame and Citron*) (Madsen 2008). Of course, colleagues who teach language also use

audio-visual resources to help develop students' listening skills and to stimulate discussion. As their fluency in their chosen language improves, students are able to access more films of their choice that are not subtitled and to draw on scholarship in the Scandinavian languages.

For those undergraduates who have not studied film before, the biggest revelation is often the nature of silent cinema. In part, learning about the Danish and Swedish 'Golden Ages' ties in with a recurring theme in Scandinavian cultural history: that these small countries have often punched above their weight on the world stage. But this is also an exercise in thinking about medium specificity: most people are aware that cinema was once silent, but the ramifications of that fact facilitate discussion of different modes of representing language (inter-titles, subtitles, captions) as well as the intersections between language and economics in the small-state context.

Beyond the Scandinavian Studies programme, I often include Nordic case studies in my teaching for other undergraduate modules in the School of European Languages, Culture and Society: many first-year BA students of other languages and cultures are enthralled by Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966) as an example of auteur cinema, while final-year BA students have explored Unni Straume's short film *Avsporing (Derailment)* (1993) and Carl Th. Dreyer's documentary short *Thorvaldsen* (1949), about the sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen, as case studies in multi-sensory cinema for my module on materiality and media. This is also true at MA level: I use the Danish pioneer Peter Elfelt's early films as examples in my teaching for the MA Film Studies core course on early cinema, and Gösta Werner's English-language *The Riddle of Sweden* (1963) as an example of mid-century informational film. The easy availability of such films via Filmarkivet.se and the Danish Film Institute's online resources is a factor here (of which more below). Dogme 95 is, of course, a *sine qua non* of any film history courses that highlight the advent of the digital or critical discourses about the 'death of cinema'. But there are also less obvious case studies that pique students' interest: MA students taking my module on short films this year have engaged with Danish director Jørgen Leth's *66 Scener fra Amerika (66 Scenes from America)* (1982) and written their essays on the music videos of ABBA. Alongside examples from French, lusophone, East Asian, British and Hollywood cinemas and others taught in our department, case studies from the Nordic region help to complicate the prevailing 'canon' of cinema in all periods of history.

Transnational perspectives

UCL's strapline, 'London's Global University', is not just a logo: 48 per cent of UCL's students are from overseas, representing more than 150 countries of origin. Accordingly, classroom discussion on Nordic cinema has been enriched over the years by a fertile mix of perspectives from countries and regions as diverse as Brazil, Poland, South Korea, China, Russia and the United States as well as Scandinavia and the UK. Their declared reasons for taking the module vary widely: in many cases, they are familiar with the films of Ingmar Bergman or Lars von Trier or with Scandinavian television drama, but sometimes they are motivated by an interest in aspects of Nordic culture such as the welfare state, the landscape or the pop music. Often, they know nothing about Scandinavia or its media history and simply want to take advantage of a module that is not available in many other universities.

For students from further afield, one challenge is often explaining the distinctive interwovenness of the Nordic region while at the same time providing rules of thumb to differentiate between the languages and cultures: how do the nations, territories and languages differ from one another historically and culturally? Sometimes, students coming to Nordic cinema with fresh eyes alight on comparisons and connections that might not occur to those of us schooled in national cinema traditions: for example, over the years I have marked many essays comparing and contrasting the style of Dreyer and Aki Kaurismäki. But when teaching Scandinavian culture to non-specialists, how do we get beyond the widely-known stereotypes of the Vikings, IKEA, fjords, and Hans Christian Andersen? Precisely because film is an audio-visual medium that both indexically captures and reframes phenomena such as landscapes and material practices, discussing Nordic films with input from international perspectives in the classroom allows for consideration of how cinema constructs and reconstructs the self-understanding of any national community, and how the Nordic region on-screen gets translated or transmediated when the films travel across the world. For example, the influence of Dogme 95 on the so-called Sixth Generation of Chinese filmmakers was a topic that my student Qian Poppy Zhai has gone on to write a Ph.D. thesis about.

The question on the other side of the coin is: to what extent does the region actually function as a region, seen with fresh eyes? On one level, this question is analogous to those raised by other modules at UCL exploring the cinema of regions such as East Asia or Latin America. On another level, the Nordic region is distinctive insofar as institutions such as the Nordic Film and Television Fund actively encourage co-production and intra-regional exchange of expertise, talent and films amongst small-nation contexts. The recent 'institutional turn' in anglophone scholarship on the Nordic region, and the wide availability of documents and statistics in English from the respective film institutes, facilitates student

projects on film policy, funding production and promotion without the need to acquire reading knowledge of a Scandinavian language. In turn, this strengthens students' knowledge of film policy, practice and institutions as a general field of study that they can expand to other contexts.

Course structure and syllabus

In terms of course structure, a few elements have stood the test of time. Firstly, I have always structured both BA and MA modules chronologically, stretching from the earliest instances of cinema in Scandinavia and ending with a seminar or two on whatever seems most interesting in contemporary filmmaking in the region. There are several reasons for this approach. At BA level, students with no prior knowledge of cinema can learn about the building blocks of film language and practice in line with the historical evolution of the medium so that they can analyse and write about film *qua* film, regardless of their disciplinary background: from Peter Elfelt's earliest one-shot films, to the complex narratives of the Swedish 'Golden Age', to the incorporation of sound, and so on. At MA level, shaping the Nordic cinema module in this way ensures that it chimes with the MA core course, which emphasizes paradigm shifts in modes of film practice on the international scale. And for students born in the digital age, being asked to think deeply about the material instantiation of the medium is increasingly intellectually challenging, and thus productive.

The real challenge, though, is structuring the modules to follow the contours of film history while including a representative sample of films and filmmakers from across the Nordic region; balancing canonicity with the impetus to incorporate women and minority ethnic filmmakers, for example, into the syllabus. And these considerations are always further complicated by the availability of the films themselves and of good quality, relevant scholarship in English. For many years, it was particularly difficult to include a representative sample of Norwegian films in the courses because of a lack of available subtitled films dating from before the 1990s. Nothing was ever Norwegian enough for my eager students, and that, too was a teachable moment: *Terje Vigen* (Sjöström 1917) was technically Swedish; Henning Carlsen's *Sult (Hunger)* (1966) was a Scandinavian co-production and sufficiently 'Danish' to make it into the 2006 Cultural Canon issued by the Danish Ministry of Culture. This circumstance prompted interesting debates about cinema and nation, but left Scandinavian Studies students specializing in Norwegian feeling short-changed. The problem has been partly solved by our library's acquisition of the strange and wonderful noir comedy *Den hemmelighetsfulle leiligheten (The Mysterious Apartment)* (Ibsen 1948), which serves both as

an introduction to sound film and as an example of mid-century genre film. Contemporary Norwegian cinema is exquisitely represented, these days, by the works of Joachim Trier. But still, I would like to be able to direct my students to Norwegian classics like *Flåklypa Grand Prix* (*The Pinchcliffe Grand Prix*) (Caprino 1975) or women directors such as Vibeke Løkkeberg or Anja Breien, in easily available formats with English subtitles.

Overall, the popular genres of the inter-war and post-war years in the Nordic region really should be better represented, preferably in open-access, subtitled formats. A pipe dream, perhaps, but one that if fulfilled by the national film institutes would do much to ensure that genres unique to the Nordic countries but with comparators elsewhere could be included on such syllabi. This is all the more important for two reasons: first, being able to study what Danes of the 1950s or Swedes of the 1970s were watching in large numbers in cinemas would improve understanding of Scandinavian cultural history generally. And second, there is a correlation between women directors and popular genre film such as folk comedy (*folkekomedie*) and homeland cinema, especially in Denmark (viz. Alice O'Fredericks, Annelise Reenberg and the panoply of filmmakers now populating nordicwomeninfilm.com).

The inevitable limitations of covering more than a century of cinema and five national contexts in one term are tempered, however, by the format of assessment, my second constant over time. Both modules are assessed by projects independently designed by the students (though an additional formative essay at BA level tests students' grasp of basic film theory). At MA level, this is standard: the students design their own essays under the guidance of the module tutor. At BA level, though, this form of assessment is more unusual. For some students, this is their first stab at independent research, but their trepidation usually falls away as they realize that this is a chance not only to explore the topic of their choice, perhaps pursuing a favourite filmmaker or building on other elements of their degree like art history or politics, but also to develop transferable skills such as source and data management, matching methodology to aims, structuring a substantial document, and developing writing skills. Perhaps because students have a personal investment in their chosen topic, the results are often very good indeed. In 2012, a selection of such projects was published by Norvik Press in the form of the volume *Framed Horizons: Student Writing on Nordic Cinema*. This anthology gave a group of students the opportunity to experience the peer review process, develop their editing skills, and work with an early iteration of the collaborative desktop publishing package BookType (see Fraser et al. 2012; Trethewey 2012).

Notwithstanding these constants, the Nordic cinema syllabus has been shaped and re-shaped over the last fourteen years by a variety of pressures and opportunities so familiar to

any university lecturer that I need hardly rehearse them here: my own evolving research, emerging tendencies in research more broadly, local trends (the popularity of Nordic noir in the UK being a case in point), and changes in timetabling, teaching space and technology. Two long-term dynamics, though, stand out as important. The first concerns publishing and sources. Though some of my undergraduate students and exchange students from the Nordic countries can read one or more Scandinavian languages, in the main, my reading lists have to be restricted to English-language sources to fulfil the needs of the very international cohort. The proliferation over the last decade or so of anthologies of writing on Nordic cinema has opened up new possibilities for the syllabus: it has become much more feasible to incorporate topics such as film institutions, genre films, and Arctic and indigenous filmmaking into the curriculum. It is perhaps unfair to single out specific works or publishers, but the commitment of Edinburgh University Press, Intellect Press and certain US presses to publishing Nordic-focused film scholarship, as well as the very substantial volume *A Companion to Nordic Cinema*, edited by Mette Hjort and Ursula Lindqvist (2016), have been game-changers.

Online resources (for a world in lockdown)

Within the last five years, students have come to expect the bulk of their reading to be available online, either open-access or via UCL Library, and linked from module webpages. Here, too, the proliferation of e-books and e-journals under the leadership of Nordic presses in open-access academic publishing have been advantageous. And of course, the very existence of *Journal of Scandinavian Cinema*, not to mention its availability via digital subscription, has been invaluable over the last decade: it has facilitated class discussion of a variety of films that I would not otherwise have been able to add to the syllabus due to a lack of relevant reading material. The Danish Film Institute's open access journal *Kosmorama* is also a good source of English-language material (full disclosure: I am an editor of Kosmorama.org).

The last two or three years have also witnessed a step-change in the availability of films online. This development has not only provided opportunities to re-shape the curriculum. It has also occasioned seminar discussions about the politics, economic and technologies of archiving and digitization and, most importantly, has pushed students to think critically about how and why material appears online: who decides what gets digitized, who pays for it, and how does the medium-specific instantiation of such material influence how we consume or analyse it? The Danish Film Institute's website dedicated to Carl Th. Dreyer, first launched in

2010 and offering an ever-expanding selection of substantial essays, digitized screenplays, posters and stills, has inspired and underpinned many a student project. Similarly, the Ingmar Bergman Foundation's web presence was radically re-vamped for the 2018 centenary, and now offers a wealth of visual and textual resources on Bergman's life and work. Beyond these auteurs, the websites of the respective national film institutes as well as the Nordic Council facilitate teaching and research on film policy, new productions and transnational collaboration. For example, students are often fascinated by the impact of tax breaks for international productions in Iceland, or the Swedish Film Institute's commitment to gender equality. In the latter regard, Nordic Women in Film is emerging as a useful resource, while several sites offer a wealth of audiovisual material from the archives: Denmark on Film (danmarkpaafilm.dk), the Swedish Film Database and Film Archive (svenskfilmdatabase.se, filmarkivet.se), and the Norwegian National Library's film section (nb.no/samlingen/film; see the end of this article for selected links).

However, a major disadvantage for those teaching Nordic cinema abroad is that only limited content on most of these sites is provided in English (the Dreyer and Bergman sites are exceptions). While there are compelling political reasons for government-funded websites to focus on content for domestic audiences in Scandinavia, there is a groundswell of interest out in the wider, anglophone world in film content that may seem too 'local' to have international appeal. But students interested in orphan or amateur films, for example, or in women's film history, can view such films online but are often hindered in researching projects on these topics because they have not studied a Scandinavian language and thus cannot manage without subtitles and contextual information in English — what they *do* want to study is Scandinavian film culture.

At the time of writing, all these online resources are shaping my teaching for 2020-21 to an unprecedented degree. It seems likely that much of our teaching will have to be done remotely until such time as the Covid-19 pandemic dissipates and social distancing can cease. Though nothing can replace face-to-face group discussion, the content of my Nordic cinema modules can be adapted easily enough to a blend of synchronous and asynchronous modes of online teaching. However, what is emerging as the most pressing problem is the issue of students' access to set viewing. The selection of films in the curriculum, and thus the curriculum more broadly, will, for the foreseeable future, be determined by what far-sighted Nordic film institutions have made available for viewing online around the world. In this respect, thankfully, I am much better placed than my colleagues teaching cinema from other national or regional traditions. However, I suspect that my modules this academic year will

be shaped around freely-available silent-era classics, orphan films, documentaries – whatever can facilitate a common viewing list for students learning in lockdown across the world.

Extracts from student work

To illustrate some of the above points and tendencies, I offer here (with the agreement of the students concerned) extracts from three essays written this past academic year for the BA and MA-level versions of Nordic Cinema. These are short extracts from essays of 4-6000 words, the topics of which are designed and developed by the students with supervisory input from me – a gentle introduction to the eventual experience of researching and writing an MA dissertation or even doctoral research.

*The first extract is by MA Film Studies student Yilu Lin. This is an example of how students, once introduced to the online film archives mentioned above, often explore the available films adventurously, despite the language barrier. In this case, I had introduced the students to the phenomenon of nation-branding via English-language commissioned shorts, such as *The Riddle of Sweden* (Werner 1963), and to the genre of the city symphony. In class, we had also watched and discussed Bergman's *Sommaren med Monika* (Summer with Monika) (1953) and the ground-breaking documentary *Dom kallar oss mods* (They Call Us Misfits) (Jarl and Lindqvist 1968), and so Yilu and her classmates had witnessed how the Stockholm of the 1950s and '60s was transformed architecturally and on screen – even if they had no personal experience of the Swedish capital. Exploring the Swedish site filmarkivet.se, Yilu happened upon *Secret Stockholm* (Maze 1963), and centred her approach to the cinematic city on this lyrical short.*

Secrets of Stockholm: Filmic representation of Stockholm in *Secret Stockholm*

Yilu Lin (MA Film Studies)

‘In search of the secret heart of Stockholm, is the unseen side. It’s the line behind these facades, in the dank, dark courtyard’ (*Secret Stockholm*, Edward Maze, 1963). Accompanied by a voice-over that suggests the crucial function of the viewer and viewpoints, the unveiling of secrets in *Secret Stockholm* begins with the distortion or rediscovery of the everyday. After successive shots from the planners’ view of the city below, the following shot capturing an alley is neither a bird’s eye view, which is always used to demonstrate the spectacular city panorama, nor the horizontal frame, which often accompanies walking. Instead, the director employs novel bottom-up framing to illustrate the rectangular sky and the dark walls surrounding it. The unfamiliar presentation of chimneys, towers and church spires that

follows further supports the conclusion provided at the end of the sequence in the accompanying voice-over: ‘The secret side of cities depends on how you look at it, how it registers in man’s eyes’ (*Secret Stockholm*, 1963).

A similarly distorted perspective has a more experimental presence in the filmography of the radical generation in the late 1960s. For example, in the sequence capturing Stockholm for the first time in *They Call Us Misfits*, a fish-eye lens is used to demonstrate the normal streets of Stockholm. These approaches effectively alienate the cityscape audiences are familiar with, representing ordinary entities and locations such as alleys and streets using novel tactics.

Distorted perspectives appear not only in the cinematography but also in urging the audience to pay extraordinary attention to the everyday. In other words, the audience is urged to focus on ordinary, everyday things that typically remain unseen to discover their fascinating yet ignored nature: ‘everyone is aware of the endless activity of water, but how many people stop to look at the water itself?’ (*Secret Stockholm*, 1963). The film then captures the fresh water of a lake, the salt water of the sea and the meeting of the watercourses at the harbour, which exists in the everyday life of Stockholmers, with particular awareness of the unseen flows and patterns. All these approaches, including the abnormal viewpoints and intensive focus on and close-ups of the ignored entities, can be categorized as the defamiliarization of Stockholm by visually registering those experienced entities. Kracauer explains:

Intimate faces, streets we walk day by day, the house we live in — all these things are part of us like our skin, and because we know them by heart we do not know them with the eye. Once integrated into our existence, they cease to be objects of perception. (Kracauer 1997: 55)

Here, *Secret Stockholm* defamiliarizes the ordinary objects integrated into the Stockholmers’ daily life. Close-ups are used to demonstrate the ever-changing patterns of water, to construct the endless mysterious water of Stockholm. Nevertheless, in a city whose topography is largely shaped by water, the demonstration of water has always been an integral part of the Stockholm landscape (Koskinen 2016). Therefore, simply capturing water is in fact not sufficiently distinctive. The difference is generated by the editing: the cross-cutting of the panorama of the harbour, the ripples of water and the arrival of ships at the harbour. An unfamiliar perception is thus created by this discontinuity.

While Yilu Lin saw the unfamiliar city reflected in the waters of Stockholm, her classmate Emily Brancher wondered if water could transcend its status as stereotypical signifier of Nordic nature to help us map out the specifics of recent Norwegian cinema. Early on in her essay, Emily ponders a question that often comes up in class discussion: do Scandinavian landscapes and climate materially impact on the style and narrative of films from the region? Emily asks:

A bird's eye view of Scandinavia sees a land heavily freckled by bodies of water and a coastline touching the Baltic, North and Norwegian seas. Do Scandinavian bodies end up in water because there are so many bodies of water? Or does water hold a greater meaning than has been recognized or credited by audiences and critics alike?

*In contrast to Yilu, a student from China encountering the Swedish cityscape for the first time, Emily has Norwegian heritage, and thus had to grapple with the blessing and the curse of first-hand knowledge of the on-screen environment. In the following extract from her essay, Emily explores how different bodies of water function to intensify the horror of *Thelma* (Trier 2017).*

There is something in the water: Norwegian bodies of water in film 1997-2017

Emily Brancher (MA Film Studies)

Anders Lysne (2019: 237) argues that the prologue of Joachim Trier's horror/psychological thriller *Thelma* induced art-dread. Lysne describes the camera move from above and below the icy meniscus of the lake, suggesting that above the water demonstrates an 'irrational connection to the animal kingdom' (2019: 237) and from below something dark and unknowable is watching. Water is the compounding factor in the mood Lysne identifies. It is the presence of water, the profound and amoral danger the frozen waters suggest as well as the freezing tides which run below it. By shifting the camera above and below the water line both are treated as spaces. Like heterotopia and utopia, above and below the water line are aware of each other and reflect each other.

The traditional conflict between city and countryside is expressed through *Thelma*'s metropolitan heterotopia, the university swimming pool, and her father Trond's country heterotopia, the wild lake. *Thelma*'s heterotopia is not the space of *crisis* and *deviation* of *Insomnia*. Instead the swimming pool has a *temporal* quality which can be understood as the

‘transitory nature of time and experience’ (Rees 2014: 11). The swimming pool is where Thelma goes to clear her head, where she first speaks to Anja, later where she and Anja kiss. The pool also connects Thelma with the lake next to her parents’ home. The water figuratively and literally connects Thelma with where she is from. Similarly, the lake at her parents’ home is where her father goes to convene with nature and indulge in the private vice of a cigarette. As well as being in or by water, the spaces directly above and below water become important, both as narrative and cinematographic device. Thelma appears to be the only one who can survive both.

The emancipatory sequence towards the end of *Thelma* best depicts the significance of water and concludes the art-dread heralded by the film’s prologue. Thelma has returned home and is being medically sedated by her father Trond. Whilst Thelma sleeps Trond takes his small motorboat out onto the lake next to their family home. Thelma’s sleep becomes restless and a murder of crows appears above Trond. In the blink of an eye Thelma appears and then disappears at the distant water edge. Trond’s hands spontaneously combust into flame; the fire spreads up his arms and across his torso, consuming him.

He throws himself overboard and all is quiet for a moment. Flames quenched, Trond reaches out from beneath the water, but before he can pull himself onto the boat, he bursts into flame again. Trond lets go of the boat, apparently choosing to drown instead of burn. Thelma, suddenly awake, is drawn to the lake; she dives in and rather than swimming to the boat swims deeper and deeper below the surface. The lake becomes fantastically deep and wide. Like bursts of lightning, lines and tiles appear ahead of Thelma and her down becomes up, as she is transported into the university swimming pool. Anja is standing waiting for her and they share a kiss as a flock of birds swarm above them. Thelma dives back into the pool and then seemingly regains consciousness floating on the surface of the lake.

As Foucault writes of the heterotopia:

The space of our dreams and that of our passions hold within themselves qualities that seem intrinsic: there is a light, ethereal, transparent space, or again a dark, rough, encumbered space; a space from above, or summits, or on the contrary a space from below of mud; or again a space that can be flowing like sparkling water, or space that is fixed, congealed, like stone or crystal. (Foucault 1984)

Arguably the inexplicably deep and dark waters which transport Thelma back to the safety of her metropolitan pool, and the woman she loves, is an expression of her internal space. For

the first time, the audience has been allowed fully into Thelma's mind during one of her magic episodes. We see what she truly wants.

Once Thelma is emancipated the pool and lake become a combined heterotopia of compensation; they become 'perfect spaces that compensate for the general chaos and disorder of human life' (Rees 2014: 11). Discovering Anja at the poolside is as though Thelma had kept Anja here. If you choose to accept a fantastical reading of *Thelma* in which she is a witch, it is conceivable then to read Anja as being magicked to a special place, a different plane of existence, or Thelma's safe place, the swimming pool.

From Trier's burning boat to Dreyer's burnings at the stake, the figure of the witch threads its way through Nordic film heritage as much as it does the region's cultural history. The third and final essay extract investigates how the architectonics of Dreyer's space construct and deconstruct the operations of power that underpin such categorizations and their consequences. This extract is from an essay written for the undergraduate variant of Nordic Cinema, by Kit Gullis, a student of the BA in Comparative Literature. Kit's degree programme enabled him to study a wide variety of literary traditions and genres as well as other media, and he specialized in Latin throughout his degree. It is all the more impressive, then, to note how skillfully Kit reads the film qua film; testament to many students' ability to consolidate and adapt their prior learning to take the medium-specific properties of cinema into account in their analyses.

The relationship between camera, space and power in Carl Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* and *Day of Wrath*

Kit Gullis (BA Comparative Literature)

The many images of doors and corners that permeate the set, as well as the way in which the camera captures them through specific angles and perspectives, become powerful tools in exploring the figure of authority but also the resistance to it. The symbolism of doors and corners in *Day of Wrath* represents an opening up to knowledge or discovery, as seen when, through an open door, Anne learns that it was her husband and his position that saved her mother from being burned at the stake (17:45). Equally, doors and corners also become images of concealment and secrecy, such as when Absalon's son, Martin, hides behind a wall from his father (09:08); thus the *mise-en-scène* becomes a battleground between truth and hiddenness, an essential anxiety relating to the ideology surrounding the church's panic about witchcraft. It is by the juxtaposing or 'between' positions of these images that the subversion

of these structures of power takes place. The aforementioned scene in which Anne spies on her husband and Marte's conversation can also be used to examine this structure (15:54-16:32). In the scene, we get a tracking shot as Anne moves from one side of the church to the other, moving behind a series of pillars. When she stops, the camera slowly pans around, changing the perspective of the scene so that the architecture of the church is fully envisioned and Anne stands at the centre of an aisle (16:24-16:32). The changing perspective builds up the structure of the church as the pillars form a sense of depth as they tower over Anne. Furthermore, the depth created in the shot makes the eye-line follow to a painting of the crucifixion which stands at the end of the aisle behind Anne. The way that the architectural qualities of the church are slowly built over Anne highlights the figure of religious authority that runs through the film. Furthermore, the way that Anne and the iconographic image of Christ are parallel with each other in the frame both intensifies this oppressive authority but also undermines it as we see that Anne and the church stand on opposite sides and we are made to see Anne as dissenter, much like Joan. Moreover, the way the camera plays with corners and different perspectives in this scene subverts the notion of the almighty truth that is tied to the church's hysterical evaluation and condemnation of witchcraft.

[...] Furthermore, one of the most graphic examples of how power is engendered by the state throughout the film comes in the torturing of Herlofs Marte. Firstly, her screams are always heard off screen with the exception of her death, but as Robin Wood states, this merely heightens its effect: 'The monstrousness of what is done to her [Marte] is presented quite unequivocally; the restraint - the sense of much not shown - intensifies rather than alleviates the horror' (1974: 15). Wood's comments move towards the idea that space in Dreyer's films becomes significant with regard to what particular space or position is shown over another. For example, when Herlofs Marte is being tortured, most of the action focuses on the prosecutor's response to the events in a long panning shot. As such, the usual locus of significance is subverted and the audience's expectations are undermined. We do not focus on Marte as the subject of torture or religious condemnation but instead we are given the behind-the-scene of the torture and become privy to the authoritative workings of such monstrosity. In this scene we notice a continuation of Dreyer's cinematic style from *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* regarding his presentation of power. Although the choppy and abstract camera changes are not present here we are given a similar sense of *grandeur* and order through the *mise-en-scène* as well as a similar juxtaposition between stasis and movement. Certain members of the state are still and fixed in their work: sitting at tables, transcribing the events, whilst others walk around the space and communicate with one

another. All this occurs over different layers of depth in which Dreyer builds a powerful structure of authority. Much like in the trial against Joan we are made to see the persecutors here as part of a larger political and social body, one which aims to dispense justice over the individual and thus the image of hegemonic structures is built into the creation of depth and magnitude in the scene. Moreover, in the beginning of the shot there is the possibility of breaking the fourth wall as the audience becomes the object towards whom the members of the court direct their gaze as we stand in the position of Marte. However, although we are made to sympathize with the oppressive and disenfranchising effects of this gaze through the camera position, Dreyer also subverts the power that is being created by reversing the gaze back onto the members of the court.

At such a precarious point in our individual and collective history, what else can we do but take comfort in the cinema that inspires us, and find new ways to empower and encourage our students to do the same? As I sit here in my improvised home office, grappling with the unfamiliar teaching technologies that will shape my pedagogy for the foreseeable future, my tried-and-tested classroom icebreaker riffing on Dreyer's career provides an unexpected source of comfort. After all, as my imaginary filmgoer emerges blinking from the darkness of the cinema in autumn 1943, facing middle age and the bewildering uncertainty of occupied Copenhagen, he or she has no way of knowing that out there in the uncharted future, a decade down the line and then another decade, two of Dreyer's masterpieces have yet to be filmed.

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Online resources

Ingmar Bergman: www.ingmarbergman.se

Danish Film Institute: www.dfi.dk

Denmark on Film: <https://filmcentralen.dk/museum/danmark-paa-film>

Carl Th. Dreyer: The Man and his Work: <http://carlthdreyer.dk>

Finnish Film Foundation: <http://ses.fi>

Icelandic Film Centre: www.icelandicfilmcentre.is

National Library of Norway Film Collections: <https://www.nb.no/samlingen/film>

Nordic Film and Television Fund: <https://www.nordiskfilmogtvfond.com>

Nordic Women in Film: www.nordicwomeninfilm.com

Norwegian Film Institute: www.nfi.no

Swedish Film Archive: www.filmarkivet.se

Swedish Film Database: www.svenskfilmdatabas.se

Swedish Film Institute: www.sfi.se

¹ The literal translation of *Ordet* is 'The Word'. The film is customarily referred to by its Danish title in English.

² 'Module' is the term used at UCL (and many UK universities) for a course forming part of a degree programme. Modules run for a term/semester or a full academic year, and, depending on subject, consist of a combination of lectures, seminars, reading groups, screenings, and online content. A student of the MA Film Studies typically takes three option modules in addition to the core module and dissertation.