

**The Archive, the Auteur and the Unfilmed Film:
Reflections on Dreyer's and von Trier's *Medea***

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C. Claire Thomson

UCL

Contact details

Dr Claire Thomson

Senior Lecturer in Scandinavian Film

Department of Scandinavian Studies

UCL

Gower Street

London WC1E 6BT

UK

Tel: +44 (0)7590 389836

Email: claire.thomson@ucl.ac.uk

Abstract

This article engages with Lars von Trier's 1988 television adaptation of Carl Th. Dreyer's screenplay *Medea* to explore the concept of the unfilmed film. Beginning with von Trier's adoption of Dreyer's tuxedo, the article asks how the notions of auteurship and the archive itself produce the unfilmed film as 'unrealized', and probes the concept of the 'unfinished' film. Some examples of unfilmed films, and documentaries about them, are discussed as examples of archival practices in the mediation of unfinished, unrealized and unfilmed films, sometimes by directors themselves, and sometimes by their successors. Dreyer's research materials and methodologies for his screenplay *Medea*, preserved in the Danish Film Institute, are discussed as an intertext to the later adaptation for Danish television by Lars von Trier.

Contributor details

C. Claire Thomson is a Senior Lecturer in Scandinavian Film at UCL. Her publications include *Short Films from a Small Nation: Danish Informational Film 1935-1965* (Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming), *Thomas Vinterberg's Festen* (University of Washington Press, 2013), and the edited volume *Northern Constellations: New Readings in Nordic Cinema* (Norvik Press, 2006). She has published widely on Nordic culture, especially the films of Carl Th. Dreyer, short films, the 'kulturfilm', slow cinema, multisensory approaches to cinema, and national identities in film and literature.

Keywords

Carl Th. Dreyer

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Introduction: Encounters with artefacts

‘This is not an attempt to reconstruct a Dreyer film, but an interpretation of the script, in respect and appreciation, and as such is a tribute to the master’ (Björkman 1999: 114). The opening titles of Lars von Trier’s *Medea*, made for Danish television in 1988, hint at the ambiguities and productive tensions inherent in the relations between an auteurial ‘master’ and his heir, and between an un-filmed screenplay and its realization. A decade after bringing Carl Th. Dreyer and Preben Thomsen’s manuscript to Danish television screens, von Trier was still ambivalent about the extent to which he had achieved his declared goal: ‘I don’t know how much of a tribute it was in the end’ (ibid.). Beginning and ending with Dreyer’s and von Trier’s *Medea*, this article considers the phenomenon of the un-filmed film, its traces in the archive, and its implications for the notion of auteur.

If much archival work consists of sifting through, as Carolyn Steedman (2001: 1165) has memorably described it, ‘the great, brown, slow-moving strandless river of Everything’, there are moments which elicit a gasp of wonder. I experienced one such moment on a hot summer’s day in 2016, as I opened a manilla envelope stored in an archive box as part of the *Medea* section of the Carl Th. Dreyer Archive at the Danish Film Institute. What spilled out of the envelope was not, as I had expected, Dreyer’s trademark typed or handwritten notecards, but a cornucopia of coloured clippings from fashion and current affairs magazines and travel brochures. Predominantly ochre, with splashes of blue and red, the images spread across the table in an improvised moodboard which wordlessly encapsulated Dreyer’s plans for a colour film about the Greek anti-heroine which he spent decades researching, but was never able to commit to celluloid. We return to the contents of this particular envelope towards the end of this article.

Our second artefact, one of the items kept in cold storage at the Danish Film Institute’s film archive in Glostrup, west of Copenhagen, is a dinner jacket. This tuxedo was tailored in Paris for Carl Th. Dreyer to wear at the October 1928 premiere of *Jeanne d’Arcs Lidelse og Død* (*The Passion of Joan of Arc*). Towards the end of his life, Dreyer gifted it to his favoured cinematographer Henning Bendtsen, who later handed it down to Lars von Trier (Geijerstam 2003: 70; Grunwald 2014; Schepelern 1998: 188-9). The jacket was worn by von Trier for his Hitchcock-style appearances in the end credits of the television series *Riget I* (*The Kingdom I*, 1994) and *Riget II* (*The Kingdom II*, 1997). For Peter Schepelern (1998: 189), von Trier’s appearance in the historic dinner jacket is an act of ‘symbolic fetishism’ in line with the younger filmmaker’s ownership of Dreyer’s

writing desk, his televised visit to Dreyer's grave on what would have been his one hundredth birthday in February 1989, and his claim the previous year that he had been in telepathic contact with Dreyer while adapting the deceased auteur's screenplay *Medea* for Danish television (Schepelern 1998: 138, 188; Stevenson 2002: 22-3).

In literally donning Dreyer's 'mantle', von Trier gestures to a number of tropes of auteurship, ownership and authorship which resonate with the *Medea* project and which underpin this article. My interest is in *Medea* as an example of an unfilmed film. Despite the eventual realization of Dreyer's screenplay by von Trier, throughout the article I repeatedly return to the term 'unfilmed' as a consciously problematic and therefore, I hope, productive concept that opens up this and other unrealized film projects.

I began, though, with Dreyer's tuxedo - this *haute couture* interloper in the archive - in order to introduce two red threads which run through this article. The first thread is the knotty problem of non-filmic material in the film archive. An antique dinner jacket kept in cold storage is an exquisitely incongruous artefact amongst the reels of nitrate film and other treasures, but my main concern is the more workaday fabric of the archive: for instance, production files, shot lists, scripts, images, budgets, correspondence. More specifically, I am interested in the paper trail left by the unfilmed film, those projects never committed to celluloid for reasons banal or scandalous, but which nonetheless exist insofar as their traces are structured and read by the work of filmmakers, institutions, archivists, researchers and fans.

The second thread concerns the role of the unfilmed film in constructing or performing the auteur *qua* auteur, and vice versa. Von Trier's claim to have been in telepathic contact with Dreyer while adapting his unrealized *Medea* project is provocative and fanciful; by gesturing to the camera clad in Dreyer's jacket, von Trier reiterates and performs the two men's shared, and mutually reinforcing, status as auteurs. Similarly, by bringing Dreyer's *Medea* to television and cinema screens, von Trier asserts his standing as Dreyer's heir, but also re-invests the text with the aura of the auteurial unfilmed film. Put differently, a film is only unfilmed to the degree that what we might call for the moment its 'unfilmedness' is mourned, or at least noticed. Auteurship and the archive produce the unfilmed film in all its unfilmedness.

The unfilmed film, the auteur, and film history

The unmade film, den urealiserede film, le film inachevé: film lovers have many wistful terms for films that remain unfilmed or unfinished. To misquote Tolstoy, every unmade film is unmade in its

own way. On the one hand, there is a clear ontological line to be drawn between a film project that has resulted in analogue or digital images (an unfinished film) and one that has not entered production (an unfilmed film). This distinction is particularly pertinent for the thwarted filmmaker. On the other hand, critical and popular responses to the phenomenon of the unmade film complicate this distinction. So too does the available terminology, which refuses to map neatly across languages or reconcile popular and professional instincts as to where to draw the line between finished and unfinished, made and unmade, realized and unrealized. Put differently, there are different degrees of ‘unrealizedness’ for a film project, insofar as the traces of the unfilmed film may be understood, used, and mediated in research, art, publishing, fandom, or by another filmmaker. In this section, I discuss a selection of tendencies and tropes in critical, popular and commercial approaches to unrealized film projects. These overlap to some extent, but certain recurring questions emerge. Firstly, there is a discussion to be had around diachronic versus synchronic conceptions of (un)finishedness. Secondly, what is often at stake is what we might call the hermeneutics of the unrealized film, its potential for providing insight into an auteur’s oeuvre or working methods, for our conception of film history, and for re-thinking film-textual analysis.

Firstly, degrees of unrealizedness can be categorized along a temporal continuum. As Matt Harle comments: ‘unfinished films are not all left unmade at the same point; there may be rushes, or a fully filmed feature that has been shelved, there may be several drafted scripts, or in some cases just notes toward a script’ (Harle 2015: 274). An additional factor here is whether the auteur in question is still alive and working. If we apply this diachronic or processual perspective to Dreyer’s and von Trier’s respective arrays of unrealized film projects, this helps us to grasp the ambivalence of the term ‘unfinished’ when applied to deceased versus living filmmakers.

In the case of von Trier, for example, his project *Wasington* (sic), the as-yet unmade sequel to *Dogville* (2003) and *Manderlay* (2005), could feasibly be resurrected within the director’s working life, or may outlive him as an unrealized masterpiece. On the other hand, von Trier’s project *Dimension* (1991-) is harder to parse, as a film truncated by a confluence of individually surmountable difficulties. Conceived as a film to be shot over thirty years in a series of three-minute annual fragments, *Dimension* was designed to survive the deaths of its actors, its director and the death of analogue film itself (Hofer 2013: 130). However, it was abandoned in the late 1990s in the face of the narrative and practice-related difficulties baked into its design (127-8). In an essay in the Danish film magazine *Ekko*, Schepeleern (2010) refers to the film as ‘Triers ufuldendte’ (Trier’s Unfinished), an allusion to an ‘unfinished symphony’. *Dimension*’s intended structure, whereby the time elapsing

between shots was a year, means that its abandonment around 2000 necessarily, immediately, and irrevocably equates to non-completion. The project's obsession with the relationship between film and time makes it a meta-cinematic monument (Hofer 2013: 130) predicated on the incommensurability of measuring time in fragments of a second versus yearly intervals. However, von Trier ostentatiously mapped the project onto his own lifetime: the premiere was planned for his sixty-eighth birthday in 2024, and he appointed an alternate director should he die or be incapacitated (Stevenson 2002: 73; Hofer 2013: 130). *Dimension* can thus also be read as a project about the relationship between film and auteur, and about the potential for various degrees of unfinishedness and un-filmedness.

The best-known of Dreyer's unrealized projects is his film about the life of Jesus Christ, an un-filmed film that has more or less entered the Dreyer canon. Jes Nysten, for example, declares that the screenplay 'offers a window into the worldview of a great (conservative) and single-minded artist and humanist' and that 'if you want to understand Dreyer as an artist and a person, there is no getting around a thorough reading of this script and a reflection on its singular position in his life and work' (Nysten n.d.). Just a few years after Dreyer's death in 1968, and the 1969 discovery of boxes of notes and plans for the film in a Jerusalem warehouse, David Bordwell wrote poignantly of how the screenplay (first written in 1949 and revised twenty years later) encapsulates the themes so central to the rest of Dreyer's oeuvre, such as intolerance, dogma, suffering, sacrifice and redemption (Bordwell 1972: 60). Bordwell's article also offers a close reading of the extant screenplay, noting its limitations in enabling us to imagine the finished film. It includes 'close-ups and camera movements' but does not allow us to 'visualize the shots precisely'; Dreyer's great strengths as a director, 'the handling of actors and the composition of shots' are only rarely discernible from the manuscript (62). The screenplay is also vague as to the details of *mise-en-scène*, leaving Bordwell to muse 'what would the completed film have looked like?' (62). Of the Jesus film, Bordwell concludes:

Still, despite all that the Jesus project might have been, one would almost rather have no film at all than the butchered product of any concessions Dreyer might have had to make to the industry. Since Dreyer strove to keep his integrity throughout his career, his mature output is small but pure. For twenty years he made no film that he did not want to make, even if that meant he couldn't make the film he wanted most to make. (Bordwell 1972: 63)

Bordwell's resigned conclusion, that 'one would almost rather have no film at all', is a variant on a common trope of commentary on unfiled films. Some books and articles adopt wistful titles trumpeting the purported loss suffered by cinematic history: 'the greatest film never made' (Castle 2009); 'the greatest movies never made' (Ide 2009); 'the greatest sci fi film never made' (Bishop 2014). The fandom-driven discourse of longing or nostalgia for a film that never was is, however, often tempered by the notion that the film's absence from cinema history is in itself meaningful. For example, film journalist Wendy Ide goes so far as to suggest 'that cinema history has been shaped almost as much by the films that didn't get made as those that did' (Ide 2009: 10).

The last few years have seen a spate of documentaries piecing together unfinished films which nonetheless were filmed in part, or at least reached an advanced stage of pre-production.ⁱ These, too, have a tendency to conclude that the films they explore have a claim to a place in film history precisely because they remain unfinished. *Jodorowsky's Dune* (Frank Pavich, 2014) traces the influence of Alejandro Jodorowsky's sci fi epic on later cinema, its director musing that the book of illustrations that visualized the film's spectacular spacecraft and planetsapes was perhaps 'as far as it [the film] was supposed to go' (Bishop 2014). Together with Ruxana Medrea, the French producer and film collector Serge Bromberg weaves together surviving test footage, interviews, animations and screenplay extracts to make *L'enfer d'Henri-Georges Clouzot (Inferno, 2009)*. *Inferno* also concludes, on the basis of interviews with collaborators, that Clouzot was psychologically incapable of finishing the film; the copious test shots and visual experiments that make up the bulk of surviving material actually constitute *Inferno's* contribution to cinema.

Unfinished film projects often provide useful information for film historians on the workings of the film industry in specific historical contexts, or, rather, how filmmakers as personalities and practitioners interact with the industry. In the case of Clouzot's *Inferno*, Bromberg and Medrea's documentary makes it clear that Clouzot was in the enviable situation of having an unlimited budget, and that this in itself may have created the conditions for his spiralling experimentation, his unreasonable demands on his crew and actors, and his eventual psychological and physical breakdown. In Dreyer's case, all three of his major unrealized projects - *Medea*, *Mary*, *Queen of Scots* and his Jesus film - were implicated in what has often been couched as a twenty-year struggle between Dreyer, his perfectionism, and the industry; see Bordwell's concluding comments above, for example. Yet both Clouzot's and Dreyer's cases suggest the difficulty of extrapolating from specific circumstances to the industry generally. Notoriously, Dreyer turned down a number of offers to make his films. Jean and Dale Drum suggest that by the age of seventy-five, he was 'in some way

emotionally unable to move forward with the [Jesus film] project' (Drum and Drum 2000: 298), and they recount his refusal to countenance making *Medea* in Yugoslavia for political reasons. The mercurial figure of the American impresario Blevins Davis also looms large in any account of Dreyer's unmade films. Dreyer's inexplicable faith in Davis as his informal agent from the late 1940s onwards weaves its way through the correspondence attached to all three of his great unrealized projects (see, for example, Bordwell 1972; Drouzy and Nannestad 1989; Thomson 2015).

Beyond the prevailing narrative about the clash between 'the industry's indifference' and 'Dreyer's refusal to compromise' (Bordwell 1972: 59), another dimension of Dreyer's work as a filmmaker has the potential to shed light on his own unfilmed films and other unrealized projects of significance for film history. This is the commissioned film: informational, industrial and educational films and advertisements which many auteurs have historically undertaken to supplement their income. While unrealized projects achieve cult status when appended to the oeuvre of auteurs, legal deposit regulations ensure that many national and institutional archives house the paper trail of more workaday and unmourned films, such as abandoned public information film commissions. As with auteurial projects, these less glamorous unfilmed films exist only insofar as the archive preserves and structures their traces: production files, shot lists, scripts, images, budgets, correspondence, committee deliberations that may be more or less opaque, and sometimes fragments of an abandoned shoot. Many such films are unmade only in the sense that they turn into, or are absorbed into, another project. In the case of Dreyer, he was involved in around a dozen short film productions for the semi-governmental agency Dansk Kulturfilm (Danish Culture Film) and Ministeriernes Filmudvalg (the Danish Government Film Committee) in the 1940s. We can point to multiple instances where Dreyer's commissioned films get entangled with his feature filmmaking in ways that are quite revealing about the traffic of filmmakers, finances and practices between mainstream and state-supported film. One of his short films was never finished, suppressed by the ministry that commissioned it because his portrayal of unsanitary conditions on Danish farms was too convincing (Tybjerg 2013). Others provided space for him to experiment with visual techniques that crop up in his realized feature films and his unrealized screenplays (Thomson 2015; Thomson 2016). While space precludes a detailed discussion of the implications of the commissioned film for the concept of the unfilmed film, I want to suggest that informational and other films made by auteurs constitute a fertile set of intertexts for their unfilmed feature films.

The unfilmed film as archive

Dreyer's and von Trier's unfilmed and unfinished films have, then, tended to inspire responses that emphasize a diachronic conception of unfinishedness. Mediation of, and scholarship on, Stanley Kubrick's various unfilmed films are a good way in to the parallel concept of synchronic unfinishedness.ⁱⁱ Kubrick's best known unfilmed project is probably *Napoleon*, which was in a sense 'realized' in book form, in two editions issued by Taschen (Castle 2009; Taschen n.d.), the first consisting of a number of books of images, notes and other materials, and the re-issue in more traditional book form.

Another of Kubrick's unfilmed films, *Aryan Papers*, is discussed by Geoffrey Cocks (2013) as an instance of Kubrick's working method of 'indirection'. Cocks uses this term to characterize the productive tension between the director's obsessive attention to detail and the freedom he accorded the viewer to read meaning into the intricately organized visual and aural spaces he created (Cocks 2013: 21-2). Doubting that it was possible to film a narrative that treated the Holocaust in a meaningful way, Kubrick invested many of his other productions with symbols, allusions and 'cultural shorthand' for the Holocaust, thus producing, in the films' own self-reflexivity, a 'space for the viewer/reader of the film to consider on the prosaic grounds of thought, personal reflection, ethical deliberation and historical analysis the horrors of the real world' (29). For Cocks, then, the unfilmed film can be seen to 'lurk' (22) in Kubrick's oeuvre as a whole.

Aryan Papers is also the focus for the artists Jane and Louise Wilson, who were commissioned by Animate Projects and the Stanley Kubrick Archives at the University of the Arts, London to make an art film engaging with Kubrick's archive. The result was the film installation *Unfolding the Aryan Papers* (Animate Projects 2016). In his reading of the Wilsons' film, Chris Darke evokes the response of some auteurs to the late twentieth-century's hyper-awareness of the impending 'death' of film (see Usai 2001; Mulvey 2006), or what Darke refers to as the 'archival afterlife' of cinema (Darke 2009: 17). As examples of filmic works in which directors have experimented with cinematic form in order to organize their own archives and engage with notions of the memory, heritage, and retrieval of cinema in the digital age, Darke refers to Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (*Histories of Cinema*, 1988-98), Chris Marker's CD-Rom *Immemory* (2008; first issued 1997), and Agnès Varda's *Les Plages d'Agnès* (*The Beaches of Agnès*, 2008). Jane and Louise Wilson perform this task for Kubrick, suggests Darke, by 'creating a space suggestive of the mental recursiveness of archival storage and retrieval, which intelligently extends their focus on an unfinished film. Unmade, its possibilities are endless' (Darke 2009: 17). Again, it will be noted that Darke ends with a nod to the openness, and thus the potential, of the unfilmed film.

This abstract notion of the unfilmed film as an open text or network of intertexts is both compelling and perplexing for the scholar faced with the very material manifestations of its half-lived life. For researchers and archives alike, the unfilmed film poses intractable problems concerning its status. We might wonder, for example, how to interpret the texts and artefacts associated with the unfilmed film. A more mundane (but no less urgent) question is whether they should be allowed to take up precious space in archives desperate for room. One relatively instrumentalist answer to this is that the traces of an unfilmed film help us to understand its would-be director's working methods. For example, leaving aside the hefty material associated with his Jesus film, Dreyer's unrealized projects *Medea* and *Mary, Queen of Scots* trail in their wake a huge archive, including shelves full of tens of books on Greek myth and literature, and on the Scottish queen and her times. This hard evidence of Dreyer's reading can illuminate aspects of his conception of history in other films for which we have less evidence about his historical research (see also Thomson 2015).

Matt Harle tries to move beyond such utilitarian uses of the unfilmed film in his discussion of Harold Pinter's screenplay of Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Harle emphasizes the multiple actors involved in bringing (or not) the screenplay to the screen, thus side-stepping the mournful focus on the thwarted auteur. He argues that

to attribute a single work as being defined by a multiplicity of media (or actors), would be to rethink [...] the abandoned or unfilmed screenplay as a frozen work in progress, a contingent text acting as a nexus in a set of interlinked artifacts, that captures a particular historical moment. (Harle 2015: 273)

Whether the endgame is to illuminate auteurs' working methods, to investigate the mechanics of political oppression, or to ponder the nature and workings of the archive, reading the unfinished film as a text that consists of an intermedial, intertextual network is a strategy that could contribute to nuancing our understanding of textuality, in the context of a particular auteur's oeuvre, or more generally. As with any exercise in intertextuality, admits Harle, the problem is knowing how to limit the parameters of the network: he asks when 'abstract sketches of ideas' or correspondence cease to be considered part of the text of the unfilmed film (Harle 2015: 274). Applying this to Dreyer's book collection, we might ask to what end the library remains in the archive on Gothersgade. Are the books themselves part and parcel of the textual network of the unfilmed film? A closer look at Dreyer's research materials for *Medea*, preserved in the Dreyer Archive at the DFI,ⁱⁱⁱ may help us to think through such issues.

Dreyer's notetaking

The journey of information from Dreyer's library to his pre-production notes is traceable in material form. A distinctive aspect of Dreyer's research habits was his propensity to take notes on small slips of paper. These could be re-ordered and categorized as needed, enabling Dreyer to record, synthesize, and store information. Though not as extensive as the surviving collection of envelopes for *Mary, Queen of Scots* (see Thomson 2015), the research materials for *Medea* consist largely of slips of paper and index cards ordered into envelopes with handwritten labels, some in Danish and some in English, such as 'Greek literature', 'Martha Graham Dance', 'Kostumer' (costumes). In some cases, the slips bear notes taken while Dreyer was reading historical or other relevant books. Here, he would list page numbers, presumably indicating passages of interest, and sometimes hand-write relevant quotations.

This practice of notetaking was in evidence as early as the 1930s, when Dreyer was in Africa collaborating with the Italian journalist Ernesto Quadrone:

From the first moment I had enjoyed how Dreyer asked about everything I told him about Africa, and wanted me to expand on everything and try to get at the core of it. He 'rifled' curiously through what I knew, as though he was trying to get to know the whole continent. He wrote down all my answers to his numerous questions on little bits of paper, which he would then read through and examine, and then he would start to quiz me again on some detail or other that he hadn't quite understood, a sentence, a word, a colour, a sound, the tone of a voice that I hadn't described carefully or precisely enough. The number of little slips of paper grew and grew, multiplying many times, ten-fold, a hundred-fold. (Quadrone 1951, my translation)

A similar method of processing information can be observed in Dreyer's preparations for his short film *Storstrømsbroen* (*The Storstrom Bridge*, 1950) for Dansk Kulturfilm. The preserved research materials include several sheets of paper with thin slips of descriptive text glued to them, and other slips paper-clipped together. As the non-narrative film consists only of a series of shots of the bridge from various angles, this system enabled Dreyer to experiment with different collages and compositions of shots.

In other words, Dreyer was not just his own archivist; he instinctively organized information in a non-linear way which resembles a database. The possibilities afforded by this method for the recombination of data and the construction of (filmic) narrative are medium-specific: there is something of the logic of the hypertext here, instantiated in paper. If we see, with Harle (2015) and Darke (2009), for example, the potential in thinking about filmmakers' archives as spaces of open-

ness and of sometimes surprising and tenuous forms of relations between texts, we can observe that this logic is already embedded in Dreyer's own research methods.

Nonetheless, Dreyer's database is resolutely papery, and, as such, organic and analogue. The slips do not always fit the envelopes precisely, and they are folded up and folded together in ways that sometimes seem to evoke their interrelations and at other times seems more random. In her discussion of women cinema stars' scrapbooks, Amelie Hastie speaks to the importance of bringing embodied knowledge into our readings of such sources:

As one unfolds the scrapbook and continues to unfold the chaos of clippings inside, we can actually experience the wear and tear of history. And in their embodiment of this wear and tear, the folds also speak to an unfolding of knowledge about the subjects we uncover in the archives and about the knowledge they, too, perform and produce in the folds of film history. (Hastie 2006: 224)

Medium-specificity is also linked to the intention, or projected reader, of the originator of the material. Anne Bachmann, for instance, has written compellingly of how the press cuttings collections typical of Scandinavian early cinema archives impose the role of meta-archivist on the researcher: s/he must read the press cuttings with the awareness that the collection is always already edited by the collector, and that 'it is all intended, in commendable and painstaking hopefulness, for the historian's eyes' (Bachmann 2013: 45). There is no evidence to suggest that Dreyer's system of clippings, slips of paper and envelopes was intended for anyone's use but his, but the files present the tantalizing possibility for future filmmakers of digging down into his research material and process well beyond the surface layer of the screenplay itself, to expose the planning and data recombination processes there. Bromberg and Medrea's *Inferno* could be a model here in terms of how this film draws on Clouzot's test shots.

The preserved research material traces the transfer of notes into screenplay via a number of drafts and commentaries from consultants such as writer Elsa Gress^{iv} and archaeologist P. J. Riis of Denmark's National Museum. Beyond the archive - and thus beyond the bounds of this article - one can also flesh out aspects of the journey from idea to script via the accounts of the director's collaborators. Nevertheless, the synthesis of ideas into Dreyer's screenplay remains largely a 'black box', and this inevitability privileges the manuscript as the cipher for the unfilmed film. The invaluable and innovative DFI website *Carl Th. Dreyer: The Man and his Work* has made Dreyer's unfilmed screenplays freely available online (Danish Film Institute, n.d.). *Pace* the limitations of staff time,

bandwidth, copyright and visitor interest, one could envisage a web resource which ‘unfolds’ Dreyer’s research materials in supplement to the digitized screenplays.

Von Trier’s colours

As flagged in the introduction to this article, a second salient characteristic of Dreyer’s *Medea* research material is the presence of a large number of magazine clippings which together constitute a colour ‘mood board’ (for example, D.I.B. *Medea* 33 and D.I.B. *Medea* 68). Once removed from the envelope and spread across the table, the clippings display a very definite palette: ochre, royal and sea blues, splashes of orange and red, with intense shadow effects. Such clues as to Dreyer’s plans for the use of colour in *Medea* are particularly seductive because Dreyer never made a colour film. In fact, *Mary*, *Queen of Scots* and the Jesus film were also conceived as colour films, and it is tempting to speculate that this impact on their projected budgets was a major factor in them remaining unrealized.

Dreyer spoke tantalizingly about a surprise he had planned for his first colour film (Drum and Drum 2000: 276); it is unclear what this surprise would have entailed, but we can speculate on the basis of his writings about colour film. In 1955, for example, he was invited to speak at the Edinburgh International Film Festival, and his lecture was published the same day in the Danish newspaper *Politiken*, under the title ‘Fantasi og farve’ (Imagination/fantasy and Colour).^v In this text, Dreyer argues that colour can renew the art of cinema by returning it to the condition of abstraction, out of the grasp of photographic naturalism. He goes so far as to suggest that colour could supersede perspective, implicitly arguing for a haptic filmmaking practice that might return film to the condition of painting.

In her recent monograph on Lars von Trier, Bodil Marie Stavning Thomsen (2016) uses as epigraph one of Dreyer’s pronouncements about colour from his ‘Fantasi og farve’ essay:

Instead, one should work towards a completely new visual construction of layers of colour, all lying on the same dimension, so that they created one great multicoloured surface, and the concepts foreground, middle ground and background would fall away. One should, in other words, avoid the perspectival image and go over to pure surface effects.^{vi} (Dreyer 1959; quoted in Thomsen 2016: 5, my translation)

Thomsen later offers a detailed reading of von Trier’s adaptation of *Medea*, with emphasis on how the medium-specificity of (analogue) video determines the film’s colour palette. The trio of colours specific to the television medium are associated with different characters and narrative

stages of betrayal, observes Thomsen: the switch between green and blue of water and sky in Medea and Jason's reconciliation, a magenta-red sky when the horse is galloping to its death, and the play between red and green as Jason paces the grass towards the end and Medea loosens her auburn hair on board Kreon's ship (Thomsen 2016: 59). Von Trier thus uses colour in a 'diagrammatic' way, referring to the materiality of the television screen, and invites the viewer to enter into a self-consciously affective relation with the surface of the screen and the story (61). Such play with colour and surface fits more generally with *Medea's* self-conscious references to the possibilities of video in the mid- to late-1980s, such as the evocation of mythological distance by transfer from video to film and back again (Bell 2006; Björkman 2003: 117-8). On the surface - pun intended - this is an adaptation which is resolutely of its time, and uses the technology of its time to construct a sense of timelessness.

And yet, folded up amongst other articles in Dreyer's research materials for *Medea*, there is a magazine article featuring an interview with the American painter Andrew Wyeth, best known for his 1948 work 'Christina's World'. This painting features a disabled girl in a pink dress crawling up a yellow grassy slope towards her family home. The article quotes Wyeth on the tension between colour tones in his painting:

I worked on the hill for months, that brown grass, and kept thinking about her in her pink dress like a faded lobster shell I might find on the beach, crumpled [...] I put this pink tone on her shoulder - and it almost blew me across the room.^{vii}

Sitting at a desk in the DFI, unfolding this clipping, I, too, as researcher was almost 'blown across the room' by the similarity between Dreyer's colour mood board and the colour palette of von Trier's adaptation. Had von Trier seen Dreyer's clippings? For the moment, I have chosen not to try to find out, respecting von Trier's insistence on the telepathic link between the two directors, or, less fancifully, the principle that the clippings, the screenplay, and the eventual adaptation are, as the opening title of von Trier's production insists, caught up in a field of tribute to each other.

Conclusion

This article has used the terms 'unfilmed', 'unrealized', 'unmade', and 'unfinished', without aspiring to draw watertight boundaries between them. In closing, I would like to try to justify the choice of 'unfilmed' as a productive term in this article's title. One justification for 'unfilmed' as a category stems from research design: in drawing up a set of parameters for the collection of data, it may

be useful to draw a line between projects that have involved some filming and those which may have reached an advanced stage of preparation but were never committed to celluloid or digital code. Secondly, I use the term to open up the possibility that an unfiled film is not an unrealized film. The unfiled film can, in some circumstances, be said to have been ‘realized’ - for example, as publishing project, art project, or documentary subject - but to a degree that does not include being committed to film. As we have seen, film projects that are unrealized by the initiating auteur may be realized by another. The notion of the unrealized film is produced by discourses and practices of auteurship, and vice versa. An unfiled film is a profoundly auteurist phenomenon, unsullied as it is by the compromises imposed on the project by the economic and other pressures of production. Focusing on the ‘unfiledness’ of a film, rather than an auteur’s failure to realize it, re-instates the process of filming as material, technological, and collective practice.

Lastly, I would like to close with a paranoid, but perhaps productively provocative proposal for the unfiled film in the age of the digital archive. D. N. Rodowick has, controversially, argued that a digitally-shot film is qualitatively and ontologically distinct from its analogue equivalent, insofar as it consists of 30,000 or so digital events rather than an indexical record corresponding to the time recorded on film: ‘the digital event corresponds less to the duration and movements of the world than to the control of discrete numerical elements internal to the computer’s memory and logical processes’ (Rodowick 2007: 165-6). On this basis, the ontological distinction between a digitized moving image and the digitized elements of the paratexts of an unfiled film is hard to sustain - as is, accordingly, the distinction between filmed and unfiled. If such an idea raises the hackles of the thwarted filmmaker or provokes incredulous laughter from the *cinéphile*, the point of their indignation is well-taken: a film is, in the end, only filmed, made, realized when it encounters its audience.

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Notes

ⁱ This is not to suggest that such documentaries are a purely twenty-first century phenomenon. A television documentary was made for Danmarks Radio in 1970 by Lars Graff Nielsen: *Et livsværk – Carl Th. Dreyers Jesusfilm*. Many thanks to an anonymous peer reviewer for drawing my attention to this broadcast.

ⁱⁱ The association of Kubrick with synchronic iterations of unfinishedness is a rhetorical point for the sake of comparison. Kubrick is also indelibly linked to the idea of unfinishedness as a race against the auteur's mortality, not least in the wake of the controversial digital censoring of *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), finished just a few days before Kubrick's death. The realization of Kubrick's project *A.I.* (2001) by Steven Spielberg is a thought-provoking analogue to von Trier's realization of *Medea*. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this observation.

ⁱⁱⁱ Primarily under the shelfmark D.I.B. Medea + box/envelope number.

^{iv} Schepelern (1998: 143) is sceptical about Gress' role in the development and translation of Dreyer's screenplay, but her letters and commentaries as preserved in the research materials do seem to bear out the idea that she played a part.

^v A version of the lecture was published in *Sight & Sound* under the title 'Notes on My Craft' (Dreyer 1956), and a transcript of the lecture was later published as 'Imagination and Colour' (Dreyer 1973: 174-186). Many thanks to Casper Tybjerg for this clarification.

^{vi} 'I stedet skulle man arbejde hen mod en helt ny billedmæssig opbygning af farveflader, der alle laa i samme plan, saa de dannede én stor samlet flerfarvet flade, saaledes at begreberne forgrund, mellemgrund og baggrund helt bortfladt. Man skulle med andre ord gaa bort fra det perspektivistiske billede og gaa over til den rene fladevirkning.' I have provided my own translation from the Danish due to certain infelicities in the translations in Dreyer 1973.

^{vii} I have not been able to find the source of the article, but it is likely to be from *Time* magazine, where Meryman was a staff writer. He later wrote Wyeth's biography (Roberts 2015).