

first described through mechanistic and linguistic metaphors, the figural expressivity of the montage-image recovers a primal, corporeal, sensual vitality—even as Eisenstein posits it, at the same time, as an agent of complex thought.

How to comprehend all this alongside Eisenstein's high praise—though unelaborated—for Dreyer's *Passion of Joan of Arc*? While it is a film that could just as well be admired by an opposite sensibility—one that would see in its rhetoric of authenticity and presence a prime case for a revelatory paradigm whose imperative is, plainly, "Believe!"—Eisenstein's thought, and his work, may also be seen in dialogue with Dreyer's.⁵³ *The Passion* does *not* in fact consist in its entirety—as it is sometimes remembered—of facial close-ups, but it is a film in which, Eisenstein might say, *all is foreground*. The intensification of foreground, where details are yoked in violent simultaneity, by no means gives rise to the human face as a harmoniously reassuring, infrangible totality. On the contrary Dreyer's face-work is fraught with violent dissociations, displacements, paradoxes and barriers which—notwithstanding its hallowed reputation—one should parse.

JOAN OF ARC, INEVITABLY

Moving through the facial-expressive trajectory of the 1920s we arrive, inevitably, at Dreyer's door to reconsider there how the terms and turns of the facial image are truly pushed to the limit. Dreyer's film gives a particular meaning to the rather broad question of how the cinematic image is invested with consciousness, how expression is facialized and addressed—also since *The Passion* so consciously straddles the transition to the talkie, when the synchronized human voice was to introduce a shift nowhere more salient than in the perception of the face.⁵⁴ All the more reason to marvel at its audacity, in view of Dreyer's cutting back and forth between expressive faces, whose mouths pronounce words that one can often decipher, followed by dialogue intertitles (quoting the historical trial transcripts), that at times repeat those very words, and back again to the actor's face, sometimes completing the phrase that the titles already spelled out. All this far exceeds standard intertitled film practice where—apart from the common wisdom that one should not burden the spectator with too much reading—the excessive *mouthing* of speech in close-up is routinely avoided not only for the sake of economy, but since it so disconcertingly highlights the *absence* of voice, and might even seem

53 For Eisenstein's expressed admiration of Dreyer see *Beyond the Stars*, 230 and 336. Dreyer for his part stated that his work was inspired by *Battleship Potemkin*—so reports Casper Tybjerg in his commentary on *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, Criterion DVD edition (1999). In his *Filmguide to La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 62–63, David Bordwell cites an anonymous review from the New York Times (February 16, 1930) that ascribes to Eisenstein instead a negative opinion of Dreyer's film: "very interesting and beautiful. . . but not a film. Rather a series of wonderful photographs." Bordwell also cites Paul Rotha's gloss on the opposition of Dreyer and Eisenstein as, predictably, following the opposition of the individual expressive shot and the montage of attractions. By the time he considers the film again in *The Films of Carl Theodor Dreyer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), Bordwell revises his earlier assertion of its "splendid unity," and admits the "disunity and contradiction" of Dreyer's *Passion* as "one of the most bizarre, perceptually difficult films ever made" (66), pointing out, as well, how Dreyer pushes everything to the foreground of the image.

54 According to Bordwell's *Filmguide*, p. 14, Dreyer's original conception was of a talking picture; when settling on silent he still retained far more dialogue than is common in silent cinema, and which the actors were to speak *in toto*. Notoriously, a sonorized version was put together by Lo Duca in 1952, but was rejected by Dreyer.



FIGURE 1.10: Mouthing speech, then swallowing the camera: an “interiority” of sorts in *The Big Swallow* (James Williamson, 1901) – frame enlargement.

uncanny. How and why should one stare into a mouth twisting open in inaudible speech? This was already parodied in the earliest cinema with *The Big Swallow* (James Williamson, 1901) (Fig. 1.10) where the oral movements of speech, magnified, evolve into the mock-monstrous swallow. Surely, if Joan is so spiritually or psychologically saturated—as viewers maintain—one should not be gaping into her mouth quite so directly and so extensively. Yet between numerous intertitles, Dreyer often leads us to do just that! How to navigate between the physical gesticulating mouth; the muted charge of speech, crying, pleading, breathing; and the intertitle quotes from historical documents? The face flutters somewhere in-between these elements in *The Passion of Joan of Arc*.

David Bordwell has commented on this peculiarity, noting the difference—one could well invoke here Derridian *différance*—between the spatio-temporality of speech-as-moving-image and that of writing. It is this same difference—or *interference*—that marks the relation between the sensory and the intelligible, between the beholding of a human face and the act of reading in the film.

The dialogue titles foreground the crucial difference between speaking and writing: lips move and then we read what they have already said. Through *Jeanne d’Arc’s* insistence on the principle of dialogue, the archaic dialogue title gets recharged with formal significance.⁵⁵

The significance is even more than formal. The elaborate artifice of repetition and syncopation between image and text in this film is such that time itself seems to stutter when facial and verbal expression seem to not simply repeat but *interrupt* each other, breaking the spatio-temporal flow of cinematic experience *and* the linearity of reading (Figs. 1.11–1.13). The temporal

⁵⁵ Bordwell, *The Films of CTD*, 91. In his earlier *Filmguide* (especially pp. 22–8) Bordwell emphasized the temporal condensation of action in the film, which he ascribes to Dreyer’s abstraction of both duration and space. Such condensation is true to the broader narrative span of the film and its balance of *fabula* versus *syuzhet*; but one notes that it is not reproduced at the level of the discrete units of exchange in the film, where temporal retardation and dislocation are at work just when one might have expected a more economical and psychologically coherent flow.



FIGURES 1.11–1.13: Mouthing the word before and after written dialogue title in *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1928) – frame enlargements.

dilation in the rebounding of the written text and the speaking mouth render language itself as a sort of material, corporeal substance. What results is that not the coherence of psychological character (well established in cinematic representation by that time), nor the integrity of Joan's inspiration—the divine revelation of her own presumed visions and voices—all these are not quite held together in Dreyer's system.⁵⁶ Some new, alien territory emerges in the gap between image and language, and in their mutual interference in the arena of the face.

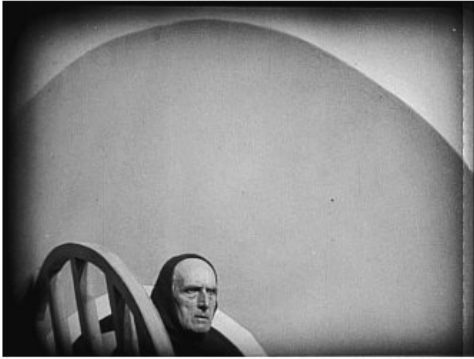
⁵⁶ My emphasis on the breakdown of psychological coherence goes against what some viewers may consider the intuitive association of the expressive face with psychological truth, which was also Dreyer's stated intention in many of his pronouncements on the film.

This interference aggravates the frequent dissociation, noted by scholars, of eyeline matches and, more broadly, the dissociation of spaces in *The Passion*. When eyeline matches do occur, it is often in moments of crisis when, as James Schamus argues, Joan is in fact being deceived by her judges.⁵⁷ The intent, expressive facial close-ups are often divorced, then, from the syntactic functions conventionally implemented by film language. With such coded, communicative legibility repeatedly thrown in doubt, a mute visual-corporeal expressivity sets in—but it is never a reassuring one. When can we read and when must we suspend the sovereignty of our languages and codes in confronting the nudity of the human face *on its own*—and on its own turf, which is what Dreyer's film seems to set up like no other film before it? When camera angles or the direction of glances suggest that the face is intent on communicating beyond itself, Dreyer's disruptive system—the frequent lack of establishing shots, the vertiginous framing with heads often de-centered, the dissociated editing—all work to isolate the face and forge its own space. And even when, as is often the case, off-screen space *is* signaled, it tends to be frustrated by unreliable eyeline matches. These shattered spatial coordinates, too, make us feel the space surrounding the head as a void—but a void that is somehow substantial, heavy, grave.

Not only by way of editing, but also in the use of *mise-en-scène*, vast yet oppressive expanses—either blank or else emphasized with arches and other architectural fragments—gape above or alongside faces and often occupy the greater part of the frame (Figs. 1.14–1.15). Such perverse, warping compositions conspire against the centripetal unity of expressive-revelatory plenitude—the psychological or spiritualized face that the film is said to promote. An iconographic-symbolic interpretation of such compositions is compelling: in pictorial tradition such spaces might be occupied by virgin's robes, by soaring angels' wings and saints' thighs; thus, the palpable lack of such divine apparatus could signify the condition of a world from which the incarnate gods have departed and that now encroaches upon the solitary human creature.⁵⁸ But what one confronts here is also the breakdown of legibility and representation. I would describe it as a cinematic correlative to Georges Didi-Huberman's account of the weight of empty spaces in Fra Angelico's *Annunciation* (ca. 1441) in the Monastery of San Marco in Florence (Fig. 1.16). Angelico's reduction of architectural elements and props as well as of realist pictorial devices—spatial constructions, shading, molding, all that would render the space and the sacred encounter that transpires in it intelligible *as* representation—gives rise to a profound ambiguity. The bare expanse that gapes in the middle of the fresco posits what one *sees* versus what one *knows*: the enigmatic composition with the vacuum at its midst interferes with both narrative and pictorial spatio-temporal coherence, and thus opens figuration to perpetual displacement. What is at stake here, according to Didi-Huberman, is a loss of legibility and, with it, a radical *otherness* that comes to lurk at the heart of seemingly

57 James Schamus's scholarship on Dreyer has inspired some of my own thinking about the film; see *Carl Theodor Dreyer's Gertrude: The Moving Word* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 66. Noël Burch's discussion in "Carl Theodor Dreyer: The Major Phase," Richard Roud, ed., *Cinema: A Critical Dictionary*, vol. 1 (New York: Viking, 1980), particularly 296–300, is compelling on most accounts. He makes the point that the space conjured in the film is specifically, and exclusively *cinematic*—in assertive rejection of both the proscenium-theatrical space and of the transparent, illusionistic filmmaking style. Yet his argument that Dreyer links shots "exclusively through eyeline matching" and yet maintains at the same time an "open" relationship between them remains problematic.

58 Such interpretation has been forwarded by my students in a seminar on the face at the University of Chicago, Winter 2010.



FIGURES 1.14–1.15: The weight of empty spaces in *The Passion of Joan of Arc* – frame enlargements.



FIGURE 1.16: The weight of empty spaces: Fra Angelico, *Annunciation with Saint Peter Martyr*, fresco (ca. 1440–1445). Image courtesy of the Museo di San Marco, Florence. Licensed by Scala/ Art Resource, NY.

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intelligible representation. These are the equivocal workings of an art already informed by humanist innovation but ultimately serving other ends: the riddles of divine mystery and its *necessarily* oblique figuration in the image.⁵⁹ Across the various Christological attitudes to image and figuration—the Florentine monk’s and the modern Scandinavian’s—strategies of interference and anachronism probe the riddles of incarnation, through *and* against the situation of the human body in space and time.

Dreyer’s work with framing and décor is consistent with his editorial system. It signals, almost palpably, just such loss of intelligibility that inflects what would first appear as a succinct narrative rendering of the trial and execution of Joan of Arc, buttressed by historical documents and a range of quasi-realist, authenticating devices. But Dreyer’s challenge is to render not simply the trial, but the *Passion*, which is certainly no straightforward representational and psychological matter. His breakdown of eyeline matches, his assertive foregrounding of empty spaces, his recursive interference with temporal flow—under the guise of strict linearity, which Dreyer underscored by shooting in chronology—all these isolate and accentuate the one element consistently charged and overdetermined in the film: the human face which persists as if on its own, and against our routine effort to comprehend its situation, orientation, and communicative meanings. Its peculiar fullness in isolation, always circling on the edge of intelligibility, has inspired one of Gilles Deleuze’s best passages of formal description:

Joan’s face is often pushed back to the lower part of the image, so that the close-up carries with it a fragment of white décor, an empty zone, a space of sky from which she draws an inspiration. It is an extraordinary document on the turning towards and turning away of faces. . . . Dreyer avoids the shot-reverse shot procedure which would maintain a real relation between each face and the other, and would still be part of an action-image. He prefers to isolate each face in a close-up which is only partly filled, so that the position to the right or to the left directly induces a virtual conjunction which no longer needs to pass through the real connection between the people.⁶⁰

Dreyer’s foregrounding principle and his isolation of the human face is what propels the image, as Deleuze puts it, into an “immediate relation with the affect” and underscores its “triumph of a properly temporal or even spiritual perspective”: *The Passion* is thus, he concludes, “the affective film *par excellence*.”

But there is something else about the face in this film: even as, for its great theme and its reputation, we expect to be transported to some “spiritual perspective,” or at least psychological depth, we sense at the same time a way in which the face is here both conduit and intrusion to such journey. In fact the face’s physical being—by way of appearance, frequently marked by the haptic appeal of skin texture, wetness of cheeks, dryness of lips and so on—is often sensed as inordinately tangible. The concrete fleshy faces that populate the film—both the judges’ and the possessed

59 I draw on Georges Didi-Huberman’s discussion across two books: *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance and Figuration*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 113–23, and *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, trans. John Goodman (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press: 2005), 13–28.

60 Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 107.



FIGURES 1.17–1.18: Sensory primacy: a nudity of face and of being in *The Passion of Joan of Arc* – frame enlargements.

protagonist's together—are reiterated by the striking procession of bodies and body parts in the outdoor crowd scene. Most memorable are the contorted acrobats and the baby at its mother's breast. In this universe where everything is so disconcertingly foregrounded, Joan/Falconetti's features—whose peasant-girl connotations Dreyer wished to emphasize—resonate with both the oppressive voids that so often encroach upon her *and* with the plenitude of concrete, corporeal being. Not so much by virtue of her expressions—since for the most part the various figures and movement in the crowd scenes do not seem to be within her line of vision—but by way of metonymic contiguity delivered to our perception in montage, Joan's face could be said to inflect these other spaces and figures, or else to *suffer* them. In effect, Dreyer asks us to compare, and equate, the sensory-expressive quality of these diverse figures: all are foregrounded; all are facialized, and this equation must be brought to bear on the sort of *truth* of the face that Dreyer must be aiming at—no foggy spirituality but intimately, umbilically, immersed the thick of life.

Casper Tybjerg cites from a contemporary review of the film by Lis Jacobsen, a Danish philologist who had attended its premiere—her powerful observation points in the direction that concerns me. It is not just the absence of make-up, Jacobsen wrote, but it is as if the skin itself is ripped off the human face in *The Passion of Joan of Arc*; its nudity is not simply that of the sentiments,

but of human existence from cradle to grave. Truth is hurled at our faces: an image of a suckling infant pictured not as a mother with a child at her breast, but as a huge bulging naked bosom clasped by a lustily feeding baby mouth.⁶¹

Clearly, this is not the image of a Madonna and Child as sublimated by tradition and convention (Figs. 1.17–1.18). Whatever iconographic connotations and metaphoric leaps Dreyer's string of images might invoke—Joan's longing to be embraced to comfort by God in heaven, the violent assault on her child-like innocence—is surpassed here by the impact of raw being. The truth of the naked face meets that of the naked breast (with which the face also resonates formally) on which the infant suckles; the mouth that is seen to speak, and pray, and take the Eucharist resonates with the immediacy and necessity of the baby's wet mouth; Joan's keen look with the baby's intuitive turn of the head, disturbed only for an instant from its primal absorption—all are metonymically joined and forcefully *equated* on the same plane by expressive foregrounding. One might say that an exchange of intensities thereby occurs between these various figures:

61 Tybjerg, *The Passion* DVD commentary, citing Lis Jacobsen.

all are oddly intrusive, offering the spectator no relief. Everything transpires in an absolute presentness, concreteness, and out in the open. Spaces empty and full, objects of all sorts blunt and sharp, body parts—all press forth, charging the faces that confront us.

In Dreyer's reliance on historical documents; in his insistence on shooting in chronology, perhaps by way of impressing upon his cast a ritualistic re-enactment of the Passion; in the assault of his close-ups upon the exposed faces of the actors—as if the camera were extending the trial's techniques of interrogation and torture—in all these ways the film appeals to a rhetoric of authenticity.⁶² However the obvious must not be overlooked: that it is an acted, costume, fiction film. Its actors' faces, like most cinematic faces (and bodies), are to be seen as both their own and as being lent to the characters they enact—a split itself thematized in *The Passion's* dwelling on certain characters' duplicity, and on the forging of the king's seal and signature.⁶³ We shall have occasion to develop the question of acting-as-being and being-as-performance when we consider the screen test as "facial genre" in Chapter Four. But due to the loud claim of authenticity in *The Passion*, its effects of bareness and presentness, and by sheer proximity, the actor's person and role are palpably yoked here, more so than in standard dramatic film practice. This is what prompted André Bazin's famous observation that, despite the artifice of theatrical gesture and décor, and despite its principle of fragmentation, the film transpires like a documentary of its actors' faces. Bazin's ontological realism seems not too far here from Balázs's microphysiognomic perception and even Epstein's geological animism:

The greater recourse Dreyer has exclusively to the human "expression," the more he has to reconvert it again into Nature. Let there be no mistake, that prodigious fresco of heads is the very opposite of an actor's film. It is a documentary of faces. It is not important how well the actors play, whereas the pockmarks on Bishop Cauchon's face and the red patches of Jean d'Yd are an integral part of the action. In this drama-through-the-microscope the whole of nature palpitates beneath every pore. The movement of a wrinkle, the pursing of a lip are seismic shocks and the flow of tides, the flux and reflux of this human epidermis.⁶⁴

Bazin is not naively equating here the acted fiction film and documentary. What he identifies in the arena of the face is, rather, the triumph of a physical, corporeal nature caught on film vis-à-vis conscious, intentional human gesture and action, or *acting* and, more broadly, representation. As in the neorealist tradition that he privileges, what Bazin sees in Dreyer's work is the bare, almost intrusive corporeal reality of the actor pushed *against* mimicry

62 For a nuanced discussion of the film's violent use of the close-up vis-à-vis its odd realism, see James Schamus, "Dreyer's Textual Realism," *Rites of Realism: Essays in Corporeal Cinema*, ed. Ivone Margulies (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 315–24.

63 The nagging question of dissimulation with regard to the face in the cinema, and in this film in particular, was sharpened for me by Michael Cramer's contribution to my seminar on the face at Yale University, Spring 2007.

64 André Bazin, "Theater and Cinema, Part Two," *What Is Cinema*, vol. I, trans. Hugh Gray (1967; Berkeley: California University Press, 2005), 109–10. Bazin's reference to the "red patches" in what we obviously see in the film as black-and-white is perhaps effected by Dreyer's appeal to our recognition of quotidian phenomena. Extreme proximity ruptures formal barriers, as well as our sense of the "envelope" that shields the person. This effect is recognizable in new wave cinemas: I'm thinking of John Cassavetes's close-ups of Gina Rowlands in *Opening Night* (1977) where, as per Bazin's discussion of Dreyer, the theatrical context makes the cinematic gesture even more salient.

and *against* the illusionistic flow of the narrative fiction. The effect of the non-actor in neorealism—types marked by class, profession, milieu, region—is of a piece with this idea. One may well dub this corporeal intrusion of the face—following the *Cahiers du cinéma* editors' celebrated expression—a “reality of the inscription.”⁶⁵

The question remains: how does such cinematographic insistence on the face-as-body still seem to endow it with a dimension of interiority and of revelation; how does one move from the material opacity of flesh to the supposed transparency of “spirit,” from the epidermal to the *self*, from image to consciousness? Can this translation be accounted for by some sort of equivalent to a physiognomic lexicon? Does the merciless attention to creases, pores, flaky scalps, moles of all shades on the judges', the guards', and the torturers' faces in *Joan of Arc* simply translate into an “inner ugliness,” their guilty conscience, their fall from the divine into corrupted flesh? Would such translation then also apply to the bodily effects of the maid herself, implicating some motivated link between her outer, inner, and transcended domains—namely our seeing one as *cause*, or *evidence*, or *index* of the other? Joan is anxious to protect the integrity of all these aspects of her *self*, bound up as one in what she *is*, in her *being*: when threatened with torture she begs her judges to not separate her body from her soul. But when we are confronted with the shearing of her hair and the bleeding; and even more so, it seems to me, when we get subtle shimmery glimpses of the inside of her mouth and nostrils, we might ask then how all such fleshy orifices and corporeal excretions are part of her *self*—since they forge her cinematographic being in the first place?⁶⁶ Just like the tears carving paths, for posterity, down the textured surfaces of her complexion—these bodily effects are what make us truly wonder what a *self* might be. How does subjective agency rise out of these many layers of physical being, out of the thick of life? The flesh is not transparent—beneath it there is more flesh, and blood. If we try to remove these layers, we kill the patient, in a manner of speaking—it is what burning witches is all about. Nor does the *legible* range of Joan's facial expressions, which is limited—fear, supplication, pity—suffice. Its limits are those of discourse and of representation: symbolic systems that cannot encompass the mystery of self. And so, since the physical substance of flesh inundates us here with excessive proof of existence—what would that *self* be?

65 Collective text by the editors of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, “John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*,” *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 495.

66 The production trivia, pointed out to me by Richard Suchenski, that in the shot isolating the arm the bleeding was in fact done to a stunt does not destroy, it seems to me, the corporeal blows of the film, even if it intrudes, somewhat, upon its myth. The fragmentation of the body by editing or other cinematic devices is a fact that Dreyer, with his dispersive editing style, would not deny. The sight of the blade cutting through flesh and the blood jetting out contain enough of a manifest cause-and-effect within a single shot to affect most viewers quite viscerally, and in ways that may be said to compensate for the editing of two bodies into one. This is a common cinematic conceit that underscores the fundamental difference between theatrical and cinematic bodies. In the theater the body is, at least in principle, integral and sovereign. In the cinema, too, the actor lends her body to the role, but not in quite the same way that she lends it to the camera: body and face are *subjected* to the cinematic apparatus and, in some sense, the apparatus always, and in principle, prevails—it has the final say, as it were. Films that explore this difference by appropriating theatrical modes of perception—like emphatic frontality and, above all, in certain uses of the long take—often do so to parse the question of the actor. The split between role and camera is very much at stake in Cassavetes's *Opening Night*. But what to make of it in Dreyer's film? We shall encounter throughout this book other such radical, and more or less *judicial*, situations of confrontation of face and apparatus.

There is a way in which all these bodily effects are *like* facial expressions—indeed like strong expressions that, whether or not discretely and fully legible, manifest, at the very least, the intense presentness of the experience with which we are confronted. But insofar as these bodily effects *exceed* a parade of signifiers more or less conventionally joined toward a literary characterization of the maid's character and her distress, they are set against a verbal order—also undermined in Joan's rejection of the forcibly signed confession. Their cumulative layering proclaims depth; this is what layers structurally *do*, especially when a temporal process—recursion, duration—partakes in their layering. The dissimulation of the actor, whose body both reveals and conceals the subject, is mirrored in the dissimulation of the character who, in her very person, both conceals and reveals the mystery; these dissimulations, too, are part of that layering process. Such layering signals a depth of experience but exceeds any discursive or legible content to be read therein. What it adds up to is the density and opacity of the subject: much as one peels off layers, the power, even threat, involved in raw being is bound up with the resistance to legibility and to iconographic decoding. Dreyer might be positing here not an inwardness offering itself to be read but a stubborn rebounding of self—whatever that self might be—through the physical density of the visual. It is the subject's most precious aspect, and it is what Joan's face, and her very person, presents to the judges, and to spectators. Dreyer's film spins such ideas—such double-negations—into circulation in the cinematic image. How, then, is Joan/Falconetti's face part of her *self*—and what is that self, insofar as cinematography can tell? In its routine operations the cinema (like other fictions) presumes to know what it shows, and display what it knows, to define and make legible its subjects (because it invents them). Dreyer explores the uncompromised presentness of the living, human face on film, staging its nudity *and* its layering to figure an agency—be it a grand theological mystery or the little mystery of the *person*. He progresses against the representational inclinations of his medium by repeatedly pointing to the gaps between seeing and knowing, by moving continually toward and away from legibility. A *Passion* is figured, but what it manifests is that its mystery cannot quite be disclosed—cannot be altogether subjected to representation, cannot be possessed by knowledge.

Another way to describe this conceit—always skirting the mind-body problem in its properly philosophical formulations—is to consider that the face is a *medium* in just the way that a person partaking in some ritual invocation might be taken as *medium* of exchange between the living and the dead, between present and past, matter and spirit. The archaic theater actor is invested with similar powers of mediation: in the actor's performance, the dramatic operations of mimesis, dissimulation, substitution, doubling, or repetition are equiposed by the presence and immediacy of the actor's body, lent to (or possessed by) the role (or some oracular spirit). Vestiges of such *daemonic* exchange might be seen to inform the distinct spatio-temporal presence-absence condition of motion pictures. In just such terms Miriam Hansen glossed Benjamin's aura, effected by an apparatus that “at once threatens and inscribes the subject's authenticity and individuality”: its efficacy may well be driven by this double movement.⁶⁷ It is not, then, an actual return of the gaze in the subject's direct look at the camera, but the *agency* of a gaze that matters—as it permeates, emanates, but is at the same time also *alienated* from the subject in its refraction across a distance. This distance, spatial and temporal,

67 Miriam Bratu Hansen, “Benjamin's Aura,” *Critical Inquiry* 34 (2008): 342–3.

is synonymous with the gap between disjunctive entities, human beings, states of being. It is especially pronounced when technologically inscribed facial indices are as accumulated and densely layered as in Dreyer's film. With the relations of image and language dislocated, with the body's intelligibility pushed to the limits and drained, with an avalanche of expressions drowning the face, auratic distance is mediated by figural leaps—and by falls. Joan's "otherworldly" gaze toward a transcendent "elsewhere" is, at once, excessively charged, audaciously embodied, and disjointed, drained. It is as if the most intensive eruption of facial expressivity must also be sensed in its utter strangeness and otherness for the face to come into its own—but that this should happen before our eyes.

Such interpretation is corroborated by Françoise Meltzer's understanding of the story of Joan of Arc as an emblematic intersection of archaic and modern discourses—this well preceding its particular exploration in Dreyer's film. It is after all, as Meltzer puts it, the story of a woman's encounter with a symbolic system that strives to make her "a 'subject' without agency." Yet Joan, being a woman, is "not a subject or person before the court." What takes place, then—as it has done symptomatically throughout history—is that agency "flows through and is realized by the body."⁶⁸ The scandal that this presents to our culture's symbolic regime is, itself, emblematic. James Schamus, likewise, describes Dreyer as staging here a "refusal between the traffic of language and image." Joan's renouncing of the signed confession allegorizes the breakdown of a verbal, male-gendered, regime in the face of the maid's visions—visions corroborated in the excessive domain of the cinematic image. We do not need to see Joan's visions for ourselves: the face thus foregrounded carries their agency with a fullness that exceeds both everyday perception and the ordinary, functional visuality of narrative cinema. Schamus adds: "Dreyer, by rupturing the marriage between word and image, approaches the real."⁶⁹ Illegibility is set up not as an impediment, but as a necessary condition of the strong, charged image. The iconicity of the cinematographic image would first seem to convey plain availability and intelligibility. But then Falconetti's skin, nostrils, mouth, the twitches of tiny muscles caught in her close-ups—all these crowd our view, cannot be deciphered away, and force us to confront again the gap between seeing and knowing.

Even tears, the most human of fluids by medieval interpretation—noble, repentant, or redemptive as they might be—are at once self-evident and profoundly ambiguous. Among their many meanings—which Moshe Barasch brilliantly parses in late-medieval Christian iconography—even the most obvious, sadness and compassion, can shift to mystical joy. "Are we at all permitted," Barasch finally wonders, "to ask what crying 'means'?" The challenge of

68 Françoise Meltzer, *For Fear of the Fire: Joan of Arc and the Limits of Subjectivity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), I quote from pp. 9 and 39. Although she does not treat Dreyer's film specifically (even as Falconetti commands the book cover), Meltzer's discussion is absolutely pertinent, and provides the best preparation for thinking about the film.

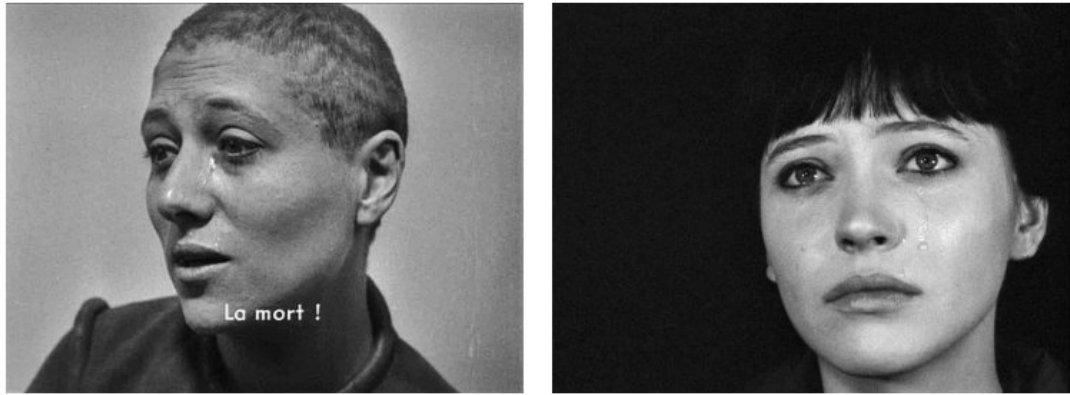
69 Schamus, *Gertrude*, 53 and 90 respectively. The Lacanian/Žižekian "real," intimated by Schamus, joins with "excess," "supplementarity," "aura" in a rather fluid nomenclature. But while we should not seek a perfect homology between these terms, there is a way in which what one struggles to describe in Dreyer's *Passion* can be approximated by any and all. My recurring notion of "illegibility" in these pages perhaps mirrors the principle of supplementarity by which Doane had glossed Balázs and Epstein, and also adjoins Eisenstein's pushing of foreground to the point of ecstatic leaps across and outside the flow of discourse. Tom Gunning pressed me to reflect on my preference for "illegibility" over "ineffability" here, to which I would respond that the ineffable carries heavier mystical connotations. These are not irrelevant to the discussion at some points in this book, but may also be juxtaposed with how the illegible sets itself more explicitly against symbolic or iconographic systems, and introduces moments (or sites) of crisis in their midst.

tears to the interpretation of causes and expressions is, perhaps, the most overt form of the face's margins of illegibility with which this book is concerned. Already here, in Dreyer's *Passion*, we see tears suspended between expression reaching its zenith, a temporal bodily eruption, an appeal to empathy, perhaps even a gift—but they do *not* readily lend themselves to causal interpretation or “reading.”⁷⁰ Indeed, Dreyer's attention to bodily presence in certain close-ups—a presence that mediates but also obstructs meaning—sometimes involves a disconcerting emphasis on the humid roundness of Falconetti's eyeballs, like spheres that almost seem to float in her teary face. And so, even tears cannot be altogether sublimated here into psychological or metaphysical meaning. Joan is firmly located in her body, and in her face-as-body. There is no getting around it in this film.

The corporeal disturbance of legibility discerned here is allegorized, finally, by the simple fact that, of course, we *do not see* Joan's own visions, nor do we *hear* her voices (we hear no voices at all)—such things do not translate across media, as it were. Any such claim would amount to vulgar literalism, itself critically echoed in Joan's interrogation, when the judges try to trick her into a heretical account of her vision of St. Michael's clothing or hair. This literalization offends her, and us: we are relieved by her clever skirting of the trick question—she answers with another: “do you think God was unable to clothe him?” But then we, too, must suspend the questions posed by our secular modernity which, Dreyer might say, perversely mirrors these judges' own dogma, and we grant Joan her truth, whose literal *content* we need no longer question. Not the learned judges' doctrine, nor our secular one, can demarcate these visions as they beckon *and* withdraw, at one and the same time, their epiphanic promise. The human face is where we encounter time and again, *in the visual*, what we cannot really know. The gap, or abyss, signaled here also means that Dreyer's audaciously foregrounded close-ups can in fact transpire *as distance*. This is where Joan's truth flickers—as consumed by fire, or as across an abyss, or in the form of a question: such, at least, is Joan's answer.

Dreyer's film bluntly dramatizes questions of face and agency that we also encounter in later cinema: that if it is not to be objectified on the one hand, nor diffused as metaphysical currency on the other, if it is to come into its own, the human face always disturbs epistemological and communicative channels—it is not transparent, it cannot let meanings, reasons, motivations, settle. But there is a price to pay for maintaining the life of the face-as-image, while preserving its freedom. *The Passion of Joan of Arc* thus also allegorizes ways in which cinema can itself become an interrogating machine, like the battery of judges weighing upon Joan. One does not interrogate consciousness directly. The cinema has developed its own ways of veiling and masking, of shielding and preserving the human face from the violence of visual interrogation *and* the constrictions of interpretation—by others and by the apparatus. But the face may then emerge as its own defense—may block, or deflect, as much as it mediates. Its illegibility need not be shrouded in divine mystery; it may still impress us as a productive principle, as a generative form of attention that knows no limits. It compels our response. But what does it mean to cultivate such forms of illegibility, yet persist in offering the face as incarnation of self in the world, a visible token of our humanity?

70 See Moshe Barasch, “The Crying Face,” *Artibus et Historiae* 8, no. 15 (1987): 21–36; quotation from p. 35. Ralph Ubl, who directed me to this essay, also pointed to the example of Mary's eyes in José de Ribera's *Pieta* (1637, Museo nazionale di San Martino, Naples), and one thinks of numerous other instances where the size, protrusion, and unique texture of eyes makes their corporeal origin interfere with their expression, their gaze, their meaning.



FIGURES 1.19–1.20: Variants of a Passion: Karina and Falconetti face-to-face, tearful, in *Vivre sa vie* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1962) – frame enlargements.

SOMETHING OF DREYER'S audacious demand survives in the cinema thereafter, even when incorporated time and again in scenarios of loss and death: a Passion of the face is continually retold through film history. We note it, with just a moment's glance ahead, in Jean-Luc Godard's great face-to-face gesture to Dreyer, across a historical divide. This is, of course, the tale of another woman's martyrdom: the prostitute Nana's existential struggle *to be*, in Godard's *Vivre sa vie* (1962). In the third *tableau*, Anna Karina's sensitive features are illuminated by reflection from the movie screen as she weeps face-to-face with Dreyer's Joan/Falconetti, tearfully accepting full knowledge of her redemptive death (Figs. 1.19–1.20). Aumont's account of Godard's composition at this point is compelling: it is as if an entire film history—implicitly encompassing all due glamour of the classical female star—is traversed in this exchange, this embedding of images.⁷¹ Indeed, the one film within the other yields an extraordinary situation of shot-reverse shot, also joining archaic and modern, time and tears, faces and souls. For Godard at that time—so well attuned to a last-bastion humanism—still believed that the cinema could mediate such an encounter, even if he already worried about its survival: the shabby, almost-deserted movie theater is itself still figured here as a space of intersubjective potentiality. As in Godard's best moments, this is not marred, it seems to me, by the irony of quotation and pastiche or by the glycerin artifice of Nana's almost-too-perfect tears.

One other glance, a couple of years later, toward one of Andy Warhol's greatest *Screen Tests* (1964) radicalizes such *Passion* of a woman's face confronting the apparatus. Subjugated now not to the Catholic inquisition but to Warhol's own *Test* regime Ann Buchanan, holding still and unblinking as instructed, sheds a tear under the bright lights (Fig. 1.21). The medium bends here almost to mimic, with the silent speed projection, photographic portraiture. The tear's decelerated welling heightens our sense of anticipation and eventual change; time itself wavers and its relation to experience (the sitter's, our own) is cast into doubt. A poignancy of expression is sustained: we ourselves may be affected sympathetically, sensing this instance as a crisis. The complex response that this film elicits pushes against physiological diagnoses or the humdrum question of hypothetical "causes." Liberated from biographical or fictional anchors, are these tears more or less authentic than Joan's, or Nana's? One recalls Barasch's questioning of a "meaning" for tears and considers, again, that the power of facial expression (tears are *expressed*) in the cinema need not hang on whether it erupts

71 Aumont's evocative description of this scene and its contexts is in *Du visage*, 9–12.



FIGURE 1.21: Variants of a Passion: *Screen Test: Ann Buchanan* (Andy Warhol, 1964). 16mm film, black-and-white, silent, 4.5 minutes at 16 frames per second. © 2015 The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, PA, a museum of Carnegie Institute. All rights reserved.

from the “inside” or is imposed, one way or another, from without. And again, as for Balázs, “the expression exists even without the explanation. It is not turned into an expression by the addition of an imagined situation.”⁷² A raw power of cinema breathes through the Buchanan *Screen Test*: what right have we to dismiss her tears under the pretext of mechanical or physiological causes? Identification and catharsis *are*, in some sense, automatic, physical responses to dramatic, verbal or visual shifts, to the breakdown of knowledge, to inevitable loss, and to recognition. Technologically conditioned, or a bodily reflex, or an index of the performer’s exhaustion, physical or psychological, tears offer themselves to us, and affect us, as do even those electrically induced expressions that Duchenne de Boulogne (Figs. 1.22–1.23) imposed on his facially paralyzed patients.⁷³

72 Balázs, *Spirit of the Film*, 100.

73 To almost anyone but the scientist or experimenting physician and his staff, the contact of electrodes with facial flesh and the resulting grimace is an excruciating sight. We have been reassured that—since paralyzed or otherwise desensitized—Duchenne’s subjects do not suffer, so that the impression of pain can be separated, theoretically, from the particular facial expression. This thought, together with our recognition of the destitution (by class, by circumstances etc.) of all these patients and other such contextual considerations, surely come *after* the primary sensory and affective impact of the image has already hit us with its ghastly contact of instruments and the grotesque facial-muscular contortion. As in our viewing of the Buchanan *Screen Test*, but even in a strong melodramatic film, the complexity of response to the expression we confront is impossible to disentangle in its varying range of visceral, empathetic, and intellectual components—calculated, constructed, visually and aurally paced and intricately designed as they might be.



FIGURES 1.22–1.23: Variants of a Passion: Guillaume Duchenne de Boulogne, facial electrostimulus experiments, from his book *Mécanisme de la physionomie humaine; où, Analyse électro-physiologique de l'expression des passions* (1862). Images courtesy of the New York Public Library.

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The encounter between the human face and the technological apparatus can be dealt in many ways, and it can be excruciating: the pathos to which it gives rise may be elicited not only by the greatness of theme, and by empathy, but also by authorial constraint or withdrawal, and by the subject's self-alienation. Dreyer's unique balance of these elements solicits questions of transcendence or spirit, but it is very much a balance couched in the body and in the apparatus itself, and no less eloquent as it is preserved in tears and in light.

THE FACE AND ITS VOICES

How did such heightened contemplation of the face—the belief it inspired in 1920s film culture, its redemptive promise at the heart of technological modernity—carry over into the talkie? One presumes, and many worried, that its absorptive expressivity would be profoundly altered when it began to speak. Historians of film style demonstrate that the confluence of the close-up (as well as medium shots, and everything in-between) with the shot-reverse shot was, in fact, busily at work in mainstream cinema already in the mid-teens and evolved in the following decade, together with the eyeline match, as key devices in continuity editing which narrative called for well before the talkie. The use of the shot-reverse shot as prime carrier of the facial close-up in mainstream American cinema increases considerably, according to Barry Salt's statistics, with the proliferation of dialogue in synchronized sound in the late 1920s and the 1930s. It reaches a certain peak of exploitation in the 1940s, though it is always tied as well to conventions of genre, stylistic preferences, and theme, and is always inflected also by nuances in shot duration—among other stylistic articulations.⁷⁴ The commitment of the face to psychological causality ultimately subtends, as David Bordwell lucidly puts it, classical cinema's "personalizing" of space.⁷⁵

Jacques Aumont argues that with the rise of the talkie, the facial image, now charged with the word, could in fact free itself from the burden of *translating* it, and at the same time from the need to *circumvent* it by overcompensation in those non-verbal "zones of pure expression or of pure contemplation. The speaking face is coupled with the word, it works

74 In *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis* (London: Starword, 1983) Barry Salt does not list the close-up in his glossary. He does however compare shot-scale distributions in classical cinema in the statistical charts on pp. 244–9. The close-up is also embedded in his discussion of shot-reverse shot, which he incorporates in the broader term "reverse-angle shot" (392). Salt's analysis suggests the stylistic diversity of the shot-reverse shot, although he does not offer a more detailed breakdown by genre, for example, or as tied to types of scenes: conversation of two or of more persons, showdowns, scenes of crisis and revelation, etc. Salt concludes nevertheless that it is not strictly this mode of editing but, rather, "the frontal close-up as such, regardless of what is on either side of it, is the important device. This must be because the perception of the human face seen closely from the front makes use of basic neural connections, and so has a more powerful effect than the sideways and more distant view of the human figure" (306). Statistics are buttressed here with positivistic assertion of the hard-wiring of facial response as underlying film style.

75 See especially Bordwell's chapter "Space in Classical Film" in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 50–9.