



Why is *Vampyr* a challenge?

Vampyr's Challenges

- “Manner” of representation confronts us investigators of cinema
- Plot and story
 - Film displays only part of the cause and effect chain that motivates the material shown on screen
 - Communication of plot through associations
- Discontinuity
 - Conventional forms of cinematic narration coupled with subversion of viewer expectations
- Dreyer's Method
 - Materiality
 - Abstract, spiritual questions

Preliminary Observation: Dreyer Warns us Not to Trust Our Assumptions



Gray arrives at Chateau



Gray searches for Gisele

- Abandon expectations of plot and story
- “Don’t trust your eyes”
- Motif of obscured vision
 - Gray’s arrival at Inn, looking through windows
 - Continually obscured vision
- Turn to dreams and the shadow world
 - Plot initiated by a dream?
 - Insight through dreams
 - Follow the shadows



Editing, framing in windows, and discontinuity undermine our confidence in what we see in opening sequence

Plot and Story



Why does the Doctor ignore Gray, when they first meet in the stairway?

- Omission of narrative causes
- What does *Vampyr* omit?
 - Discussion of conflicts
 - Options of response
 - Decisions
- We see actions whose motivation remains for us uncertain, as in Marguerite Chopin and the Doctor's meeting

Vampyr Program
(1933)

11/4-33



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I. Setting

- Rural village Courtempierre (France)
- Village ruled by Marguerite Chopin, a vampire
- Her servants are a doctor and a soldier
- She has also targeted Léone, and is seeking to suck her blood and induce her suicide
 - Léone's father is Lord of a local Chateau
 - Léone's sister is Gisèle
- When Allan Gray, obsessed with vampires, arrives the Lord of the Chateau entreats him to help

VAMPYR

ISCENESAT AF

CARL TH. DREYER

Manuskript

CHRISTEN JUL og CARL TH. DREYER

Musik

WOLFGANG ZELLER

Fotografi

RUDOLF MATÉ

Dansk Bearbejdelse

HENRIK V. RINGSTED

Officin

CARL TH. DREYER PRODUKTION



Eneret: GLORIA FILM
JØRGEN S. JØRGENSEN

2. The Lord's Murder



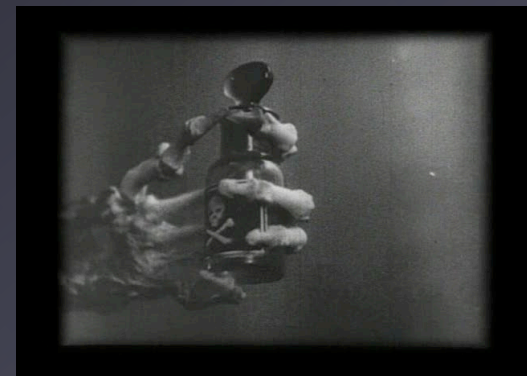
- Gray leaves his hotel in search of the Lord
- He gets lost en route to the Chateau, and finds Doctor's lair, where Chopin and her shadows are present
- Chopin orders soldier to kill Lord of Manor, so she can seduce Léone
- Gray finds his way out of Copin's lair and hurries to manor
- Gray witnesses murder of Lord
- Lord affirms love of Gisèle in death Coachman goes for police

3. Vampire attacks, and is revealed

- Chopin seduces Léone into the forest
- Gisèle and Gray save her
- Gray begins to read the book the Lord left him, “in case of his death”
- Coachman returns dead
- Léone worsens, nears death
 - Doctor arrives, to help Léone, but tries to induce her suicide
 - Gray volunteers to give blood to help her recover
- Servant picks up Gray’s book, and Chopin’s methods and name are revealed
- Gray dreams and servant awakens him to save Léone from poisoning herself
- Doctor flees



Under the spell of Marguerite Chopin, Leone nears death



Gray’s dream reveals association between suicide and Chopin, the skeleton

4. Recognition and Resolution: Life and Death Struggle



Allan Gray leaves his body during his second dream, which allows him to see the truth of his earlier experiences

- Gray runs after Doctor
- Servant sets out to Chopin's grave
- Gray's dream reveals what he saw early in the film
 - He was among the dead,
 - His funeral shows where he was
 - The Doctor and the soldier work for death
 - Chopin is their master
- Gray awakens and realizes he must help destroy Chopin
- Chopin destroyed, curse lifts
- Lord of the manor avenges his death by haunting soldier
- Servant smothers Doctor in flour mill
- Life on the water had displaced death

Example: *Vampyr* (1932) and *Dracula* (1931)

- What information does the opening sequence give us?
- *Vampyr*
 - What is Allan Gray trying to achieve?
 - Is there a threat?
 - Who is involved?
- *Dracula* (1931)
 - Tod Browning
 - Universal horror cycle of 1930s
 - Questions about the opening?
 - What is Redfield trying to achieve?
 - Is there a threat?
 - Who is involved?
 - Dreyer cues us not to expect the plot to be communicated clearly, but gives us associations to follow



Contrasting
images of the
Vampire





Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931) was the first of many horror films produced by Universal Studios in the 1930s

Clarification through Association

- Motivations are clarified by associations
 - Reasonable assumptions based on cultural knowledge
 - “Mannner” of representation creates consistent associations
- Some key associations
 - Water and isolation
 - Styx
 - Shamanism
 - Dream provides insight into spiritual realities
 - Death is a world of shadows
 - Skeleton, skulls, with vampire Marguerite Chopin



There are shadows
everywhere in
Courtempierre...

Gray sees shadows at the lake



Soldier's Shadow



Doctor Arrives at the Chateau





Note use of montage editing and mise-en-scene to underscore Chopin's association with skeletons

Discontinuity



Vampire looks into Gray's coffin during last dream sequence, but where did she come from?

- What is continuity?
 - System of rules about action in the frame and editing of shots that stabilizes image of space for the viewer
 - Emphasizes matching across shots in a sequence
- Dreyer continually violates the rules of continuity
 - Lack of establishing shots
 - Unreliable point of view
 - Continual movement outside the frame that are relevant to plot
 - Confusing spatial markers
- Unconventional system forces us to accept Dreyer's system of representation

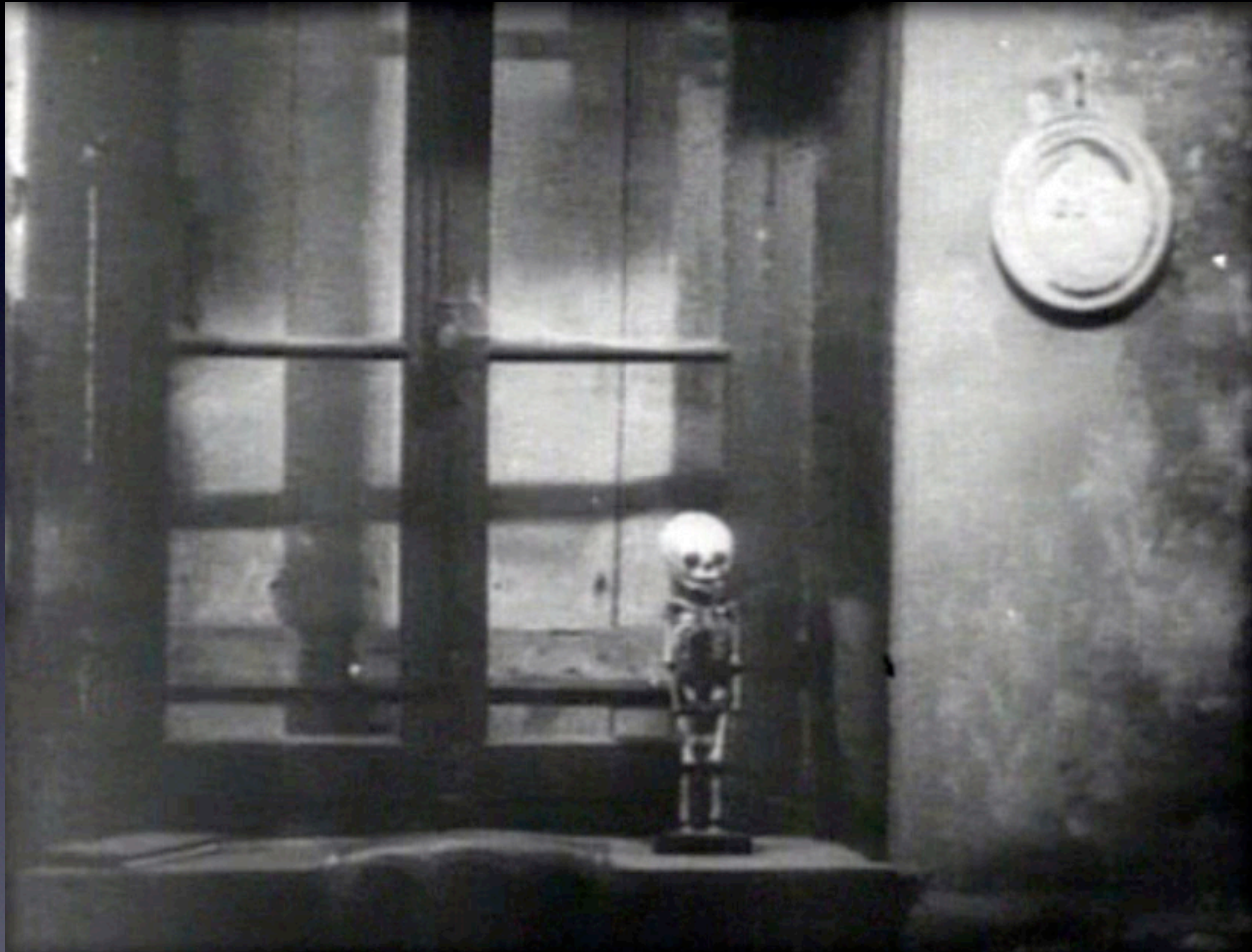
Gray enters room, looks right, but
no establishing shot



Camera appears to match Gray's look in
pov shot, panning L \Rightarrow R



Camera notices skeleton icon,
which will mark a later location



Gray reenters frame from right, indicating we haven't seen pov, moves into next room



Gray enters new room (Doctor's laboratory with bottles), matching on action, and invoking continuity





Clip of Allan's exploration of Doctor's lair -- look for the sign "medecin/docteur" on the floor

Instances of continuity



- Sequences of continuity editing stand in contrast to the discontinuity that characterize the film
- Shot-reverse-shot editing in dream sequence from Gray's perspective in the coffin



Vampyr dream sequence -- note shot-reverse-shot continuity

Dreyer's Method

- Disorienting method compel us to look for points of reference
- The face, gesture, and the set establish contrasts that offer handholds
 - Extreme method acting
 - Prominence of the face and gesture in Dreyer's cinema
 - Lack of makeup
 - Indexical emphasis
 - Casting
 - Set
- Paradoxical naturalism



Strange gesture



Stress indexcality



Preben Lerdorff Rye on Dreyer's casting for *The Word* (1955), where he studies a character with Christ mania -- extreme method acting

Léone being examined



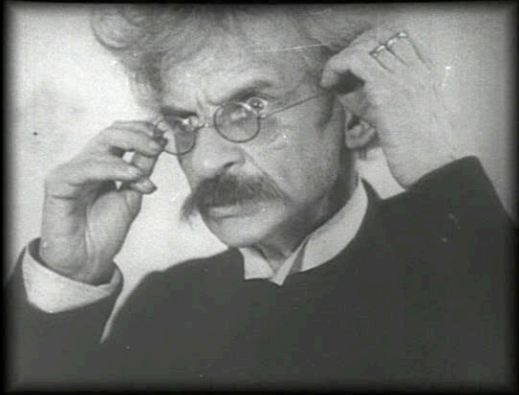
Léone near death



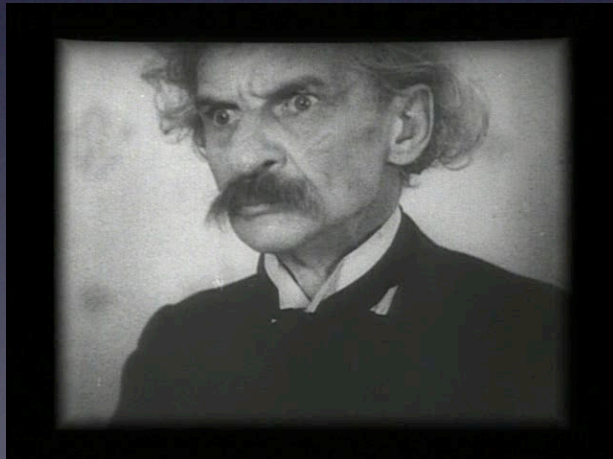
What is the cause of
Léone's illness?



Non-professional actors and strange sets



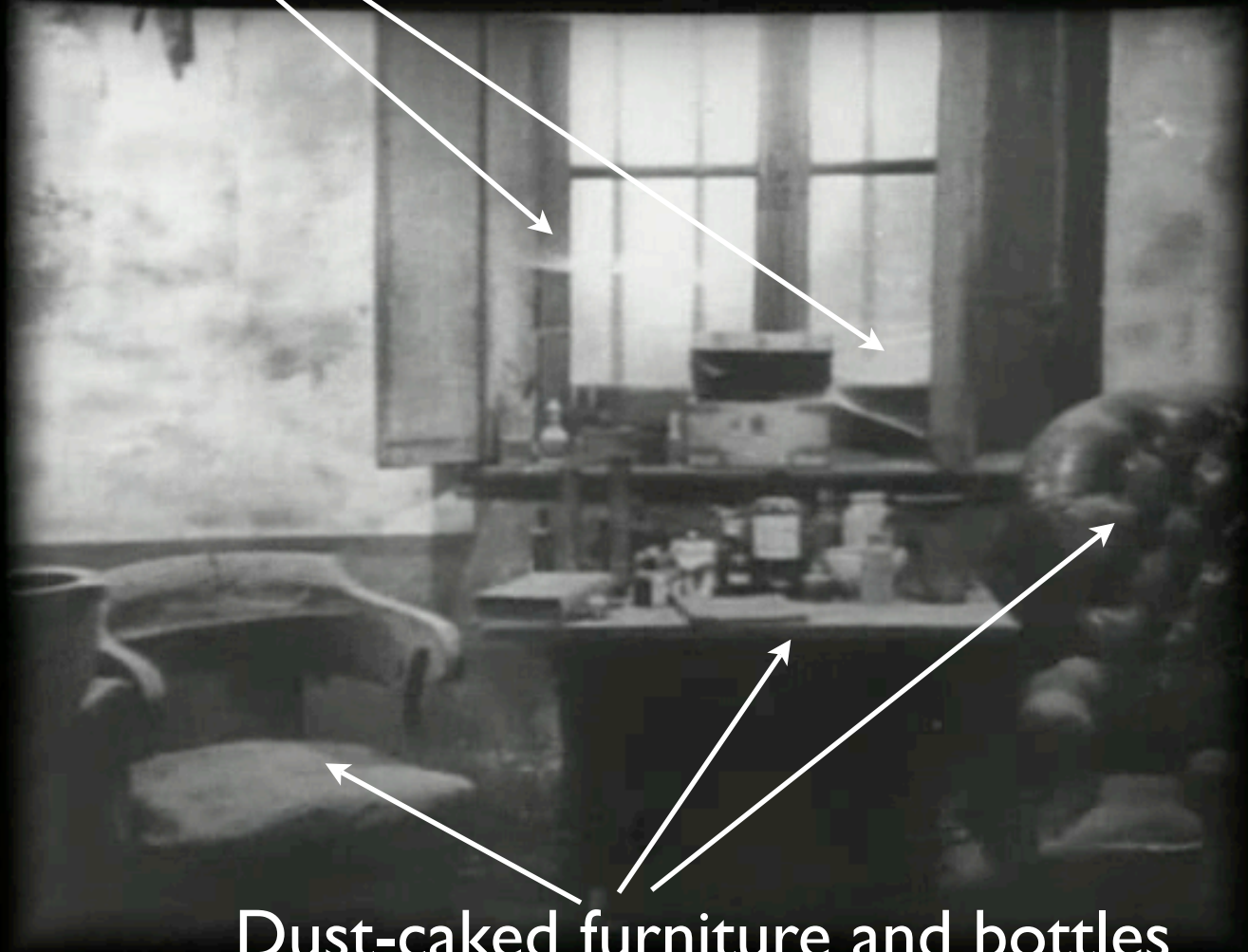
Doctor...



and poet

- Habit of casting non-professional, elderly actors
- *Vampyr's* cast
 - Baron Nicolas de Gunzburg as Allan Gray
 - Mother of an actress, Marguerite Chopin
 - Ralph Holm discovers Hieronimko, the Doctor
- Creating the Doctor's Lair with the help of the neighbors

Heavy cobwebs

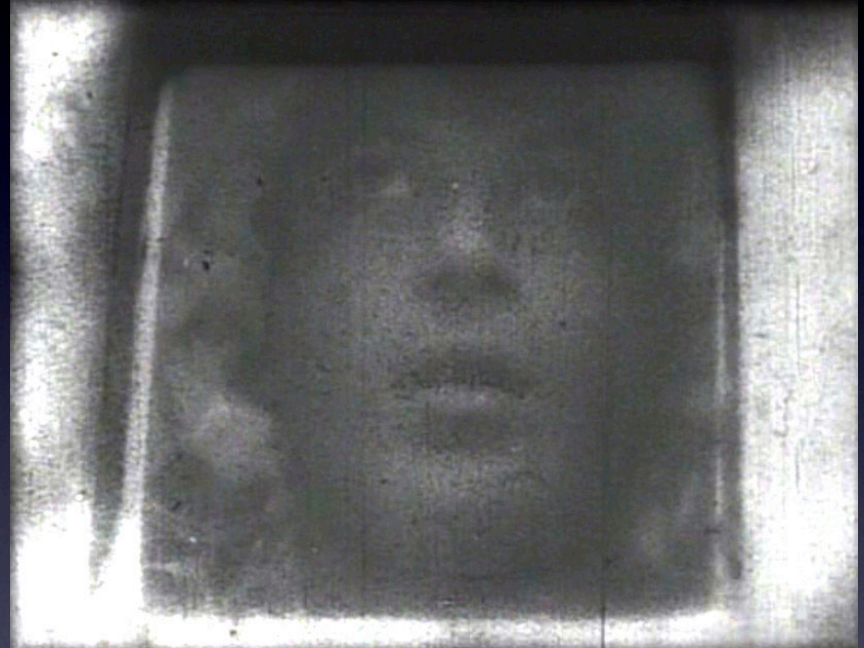


Dust-caked furniture and bottles

Dreyer's Method

Paradoxical Naturalism

- Dreyer attempts to represent material, worldly experience as visible to us
- Paradoxically, our experience of everyday life is motivated by beliefs and meanings, which have no “appearance”
- How can film capture this paradox?
- Salient conundrum, which Dreyer explores with a different style in each film, depending on material



What is it to experience a
world of death?

Summary

- Why does the film challenge us as investigators of cinema?
 - Plot and story
 - Discontinuity
- What evidence can we prioritize in figuring out *Vampyr*?
 - Associations
 - The face
 - The set