2. Evidence, Second Movement: Tableaux and Faces

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Evidence, Second Movement: Tableaux and Faces

> What was normal [by the seventeenth century], at all levels from the patrician to the plebeian, was the marriage of word and image. That "mutuality" may be tacit: thus heroic painting in the grand manner does not generally carry with it, in so many words, a commentary, keying in the mythological figures; yet artists habitually gave their paintings titles, mottoes, tags and quotations, and their works abound in literary allusions. But very commonly the interleaving of the verbal and visual is quite explicit.
>
> —ROY PORTER, "Seeing the Past" (1988)

> The originary world is therefore both radical beginning and absolute end; and finally it links the one to the other, it puts the one into the other, according to a law which is that of the steepest slope. It is thus a world of a very special kind of violence (in certain respects, it is the radical evil); but it has the merit of causing an originary image of time to rise, with the beginning, the end, and the slope, all the cruelty of Chronos. This is naturalism.
>
> —GILLES DELEUZE, *Cinema 1* (1986)

An Unnatural Business

What better place to begin pictorially than in the underground lair of an old witch named Karna? A hoary, wrinkled woman moves busily in her dark underground room, the scene cluttered with a variety of objects that are difficult to recognize and yet generate an ominous, dreadful sense that something malevolent is going on here. The old woman tends to a pot over the hearth in the middle of the large, dank room; not precisely the cauldron central to the witch stereotype, but certainly close enough. An accomplice,

a somewhat younger version of the sorceress, enters the room with a large bundle of straw, roughly tossing the bundle to the side. The bundle falls heavily and the old shrew quickly reveals why; hidden within the shock of straw is a corpse (or part of a corpse), exposed by the old woman parting the straw and drawing a lifeless hand from within the bundle. The meaning of her previous dialogue ("Tonight the stars shine favorably over the gallows hill") is answered by this gesture.

Complaining about the quality of the item her coconspirator has procured ("Ugh! What a stench!"), the old woman nevertheless proceeds to examine the hand carefully, suddenly snapping one of the fingers off the decaying hand. Noting that the finger of the thief may be "too dried out" to lend any power to her brew, Karna nevertheless ties a string to it and lowers it into a large cask. Her partner does not respond and blithely stirs the small cauldron boiling on the hearth. In a series of flowing, intercut close and medium shots, Christensen reveals the terrible ingredients of the cauldron—ingredients that (save for a large, writhing snake and a still-alive toad feebly attempting an escape) are unidentifiable in their strangeness. This mildly creepy reveal visualizes a stock cliché of the witch stereotype regarding the ingredients she uses: of nature and yet revoltingly unnatural and unwholesome at the same time. The casual suggestion of cannibalism also references the popular understanding of the witch, something we discuss in relation to the witch's Sabbat later in the book.

Someone approaches the entrance to the old woman's home. She is hidden and nearly frantic to enter before she is seen. A customer. Karna shows the plain, middle-aged woman in. Warily surveying the scene, the customer gets directly to business. She is in need of a love potion to be used to entice "a pious man of the church." Karna, being a savvy entrepreneur, has a range of choices to offer her customer. In succession, she offers a potion of "cat feces and dove hearts boiled in the moonlight" or a stronger brew rendered from "a young and playful male sparrow." As Karna speaks, the customer visualizes the potential outcomes of each potion, Christensen dissolving back and forth from our perspective eavesdropping on the transaction to scenes of the customer administering the potions and their results, first one of ardor, then one of frenzied sexual arousal.

Although played for amusement, this sequence serves the purpose of presenting several additional elements of the witch that were not precisely

germane to the stern lecture in the opening chapter. First, the conflation and merging of myriad forms of popular magic with the *person* of the witch is plainly shown here. Classic witch-hunting manuals such as the *Malleus* sought to associate common magical practices of protection and healing with the witch; this association had to be strongly asserted by elite writers of the time as the connection was not obvious and was never fully absorbed into popular discourses of what constituted a witch.[1] Second, the stereotype of a debased and corrupted priest is forcefully introduced at this juncture. The object of the customer's affections, surrounded by wealth and comfort, is a fat, uncouth, and (if one is to "read" the face) vaguely stupid friar who appears to be completely subjugated by his desires. In each short fantasy aside, the friar is shown eating lavishly prepared food in the manner of "an animal," dismissive of the woman serving him prior to administering of the potion—he is then instantaneously and completely overtaken by his desire once the witch's concoction is ingested. The question that forms in the mind of the viewer is not about the effectiveness of the potion, but why the customer would desire such a slovenly, corrupt man in the first place.[2]

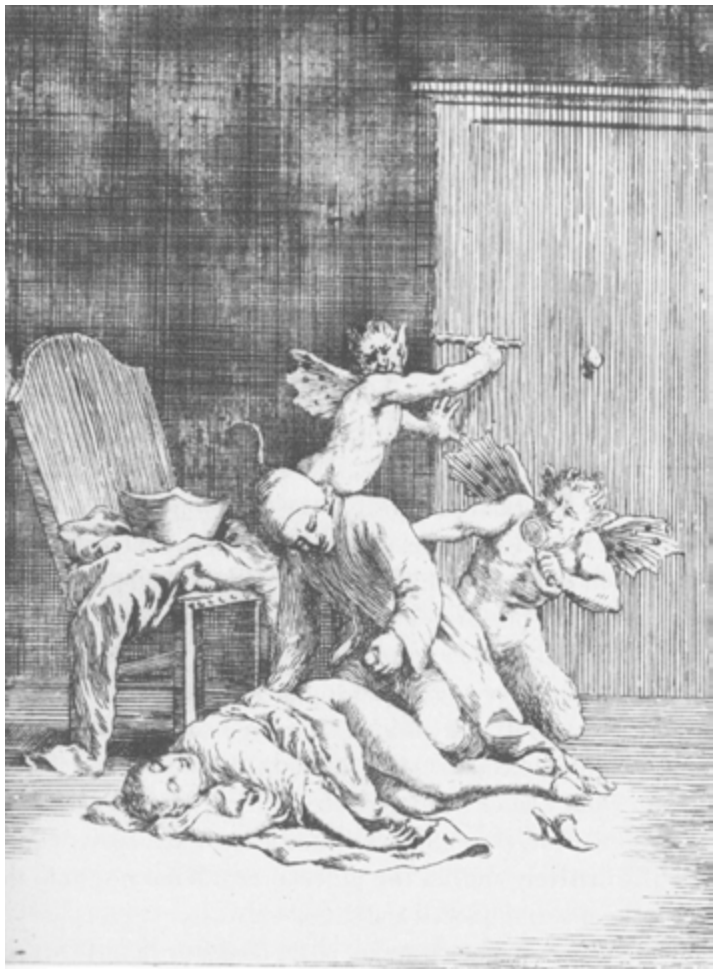
Christensen leaves this particular question hanging, although his insultingly satirical portrayal of this gluttonous, lustful priest has an antecedent in the strategically vulgar aspects of Protestant discourse against the Catholic Church in the sixteenth century. No less than Luther himself was known to slander, scandalize, and offend his adversaries using explicitly vulgar language against them. Taking cues, artists of the period extended the instrumentalization of slander through the production of proto-pornographic images of bishops, priests, and the pope engaged in myriad obscene acts. It was not uncommon for the pope to be depicted as the Antichrist in such works. Ignoring Thomas Aquinas's assertion that scandal, either "active" or "passive," is always a sin, Protestant propagandists sought to offend, using explicit rudeness as a weapon in the battles of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. For them, satirical, injurious images were regarded as expressions of empirical realities; this was not in spite of their obscenity, but rather *because of it*.[3]

As empirically grounded as *Häxan's* depiction of this persuasive discursive form is, Christensen's fidelity to historical facts did not endear his film to censors. The difficulty Christensen had in getting *Häxan* released in Germany serves as a good example of the issues raised in nearly every country outside

Childhood of Christ; the Passion; three cuttings from *Itinerarium beatae Mariae virginis*, printed by Johann Reger, Ulm. Courtesy of British Museum, London.

of Scandinavia where distributors attempted to show the film. Although several private screenings prior to its public première generated praise for *Häxan* in the German press, the film's release was denied when first submitted to German censors in February 1924. Only after substantial cuts was the film publicly shown in Berlin in June of the same year. The controversy over *Häxan* lingered despite Christensen substantially truncating the work. In January 1925, the Prussian Ministry of the Interior formally petitioned the censors to rescind their approval, citing scenes such as the one described above as expressly intending to offend religious feeling, to threaten public order, and to "brutalize."[4] Although the petition was rejected, such efforts severely restricted showings of *Häxan*, laying the groundwork for its unfortunate status as an "unseen classic." Interestingly, it was quite often scenes such as those depicting the emotional states and desires of the clergy that aroused as much ire as scenes showing nudity, demonic violence, sex, and cannibalism.

Christensen ends this lusty introductory scene with Karna, not yet taking her customer's money, suggesting that the best remedy of all may be her



Devils Watch while a Jesuit Sodomizes a Young Woman, from *Historische Print en Dicht-Tafereelen, van Jan Baptist Girard, en Juffrou Maria Catharina Cadiere* (1735). Courtesy of Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.

salve. This ointment (which she dramatically displays by carving out a portion with a blade) is so powerful that the "pious monk might directly come to [her] chamber." She notes that they would fly together at night in amorous bliss. Again, Christensen introduces another core element of the witch stereotype: the salve. More than any other substances, magical salves and

Desirous priest in *Häxan*, film still (Svensk Filmindustri, 1922).

ointments were considered particularly powerful and troubling by demonologists, and their use was a sure sign that an individual was engaged in witchcraft.[5] *Häxan* stops before showing whether Karna's customer takes her up on the offer.

Häxan's thesis is now unfolding. Without warning, the film cuts from the scenes with Karna to a moody, melodramatic scene with a young man hurrying another corpse through the streets of the village, finally arriving at a door where he is ushered in to the home with his load. Joined by a second young man, the two of them laboriously heave the bundled body down into the basement, at first unnoticed, observed by a woman awakened by the commotion. Through a series of cuts between the men and the spying woman, the female corpse is revealed. They are troubled and nervous. "Listen brother, shouldn't we pray . . . ?" asks one as the other stands dramatically poised with a large knife, ready to plunge it into the cadaver. Pray they do, beseeching the Holy Mother for forgiveness for cutting open a body in order to learn its secrets. The spying woman, overcome with curiosity, walks

in on the macabre scene. Realizing what is about to take place, she runs screaming into the streets, shrieking of the desecration brought about by "two witches."

This scene is quite dramatic, but also puzzling in its placement in this section of the film. Certainly the evolving practice of anatomical dissection and the development of pathological anatomy as a central element of medicine drew objections and accusations of blasphemy and desecration (although in an historically uneven way); what is strange is that this was not a strong element of the witch stereotype in the time period to which *Häxan* ostensibly restricts itself. Dissection and dismemberment of bodies did exist as a religious practice, but tended to be restricted to the securing of holy relics from the bodies of recent dead regarded to be "saintly" or in public displays for the purpose of understanding anatomy and general curiosity.[6] One must wait nearly two centuries before the trope of the "body snatcher" in the name of anatomical science really comes into being. While inquisitors and demonologists were certainly concerned with abuses visited on corpses, the evidence to which Christensen cleaves in the inquisitorial manuals drafted during the early modern period simply does not support the idea that anatomists or physicians were mistaken for witches. It is clear that Christensen wants practices associated with developing and testing medical knowledge to enter his visual narrative from the earliest moments, even at the risk of contradicting the historical record.

Christensen's inclusion of this event, directly following the scene with the lay practitioner of natural magic, is peculiar, as the film clearly depicts Karna as a "witch" while implying that the young men are simply "mistaken" for witches. We can only speculate as to the reasons for this empirical lapse, but the short scene does allow for a strong visual correspondence between misunderstandings of illness and scientific medical practice and the reasons for witchcraft accusations. *Häxan*, for all its cinematic license and unspoken complexity in relation to the power of the witch, never explicitly moves away from its self-positioning as a *scientific* investigation. As such, the idea that we are waiting to discover the "real" reasons for witches is never far from its agenda, whatever else *Häxan* actually communicates to its audience. To undercut the idea that Karna is a witch, however, would have severely weakened her scenes, and Christensen's tone here is one of unambiguously

positioning her as not only a misguided healer but also someone who explicitly believes she *is* a witch and acts more or less in the conspiratorial manner that is described in the *Malleus* and elsewhere. Yet also aspiring to have the audience feel the power of the witch, Christensen must constantly pull back from the dramatic outcomes of what *Häxan* depicts. Thus, pulled between these tensions, we see a dramatic slippage in the scene of the two amateur anatomists. Unable to fully negotiate the multiple demands Christensen himself makes of the film, we are presented with a dramatically useful error in the presentation of the evidence for his thesis.

Christensen notes at this point (via title cards) that it was common for everyday people at the time to see witchcraft as the source for a wide variety of misfortunes; in order to illustrate this statement, he moves to a scene of a conflict on the street at night between an old woman sleeping on some steps and a passer-by. The man angrily rousts the woman, accusing her of "bewitch[ing] the legs of honest people." Her aggressive reply is to bewitch the man's jaw, forcing his "filthy mouth [to] remain open for eternity." The stricken man, a look of terror on his face, collapses on the very steps from which he has rousted the old woman. This seemingly throwaway scene is interesting in that Christensen's depiction does not appear to illustrate the paranoid delusions of witch-crazed villagers; rather, it is a scene that unambiguously shows the bewitching of a man. While the audience can speculate as to potential somatic or psychosomatic causes for the man's sudden affliction, *Häxan* unequivocally plays the scene as a demonstration of the power of the witch. Unlike the previous scene of misunderstanding arising from the activities of the amateur anatomists, there is no visible cause for the action here except the angry spell of the old woman.

The function of this short scene is subtle. As the film unfolds, it is clear that Christensen is aware that the witch comes into being in overlapping vectors between learned discourse and popular belief. This requires some ground for agreement between the two domains; one clear aspect of this overlap is the widely held set of beliefs regarding the "nature" or "essence" of women. Echoing Christina Larner's assertion that witch trials were gender-related but not by definition gender-specific, the rhythmic alternation in this chapter of *Häxan* between women and men acting according to their supposed natures provides some insight into not only why the accusations

against women came to dominate the witch trials but also how it was possible, under some conditions, for the accusation to be leveled at men as well.[7]

The gender that Christensen invokes here, although perhaps somewhat overdetermined in its reliance on functionalist binaries and contrarieties, is not far from the social–functionalist explanations offered by anthropologists such as E. E. Evans-Pritchard, and more recently by historians such as Stuart Clark who have been inspired by anthropological attempts to apprehend the figure of the witch.[8] Returning to Larner's insight, it important to note that *Häxan* does not represent the vicious pursuit of witches as a straightforward instance of misogyny on the part of the Church or sixteenth-century civil authorities. Rather, it was the case that women often came under suspicion of being witches because they were understood to be particularly susceptible to lust, avarice, and jealousy by their very nature. Women, acting in accordance with this presumed nature (as the mean old woman briefly demonstrates), were therefore "naturally" susceptible to witchcraft. Men could also be witches, but generally only in instances where they were clearly acting against norms. The young proto-anatomists, therefore, have given in to a curiosity that was by the standards of the time morbid and unnatural. They, too, are taken to be witches, but only because what they are doing is *not* expected of them, a sure sign of unnatural forces at work. By contrast, women could signal the mobilization of these same unnatural forces simply by enacting elements of the nature that they were always already presumed to possess.[9] This difference will be important as *Häxan* progresses through its thesis.

The uneasy structural ambiguities carry over into the following scene. "So it happens with witchcraft as with the Devil; people's belief in him was so strong that he became real." This intertitle follows the line Christensen established earlier regarding the error and false consciousness of those who believed in witches and generates a nagging, almost unconscious, reluctance about Satan being made real. This phrasing is consistent with the positions taken by Clark, Roper, and a host of other recent historians that one cannot approach witchcraft or possession from a vantage point in the present without granting some legitimate status to the ways in which the Devil and witches were not only asserted to be real but were experienced as such.[10]

Reassuring Visions

Häxan's visual expression of this point constitutes one of the best-known scenes in the film. A priest, revealed later to be Father Henrik, engaged in intense prayer, is suddenly confronted by the Devil himself. Seeming to emerge directly out of the large Bible the priest is reading (in fact, popping up from behind the stand supporting the book), Satan is monstrously intimidating, leering at the terrified priest who backs away in horror. Played by Christensen himself, Satan taunts the priest and his colleague, who has rushed over in aid. Spreading his terrible claws over the pages of scripture, Satan dominates in even the holiest places (a church) and through things (sacred text), a fact that Christensen renders powerfully in this sequence.

This scene is campy by today's standards, in part due to the lasciviousness of Christensen's Satan and the hysterically overwrought reactions of the

Satan appears in *Häxan*, film still (Svensk Filmindustri, 1922).

Satan appears in *Häxan*, film still (Svensk Filmindustri, 1922).

harassed priest. Its power to shock, however, remains intact. Satan erupting forth for the first time during an act of prayer, in a church, and confronting a pious believer and instrument of God, visually conveys the terrifying and reassuring sense of power and threat Satan possessed. Although often understood as the point in which *Häxan* begins to slide into the territory of farcical reenactment, this short scene is among the most empirically consistent sequences in the entire film, particularly in relation to an understanding of the power of the witch and the Devil and the sense of these beings that existed in relation to life at the time.

Prior to Satan's dramatic entrance, we see the religious trappings, but there is no evidence of God's acknowledgment or answer to the friar's prayer. Yet, despite the obvious shock of the event, Father Henrik's confrontation with Satan at the very moment he beseeches God is shown to consolidate, rather than dissipate, his pious resolve. This resolve in *Häxan* reverberates outward toward the implied (visual) term in this powerful image; Satan is

indeed right in front of Father Henrik but the witch is not far behind. Encircled by these diabolic figures, the friar can ironically perceive the truth of the words he had just been carefully reading. On its own, the Bible is unable to convey information or simply *communicate* in a reliable, testable manner.[11] Coming face to face with Satan, at the very moment of the Word's perception in the mind of Father Henrik, the required supplementary proof is given via the concrete, threatening body of the evil one himself. Body and Word conjoined in Christensen's cinematic image; the ritual the scene began with can now *speak*.

The sense that Satan could be everywhere, positioned just out of sight, pulling the strings of his demonic human puppets is not limited to the early modern period. Nor is *Häxan* the only film where the notion appears. The figure of Satan as the power behind calamitous events in human history is also used in Dreyer's *Leaves from Satan's Book*. Like *Häxan*, *Leaves* is an episode film, but in Dreyer's slightly earlier work, Satan's *malefic* presence not only traverses far spaces but also crisscrosses time itself in what Bordwell has termed "a density of parallelisms."[12] Composed of four sections showing the crucifixion of Jesus, the Spanish Inquisition, the French Revolution, and the then-current civil war in Finland, *Leaves* portrays Satan as being potentially behind all calamity, driven to subvert humankind as punishment for his rebellion against God. In Dreyer's version, the Devil is awesomely powerful but also somewhat pitiable in that he can do nothing else but disrupt and destroy as an enforced condition of God's punishment. This rendering of Satan, at times strangely sympathetic, relies explicitly on discourses of theodicy and God's ultimate permission for Satan's deeds, debates reaching back well into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Importantly, Dreyer figures Satan as a problem of the present in the last episode of the film, with the Bolsheviks violently engaged in revolutionary struggle being the manifestation of a transcendental demonic power. There is a great deal of debate as to Dreyer's political leanings in associating Satan with contemporary communists. The disagreement about whether Dreyer was a "conservative" or engaged in explicitly ideological filmmaking with *Leaves* is important on its own terms, but is not relevant here.[13] It is, however, important to note that Satan was a very powerful figural vehicle in Scandinavian cinema at this time and that Christensen's own rendering of the Devil as potentially "being everywhere" would have certainly reverberated with contemporary

debates over politics and evil, and with other films such as *Leaves* that take up a similar expressive strategy. As in the time of Thomas Aquinas, this question of theodicy ultimately cannot help but come around to God's seeming absence from the world; in the wake of the devastation of the First World War, this question for many had never been more pressing.

Several scenes building on the displayed power to deceive and bedevil human beings follow the shock of the Devil's first appearance in *Häxan*. In sequence, Satan's ubiquity and lustfulness is shown over three scenes: (1) terrifying a woman lying in bed at night (it is unclear whether this is a nightmare); (2) enticing a nude female somnambulist out of her home into the forest, where she eventually kneels before a demon who embraces her; (3) appearing at the window of a woman sleeping with her husband and violently "encouraging" her to come with him—she does not immediately succumb, but is shown in several close-up shots grimacing and licking her lips, then in medium shot arching her body in erotic pleasure, and finally returns the Devil's embrace in her bed. While the charged eroticism of this sequence is played for shock and titillation to some degree, it remains consistent with the strategy of giving a powerful sense of the descriptions of Satan that exist in the demonological literature to which *Häxan* refers, particularly regarding the materiality of the Devil and sexual encounters with him. As Walter Stephens points out, proving sexual relations with the Devil was an essential task in many witch trials and served as crucial empirical evidence for Satan's existence.[14]

It is notable that in this series the targets of poisonous attention are young, beautiful women. While they are described as the "Devil's companions," these scenes are ambiguous as to the will and agency of the young women who become entangled with Satan's erotic power. Moving to the next sequence, *Häxan*'s narrative shifts focus to a character that actively seeks the companionship and assistance of the Devil—the viewer is brought back to the figure of an old woman.

Venusberg

Häxan now returns to the basement lair where this chapter of the film began. It is apparent that the set is the same one inhabited by Karna earlier,

but this time the viewer is introduced to Apelone. Christensen's first-person form of address in the intertitles is jarring as he directly queries Apelone by asking if it is "from the eternal fright of the pyre that you get drunk every night, you poor old woman of the Middle Ages." As the audience "hears" this condescending question directed at the old woman, she is shown shuffling and stumbling around the dimly lit basement, although interestingly she is not shown to be actually drinking. Christensen is forcing the issue somewhat, as there is an obvious distance between what is "said" and what is seen. Sarcastically driving a further wedge, doubt as to the director's felicity arises at various stages in *Häxan*, with this short sequence being a prime example. While it is unclear if Christensen intended to make a self-consciously critical statement, this quasi-humanist magnanimity reveals what Catherine Russell has termed "condescension toward the Other."[15] Her critical analysis of Buñuel's *Land without Bread* is also appropriate here: "Surrealist ethnography might therefore be a means of denoting the strategic roles of ambivalence, cruelty and empathy in refiguring the ethnographic relationship in postcolonial culture. Buñuel evokes the dangers of the photographic image and its implicit historical structure, marking the deep divide between those 'out there' in the real, and those who watch 'in here,' in the auditorium."[16]

Christensen is hardly a surrealist *ethnographer*, but his dreamlike *historiography* of witches is presented with the same double signature, simultaneously relying on and then disavowing the authority of science and its humanist social iterations. The unsteady trace of this signature become all too apparent in harsh moments such as the director's address to Apelone in *Häxan*, revealing Christensen's documentary to exist as an often cruel secondary revision of what is, or was, already in the world. The correspondence between art and science driving this revision is left unmarked, but, echoing Walter Benjamin, it is quite clear that Christensen's art sets out to "conquer meaning."[17] This move, made manifest at the expense of a defenseless figure from the past, scarcely distinguishes *Häxan* from the science it overtly aspires to or its contemporary approach to the unfortunate hysterics that become the focus of the final two chapters of the film. In this sense, *Häxan* is rigorously consistent throughout.

Apelone falls into a stupor in the corner; the Devil appears. In the course of rousting Apelone, Christensen's Satan performs some of the most outlandish and obscene gestures of the film. In particular, his frenzied thrusting

Satan "churns his butter" in *Häxan*, film still (Svensk Filmindustri, 1922).

of what appears to be a butter churn positioned suggestively between his legs unmistakably is meant to intimate masturbation. Christensen's wild, onanistic gestures may draw shocked laughs today, but it is an effective, purposeful performance, producing a disturbed affect that ratifies the blasphemous, obscene experience of being confronted by Satan himself. The shouting, tongue-wagging, powerfully stroking Devil is truly disturbing and grotesquely attractive in the way that only a night vision can be.

Apelone, like the audience, appears terrified when she comes to realize what she is seeing. She is nevertheless compelled to follow where Satan commands her to go. Satan suddenly flies up in the air and out through a high window; now fully aware, the old woman hurries over to the window and is hurled into the air herself. The film cuts to a shot of a castle, noting to the audience that this is Apelone's "dream castle" (with the potential double meaning of the word "dream" left open to interpretation) and the place where the Devil will fulfill her wishes.

Häxan then cuts to a close-up of an unconscious Apelone. Interestingly, although she is shown flying through the air immediately prior, the ride itself and her mode of conveyance (typically represented as a broomstick or chair in woodcuts at the time) are not shown. A full visualization of the infamous Wild Ride will have to wait until later in the film. We see gold coins pouring down on Apelone's head, awakening her. The shot widens to show the floor of the well-appointed room where she is now covered in these coins. Stunned, she excitedly gropes the coins, unaware that Satan is watching her. She dumps a pile of coins on the table located in the foreground of the room when suddenly the coins begin to fly up in the air, disappearing. Apelone is alarmed and feebly attempts to corral the vanishing coins. She fails miserably and pleadingly looks up into the ether where the coins have vanished. *Häxan* then moves to the door of the room, now open. The coins remaining on the floor in front of the door fly away as well. A close-up of Apelone's frantic, greedy face betrays her confused terror to the viewer. The

Apelone's disappearing coins in *Häxan*, film still (Svensk Filmindustri, 1922).

coins completely fly away from Apelone as she chases them, stumbling clumsily into the next room.

The effect of the disappearing coins, generated by running the original shot backward, is nearly as old as cinema itself. The Lumière brothers' short actuality, *Demolition of a Wall* (*Démolition d'un mur*, 1896) is believed to the first film to deploy this technique by simply running the film backward through the projector, showing first a wall being torn down and then the smashed wall miraculously reconstituting itself. If the conceptualization of time as an "arrow" dominated thinking in the late nineteenth century, then the revolutionary potential of this simple technological reversal is obvious. These unnatural reversals were in centuries past attributed to the Devil's deceitful manipulation of natural laws or the senses, so it is no stretch to suggest that cinema's early association with magic is a logical one, an association linked to the special effect in early horror such as J. Searle Dawley's version of *Frankenstein* (1910). Mary Ann Doane attributes this correspondence to the "semiosis of cinema's own technological condition," whereby such conditions are transformed into "legible signs."[18] By attempting to bring the witch to life, such signs serve as both subject and subtext. The Vitagraph/Edison film *The Artist's Dilemma* (1901) is more explicitly a precursor to *Häxan* in this respect. The short film begins with an artist carefully painting a model in what appears to be a Victorian drawing room. As described by Doane, a "clown/demon" emerges from the clock and proceeds to "unpaint" the original picture and with rough brushstrokes substitutes his own photo-likeness version of the model, which he then proceeds to bring to life and help down off the canvas. Although used in a much more sophisticated way in *Häxan*, the reverse-motion effect in *The Artist's Dilemma* bluntly demonstrates the technique's general purpose in both films. As Doane writes about the earlier short, "The parallel between the realistic portrait and the film image—both inhabit a frame and emerge out of blackness—demonstrates that [*The Artist's Dilemma*] seeks to reinscribe the uncanny likeness of the cinematic image as magic, and magic as the underside of science."[19]

Over two decades later, *Häxan* would deploy the same special effect in its scene of Apalone's visit to Venusberg, despite the technique having gone out of favor with filmmakers as a gimmick of earlier cinema. In this case, the technique's connection to what was even in 1922 a somewhat anachro-

nistic cinematic past grounds its use within the subject of the film, allowing it to work precisely *because* of its association with the past. The alterity of the antiquated method here edges the radical power of the witch a little closer to the viewer.

In the next scene, a sumptuous feast is laid out for Apelone. Having forgotten her lost fortune in gold as quickly as it appeared, Apelone greedily moves over to the table to eat. Before she can even begin, a small demon claws his way through a nearby door, tearing through it sharply. Thinking better of the situation, Apelone backs off and escapes the room through another exit, entering a dark room dominated by a large wall painted with Satan's face. The eyes fix their gaze on the old woman, glowing, as the door (positioned as his nose and mouth) opens to reveal a group of witches dancing wildly in a circular fashion, darting in and out of sight through the orifice. These glimpses of the unfolding Sabbat are intercut with close-ups of Apelone's beseeching face, tears streaming down her cheeks. Apelone charges the door, but it slams shut, Satan's glowing eyes ludicrously crossing as his gaze continues to hold the old woman. On the side of the room a beautiful maiden beckons for Apelone to join her, a slightly older woman observing from immediately behind. We see Apelone's relieved smile, but before she can move, the scene abruptly changes; the old woman starts awake, back in her dark basement, the moon shining through the open window. We now see a man, slumped in a chair, holding a trumpet. He moves toward the gauzy light of what appears to be dawn filtering through his window and blows the trumpet. Other trumpeters answer the call in the twilight. Apelone, in profile, stares out the window toward the sound of the echoing horns.

Through Apelone's night visit to Brocken, Christensen has broadly introduced two more elements of the witch stereotype: the Wild Ride and the legend of "Venusberg" as a gathering place for the Sabbat. These elements return throughout the film. As the Wild Ride itself is not shown in any great detail in Christensen's depiction of Apelone, our discussion here will follow *Häxan*'s rhythm and will come to the Ride later. We can at this point, however, say more about the settings of Brocken and Venusberg.

Apelone's travel to "Brocken" is either a concession or an error on Christensen's part. While the place may have been recognizable to viewers in 1922 through the famous scene of the Sabbat at Brocken in Goethe's *Faust*, the seventeenth-century writings of Johannes Prätorius, and Christopher

Marlowe's attack against conjurors (and Jews) in his circa 1593 play *Doctor Faustus*,[20] the setting would have been completely unknown to the people depicted in *Häxan*. The best-known meeting place for the Sabbat was the Heuberg ("Hay Mountain") in southwestern Germany. Sometimes also called "Venusberg," this remote site was suffused with myth well before the emergence of the witch in the late Middle Ages. Believed to be the peak where the goddess Venus convened her clandestine court, the Heuberg was known far beyond its local region, as evidenced by Nider's mention of the place where witches assembled at the Council of Basel in 1435 and the fact that the site is directly named in trial transcripts from the 1520s. Even in the case of the rare male accused, Chonrad Stoeckhlin, well-known today through Wolfgang Behringer's careful study of the case, the Heuberg was named and played a prominent role in the mobilization of the witch stereotype.[21] Of course, the fact that Institoris gained, by serving as an inquisitor, the "ethnological" experience with witches that provided the basis for his writing of the *Malleus Maleficarum* in this region is also quite significant, given the inspiration Christensen took from the book.[22]

Dreamtime

Apelone's night flight in *Häxan* serves to place the audience in the milieu of "dreamtime" of the sixteenth century as described so clearly by Behringer.[23] The presentation of rigorous empirical details pertaining to this dreamtime will come later in the film. Christensen is well aware that the time of the witch craze will appear naïve, strange, and distant to a viewer in 1922; his task at this stage of the film is to decisively close this distance. The task is trickier than it seems, particularly given Christensen's own indecision. On the one hand, setting the mood of the film through the context of Apelone's apparent hallucination serves the need of affectively positioning the audience for what follows; this is hardly revolutionary. Yet the steep slope of Christensen's naturalism in *Häxan* edges into view. Recalling Deleuze's description of naturalism in cinema, at this point in the film we do not yet have a proper sense of either the witch or the demonic source of her power. What we do know, or more precisely what we can *sense*, is the originary world from

which these figures come. Apelone making a quick trip to the fantastic Heuberg or Satan lasciviously mocking the Church through the startling denigration of its servants are essential elements of what *Häxan* aspires to, but it is only a beginning. Now building on top of the repertoire of images shown in the first chapter, Christensen is visually rendering oral and written sources as elements of the image. This is parallel, but is not identical to, what the original artists were doing in creating the woodcuts and paintings seen earlier. Christensen is now working *cinematically*, seeking to create affective conditions that differ from those of painting or drawing. Again, this difference, this naturalism that is now properly cinematic, relates to *time*. Thus, we cannot *yet* see the witch (Apelone hardly appears to qualify as one), but without Christensen's efforts to affectively shift the sensory world of the viewer as he does in this chapter she would effectively remain invisible to us. This was not the situation for Dürer, Baldung, or Cranach. Artists at the dawn of the Reformation sought to represent the void as a figure;[24] Christensen, veering away somewhat from the obvious Protestant influence on his art, seeks to coax the figure of the witch out of this profound void.

In a film as indebted to painting as *Häxan*, the impulse to ascribe to it a label such as "Romantic" or "Expressionist" is great. Such a move is not entirely without merit. The Romantic oscillation between the macabre and the lyrical appears to be one obvious correspondence. The attention paid to the extremes of mundane life and the strategies by which Expressionist painting sought to externalize states of mind do at times appears to be another. Read in this way, *Häxan* can be understood as being very similar in its modeling to the other great masterpiece of early horror cinema released in 1922: F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (*Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens*). Like Christensen, Murnau took direct inspiration from the visual art of centuries past, composing his scenes in a manner that reflected the influences of a diverse set of painters, including Arnold Böcklin, Giorgio De Chirico, and Caspar David Friedrich.[25] While some film scholars have challenged the usefulness of the label "German Expressionist cinema," it is nevertheless undeniable that Murnau and other German directors such as Wiene drew heavily from the visual strategies and creative energies of works associated with these movements in painting.[26] Considering the close ties that existed between Svensk Filmindustri and the German studios—not to mention

Christensen's own strong connection to this film industry—the idea that *Häxan* can be placed among films such as *Nosferatu*, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, and *Faust* (F. W. Murnau, 1926) is plausible.

While we acknowledge the reasonableness of this grouping, our own analysis demonstrates that one should be wary of *Häxan* fitting neatly into given categories. *Häxan* does not play well with others. Rather than defending or refuting questions of categorization, our own approach has been to emphasize how *Häxan* corresponds with a variety of traditions without seeking to assimilate the film fully within one over another. It is true that we claim that *Häxan* exists as a naturalist film, but this claim is intended to mark a relation rather than a rule.

Faces, *Tableaux*

In the context of our refusal to wholly associate *Häxan* with any single designation, our concern here shifts from whether *Häxan* is indeed an Expressionist film to how *Häxan* expressively operates in relation to other films contemporary to it. Specifically, we return to questions of tableau and face, as it is along these two poles that one can discern similarities with some (Dreyer) and differences with others (Murnau). Bordwell has identified these two elements as essential to understanding Dreyer's early films, particularly *Mikaël* (1924), and while the interplay of these two elements produces a much darker outcome in *Häxan*, they are nevertheless similar.[27] In particular, the stillness and fixity of tableau-like shot composition that is evident in the works of both filmmakers and distinguishes them from nearly all their contemporaries. Implying a closed system in such shots, the affect is often one of a suffocating organization. Dreyer takes this principle to new heights in films such as *Master of the House* (*Du skal ære din hustru*, 1925) and particularly *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (*La passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, 1928). Christensen himself had already deployed an evolving version of this logic in his previous films *The Mysterious X* (*Det hemmelighedsfulde X*, 1914) and especially in *Blind Justice* (*Hævnens nat*, 1916). *Häxan*, too, puts this principle to work, albeit in correspondence with very specific countershots of great mobility and freedom. Crucially, Christensen ruptures the tableau element of *Häxan* in order to visually express the lively, mobile power of Satan; specific ex-

amples include the bewitched priest chasing his servant, Satan's initial eruption before the praying friar (both in Chapter 2), and of course the extended scenes of the Sabbat (Chapter 4) and the possession of the nuns in the convent (Chapter 6). Thus, only the upsurge of Satan's power can break the immobility of the tableau, which we find well into the sequences regarding possession and hysteria. This visual strategy bears a precise relation to how demonologists conceptualized the workings of the Devil's power in practical terms.

The face in *Häxan* also disturbs the tableau element of the shot. As with the tableau, the film resembles but is not identical to Expressionist art or cinema in this specific regard. Deleuze summarized Expressionism as the play of light and darkness, with the mixture of the two producing an effect that suggests either "fall[ing] into the black hole or ascend[ing] towards the light."[28] In Deleuze's analysis, the face concentrates this series, elevating what may be symbolically rendered as "light" or "dark" to a power or a quality.[29] In Dreyer, the viewer finds that the face allows for a perspective that, in its suppression of depth of field and backgrounds generally, makes this affective power *mobile* along the lines of Deleuze's meaning: *mobile* as *spiritual* in its effect. Although perhaps not as finely developed as in Dreyer's later films, this formal characteristic aligns *Häxan* with Dreyer's work in the 1920s through to *Vampyr* (1932) and serves to distinguish Christensen's use of tableaux from that of Murnau.[30] In Murnau the tableau frees the viewer for introspection regarding nature in a kind of emotional, spiritual release. The close-up is almost never deployed in many of Murnau's German films, as it would structurally disrupt the affect he was seeking in works such as *Nosferatu*; compare this with the disruptive pathos the close-ups generate in the German director's *The Last Laugh* (*Der letzte Mann*, 1924). In *Häxan* the tableau grounds the uncontrollable forces at work on the faces of those confronted by the power of the witch, constituting an intensive rather than introspective power in the shot.[31]

The functional interplay between tableaux and faces in the course of grounding *Häxan* in a naturalist cinema of the demonic is only faintly registered at this specific point in the film. At the conclusion of this chapter, the audience is comforted by the thought that this is *all* a delusion, not yet realizing that they have not simply witnessed Apelone's "hallucination," but are in fact themselves being drawn into someone else's dream. Living among

the restless dead and in the specter of an increasingly active evil, the dream-beings for Apelone would not have presented themselves as the harmless images of an overactive subconscious; there is no question of what is "real" in her dreamtime. Setting us up in this way, it is increasingly clear in *Häxan* that the dreamtime of the witch is not as harmless or as distant to the modern viewer as we would like to believe. We are not yet fully held by the witch at this point in *Häxan*, but she is starting to move closer.

Häxan presents itself in the formal procedure of a progressive unfolding of the material world through the style of a lecture. This form would have been quite familiar to those members of an educated, literate public in 1922 interested in the apprehension of the world through humankind's chief instrument: *science*. A hierarchy emerges, and thus art and religion are subjected to the scrutiny of scientific proof. Drawing force from the near-messianic belief in the perfectibility of man, *Häxan*'s opening chapter invites viewers into a narrative of the witch and an exploration of the wonders and "errors" of the past. But Christensen is not simply addressing an assembly of experts; rather, he is trying to draw a spectating public into the zone of the witch. Then, as now, a filmed lecture would not generally qualify as a satisfying film-going experience for anyone but the most dogmatic viewer. Continuing in this way may not even qualify *Häxan* as a work of cinema.

Häxan thus abandons the rather overbearing didacticism of the opening by moving directly into the "underground home of a sorceress in the year of the Lord 1488." Now the static images presented earlier come to life on the screen. The full force of this reanimation only becomes apparent as the film moves forward—*Häxan* gives an affective form to the otherwise abstract, myth-like notion that witches were widely believed to be real and powerful in the early modern period.

Christensen is composing images of a figure that is already present. The witch of the opening chapter was a perceived thing held at a distance, a set of ready-made circuits of recognition and association that nearly any viewer would instantly recognize. From here on out, *Häxan* progressively moves away from the clichéd figure, bringing us dangerously close to the *real* power of the witch in the process. Our use of the hazardous term "real" is meant quite precisely, as *Häxan* proves to be a film based on a magnified form of *realist* cinema. More specifically, *Häxan* is rooted in a *naturalist* impulse. Through an assemblage of fragments from this basis in its formation of a

cumulative image of the witch, *Häxan* will, in Deleuze's words, make apparent "the invisible lines which divide up the real, which dislocate modes of behavior and objects, are supercharged, filled out and extended."[32] Christensen not only marks out an image of the present in *Häxan* but also conjures the aura of a seemingly timeless origin myth, collapsing the distance between them in the violent multiplicity of *Häxan*'s surfaces and figures. Christensen's witch is not only here *now*, it has always been here: a figure of nature. Demonologists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries explicitly associated their work with the "advancement" of natural knowledge.[33] In a deliberately perverse style, Christensen appears to agree with them. It is a testament to Christensen's skill that the viewer is seized by the witch despite the nagging suspicion that one should "know better." Like everyone else, the viewer is gradually ensnared.

Terms like "capture" or "seizure" denote physicality, a manual activity that lay at the heart of Christensen's method. This seems paradoxical considering the virtual nature of images, but it is important to remember where *Häxan* begins—with woodcuts, drawings, and paintings that originate from an act of touch. While it is questionable if the cinematic image can ever achieve the tactility of the painting or woodcut, Christensen aspires to surpass the commonsense division between the tactile and the optical in order to generate for cinema viewers what Deleuze in a different context called a "haptic vision."[34] This corresponds precisely to the tactic in the opening chapter of the film, to present figurative, clichéd givens as they establish the ground by which Christensen can transform these figures from virtual givens to haptic modifications through the remainder of the film. The eye and the hand work together in *Häxan* to mold the image. This is possibly due to Christensen's ability, working expertly with cinematographer Johan Ankerstjerne and set designer Richard Louw, to correspond the movement of cinema in line with what are more commonly painterly images. In this sense, *Häxan* bears a close relation to the silent films of Carl Theodor Dreyer in that the "plane-ness" of the image, the negation or perversion of depth of field (particularly through the close-ups of faces), and the occasional use of eccentric, disorienting continuity editing (eye-line mismatches, violation of the 180-degree rule, etc.) produces a molded, affective, tactile quality that compels the viewer to grope for the image.[35] In the case of *Häxan*, the "clay" from which Christensen will mold these haptic images—the tactile substances

by which one can touch (or be touched by) what is happening onscreen—has already been literally shown to the audience and will continue on occasion to recur throughout the remainder of the film. *Häxan* seizes (the audience) and is seized (by the witch), establishing a formal cinematic strategy that parallels the very problems of seeing and touching *virtual beings* (such as devils) that transformed what constituted evidence for the presences of the witch.

In Chapter 1, *Häxan* began with image fragments, narratively held together through an almost belligerent narrative logic. In Chapter 2, Christensen empties out and "paints over" these figurative givens in his own assemblage of the witch. In moving to the live action of "the underground lair of a sorceress," the film is now utilizing the repertoire of oral tradition: "old witches tales." Now firmly in the creative mode of composing images on top of given visual surfaces, *Häxan* will move progressively from *tales* to *theology*, and finally, *diagnosis*. It is a rigorously logical structure that works simultaneously to throw the fissures of the real into relief while also boldly expressing the tangible singularity of the power of the witch.