PLAYING THE WAVES

LARS VON TRIER'S GAME CINEMA

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Introduction

It took longer to get this book published than it took Lars von Trier to produce and release MANDERLAY and, by the time this book will be published, THE BOSS OF IT ALL and WASINGTON (*sic*). This difference in pace between the two media is, of course, to the disadvantage of the slower medium of print, which can hardly keep pace with the much faster audiovisual media. However, as former soccer player and coach Johan Cruijff always says, 'With every disadvantage comes an advantage'. The time it took to get the manuscript published provided the opportunity to include a final chapter on MANDERLAY in this book. Though this film did not raise any new issues since DOGVILLE, it confirmed the major claim of this book that von Trier's movies are best approached as cinematic games. Whereas the preceding chapters dealt with the stylistic, structural and formal aspects of von Trier's films, MANDERLAY offered the opportunity to see whether the claim that von Trier's films are a cinematic version of contemporary computer games can be substantiated by a theoretical game analysis of the content of the stories of his films.

This book grew out of a certain dissatisfaction with the reception and interpretation of the Dogme 95 movement as either a call to realism or as a resuscitation of the modernist film movements from the 1960s. It seems hard to believe that in 1995, in the midst of postmodernism and at a point in history when cinema was already rapidly moving into the digital age, a filmmaker as sophisticated, knowledgeable and provocative as Lars von Trier could seriously propose returning to the aesthetics and politics of Italian neo-realism and *Nouvelle Vague* modernism. After all, the exhaustion of the European auteur and art cinema was generally considered to be a major cause for the decline of European cinema. The labels Dogme 95 found itself adorned with, 'neo-Bazinian realism', 'DVD-realism', or 'prescription for low-budget filmmaking' did not seem very appropriate for a manifesto that shunned every reference to content and subject matter, and filmmakers who produced movies like THE CELEBRATION (FESTEN) and THE IDIOTS, which were neither realist nor low budget.

These labels seemed to reflect the limits of classical film theory and what is nowadays called 'critical theory' as well as a certain ignorance of von Trier's earlier movies and production practices. The Dogme 95 Manifesto is only one of the many manifestos that accompanied von Trier's films. Most of these manifestos did not address the themes or problems the films dealt with, but defined

the constraints von Trier set for himself with each film production. As the author of these manifestos and 'production notes' von Trier took on the same role with regard to himself as the filmmaker von Trier as he did with regard to the filmmaker Jørgen Leth in the film THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS: he acted as the master and the arbiter of the game.

As this book argues, in von Trier's earlier films, in his Dogme 95 film THE IDIOTS and in the films he made after Dogme 95, von Trier plays with a new cinematic concept that is too radically innovative for classical, contemporary or critical film theory to grasp. Rather than being a continuation or resuscitation of the political, stylistic and thematic concerns of earlier film movements, von Trier's cinema is firmly based in an emergent new media culture of virtual realities and, even more importantly, games. The book consequently takes a perspective from the aesthetics of new media, games studies, and game theory to come to terms with von Trier's cinematic games appropriately. This might come as a surprise since von Trier has repeatedly stated his aversion to the use of computer-generated images and digital special effects in cinema. As this book will try to show, this does not mean that von Trier believes that cinema should capture and represent a 'pure' and non-manipulated real. Instead, if von Trier can be called a 'neo-Bazinian' filmmaker at all, it is because, in his view, the virtual is not a 'special effect' or a technological artefact, but because the virtual and the real include and presuppose each other, and cinema is the medium most suited for capturing the virtual in the real or the real as part of the virtual. Without the religious undertones of an André Bazin, and as a filmmaker of 'Cinema in its Second Century' (as the conference was called where he first announced the Dogme 95 Manifesto), von Trier is closer to Deleuze than to the 'godfather' of twentieth century film realism.

Von Trier was already experimenting with aspects of the aesthetics of new media and video games before 'the digital revolution' actually took place and new media genres and formats were still in their infancy. Von Trier's cinema represents an interesting example of what one might call 'synchronous remediation', or, in a shortcut neologism, 'symmediation', a process in which one medium incorporates and develops features of another new medium at the same time the latter is coming into being and still looking for its own distinguishing characteristics, genres, and formats. These features are virtual realities in his pre-Dogme films, modelling and simulation in his Dogme film, virtual realism and distributed representation in his post-Dogme films (some of which, surprisingly enough, share techniques with Hollywood blockbusters like THE MATRIX, but use them for opposite ends). The overarching principle and common ground in all of his films is gaming: Von Trier defines the practice of filmmaking as a game, he performs the founding of a film movement as a game, he builds the story worlds of his films as game environments, he models film

scenes like simulation plays, and he treats stories as reiterations of always the same game (which went unnoticed by film theorists and critics, but which is quite familiar to game theorists).

The most important point this book wants to make is that, contrary to an often heard post-modern maxim that states that 'everything has already been done' in the arts in general and film in particular and that artists and film-makers can only recycle bits and pieces from the past, there are still filmmakers capable of launching a genuine 'new wave' in filmmaking. All it takes is a new perspective to be able to see that.

New perspectives always need to be sharpened, adjusted and fine-tuned. I am much obliged to my colleagues at the NWO-funded research group 'Digital Games' for discussing chapter drafts from the book, also my Department for Media Studies colleagues and students at the University of Amsterdam for their patience and comments in seminars and lectures and Thomas Elsaesser for making the English language publication of this book possible.

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1 Manifesto and Modernism

The Manifesto as a postmodern parody

It is an open question whether Dogma 95 would have become a controversial international movement, and whether the first four Dogma films would have attracted the attention of the public, press and critics outside of Denmark, were it not for the document published in 1995, three years before the first Dogma film FESTEN had its world premiere at the 1998 Cannes Film Festival: the infamous Dogma 95 Manifesto. Still, the converse is also true: in the absence of Thomas Vinterberg's FESTEN and Lars von Trier's IDIOTERNE, both of which were presented that year at Cannes,[1] it would have been difficult to imagine what sort of films the authors of the Manifesto and of the ten commandments laid down in the accompanying Vow of Chastity actually had in mind.[2] The Manifesto only really sunk into the minds of the public, the press and the critics when FESTEN en IDIOTERNE were presented at the 1998 Cannes Film Festival as 'Dogma #1' and 'Dogma #2'.[3]

Von Trier had already contributed to the mystification surrounding the Manifesto. In 1995 he had read it out to the Paris conference 'Cinema in its second century', refusing to provide any elaboration on the grounds that 'the Movement' had forbidden it, and then immediately left the congress. Given von Trier's reputation as the *enfant terrible* of Danish film, the theatricality with which the Manifesto was launched, the bombast and rhetoric that called to mind the numerous political and artistic manifestos of the 19th and 20th centuries, and the contradictions, impracticalities and absurdities of the rules themselves, the Manifesto was initially simply shrugged off as the Danish filmmaker's latest provocation. Moreover, his own film BREAKING THE WAVES, which had won the Grand Prix at Cannes in 1996, showed scant obedience to the rules of von Trier's co-authored Vow of Chastity.

The Manifesto also had all the characteristics of a postmodern pastiche.[4] Its opening stated aim 'of countering "certain tendencies" in the cinema today' is an explicit reference to the famous article by François Truffaut, '*Une certaine tendance du cinéma français*', which appeared in *Cahiers du Cinéma* in January 1954 and which is widely regarded as the founding tract of the Nouvelle Va-

gue.[5] Phrases like 'In 1960 enough was enough! The movie was dead and called for resurrection' echo passages in Marinetti's Futurist Manifesto of 1909 ('Museums: cemeteries!' and 'You have objections? – Enough! Enough!'). The sentence 'Today a technological storm is raging…' paraphrases the first line of the 1848 Communist Manifesto of Marx and Engels ('A spectre is haunting Europe…').

Moreover, all these texts were first published in Paris, where the conference at which von Trier launched the Dogma 95 Manifesto had gathered to celebrate the fact that 100 years earlier the city had hosted the world's first ever public film viewing. The Odeon Theatre, where the Manifesto was launched, was the very place that the Paris student revolts had ignited in 1968.[6] The Manifesto also took aim at well-known features of the programmes of previous critical film movements (see Rockwell 2003: 34): terms such as 'illusions', 'trickery', 'predictability', 'superficial action' and the 'superficial movie' are variations on a familiar theme, the critical mantra that has dogged popular film in general and Hollywood films in particular. Connoisseurs of the manifesto genre will recognise even the heavy criticism of the directors of the film 'waves' of the 1960s as the customary gesture with which every new self-appointed avant-garde turns its back on its immediate predecessors and accuses them of failure, revisionism or outright betrayal.

All in all, it looked as if von Trier had chosen the 'Cinema in its second century' conference to literally stage Marx's declaration that 'history invariably repeats itself as farce'. Von Trier and Vinterberg's subsequent confession that the Manifesto had been drawn up in 25 minutes and 'under continuous bursts of merry laughter' did much to confirm the impression that the Manifesto and the Vow of Chastity were no more than an ironic gesture, a postmodern pastiche of the tradition of the modernistic manifesto – of which Paris, which Walter Benjamin (1977b) had called 'the capital of the 19th century' and which was widely regarded in the 20th century as the capital of film, was the birthplace. In the already postmodern atmosphere of 1995, how could anyone be expected to take a document with such a title seriously? Both their gestures and tones made the Manifesto and the Vow of Chastity ambiguous documents: Was this sort of pastiche, caricature and parody criticism disguised as performance, or performance disguised as criticism?

The Manifesto taken seriously

When FESTEN and IDIOTERNE were presented at the 1998 Cannes Film Festival as 'Dogma #1' and 'Dogma #2', their authors, at least, seemed to be taking both

documents seriously. Since then, the reception of Dogma 95 has been one of extremes: either outright dismissal or warm embrace. Some saw in Dogma 95 no more than a successful publicity stunt, and saw this as reason enough to disqualify the movement. For Paul Willemen (2000), Dogma films and von Trier's films in particular are

> advertising techniques, here mostly deployed to advertise one and only one item: von Trier himself as a directorial value on the cultural stock market.

Dogma 95 would certainly seem to have listened carefully to what Lindsay Anderson, the leading light of the British Free Cinema movement of the 1950s, had to say. When Anderson was faced with the problem of generating press attention for films that no one wanted to screen, his solution, which he recommends to young filmmakers to this day, was as simple as it was brilliant: 'Start a movement':

> For journalistic reasons as much as anything, because journalists won't write about an independently made 16mm film of 20 minutes or about a 50-minute film about two deaf mutes in the East End. But if you put your films together and make a manifesto and call yourself 'Free Cinema' and make a lot of very challenging statements – then of course you write the articles for them, and they're very happy to print them. You do their work for them. (in Mackenzie 2003: 51).

The Dogma 95 Manifesto did just this. It gave international film festival journalists and critics, always on the lookout for new trends, currents or movements, the copy they needed. And they couldn't have chosen a better moment to do it. Exactly thirty years before, Nouvelle Vague filmmakers had occupied the old Palais du Festival at Cannes in solidarity with the revolutionary students and workers of May '68. For the first time since those heady days, Dogma 95 seemed to be uniting politics and culture in the same way – with von Trier standing in for the movement's *provocateur par excellence*, Jean-Luc Godard. So the Dogma 95 performance in Cannes particularly pleased those young film critics and journalists who felt that 'it was just about bloody time somebody started some trouble' (Kelly 2000: 7).[7] A movement that not only followed in the footsteps of the Nouvelle Vague, but that also consigned the Nouvelle Vague itself, in classic manifesto prose, to the 'dung heap of history' – what more could you wish for? There were even films that demonstrated what the movement stood for, and a Manifesto that gave critics and journalists a framework within which these films could be discussed. An advertising agency could not have done a better job.

Dogma 95's success as a publicity stunt, however, meant that the Manifesto was taken quite literally, and often seen in the light of the very traditions that it mocked. Those who did take it literally had every reason to do so. After all, the

Manifesto subscribed to the aims of the Nouvelle Vague ('the goal was correct but the means were not!') and, in its anti-illusionism and its solemn oath 'to force the truth out of my characters and settings', it upheld the postwar tradition of modernistic film movements which, in the name of one or other form of realism, had opposed Hollywood and other earlier (or competing) film movements.[8]

The proposition that today's 'technological storm' would bring about the 'ultimate democratisation' of film – 'For the first time, anyone can make movies' – was seen as an invitation to make use of new, portable, user-friendly and relatively inexpensive digital video technologies to film everyday reality, just as earlier filmmakers, from Nouvelle Vague to Direct Cinema, had used the portable 16mm camera to film on the streets. The Hong Kong filmmaker Vincent Chui Wanshun, whose film LEAVING IN SORROW[9] was made in accordance with the Dogma 95 rules, sums this interpretation up perfectly:

> Hollywood's studio system creates an artificial reality, but Dogma 95 looks for reality. My film has taken stories from real life and that's ideal for the Dogma style (in Hjort and MacKenzie, 2003: 10).

However, if we now replace the term 'Dogma 95' with the term 'Italian neorealism' it becomes clear that such a sympathetic interpretation of the Manifesto unwittingly bears out those critics who saw Dogma 95 as no more than a publicity stunt, since the only possible conclusion is that Dogma 95 is an old idea parading as a new one, giving rise to nothing but spectacle and uproar (see Weisberg 2000). Chui places Dogma 95 in the tradition of the postwar modern European film, one characterised by a desire for realism in the choice of subject (social problems, political oppression, war); in the form of the film itself (loosely structured, episodic, slice-of-life narratives); and in the use of stylistic devices such as long takes which violated the continuity of time and space as little as possible (Bordwell and Thompson 1994: 412). Cynical and sympathetic interpretations alike, therefore, reduce Dogma 95 to a re-run of the interventions of earlier modernistic film movements. In doing so, both thereby overlook the fact that Dogma 95 does not emulate modernism in film, but parodies it and openly rejects it.

Both filmmakers and academics have seen in the Manifesto a modernistic *rappel d'ordre*, and in Dogma 95 a resurrection of the realism and humanism of postwar Italian neorealism and of the ideas of the French film critic André Bazin. As Ian Conrich and Estella Tincknell (2000) put it:

> What Dogma 95 has provoked is an exciting re-examination of questions of film realism, truth and purity, and precisely at a time when Hollywood appears to be enraptured by a cinema of attractions, driven by post-production effects, and new media technologies such as computer generated images. The questions of film purity that

Dogma 95 raises will be considered in this article in connection with the development of an ideal that we suggest is neo-Bazinian, and the relationship between the underlying ideological values of the Dogma manifesto and the cultural context in which it has appeared.

Others recognise in the Manifesto and in the Dogma 95 films the same contradictions and constraints that have dominated the debate on realism and representation in film ever since the 1960s. The philosopher Berys Gaut (2003: 98) has pointed out that 'content realism' (the world depicted in the film follows the same laws that govern ordinary reality) need not presuppose 'perceptual realism' (the film shows us objects and locations we can expect to encounter in real life). He goes on to observe that while the rules laid down in the Manifesto might be conducive to content realism, they offer no guarantee against departures from naturalism:

> Directors can still, for instance, create extremely odd characters and situations that depart far from their real world counterparts, even if the plot follows out strictly what would then happen according to the rules of probability (98-99).

The best evidence for the correctness of this assertion is, of course, IDIOTERNE, whose characters both fulfil the promise of the film's title and amply demonstrate the limitations of content realism. As far as perceptual realism is concerned, Gaut wonders why it is that Dogma 95 included no rule 'requiring unobtrusive editing and very long takes (which are more like our normal way of seeing)?' (ibid. 99). He compares the montage style of FESTEN and IDIOTERNE with that of neorealistic films and the early Direct Cinema films of Frederick Wiseman in order to establish that the Dogma films were at odds with perceptual realism, 'since we don't see the world via jump cuts', and concludes:

> So, in respect of the motivation for these rules, construed in terms of a broad notion of realism, Dogma's adoption of some rules while eschewing others seems at times arbitrary (ibid.: 99).

Gaut is not blind to the differences between Dogma 95 and the realism of the postwar modernists, but he sees these differences entirely in terms of the shortcomings and inconsistencies of Dogma 95. However, might the source of the shortcomings and inconsistencies he sees actually lie in his choice of interpretive framework? It is remarkable, to say the least, that Dogma 95 should be assessed in terms of a 'realism problem' on which the Manifesto itself is altogether silent. It is also most improbable that in the absence of this 'neo-neorealistic'[10] interpretation of the Manifesto, films such as FESTEN and IDIOTERNE would ever have been discussed within the framework of Bazin's film aesthetic or the traditions of Italian neorealism, direct cinema and cinéma vérité. FESTEN is intrinsi-

cally more closely related to the drama of Ibsen and the films of Bergman than to those of Anderson or Rossellini (see Lauridsen 2000), while IDIOTERNE has even led to von Trier being called a 'sentimental surrealist' (Smith, 2003). All these contradictions and anomalies must raise the question whether the choice of interpretive framework is not itself arbitrary. Any interpretation must fit the evidence supplied by the text (Eco 1992: 49),[11] and this clearly does not apply to interpretations that see in Dogma 95 the resurrection of modernism in film.

The Manifesto and modernism

Those keen to place the Dogma 95 Manifesto within the tradition of postwar film modernism must have been struck by the fact that the Manifesto has nothing to say about the 'reality' that realism in Dogma films was to convey. This is remarkable, since modernisms have always justified themselves by claiming both a better grasp of 'reality' and possession of better methods of portraying it (see Thompson 1988: 200-201). This varied from the reality of social problems or everyday real life (neorealism, kitchen sink drama, Direct Cinema, etc.), and the reality of subjective experience (Antonioni, Bertolucci, Fellini, Varda, Truffaut), to the reality of representation itself and the means by which it is achieved (early Godard, Straub and Huillet, Akerman, Dwoskin). The chosen conception of reality invariably shaped the choice of favoured stylistic devices: long takes and deep-focus photography for neorealism; flashbacks, subjective imagery and baffling camera angles for psychological realism; collage techniques and the mixing of different styles and genres for Godard, etc.[12]

Nothing of the kind is to be found in the Manifesto. What it does do is reject the means which the new wave had used to revive the dead cinema of 1960 ('the goal was correct but the means were not!'). The means referred to here seem to have been the ideology of individualism and artistic freedom embraced by the Nouvelle Vague, but not its choice of subject matter or the stylistic devices it developed (inasmuch as Nouvelle Vague can be spoken of as a coherent movement at all). The Manifesto also targeted the 'cosmeticisation' of contemporary film, which after 100 years still saw 'fooling the public' as its supreme task, assisted by a 'technological storm' that had 'elevated cosmetics to God'. While this does accord with a long tradition of disparaging the illusionism and escapism of Hollywood, unlike previous realisms the Dogma 95 filmmakers do not actually specify the 'truth' they wish to 'force out of their characters and settings'.

Of course, it can be argued that the exclusion of props, sets and costumes, 'temporal and geographical alienation' ('that is to say that the film takes place

here and now'), 'superficial action' ('murders, weapons, etc. must not occur') and 'genre films' is necessarily conducive to intrinsic realism. The rules effectively make it impossible to make films that take place in any time but the present, or which comprise actions prescribed by the conventions of a genre (Gaut 2003: 98). But as far as the actual content of a Dogma film is concerned, the Manifesto says only that the film must be made on location and under circumstances that the director must not change, and that the film must not be a genre film. This does not tell us very much.

Indeed, the first four Dogma films demonstrate that the rules give a filmmaker considerable freedom in the choice of subject and location. FESTEN takes place in the by no means commonplace environment of a large hotel, whose luxurious décor, props and costumes – black tie and evening gowns – are quite acceptable under Dogma rules. Kristian Levring's Dogma #4 – THE KING IS ALIVE (USA/Dk/Sw 2000) takes place in the equally non-humdrum 'here and now' of the Gobi Desert in Namibia, while Søren Kragh-Jacobsen's Dogma #3 – MIFUNES SIDSTE SANG (Dk/Sw 1999) was located in a remote corner of rural Denmark as a way of avoiding urban reality.

The notion of genre is notoriously vague, and only those whose definition is restricted to Hollywood film categories can maintain that Dogma films do not conform to genre conventions. It has already been noted that FESTEN is part of the tradition of Ibsen and Bergman's psychological drama, and the film has also been called a 'classical drama in docu-soap style' (Lauridsen 2000). THE KING IS ALIVE, in which a number of tourists stranded in the desert decide to study Shakespeare's *King Lear*, is part of a long tradition of a 'play within a play' whose parallels, commentaries or predictions influence the course of events in the film or play in which it is embedded. Examples include art movies such as Bergman's AFTER THE REHEARSAL (Sw 1984) and Al Pacino's LOOKING FOR RICHARD (USA 1996), but also classical Hollywood films such as George Cukor's musical A STAR IS BORN (USA 1954).

If IDIOTERNE is seen by many as a critique of the hypocrisy of contemporary Danish society, this cannot be unrelated to the fact that the film is interpreted in terms of the well-worn trope which holds that madmen, primitives, children, and drug-crazed and otherwise marginalised figures are the bearers of an inalienable, authentic humanity. According to von Trier himself, IDIOTERNE, BREAKING THE WAVES and DANCER IN THE DARK form the trilogy *A Heart of Gold*, based on the fairy tale *Guld Hjerte – Golden Heart* (Stevenson 2002: 89-90);[13] and is not the fairy tale the ultimate genre? Critics have called MIFUNES SIDSTE SANG a 'romantic comedy' (Weisberg 2000) and Kragh-Jacobsen himself has called it a 'classic kind of love story' he had conceived as a 'summer film' (in Kelly 2000: 155). If Rule #8 of the Manifesto, 'Genre movies are not acceptable',

has any meaning at all, it is hard to see how it has any bearing on the kind of subject matter or story deemed unsuitable for Dogma films.

The Manifesto rules comprising film style prescriptions are too meagre to infer the aim of perceptual realism. The emphasis is on prohibition, such as that of 'special lighting', and of optical work or filters in post-production. There are a number of rules specifying that filming must be done on location, that the film must be in colour and that the camera must be hand-held, but these alone are not enough to conclude that 'filmic techniques are regarded as the main obstacles to the creation of genuine films' or that 'technical devices are identified as cosmetics that create illusions' (Christensen 2000b). After all, the 'technological storm' was also seen to hold the promise of 'the ultimate democratisation of the cinema', and the Manifesto's authors, 'due to budgetary reasons and the good and exciting results some of the directors had with Digital Video', decided to retain the option of making film with digital video cameras. Only Kragh-Jacobsen's Mifunes Sidste Sang was shown on 16mm, but other Brethren films were recorded on Digital Video. The Dogma 95 Manifesto does not reject technology and its tools *per se*, but rather the uses to which they are put, and the time and attention that film technologies demand of the filmmaker.

Moreover, nowhere does the Manifesto state the need for film images to approach or simulate the perceptual and psychological conditions under which reality is generally perceived. André Bazin held that the metaphysical aim of cinema was to bring the viewer into a relationship with the film image which was 'closer to that which he enjoys with reality' (1971: 35). For Bazin this meant that the film image had to offer the viewer the same freedom of interpretation as was offered by the real world. To this end, the continuity of time and space had to be respected as much as possible, using deep-focus photography and *plan séquences*.

It can of course be argued that prescribing that a hand-held camera must follow the action ('shooting takes place where the film takes place') simply updates the respect for temporal and geographical continuity to include modern technology. After all, the Italian neorealists didn't even have portable 16mm cameras, let alone hand-held digital video cameras. Moreover, the use of portable cameras by cinéma vérité filmmakers, Direct Cinema and television journalists have helped change the norms of film realism since Bazin. These days, jerky, blurred and grainy pictures, swaying camera pans, overlit or underlit subjects and messy framing, often in combination with rapid montage, have become the hallmarks of the 'realistic effect'. In feature films such as In Bed with Madonna (Keshishian, USA 1991), The Blair Witch Project (Myrick and Sanchez, USA 1999), Saving Private Ryan (Spielberg, USA 1998) and Cidade de Deus (Lund and Meirelles, Br/Fr/USA 2002), these stylistic devices have become a conventional reference to the 'documentary essay'. In the case of Dogma 95 we can add

the 'home video' aesthetic, in which such characteristics not only point to an amateur filmmaker's customarily partial standpoint, but also to his or her technical shortcomings. It can't be a coincidence that Dogma 95 has also been called a 'film DIY guidebook'. Ironically, von Trier was actually inspired to include the hand-held camera clause by such American television series as NYPD Blue (Bochco and Milch, USA 1993) and Homicide: Life on the Street (Levinson, USA 1992-1999) (Stevenson 2002: 82).

In all of these examples we might be able to maintain that the portable camera's jerky, underlit and badly-composed images function as the signifiers of a reality whose temporal and geographical continuity elude the limited means and unavoidably restricted perspective of the filmmaker. However, in documentaries, films and home videos the jumps and sweeps of the camera bear witness to the filmmaker's heroic efforts to get everything into the picture, while in Dogma 95 films the camera often seems to lead a life of its own:

> With its constant swish-pans, tracking (or rather carried) shots, and quick zooms in and out (as though it were a trombone), nothing is done in order to conceal the camera's presence. On the contrary, the camera work in *The Celebration* is so clearly visible that it can almost be said to call attention to itself (Laursen 2000).

The same can be said of the montage. We have already noted that the Manifesto devotes not a single word to montage, even though this is the most problematic area of any realist film aesthetic because it is potentially the most manipulative: it is not for nothing that Bazin (1975) wrote an article entitled 'Montage interdit'. Frequent jump cuts and non-continuous editing appear in Festen and Idioterne in particular, and there is frequent discontinuity in the position, posture or expression of the characters. In the words of Paul Willemen (2000):

> Cinematic space and time are destroyed in favor of snippets that can be combined and recombined until they have been emptied of all traces of a world rather than that of the filmmaker's idiotic, sorry: idiosyncratic 'personal perspective'. …

This suggests not only that temporal and geographical continuity do not enjoy a particularly high priority in the Dogma 95 aesthetic, but also that the montage was actually being used to undercut any reference to a given reality. We could hardly be further from a Bazinian ideal of realism and humanism (see chapter 3).

It is improbable that the 'agitated camerawork' (Laursen 2000) in Dogma films, in which the recording equipment and its operators appear in the picture, and the anti-continuity editing of Dogma 95 are there to reveal to the audience the construction principles of film. The Manifesto puts forward no didactic or ideological ambitions. Moreover, this is an age in which every DVD release of a film explains how the special effects were done, in which most filmgoers grew

up with film, television and video, and in which many of them have shot and edited video or digital film themselves. It would seem to be a waste of time to prove to them that a film image is 'not a just image, but just an image' (*pas une image juste, mais juste une image*), as Godard did in Le Vent d'Est (Groupe Dziga Vertov, Fr/It/BRD 1970). The Manifesto does, however, make explicit mention of the 'truth' that the filmmaker must force out of the actors and settings. And in the Dogma 95 website FAQs, Vinterberg says that 'the two most essential of instruments to a director [are] the story and the acting talent'. So Dogma 95 is less interested in the 'reality' or 'truth' of the film-making process itself than in the 'truth' of 'characters and settings', 'story and acting talent'.

Whatever may have been meant by the term, Dogma 95's 'truth' is something other than the 'truths' sought in modernistic film movements. And if no clearly defined aesthetic can be found in the Dogma 95 Manifesto, perhaps this is because those who looked for one were going by the lights of the same modernistic film aesthetic that Dogma 95 abandoned. *Bye bye Bazin*.

From 'essence' to game

Most classical and modern film aesthetics ask the question 'what is film?' and use the answer to determine what a film should look like. An *ontological* definition of film is used to derive a *deontology* which prescribes the stylistic devices that a film-maker ought ideally to use (see Casetti 1993: 15-16). Bazin, for whom the essence of film lay in its objective, photographic reproduction of reality, advised the use of deep focus and the *plan séquence* because these techniques respected the spatial and temporal continuity of the everyday world.[14] Eisenstein, however, for whom the essence of art in general and of film in particular lay in the organisation of collisions between heterogeneous and conflicting elements, saw montage as the cineaste's most important tool (Eisenstein 1969).

Classic film theories have also usually framed their aesthetic from an ethical perspective. For Bazin (1971: 15) the task of film and photography was to bring reality 'in all its virginal purity to my attention and consequently to my love'. For Eisenstein, for whom 'the image' is more significant than 'the imaged', an 'intellectual' montage would, 'from the combination of film images, allow a new qualitative element, a new *imagery*, a new *conception* to arise'. Italian neorealism also adhered to certain principles (such as filming on location with available light, the use of non-professional actors, and the use of a freely moving camera) to serve the ethical purpose of showing events truthfully and from the perspective of the ordinary person (see Liehm 1984: 131pp).

Such metaphysical foundations (Casetti 1993) and ethical principles are notably absent in the Dogma 95 Manifesto; on the contrary, it distinguishes itself from previous modernist manifestos by divorcing stylistic experiment from content (see MacKenzie 2003: 51-52). Those Dogma rules which suggest a concept of what film is or ought to be, such as the insistence on using colour film, recording sound and image together, and issuing the film in Academy 35mm format, are largely the result of practical and tactical considerations, not principled ones. The original obligation to shoot with 35mm film was soon abandoned 'due to budgetary reasons and the good and exciting results some of the directors had with Digital Video', but the rule about bringing the film out in 35mm was kept because

> It also ensures the possibility that a Dogma 95 film can be shown all over the world in every single movie theatre. Dogma 95 is intended to influence the current film environment.

The requirement to shoot in colour is nowhere explained, but is doubtless derived from the fact that these days, the use of black-and-white film is seen either as the atypical, deliberate choice of the filmmaker,[15] as the result of applying the optical processing and filters that the rules forbid, or because the use of black-and-white film in combination with hand-held cameras has become a genre convention for suggesting a documentary effect (see Stevenson 2003: 32-33). Whatever the actual reason, these considerations are not grounded in the supposed 'essence' of the film, but are framed by the same contemporary, contingent historical context of current film practice in which Dogma 95 itself operates.[16]

Within this context of contemporary film culture the Dogma 95 Brethren are unconcerned with the promotion of low-budget films, even though this is how the rules have been interpreted both by critics and by followers. The Manifesto does speak of modern technology's 'democratisation' of film, and in the FAQ its authors note that thanks to the affordability of Digital Video cameras and computers and Dogma 95's low-tech approach, 'it should be possible for almost everyone to make a Dogma 95 film'. Nevertheless, they firmly deny that the Dogma 95 Manifesto is a DIY manual for low-budget filmmaking. Vinterberg points out that by Danish standards FESTEN was by no means a low-budget film. The Manifesto's authors are clearly concerned to dispel this illusion, as is evidenced by the inclusion of a separate Q&A on Dogma's website FAQ:

> *Is 'Dogme' a way of making low budget films?*
> No, not at all. The Dogme 95 Manifesto does not concern itself with the economic aspects of filmmaking. A 'dogme' film could be low-budget or it could have a 100 million dollar budget as long as the filmmaker follows the Vow of Chastity.

Von Trier and Vinterberg also emphasise that the Manifesto is not aimed at young or novice filmmakers, but at

> Professional directors who might need to have a 'purifying' filmmaking experience. In fact, it is not advisable for first-time feature film directors to make a Dogme 95 film, because one has to be aware of the difference of making a conventional film and making a dogme film.

Furthermore, they have also invited directors like Martin Scorsese and Steven Spielberg to make Dogma films (Kelly 2000: 145). Moreover, Dogma 95 has not rejected the whole of the Nouvelle Vague. According to Kristian Levring, maker of the Dogma #4 film THE KING IS ALIVE and one of the founding brothers of Dogma 95, Godard ought to be the chairman of Dogma 95 because À BOUT DE SOUFFLE (Fr 1960) '(is) probably the best Dogma film that could be made' (in Kelly 2000: 47).

So, the Dogma 95 rules do not seem to arise out of a concern for 'reality', as in the aesthetic of André Bazin, or out of a concept of the 'essence' of film, or indeed out of an effort to employ unconventional means in order to bring about the viewer's alienation by presenting reality in less familiar ways. Rather, they are intended to have a therapeutic effect on professional filmmakers who want to purify themselves of conventional cinematic practices, clearing the way for a concept of acceptable film broader than that which prevails today. Von Trier feels that filmmakers ought to be able to

> ... look at Dogma and think 'If that's a film, then we can make films too'. Instead of just thinking, 'Oh, if it doesn't look like STAR WARS, then we can't make a film' (Kelly 2000: 146).

To banish this illusion the rules prescribe a kind of detox for professional filmmakers, a cold turkey experience, like that undergone by pop musicians in MTV's UNPLUGGED under the motto 'No electric guitars. No keyboards. No special effects' (see Stevenson 2002: 104).[17] The filmmaker must forgo all 'cosmetics', all technical tools and stylistic devices that distract the filmmaker from his or her most essential instruments: the actors and the story.

Again, certain effects are banned not for their own sake but for the reasons they are usually employed. The restrictions are intended not to curb, but to stimulate:

> These unusual production circumstances give both restriction and freedom to the director, who is forced to be creative. You eliminate the possibility to 'save' a horrible, not functioning scene with underlying music or voice-over. You have to come up with creative solutions to get, for example, music into your film (von Trier and Vinterberg 1995b).

Such rules are in the spirit not of André Bazin but of Robert Bresson (1983: 130), whose *Notes sur le cinématographie* on 'rules' advise:

> To forge iron laws, if only to make them hard to observe and to break.

Taken together the rules define, not a specified alternative aesthetic, but a set of wilfully self-imposed restrictions which force filmmakers to find creative solutions to the problems that these restrictions inescapably present. One beneficial result would be that filmmakers would rediscover that the norms and production practices of mainstream film are not the only ones that can bring about universal happiness, and can make no claim to a universal or absolute norm of acceptability. Naturally, the same applies to the Dogma 95 rules themselves. For the very reason that they are not embedded in an aesthetic or ontological concept of what film is or ought to be, the rules are arbitrary and replaceable. As Lars Bredo Rahbek of Nimbus Film, the company that produced MIFUNES SIDSTE SANG,[18] points out:

> Dogme is not about following the Brothers' Rules: it's simply about setting some rules and some limitations, and these can be any. The idea is simply to gain creativity through self-imposition (Kelly, 2000: 80).

Kragh-Jakobsen shot MIFUNES SIDSTE SANG with a 16mm film camera simply because he relished the challenge of filming on location somewhere deep in rural Denmark with a single shoulder-mounted camera ('I mean, that's sport, right? It's alive, organic – it looks a bit like a Polish film, 1969. I wanted to go back there' (Kelly 2000: 158)). Von Trier is likewise prepared to put the importance of the specific regulations of the Manifesto into perspective:

> But I still think that Dogme might persist in the sense that a director would be able to say, 'I feel like making that kind of film'. I think that would be amusing. I'm sure a lot of people could profit from that. At which point you might argue that they could just as easily profit from a different set of rules. Yes, of course. But then go ahead and formulate them. Ours are just a proposal. (in MacKenzie, 2003: 56)

The Dogma 95 game, then, is largely about devising a set of rules, just to see what happens when the rules are actually observed. Seen like this, Dogma 95 filmmaking is more the exploration of a hypothesis than a realistic 'dogma'; after all, the issue is simply: what happens if a film-maker has to stick to these rules? Notably, this is the working method that Lars von Trier has always employed. The Dogma 95 Manifesto is just one of several production codes that he has imposed on his own or others' films, such as the documentary THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS (Jørgen Leth and Lars von Trier, Dk 2002), in which he has the director Jørgen Leth make five variations of his earlier short film THE PERFECT

HUMAN (Jørgen Leth, Dk 1967), each with 'increasingly sadistic commands and difficult-to-overcome limitations'.[19]

Once rules have been laid down, they have to be observed (and where they are broken, this has to be owned up to). In von Trier's words:

> But you know, it's been very difficult for people to take them seriously, these Rules. And that's where I'm very 'dogmatic', as they say. It's not interesting if you don't take it seriously – because then, why do a Dogme film? It is a little game, right? So you should play by the rules. I mean, why play football if you don't want to put the ball in the back of the net? (Kelly 2000: 148).

As von Trier here makes explicit, the rules of the Manifesto have all the characteristics of the rules of a game. Such rules are only meaningful within the context of a game: they specify the actions a player must, may, or may not carry out in order to reach a goal, which is also specified by the same rules. Computer game theoretician Jesper Juul (2003: 55) describes such rules as follows:

> The rules of a game ... set up potential actions, actions that are meaningful inside the game but meaningless outside the game. … Rules do not just prevent you from doing something, but they specify what you can meaningfully do. ... Rules are limitations and affordances. Everything that governs the dynamic aspect of a game is a rule.

The consideration of filmmaking as a game shows a strong affinity with the 'language games' that Ludwig Wittgenstein introduced into philosophy as a therapeutic technique. The linguistic analyses of many philosophers, including the early Wittgenstein, had tended to concentrate on just one form of linguistic expression, the 'declarative sentence' of the type 'Dogma 95 is a movement of Danish filmmakers', with which the speaker makes a claim about the state of affairs in the real world. This led to the impression that language consisted only of declarative sentences, usually expressed as statements or assertions; other types of linguistic expression such as promises, performative expressions ('I declare this academic year to be open'), questions and orders were seen as variations of such statements. Giving linguistic privilege to such statements also inevitably gave rise to the idea that the propositional content of a statement corresponded to a situation in the world, and the nouns in that proposition to real objects.

To dispel this grammatical illusion and to demonstrate that language comprised several kinds of expression, of which the declaration was only one, Wittgenstein advised looking at 'primitive language games', especially those played by children. In these language games, issues of truth and falsity, correspondence and non-correspondence with reality, and the nature of declarations, assumptions and questions arose

> without the confusing background of highly complicated processes of thought. When we look at such simple forms of language the mental mist which seems to enshroud our ordinary use of language disappears. We see activities, reactions, which are clear-cut and transparent (Wittgenstein 1965: 17).

The aim and means of the Dogma 95 Manifesto are closely related to those of Wittgenstein's language game: Dogma 95 wants to do away with the idea that mainstream film is the whole story, and therefore proposes a therapeutic return to elementary working methods; shrugging off the ballast – the mental mist – of conventional film practice in order to rediscover the nature of filmmaking.

To regard filmmaking as a game is also to propose the demystification of conventional filmmaking methods as nothing more than games played by *other* rules – rules that are taken much too seriously. Seen from this angle, classic, modern and contemporary films, like any other mode of narration (Bordwell 1985), are no more than 'film games'. The Dogma 95 rules become a 'move' in the game of filmmaking. The significance of the rules lies not in their specific content (though this does have a function), but in the effect that they are intended to have in the filmmaking arena: the 'denaturalisation' of the dominant mode of filmmaking as a contingent, historically-determined and therefore inconstant 'film game'. With this move, Dogma 95 transforms film into an agonistic domain within which games and linguistic actions are weapons in a battle of all against all, an '*agonistique générale*' (Lyotard 1979: 23).

Wittgenstein used the technique of language games to repudiate the idea that the meaning of a linguistic utterance was determined by its correspondence with a state of affairs in the real world, and that the meaning of a given concept was an 'essence' shared by all objects designated by a given expression. In the same way, the Dogma 95 approach has had far-reaching effects on the concept of what filming is and what it means. In particular, it has radically rejected the idea that film is the non-recurring representation of a unique series of events, and replaced it with a concept of film that sees it literally as a game. Dogma 95 has a number of less widely discussed and less well understood aspects, such as its explicit profession of anti-individualism and anti-auteurism and its anti-art stance ('I am no longer an artist'), which have hitherto been rather overlooked by Dogma 95's supporters and detractors alike. I hope to show that the 'ludological' perspective (Frasca 2003a) will throw some useful light on these areas.

The Manifesto: Reiteration and difference

Both sympathetic and critical responses to Dogma 95 have seen the movement as a reiteration of the manifestations of European modernism in film from the 1960s, and in doing so they have overlooked the theatricality of the gesture: the form and the composition of the Dogma 95 Manifesto as well as the context in which von Trier presented it. This because both camps perceive, interpret and appraise contemporary film culture from a critical perspective whose foundations were laid in the very period which Dogma 95 parodies. Both camps approach Dogma 95 from the point of view of the problem of the relationship between film and reality. Those who sympathise with Dogma 95 and the Dogma films see the Dogma style as an ideal approach to the depiction of 'real-life' stories; cynics see the Manifesto and the Dogma style as a propaganda tool for the directorial idiosyncrasies of Lars von Trier. The first approach sees Dogma 95 as an attempt to save film, in the name of truth and purity, as a medium of realistic representation; the second sees Dogma 95 as a perversion of the *auteurisme* that the Nouvelle Vague brought into fashion and which regarded film as the expression of the filmmaker's personal vision of reality (however this was defined).

From this perspective, it would be reasonable to suppose that the provocation of Dogma 95 had the same goal in mind as did the provocative film movements of the 1960s, and this supposition is supported by the fact that the Manifesto employs identical or similar terminology as these movements did to reject the products of the dominant film culture as illusionism, deception, trickery, and so on. Still, it is hard to see how Dogma 95 could then also reject the auteur concept as being 'bourgeois romanticism' and therefore 'false' because it was *no longer* capable of bringing about the 'resurrection' of film. Both the sympathetic and the hostile reception of Dogma 95 have rather overlooked the 95 in the name, which after all makes it abundantly clear that Dogma and the Manifesto wanted to address *contemporary* film culture – one which bore little resemblance to the one that gave rise to the European new waves of the 1960s (see chapter 7).

The most important axis on which the Manifesto locates contemporary film is the technological. The 'technological storm raging' through film not only enables the 'ultimate democratisation of the cinema' but also results in 'the elevation of cosmetics to God' and that 'anyone at any time can wash the last grains of truth away in the deadly embrace of sensation'. The digital technologies to which the Manifesto refers have yielded film images of which it is impossible to say whether they show real-life locations, objects and actors that the camera recorded, or computer-generated locations, objects and actors with no counterparts in the real world. From JURASSIC PARK (Spielberg, USA 1993) to the LORD

OF THE RINGS trilogy (Jackson, NZ/USA 2001, 2002, 2003), live action sequences have been seamlessly integrated with computer-generated, synthetic images of locations, objects and actors that never actually existed – and many that never *could* have existed. The 'technological storm' has changed contemporary film from a photographic medium into one which simulates the photographic rendition of the impossible (see Darley 2000: 108), thereby rupturing the causal relationship between representation and referent which had always been held to be constitutive for photography and film. Contemporary film immerses its audiences in a spectacular and sensational virtual world that is entirely disconnected from the humdrum physical and historical reality of their daily lives.

The dominant mode of cinema today is not, therefore, the same cinema against which the new waves of the 1960s were agitating. The unlikely plots, happy endings, and routine denial of social, political, ethnic and gender problems may allow us to dismiss the classical Hollywood film as 'an illusion', but the *impression de réalité* this cinema gave nevertheless depended on the knowledge that the moving images on the screen were photographic reproductions of '*le mouvement lui-même dans toute sa réalité*' (Metz 1983: 24). The 'impossible photography' of a contemporary film (Darley) transforms it into the *simulacrum* of a classical film. The images have a resolution, contrast and clarity that rival photographic images, but they are no longer the lens-based recordings of reality.

This means that contemporary film effectively dispenses with the problem of realism which, in the age of the classical film, drew the battle lines between the illusionist and escapist Hollywood film on one side and the various critical film movements on the other. As Lev Manovich (2001: 294) has pointed out:

> From the perspective of a future historian of visual culture, the differences between classical Hollywood films, European art films, and avant-garde films (apart from the abstract ones) may appear less significant than this common feature – their reliance on lens-based recordings of reality.

According to Manovich (ibid. 295), film in the digital age is no longer 'an indexical media technology but, rather, a subgenre of painting'. He describes contemporary cinema as a particular case of animation, one which in the age of the classical, indexical cinema had formed only a marginal genre:

> Digital cinema is a particular case of animation that uses live-action footage as one of its many elements. … Born from animation, cinema pushed animation to its periphery only in the end to become one particular case of animation. (Ibid.: 302)

If film as a media technology has relinquished an indexical relationship with profilmic reality, then there is little point in positing, on the basis of one or another concept of realism, some 'correct' relationship between film image and

reality as opposed to the 'false' relationship of reality presented by mainstream film. After all, contemporary film has exchanged the problem of representation (in which sign and referent are distinct elements having a meaningful relationship) for a hyperrealism in which sign and referent, object and image, depiction and the depicted have become inextricable and the 'art of the index' has become a medium of synthesis and simulation.

Indeed, in the face of the hyperrealism of the contemporary film Dogma 95 advances no reworking of the call to realism that characterised the modern and modernistic film movements; in fact the Manifesto makes no mention at all of *real*, *reality* or *realism*. While the Manifesto does declare that 'To Dogma 95 the movie is not illusion!', it opposes the 'illusion of pathos and … illusion of love' in today's 'superficial movie' not with reality but with 'truth': 'My supreme goal is to force the truth out of my characters and settings'. Whatever this truth is (and the Manifesto does not elaborate on this point), it is clear that it need not necessarily coincide with the material, physical, tangible and perceptible reality that happens to exist in front of the camera. The way in which the Manifesto articulates this 'supreme goal' actually allows for a more robust interpretation in which the actors and locations are no more than an instrument, or medium, of a truth which requires their existence for its disclosure but which is not identical to their manifestation.

One possible indication of what Dogma 95 meant by this truth lies, again, in the theatricality with which the movement was presented to the film world. The occasion, the location, the gesture and the means by which von Trier presented the Dogma 95 Manifesto at the centenary film conference in Paris, and the rhetorical bombast in which the Manifesto itself was framed, turned the event into a performance recalling the famous gestures and manifestos of avant-garde political and artistic history. The fact that von Trier chose to give this performance in the Odéon Theatre suggests that he was copying the French filmmakers who had spurred on the notorious student uprisings of May '68 in that very theatre. But the reiteration of this gesture also inescapably introduces a distinction between them: by adopting the gestures of the instigators of earlier film movements, von Trier's own performance becomes the execution of a scenario whose roles, props and actions are already defined. From this perspective, both the presentation of the Dogma 95 Manifesto and its content become the re-enactment of a scenario distilled from the performances given by earlier vanguard movements in politics, culture and film.[20] In presenting the Dogma 95 Manifesto, von Trier was clearly taking on a *role*. The von Trier who read the Manifesto in the Odéon Theatre, threw red pamphlet copies into the auditorium, and then took to his heels without a word of further explanation because 'the Movement' had forbidden him from revealing more about Dogma 95 than

the text of the Manifesto, was the *avatar* of a new film movement, of whose progenitors the centenary film conference audience was as yet unaware.

Von Trier's actions also put the conference audience members in much the same position as most of his film protagonists (both pre- and post-Dogma), who discover that the characters around them have very different intentions than those which the masks of their social position and conventions suggest (see chapter 5). Moreover, his leading characters are often forced by their surroundings to adopt roles which are at odds with their self-image. The unmistakable parody of the gesture with which von Trier launched the Manifesto brought about a similar dislocation between the 'actor' von Trier and the 'role' he assumed – a dislocation not only characteristic of the position in which his film protagonists find themselves but also of the relationship between actor and role in his Dogma and post-Dogma films.

Because the presentation of Dogma 95 simultaneously re-enacts the gestures of earlier film movements and launches a new one, the presentation itself becomes an event of the order of a *simulacrum* in which gesture and performance, playfulness and seriousness, presentation and representation are indistinguishable. However, as a simulacrum, the presentation of Dogma 95 also has a retrospective effect on the gestures of the earlier movements which it re-enacts. After all, if Dogma 95 is the new enactment of a script distilled from the performances of previous film movements, in retrospect the performances staged by earlier cultural and political avant-gardes can also be seen as enactments of the same scenario. The 'example' being imitated is then not an original, but just one of an infinite number of enactments which the scenario allows. In one and the same movement, example and imitator, model and copy, referent and representation are incorporated into the order of the simulacrum.

The Manifesto actually says as much. The 'new wave' whose goal was 'correct' is compared with a 'ripple that washed ashore and turned to muck'. A ripple is indeed a small wave movement on the surface of the water, but ripples never appear in isolation; they occur in groups with a similar form, scale and intensity. Although two such ripples are never exactly the same, successive ripples show a recurring pattern – though this pattern cannot be reliably identified by the form of a single wave, and no 'standard wave' can be derived from the wave series as a whole. Every wave is therefore the *actualisation* of a purely *virtual* pattern that is rendered visible only by the mediation of such actualisations. Because every single wave is an actualisation of this virtual pattern, no hierarchical or ontological distinction can be drawn between earlier and later waves; there can be no 'original' and no 'copies'.

Moreover, any given wave is also virtual, in the sense that only its movement is propagated; the water of which it is composed stays in the same place, and is no more than a fortuitous, arbitrary medium for the actualisation of the virtual

movement, which might have propagated just as well in some other fluid of a different composition or colour. Seen in this light, Dogma 95 and its predecessors which it imitates are more or less fortuitous media actualising a certain virtual pattern – the ideological, political or aesthetic content of which is more or less arbitrary for any given wave. The specific views and goals of the modernistic film movements of which Dogma 95 wishes to be the continuation, re-iteration and critic at the same time are – and this is the key point of Dogma 95 – only important inasmuch as they function as the medium for the virtual pattern that they actualise; they are not important to the virtual pattern itself. This is what distinguishes the Dogma 95 episode: the arena is displaced from the domain of *representation* to that of the *simulacrum* and the *simulation*, and the problem of the relationship between film and *reality* is transformed into the problem of the relationship between film and *virtuality*. In doing so, Dogma 95 places itself on common ground with the 'movie of illusion' to which it is so strongly opposed, the better to confront it.

The virtual pattern that Dogma 95 and preceding film movements are the actualisations of, as I have noted, a script of film movements. The term 'script' should be taken here to mean not so much a scenario comprising a specific set of events, but rather a script or frame in the sense that these words have been defined in the field of cognitive psychology, where they indicate a schematic representation of the actions and participants found in a common sequence of events – as a restaurant scenario comprises a customer, a waiter, a menu, service and cutlery, the business of ordering, serving, eating and paying, all without specifying the type of restaurant, how the participants are dressed, which meals are provided on the menu, and even the choice the customer makes (see Schank and Abelson 1977). A script of this kind has more in common with the rules defining a game than with a scenario describing the actions and events of a play or a film. In contrast with the shooting of a film script or the staging of a play, actions which amount to discrete interpretations of the same scenario, a game cannot be identified by any single performance; neither can a game be described in terms of some sort of common 'average' of actions and events that occur in all performances. What would an average football match or an average chess game look like, for instance? Nor can we say that the first-ever performance of a game by, let us say, its inventors, is an original and all subsequent games are its copies. The very first instance of a game is the performance, or rather the actualisation, of one of the many possible instances defined by the rules.

The rules of a game do not define a specific performance, but a so-called *state space* which comprises all possible states allowed by the rules. There is no hier-archical relationship of antecedence or quality between the unique states found within this state space; they are all merely actualisations of the virtual condi-

tions set down by the rules. From the point of view of the rules, players and props can take a myriad of forms; chess pieces can be any shape, and in principle football players can wear anything they like or, indeed, nothing at all. What counts is that the rules are taken seriously, and that the players are ready to subsume their individual preferences, wishes and behaviours to the rules and requirements of the game. In other words, players are expected to relinquish their individuality and adopt a *role*; and this ineluctably lends game-playing a theatrical dimension. The players' 'real' personalities are absorbed into the 'virtual' roles defined for them by the rules of the game. Within the game there is room for individuality only inasmuch as the performance of the game contributes to the actualisation of virtual situations defined by the rules – this, indeed, is where players' individual qualities and talents can make a difference; so a game, by definition, is played on the cusp between reality and virtuality.

The game, too, is by definition of the order of a simulacrum: it neither mimics any other reality, nor does it aspire to the fictitious actuality of a movie. A game creates its own reality, within which real moves are made that make a real difference to the players within the world of the game. In presenting the Dogma 95 Manifesto in the Odéon Theatre, von Trier put film and the practice of filmmaking on the borderline between reality and virtuality, and located it in the order of the game and the simulacrum. Within this arena, Hollywood and the new waves no longer represent diametric opposites along the political, ideological or even ontological lines identified by classical and modernistic film theorists and critics, but are all 'players of the film culture game', players having different tactics and strategies (which at most only *simulate* the maintenance of such contrasts and distinctions). The dimension on which Dogma 95 locates this distinction in tactics and strategies is that of 'illusion' versus 'truth'. What difference could this distinction make within the order of the simulacrum? In other words, what is the difference that Dogma 95 wanted to bring about in the film world?

2 The Name of this Game is Dogma 95

Filmmaking as a game

Because Dogma 95 presented its rules in the puritan and moralistic form of a Vow of Chastity, and the Brethren originally gave Dogma certificates to film-makers who had followed the rules (and who had properly owned up to the occasional transgression), the rules were wielded by many critics and journal-ists as a checklist with which to determine how 'Dogmatic' a Dogma film really was. This eventually led to an absolutism in which the rules were held to be the only measure of the 'true' Dogma film.

In the spirit of modernist manifestos, which, not coincidentally, had always displayed a predilection for proclaiming ten declarations, the ten rules laid down by the Vow of Chastity were seen as the filmmaker's Ten Command-ments. In light of the same tradition, Dogma 95 could be classified as clearly belonging to one side of a dualism that had traditionally divided art and cinema into two opposing realms: a conventional, rule-bound one and a creative, ex-perimental one. However, the aim of the Manifesto was to show that not only Dogma 95, but *all* approaches to filmmaking imposed constraints on the film-maker ('if it doesn't look like Star Wars, then we can't make a film'). If Dogma 95 has any doctrine to proclaim, it would be that every film practice is based on a number of arbitrary and interchangeable rules and that none is better than any other.

That the Vow of Chastity does not represent an absolute standard is made clear by the fact that its authors have only made one Dogma film each, and that they themselves substituted the Dogma rules for others before Dogma 95 itself became an inflexible canon. When asked whether his next film projects would be Dogma films, Vinterberg answered: 'Definitely not. I mean, that's the whole point' (in Kelly 2000: 113). His first film after Festen, It's All about Love (Dk/Sw/N 2003), which was described in the press as 'a fascinating and disturbing blend of science fiction, thriller and love story set in the near future', was the opposite of a Dogma film. The same can be said of von Trier's Dancer in the Dark (Dk/BRD/Nl/USA/UK/Fr/Sw/Fin/Iceland/Nor 2000), which broke pretty much every one of the Vows (see chapter 5). The closing scenes of Søren Kragh-Jacobsen's Dogma #3 film, Mifunes Sidste Sang (Dk/Sw 1999), even poke fun

at the Vows (see chapter 3). It was Kristian Levring alone who followed his Dogma #4 film THE KING IS ALIVE (USA/Dk/Sw 2000) with THE INTENDED (UK/ Dk 2002), a film which was subsequently given a lukewarm reception as 'a Dogma 95-inspired drama', and 'of some interest for students of Dogma 95'.[1] For different reasons, Dogma 95 was at best a purifying experience for the Brethren, perhaps even a therapeutic one for von Trier (see Stevenson 2002), but by no means an unbending law to which they wished to subject the entirety of their future careers. That would, indeed, have been against the spirit of the movement, whose goal was to rediscover the practice of filmmaking as a game.

Film and formalism: The parametric film

The idea that film rules are arbitrary was not, of course, invented by Dogma 95 or by Lars von Trier. The films of Jean-Luc Godard repeatedly exposed the conventions which regulated and naturalised film, and he was neither the first nor the last to deconstruct the language of film. David Bordwell (1985) and Kristin Thompson (1988) even distinguished a special 'parametric' film form in which stylistic devices are independent of narrative functions and motivations, and which exist primarily to call attention to themselves (Bordwell 1985: 280; Thompson: 248-249).[2] In parametric films, the filmmaker selects a limited number of stylistic devices from the repertoire of a filmic mode of narration (classical, art cinema, historical-materialistic, etc. – see Bordwell 1965), and distributes these devices systematically in the film according to an independent logic. In PICKPOCKET (Fr 1959), for instance, Robert Bresson uses medium shots and medium close-ups, eyeline matches and shot/reverse shot combinations, but no establishing long shots, match-on-action cuts, or analytic *découpage*. In this way, the devices employed are extracted from their conventional, codified context and 'moved forward as pure parameters' (Bordwell 1985: 293).

   From a formal perspective, then, parametric filmmakers would seem to be employing the same strategy as that proposed by the Dogma 95 Manifesto: To put themselves under certain constraints by making a limited selection from the range of available stylistic devices, and to employ these chosen stylistic devices according to a logic which is independent of the story or the need to give dramatic weight to certain events. Because the selection and occurrence of a parameter is *not* motivated by story, probability or genre rules, Bordwell and Thompson speak here of 'parametric play' (Thompson 1988: 248). Parametric patterns need to be consistently sustained if they are to be perceived; however, if this succeeds, they can 'shift our habitual perceptions of filmic conventions through defamiliarisation' (Thompson 1988: 251). The most important result of

this shift is that the familiar, self-evident styles of conventional films are revealed as the product of stylistic choices. The Dogma 95 rules, too, intend to bring about a shift in the conventional image of the quality or acceptability of a film.

With a little goodwill, Lars von Trier's pre-Dogma films such as ELEMENT OF CRIME and EUROPA could qualify as parametric films. With no clear narrative motivation, all the scenes take place in the evening or at night, in artificially lit locations. Both films seem to have been shot in black and white, until sparse elements of colour denaturalise the monotone to which the viewer has become accustomed. ELEMENT OF CRIME uses only sepia-like yellow artificial lighting, and consists almost entirely of long takes. In EPIDEMIC (Lars von Trier, Dk, 1988), this time a genuinely black-and-white film, the camera is aimed in turn at von Trier and his co-scriptwriter Niels Vørsel, but there is no cameraman and the camera does not move in order to follow the actors or to alter the framing. In EUROPA, actions that take place at the same time but in different places are linked together by long and complex camera movements. Transitions between scenes are frequently effected by allowing elements of the new scene to appear in the background of the current scene, and actions within scenes are commented on, or contrasted with, background projections or seamless double exposures. In EUROPA, the editing is performed almost exclusively 'in frame', which places the mental and modifiable character of the film's time and space in the foreground (see chapter 4).[3]

While these films were shot in accordance with rules that were arranged beforehand and which limited the range of acceptable stylistic devices available to the filmmaker, ELEMENT OF CRIME, EPIDEMIC and EUROPA can be seen as parametric films[4] but they are not Dogma films. On the contrary, drawing up the Dogma 95 Manifesto and making IDIOTERNE was von Trier's attempt to liberate himself from the technical and stylistic perfectionism that had marked his earlier films. With EPIDEMIC, von Trier had wanted to make a film with 'no technique', but it was only with THE KINGDOM that he was first really able to throw the ballast of conventional film technique overboard (see Stevenson 2002: 104). For all the superficial similarities between parametric films and the playfulness of the Dogma 95 approach to filmmaking, the differences between them are too large to group them within the same paradigm.

Nevertheless, the comparison to parametric films, which are often seen as the perfect example of modernism in film (see Bordwell 1985: 310), is a useful one. It throws light onto the forcefulness with which Dogma 95 rejects modernism, and onto the nature of its objections to the 'new waves'; but it also helps us to understand why the genuinely innovative dimensions of the Dogma 95 approach to filmmaking are all but systematically overlooked.

Aesthetics and dramaturgy

Dogma 95 shares with modernism in film the desire to demonstrate that the prevailing modes of film practice are contingent constructions rather than natural norms (see Bordwell 1998: 92-93). However, Dogma 95 takes a radically different line than that taken by modernist filmmakers and their theorists. This modernism, which wishes to lay bare the 'codes' of film as such and to change the viewing habits of the film audience, approaches the film from the viewpoint of the completed work and its relation to the audience. Noël Burch, whose *Praxis du cinéma* (1969) inventoried the parameters of the medium and formulated an influential aesthetic of film modernism, makes it clear from the outset, with reference to a term such as *découpage*:

> Although obviously derived from the … meaning of a shot breakdown, it is quite distinct from it, no longer referring to a process taking place before filming or to a particular technical operation but, rather, to the underlying structure of the *finished* film (Burch 1981: 3-4).

From this perspective, Burch regards the 'formal organisation of shot transitions and 'matches' as 'the essential cinematic task' (Burch: 11). Burch describes the filmic parameters as these are perceived by the audience in watching the finished film, and encourages filmmakers to conceive not just the film as a whole, but every separate frame from the viewpoint of the audience, 'as a total composition' (Burch: 35). In the modernist aesthetic of the 'open work' (Eco 1965), which also seeks ambiguity and which consciously makes itself dependent on the active intervention of the viewer, the business of discerning the poetics of a work, 'the work to be done as the artist imagines doing it', comes down to

> *retrouver le projet à travers la manière dont nous jouissons – ou dont d'autres jouissent – de l'objet* (Eco 1965: 11).

In *L'œuvre ouverte*, Eco regards the artwork in the spirit of the 1960s, from a 'communication studies' perspective which presupposes that the artist's work gives form to a 'message' and that the artist cannot ignore the fact '*qu'il travaille pour un recepteur*' (ibid.).

However, the Dogma 95 Manifesto does not mention stylistic devices, visual habits or ambiguity, but does mention production methods, the use of techniques, and the simplicity of production means. The Manifesto rules do not aim to change the audience's visual habits, but rather the concepts, habits and working methods of the filmmaker. The Dogma treatment is not intended to make film viewers aware that films are artefacts based on contingent codes, but to allow filmmakers to undergo a detoxification that allows them to discover that stan-

dard production methods and techniques are not the only ones that promise satisfactory results.

The Manifesto therefore approaches film not from the vantage point of the finished product, but of the impending project; and it is aimed not at the spectator, but at the maker. It is an example of the problem-solving approach which Bordwell (1998: 149 et seq.) proposes for the history of film style. This takes the position of the filmmaker whose work means dealing with a range of problems; for some of these problems solutions are provided by existing practices and traditions, but for others the solution has to be invented. The historian, by contrast, derives the practical choices made by filmmakers from the films they have actually made, and locates these choices within 'the rules and roles of artmaking' and within the context of the institutions that formulate tasks, put problems on the agenda and reward effective solutions (ibid.: 151).

Unlike the historian, who independently reconstructs the problems and their solutions from the finished films, the Manifesto wishes to introduce new production methods that question the contemporary institutionalised practice of filmmaking. The Manifesto provides no solutions to this end, but gives rules that pose problems for filmmakers. The Manifesto does not therefore advise the use of certain stylistic devices, but at most prescribes the use of certain techniques, such as the use of freehand recording. A hand-held camera does not self-evidently imply certain stylistic devices, such as *plan séquences*, long takes or even moving shots ('any movement or immobility attainable in the hand is permitted'). Leaving to one side for a moment the various ideological connotations associated with the use of a given stylistic device, the issue of choosing whether or not to employ one does suppose that a specific problem has been defined and solved. The Manifesto, on the other hand, wants to push the filmmaker into using a bare minimum of resources to invent or re-invent solutions to problems, because access to the modern film world's conventional 'grab bag of slick tricks' (Stevenson 2002: 104) is denied.

Unlike Noël Burch (1981), for whom a film is a finished product, a perfect whole composed of separate shots, and for whom the formal organisation of shot transitions is the core of filmmaking, the Manifesto is also entirely silent on the subject of film montage; and given its intention to question the practice of film production, we should not be very surprised. To start with, despite the 'digital revolution' in film which first made itself felt in the post-production phase, the practice of montage itself has not substantially changed. Whether it is carried out at a Steenbeck montage table or done using Final Cut Pro editing software, montage still is and will always be the business of cutting and linking shots. Rule 5 of the Manifesto, which forbids the use of optical work and filters, is in principle enough to exclude the use of post-production effects such as multi-image layering and within-image montage. Incidentally, von Trier had al-

ready demonstrated in Europa that many such effects could be produced during shooting (see chapter 3).[5]

Secondly, approaching film through montage means that the film has been conceived of as a whole, from its conceptual phase onwards. If a film is conceived from the viewpoint of the 'formal organisation of shot transitions' (Burch 1981), then the shots themselves will be composed with these transitions in mind. For the great theorist and practitioner of film montage, Sergei Eisenstein (1981), the film image is a 'montage cell' and montage is characterised by such 'filmic' conflicts as:

–   the conflict between graphic tendencies (lines),
–   the conflict between areas (with regard to each other),
–   the conflict between volumes,
–   the conflict between spaces, etc. (Eisenstein 1981: 39).

In order to bring about these conflicts in the montage the filmmaker has to take account of them during the shooting, organising every single shot from the perspective of the position and function which it will have after montage in the finished film. In both classical and contemporary films this perspective is shaped in the process of storyboarding, in which composition, framing, camera angles, actor positions and movements, lighting and all other relevant aspects are delineated and determined long before shooting begins. It is well known that Alfred Hitchcock considered the actual shooting to be the most boring part of making a film, as it was little more than the implementation of the storyboards he had already meticulously prepared (see Truffaut 1978). And in principle (with the possible exception of certain practical, technical issues) the storyboard approach deals with all dramaturgical and stylistic problems in advance. The storyboard approach is widespread, not least because it allows the producer to plan the organisation and logistics of the shooting sessions, and to draw up a budget for the film (the same reason, according to Godard, that film scenarios appeared at exactly the same historical moment as film producers did). The advent of digital technologies in the production of 'special effect films' has only served to buttress the storyboard approach:

> The production of the effects demands that all other aspects of the production be treated as tasks whose execution must be planned in advance and managed in terms of preset priorities calculated to facilitate the creation of the digitally enhanced images (Crogan 2003: 287).

The same *a priori post festum* storyboard approach characterises Sean Cubbitt's (2004: 8) attempt to replace semiotic approaches of film as language, as proposed by Christian Metz (1977), or Bordwell's (1985) cognitive-psychological approach, 'with a more digital analysis of the mathematical bases of motion'.

This mathematical basis has three elements: the *pixel*, or that which invites the spectator to become immersed in the 'now' of the film image; the *cut*, which bounds this undifferentiated 'now' and … the spectator of the 'pre-existence of the filmstrip'; and the *vector*, which transforms the film image from a 'being' to a 'becoming', thereby exciting expectations of the future. These three elements are in line with classical and contemporary film theory, conceived as these are from the perspective of the spectator:

> [T]he pixel grounds us in the film as a present experience, the cut in the preexistence of the filmstrip to consciousness of it, the vector in the film as the becoming of something as yet unseen. It is the principle of transformation, the quality of changing what we expect from moment to moment (ibid.: 71-72).

Cubitt's digital analysis (whatever that is, incidentally[6]) cannot be seen separately from the storyboard approach which Dogma 95 wants to escape.

The storyboard approach is a form of dramaturgy in which a directorial concept is developed and used to support a wide variety of choices – from scene selection and set design to mise-en-scène. Dramaturgy is what makes a film foreseeable, in the sense that it can be planned and budgeted; but it also makes it predictable. This is where the aesthetic and the practical approaches to filmmaking meet. After all, both approaches conceive of film as being *a priori post festum*. The film aesthete reconstructs the intentions of the filmmaker by reference to the product; the film historian determines the choices made and solutions devised by filmmakers on the basis of their finished films; and for storyboarders, the film is completed even before shooting begins. This is exactly what Dogma 95 rejects:

> Predictability (dramaturgy) has become the golden calf around which we dance.

Filming: story as reconstruction and as representation

From the perspective of conventional film aesthetics and practice, it is easy to see why attention has focused on those rules which forbid props and sets to be taken to the film location, forbid the separate recording of sound and image, and insist that films be made on location and filmed using a hand-held camera. After all, these are the rules which from the production viewpoint most directly affect the logistics and budgeting of filmmaking, and from the aesthetic viewpoint most directly affect the issues of stylistic choice and the problem that lies at the heart of almost all film aesthetics: namely, the film's relationship to reality. Banning the use of specially transported or constructed film props and 'im-

provements to the look of a film made in postproduction or on the set' locates the 'truth' of the film in the domain of the profilmic, and this, according to Ove Christensen (2000b), is a plausible reason 'for refraining from technical improvements of the depicted'.

The question then, of course, is what is actually meant by the term 'profilmic'. For Christensen this is the 'content' of the film, although Paul Willemen (1994), who had originally coined the term, had a more literal meaning in mind: everything that could be found in front of the camera lens during takes. 'Content' and the 'profilmic' are not necessarily the same thing. In actual fact the content of a film image seldom if ever corresponds to that which is literally visible in the image at that moment. The content is also determined by what just happened, what the viewer anticipates is about to happen, what the viewer thinks might be happening in the non-accessible parts of the visual image (both on-screen and off-screen), etc. The meaning of a film image is just as much a product of the narrative context within which the spectator perceives and interprets it, as of that which the camera formally registers (see Bordwell 1985; Branigan 1992).

This distinction between the denotative content of a film image and the narrative viewpoint from which the image is perceived and interpreted is the reason that realistic film aesthetics are frequently criticised as being oblivious to the fact that films necessarily presuppose selection (between sections of space and time) and organisation (of montage), and cannot therefore be seen as the objective and inclusive recordings of an independent reality. Critics who view Dogma 95 from a Bazinian-realistic perspective never fail to point out the 'authentic illusions' (Christensen 2000b) or 'limitations' (Gaut 2003) inherent in the Manifesto rules. However, it is very unrealistic to suppose that von Trier, technically one of the most accomplished directors of his generation (Schepelern 2003), and the other co-founders of Dogma 95 are unacquainted with these obvious truths. Indeed, they form the point of departure of Dogma 95, targeted as this is at a concept of representation founded on realistic aesthetics.

A movie is a *re-presentation* in more than one sense. In the first place, the film image re-presents that which, in the words of the French film semiotician Christian Metz (1980: 8), was present 'at a moment when the spectator was absent (during the shooting of the film)', and which is absent when the spectator *is* present (during the film's projection). This is the symbolic function of the film image that represents and refers to things other than itself. The referent of the film image is frequently identified with the denotative, profilmic content (see Christensen 2000b) – namely, that which the camera has registered – but this 'realistic' description of the content of a film image ignores the fact that a film or movie image is not only perceived and interpreted within a narrative context, but was also deliberately structured with a view to its narrative function.

This brings us to the second sense in which a movie image is a *re-presentation*: the events recorded by the camera are themselves reconstructions or re-enactments of events which are thought to have occurred in a time and at a place other than those in which the film was made. The temporal disparity, in particular, between filming a representation of the events and the moment at which the events are held to have taken place is crucial, because it forms the precondition for storytelling itself.[7] A story is a series of temporally sequential and causally related events. Because cause necessarily precedes effect, and can therefore only be identified as a cause if the effect demonstrably takes place, a story can only be told in retrospect, after hindsight has reconstructed the chain of causal links which led to the final situation (see Bal 1980; Danto 1985; Martin 1987). This retrospective temporality is therefore an 'essential parameter of narrativity' (Gaudreault 1988: 108). It enables the storyteller to establish a causal sequence linking the beginning of the story to its conclusion, and to distinguish the events that are necessary to this sequence from those that simply fill the spaces between 'core functions' (Barthes 1984).

This fundamentally retrospective characteristic of storytelling also forms the foundation of the storyboard approach to making films. Since the events in the story are already known, film-storytellers – for that matter, any storytellers in any medium – can interpret and evaluate these events as they like, and plan their reproduction in a style which reflects and supports their interpretation and evaluation. From the standpoint of the film-storyteller, the story's actions and events are known in advance and their representation is conceived from this prescient position. Mise-en-scène, lighting, camera angles, actor positions and movements are all orchestrated from a point situated, with respect to the events of the film, somewhere in the future, from where everything that happens in the film is of course predictable. In contrast to the widespread belief that a film's events take place in the 'present imperfect', they are actually located in the 'past historic' tense of literary storytelling (Hamburger 1987: 65).

Naturally, the same series of events is open to different interpretations, and films such as Rashomon (Kurosawa, Japan 1950) have played with this fact. But because a movie is the representation of a unique series of events located somewhere in the past, the story can only be presented in one way. Even if it is represented from several viewpoints, it still concerns the same series of events, which would have presented themselves in the same way to any observer who happened to share the camera's vantage point at the moment the events were filmed. The classic concept of representation therefore supposes a one-to-one relationship between the film image and the profilmic on the one hand, and via this profilmic, between the film image and the events and actions it portrays.

In this respect, parametric films, more conventional 'classical' films and other modes of narration are all based on the same approach, in which the representa-

tion of actions and events in separate scenes is arranged on the basis of a prior interpretation or previously conceived, systematic, stylistic principle. Decisions on style, mise-en-scène and *mise-en-cadre* invariably precede recordings of the actions and events themselves. *Lessons with Eisenstein* (Oranje and Hogenkamp 1979), still a remarkably instructive document, lists the interpretative and dramaturgical considerations that should guide a director's scene staging and choice of camera angle, framing and lighting. From this viewpoint, a film, as a manufactured artefact, is always an invitation to interpretation because for every shot the spectator can (and should) ask which meaning the filmmaker wanted to convey in fashioning a certain image within a certain (historical, cultural, transtextual and intratextual) context (see Sperber and Wilson 1986).

It is exactly this conventional attitude towards film to which the Dogma 95 Manifesto is opposed, and in which many critics of Dogma 95 have remained ensnared. Many may also have missed the crux of the Manifesto because Dogma 95 does not reject narrativity as such. Unlike their modernistic predecessors like Wim Wenders and Godard, who saw in 'stories' an artificial limitation of the vicissitudes and riches (or, for that matter, the tedium and aridity) of real life, the founders of Dogma 95 fully accept film narrativity both in word (especially in the FAQs on the Dogma 95 website) and in deed (the Dogma films that they have made). The interview sequences in IDIOTERNE, in which members of the group of 'idiots' look back on the '*spassen*' in which they took part in other scenes of the film, also reveal that this film too, despite the ban on 'temporal and geographical alienation', implies the acceptance of the inherently retrospective standpoint of a narrative. What *is* rejected is the idea that this retrospective standpoint also necessarily introduces predictability.

Contrary to the usual practice of film narrative, Dogma does not approach a 'story' as a closed series of actions and events of which a single appropriate representation has to be produced. Rather, a storyline is seen as the portal to an infinitely larger number of variations, none of which is obliged to immediately meet the demands of representative accuracy, dramatic necessity, or genre conventions. The ban on temporal and geographical alienation, which is frequently seen as a ban on historical costume dramas, science fiction films or adventure films set in exotic locations, can also be seen as a demand that the action takes place in the 'here and now' of the space in front of the camera lens and the soundman's microphone. The demand that the camera follow the action rather than that the action be directed towards the camera ('the film must not take place where the camera is standing; shooting must take place where the film takes place') points to the same concern; instead of deciding camera positions and angles in advance on the basis of a dramatic interpretation of the action and organising the action with these camera positions in mind, the action should be allowed to develop freely and naturally. Genre conventions are then an equally

unwelcome intrusion, because they subject the action to external, institutionalised patterns and conventional forms of mise-en-scène and *mise-en-cadre*, with the ban on 'superficial action' providing an additional guarantee against their temptations. Again, the ban on genre conventions is directed not so much at the story or the script – many commentators have pointed out that the Brethren have not shrunk from genre clichés of this kind (see chapter 1) – but rather towards the way in which the action in separate scenes is filmed (see chapter 3).

Those who have pointed out that a choice of location and actors also infers a preconceived view of a scene are indubitably correct, but this disregards the entirely original vision that Dogma 95 brings to the notion of a 'scene'. For Dogma 95, a scene is not the representation or reconstruction of a situation; it is a model or simulation. With this approach Dogma 95 leaves behind the classical and modern realm of 'representation' and enters a new domain of 'simulation' and 'game': enter the matrix.[8]

Enter the matrix: Game, simulation, rules and art

'Simulation' and 'game' are concepts which at first sight might seem incompatible with the medium of film. Film, after all, is the one-off photographic registration of a situation, event or action which, once recorded and edited, is always shown in the same linear way. Like a photographic record, filmic representation is the analogue, 'motivated' representation of a profilmic situation or event, in which the visual characteristics of the profilmic are retained as fully as possible. The characteristics of a simulation or model are dissimilar in almost every respect. The *ludologist* Gonzalo Frasca (2003a: 223) gives the following tentative description of simulation:

> to simulate is to model a (source) system through a different system which maintains (for somebody) some of the behaviors of the original system.

In contrast to a representation, which generally provides a verbal, pictorial or mimetic description of characteristics and successive events, a model preserves the *behaviour* of the source system which it models, and shows how the system behaves under a range of circumstances. A model comprises data, which define the relevant system characteristics, and rules, which dictate the system's behaviour. Data input functions as stimuli, to which the model responds according to its defined characteristics and behavioural rules. So a model shows not only the specific behaviours demonstrated by the modelled system in circumstances that existed at a given moment, but also how the system *would* behave *in the event that* certain circumstances *were* present. In linguistic terms this means that

the 'modality' of a simulation is not that of the assertion, which expresses that a certain state of affairs is or was the case, but that of the conditional, non-factual or counterfactual expression, which articulates what would happen if certain circumstances were to be present. These circumstances may be absent in reality, or may not yet be present, or they may even be impossible.

A model or simulation is therefore fundamentally different from a representation in a number of important ways. A model does not describe a certain sequence of actual events, but defines a field or matrix – a 'state space' – of the possible situations and events that might take place under certain conditions, given the characteristics and behavioural rules of the system being modelled. A representation regards the actual behaviour of the source system as the 'original' and the representation as its image; a simulation regards the actual behaviour of the source system as just one actualised sequence out of all possible sequences existing in the state space of the model. An actual sequence is in principle no more than a contingent realisation of one of the many virtual sequences in the state space; neither does it occupy any special position in comparison to the non-actualised sequences (see Kwinter 2001: 48-49).[9]

A simulation does not even have to model a real-life system, and where a simulation takes a historical situation as its starting point, actual historical details are often unimportant to the basic function of the model, amounting to little more than a filling added to make the model behave more interestingly for the user. Strategic computer games, for instance, such as *Close Combat* (Atomic Games) or *Combat Flight Simulator* (Microsoft Games), take historical battles or campaigns as their starting point, but instead of having the players act out the historical course of these events, players are invited to find out what might have happened if certain circumstances were different, or if the historical protagonists had taken decisions different to the ones they actually did.

In these forms of counterfactual gameplay (Atkins 2003: 102),[10] actual historical facts are subordinate to the choice of altering the course of events, and ultimately amount to little more than the 'colouring' of actions and objects defined at a more abstract level (see Simons 2002a: 246 et seq.; Crogan 2003: 292), just as in a game of chess the names and shapes of the pieces echo the battles of which chess is a stylised variation, but are no longer relevant to the game itself. A simulation is therefore only a partial modelling of the source system, in that it includes only those characteristics which impinge on the behaviour being modelled.

Seen from the viewpoint of simulation, Dogma 95's ban on the use of décor and props takes on a different meaning than the unconditional desire for an authentic and unmediated realism. The ban forces filmmakers to concentrate on the elementary components of the system being modelled, that is to say, the story and the actors – in other words, the algorithms and the data of the model:

> The essence of Dogma 95 is to challenge the conventional film language – in order to make authentic films, in search of the truth. This implicates cutting out the usual aesthetic means of adding sound, light, make up, 'mise en scene'. In addition, it gives more time to improvise the acting, because there are no breaks for hair, make up, light and costume change. Another point is that the handheld camera gives the actors more freedom and space to really impersonate and act out their characters, since the camera follows the actor instead of the opposite (von Trier and Vinterberg 1995b).

Props, décor, costumes and hairstyles, as computer game designers have long appreciated, are no more than incidental, superficial, and outward features of what good old-fashioned structuralist semiotics called 'transformations' and 'actants' (see Greimas 1966), embodied at the manifest surface level by the actions and appearances of the actors. A model needs no more than a location, characters and actions. Additional ingredients will even distract attention from the behaviour that the model is intended to simulate. A model's 'truth' therefore does not lie in its external similarity with the source system, nor in any supposed agreement with actual fact, but in the degree to which it adequately simulates the behaviour of the source system under all circumstances – including circumstances that may never have occurred, and may indeed never occur, in real life.

Another important difference between simulations and representations is this: while a simulation's creators define the model's algorithms and data, and set the conditions under which the model will operate, with respect to the model's actual behaviour they become its spectators. The designer of a model therefore imparts no vision to the process (as certainly is the case in representation), but merely defines the conditions under which the model will develop, and the rules governing its behaviour, and then sits back to see what happens. In simulations of complex systems, the model's actual behaviour is not programmed. Neither do the model's characteristics, or the elements of which the model is composed, form a basis by which this behaviour could be predicted. Instead, its behaviour *emerges* from the interactions between model components and those between the model and its artificial environment. Complex systems display complex behaviour: they are sensitive to small differences in initial circumstances (the 'butterfly effect'), an impact on one part of the system can have non-linear effects elsewhere in the system, feedback loops mean that the model influences itself in unpredictable ways, and so on (see Cilliers 1998; Holland 1998; Johnson 2001; Wilson 2002). Complex systems are therefore too unpredictable to infer their behaviour from a maker's intentions. As Stephen Wilson said of *algorists*, artists who use computers to automatically generate images:

> the artist created the algorithm and then the computer executed the steps to create the image (Wilson 2002: 313).

In this sense, games are also simulations. They model a source system (as chess models a battle, and as city kids can model their streets, squares and parks on the prairies and forests of the Wild West), the rules define prescribed, permitted and forbidden actions, and the course of events then depends on the experience, dexterity, skill, competence and luck, and, above all, the interaction of the players. Any aesthetic quality of the performance of a game does not depend on the game's creator or designer, but on the players: whether a game of football is boring or interesting depends not on the game's inventor but on the players on the field, and though their behaviour is bounded by rules, the outcome of the match is (at least most of the time) entirely unpredictable.

Dogma 95 takes the same line with regard to a film. The filmmaker is not the director or the scriptwriter, for their roles are limited to the definition of rules and conditions (the 'story') which together specify the state space (the totality of possible situations). On the basis of these rules and conditions, the actors embark on a collective process in which one of the situations possible within the state space evolves. The filmmaker is no more an artist than a game designer is,[11] and the film is no more an artwork (in the sense of an artefact arising out of the intention of the maker) than a game or a simulation is. Every actualised situation is just one contingent version of the possibilities offered by the matrix, and is not necessarily better, more authentic or more realistic than any other real or potential situations. So, what could virtuality mean to the medium of film, and how can the Vows of Chastity be read as a Manifesto for Cinematographic Simulation?

Complex art: Psykomobile #1: The World Clock

The idea for Dogma 95 arose outside the domain of film,[12] when von Trier, invited in 1994 by the city of Copenhagen to take part in European Cultural Capital 1996, began working with his scriptwriter Niels Vørsel on a 'living art exhibition': *Psykomobile #1: The World Clock*. Fifty-three actors were drafted to portray fifty-three characters, whose traits and mutual relationships were sketched by von Trier and Vørsel. Each actor received only summary details of his or her own character and their relationships to the others, and had to develop a character on the basis of the limited information these details provided (see Schepelern 2003: 62-63). For fifty days these actors lived in nineteen rooms of the Copenhagen Arts Society, which were fitted out as typical spaces: a hospital ward, a girl's room, and so on.

For three hours a day the actors had to improvise, alone or together, on the basis of the characteristics they had been given, and of mood indicators, four

coloured lights that had been installed in their rooms and which were controlled by a computer receiving video signals from cameras trained on an ant colony in New Mexico. Depending on the behaviour of the ant colony, the computer switched these coloured lights on or off, and this gave the actors the cue for the mood they were to bring to their improvisations.

Psykomobile #1 is a simulation of a complex system. The makers limited themselves to sketching the principal social and psychological characteristics of the fifty-three characters and creating an environment in which they could function. The collective behaviour displayed by this group was not foreseen, programmed, written out or directed, but simply arose in the interactions between separate improvisations. The 'input', that is, the stimuli to which this complex system reacted, was not programmed either, but was a series of events triggered by the behaviour of an ant colony.

The choice of an ant colony in New Mexico as a source of input for the actors' colony in Copenhagen is no coincidence: ant colonies are a classic example of a complex system. The remarkably well-co-ordinated behaviour of an ant colony is not the result of a central command system, but emerges out of the behaviours and interactions of individual ants; no single ant knows what is happening beyond its immediate environment (see Johnson 2001: 32). A complex system like an ant colony is more than the sum of its parts, and its behaviour cannot be derived from the characteristics and behaviours of its separate constituent units (see Cilliers 1998).

Just as an ant colony is not directed by its queen, the actors' collective in Copenhagen was not directed by a director and scriptwriter shaping and determining the course of events. The role of von Trier – who to the astonishment of many commentators was actually absent during the performance (see Stevenson 2002: 111; Schepelern 2003: 64) – was limited to that of the *algorist*: He defined the conditions and behavioural rules governing an otherwise uncontrollable process.[13] The outcome of the interactions between the actors, their environment and the ant colony were ultimately contingent and unpredictable. For von Trier the concept of the project was more important than its execution. He says as much in the project's accompanying 'Document III':

> The *World Clock* consists of three documents and its realisation is a reproduction, not the work of art itself! (in Schepelern 2003: 64).

The principles of this project, which according to Jack Stevenson (2002: 110) 'had nothing whatsoever to do with film',[14] were ones that von Trier did, in fact, subsequently transfer to film. In the first place, this meant that the role of the director was limited to the provision of a blueprint sketching characters and situations. The actors – whose lines von Trier wanted them to *unlearn* rather than memorise (Stevenson 2003: 95) – then had to improvise the actual scenes.

The Dogma 95 Manifesto also demanded that the director forgo mise-en-scène, the usual acting directions, and the determination of camera positions, and leave the actors free to interact and improvise as they wished. As Vinterberg makes clear on the Dogma 95 website,

> The 'Dogme' directors' finest duty is to register private moments between persons and not to influence them.

In the same FAQs, von Trier and Vinterberg recommend using handheld cameras for the same reasons:

> The handheld camera follows the actors, which allows them to concentrate on acting with each other, and not acting towards a big monster of a camera.

Thanks to the convenient, portable digital camera, actors can rediscover the freedom of allowing a scene to evolve naturally according to its internal logic, their mutual interactions, and their relationship with the environment. The actors can be filmed in proximity so easily that the distinction between cast and crew falls away, and because more than one camera can be used at the same time, the actors have no idea which one to 'play' to. All attention becomes focused on the action and the acting (see Stevenson 2003: 84; 95-96). In the FAQs, von Trier and Vinterberg explain the ban on including the director's name in the film's credits as follows:

> They are an expression of the directors' wish to recede into the background and thus push other talent into the foreground.

This 'other talent' is 'the story and the actors', the data and the algorithms provided by the filmmaker in order to model the processes in which he or she is interested. The director is no longer a demiurge prescribing a pre-planned and pre-visualised course of actions, but an algorist who provides a model, a few pre-conditions and behavioural rules, and then sits back to see what happens. This was exactly the approach that von Trier had in mind for IDIOTERNE:

> The script, as noted, was not just read and thrown away, but it was never intended to be a script in the traditional sense. In all of von Trier's idealism, it was meant to be just a blueprint, or not even that. It was more like a window frame without any glass and not attached to any wall. One that could be carried around. It was all about being ambushed by the moment… 'Let's just do it', one can almost hear von Trier say, 'Let's just go out and see what happens' (Stevenson 2003: 96).

This algoristic approach explains why the Dogma 95 filmmakers had to swear 'to refrain from personal taste', that they would no longer be 'an artist', and that they would 'refrain from creating a "work", as … the instant is more important than the whole'. Incidentally, the fact that this 'anti-art' stance is part and parcel

of an artistic concept is made explicit in a letter that von Trier sent on 14 August 1995 to the Danish Ministry of Culture, Jytte Hilden. According to the Brethren, Hilden had promised 15 million kroner to support Dogma 95, and when this ended up in the Danish Film Foundation to fund numerous low-budget productions, von Trier pointed out:

> That Dogma films in highest probability can be produced cheaply has nothing to do with the original idea… Dogma 95 is an artistic concept, not an economic concept (in Stevenson 2003: 75).[15]

The film methods advocated by Dogma 95 were not new in themselves: directors such as John Cassavetes and Maurice Pialat had used them before von Trier. But where these directors had striven to represent the situations being depicted in film in as lifelike a way as possible, in Dogma 95 films the scenes are models or simulations, each version of which is simply one contingent variant in a matrix of possibilities defined by the starting point, the character descriptions and the behavioural rules. In the television series RIGET – THE KINGDOM, for which von Trier, in contrast to ELEMENT OF CRIME and EUROPA, used neither storyboards nor rehearsals, scenes were filmed a number of times, while – as was later done with lights in *Psykomobile #1* – the actors were asked to experiment with different moods, expressions, poses, positions and movements (Stevenson 2002: 84).

Like *Psykomobile #1*, the practice of Dogma 95 filmmaking has less in common with film traditions such as neorealism or the Nouvelle Vague than with the performances, happenings and new media art of the 1960s and 1970s. These art movements brought theatre, dance and electronic media together, using electronic equipment to record performances that emerged from the application of a few simple rules in interaction with the public or on the basis of feedback from electronic devices and later computers (see Rush 1999: 36 et seq.). In the 1980s and 1990s, these art forms found their way into computer-based multimedia performances which enabled real-time interaction between the artwork (into which the artist was occasionally incorporated) and the public (see Dinkla 1994). At first sight the linear, fixed character of film made the medium unsuited to the furtherance of this avant-garde artistic experiment, but *Psykomobile #1* seems to have shown von Trier the way. However, it demanded a new approach – and not just to mise-en-scène, but also to the modality of the events being filmed.

In conventional film practice, the requirement of continuity across 'takes' means that the same action has to be reproduced for each 'take' as exactly as possible. Von Trier, by contrast, strives for the greatest possible variation, by changing the conditions ('moods') under which the action is carried out: in other words, by giving the model new input. The modality of each performance

then changes; 'action *x* occurred in this way' becomes 'action *x* occurred in this way under conditions *a*, and in that way under conditions *b*'. Every performance is a simulation, and no single performance can be said to be more original, more authentic, more 'true to life' than another. And those performances that happen to remain virtual are no less real than those which attain actuality.

In Dogma 95 film practice, the status of simulation is given filmic form in the montage. In contrast to conventional continuity editing, this montage is not directed towards suggesting the continuity of a unique sequence of events, but is an attempt to 'dismantle psychological continuity' (Stevenson 2002: 84). In the finished film, the course of a sequence of events is constructed using a montage of takes from the various performances of that sequence, a montage in which the usual concerns of camera position, and continuity and correspondence of action, facial expression, movement or position are irrelevant. The totality of the sequence is created not by additively linking separate elements of a single performance of that sequence, but – in a process which Eisenstein (1981: 271) foresaw: 'unity in plurality' – by combining elements from different, co-existing virtual variants, thereby allowing a mental image to arise from the 'matrix' from which these variants were drawn. This form of montage, which may perhaps best be defined as a form of 'distributed montage', will be described in more detail in chapter 4. For now we can observe that continuity editing has been replaced by *sampling*, and film as the registration of reality has given way to film as an exploration of virtuality. This, then, is the matrix revolution of Dogma 95.

'There is something digital in the state of Denmark'

An analysis of the Dogma 95 Manifesto from the perspective of the 'simulation' and the 'game' yields a more coherent discourse than does an approach from the perspective of classical, predominantly Bazinian film theory, or that of realistic film aesthetics. The cinematographic-simulation approach also clarifies a number of other aspects of the Dogma 95 Manifesto, such as its fierce anti-individualism and its rejection of film as 'art' – aspects which have long resisted explication from a conventional standpoint, or which were simply dismissed as the vagaries of a wayward *enfant provocateur*. It also becomes clear why the founders of Dogma 95 held that the modernistic 'new waves' of the 1960s could not take the crucial step towards a genuine renewal of film: for they remained imprisoned in the classical, conventional view of film as the representation of a unique sequence of actions and events, and they continued to approach film-

making from the traditional perspective of a pre-conceived, pre-determined and, therefore, entirely predictable dramatic exercise in 'filling in the blanks'.

The cinematographic-simulation approach to the Dogma 95 Manifesto makes it possible to place its theoretical analysis within the context of the analysis of contemporary 'visual digital culture' (Darley 2000). This makes it possible to regard the Dogma 95 Manifesto not as a checklist by which it can be decided whether or not a film deserves a Dogma certificate, but as the manifestation of an entirely new conceptualisation of film and filmmaking. This new conceptualisation was already being worked on in von Trier's pre-Dogma films and projects, and was developed further in the films that followed IDIOTERNE. The Dogma films do not, therefore, represent an incidental break with the films that von Trier in particular, made before and after the launch of the Dogma 95 Manifesto. Rather, the launch of the Dogma 95 movement was an event that arose from his practice as a filmmaker, and which went on to affect his later films.

The cinematographic-simulation approach also demonstrates that the theory and practice of contemporary film has not been unaffected by the profound shifts that have accompanied the arrival of the 'new media'. Dogma 95 has shown that the *remediation* of film (Bolter and Grusin 1999) has not limited itself to the blockbusters, digitally manipulated and groaning with special effects, which have swamped the world via Hollywood, but is changing the furthest-flung corners of film culture, in the profoundest way. Dogma 95 is certainly not a barricade thrown up against the globalisation of contemporary film culture (Hjorst 2003), but rather an attempt to translate the conceptual and artistic implications of the changes occurring on a global scale in the contemporary culture of 'real virtuality' into a new concept of film.

Realism-oriented interpretations of Dogma 95 have shown how a theoretical paradigm can blind its practitioners to the changes that extend beyond the domain of that paradigm, and how far they will go to accept and even maintain the anomalies that arise in the confrontation between this paradigm and new phenomena (see Kuhn 1962). Dogma 95 is much more than a protectionist strategy designed to defend the cinemas of smaller nations like Denmark against global film culture. Dogma 95 has indeed confirmed that 'there is something digital (even) in the state of Denmark'.

Film is no longer the 'old medium' that classical film theorists wanted to emancipate, to raise to the status of an independent 'seventh art', later to be honoured with its own academic domain. The cinematographic-simulation perspective shows that film is not an 'old medium as new medium' (Manovich 2002a), nor, indeed, a 'new medium as old medium' (Simons 2002), but – and despite appearances to the contrary – a new medium, bringing forth correspondingly new practices and new forms. That is, if the cinematographic-simulation perspective succeeds in throwing a new and more useful light on the

films of Dogma 95 than has been cast thus far by traditional film aesthetics. Well, as von Trier says: 'Let's just do it and see what happens.'

3 Filming the Game

I have never had any desire to make films which
are about reality. My films are very 'film'.
Lars von Trier[1]

The rules of the game

If the Dogma 95 Manifesto is regarded not as a parody but more literally as a game, it acquires more coherence and meaningfulness than classical and modern film theory have thus far been able to give it. The game of Dogma 95 operates at all levels and comprises all four game categories – *agôn* (competition), *mimicri* (simulation), *alea* (chance) en *ilinx* (vertigo) – distinguished by the game theorist Roger Caillois (1977):[2]

– The Manifesto itself, its presentation in Paris in 1995, its rhetoric and tone, and the Vow of Chastity's ten commandments are a parodic form of *mimicri*, the game pattern in which the player imitates another person, an animal or another real or imaginary being. The Manifesto clearly mimics the political and artistic avant-garde manifestos of the 19th and 20th centuries.

– By formulating a number of game rules for filmmaking, Dogma 95 reveals the contingent and conventional character of existing film practices. By setting these rules up against those of conventional filmmaking, Dogma 95 transforms existing film culture into an *agôn*, an arena or theatre of war in which different approaches to filmmaking compete one against the other.

– Because its own game rules are no less contingent and artificial than those of any other practice, Dogma 95 defines, at a general *meta-level*, the practice of filmmaking itself as the formulation and observance of game rules. Dogma 95's own rules do not articulate a deontology arising from an ontological concept of 'what film is', but simply emphasise the 'playful' character of film practice. They serve as a therapeutic means by which to dispel the 'mental mist' (Wittgenstein) that obscures the ludic character of filmmaking, and to shock filmmakers out of their lethargy with a vertiginous experience: *ilinx*.

– The rules set out to replace the dramatic and stylistic pre-conception of a film with the events and developments that arise out of chance, improvisation and interaction between actors, environment and initial conditions formu-

lated by the storyline. The predictability of conventional filmmaking gives
way to *alea* or chance.

– This approach changes the status of a scene. No longer is it the most accurate
possible representation of a unique series of events; it becomes rather the
filmed actualisation of a model (a 'state' taken from the 'state space' pro-
vided by the model). The scene is a simulation which in principle has the
same status as any other actualised or virtual situation made possible by the
model. Neither can the conventional distinction be drawn between an 'exam-
ple' and a 'representation', because the 'example' itself is also a 'state' in the
'state space'.

These game categories and characteristics encompass levels ranging from the
abstract meta-level of film in general to the most concrete micro-level of the
practice of filmmaking on set. The Dogma 95 Manifesto, however, does not
give its 'game' away, it specifies no 'game rules', and it certainly makes no ex-
plicit distinction between the different levels on which the rules operate. The
Manifesto and the Vow of Chastity do not embody a theoretical treatment of
'the nature of film', but are a playful form of mimicry. Their strongly empha-
sised polemical tone has obscured their playful nature for many critics, who
have seen mostly contradictions and absurdities.

Another source of misunderstandings was pointed out in the previous chap-
ter: where current film practices, theories, aesthetics and criticisms use the fin-
ished product as their starting point, the Dogma 95 Manifesto adopts the radical
standpoint of viewing the film as an indeterminable work-in-progress. This has
two consequences.

Firstly, Dogma 95's meta-level criticism of mainstream and modernist film
seems general, vague, indefinable and even erroneous (see Gaut 2003; MacKen-
zie 2003). It becomes coherent and useful only when it is understood that it is
directed at the level of filmmaking practice. By defining filmmaking as a contin-
gent, ludic practice, Dogma 95 also denaturalises, at the meta-level, the classical
and modern film as practices based on contingent and arbitrary conventions.

Secondly, the Dogma 95 Manifesto lacks the middle level of the finished film,
in the form of a positively formulated film aesthetic expressed in terms of fa-
voured stylistic figures or content. This second point follows logically from the
first: the most important hallmark of the Manifesto rules is their insistence on a
literal *tabula rasa* at the level of film practice and an end to the *a priori post festum*
approach to filmmaking, with its pre-conceived dramaturgy prescribed by aes-
thetics, convention, genres and trends. The Manifesto rules define no more than
the playing field and the means available to the filmmaker as a player of the
Dogma 95 game.[3]

A distinction must therefore be drawn between, on the one hand, the meta-level on which Dogma 95 defines filmmaking as a practice with contingent and exchangeable game rules and filmmaking itself as the formulation and observance of such rules, and on the other hand, the specific collection of rules which the Dogma 95 filmmakers defined for themselves. This distinction turns the popular pursuit of unearthing and making public any transgressions of the Manifesto rules (an activity that has been only encouraged by the practice of issuing Dogma 95 certificates and the Brethren's obligation to own up to any such lapses) into a rather subordinate and somewhat futile exercise. At the meta-level Dogma 95 is not concerned with the specific rules themselves, and at the filmmaking level these rules are arbitrary anyway. The Dogma 95 film-makers saw the business of 'owning up' as an ironic part of the Dogma 95 game, as became clear when the Brethren decided to stop assessing submitted films themselves, but to award a Dogma certificate to any film whose maker was of the opinion that one was warranted.

Seeing film as a simulation forms an important part of this approach. While the Manifesto rejects predictability and dramaturgy, genre films and superficial action, it does not explicitly prescribe improvisation as a working method. This is merely recommended because it works well in combination with the light-weight handy-cam:

> No, Dogma 95 films don't have to be improvised. But improvisation has been an inspiration for almost every Dogma director because it fits so perfectly with the freedom of the handheld camera (von Trier and Vinterberg 1995b).

The Manifesto has nothing explicit to say on issues of representation and simulation; seeing film as simulation is a characteristic of Dogma 95 which emerges from the combination of the film-as-game approach and a special interpretation of the Dogma 95 rules. This combination appears *de facto* only in the Dogma and post-Dogma films of von Trier (and to a lesser degree in Vinterberg's Festen). Von Trier is the undisputed initiator of Dogma 95,[4] and the Manifesto itself is one of a series of 'manifestos' which von Trier had also written in connection with earlier films. Lastly, to a very considerable extent the Dogma 95 Manifesto can also be seen as the codification of von Trier's experiences during the production of the television series Riget – The Kingdom (Dk/Fr/BRD/Sw 1994) (Schepelern 2003: 59-60) and the project *Psykomobile #1* (see chapter 2).

Moreover, no member of the Brethren was more in need of an 'unplugged filmmaking' detoxification than von Trier. Vinterberg, who before Festen had made a teen film, The Boy Who Walked Backwards (Dk 1994) and a road movie, The Greatest Heroes (Dk 1996) was barely qualified to be a member of the professional filmmaking cadre towards which the Manifesto was directed. The same applied to Kristian Levring, whose low-budget film A Shot

FROM THE HEART (Dk 1986) had been a commercial and critical flop and who was making ends meet by shooting commercials and editing documentaries and feature films. Levring was entirely unknown as a feature film director until he was given the chance in 1999 to make the Dogma #4 film, THE KING IS ALIVE (see Stevenson 2003: 113).

Apart from von Trier, only Søren Kragh-Jacobsen can justifiably be called an experienced filmmaker. After making his debut in 1978 with the teen film WAN-NA SEE MY BEAUTIFUL NAVEL? (Dk), he made his name with a series of these kinds of films. Incidentally, the most successful of these, RUBBER TARZAN (Dk 1981), was criticised by von Trier in the Danish newspaper *Politiken* (23 November 1982) as being one of those Danish films that tell innocent stories in an innocent style (see Stevenson 2003: 107). Kragh-Jacobsen, a composer and singer who had had a big hit in 1975 with *Kender Du Det?*, the refrain of which is still engraved in the memories of many Danes, joined Dogma 95 when he was putting the finishing touches on THE ISLAND ON BIRD STREET (Dk 1997), a complex international co-production that had almost persuaded him to abandon filmmaking for good. As the Dogma historian Jack Stevenson (2003: 108) noted, 'At that point in time the simplicity of Dogma was just what the doctor ordered'. Of all the Brethren, Kragh-Jacobsen had the most reservations about the Manifesto rules.

The Dogma 95 Manifesto can be attributed principally to Lars von Trier, and with this in mind we should not be surprised that its most radical implications can be found in his own film practice. If the common denominator in the four Brethren's Dogma films is the approach to film as a game, then the notion of film as simulation, apart from in von Trier's films, appears only sporadically in Vinterberg's FESTEN.

The game of filming, and films about games

The first four Dogma films, one by each of the Brethren, do at least have the 'game' theme in common (Gaut 2003: 93). Since the first four Dogma films follow the Dogma 95 Manifesto rules, they can be seen as manifestations of the Dogma 'game of filmmaking'. FESTEN shows us a family party, one largely governed by conventions and traditions, to celebrate the 60th birthday of the *pater familias* (played by Henning Moritzen). The party is, however, seriously disrupted by the oldest son Christian's (played by Ulrich Thomsen) revelations about his father's sexual abuse of his sister and himself. The illusion of a happy, harmonious family is rudely shattered by these disclosures, which appear only after Christian – egged on by an old school friend, now the chef of the hotel –

manages to summon the nerve to make them in public. The form and the content of the film reflect this conflict: the structure and realisation of the story follows a classical Aristotelian model (see Lauridson 2000), but the style of the film is that of the anything-but-classical home movie in which the camera mercilessly records the protagonists' shortcomings (whence the popularity of such television programmes as AMERICA'S FUNNIEST HOME VIDEOS).[5] It does not require much interpretative invention to see in FESTEN an allegory of Dogma 95 itself:[6] invited to film's centenary birthday party, the youngest scion of film history disrupts the festivities with unconventional films that want to 'force the truth out of characters and settings'.

Von Trier's Dogma film IDIOTERNE lends itself well to the same allegorical interpretation (see Gaut 2003: 97; Christensen 2000a). It concerns a group of well-educated, middle-class people who withdraw to a vacated villa and provoke the neighbourhood with their 'spassing': they play the fool, embarrassing the unsuspecting locals. The style of IDIOTERNE itself has been called a sort of spassing because von Trier, 'one of the most accomplished filmmakers of his generation', pretends he is an idiot who knows nothing about filmmaking:

> Spassing is the activity of an intelligent person pretending to be an idiot; so the conclusion is inescapable: Von Trier is spassing. And he is spassing by employing the Dogma rules, which, given their eschewal of several basic cinematic techniques and practices, can easily be employed so as to appear incompetent (Gaut 2003: 94).

MIFUNES SIDSTE SANG (MIFUNE) and THE KING IS ALIVE, despite being more conventional films, can also be given a similar allegorical interpretation.[7] MIFUNE shares with IDIOTERNE the theme of the idiot who openly expresses the fears and insecurities that 'normal adults' hide behind social conventions. The film's central character, the mentally handicapped teenager Rud (played by Jesper Asholt), creates his own universe out of comic figures and science fiction stories about invaders whose spacecrafts leave mysterious crop circles in the wheat fields. The mythologising effect of science-fiction and similar special-effects films in a society whose local traditions and cultural identities are being wrenched out of joint by the speed of technological innovation can hardly have been better illustrated than by the character of Rud, living as he does in a remote and isolated corner of rural Denmark.

Like FESTEN, MIFUNE has a character – in this case Rud – who lays bare the role-playing with which the film's other characters hold their ground in a modern urban society. His oldest brother Kersten (played by Anders W. Berthelsen) has exchanged Rud's bucolic Denmark for the buzz of its capital city Copenhagen, where he marries his boss's daughter Claire (played by Sophie Gråbøl). He conceals his humble origins from his worldly, stylish wife and his in-laws by pretending he is an orphan. However, his father's death obliges him to return

to the family home and make arrangements for Rud. He places an advertisement for household help which is answered by Livia (played by Iben Hjejle), who also works as a prostitute in order to provide for her younger brother Bjarke (played by Emil Tarding). All the characters except Rud are playing a role of some kind: Kersen plays the rootless yuppie, Livia the whore (the archetypal role of the woman who pretends to derive enjoyment from men's lusts), and she adopts yet another role when at the brothers' farm.

Kersten's starring moment comes when, with a pan and leather gloves on his head, he does an imitation for his brother of the 'last Japanese samurai', the actor Toshiro Mifune (whose name also pops up in The Matrix Revolutions), made famous by the films of Akira Kurosawa, when Livia unexpectedly appears in the house. Incidentally, this Mifune imitation is also a masterly example of Dogma acting since Kersten is making use only of locally found props. Kersten and Livia finally succeed in abandoning their roles as boss and housekeeper when, with childlike playfulness, they express their mutual feelings for each other by painting white paint on each other instead of the farm walls:

> The film seems to be asserting that play is essential to identity, and that a return to childhood is necessary to the character's emotional recovery (Conrich and Tincknell 2000).

Whether Mifune does indeed manifest the 'central underlying humanism' that Conrich and Tincknell also claim to see in the Dogma films is open to question. All things considered, Livia also seeks solace in her role as a prostitute when she discovers that the obscene caller from whom she has fled to the country is none other than her own brother, and she is all but raped by Kersten's childhood friends when they discover her professional identity. When Kersten is punished in turn by Livia's (ex-?) colleagues and girlfriends for his suspected rape of Livia, Mifune would seem to have changed into a *comedie d'erreurs* in which the characters' 'real identities' are seen as a mask and their adopted identities as the real thing. More than an emotional recovery brought about by the rediscovery of childhood, Mifune shows us the inescapability of role-playing, with all its positive and negative aspects.

The film also pokes some fun at Dogma 95 itself. When Livia surprises Kersten in the middle of his Mifune act, she looks as if she thought she was dealing with one of von Trier's film 'idiots'. But the self-mockery reaches its high point at the end of the film, when the 'idiot' Rud films Kersten and Livia with a digital video camera as they dance and kiss to the music of a live orchestra playing in the room. This is the literal embodiment of Rule 2 of the Manifesto, 'the music must never be produced apart from the images and vice versa'. But when Bjarke implores Rud to stop filming 'before it becomes pornography', the suspicion arises that the 'idiot' Rud is standing in for von Trier, the maker of Idioterne,

and that at the end of his film, Kragh-Jacobsen is perhaps saying his goodbyes to the very movement he had helped establish.

Kristian Levring's THE KING IS ALIVE can also be seen as an allegory for Dogma 95. In this film, too, 'play' – in the sense of acting and role-playing – is the central issue. An assortment of tourists in a bus are stranded in an old mine in the middle of the Namibian desert because their driver (played by Vusi Kunene) in his navigations had used a defective compass. To withstand the heat, the desolation, and not least of all the sexuality and aggression that arise in this remote place, so far from civilisation, the group begins rehearsals for a DIY version of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, on the initiative of the group's intellectual Henry (played by David Bradley).

THE KING IS ALIVE allows us to see Dogma 95 *in actu*, as it were. With no décor and no costumes, in the natural light of the sun's glare, and with no recourse to the technical resources of the theatre, the amateur actors study their roles; Henry writes everybody's lines out by hand, from memory. And the choice of *King Lear* could well have been made with Dogma 95 in mind. The piece concerns a king who wishes to step down, and who decides to divide his realm and riches between his three daughters, according to the degree to which they shower him with praise and love. Might King Lear, then, not be the centenarian world of cinema, dividing its estate between successful commercial cinema, respected art cinema, and Dogma 95 as Cordelia, the abandoned and only truthful daughter, who is left empty-handed and is finally killed? In the film, Henry writes Cordelia's lines on the back of a manuscript entitled *Space Killers*, the scenario for a science fiction film he was reviewing for his employers in Los Angeles: Dogma 95 as the 'reverse' of the cosmeticised film of illusion, perhaps? Might the roles that Henry writes out separately for each of his players (in a back-to-basics effort that harks back to the pre-typewriter days and embodies the minimalistic, unplugged spirit of Dogma 95) also be the theatrical equivalent of the film roles that von Trier and Vørsel drew up for the actors in *Psykomobile #1* (see chapter 2)?

References to the Manifesto rules, not entirely devoid of self-mockery, also abound. Jack (played by Miles Anderson), the self-appointed leader of the group, and according to Kristian Levring 'a joke' (Kelly 2000: 214), provides five rules for surviving in the desert: 'collect water, stock food, find shelter, stay visible, and keep your spirits up'. Of course, these rules are self-evident, banal to the point of meaninglessness. At the end of the film we learn that Jack, in whom the group has invested its hope and who has gone to seek help at an outlying village, has lost his way in the desert, not far from the camp, and is dead. Is Jack in THE KING IS ALIVE, like Rud in MIFUNE, a reference to the self-appointed leader of Dogma 95, Lars von Trier? The bus driver responsible for the group's predicament is called Moses, the prophet who gave his people ten

commandments and led them around the desert for forty years. So the links between the ten commandments and the Vow of Chastity, and between Moses and von Trier, were made long before von Trier's own Dogville.

And then, of course, we have Charles (played by David Calder), who only takes part in the rehearsals in exchange for sex with the American Gina (the Hollywood-born Jennifer Jason Leigh), who is competing with the *française* Catherine (played by Romane Bohringer) for the role of Cordelia. Might Charles, who misuses the situation in order to satisfy his lusts, be the evil genius von Trier, using Dogma 95 to satisfy his own lust for fame, and making European art films as a springboard to reach the heights of the Hollywood director? It is somewhat remarkable that all the characters that *might* refer to Dogma 95 and its leading light are either idiots (Jack), stupid (Moses), or cynical and egocentric (Charles), and that all of them except Moses, including Gina/Cordelia, end up dead.

The titular king who stays alive is undoubtedly Henry. He scrapes together a living reviewing scripts for Hollywood, but he is the one who, in the middle of the barren desert, actually does something to 'keep everyone's spirits up' by giving the group a classical theatre play to learn. He partly imitates Dogma 95 practice in that there are no props, artificial light or costumes, and he writes out separate scripts for each actor to play, but at the same time he can count on each actor knowing the story in its entirety, and he directs his rehearsals in the conventional way. Although the *King Lear* rehearsals in The King is Alive follow the Dogma 95 rules in many ways, Henry's working practices end up departing from them, just as Levring's film follows the Dogma 95 rules to the letter but pokes fun at them at the same time.

Still, The King Is Alive shares with Idioterne and Mifune a central concern for the game rather than the results. 'Spassing' is a continuous game with no real end, and one which does not need an audience. Kersten does his Mifune act just to find some inner peace (at the beginning of the film he stands on the roof of his Copenhagen house imitating samurai movements). Meanwhile, the group in the Gobi Desert doesn't ever get to the point of actually performing *King Lear*. There are no final, definitive versions of 'spassing' or Mifune impressions, and the version of *King Lear* that the tourists would have performed in the desert is entirely dependent on the contingent, unstable circumstances in which the group was operating. Which bits of text was Henry going to remember? What types of casting did the group make possible? Who was up to playing the roles? And even more importantly, who was going to survive? So the films all focus on contingent processes in which the *state space* of a model defined by circumstances and initial rules ('spass as much as you can', 'give a convincing imitation of Mifune', 'put on a play') is explored. This applies in particular to the state space defined for an actor by his or her role. Dogma 95 is no humanist

quest for an unadulterated, authentic identity, but an exploration of the tension between an actor's character and his role. Von Trier has made this tension the subject of his films, as many non-professional actors such as Björk will readily attest.

The four Dogma films demonstrate, to varying degrees, that Dogma 95 is not, in principle, opposed to stories or even to genre pieces. All four films tell a story, ones which might have lent themselves just as well to a classical or art cinema narrative style. It is not for nothing that FESTEN has been called 'a classical drama in docu-soap style' (Lauridsen 2000). Levring calls MIFUNE a 'classic love story' which he had originally envisaged as 'a summer film for the whole family', and THE KING IS ALIVE would have done well in the art-house circuit with or without Dogma 95 (although it is open to question whether Levring could have attracted a cast of reasonably well-known American, British and French actors without the benefit of Dogma's fame).[8]

As is demonstrated in THE KING IS ALIVE, a story is not conceived as a series of events that has to be shown as clearly and as fully as possible, but as a collection of data (characters and locations) and algorithms (the 'roles' or actions) which together define a field of possibilities (a matrix or state space). Filmmaking, to Dogma 95, is about stripping a story of all its 'colouring' (as is Shakespeare's *King Lear* in THE KING IS ALIVE) and, using a model that adopts only the story's most elementary characteristics (characters, actions), exploring the state space that the model defines.[9] Since in a film or a play these elementary data are embodied by the actors and settings, and the algorithms are formed by the events of the story, the playing field of film and theatre is determined by the interaction and feedback loops, put into action under continually changing conditions, which arise between the actors and the roles and between the 'system' and its environment. And because the film camera takes on the function of a sensor recording the process, the model whose behaviour is being recorded begins to closely resemble theatre. In this respect, DOGVILLE, for instance, does not break from Dogma 95, but is its logical extension (see chapter 4), just as Dogma 95 itself was inspired by the 'living theatre' project *Psykomobile #1*.

Like FESTEN and IDIOTERNE, MIFUNE and THE KING IS ALIVE observe the letter of Dogma rules; but unlike FESTEN and IDIOTERNE, they also take an ironic distance from them. The Dogma films of Kragh-Jacobsen and Levring follow a minimalist interpretation of the Manifesto, and observe the ban on using the 'grab-bag of slick tricks' (props, artificial lighting, separately recorded sound, etc.) available to conventional film practice. But their films are first and foremost films *about* roles, acting and playing, rather than films which make use of the Dogma rules in order to play a game with film styles themselves. In both these films the game of filmmaking is played at the film production level, or at the allegorical level, but it does not find expression in the form of a film.

For instance, the various selections from the state space of the Mifune act or of scenes taken from *King Lear* are sequential; that is, they are shown as discrete performances given one after the other (the various rehearsal scenes, for instance), and in the same order as they appear in the *fabula* of these films. In contrast to Festen and Idioterne, therefore, these films adhere to the conventional approach to a scene as the representation of a unique series of events. The makers of Mifune and The King Is Alive have admitted in interviews that they used the Dogma rules within the framework of conventional film practices: Kragh-Jacobsen used them to give his film a '1969 Polish film' look (Kelly 2000: 158), and Levring used them to strip a classical theatre play down to its unadorned core. For the most rigorous interpretation of the Dogma 95 Manifesto and the rules of the Vow of Chastity, in the form of an approach to film as a game and a simulation, we must turn to the work of its spiritual father and most consistent pioneer, Lars von Trier.

Idioterne (1)

Spassing: Agitation or simulation?

Idioterne, Lars von Trier's contribution to the quartet of Dogma films made by the Brethren themselves, has been called 'the ultimate Dogma film' (Schepelern 2003: 65). Peter Schepelern suggests that Idioterne 'not only uses but is *about* the Dogma rules':

> Only in The Idiots is the following of technical and aesthetic rules matched by a story about rules and the observance of rules, about the courage to pass a challenging test. Does the teacher dare to 'spass' in front of his art class? Does the returned wife dare to 'spass' in front of her family? Does von Trier dare to spass with his film language? (Ibid: 65-66).

Berys Gaut (2003: 94) also sees a parallel between the Dogma Manifesto and Idioterne. In his view, the 'apparent director'[10] of the film is 'spectacularly incompetent and deeply ignorant of filmmaking', and because Lars von Trier is known to be one of the most technically proficient directors of his generation, he comes to the conclusion that 'von Trier is spassing':

> And he is spassing by employing the Dogma rules, which, given their eschewal of several basic cinematic techniques and practices, can easily be employed so as to appear incompetent (ibid.).

Gaut describes IDIOTERNE as 'a kind of documentary of its own genesis' (ibid.: 95), and the film does indeed invite this sort of interpretation.

It is, after all, about a group of socially successful, well-educated young adults who move into a large empty house, using it as a home base from which to 'spass about', that is, to act like spastics or idiots, in public and semi-public spaces. The self-appointed leader of the group Stoffer (played by Jens Albinus) explains to newcomer Karen (played by Bodil Jørgensen) that they do this to discover their 'inner idiot'. There is a parallel with Dogma 95 here, for the Manifesto was intended as

> a welcome shift in focus for professionals who, through Dogme, could forget the heavy load of the modern film production machinery for a while and instead develop and exercise their creativity (von Trier and Vinterberg 1995b).

The Manifesto rules demand that the filmmaker cast off the burdens of conventional film practice and re-invent filmmaking, as it were, from the ground up. To follow the rules of the Vow of Chastity can then easily be seen as the cinematographic equivalent of the Rousseau-like return to 'a kind of natural origin' (Schepelern 2003: 66) which the group of 'spassers' in IDIOTERNE desire.

It is tempting to see the 'spassers' as the fictional representatives of Dogma filmmakers, and to see their self-appointed leader Stoffer, who claims to have invented spassing, as their von Trier. The problem with this kind of allegorical interpretation is not that it might be incorrect; allegorical interpretations are generally difficult to dismiss because it is always possible to draw an analogy with one phenomenon or another (see Bordwell 1989: 120; Eco 1992). The problem is rather that they run the risk of failing to notice the playful, parodic character of a film, in the same way that literal interpretations of the Dogma Manifesto and Vow of Chastity have done (see chapter 2). Gaut (2003: 93-94), for instance, finds the search for the 'inner idiot' as a motive for spassing particularly unconvincing because he detects nothing in the behaviour of the characters which would indicate that they actually believe in it. He may well be right, but he goes on to reject these reasons, 'with their pop-psychological, sub-Nietzschean resonances', with the same solemnity as that with which he rejects, on theoretical grounds, the inadequate motivation of the Dogma Manifesto rules (ibid.: 100). Schepelern (2003: 66) draws the same parallel:

> The idiot group tries to return to an original state of being and to realise an inner idiot (seemingly related to the inner child), just as von Trier is on the track of an original film art [form]. … A symptomatic expression of this theme occurs when the film examines and oversteps conventional barriers of nudity and sex as a test of the overstepping of conventional bourgeois norms, which in turn is matched by the overstepping of a film-aesthetic consensus.

These interpretations fail to see that IDIOTERNE is saturated with the same irony and parody as is the Dogma 95 Manifesto. Just as the Dogma 95 Manifesto is a parody of the modernist manifesto, the spassers in IDIOTERNE are a parody of the communes and squatters of the 1960s and 1970s – of which Christiana in Copenhagen was one of the most famous in the world. The scene in which Stoffer, the most politically motivated character in the film, shouts 'fascist!' as he runs after a council official, undressing as he goes, suggests at the very least that the political activist of old has turned into a pitiable idiot. Again, we see history repeating itself – but as farce.

Only newcomer Karen seems to take the search for the 'inner idiot' seriously, but when, at the end of the film, she is the only one of the group who spasses at home, amongst her family, she is gently led away by another group member Susanne (played by Anne Louise Hassing). For Karen, for whom spassing seemed to promise 'a way of revealing the truth about her and their situation' (Gaut 2003: 94), her liberation leaves her exactly where she was before she met the spassers: cast out of her home. Like Dogma, spassing is not a game for naïve beginners.

Group antics of this kind in public or semi-public places might be seen as a parody of the 'concrete actions' carried out by the *Situationiste Internationale* (the anarchistic movement established by Guy Debord in 1957 and seeded the Paris revolts of 1968), or as an anachronistic replay of the performance art and street theatre of the same period (see Rush 1999). But there are important differences, too. The Situationists and the other 1960s activists were professional agitators for whom 'the movement' was nothing less than a way of life; the spassers in IDIOTERNE, however, are 'Sunday idiots' taking a brief holiday from jobs and families – and unwilling to actually risk their jobs and families by spassing when Stoffer challenges them to do so. Compared with the social and political engagement of the alternative movements of the 1960s, the spassers look particularly non-committal. Even the villa that serves as the home base for their spassing sorties has not been squatted or otherwise appropriated from its bourgeois owner, but becomes available because Stoffer is looking after it for his uncle until it is sold. The time-honoured claim made of the 1960s protesters, that most of them were the spoiled sons and daughters of the moneyed classes, makes of Stoffer practically a caricature.

Still, perhaps the most significant difference is that while the Situationists directed their actions against the *société du spectacle* (Debord 1996), and other comparable movements were set against the 'consumer society' or the 'bourgeoisie', the spassing in IDIOTERNE had no other aim than the amusement of the group members themselves. In this respect, the idiots' spassing reflects the distinction between formal experiment and ideology that is laid down in the Dogma 95 Manifesto (see chapter 2). Dogma 95 has no ideological or aesthetic message to

impart to the world in general and the film community in particular, and is not concerned with the film-going public, but directs itself towards filmmakers, who – like the spassers in IDIOTERNE – are asked to break out of their daily professional routines in order to rediscover themselves. Like the street theatre and performance artists of the 1960s and 70s, the spassers seek out members of the public with which to interact, but this time the public has no idea that it is taking part in a piece of theatre and no idea that it is being ridiculed. The benefits of spassing are for the spassers alone, just as a Dogma 95 film need not be distinguishable from a conventional film as far as its audience is concerned: the Dogma 95 'cure' is intended for the filmmaker, not for the film viewer.

Not coincidentally, the spassing in IDIOTERNE reaches a climax in a scene in which the group spasses itself into a collective orgy. The 'inner idiot' is exposed – literally – as a collection of desires that are ordinarily suppressed. Once this 'truth' has been 'forced out of the actors and settings' of IDIOTERNE, the group quickly begins to fall apart, much as the political movements of the 1960s fell apart after personal subjectivity – 'the personal is political' – became its focus. The group sex scene is therefore the climax of the film – under Stoffer's leadership the group, as it were, 'fucks itself'[11] – but it is also its turning point. Josephine, who first dares to admit her feelings towards Jeppe during this party, but who could only do it under cover of spassing, is collected by her father the next day and taken back to respectable, bourgeois society. The orgy therefore heralds the reinstatement of the patriarchal order and the return of normality. The group members come to their senses, as it were, and discover, as one of them expressed in an interview, 'that you have to look at one another in the eyes afterwards, and that you can't just go on making fools of other people'.

The group is actually uninterested in a Rousseau-like quest for the 'inner idiot', as is shown by their unease when a group of genuinely mentally handicapped people unexpectedly appear at the villa. Stoffer actually walks out in annoyance and dismisses the whole reception as 'sentimentalism'. Clearly, the group has no interest in making a closer acquaintance with the inner world of real 'idiots'. The point of spassing was not to use method acting as a way of imagining oneself into an idiot's world; neither was it to behave as idiots in public spaces as a way of demanding that marginalized people such as these be given a place in society. The spassers adopted only the outward, visible characteristics of the mentally handicapped, in order to create the impression amongst unsuspecting members of the public and passers-by that that was indeed who they were. When they evaluate each other's spassing performances in group discussions they talk only of the most convincing performance, and not of any progress they might be making towards encountering the 'inner idiot' within themselves. Spassing has little or nothing to do with *identification* or *representation*, two terms with a central role not only in modern political ideology but also

in practically all classical and modern film aesthetics theories. Spassing is a purely formal activity directed towards an external effect; it is a form of mimicry, and a competitive one at that, with the spassers continually assessing each others' performances.

IDIOTERNE's spassers are to movements like the International Situationists or the Amsterdam Provos of the 1960s what Dogma 95 is to modernist artistic and political movements: no more or less than their *simulacra*. Not only do the spassers, like Dogma 95, confirm Marx's aphorism about history repeating itself, but as simulacra they also rewrite 'histories' in the sense that they manifest them as actualisations of the same pattern. Just as Dogma 95, by expressing its own film practice as a state within the state space of the game of filmmaking, simultaneously defines *all* film practices as possible states within this state space, Dogma 95 (and its cinematographic actualisation in the form of the spassers) *retrospectively* strip the movements they parody of their ideological baggage and political intentions, and shift attention to the formal aspects of these movements – which can then be seen anew as special instances of a formal pattern. The spassers redefine their precursors, such as the Situationists and the Provos, as 'idiots', and reassess their activities from within a new context: no longer the solemn drama of history, but the merriment of the game. Seen like this, IDIOTERNE, like Dogma 95 itself, is a proposal for a *gaya scientia* of (film) history.

It is not for nothing that the Dogma 95 Manifesto calls the 1960s new wave 'a ripple that washed ashore'. Of course, this sentence could be interpreted as a disparaging insinuation that the new wave was ultimately no more than a wavelet. But a ripple is never alone; it always comes in association with other, similar ripples. First and foremost these are all 'pure' movements, in the sense that the water over which they move does not itself travel; but they are also clearly manifestations of the same dynamic pattern – even though no ripple is identical to another, and the pattern itself cannot be identified on the basis of any single ripple or some posited 'average' of the form of these ripples.

The pattern is a *virtuality* that specifies a *state space* of which the ripples are a number of possible actualisations. No single ripple can be said to be a better, more original or more proper representation of this pattern than any other. In fact the ripples are not 'representations' of the pattern at all, because the pattern itself does not exist except by virtue of its actualisations. Conversely, the pattern is nevertheless 'real' because it exerts an effect upon its actualisations which confers a discernible degree of stability (see Delanda 2002: 32).[12]

In this reading of the Manifesto, the description of the Nouvelle Vague and other new wave movements as a 'ripple' is not so much a denigration as a qualification of the weight of such movements and, by implication, of Dogma 95 itself. In this metaphor, Dogma 95 is just another ripple that washes ashore and is dissipated. A more important implication, however, is that Dogma 95 places

the manifestos of all such movements, including its own, within the domain of human activities that are by definition the actualisations of a virtual pattern: games.

Spassing as a game

If IDIOTERNE is the cinematographic equivalent of the Dogma Manifesto, then spassing should be regarded in the same light as the rules of the Vow of Chastity. As Schepelern (2003: 65) and Gaut (2003: 95) have both pointed out, IDIO-TERNE not only follows the Dogma rules but is also *about* them.

I have already noted that from the meta-level perspective, the specific nature of the ten rules is less important than the definition of filmmaking practice as a game. The Vow of Chastity's ten commandments simply represent one possible, contingent and commutable interpretation of filmmaking as a game, just as football and chess are both at a meta-level representatives of an *agôn* between two parties while having no other characteristics in common (they are linked by family resemblances, not by any set of shared essential characteristics – see Wittgenstein 1965). The film practice proposed by Dogma 95 has little in common with contemporary Hollywood practice, but at the meta-level both can be seen as specific interpretations of the game of filmmaking. And once filmmaking is defined as a game, common ground exists on which one 'game strategy' can compete against another (see chapter 2).

At the micro-level of concrete film practice, the Manifesto also formulates no intrinsic values or convictions as being the motivation underlying the specific rules of the Vow of Chastity. The Manifesto formulates only the rules – or rather, the prohibitions – which the filmmaker must obey, and leaves the choice of subject, theme, critical ideology, and style up to the filmmaker (see Mackenzie 2003: 52). The rules are purely formal (and predominantly negative) specifications for allowable film practice, just as the rules of a game are the purely formal specification of prescribed, possible and forbidden actions within a given game. IDIOTERNE does not examine the deeper motivations of spassing, nor does it reveal the spassers' individual intentions or motives. Asked in the film interviews why they did it, the spassers either gave vague, contradictory answers or none at all. Karen seems to be the only one who takes the 'search for the inner idiot' at all seriously. The spassing itself is subject to one simple guideline: 'play the fool in public and semi-public spaces as convincingly and as consistently as possible'. Like the rules of the Dogma 95 Manifesto, this guideline is purely formal and amounts to the instruction to 'go as crazy as you can'. It leaves the spasser free to choose how, where and when to spass. The guideline has nothing to say about interpretation, intention or effect, and in the spassers' daily discussions only the external aspects of their performances are evaluated.

This indicates that despite the connotations of spontaneity and authenticity that adhere to the romantic, Rousseauian concept of the 'noble savage', spassing is anything but a natural, dissolute, and free activity. The fact that spassing was not 'natural' to the members of the group is shown by the refusal of Axel (played by Knud Romer Jørgensen) and the inability of Henrik (played by Troels Lyby) to play the fool in the normal environments of their family and work, respectively, and by the group's unease when confronted with genuinely mentally handicapped people. When Stoffer leaves the spassing Jeppe behind in the company of a group of Hell's Angels with a parting 'that'll teach him', he is making it clear that spassing has to be learned, that it is a skill that requires training and experience. Spassing, then, is not a process of 'letting go', but the most convincing and consistent possible *simulation*, in a public place, of the idiotic behaviour of 'idiots'; and this simulation has to be *learned*. Spassing is not a natural form of behaviour but a learned skill, and this is why the spassing in IDIOTERNE also has a competitive, agonistic element. After all, there is little point in competing to see who is the best spasser if skill in spassing itself cannot be improved through practice, experience and criticism.

Here is another parallel with the film practice of Dogma 95, which does not counter the artificiality of the 'film of illusion' with the spontaneity and insouciance of the home video or amateur film, but which is explicitly aimed at professional filmmakers who understand what the limitations demanded by Dogma 95 actually mean. In the Dogma 95 website FAQs, von Trier and Vinterberg make this quite clear:

> In fact, it is not advisable for first-time feature film directors to make a Dogma95 film, because one has to be aware of the difference [between] making a conventional film and making a Dogma film. Basically it is important to know what constructs a conventional film, before one starts tearing the film language apart.

Dogma 95 film practice is also an acquired skill that demands training, practice, and experience. The *agonistic* element is also present in Dogma 95: to begin with, the Brethren issued rulings on the films that applied for Dogma certification, and the obligation to own up to any transgression of the rules of the Vow of Chastity also introduced a competitive element: whoever made the fewest lapses was considered to have made the most 'Dogmatic' film.

Spassing, like Dogma 95 filmmaking, is therefore about following the rules as closely as possible, and not about 'the most individual expression of the most individual emotions', as the romantic poets would have it.[13] The spasser simulates idiocy without identifying with the idiot (this is a personal search for the 'inner idiot') and without wishing to represent the idiot (for instance, no demand is made for a legitimate place for idiots in public or semi-public areas). Spassing is a form of mimicry in which 'the subject makes believe or makes

others believe that he is someone other than himself' (Caillois 1961: 19-20). Karen's tragedy is that she confuses the dimension of *mimicri* in spassing with identification and representation, and sees spassing as the expression of an authentic personality. Naturally, she entirely fails to grasp its ludic character.

Just as spassing is not a quest for an authentic identity, the simulation of idiocy is not a form of sociological or anthropological research, nor is it a political or social experiment. Of course, by introducing the disturbance of idiot behaviour into public or semi-public spaces, spassers might be searching for the critical threshold at which a normal, stable situation suddenly changes into a state of disorder, chaos and anarchy. By subjecting a stable social environment to external disturbances, spassers, in a manner of speaking would turn the behaviour of its population into a 'model', by which means the behaviour of social groups under extreme circumstances can be studied. The effect of introducing spassing to 'normal' social environments is therefore analogous to the effect that the introduction of Dogma 95 had on the 'normal' world of professional and commercial film. In both cases, a 'denaturalisation' effect can be seen in which the social environment and the context of film culture, respectively, are transformed into test laboratories and game arenas. In both cases the element of *ilinx*, vertigo, is also introduced: spassing consists of 'surrendering to a kind of spasm, seizure, or shock which destroys reality with a sovereign brusqueness' (Callois 1961: 20), and Dogma 95 was launched like a bomb into the film world with the express intention of demolishing its self-satisfied opinion on the nature of a 'good' film.

In contrast to their historic precursors such as the Situationists and the Provos, who pursued such strategies in all seriousness, the spassers seek the critical limit to the system where it can still recover, either by absorbing the disturbing factor (as the Hell's Angels care for Jeppe) or by paying a small price for it to go away (as the waiter allows them to leave without paying). In other words, they do not seek change, but equilibrium and homeostasis; they do not seek political transformation, but personal gratification. As said before, Dogma describes the new waves of the 1960s (and by implication, itself) as no more than ripples on the water; spassing and Dogma 95 are not forms of political activism, but types of games. As with spassing, the Dogma 95 game is not aimed at the enlightenment of the spectator, or the support of marginalized or suppressed social groups, but at the gratification of the players, that is, the filmmakers.

Just as Karen misunderstands spassing as a form of identification and representation, the self-appointed leader Stoffer also misunderstands the genuinely ludic dimension of spassing when, after the orgy, he challenges the other members of the group to spass in their work or home environments. By playing 'spin the bottle' to let chance determine which member of the group has to start spassing in their normal environment he not only introduces the element of *alea*, or

chance – 'a decision independent of the player, an outcome over which he has no control, and in which winning is the result of fate rather than triumphing over an adversary' (Caillois 1961: 17) – but he also reaches the critical limit of spassing itself. This is the precise demarcation between spassing as a game and spassing as a form of political agitation and social and political transformation. When the spassing gets serious, Axel and Henrik back out, and only Karen, for whom spassing had never been a game, is prepared to accept Stoffer's challenge.

So first and foremost, spassing is a game (again, like Dogma 95 itself) which comprises the dimensions of *mimicri* (pretence), *agôn* (competition), *ilinx* (vertigo) and *alea* (chance). Like all games, spassing is an activity that is bound to purely formal rules, but, as is the case with Dogma 95 itself, the rules of spassing are not very specific and mainly negatively formulated: 'don't act normal'. At first sight this might seem to be at odds with the nature of a game as a rule-based activity, but, in fact, games are a perfect example of a category of activities *not* characterised by a core of shared attributes and therefore not necessarily positively characterised by 'game rules' (see Wittgenstein 1965), and moreover, games have many different sets of rules.

Ludologist Jesper Juul (2003: 68) distinguishes two types of games – namely games of progression and games of emergence – on the basis of the types of rules that the players must observe. 'Games of progression' have specific, detailed and extensive rules which players have to follow correctly in order to make any progress in the game. The computer game *Myst* is a typical example of this category, because a player cannot advance to the next location in the game until he has found the right 'key' with which to unlock it. 'Games of emergence' have only a few basic rules and leave more room for the player's skills, insights, inventiveness and tactical abilities. A typical emergence game would be *Pong*, that pits player against computer in a virtual game of table tennis.

According to Juul, there is an inverse relationship between the simplicity of the game and the simplicity of the rules. Games of progression have extensive and complex sets of rules, and leave the player little room to manoeuvre and it can only be played 'correctly' in one way. Once players find the 'keys' and have completed the game, they usually show little interest in playing again. An emergent game, however, with a few simple rules, can evolve in a complex way because the game offers more scope for the player's investigation, experimentation, improvisation, and technical and tactical developments. Because players are in a position to improve their game techniques and their tactical and strategic insights with every game, emergent games can be played endlessly and can offer new challenges with every game. In other words, simple rules lead to complex games.

Spassing and Dogma 95 film practice both belong to the category of emergent games. They do not specify how spassing should be done 'correctly', or what a Dogma 95 film should look like; they simply provide a few rules of thumb which leave spassers and Dogma 95 filmmakers considerable room for exploration, experimentation and development. It is not for nothing that predictability is one of the aspects of the contemporary 'film of illusion' that Dogma 95 rejects.

The storyboard technique employed by conventional film practice approaches a film project *a priori post festum* (see chapter 2), which, in terms of game theory, comes down to its treatment as a game of progression having only one correct trajectory. Juul notes (2003a: 73) that the game of progression 'is also where we find the games with cinematic or storytelling ambitions'. As in games of progression, conventional film practice limits the state space of possible situations that a system comprising characters, actions and settings can yield to just one single sequence of states. This trajectory, however, represents no more than the choice made by the conventional filmmaker or progression game designer between the many possible trajectories that might have been chosen (see Juul 2003a: 73; Manovich 2001: 227).

Dogma 95 film practice, as was described in chapter 2, replaces the storyboard technique with an algoristic approach which specifies a limited number of starting conditions, elements and relationships, and then gives the players the freedom to explore this defined state space as they wish. In other words, a state within this state space is not staged in order to represent as adequately as possible a single trajectory through the state space, but is *modelled* so as to enable *simulations* that explore trajectories that can be actualised under different starting conditions. Film as a game of emergence is no longer the enactment of the realisation of a possibility described by a scenario or storyboard, but becomes an interface with the *virtuality* that arises, on-set, out of actualised models and simulations.

Idioterne (2)

Film as interface: Virtual realism

Idioterne is a film about simulation, but can the film itself meaningfully be called a simulation? To the extent that the film is a registration of the group's experiments with spassing, we could say that the film turns the viewer into an eyewitness of an experiment, of which the cameraman, Lars van Trier, was also an eyewitness with no idea how the spassing was going to turn out or how the environment would react to it. To the extent to which improvisation and unpre-

dictability formed the most important ingredients of the concept of IDIO-
TERNE,[14] the cameraman fulfils the role of *monstrateur* whose work 'is located in
the here and now of the *représentation*' (André Gaudreault 1988: 110).

Still, a film necessarily shows an established series of events in retrospect as
the pictorial description of an entirely or partially realised process, and even if a
film accurately depicts a series of events arising during a simulation, the film
itself is not a simulation but the re-presentation *of* that simulation (Frasca 2003:
224). Even if the film were to comprise a single unbroken take of a series of
events arising during a simulation, this mode of depiction would still depend
on the choice of the *narrateur*, whose *regard intermédiaire* interprets, selects, ar-
ranges and therefore filters the material supplied by the *monstrateur* (Gau-
dreault 1988: 110). This is certainly the case for IDIOTERNE, in which practically
every scene is marked by a narrator's blatant breaks, gaps, jump cuts and mis-
matches.[15]

The retrospective character of the film is underlined by the inclusion of sev-
eral interviews with the film characters which, according to John Rockwell
(2003: 45), make of IDIOTERNE a depoliticised LA CHINOISE (Godard, Fr 1967).
The group members look back on their spassing from a point some time after
the film was made, as is shown by their answers to Lars von Trier. Katrine, for
instance, says: 'It's over and done. I don't think we'd ever find that back.' Sus-
anne says that she was the last to see Karen, and Axel is asked to give a sum-
mary of the history of the spasser's group ('to do as much fucking as you could
in the least possible time', sneers his wife, who is also present at the interview).

At first sight, the interviews fulfil the same sort of function as those in REDS
(Warren Beatty, USA 1981), in which contemporaries, historians, writers and
intellectuals such as Susan Sontag and Henry Miller discuss the fate of John
Reed (played by Warren Beatty) and Louise Bryant (played by Diane Keaton)
from the point of view of their own personal recollections or from a wider his-
torical, political or cultural perspective. Such interviews, like flashbacks in gen-
eral (see Turim 1989), generally serve to clarify, explain or interpret crucial
events in the film's story (a common device in *film noir*), or to let us know what
has happened to the protagonists since. They are intended to help us to under-
stand the events that the film depicts. However, they also dramatise the role of
the narrator, who – equally retrospectively – arranges the sequence of past and
known events and actions into an intelligible whole. Of course, the chronologi-
cal ordering of these events is itself an explanatory principle (see Barthes 1984:
26; Danto 1985: 130). The interviews therefore make explicit the *a priori post fes-
tum* character of any narration, which can only begin after the events it de-
scribes have finished taking place and their outcome is known (see Martin
1987: 74). A story is therefore by definition a *representation* of a unique, actua-

lised series of events, and the interviews in IDIOTERNE seem only to substantiate the representative character of this film.

At first sight, von Trier's interview questions seem to lead in this direction; he asks why Karen joined the group, whose idea spassing had originally been, which anti-bourgeois ideologies spassing was based on, and he even asks for a short summary of the history of the group. But the interviews in IDIOTERNE yield more questions than answers. The ex-group members are all filmed in medium- to close-up shots against neutral backgrounds, so the images reveal nothing about their current circumstances. The only exception is Axel, who is interviewed in the presence of his wife and child; but because his wife considers the entire spassing episode an objectionable one, which Axel took part in principally because he wanted 'to fuck Katrine' (her words), Axel's answers are the least spontaneous. The unreliability of his responses is thrown into strong relief by the contradictions between his supposedly anti-bourgeois ideology ('Ideologies? That there's more to life than meaningfulness and efficiency') and his evident existence as a husband and father. But the answers given by the other group members are little better, characterised as they are by vagueness and non-commitment (Jeppe: 'I've no idea why Karen joined us'; Ped: 'Oh, Jeppe was OK'; Suzanne: 'I was the last to see Karen'; and so on), and could have been omitted from the film without affecting its comprehensibility. In fact, the answers are sometimes at odds with each other, as for instance when Axel and Jeppe both claim to have first had the idea for spassing even though, as the interviewer points out, no one else in the group had named Jeppe as the instigator.

At one point the interviewer exclaims that he must have heard seventeen different versions of the group's story. Clearly, the members of the group have not only their own interpretations, but entirely personal versions of the events, and it is impossible to determine which version is correct. While retrospectives and flashbacks in films usually serve to lessen potential ambivalences and, at the very least, create a consensus about the factual course of events, in IDIOTERNE exactly the opposite occurs. Every member of the group has a personal version of the course of events, which does not necessarily coincide with other members' versions and whose truth it is impossible to establish. For example, although it appears that Karen has understood and experienced spassing differently from the others, this is unclear because according to Ped (played by Henrik Prip), the group's intellectual and diary keeper, Karen had understood that for the others in the group spassing was about making a fool of other people. Inconsistencies like this suggest that the history of the group is not an objective, actualised series of events, but a state space of possible histories through which every group member has followed his or her own individual trajectory, each one experiencing a different set of states along the way.

The interviews reveal that there is no question of a shared, common history which each of the group members can look back on with different thoughts, feelings and judgements. But though this 'communal history' does not appear in any of the separate trajectories through the state space, it is nevertheless no illusion, if only because every member persists in describing his or her spassing within the context of the group as a whole. The fact that every member of the group has a different story does not make one story wrong and another right; Karen's version, like all the others, is just one of the many possible actualisations of the state space of the history.

The film has no single narrative which concerns the entire group, but a number of different narratives, each of which follows part of the development of a number of characters. Some critics believe that the film is actually about Karen, who opens the film and about whom most questions are asked during the interviews. Her character undergoes a development, she is the only one of the group to take spassing seriously, and is the only one to do it with her family, outside the protection of the group. But the film is also about Stoffer, who takes spassing as seriously as Karen does (albeit for different reasons) but who takes the framework of the game away, thereby hastening the group's dissolution. Then there is the story of Axel and Katrine, in which neither Karen nor Stoffer play any significant role; and that of Jeppe, whose spassing talents are first held in low regard by the others but who gradually grows into his role (see Smith 2003: 117-118), and still more fragmentary portraits of a number of other group members, but by no means all of them. It would be impossible to reconstruct a coherent *fabula* from all these narratives even if they had a clear beginning, middle and end – which they do not.

In this regard, too, IDIOTERNE can be compared to a game. A game has a starting point, a number of elements (players, resources) and above all *rules*, which together define a state space comprising numerous virtual trajectories which are either actualised or not, depending on the players' moves. Once a trajectory within this state space has been traversed it can be related retrospectively as a 'history' (see Frasca 2003a: 224; Simons 2002), but this history is not *the* history of the game. The rules of chess specify a state space which comprises every possible combination of pieces permitted by the rules, a state space which is partially actualised in the states which a given game of chess attains. The game of chess does not correspond to any single actualisation or any other virtual performance of the game, but it is more than just a specification of the elements and moves allowed by the rules (the algorithms specifying the state space): if the rules of chess are not actualised, no chess game takes place. But because the state space can be actualised only in separate, limited areas of the virtual space available, the game itself, of which every trajectory is another actualisation, remains a virtual one.

This is also the case in IDIOTERNE: the interviews look back at the game as it was experienced in the trajectory of a number of its players, while in the film's live action scenes, the camera literally follows the players as they negotiate their ongoing trajectories through the state space. The partial registrations of these separate trajectories yield a picture not only of the virtual totality of each separate narrative, but also of the virtuality of the entire state space and the 'phase portrait' (described more fully in the following section) of the most frequently travelled trajectories within the state space, each of which is a new and unique actualisation of the virtuality of the state space, though this virtuality is never fully manifested. The totality of this virtuality is a purely mental construction based on partial actualisations of this virtuality in different (and even in partial performances of) trajectories through the state space. The film IDIOTERNE is therefore, all realistic interpretations notwithstanding, not the depiction of a given material reality, but an interface whose partial actualisations afford us access to a virtual reality.

Distributed representation

The virtuality of 'the story' – which it no longer can be called, given that the principles of uncertainty, contingence and interchangeability play a more important role than those of causality and chronology[16] – is at work not only at the level of the relationship between what is generally termed *syuzhet* and *fabula* (Bordwell 1985), 'story' and 'discourse' (Bal 1980), *récit* and *histoire* (Genette 1972), but also at the level of the individual scenes. Much has been written of IDIOTERNE's very unconventional film style, which includes the use of hand-held cameras, fuzzy, unfocused images, brusque camera movements, a pseudo-documentary recording style, visible crew members, overexposed and underexposed images, and jump cuts resulting from mismatching in the editing. These stylistic devices are usually discussed in light of the Dogma 95 Manifesto rules and are either deemed 'realistic' in terms of a home video aesthetic, or, in line with the realism of an André Bazin, they are considered to be at odds with Dogma 95's pursuit of perceptual realism (see Gaut 2003: 99 and chapter 1). Probably because the Manifesto talks about the use of portable and hand-held cameras, many of these discussions concentrate on the relationship between the camera and profilmic reality; at any rate, the relationships established by the montage between separate shots is a less frequently discussed issue.

The Manifesto, as Gaut (2003: 99) correctly points out, is surprisingly reticent on the question of montage technique; but only from a Bazinian perspective can the absence of a rule 'requiring unobtrusive editing and very long takes (which are more like our normal way of seeing)' be seen as an 'anomaly' (ibid.). Gaut evidently overlooks the fact that, in part as a result of the influence of new film

genres, from television reports to home videos, the norms of perceptual realism have left a Bazinian sense of continuity of time and space a long way behind them. I have already noted that von Trier's Dogma 95 recording and montage style was inspired by realistic police series like NYPD Blue (see chapter 1). However, perceptual realism is not the hallmark of Dogma 95, and certainly not of Lars von Trier's other work. The pseudo-documentary camerawork (by von Trier himself) in Idioterne, that appears to emphasise its profilmic 'reality', is accompanied by a montage style which transforms the filmed events into an actualised *virtuality*.

Von Trier continually breaks the rules of continuity in Idioterne – as he also does in his earlier television series Riget – The Kingdom and his later, post-Dogma films – and it is tempting to call this montage a form of spassing. The scene in which Stoffer challenges the others in the group to spass at home or at work is a good example. In one shot, Stoffer is sitting in a wheelchair, in the next shot he is standing behind Ped's wheelchair, in the next shot he is walking away from his own wheelchair, and in the following shot he suddenly appears through a door. The dialogue is continuous, which probably explains why the discontinuities in the montage are barely noticeable.

This series of shots also displays other discontinuities and incongruities. In one shot, Nana is sitting on a sofa against a wall varnishing her nails, in the next shot she is lying on her back, in another shot we see her lying on her side (asleep?), while in the next shot Suzanne is suddenly sitting next to her. Katrine, who is sitting on the floor in the middle of the room, is the only constant in this scene – and even she appears to be talking to someone who is located in a different part of the room in every shot. Similar incongruities crop up in many other scenes. In the final scene of the film, Karen has a wound near her left eye in some shots while not in others. This is because the scene (in which Karen is hit in the face by her husband Anders (played by Hans Henrik Clemensen) was shot twice, and in the second take a plate was broken over Bodil Jørgensen's head – 'Dogma blood', for Lars von Trier (see Rockwell 2003: 44).

These are not the sort of discontinuities generally understood by the term 'jump cuts' (elliptical leaps in which part of the movement carried out by a character or by the camera is, as it were, 'missing').[17] The jump cuts, breaks and discontinuities arise because different takes of the same scene are interwoven in the editing, and the actors have been instructed to show the greatest possible variation in mood, movement, posture, physicality and gesture between takes (see Stevenson 2002: 84).

Every performance is a new passage through a state space specified by the parameters of the scene, such as the characters, their mutual relationships and interactions; and for each performance the initial conditions are altered by manipulating external parameters such as mood, position, attitude, and so on, as

von Trier had done before with the *Psykomobile #1* project (see chapter 2). From these different trajectories through the state space of a scene something emerges which is comparable to the concept known to complex dynamic systems theory as a *phase portrait* (see Gleick 1998: 50). A phase portrait is a mathematical model of the points in a multidimensional space through which a dynamic system in the physical world passes under different initial conditions, and shows the long-term developments which that system tends to display. The trajectories passing through a state space converge at so-called *attractors*, which are purely virtual in that every separate trajectory approaches an attractor with asymptotic proximity without ever actually touching it (see Delanda 2002: 31). Although an attractor can never be actualised, it indisputably exists because it lends the various actualised and virtual trajectories through the state space of the system a discernable degree of stability.

In Lars von Trier's Dogma 95 approach, scenes are not representations, but models of situations, simulated with the help of actors and sets. The different trajectories that these models take through the state space under different initial conditions yield a phase portrait which provides a view of the virtual attractors to which the various trajectories converge. Von Trier described the method as follows:

> Each scene is filmed with as many different expressions and atmospheres as possible, allowing the actors to approach the material afresh each and every time. Then we edit our way to a more rapid psychological development, switching from tears to smiles in the course of a few seconds, for example – a task which is beyond most actors. The remarkable thing about this cut-and-paste method is that the viewers can't see the joints. They see a totality, the whole scene (in Stevenson 2002: 84).

The totality, the 'whole scene' that von Trier is driving at is the phase portrait that arises out of collisions between different actualised trajectories through the state space of a single scene in the final montage. This closely resembles the virtual whole that Eisenstein (1981: 189) had in mind when he described an image that arose in the mind's eye of the viewer out of the separate shots of a 'montage construction'. It also resembles – in another context entirely – Gilles Deleuze's (1981) concept of *le montage du Tout*, a mental construct which arises out of the interaction between actualised images and the interpretations, feelings and thoughts that the viewer attaches to these images – a construct which never achieves definitive form.

The phase portrait in the state space of a scene that is approached as a system to be modeled does not coincide with any single one of its actualisations, and it is also more than the sum of all such separate actualisations because it comprises in principle an open and infinitely large collection of virtual trajectories. Like the virtual pattern that lends the form of a ripple in water its stability, it is

not an 'average' but a virtual reality, which can be seen only indirectly through the mediation of its actualisations. The phase portrait or virtual pattern emerges out of the simulations of the behaviour of the system under different conditions. It is a 'totality' whose representation is spread over a theoretically infinite number of actualisations. This totality can therefore be made only partially visible, by sampling different actualisations, and this is precisely what the montage in IDIOTERNE sets out to do. In IDIOTERNE, continuity editing makes way for a cinematographic actualisation of what connectionist cognitive theory calls *distributed representation*. By this is meant that a concept (an idea, an image) is not encoded into one or a series of symbols, but that it is spread across a large number of activated nodes in a network. In such a network, it is impossible to say that informational content is located at any given node or cluster of nodes, nor what specific contribution to semantic interpretation is made by each of these nodes.[18] Because no particular characteristics of the informational unit are attached to specific nodes, a distributed representation is also robust; informational content is not lost if part of the network fails because it can be complemented by the network that remains. While a film obviously consists of film images conveying particular and specific information, these images can be so organised that they become the bearers of networks of association which generate an interpretation that is more than the sum of its parts.

This is not only the principle of Eisenstein's intellectual montage, but also of the montage technique which von Trier developed in IDIOTERNE (and earlier in THE KINGDOM). In this approach, a scene does not consist of a linear sequence of shots that represent an equally linear, chronological sequence of actions; it is a *sample* of takes of different trajectories of the model through the state space of a system. Together these takes form a network that generates the virtual phase portrait of this system. This phase portrait is independent of the (otherwise random) sample of simulation takes, which could quite well be exchanged for takes of simulations that were carried out under different initial conditions. Because the sample is in principle an open, extendable, and replaceable collection of trajectories, it does not possess the 'closure' of a narrative sequence. A sample is intended to generate an image of a higher order than that of the takes themselves, an image that the samples must repeatedly evoke *in actu*. Every screening of IDIOTERNE is therefore a traversal of simulations giving access to their virtual substrate. Film, from this perspective, is not a 'window on reality' but an *interface* giving access to a pure virtuality.

4 Virtual Explorations:
Journeys to the End of the Night

C'est le privilège européen d'avoir eu à affronter, en plein XXe siècle,
quelque chose comme le Mal, c'est-à-dire le contrechamp interdit,
là où les Américains n'ont jamais été avares de
représentations réalistiques du Diable.
Mais pour 'se' faire, L'Europe devra oublier cela.
Serge Daney (1993: 108)

Rules and Manifestos

The extremely popular Danish television series The Kingdom, Idioterne and the Dogma 95 Manifesto are generally regarded as representing a break in von Trier's work. The last two have even been described as a 'calculated career shift' and as wilful 'career-icide' (see Stevenson 2003: 69). If the rules of the Vow of Chastity had been intended to free filmmakers from 'the oppressive apparatus of "major motion picture" filmmaking with its big money, big crews, big pressures and big temptations' (Stevenson 2002: 104), then they might have been written for von Trier. With Dogma 95 and Idioterne, von Trier did indeed seem to be forcing a break with the working methods he had followed in all of his pre-Dogma films.

During the launching of the Dogma 95 Manifesto in Paris, von Trier was still involved in the production of Breaking the Waves, the preparations of which dated from 1991. Despite a number of similarities with Idioterne, such as the use of hand-held cameras and semi-improvised acting, in all other respects the production of Breaking the Waves employed working methods completely at odds with those laid down in the Dogma 95 Manifesto:

> It was a major production with all the planning and personnel that implies. It was not set in the 'here and now' (taking place in the 1970s) and it employed a mass of special effects and post-production lab processes. The Apparatus was back in all its clanking, grinding glory (Stevenson 2003: 65).

Against this background it is tempting to see the 'cold turkey' that the Dogma 95 Manifesto prescribed to filmmakers as a medicine that von Trier had prescribed first and foremost for himself (ibid.: 53). As he admitted in an interview:

> Those of the Dogme rules that I myself have been responsible for are to a high degree
> designed with pedagogical motives in mind – a pedagogy directed against myself (in
> Schepelern 2003: 67).

This pedagogy was directed not least towards his obsession with technique and
style, and his compulsive need to exert total control over the production pro-
cess which, as he describes in his Third Manifesto (on the occasion of the film
Europa), turned the process of making a film into 'a hell' (in Stevenson 2003:
283; see Schepelern 2003: 64). To his great frustration, pre-Dogma productions
such as The Element of Crime and Europa attracted attention in particular
because of their unmistakable technical and stylistic virtuosity. These two films,
which he held to be nothing less than masterpieces, won only the *Grand Prix
Technique* at the 1984 and 1991 Cannes International Film Festivals (and the
Prix du Jury for Europa – shared, moreover, with Maroun Bagdadi's Hors la
Vie (B/Fr/It 1991)) – but not the coveted *Palm d'Or*.[1] For Breaking the Waves
he was awarded the *Grand Prix* in 1996, finally collecting first prize in 2000 with
Dancer in the Dark. Epidemic, Idioterne and Dogville were awarded no
prizes at Cannes.

His need for control over the production process and his technical and stylis-
tic perfectionism had already made von Trier a master of the storyboard techni-
que (see chapter 2) during The Element of Crime and Europa. Every shot of
The Element of Crime had been planned, drawn and rehearsed and every
location had been reconnoitred beforehand: 'We knew precisely every single
camera position before we began' (von Trier in Stevenson 2003: 53). Like the
other master of the storyboard approach, Alfred Hitchcock, he had contempt
for actors ('treat them like cattle'). In his pre-Dogma period he could confidently
assert:

> For me, it's an indication of professionalism that actors follow the director's instruc-
> tions. It's *his* vision… Danish actors would demand to 'understand' their roles. But
> what is there to understand if the director knows precisely what he must have? (in
> Stevenson 2002: 35).

Even after having undergone his Dogma 95 'treatment' von Trier would con-
tinue to have a difficult relationship with his actors. Both Björk and Nicole Kid-
man declared (after Dancer in the Dark and Dogville, respectively) that they
would never work with him again. The actors often felt truly free to improvise
only when von Trier handed the acting direction over to someone else, as he did
for The Kingdom.

Whatever the case, the rules laid down in the Vow of Chastity are certainly at
odds with von Trier's own pre-Dogma film practices. Preconceived, pre-visua-
lised, and pre-rehearsed camera movements contravene the demand that 'the

shooting must take place where the film takes place' (rule 3); the prescribed use of colour film and the ban on optical filters are diametrically opposed to the use of monochrome with supplemental colour elements in von Trier's so-called Europa trilogy (The Element of Crime, Epidemic and Europa); the ban on mentioning the director's name flies in the face of von Trier's oversized directorial credits for Europa, and the Dogma oath in which filmmakers renounce their artistry and any recourse to 'personal taste' is difficult to square with the claim that a film reproduces the director's vision.

Notwithstanding these unequivocal differences, there exists a remarkable continuity in von Trier's pre-Dogma, Dogma and post-Dogma film practices. To start with, the Dogma Manifesto is not the first manifesto von Trier ever wrote: he has drawn one up for every one of his nine films.[2] In these manifestos, too, he claims that routine, indifference and lack of faith were dominating the current film climates at the time. In the First Manifesto, published on 3 May 1984 together with the release of The Element of Crime, he compares the relationship between the filmmaker and his film with a stormy love affair that has become a sensible marriage:

> How could such tempestuous love affairs of film history wither away to become sensible marriages? What has happened with these old men? What has corrupted the old masters of sexuality? The answer is simple. The misunderstood willingness to please, the great fear of self-disclosure (what does it matter that the potency is gone when the wife has long since learned to live without it?) has gotten them to jettison that which once gave even their relationship budding life: *The Fascination!* (in Stevenson 2003: 281).

The sexual metaphor forms a guiding principle in all three of the Europa trilogy manifestos; von Trier repeatedly accuses his film colleagues of a lack of daring and passion, and demands 'the real goods, the fascination, the experience – childish and pure as true art' (ibid.: 282). In the Second Manifesto, published in a small booklet for the premiere of Epidemic in Cannes on 17 May 1987, it takes the following form:

> Seemingly all is well. The young men are engaged in their steady relationship with a new generation of film. The anti-conception which is supposed to contain the epidemic only makes the birth control more effective: no unexpected creations, no bastards – the genes are intact. There exist those young men whose relationships resemble the endless stream of Grand Balls of an earlier era. There are also those who live together in rooms devoid of furniture. But their love becomes expansion without soul, reduction without bite. Their 'wildness' lacks discipline and their 'discipline' lacks wildness (ibid.: 282).

In the Third Manifesto, published on 29 December 1990 on the occasion of the release of Europa, this erotic metaphor reaches a climax as von Trier admits that his passion for film is a search for carnal satisfaction and filmmaking a kind of masturbation:

> There is only one excuse that justifies going through, or forcing others to go through, the hell that is the process of creating a film: the carnal satisfaction which arises in that fraction of a second when the cinema's speaker and projector in unison inexplicably let the illusion of motion and sound rise up – like the electron which leaves its orbit and thereby produces light – to create THE ONE THING: A miraculous gasp of LIFE! It is only THAT which is the filmmaker's reward and hope and just due. That physical sensation, when the film magic really works, that shoots its way through the body like a shivering ejaculation… it is my hunt for THAT experience which always will be and always has been behind all my work and effort… NOTHING ELSE! So, now it is written, that did me good. And forget explaining it away with phrases like: 'the childlike fascination' and the 'universal humility', for here is my confession in black and white: LARS VON TRIER, THE SIMPLE MASTURBATOR OF THE FILM SCREEN (ibid.: 284).

If the Vow of Chastity is regarded as a call to abstinence, it means quite a U-turn for this sexual metaphor; one that may perhaps have been provoked by the fact that after the Third Manifesto von Trier was being called a 'jerk-off artist of the film screen' (see Schepelern 2003: 67). Be that as it may, while the Dogma 95 Manifesto and the three Manifestos of the Europa trilogy are loaded with sexual metaphor, religious-sounding rhetoric and grandiloquence and a provocative tone, the mix is also leavened by large doses of irony.[3] All four Manifestos have an incontestable element of play.

   Not only does the Dogma 95 Manifesto fulfil the same public relations and polemical function as von Trier's earlier manifestos; the rules of the Vow of Chastity are also part of a history of constraints that von Trier had imposed upon himself in earlier films. In chapter 2 it was noted that von Trier's Europa trilogy placed certain parameters in the foreground and excluded others. For instance, The Element of Crime and Europa are both shot exclusively in the dark; all three films are monochrome with sparse colour effects, cross-cutting and cross-editing are not used, and optical effects are not created during post-production but during filming. The Element of Crime and Europa, like Idioterne (see chapter 3), also have the following of rules- as a central theme. In The Element of Crime, retired detective Fisher (played by Michael Elphick) tracks down suspected child murderer Harry Grey in line with the verdict of his mentor, Osborne (played by Esmond Knight), that a detective must identify himself with the criminal. In Europa, the young American Leopold Kessler (played by Jean-Marc Barr),[4] whose uncle (played by Ernst-Hugo Järegård) is

training him to be a conductor on the rail company Zentropa, is instructed to always follow the rules strictly while the company director Max Hartmann (played by Jørgen Reenberg) advises him to do whatever he thinks best. Just like the spassers in IDIOTERNE, the leading characters of both these pre-Dogma films are following regulations and behavioural rules that were drawn up by someone else.

In hindsight, the second Europa trilogy film, EPIDEMIC, can be seen as a prologue to Dogma 95. The film arose out of a bet that von Trier made with Claes Kastholm Hansen, advisor of the Danish Film Institute (DFI), that he could make a commercial feature film for less than a million Danish kroner (about €130,000) (Stevenson 2003: 55). The film is about a director (von Trier) and his co-scriptwriter (Niels Vørsel, who in reality also often works as von Trier's co-scenario writer) who have to write a script in a few days because the script they were on the point of delivering to a DFI advisor was accidentally erased from a floppy disk. The scenes in which von Trier and Vørsel discuss the new script in their office were shot using a static camera which was operated by one while the other was talking, and sometimes by no-one at all. This pre-Dogma film can clearly be seen 'as a kind of demonstration against the meticulous and time-consuming methods of the professional cinematographer' (Schepelern 2003: 59).

The film also pokes fun at some familiar rules of film. In one of the first scenes, von Trier gets into a taxi. It is shot from outside the taxi, with the camera on the driver's side (the driver is played by Michael Simpson). The next shot is a close-up of the taxi driver's hand putting the car in gear. The final shot is of the taxi, again being filmed from outside the car but this time from the passenger's side, driving away – in reverse. The scene makes fun of the so-called 180° rule:[5] the first shot creates the impression that the taxi is about to move forward, that is, out of frame left, but because the third shot is at a 180° angle to the first, this expectation can only be fulfilled by having the car drive backwards. EPIDEMIC unmasks the usual rules of film as game rules that can also be played with.

EPIDEMIC and IDIOTERNE are productions for which von Trier set himself constraints in order to kick the habit of using the elaborate, time-consuming techniques that characterised not just conventional films in general but also all of his other productions. This therapeutic function has meant that the rules of the Vow of Chastity have often been interpreted as the expression of von Trier's desire to distance himself from the techniques he had used in other productions and return to a down-to-earth realism. But while EPIDEMIC and IDIOTERNE occupy a special place in von Trier's oeuvre, the rules he formulated for their production are no more than a special case of the practice he had followed for all his earlier productions. Von Trier makes his films by setting limitations for himself, some of which, such as for DANCER IN THE DARK and DOGVILLE, he formulated as 'production codes'. As he himself has said of the Dogma rules:

> But I think the provocative thing is this idea of putting limitations on yourself, which, when you think about it, is something that you do all the time. But of course, it's particularly provocative to do it in public, to publish it (in Kelly 2000: 137).

Making films has always had a playful dimension for von Trier, and this is precisely because he approaches filmmaking as a game whose rules are contingent, arbitrary and interchangeable. Von Trier can change the rules from one production to another with the greatest of ease.

However, closer scrutiny reveals not only that this playful dimension has been a constant factor in von Trier's films. The Dogma 95 approach to IDIOTERNE represents a new method for a project that he had already launched with THE ELEMENT OF CRIME and EUROPA: the exploration of *virtuality*.

Virtual explorations: The Europa trilogy

In the period between 1984 and 1991 in which the Europa trilogy was made, the term 'virtual reality' had barely reached beyond computer and media labs and a few experimental artist circles.[6] Nevertheless, virtuality plays an important, not to say crucial, role in all three films, in different ways. Firstly, the reality (or *diegesis*) of the worlds depicted in these films is undermined from the start because these worlds are the mental projections of the principal characters, and these projections are not necessarily based on reliable perceptual evidence. Secondly, these worlds are constructed using purely photographic and cinematographic means, in the most literal sense. Objects and locations become mere lighting effects. And thirdly, space and time are flexible categories having little in common with physical, Newtonian reality.

Virtual worlds

Journeys through the mind

In THE ELEMENT OF CRIME Fisher undergoes hypnosis, at the direction of his Egyptian psychotherapist's thickly accented voice, back to the Europe from which he has just returned. A remark by the psychiatrist – 'You always come back after the fact, to let me cure your headaches' – tells us that THE ELEMENT OF CRIME is going to show us a mental reconstruction of Fisher's earlier experiences in Europe. Because his adventures have given him headaches and he can-

not embark on the exploration of his memories except under the guidance of a psychotherapist, it is clear from the start that Fisher's mental exertions will not necessarily yield an accurate picture of his experiences.

EUROPA opens with an image of railway tracks gliding past, while in voice-over Max von Sydow addresses a 'you' of whom it is unclear whether this is the viewer or the principal character of the film. The voice-over transports this person by hypnosis into the world of history: 'At the count of ten you'll be in Europe 1945… one… two…' The images of the past in this film are therefore modalised from the outset as a hallucinatory journey through the imagination of the protagonist and the spectator at one and the same time. The world in EUROPA is not a representation of an independently existent reality, but is continuously conjured up by the voice of the narrator, who thereby becomes the creator of a world of which he himself forms no part.

Finally, in EPIDEMIC, a voice-over by von Trier links the first section, pseudo-documentary in style, in which he and Niels Vørsel have to produce a new film script in a few days, with a second section, filmed by Henning Bendtsen, the erstwhile cameraman of Carl Theodor Dreyer, which purports to show fragments of the film that von Trier and Vørsel are working on. Von Trier's voice-over also links the fictional events depicted in the film with the 'reality' of the film by asserting that the epidemic forming the subject of the film had actually broken out for real on the day that the script was ready.

The 'film-within-the-film' is therefore not only virtual in the sense that as the movie begins it remains to be conceived, written and shot; it is also virtual in the sense that a feedback loop exists between the reality of the framing film and the virtuality of the embedded film. The epidemic that von Trier and Vørsel invent for their film project contaminates their reality – which, of course, is also thereby virtualised. The world of the film is blatantly presented as a mental projection. Again and again we see how von Trier, in particular, derives inspiration from objects and documents occurring in the film frame, and how the film emerges, so to speak, in his mind's eye. At the end of the film, the theme of hypnosis – one central to the worlds of both THE ELEMENT OF CRIME and EUROPA – returns to spectacular effect when at the dinner at which the scriptwriters are to hand the finished script to the DFI advisor, a hypnotised medium (played by Gitte Lind) is asked to 'go into the film'.

This last scene points to another aspect of virtuality: the worlds presented in these films are the mental constructs not only of the films' characters, but also – and more importantly– of its spectators. The appeal made to the medium in EPIDEMIC to 'go into the film' is the same one made by every filmmaker to the film's viewers to leave their real lives behind and to make the leap into the reality of the film, a reality that may be governed by a cosmology and logic very

different from that of chronology, linearity and causality – as, indeed, is the case in this trilogy.

Max von Sydow's hypnotising voice-over is directed just as much towards the viewer as towards Leopold Kessler, and in THE ELEMENT OF CRIME the Egyptian psychotherapist is seen in silhouette, talking straight to the camera – which is evidently on the analyst's couch. Since Fisher himself does not appear in this scene we may assume that the psychiatrist's words are directed both to him and to us, and that we, too, are being invited to accompany Fisher on his hallucinatory journey down memory lane. Here, too, we see an intermingling of levels: We are being asked to reconstruct Fisher's history by identifying ourselves with Fisher, while in the story Fisher is asked to identify himself with the child murderer Harry Grey in order to reconstruct the history of the 'lottery murders'.

Not only is entry into the hallucinatory world of the Europa trilogy marked by a hypnotising voice-over or a hypnotised medium, but every scene in THE ELEMENT OF CRIME and EUROPA is cloaked in a nocturnal darkness, obscured still further in THE ELEMENT OF CRIME by a permanent drizzle. As the Vietnamese whore Kim (played by Me Me Lai) says in THE ELEMENT OF CRIME: 'it's always three o'clock in the morning, if you know what I mean'. In these nighttime worlds, where reason has been put to sleep by hypnosis,[7] elements of daily and historical reality appear in perverse and monstrous form, as if in a nightmare.

All three films are located in 'Europa' and all three seem to take place somewhere in Germany. It is a post-apocalyptic Europe: in THE ELEMENT OF CRIME, the cities that Fisher visits lie in ruins, the roads are littered with wrecks and dead horses, buildings are half-submerged in floodwater, and the signs of irrevocable decay are everywhere. EUROPA is located in a Germany devastated by the Second World War; in EPIDEMIC a plague epidemic breaks out. Nevertheless, although in THE ELEMENT OF CRIME and EUROPA place names, characters and even maps seem to refer to actual places and historical events, these references actually function as do the *Tagesreste* in a dream, plucked out of their original context by the dreamwork and located by the unconscious within a new whole where they can convey a new significance, one hidden to the conscious mind.

As Freud noted (1982: 192): 'a dream works under a kind of compulsion which forces it to combine into a unified whole all the sources of dream-stimulation which are offered to it', and in the Europa trilogy films, materials derived from perception and memory (symbolised by the archive materials in EPIDEMIC) are detached from their historical contexts and forged into a new filmic whole. While for Freudian psychoanalysis this 'displacement and condensation' takes place in the unconscious, in the trilogy it is the work of cinematographic

imagination. The Europe of the trilogy is thoroughly rewritten by historical film tropes, evoked not only by the presence or co-operation of such eminent technicians as Carl Theodor Dreyer's cameraman Henning Bendtsen or respected actors such as Esmond Knight, of PEEPING TOM (Michael Powell, UK 1960), Eddie Constantine, who played (amongst other lead roles) Lemmy Caution in Jean-Luc Godard's ALPHAVILLE (Fr 1965), another film in which nighttime shots of Paris created a futuristic universe,[8] and Barbara Sukowa, famous for numerous roles including Fassbinder's LOLA (BRD 1981) and BERLIN ALEXANDERPLATZ (BRD 1980), but also by numerous stylistic devices and quotations borrowed from film movements and directors from (principally European) film history. It is not for nothing that the Europa trilogy has been linked to German expressionism: EUROPA has been compared with DAS KABINETT DES DOKTOR CALIGARI (Wiene, BRD 1920) and also (because of a scene in which a throng of workers pulls a huge locomotive out of a depot) with Fritz Lang's METROPOLIS (BRD 1927). The railway and locomotive theme is, of course, forever linked with the Holocaust by Claude Lanzmann's monumental documentary SHOAH (Fr 1985). References to F.W. Murnau's NOSFERATU (BRD 1922) and FAUST (BRD 1926) are also present. EUROPA has also been linked to such films as Luchino Visconti's THE DAMNED (It/Sw/BRD 1969), to horror films, to film noir (itself often described as an American reworking of German Expressionism – see Paul Schrader 1996: 55; Werner 1985: 110),[9] to Orson Welles's THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS (USA 1942) and CITIZEN KANE (USA 1940), to Carol Reed's THE THIRD MAN (UK 1949), and to numerous other films (see Visy 2003). In EPIDEMIC, Dr. Mesmer (Lars von Trier) is addressed as 'Dr. M', an unmistakable reference both to Fritz Lang's DAS TESTAMENT DES DR. MABUSE (BRD 1933) and to M – EINE STADT SUCHT EINEN MÖRDER (BRD 1931).

Let us continue. The Germany in THE ELEMENT OF CRIME has been linked to Roberto Rossellini's GERMANIA ANNO ZERO (It/BRD/Fr 1948). A railway worker inspecting wagons that remind us ineluctably of the Holocaust's transport trains is whistling 'Lili Marleen', the popular WWII song that formed the point of departure of Fassbinder's eponymous 1981 film. When helicopters converge on the spot where, at Fisher's advice, horse cadavers are being disinterred, we are equally strongly reminded of Francis Ford Coppola's APOCALYPSE NOW (USA 1979), and when Fisher says to Kim 'I'll fuck you back to the stone age' he seems to be quoting Robert Duvall, who said in the same film of the Vietnamese: 'We'll bomb them back to the stone age'. The name of the supposed child murderer Harry Grey is a reference to the character of David Gray (played by Julian West) from Dreyer's VAMPYR (Fr/BRD 1932), whose German title, DER TRAUM DES ALLAN GREY, also suggests a link with von Trier's film. Tarkovski's ANDREI RUBLEV (USSR 1969) and STALKER (BRD/USSR 1979), Wim Wenders' IM

LAUF DER ZEIT (BRD 1976) and Godard's ALPHAVILLE can all be cited as possible sources for THE ELEMENT OF CRIME.

This list could effortlessly be supplemented with films such as Stanley Kubrick's THE SHINING (UK 1980) whose protagonist Jack (played by Jack Nicholson) is transported into the spirit of the hotel's earlier deranged managers, or Antonioni's PROFESSIONE: REPORTER (THE PASSENGER, Fr/It/Sp/USA 1975), whose protagonist (also played by Nicholson) literally and figuratively takes the diary and the passport and assumes the identity of the arms dealer he encounters, dead, in a North African hotel. THE ELEMENT OF CRIME has even been called an art house BLADE RUNNER (USA 1982), not just because the detective in Ridley Scott's classic science-fiction film also turns out to be the kind of replicant he is supposed to hunt down, but because of the corresponding setting – a dilapidated city shrouded in twilight, artificial lighting and rain. The hypnotic trip through Europe that Fisher takes in THE ELEMENT OF CRIME has echoes of APOCALYPSE NOW, which can also be interpreted as a long, bad, acid trip into the mind of Captain Willard (played by Martin Sheen) whose drugged features are seen in close-up at the beginning of the film. To sum up, practically every shot in the Europa trilogy recalls the films, the filmmakers and the film styles of (European) history.[10]

In this respect, they are prime examples of a postmodern culture of pastiche and eclectic quotation. The history of film in general and of European film in particular becomes, the source of an inexhaustible supply of subjects, themes, plots, characters, and visual and cinematographic styles and devices, one which von Trier unreservedly plunders, re-working a rich assortment of fragments and devices to form a new whole. It is a characteristic of the postmodern 'retro' or *nostalgia* film (see Jameson 1992) that it makes no effort to present a reasonably accurate historical representation of the past (in this case, a post-Second World War Germany), but uses this history to construct a *simulacrum* that is based on images of this past or on images that have become part of the collective imagination of this past. The postmodern retro-film, which Frederic Jameson believes Bertolucci's IL CONFORMISTA (It/Fr/BRD 1970) was the first example of, simulates the reconstruction of a given historical period by conforming to an existing set of stylised, manufactured representations of this period, derived from a broad spectrum of widely distributed media such as film, photography, advertising, and illustrated magazines and newspapers.

This is certainly the case in EUROPA, which depicts 1945 Germany by constructing countless quotations and references; this is a cinematographic simulacrum, not a historical reproduction. To the extent that the trilogy refers to a historically and geographically factual Europe, these references are made through such a dense layer of cinematographic treatment and allusion that – just as in the *Tagesreste* in the dream – any direct connection with the actual,

original historical and geographical context is lost. Von Trier's trilogy thereby embodies the opposite of a project such as Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's three films Ludwig – Requiem Für Einen Jungfräulichen König (BRD 1972), Karl May (BRD 1974) and Hitler – Ein Film Aus Deutschland (BRD/UK/Fr 1978), which take the viewer on an expedition through the pre-war, romantic *imaginaire* of Germany, largely suppressed after WWII, to unearth the subjective, mythological and psychological roots that had paved the way for the horrors of National Socialism. Von Trier makes use of the same traces, images, remains and memories of this *imaginary*, but he does so in order to create an autonomous, closed, virtual universe, built with cinematographic means and having a very casual relationship with historical truth.

Instead of anchoring the worlds of the Europa trilogy in historical and geographic reality – the referential function of the sign as representation (see Jakobsen 1963: 214) – references are detached from their familiar historical and geographical contexts and, using comprehensive treatment and recycling through cinematographic memory and filmic imagination, transformed into a virtual reality which can exist only in the imagination and in the sleep of reason. Films such as The Element of Crime and Europa are examples not only of a typically postmodern culture of eclecticism and quotation, but also of the *sampling* and *cut-and-paste* aesthetics which have since come to characterise the language of new media. The history of Europe and the history of film together form an enormous database from which the filmmaker can extract items at liberty. In the Europa trilogy, von Trier works like a DJ, creating a new musical mix by selecting and combining existing tracks: 'true art lies in the "mix"' (Manovich 2001: 135).

The sampling style employed in Europa is not only an example *avant-la-lettre* of new media aesthetics; like the montage style used in The Kingdom and Idioterne, it is also a form of distributed representation. If the images in Europa can be seen as a postmodern pastiche and a form of eclectic recycling of images, figures and stylistic devices drawn from the history of audiovisual imagination, this implies that every image is a node in not just one, but numerous networks of associations, memories and impressions, all of which may be activated by this and other images in the film. As a node in this network of associations, memories and impressions, every image is therefore a partial representation of a virtual whole that can be evoked in the imagination of the viewer by this image or by a combination of such images. This virtual whole is not bound by, nor is it limited to, a single image or to a combination of images in any given film, as these constitute merely its contingent, interchangeable, and partial representations. The images are no longer the representations of a unique, actualised sequence of actions and events that we presume took place in the historic or fictional world of the film; by evoking a virtual totality, they 'virtualise' these

actions and events as the contingent, and in principle interchangeable, actualisations of this virtuality.[11]

Characters as avatars

The referential or denotative function of the visual signs in the trilogy is, moreover, continually undermined by the fact that nothing is what it seems. This theme is made more or less explicit during our introduction to the principal characters in The Element of Crime and Europa; they suffer from memory loss (Fisher), as well-meaning idealists they enter an unknown continent having a complex and – for outsiders – inscrutable history (Kessler), or they wander around unfamiliar, plague-infested areas outside the city (Mesmer in the 'film within the film' in Epidemic).

The initially idyllic and romantic image in The Element of Crime, of a Europe in which farmers transport their vegetables along country roads, rapidly changes into its opposite when the desolate landscape turns out to be littered with rotting fruit and the dead bodies of horses. But the real mystery in this film is Fisher himself. On the advice of his supervisor, Osborne, Fisher starts tracking down a man by the name of Harry Grey, suspected of having killed a number of young female lottery ticket sellers. However, Kim, the prostitute he meets on the way, seems to recognise Grey in Fisher himself. Fisher considers that the crooked line that Osborne drew on his wall was not a 'G' (for Grey) but an 'H', and infers that the next lottery murder will take place in Hallstadt; but he overlooks the fact that the 'G' might equally have been an 'F' for Fisher. Once in Hallstadt Fisher completes Grey's progression by killing the girl he employs to bait Grey. At the end of the film, police chief Kramer (played by Jerold Wells) tells Fisher that Osborne has sent him a letter in which he confesses the lottery murders, and takes him to the spot where Osborne has hung himself. Naturally, the viewer will ask: who is who in this film, and who has been manipulating whom?

The film's ending raises many questions. Does Harry Grey exist? Has Fisher identified himself too closely with Grey? Are Fisher and Grey the same person? Did Osborne manipulate Fisher by making him identify himself with Grey, perhaps in order to throw Kramer off the scent? Did Osborne become a victim of his own theories? Did he, too, identify with Harry Grey, and later make Fisher follow the same route, using him as a tool with which to carry out the crimes of Grey/Osborne/Fisher? Did Osborne take responsibility for the lottery murders to save Fisher?[12]

Every time a plausible interpretation of the events in the film arises, it is immediately absorbed into a closed circuit in which one interpretation vanishes behind another, only to pop up again later on. The laconic manner in which the

pragmatic police chief Kramer decides that Osborne's confession solves the case suggests that there is little point in probing for the 'truth' of the matter. It is no coincidence that von Trier's final image in the film is of a loris, a large-eyed, nocturnal, myopic loner primate, as if to say: what you see depends on what you're equipped to see, and if you're looking for a logical, causal explanation for the events in this film, you're staring into the dark. Endless speculation is unlikely to cure Fisher's headaches, and while Kramer's pragmatism closes the case, it fails to provide a satisfactory answer. You have to call it a day at some point, but every such point is arbitrary, and therefore disappointing.

The same questions and uncertainties haunt the world of Europa. Leopold's uncle, who is training him to become a train conductor for Zentropa, begins by explaining to him that the Germans who Kessler wants to help with the rebuilding of their country ('someone should show some compassion for the Germans') invariably will try to exploit him, and actually hate the Americans. The train in which Kessler and his uncle are set to work seems at first sight to be a luxurious express train, but when Leopold is taken by Lawrence Hartmann (played by Udo Kier) to a part of the train he has not visited before, he encounters wagons filled with emaciated, shorn men, half-naked or wearing concentration camp clothing. The express has turned into the kind of goods train we recognise from postwar film and television images of Jews being transported across Germany and Poland in cattle trucks. Innocent-looking children, like the boy and girl that Leopold entrusts to the care of the future mayor of Darmstadt and his wife, turn out to be full-fledged terrorists who kill their temporary guardians in cold blood on the orders of a mysterious resistance group. Max Hartmann, the director of Zentropa, is officially declared by a Jew (played by Lars von Trier) to be the one who helped him to escape from the Nazis, but as the document is signed we see this witness taking money from Colonel Harris, family friend of the Hartmann's, who explains that Hartmann and his Zentropa are absolutely essential for the postwar reconstruction effort. Leopold's sweetheart, Katharina Hartmann, turns out to be a 'Werewolf', a member of a resistance group organising terror attacks against the allies, and who uses Leopold to plant a bomb on the train. Colonel Harris, in turn, uses Leopold to spy on Katharina's movements. The lesson that the naïve Leopold learns in this *Bildungsroman* is summed up well by Leopold himself: 'I've been screwed by everybody.'

We might choose to see the theme of the werewolf, 'man by day and wolf by night', as Europa's leitmotif, were it not that this key only affords us access to a hall of mirrors in which riddles endlessly multiply. Since every scene in Europa is shot at night, the question arises: when is Katharina a woman, and when is she a Werewolf? Or is the werewolf theme merely a product of the imagination of the all-knowing narrator, or better still, the *grand imagier* (Metz 1991: 18), whose voice-over seems to dictate the course of events?[13] Does Katharina take

part in the Werewolves' operations voluntarily, or has she been coerced? What do the characters want? Who does good, who evil? Should Kessler take Max Hartmann's advice and do what his heart tells him? Should he plant the bomb in the train in order to save Katharina? Or should he stick to his uncle's directions and follow the conductor's rules regardless of what happens? Who is Hartmann, anyway? How did he build up and maintain a railway empire under the Nazi regime? Are the accusations directed against him, and projected onto the scene during the Jew's declaration, correct? Is the Jew lying?

The naïve Kessler – literally fleeced by his uncle and by Zentropa when, at the start of the film, he has to pay for his own medical inspection and company uniform ('I think I understand unemployment in Germany much better now. People just can't afford to work here') – unwittingly becomes the battlefield between numerous conflicting interests, a no man's land in which ghost riders and fellow travellers are indistinguishable from one another. But distinguishing ruse from reality would have been just as difficult for someone with an indigenously European outlook. Hartmann commits suicide when the disparity between the various roles he plays becomes unsustainable, the Americans and Europeans play tricks on each other, and the Europeans not only connive against the gullible outsider, but continually cheat each other. In this endless bout of shadow boxing there is no such thing as an 'authentic identity' or an 'innocent soul'; there are only roles that people are obliged to adopt and forced to play by circumstance.

When Kessler professes his innocence to Katharina by saying 'But I haven't done anything', she answers with a curt and conclusive 'Genau!' In the Europe depicted in Europa and The Element of Crime there is no place for an innocent, authentic, unsullied identity; to survive, you have to adapt. In this Europe, an identity is not a stable, durable set of attributes defining a 'character' or a 'personality'; it is a pragmatic (not to say opportunistic), contextual and contingent construction. A 'character' here exists only in the classical Greek sense of a mask that represents a personage while concealing the actor.

The characters in Europa are therefore rather like the avatars in virtual online communities, whose external characteristics say equally little about their users' actual offline identities. In hindsight, the film presents a wry counterpart to the famous joke 'on the Internet no one knows you're a dog': 'in Europa no one knows you're a Werewolf'. Just as in online virtual communities the avatars cannot be taken 'at interface value' (Turkle 1995), the characters in Europa cannot be taken 'at face value'. In this respect, the Europe of the Europa trilogy is no less than a cinematographic counterpart of the internet, in which people play and experiment with adopted identities and which, according to Sherry Turkle (ibid.), encourages us 'to think of ourselves as fluid, emergent, decentralised, multiplicitous, flexible and ever in process' (ibid.: 263-264). Turkle is suggesting

here that playing and experimenting on the Internet can also lead to the realisation that one's *offline* identity, too, is not a stable, unchanging set of attributes, but is subject to change, is continuously shifting and emerging from the changing circumstances in which we live. Those unable or unwilling to see the contingent, alterable (and in EUROPA, chameleon-like) nature of identity, or who try to protect an 'inner personality' against the changes that participation in the world always brings about, invariably come to grief. This is true for Leopold Kessler, but also for Karen in IDIOTERNE, for Bess (played by Emily Watson) in BREAKING THE WAVES and for Selma in DANCER IN THE DARK, for whom Grace in DOGVILLE seems to act as an avenging angel.

Virtual film

The continuous duplication, duplicity and deception that the protagonists in THE ELEMENT OF CRIME and EUROPA experience in person is continued at the level of structure, form and style within the films. At first sight, both films would seem to be narrative genre films: Fisher's quest in THE ELEMENT OF CRIME for the lottery murderer seems to follow the whodunit blueprint, decked out in the visual style of *film noir* and *retro film noir* (which had enjoyed a new upsurge of interest in the 1980s with films such as BODY HEAT (Kasdan, USA 1981), THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE (Rafelson, USA 1981), HAMMETT (Wenders, USA 1982), BLADE RUNNER (Ridley Scott, USA 1982), BLOOD SIMPLE (Joel and Ethan Coen, USA 1984), etc.). EUROPA seems to follow the *Bildungsroman* pattern in which a journey symbolises the learning and maturing process of a young, ingenuous soul. From the earliest days of film history, railways and the train journeys have denoted the irreversible causal and chronological trajectory of a story and the inescapable fate of the protagonist.

However, narrative logic is a pattern constructed after the fact, one that draws contingent and disparate events together into a coherent, explanatory whole. In THE ELEMENT OF CRIME and EUROPA, the hypnotic voice-over and the psychoanalyst transport the protagonists, and with them the spectators, into a universe no longer governed by the laws of reason, and one whose coherence is no longer based on a comprehensible storyline. As a critic said of THE ELEMENT OF CRIME:

> The narrative is difficult to extrapolate from the individual scenes, and in the end it is mostly irrelevant. Even with Fisher's voice-over narrative guiding the proceedings, the character's motivations are cloudy and the general thematic drive of the film is hard to decipher (it has something to do with merging the police investigator and the criminal he is investigating) (Kendrick 2000).

The same applies to EUROPA, in which an imperative voice-over speaks without explaining the connections between episodes or the reasons for the leaps in space and time. Zentropa's railway network maps and the names of the destinations in Kessler's journey are of no help in reconstructing his geographic movements, either. Although at first sight, both films comprise familiar aspects of narrative genre films, every story that emerges is actually taking shape, provisionally and tentatively, in the mind of the spectator. To the extent that we may talk of a 'story' at all, here it is simply one of numerous virtual trajectories through the state space made possible in each film.

Black-and-white or colour?

This kind of playing with familiar forms, so that their self-evidence is removed, is extrapolated into the style of the Europa trilogy. A good example of this is a scene in which Kessler looks out of his train compartment window and sees Katharina through the window of hers; the two trains are running side by side. Each train overtakes the other in turn, but the actual direction in which they are travelling cannot be ascertained. The film camera is fixed and mounted at right angles to the window; Katharina's train moves to the left and to the right with respect to the composition, and this tells us about the movement of one train relative to the other, but we do not know in which direction both trains are actually travelling. The absolute movement of both trains is a virtual one, and the relative movement between the two compartments is brought about by means of visual effects alone. Here, too, every reconstruction of the movement of the train compartments that is based on the optical and cinematographic effect of their relative movement is no more than a selection from numerous possible states within the state space. Both trains could be moving forwards and backwards, Katharina's train could be moving to and fro while Kessler's stands still, Kessler's train could be moving to and fro while Katharina's stands still, and both trains could be moving in the same direction (forwards or backwards), but at varying speeds.

The scene visualises particularly well how, in a universe without fixed reference points, the relationships of synchronicity, parallelism and (brief) stability are an effect of the position of the spectator. It is comparable to the game played with the 180° rule in EPIDEMIC, and shows relationships of space in the Europa trilogy are projections based on purely cinematographic effects.

And this is true not just of the spatial relationships. The worlds in these three films are built entirely out of film effects. In the scene in THE ELEMENT OF CRIME in which Fisher murders the girl he had set out as bait for Harry Grey, the action takes place inside a tent that is filmed from the outside while a backlight casts their silhouettes against the cloth: the shadow play, a classic film device that has

lost none of its power. It is not for nothing that THE ELEMENT OF CRIME and EUROPA take place entirely in darkness and obscurity; besides intensifying the nightmarish character of both films (as, for instance, in Charles Laughton's NIGHT OF THE HUNTER (USA 1955)), it also means that their visible reality is dematerialised as a pure lighting effect. Just as the railway tracks in the opening sequence are briefly illuminated by the headlight of an approaching locomotive before returning into darkness, the characters, objects and buildings in these films are visible only in the light of neon strip lights, light bulbs, headlights, searchlights, candles, torches, street lights, moonlight (and in the closing moments of EUROPA, the rising sun), or reflected in mirrors, windows, glass, and the surface of rivers and pools. Both films are forms of pure photography (literally: 'writing with light'), and as such they are representations of what filmic worlds are: virtual worlds composed of recorded and, later, projected reflections of immaterial light. Not just the numerous film references, but also the way they are presented, make the worlds in these films purely virtual universes.

The photography and cinematography in THE ELEMENT OF CRIME and EUROPA are not, however, intended to demonstrate the ontological or semiotic 'truth' of the photography or the film: they are not an exercise in demonstrating that 'the essence of film is the creation of virtual realities'. Rather, they fully take part in the game of disclosure and illusion that is played by the films. For instance, both films appear to have been shot in black-and-white, and THE ELEMENT OF CRIME seems to have been given optical filtering treatment in post-production in order to create the sepia effect in which Fisher's world is drenched. But in THE ELEMENT OF CRIME other colours sometimes also appear, derived from light sources in the image, such as the blue glow of a television screen or the red of a neon lamp. This makes it clear that the film was actually shot in colour and that the largely monochrome appearance of the film is the result, not of a choice of film stock, but of a conscious choice by the filmmaker to make use of only a limited number of the parameters available to him (see chapter 3). The flashes of colour in THE ELEMENT OF CRIME and the overall sepia effect come from the light sources that were on set: fluorescent lights, street lights, and so on. The sepia effect is not, then, the result of an external process, as the yellowing of photographs is the effect of a lengthy external process. It is a photographic effect: the consequence of the lighting that was used during shooting.

At the level of film style, then, THE ELEMENT OF CRIME subjects the viewer to the same alternation of illusion and disillusionment as Fisher himself undergoes, by raising questions about the nature of the film material, and just when the questions seem to be answered, sowing doubt about those answers. The film is neither black-and-white (for we have evidence that it was filmed in colour) nor colour (for only a tiny part of the colour spectrum is actually used), yet it is simultaneously black-and-white (apart from the sepia effect there is hardly any

colour in the film at all) and colour (the sepia colouration is not artificial but is brought about by the lighting itself). This approach – which could easily be grouped with the mode of parametric film narration (see chapter 2) – also has a clearly playful element: Besides the fact that the hypnosis induces an *ilinx* or vertigo, which is reproduced by the continuous stylistic reshuffling, our uncertainty about the nature of the film material is also called into play by a dimension of *mimicry*, where the film 'pretends' to be in black-and-white and/or in colour. The monochrome and sepia effects are the result, moreover, of arbitrary and technically unnecessary (not to say needlessly convoluted) limitations which von Trier had established for himself via a production code: a sepia effect obtained without recourse to post-production procedures, and a black-and-white effect obtained despite the use of the colour film required for this sepia effect. These voluntary constraints show us that von Trier was introducing game elements into his filmmaking practice over ten years before he launched Dogma 95.

And the game is continued along almost every dimension of style in the Europa trilogy. In THE ELEMENT OF CRIME, for instance, it is played with the issue of whether an image is a film or a photograph. At a given moment, we are shown a photo of Osborne in front of the burning car in which Harry Grey is supposed to have died. When this photo – according to Osborne, 'the only existing picture of Harry Grey' – is blown up until it fills the entire screen, it is not at all clear whether there is anyone in the car, just as the blow-ups made by the photographer Thomas (played by David Hemmings) in BLOW-UP (Michelangelo Antonioni, UK/It 1966) failed to answer the question of whether or not a body lay in the park bushes. However, when the camera zooms out again the picture has become a live action sequence; so, is the photo a still from this shot, has there been a subtle dissolve, or is it a double exposure? As in Antonioni's film, this mixture of photographic footage and post-production manipulation seems to raise the question of the status of photographic evidence, but with this difference: the question is not whether people see what they want to see in a photograph, but whether people see an image as a photograph because they want photographic evidence. It boils down to the same thing, anyway: after all, the question as to what a photograph allows us to see is frequently answered by referral to what photography *is* (see Bazin 1975; Barthes 1988). Both in Antonioni's film and the Europa trilogy, 'seeing' has at least as much to do with mental projection as with the perception of external stimuli.

EUROPA displays similar ambiguities with regard to the nature of the film material used and the status of the images. This, too, seems to be a black-and-white film, but coloured elements frequently appear (more often than in THE ELEMENT OF CRIME); these vary from letters (the title, EUROPA, is projected in red letters); faces (Katharina is always depicted in colour); and objects or scenes

to which the viewer's attention is to be drawn, such as Max Hartmann's blood in the bath as he hacks at himself with his razor, or the Jew's declaration which obtains Hartmann's exoneration from charges of collaboration. Unlike in THE ELEMENT OF CRIME, colour here neither means that the film was shot using colour film; nor are the colours the result of the colouring in of black-and-white images, like the 1964 version of JOUR DE FÊTE (Fr), released as a black-and-white film in 1949, for which Jacques Tati had painstakingly hand-painted objects such as flags and balloons.[14] In EUROPA, the coloured elements were shot on colour film, but 'laid over' the black-and-white shots in post-production.

Relativistic spaces

The film images in EUROPA do not consist only of heterogeneous elements such as black-and-white and colour; they often depict spaces which have a dramatic unity but are constructed out of separate takes. In the scene in which the youthful murderer of the mayor of Darmstadt is himself killed by an American MP, the youth's head appears in the foreground while we see the mayor dying in the background. However, the youth and the mayor are filmed from different positions, so that the combination provides a multi-perspective viewpoint of the event. Conversely, events having a dramatic contrast are sometimes united by camera position or movement: when the Jew has handed over his bogus declaration and leaves Hartmann's house, the camera follows him through a hole in the wall[15] after the door has closed, so we are able to see how he receives money from Harris (and tell him that he's fed up with the whole business). By contrast, earlier in the film, four depth-separated events had been visible through the open door, events which had had nothing to do with the main action.

The same multi-perspective approach returns in a later scene. Kessler has been summoned into a car by one of the Werewolf leaders; from inside the car he sees how Katharina stands still at the side of the road and turns towards him. In this shot, in which the car is filmed from the outside as it passes Katharina, Kessler's head stays in close-up in the centre of the picture, while the Werewolf's head, slightly out-of-focus and smaller than his distance from Kessler would suggest, moves across the picture from left to right in the background. In this almost cubist perspective game it seems as if the camera is focussed on the car (explaining Kessler's constant head position) and, at the same time, fixed on Katharina (explaining the Werewolf's movement). In the next scene, shot from inside the car, we pass Katharina in a way that cannot be fully explained by the supposed movement of the car.

These are just a few examples of how the image of a location that forms a unity of time and space is depicted from several perspectives at once. In EURO-

PA, the unity of time and space in a scene is also frequently broken open by the appearance of elements that belong to the following scene or which are part of an event taking place elsewhere. When Katharina and Kessler meet on a bridge on Christmas Eve, and Kessler asks Katharina to marry him, the image of a priest looking on approvingly rises from the glistening water of the river. The image flows seamlessly into the next scene, in which Kessler and Katharina are in a church, being united in marriage by the same priest. Space and time in Europa are not the objective and stable dimensions of a Newtonian universe, but are subjective, modifiable, manipulable, relativistic dimensions. In other words, space and time in Europa are not the dimensions of the everyday, familiar world, which the film endeavours to depict as realistically as possible, but – once again – virtual relationships brought about by purely cinematographic means.

It would be easy to attribute these continuous interruptions in the unity of perspective and space-time to post-production procedures, as was the case in numerous Hollywood blockbusters that were produced around the same time: for instance, Total Recall (Paul Verhoeven, USA 1990) or Terminator 2: Judgment Day (James Cameron, USA 1991). In Europa, however, most of these effects were obtained during shooting, using background and foreground projections, mirrors, and double exposures. Though the effects visible in the film make us suspect that post-production manipulation of footage has severed the connection between image and referent, the images are in fact indexical registrations of on-set combinations between live action shots and film images produced beforehand. For instance, the locations in Europa were filmed in Poland and the live action scenes in Copenhagen (see Stevenson 2002: 65).

This principle of achieving 'impossible photography' (Darley 2000: 108) by photographic and cinematographic means is demonstrated ironically in Epidemic, in a scene in which von Trier simultaneously pokes fun at film conventions and shows us how simple film techniques can be used to create an impossible reality. During the film-within-the-film, Dr. Mesmer leaves the city and we float with him over a flat landscape. When the camera zooms out from a medium shot of Mesmer to a long shot, we see that he is hanging on a rope from a helicopter. The shot becomes the indexical registration of what has occurred in front of the camera, namely, *how* this special effect was achieved. It also produces a virtual image, because in the diegetic world of the film-within-the-film Mesmer floats over the landscape. Because a floating Mesmer could not have occurred in the ordinary physical world, or for that matter on a film set, it is left to the spectator to imagine Mesmer floating in this way (see chapter 6).

Europa, too, consists of indexical photographic images of a virtual world. The paradox is presented by the images themselves: on the one hand, the fragmentation of spatial continuity in a setting distributed over different perspec-

tives, and on the other hand, the synthesis of these fragments into a new and seamless whole. The new unity is 'synthetic' both in the sense of being a compound unity, and in the sense in which artificial substances and computer-generated images are termed synthetic. Just as synthetic substances are created in the laboratory and computer-generated images 'are created *within* the computer' (Darley 2000: 19), the space-time relationships that result from these syntheses in the film are impossible in the real world. They are nonetheless 'generated' using indexical photographic and cinematographic means, largely with the help of tricks that had been employed by such early filmmakers as Abel Gance in NAPOLÉON (Fr/BRD/It/Sp/Sw/Cz 1927) or Dziga Vertov in THE MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA (USSR 1929). EUROPA achieves a cinematographic squaring of the circle, so to speak, using indexical images that themselves contain indexical images, but which nevertheless (or perhaps for this reason) lose their dependence on an independent, objective 'reality' (see Darley 2000: 133).

The key to the aesthetic strategy in THE ELEMENT OF CRIME and in EUROPA lies in the equally paradoxical use of montage. In a classical feature film, editing is the art of creating a co-ordinated succession of shots, whereby cutting and splicing bring about direct, abrupt transitions from one shot to the next (see Bordwell and Thompson 1993: 247 et seq.). Classic editing technique is usually called continuity editing, because mise-en-scène and camera positions have been so planned that transitions between shots do not distract the viewer from the events taking place in the scene (ibid.: 261). Editing nevertheless destroys the continuity of an event by breaking it up into more than one shot, eliminating trivial details, and directing the viewer's attention towards dramatically important details, or towards each speaker in turn using a series of shots and reverse shots. For this reason, continuity editing is also called analytical editing (see Bordwell et al. 1985: 198 et seq.; Bazin 1984: 45 et seq.).[16]

With the exception of the framing story in EPIDEMIC, analytical editing was not employed in the films of the Europa trilogy. In EPIDEMIC, too, every scene in the film-within-a-film consists of a single continuous shot. THE ELEMENT OF CRIME and EUROPA also make use of long, often complex, uninterrupted camera movements. Occasional use is made of 'in-image editing', for instance, when we see different images at different screen depths, such as the scene in which the Jew officially exonerates Hartmann. But at other times, complex camera movements link events taking place at the same time but in different places, such as the scene which starts in the attic of Hartmann's house, where Leopold and Katharina are making love ('you said someone should show some compassion with Germany; show some compassion with me'); the camera leaves them, sinks straight through several floors, and ends up in a bathroom, where Hartmann is hacking himself with his razor. In this scene,[17] a single camera movement creates space-time relationships that would normally be suggested by par-

allel editing. In Europa, these kinds of camera movements also bring about temporal relationships of succession, which in conventional films are expressed by successive shots separated by cuts. For example, after Hartmann has been found dead in his bath by Leopold, Katharina, Harris and the priest, the camera leaves the house, in an exceptionally complicated movement, and ends up in a train compartment, at which Leopold and Katharina have since arrived. These *tours de force* ineluctably call to mind the extraordinary camera movements in Orson Welles's Citizen Kane and the opening scene of his Touch of Evil (USA 1958).

Such camera movements are perhaps not common to classical film,[18] but they are, as the films of Orson Welles and others have shown, not unacceptable within the classical paradigm (Metz 1983: 146; Manovich 2001: 148). Bazin (1984: 50), speaking in connection with the films of Welles and William Wyler, has even called them 'a first-rate asset for mise-en-scène' and 'a dialectical advance in the history of film language'. Within the paradigm of the classical film, such long, continuous, unbroken shots were correlated with 'chunks of space-time' whose internal space-time continuity was maintained, but which was discontinuous with the preceding and the following segments. For this reason such shots were generally demarcated by means of blatant transitions (a cut, a fade-out/fade-in, a wipe), and thereby clearly distinguished from previous and subsequent segments (Metz 1983).

This also seems to be the case in Europa. The various episodes in the film are separated from one another by images of the railway tracks and the hypnotic voice-over of Max von Sydow, while within each episode the various shots are not separated one from another by clear cuts or other distinctive demarcations. Nevertheless, leaps are regularly made in space and time within each episode, even though it is not always possible to trace these movements through the imaginary Germany of the film. There is a continuity, in the sense that it is always Leopold Kessler who makes these transpositions, but the transpositions themselves are usually depicted in a very elliptical manner. While camera movements start and end at identifiable locations, they are not clearly punctuated by demarcations from preceding or succeeding shots. Within each episode, space-time transitions are achieved by complex camera movements which leave characters at one location, only to find them at another, or by having elements of the following location or action loom up in the picture, or by using blatantly symbolic imagery. For instance, we see Kessler's side-on silhouette, running without apparently advancing, against the background of a huge clock;[19] or we see a close-up of Kessler's eyes rolling as if he were trying, at some other level of reality, to 'face up' to the vicissitudes of his life.

At the editing level, Europa follows the same paradoxical strategy as in the spatial composition of the single image. Because the action is distributed over

several locations, because all sorts of disparate images appear and disappear again, and because the action is continually transposed in space and time, the narrative and space-time continuity of the film is continually disrupted. At the same time, this fragmentation is smoothed away by means of seamless cross-fades, double exposures, fadeouts, zoom movements or anamorphoses (see Visy 2003), which lend the film the fluidity and smooth continuity that would become a characteristic of new media's 'anti-montage' (Manovich 2001: 142). The sense of continuity which the film creates has little to do with a bazinian respect, for the spatial and temporal continuity of action. The film does not simulate the visual and auditory perception of the space-time continuity of the physical world, but rather the way in which dreamwork unites the disparate elements of a dream into a whole (see Freud 1982: 191 et seq.). The continuity of Europa is not an analogous representation of the continuity of the diegesis, as for instance in Hitchcock's Rope (USA 1948), but is a synthetic effect brought about purely by filmic – and in this case, frequently 'analogue' – methods.

The paradoxical way in which the continuity of camera movement unites narrative and space-time discontinuities yields a form of editing which cannot be described using the conventional terminology of film technique and film style but which must be characterised as a form of compositing: according to Lev Manovich (2001: 142), 'the key operation of postmodern, or computer-based, authorship'. Compositing – 'assembling together a number of elements to create a single seamless object' (ibid.: 139; see also Darley 2000: 133) – is, according to Manovich, a form of 'anti-editing', because editing is directed towards the differentiation of clear-cut, discrete units, while compositing is directed towards the effacement of boundaries between different elements so that they stand in a new and seamless unity: 'In digital compositing, the elements are not juxtaposed but blended, their boundaries erased rather than foregrounded' (ibid.: 155).

To the contradictory aspects of the film style of The Element of Crime and Europa (neither colour nor black-and-white, both indexical and virtual), we can thus add, another dimension along which both films express a certain ambiguity. Although both films are, technically speaking, films, and the worlds in both have been created using cinematographic methods, both exhibit stylistic principles which in hindsight may be regarded as examples of 'new media' aesthetics *avant-la-lettre*. Using film techniques, von Trier created a virtual reality in these two films in which he – ironically enough, in contrast to the much later developers of immersive 3D virtual reality environments – does not strive to achieve the photorealistic simulation of a physical environment, but the cinematographic construction of a virtual reality which does not necessarily possess the same attributes and dimensions as the material and physical world. It has already been noted that space and time in these film-virtual realities are not char-

acterised by the objectivity and constancy of measure and unit, but by modifiable mental dimensions created by subjective perceptions and experiences. To cite in this context the master of montage, Sergei Eisenstein (1981: 250-251), these are not spaces constructed according to 'an aesthetic of the filmic eye', but to 'an aesthetic of the plastic materialisation of the view or vision of a phenomenon' (although Eisenstein would doubtless have taken offence at the 'views' that von Trier chose to propagate in Europa).

The spaces we enter in the films of the Europa trilogy are not independent geographical, physical and architectural environments, but immaterial, mental 'information spaces', because they function as nodes in networks of the memories, impressions and associations they bring about. They do not refer to important historic or fictional objects or events, but are fragments of a mental and conceptual world; they are images not of a physical world, but of a cognitive and intellectual one (see Bolter 1991: 47). The worlds in these films are not photographic representations of existing or even of possible worlds, but cinematographic simulations of virtual realities, as is, in a different way, the case in Idioterne as well (see chapter 3).[20]

The aesthetic strategy developed in Europa is therefore pervaded with the same ambivalence as that which pervades every element and every level. Not only does Leopold Kessler discover that no one is who they are purported to be; we too, as viewers, are left in a constant state of uncertainty about the status of the film images and their mutual relationships (black-and-white or colour, indexical or synthetic, continuous or discontinuous), and even about the nature of the medium. Naturally, there can be no material doubt that Europa is a film, and one which satisfies the popular cultural requirements of 'film' and 'cinema' (see Odin 1990: 55-57). But The Element of Crime and Europa immerse the viewer in a stream of images of synthetic, virtual realities that were nonetheless created by purely filmic means.

Perhaps the only answer to the ambiguities with which the Europa trilogy films confront the viewer is Kessler's retort when he finally appreciates the ambivalence of the Europe in which he has ended up: 'I've been screwed by everybody.' Such dysphoria contrasts sharply with the euphoria with which new media and virtual realities were received in the 1980s and 90s (see Lunenveld 2001: 85 et seq.). Computer-based information and communication technologies (ICT) were seen as the portals to a virtual reality in which everything that divided people (sex, age, ethnicity, social class, cultural background, national borders, language, etc.) and which limited them (restrictions on time and space, the vulnerability and mortality of the human body, the limits of knowledge and perception) could be transcended in a purely spiritual, intangible, virtual reality, built by knowledge and information alone, in which individuals would freely converse, exchange knowledge and experience, and thereby form a virtual com-

munity founded on the principles of equality and co-operation.[21] These 'tech-noromantic' views characterised the ICT future as 'unified, fair, egalitarian, and highly productive' (Coyne 1999: 20).

The virtual reality created and opened in the Europa trilogy by filmic means is a very different place. If it can be compared to anything else, it might be with the dystopic 'consensual hallucination' depicted in the novel *Neuromancer* (1984) by William Gibson, who coined the term 'cyberspace'. In the Europa trilogy, technology has a function that is apparently at odds with the 'healing' function ascribed to it in the digital utopias of the techno-romanticists. Instead of show-ing us the way to the 'pearly gates of cyberspace' (Wertheim 1999), the prime function of the film technology in these films seems to be the destruction of unity and the unleashing of all sorts of centripetal forces: the forces that run riot 'when reason sleeps'. While the techno-romanticists portray ICT as a new driv-ing force for the bonding of virtual communities, the cinematographic technol-ogy in the Europa trilogy obstructs unity and portrays a virtual reality drifting ever closer to entropy.

This technology continually excites tensions, contradictions and conflicts which render any conclusive underpinning impossible. Goya's famous painting *The Sleep of Reason* displays the same ambiguity: When reason sleeps then fear and superstition enter, but what if reason, too, is a dream? This is not an issue with technology: Whether they are created with old or new media, virtual reali-ties are not virtual because of their technology but because they are ultimately the product of the human imagination. A filmic universe is a virtual reality not because it has no referent in the real world, but ultimately because it is a mental projection. If film is a game, then it is a mind game.

And while von Trier certainly launched the Dogma 95 Manifesto in order to offload the ballast that the logistics, organisation and production of such films as Europa (and later, Breaking the Waves, Dancer in the Dark and Dog-ville) entailed, the films of the Europa trilogy represent an exploration through virtual worlds which von Trier would resume in later films by other means.

5 The Leader of the Game

Many films, one game

Just as von Trier's 'naturalistic' Dogma film IDIOTERNE was seen as a radical break with his earlier, highly stylised proofs of cinematographic mastery, the films he made after IDIOTERNE were seen as a radical break with the Dogma aesthetic. For instance, film critic Rodriguez (2004) wrote that Dogma 95 'championed naturalistic filmmaking with no artificial lights or sounds', while Simon Spiegel (2003) wrote of DOGVILLE: '*(Der) Regieexzentriker von Trier geht also nach seinem Dogma-Experiment einmal mehr daran, das Kino radikal neu zu erfinden*' and called DOGVILLE '*das krasse Gegenteil des Dogma-Naturalismus*'. It was no doubt partly the result of the interview with von Trier which was printed along with the production notes in the DOGVILLE press pack,[1] that wide reference was made to the consciously Brechtian aesthetic that was supposed to have taken the place of Dogma naturalism (even where this influence was contested – see Bots 2003) or to the minimalist, theatrical character of the film (see French 2004).

And DOGVILLE is, indeed, the opposite of a Dogma film. Pretty much every rule of the Dogma 95 Manifesto is transgressed: the film takes place in the America of the Great Depression and as a historical costume drama it violates both the ban on 'temporal alienation' and the prohibitions on props and costumes. Much use is also made of sound that was not recorded on set, as von Trier himself explains: 'you hear gravel crunch under the actor's feet even if there's no gravel visible on the studio floor' (in Björkman 2004). Lighting effects and special effects are not avoided, such as the *Alpenglünen* which shines through the window of the blind Jack McKay (played by Ben Gazarra), the blossom that descends during the meal held on the Fourth of July, and the snow that falls during Grace's plea during the last Dogville residents meeting. The finale of the film is, of course, the most flagrant violation of Dogma's ban on 'superficial action' ('murders and weapons, etc. must not occur').

However, these transgressions of the Dogma rules can only be seen as representing a break with 'Dogma naturalism' if the Manifesto is read and interpreted from the perspective of Bazinian or neo-Bazinian realism (see Conrich and Tincknell 2000). Seen from a ludological and model-oriented standpoint,

the rules point to a very different conceptualisation of film and reality (see chapter 2). If the rules are seen as guidelines that assist the filmmaker in being able to concentrate only on the genuinely important elements with which a situation is to be modelled, (the 'actors and settings', as the Manifesto describes), and if every performance of a scene is no more than the contingent actualisation of the infinite number of virtual variations comprised in the 'script', then one performance is no more 'natural' than another, and props and costumes, extra light or sound are no more than the incidental 'colouring' or detailing of the model.

If von Trier has radically reinvented film then this is not because he has tried a new style or approach with every film, one which would represent a radical break with all his former films. Von Trier's reinvention of film consists of a totally original concept of 'what film is', a concept that represents a radical break with the classical and the modernistic concept of the film as a representation of reality in all its social, political, psychological and aesthetic varieties (see chapter 2). Film for von Trier is a playful, rule-bound activity. His scenes are not imitations of an original historic or fictional situation, designed to resemble the original as closely as possible; they are models in which the behaviour of a system is simulated under different circumstances. Every execution is no more – and no less! – than a given state in the state space defined by the parameters of the situation concerned and its context.

From this viewpoint, the differences between IDIOTERNE and DOGVILLE (and between IDIOTERNE and DANCER IN THE DARK, the film that immediately followed it) are not as fundamental or radical as they may at first appear from a classical or modernistic perspective. And if it is true that the perceivable differences and breaks between von Trier's films exist at the level of the incidental filling in of his models, then the question arises whether von Trier's films might not actually be states within the state space 'von Trier'. The issue then is: which parameters and algorithms define this state space?

The 'von Trier' gameworlds

For a filmmaker who is supposed to reinvent cinema with every new production, the structural elements of his films remain remarkably constant. All of his films include a principal character who is an *outsider* who enters a new and unfamiliar environment where the codes of behaviour are unknown or misunderstood. The inability to work out these behavioural codes or to accept them ultimately leads to the physical or mental collapse of this character.

In THE ELEMENT OF CRIME, Fisher returns under hypnosis to a post-apocalyptic Europe after an absence of ten years; it has become an unrecognisable waste-

land. In Europa, Kessler arrives, as a young and idealistic American, in a Germany devastated by war where everyone seems to be caught up in a shadowy struggle. In Idioterne, Karen gets involved in a group of spassers whose explanations for their peculiar behaviour she believes, but fails to notice that everyone else in the group is simply pursuing their own sexual and assorted other pleasures. In Breaking the Waves, Bess's psychiatric past makes her an outcast to the people in the island's small, closed community where she lives, and she fails to see that their piety conceals a cruel conservatism. In Dancer in the Dark, Selma is an immigrant in a provincial American town, but in her fantasies she returns again and again to the musicals of her youth in Czechoslovakia, heedless of her American neighbour's craving for status and consumption and his impending bankruptcy at the hands of his demanding wife. In Dogville, Grace, a sophisticated urbanite, is utterly ignorant of the poverty-stricken existence of the inhabitants in this small, isolated community in the Rocky Mountains and obstinately continues to see them as 'the good and honest people of Dogville'.

The cognitive and social deficiency that marks von Trier's characters is both motivated and symbolised by two psychological attributes of these characters. Firstly, they are in a state of mental confusion which can itself take either of two forms: the troubled mind, or the naïve one. Fisher returns to Europe, tormented by 'headaches' and under hypnosis, to relive his investigation into the lottery murders; after the death of her child, Karen is in a state of shock when she meets the spassers; Bess has a psychiatric history to which her parents and the other islanders repeatedly refer. Other protagonists seem to suffer from extraordinary naiveté: Kessler comes to Europe after the Second World War to help with the rebuilding of Germany ('somebody should feel sorry for the Germans'); Selma has a visual handicap which not only makes it impossible for her to support herself economically or socially (she is rendered unsuited for work in the hardware factory, and the musical director Samuel, played by Vincent Patterson, deprives her of the lead role in *The Sound of Music* because of her bad eyesight), but it also literally prevents her from seeing the true intentions of her neighbour and landlord, sheriff Bill (played by David Morse) – she fails to see him hanging around after taking his leave so as to find out where she keeps her money; and Grace expects the inhabitants of the impoverished mountain village of Dogville to lead lives different from the one she is fleeing from, but also to have a mentality unlike that of her father's gangsters ('it sounds like the words gangsters would use', she utters with surprise, when Tom proposes a *quid pro quo* in which she would offer services to the villagers in return for shelter and protection).

This cognitive and social deficiency is also invariably coupled with one or another form of idealism or credulity. Fisher believes in the 'Osborne method'

that stipulates that a detective must identify with the criminal he wants to find; Kessler is an incorrigible optimist; Karen genuinely believes that spassing is a way to search for the 'inner idiot'; Bess believes that the health of her lover Jan, now paralysed after an oil rig accident, depends on the amount of sex she has with other men; for Selma, the duty she feels to enable her son to have an eye-sight-saving operation is more important than her own life (she refuses to spend the money saved up for the operation on a lawyer who could commute her death sentence to life imprisonment); and Grace continues to believe in the up-right intentions of the 'good and honest people of Dogville' until her father opens her eyes.

The situations in which von Trier's protagonists find themselves, despite the differences in outward appearance and disparate historical and geographical references (see chapters 4 and 6), also show a remarkable consistency. The logic underlying the behaviour of the people in these surroundings, which the prota-gonists fail to distinguish because it is at odds with their own idealism (often manifested as an inclination to self-sacrifice and disinterested altruism), is prob-ably most tellingly displayed by Dogville's aspiring writer Tom Edison (played by Paul Bettany), when he suggests that Grace offer a *quid pro quo*. Having made a round in Dogville and having questioned the inhabitants about Grace, who they suspect is on the run, he makes the following suggestion:

> From a business perspective, your presence in Dogville has become more costly. Be-cause it is more dangerous for them to have you here. Not that they don't want you. It's just that they feel there should be some counterbalance, some *quid pro quo*.

Grace's first reaction – 'it sounds like the words gangsters would use' – imme-diately makes it clear that the 'business perspective' that Tom is presenting re-presents exactly the values from which she is fleeing. Tom reassures her that the exchange has a purely symbolic character, one she should see as a game:

> T.: 'You've got two weeks' time to get them to accept you.'
> G.: 'You make it sound like we're playing a game.'
> T.: 'It is. We are. Isn't saving your life worth a little game?'
> ...
> 'Dogville offered you two weeks. Now you offer them...'

This exchange – in the sense both of the dialogue, and of the barter on the prin-ciple of 'one good turn deserves another' – provides three keys to the nature of the game rules governing the narrative worlds inhabited by von Trier's prota-gonists.

Firstly, the relationships in these worlds are dominated by material exchange. In Dogville, Grace has to offer her services to the community in exchange for a hiding place. In The Element of Crime, these exchanges are embodied by the

prostitute Kim, but Fisher encounters all sorts of black marketeers and traffickers in his travels through Europe. In Europa, the law of the marketplace is symbolised by the Jew, played by von Trier himself, who exonerates Max Hartmann from collaboration with the Nazis in return for a cash payment from Colonel Harris. But, meanwhile, Kessler has been confronted with horse-trading practices from the start of his *Bildungs* journey, when his uncle makes him pay for his own medical examination and uniform. Later, he is faced with an impossible trade-off, when the Werewolves make it clear that he must either sacrifice the life of his sweetheart Katharina in order to save the lives of the train passengers, or plant a terrorist bomb in the train in order to save her life.

In Breaking the Waves, Bess becomes ensnared in a twofold *quid pro quo* logic. For her, the sexual relationships she undergoes with other men are expected of her in return for the safeguarding of Jan's health; they exist at a higher, symbolic, even transcendental level. For the elders of the island, however, they merely represent lust and money-grubbing: exchanges of a material and immanent nature. The relationships between the spassers in Idioterne are rivalrous: the best spasser can lay claim to leadership of the group. In Dancer in the Dark, Selma foots the bill for the infernal deal made by her neighbour and landlord Bill, who has to buy the love of his wife Linda (played by Cara Seymour) with expensive furniture and luxury articles which his policeman's modest salary cannot afford. In Dogville Grace is eventually trapped in a vicious circle of ever worsening *quid pro quo*. The terms of her exchange are untenable, as is made clear by Jason (played by Miles Purinton), the young son of Vera (played by Patricia Clarkson) and Chuck (played by Stellan Skarsgård), who demands that she spank him and threatens that if she doesn't he will tell his mother that she did.

The impossible *quid pro quo* in which Grace becomes trapped brings us to the second dimension of the game rules displayed by von Trier's narrative worlds. That is, the *quid pro quo* relationships to which the protagonists become subjected have all the characteristics of a *potlatch*, a ceremonial ritual amongst the Indian tribes of British Columbia in which one group showers another with gifts, obliging the other to return or, better still, surpass the gesture. A potlatch can even involve destroying one's own property to show that one is wealthy enough not to care (see Huizinga 1997: 82-83).

Although the potlatch can have far-reaching economic effects for those taking part, its principal purpose is symbolic and directed towards obtaining prestige and pre-eminence. In this light, it is not entirely without significance that in Dogville Tom suggests to Grace that she respond to the villagers' willingness to offer her a hiding place (a gesture which costs them nothing) by offering to do the odd jobs that the villagers themselves have never gotten around to and which, while strictly unnecessary, would make their lives more pleasant. Once

set in motion, this potlatch logic leads irrevocably to more and more *quid pro quo*, which Grace ultimately brings to a stop by totally destroying the village.

Von Trier's other protagonists are ensnared in equally impossible transactions. Fisher pays for his adherence to the 'Osborne method' with his own psychological integrity. Kessler is faced with the choice of saving his sweetheart or preventing an act of terror. Bess sacrifices her social standing, her reputation, her physical integrity, and ultimately her own life for her Jan's health. After the group of spassers has fallen apart, and she has thanked them for their friendship, Karen gives the ultimate spass-performance that the others dared not give and is rewarded by permanent banishment from her family. Selma is forced to shoot Bill dead in order to retrieve her stolen savings, and therefore pays for her son's future eyesight with her life. The only character to emerge from the potlatch a winner is Grace. She is the only one of von Trier's protagonists to figure out – with some hints from her father (played by James Caan) – that the exchange of services and protection was not based on selfless sympathy and appreciation, but was governed by the logic of the potlatch. And as the only one of von Trier's characters to do so, she escapes from the environment in which she had been trapped until that moment.

This brings us to the third characteristic of the *quid pro quo* relationships in von Trier's films: his protagonists become enmeshed in these 'one good turn deserves another' deals either unconsciously or against their wills. Fisher fails to realise that his master Osborne has used him as a scapegoat in order to throw the police off his own scent. Without realising it, Kessler becomes the dupe of various conflicting parties in postwar Germany ('I've been screwed by everybody!'). Bess offers her sexual services for the sake of Jan's health and not, as the elders think, for her own pleasure and income; her motives are 'otherworldly'. Karen devotes herself to spassing because she wants to discover her 'inner idiot', unaware of the rivalries between the other members of the group. Selma devotes her savings to fulfilling her 'higher' motherly duty of safeguarding Gene's eyesight and withdraws from the material *quid pro quo* relationships which have landed her in prison but which might also enable her to buy an appeal. Grace persists in seeing the *quid pro quo* relationship she has with the villagers as a 'game' played for symbolic stakes.

An interesting parallel can be drawn between von Trier's films and the world of video games as described by computer game theoretician Jespen Aarseth (1998). According to Aarseth, these games pit man against environment and draw a distinction between what he calls the 'player's puppet' and the other elements of the game world, which he characterises as being '"in the world but not of the world", so to speak'. Von Trier's protagonists come into conflict with their surroundings despite their also being disconnected from them. The principal function of their psychological characterisation is to accentuate (and moti-

vate) their disparities with, and alienation from those surroundings. As outsiders and idealists they are unacquainted with the egocentric *quid pro quo* logic governing an unfamiliar and often hostile environment. Their naiveté, gullibility or bewilderment forms an extra handicap, because it makes them accept the characters that appear around them at 'interface value' (Turkle 1995). The result is that they find themselves in the same situation as that of a player or avatar in a computer game:

> The player ... is placed in this alien world and must defend themselves against its unknown dangers. ... The space is not familiar and the player is at once immersed within it, yet pitted against it, viewing it as an abstracted puzzle (Newman: 2004: 116).

Discovering the 'patterns of behaviour' exhibited by other players in a computer game environment, behaviour which is often controlled by the game itself, 'is usually itself part of the game, allowing a player to advance to higher levels once the pattern is recognised and mastered' (Wolf 2001: 81). The psychological characteristics of von Trier's protagonists do not equip them particularly well for this task, and it is Grace alone, with her father's assistance, who succeeds. She is the only one who recognises the patterns of behaviour as the rules of the potlatch, which Huizinga, despite the gravity of the ritual, called an 'agonal game':

> It seems to me that in the complex known as a *potlatch* the agonal instinct is primary; it is a communal game of promoting the collective or the individual public figure. It is a serious game, a disastrous game, a bloody one on occasion, a sacred game, but a game nonetheless (Huizinga 1997: 86).

The rules of this 'disastrous game' also govern the patterns of behaviour in the narrative environments of von Trier's other films, which makes it possible to speak of the status of these films as states in a state space. Discovering the rules and patterns of a computer game environment is necessary not only to survive in that environment but also to escape from it and gain access to a new, higher game level, which will confront the player with new problems and challenges. For all the different ways in which they have been 'filled in', von Trier's films do seem to repeat a persistent theme, to share a common pattern, in which the protagonists fail to find the key to the behaviour of other characters and ultimately meet with disaster as a result. This pattern can be perfectly well described in game theoretical terms, as will be demonstrated in chapter 8. It would seem – as is the case in Tom Tykwer's LOLA RENNT (BRD 1998) in a more condensed form – as though each film represents a renewed attempt to discover and master the rules and behavioural patterns of a game level:

> Often a game's levels will be almost impossible to complete the first time through, since they may require a player to know in advance an exact series of actions that will get him or her through a level. Repetition, then, becomes a form of training, and each time through the level becomes a slightly (or even substantially) different experience for the player (Wolf 2001: 81).

As stated earlier, the psychological characteristics of von Trier's protagonists do not equip them particularly well for the task of determining the logic underlying the behaviour of those around them. They do not possess sufficient cognitive and intellectual resources to solve the riddles and problems posed by their surroundings. However, the same characteristics also make them willing pawns in the game strategies being played by others. But for which players do the protagonists become the 'player's puppet' (Aarseth 1998)? To answer this question, it is worth having a closer look at the only one of von Trier's protagonists who does not seem to fit into this category, the character played by Lars von Trier himself in the film-within-a-film sequence in EPIDEMIC: Dr. Mesmer.

EPIDEMIC**: reverse engineering**

In many respects, EPIDEMIC is not a typical von Trier film, but it is precisely for this reason that it actually throws useful light onto the others. If we adhere to von Trier's own structural division within the three trilogies he has made thus far, then EPIDEMIC, the second film in the Europa trilogy, correlates with IDIOTERNE, the second film in the Golden Heart trilogy. EPIDEMIC and IDIOTERNE are both low-budget films made with few resources, sandwiched between larger, technically and stylistically more ambitious films: EPIDEMIC was made between THE ELEMENT OF CRIME and EUROPA, and IDIOTERNE between BREAKING THE WAVES and DANCER IN THE DARK. Both films can be seen as therapeutic intermezzos in which von Trier gave himself a temporary rest from the heavy workload that the production of ambitious feature films – basically all of his other films – invariably entail. The Dogma 95 Manifesto ends with the following oath:

> Furthermore, I swear as a director to refrain from personal taste! I am no longer an artist. I swear to refrain from creating a 'work', as I regard the instant as more important than the whole. My supreme goal is to force the truth out of my characters and settings. I swear to do so by all the means available and at the cost of any good taste and any aesthetic considerations.

While this can certainly be seen as a redefinition of the role of the film director, namely, as an algorist who devises the rules of the game and then oversees the process by which these rules are executed in a model (see chapter 2), it can also

be read as expressing von Trier's own frustrations with the demands made by large film productions (see Stevenson 2002: 104).

The two films are, moreover, linked by their concept of play. Play – in the sense both of playing (games) and of acting (role-playing) – is of central importance both to the story and to the production methods of IDIOTERNE (see chapter 3). EPIDEMIC also has a ludic dimension, because its production was a bet von Trier made with an advisor from the Danish Film Institute, Claes Kastholm Hansen, that he could make commercial feature film for less than a million Danish kroner, between one-seventh and one-eighth of the normal budget for this kind of film in Europe (see Stevenson 2002: 42-43). Stevenson (ibid.: 43) describes the experience that von Trier derived from EPIDEMIC in words that might have been borrowed from the Dogma 95 Manifesto:

> With his new found poverty, von Trier claimed he had also found freedom, freedom from the oppressive apparatus of commercial filmmaking, freedom to improvise, experiment and find spontaneity. While some claimed he was simply making a virtue out of necessity, he was by any measure now forced to tell and to make his film in a different way. As he expressed it, it was more important to challenge himself and grow and develop as an artist than to just give people what they expected.

The bet meant that von Trier was setting himself limits, just as the Vow of Chastity limits the Dogma filmmaker. Because these limits were voluntary, it is safe to say that von Trier was approaching the practice of film production as a game as early as with the production of EPIDEMIC.

When he bet Kastholm that he could make a 'commercial film' for less than a million kroner, von Trier cannot possibly have meant a Hollywood-type film. However, neither Stevenson nor von Trier bothered to explain what 'a commercial film that doesn't give people what they expect' actually is. As far as the story is concerned, EPIDEMIC's theme – familiar to the world of the European art film – is of the filmmaker in crisis, and it shows us the same landscape that the other two Europa films show: a Europe in the aftermath of a disaster. The production methods, content and narrative form are, at any rate, closer to the tradition of European art cinema than that of the American or popular European film.

EPIDEMIC operates on two different levels: It has a framing story about a filmmaker and his scriptwriter ('Lars and Niels'), played by von Trier and his scriptwriter Niels Vørsel, and it has a film-within-a-film in which the story of Dr. Mesmer (also played by von Trier) unfolds, and this is the story that Lars and Niels are writing. The situation in which Lars and Niels find themselves in the framing story is not unlike the situation in which von Trier found himself with Claes Kastholm. By the end of the week, Lars and Niels have to deliver a script to an advisor of the Danish Film Institute, played by Kastholm himself. How-

ever, the computer has erased the diskette that contained the script for their project, THE COPPER AND THE WHORE. Instead of trying to rewrite it, Lars and Niels decide to devote the five days they have left to a new project about a plague epidemic, which they entitle EPIDEMIC.

Almost all of von Trier's films display this kind of layering in which one layer performs a narrative function (like the psychotherapist and Fisher in THE ELEMENT OF CRIME, the voice-overs by Max von Sydow in EUROPA and by John Hurt in DOGVILLE, the interviewer and the ex-spassers in IDIOTERNE, or the fantasising Selma in DANCER IN THE DARK), and the other, embedded, layer portrays the story being told by the narrators in the first layer. EPIDEMIC and DANCER IN THE DARK are the only films in which the narrators are given faces and appear as recognisable characters (even Fisher, in his role as narrator from the psychotherapist's couch, remains off-screen).

Lars and Niels's story of Dr. Mesmer also differs from the embedded stories in von Trier's other films in a number of respects. First of all, Dr. Mesmer is not an outsider entering new and unfamiliar territory, but the respected member of a medical society who decides to leave that society. His medical colleagues offer him a ministerial post in the emergency government, composed entirely of medics, which is set up to ward off the plague epidemic which is advancing from the countryside towards the city. Mesmer declines the post, and accepts the professional rejection that follows. Mesmer considers the research into the plague as more important, and he leaves the safety of the city. Secondly, Mesmer is not misled by those he meets on his journey, but helps those who bear the outward symbols of societal dignity to rediscover their 'true' identity. For instance, he meets a black priest (played by Michael Simpson) who confides his doubts about his calling and who, as Mesmer gives him an injection to lower his fever, shouts out 'What the hell! The only thing a Negro needs are loose shoes, tight pussies and a warm place to shit!' Unlike the sternly religious elders on Bess's island in BREAKING THE WAVES, this priest needs only Mesmer's salutary medicine to become human. Thirdly, Mesmer is not destroyed by the harmful forces in his new environment. Like Fisher and Karen, his destiny is uncertain, but while Fisher's 'headaches' lead him to the psychotherapist's couch, and Karen's acceptance and fulfilment of Stoffer's challenge leads to her permanent ostracism by her family, EPIDEMIC's film-within-a-film gives us no details of the course of Mesmer's further adventures.

So, Mesmer is not only an exceptional figure amongst von Trier's other protagonists for several reasons, but is actually their mirror image. Mesmer's disparities with von Trier's other protagonists are therefore systematic, and the patterns that recur in varied forms in all of von Trier's other films are revealed all the more clearly for it. The systematic character of the disparities between Dr. Mesmer and von Trier's other protagonists also implies a common ground be-

tween them. This common ground in the first place consists of the dimensions along which Mesmer and the other characters take up polar positions, such as native inhabitant vs. outsider, emigrant vs. immigrant, healer vs. victim, researcher vs. believer, and so on. Besides these differences, there are also a number of similarities: Mesmer refuses the ministerial post because his 'calling' as a doctor and researcher is a higher one. So, like von Trier's other protagonists, he is an idealist, that is, he is inspired by belief in and loyalty to an ideal.

However, the most important (and conspicuous) difference between EPIDEMIC and the other films is the framing story within which Lars and Niels conceive of Dr. Mesmer's chronicle. This, too, throws useful light onto the other films, even though the creative process by which a story takes shape is not generally made visible in this way. As I have mentioned, the framing story is part of the tradition of European art cinema, in which the process of filmmaking and the crises that filmmakers and scriptwriters undergo has been thematised. Examples of this would include Frederico Fellini's OTTO E MEZZO (It/Fr 1963), Jean-Luc Godard's LE MÉPRIS (Fr/It 1963), François Truffaut's LA NUIT AMÉRICAINE (Fr/It 1973), and Wim Wenders' DER STAND DER DINGE (BRD/Pg/USA 1982).[2]

The framing story shows how Lars and Niels develop the Dr. Mesmer story using documents they find in an archive and the explanation the archivist offers them, but also an autobiographical anecdote from their friend Udo (played by Udo Kier) whom they visit in Germany. Kier tells them how his mother and her neighbours sought refuge in the water of a canal during a bombing raid in the Second World War in order to escape the resulting inferno. Directly afterwards we are shown a scene of the film-within-a-film in which the black priest is lying in the water, surrounded by dozens of others, all trying to escape the plague.

Dr. Mesmer's story is therefore composed of various heterogeneous 'readymades': historical material drawn from city archives, the accompanying comments of an historian and archivist, the autobiographical recollections of a friend, mixed with fictional ideas by the two scriptwriters themselves. But these fictional ideas, also originate in the images and sounds that impinge on the consciousness of the two scriptwriters via all sorts of media. Niels relates how after having seen THE KING OF MARVIN GARDENS (Bob Rafelson, USA 1972) he had wanted to know more about Atlantic City, but without having to travel there. To this end, he had arranged, via a journalist in New Jersey, to place a classified ad in a local paper, pretending to be a sixteen-year-old boy looking for a female pen pal. The response was overwhelming, and with laughs and witty comments he and Lars read some of the responses received aloud and play a cassette that one of the girls had recorded for him to give him an impression of American radio programs.

Although this episode might seem to be a meaningless and irrelevant digression within the framing story (see Stevenson 2002: 46-47), it acquires significance when seen in the light of von Trier's other films. Niels compares the way he has formed his impression of the United States with the way Franz Kafka wrote his novel *Amerika* without ever having been there, basing everything on the information he obtained from an uncle. Dr. Mesmer's story is based on second-hand information, and so are the worlds depicted in THE ELEMENT OF CRIME and EUROPA – built, as these are, on a body of 'second-hand images' of Europe comprising the films, photographs, stories and pictures which circulate within the culture and which form a database, on the basis of which contemporary viewers, who could never have seen these things with their own eyes, can form an image of the past (see chapter 4). When he was later accused of having made films about the USA (DANCER IN THE DARK and DOGVILLE) without ever having been there, von Trier countered by referring to the 'Kafka method'. In an interview about DOGVILLE he said:

> I've had the notion lately to set all my films in the US – maybe because with DANCER IN THE DARK I was criticised for making a film about a country I'd never visited. I find that hard to understand: I dare say I know more about America via various media than the Americans knew about Morocco when they filmed CASABLANCA. Today it's difficult not to get information about the US, and it should be of interest to Americans to see how a non-American who has never visited their country perceives it (Björkman 2004b: 25).

Thus the framing story yields a formula, so to speak, with which the imagery in von Trier's film worlds can be prepared: They are models, blueprints, distilled from the images in cultural circulation in order to be synthesised with other models and imagery in new relationships.

The Atlanta City episode and the Kafka method tell us still more. To find a pen pal, Niels pretended to be someone else (and this leads to a hilarious scene in which one of the pen pals travelling through Copenhagen arranges to meet Niels in a café, and Niels wears a long-haired wig to disguise himself as a sixteen-year-old for her and her governess). Various media allow you not only to convey information but also to assume a false identity: what we now jokingly call 'snail mail' also offers plenty of opportunities to become an 'avatar' with an entirely different identity. False identities and misleading avatars are recurring themes in von Trier's films. His protagonists frequently make mistaken assumptions about people's intentions on the basis of their appearances. In this respect, the framing story is a reversal of the situation in von Trier's other films, in that it is the principal characters Lars and Niels who revel in the naivety of the young American girls who took Niels' advertised identity seriously; in the

other films it is the principal characters who are the victims of the disparities between other people's private and public identities.

EPIDEMIC is therefore not only something of a mirror image of von Trier's other films in several ways, but also takes us backstage: while a comparison between EPIDEMIC and the other films sheds light on the 'von Trier system', it also demonstrates how this system arose in the first place. The question remains: does the relationship between the framing story and the film-within-the-film tell us anything about the relationship between narrators and stories in von Trier's other films? It is notable that the creative process by which Lars and Niels concoct Dr. Mesmer's story is also used by the protagonists from other films, such as Selma in DANCER IN THE DARK who combines memories of the musicals of her youth, Kathy's descriptions of the song-and-dance numbers in the musicals they go to see at the local cinema, and audiovisual impressions of her surroundings, transforming them in her imagination into a new musical world. Fisher imagines the story of his search for the lottery murderer out of a mixture of memory and hallucination, while the Europe in which Kessler meets his doom is built of numerous film and stylistic quotations (see chapter 4). In IDIOTERNE, the episodic and rambling character of the story of the group of spassers reflects the ex-spassers' inconsistent and incoherent memories of the episode as recorded by the documentary maker ('I must have heard seventeen different stories' – see chapter 3). Finally, in DOGVILLE, Tom Edison sees the mountain village Dogville by the lights of his literary and philosophical ideas, so that here, too, sense impressions of the actual environment are mixed with literary and other fantasies of a better life.

However, the most notable characteristic of the relationship between the framing story and the film-within-the-film in EPIDEMIC is the temporal relationship of simultaneity, or rather 'prospectivity', which exists between the moment of narration and the unfolding of Dr. Mesmer's story. When Lars and Niels set to work on the script of the film-within-the-film they think up a film which has yet to be made, and for whose production DFI advisor Claes Kastholm has yet to give his approval and funding; at the end of the film we see them presenting the script to Kastholm. The images of the film-within-the-film are thus images of a virtual film which does not yet exist– indeed, it is not even certain that it will *ever* exist. By the end of the film, we see Kastholm voicing objections to the entire concept.

In other words, EPIDEMIC exhibits the converse of the retrospectivity which traditionally characterises the relationship between a story and its narrator (see Martin 1987: 72). In contrast to the traditional narrator, Lars and Niels have no idea how Dr. Mesmer's story is going to end, but are themselves in the middle of the production of this as yet unfinished and in part open-ended story. This also means that their relationship with the protagonist – and the other charac-

ters in his story – is not the usual relationship between a narrator and his or her characters. The traditional narrator pretends to 'follow' the characters, so to speak, in relating an account of the events experienced by these characters at some time in the past. In Epidemic, on the other hand, the protagonist Mesmer 'follows' the 'instructions' thought up for him by narrators Lars and Niels in the framing story. Lars and Niels are not Mesmer's chroniclers but his manipulators, and Lars and Niels *produce* history before the audience's very eyes.

This simultaneity of narration and production of history, and the manipulation of characters instead of the chronicling of their trials and tribulations, is a recurring figure in almost all von Trier's films. The most blatant of these manipulators has to be the voice-over narrator in Europa, who addresses himself squarely to the protagonist, Kessler, and transports him under hypnosis to a particular time in history and to various locations in postwar Germany ('On the count of ten you will be...' – see chapter 4). In The Element of Crime, the narrator Fisher is himself under hypnosis and 'produces' his own history: as in a positive feedback loop, his memories are simultaneously intermingled with and distorted by the hallucinations and delusions that his earlier adventures have produced. Fisher does not even *know* his own story, but wants to get to know it; as the narrator he is himself amazed by the turns 'his' story takes. In Dancer in the Dark, Selma creates her musical fantasies 'on the fly', so to speak; and the episodic character of Idioterne reflects the documentary maker's powerlessness to produce a coherent story.

Breaking the Waves and Dogville would seem to be exceptions to this pattern. In the first, a narrative instance is manifested in title sequences between scenes; in the second, John Hurt's voice-over texts give a summary preview of the coming episode, as is often done with operas broadcast on television. This can only happen if the narrator knows the story in its entirety. But in Breaking the Waves, Bess has a number of conversations with God, and provides the other half of the conversation by being God's mouthpiece, like a ventriloquist's puppet (and as the young Danny Torrance, played by Danny Lloyd, in Stanley Kubrick's The Shining, UK 1980, communicated with the spirits in the Overlook Hotel). Because she continually asks Him for guidance and instructions, God has the same role for Bess in Breaking the Waves as Max von Sydow's voice-over has for Kessler in Europa. Moreover, Bess casts several surreptitious knowing looks at the camera, as if she were aware of the presence of this *monstrateur*. A camera *monstrateur* is by definition altogether in the here-and-now of the action (Gaudreault 1987: 110-111), and thus it maintains a relationship of simultaneity. At the end of Breaking the Waves the camera *monstrateur* literally has a 'God's eye view' of the church bells which mysteriously sound from the clouds above the ship from which Jan and his friends had consigned Bess's body to the deep the night before. So Breaking the Waves displays a

relationship which is marked by manipulation (God acts as Bess's guide) and simultaneity (the camera functions as the eye of God).

In DOGVILLE, it is the *wannabe* writer Tom Edison who acts as the manipulator: both of Grace and of the inhabitants of the mountain village, to whom he sermonises in weekly church meetings on how they should live together and how they should deal with their new guest. Grace's entry, which takes place at a moment when Tom is sitting on a bench in the moonlight musing on his profession as an author, even allows for the possibility that Grace is actually the product of his imagination – just as later he wants to get rid of Grace because she could get in the way of his writing: as if she were just a 'bad idea'. At the end of the film when Grace shoots him herself, he has lost control over Grace to her father, who opens her eyes to the true nature of Dogville's inhabitants in particular and of humanity in general. But at no point in the film does Grace act of her own volition; she is directed, first by Tom and then by her father. Both characters have a place 'in' Grace's story and maintain with her a relationship of simultaneity and manipulation.

The possibility of manipulating a character requires not only a relationship of temporal simultaneity between the manipulator and the manipulated, but also that the levels on which the manipulator and the manipulated operate are mutually accessible: the area between these levels must be permeable. This permeability is most spectacularly displayed in EPIDEMIC, in whose closing scenes a female medium pays a call during a dinner party being held by Lars and Niels and Claes. Via this medium, who undergoes a prolonged attack of hysteria while under hypnosis, the symptoms of the plague epidemic of Dr. Mesmer's film-within-the-film story enter Lars and Niels's framing story. A product of their imagination strikes back with a vengeance, indeed. But this relationship of permeability and manipulation can also be found in other films: Fisher unwittingly manipulates the memories of his adventures (however paradoxical this may sound); the voice-over in EUROPA 'reaches' Kessler; Bess exchanges knowing looks and has conversations with God; in talks with the documentary –maker, the ex-spassers all bend the history of the group to their own purposes; in her fantasy world Selma 'directs' her surroundings; and Tom and Grace's father are characters and manipulators at the same time.

These last two are manipulators who simultaneously form part of the world of Grace's story, but by manipulating Grace they also *produce* the story. Each illustrates an aspect of the relationship between the different levels that is absent in EPIDEMIC. Tom and Grace's father have an agonistic relationship with each other: both want control over Grace. As Grace's spiritual father, writer and mentor Tom is also a rival for her real father's control over her. Thus Tom and Grace's father are opposing players in a contest over the control of the 'game puppet' Grace. Whoever wins gets to imbue the dummy, Grace, with any attri-

butes he wants (his own values, ideals and views), just as the players of an on-line role playing game 'clothe' their avatars with values, ideals and views, and the outward signifiers of these attributes (and similar to how Niels Vørsel 'clothed' the avatar he invented for his contact advertisement with the desires and ideals of a sixteen-year-old boy, wearing a wig during the later face-to-face meeting with one of the girls in order to make his offline identity correspond with his avatar's).

Tom and Grace's father therefore have the same ambiguous relationship with Grace as do the players of a computer game with their avatars: via the avatars with whom they identify they form part of the game world. But as players they are simultaneously outside this world and its inhabitants – manipulating, fight-ing, using and misusing them with no fear of suffering the physical, psychologi-cal, social or economic consequences of their online actions in person. Losing does not mean dying, but merely having to reset the game and starting over again. Similarly, it could also be said that every 'death' or disaster that a charac-ter experiences in one of von Trier's films is followed by a reset and a new start in a later film; I will return to this theme in chapter 6.

The narrators in von Trier's films all assume this ambiguous role. The voice-over in Europa manipulates Kessler without having to enter the world of post-war Germany; he enjoys the same position as the player of an online role play-ing game, directing his avatar from the safety and distance of his computer. The *monstrateur* God in Breaking the Waves is – for Bess, anyway – both in the world and outside it. He is omnipresent, if not visible to everyone, but is also literally above the 'underworld' of the characters in the film, as the last shot shows. Selma lives simultaneously in the fantasy world of her musicals and the rather grimmer world of her daily life. As narrator, Fisher may be located out-side the world of the story (he is on the psychotherapist's couch) but he under-goes the adventures of his avatar as if he were there in person, and simulta-neously 'feeds' his alter ego in Europa with the fears and delusions that he suffers as 'player-narrator' (the positive feedback loop referred to earlier). The most ambiguous position is adopted by the documentary maker in Idioterne, who locates the spassers *post festum* to interview them about their experiences and memories of that period – but who was also at the very least an eyewitness to those events, even if, like a video game *lurker*, he took no part in the action.

The ambiguity of the position of the narrator-players of von Trier's films must no doubt be part of the explanation for their protagonists' naivety, credu-lity and idealism. As avatars standing in for players outside the game world, they inherit, so to speak, the standards and values that prevail in the world of the narrator-player, under the mistaken assumption that these also apply in the game world. Their downfall is almost always the result of the mismatch be-tween the standards and values of these two worlds, or of the inability of the

protagonist to distinguish between them. Here, too, Epidemic serves to clarify the point: a hypnotised medium allows destructive forces from Dr. Mesmer's world to enter Lars and Niels's world, while in the other films, the movement is in the other direction. Bess adopts the Christian conventions she believes come from the God she has chosen as her guide, but these are at odds with the notion of God and the value system of the other islanders. Grace embraces the idealism of writer and mentor Tom. Selma tries to live her daily life as a musical, although in reality her visual handicap deprives her of the lead role in *The Sound of Music*. Kessler is entirely controlled by the voice-over of Max von Sydow, who is however of little help when it comes to deciphering the codes, tactics and strategies underlying the behaviour of the 'pitiable' Germans – and Allies. After all his adventures in Europa, Fisher still seems incurably attached to his belief in the Osborne method, because he has to re-experience his story and again embark on a process of *durcharbeiten*, as the classical Freudians would say.

So, in von Trier's film worlds, the protagonists have the same ambiguous status as avatars in the worlds of video and computer games. They form part of those worlds, but because they are simultaneously the iconic representations of players located outside these worlds they depend on these players for the knowledge, experience, capabilities and insight they can bring to bear on the game. Alas, all too often they are in the hands of a player who never makes it past the first game level. Grace might turn out to be the only exception.

Nuances and subtleties

Of course, Lars von Trier makes feature films, not computer games. The films themselves are laid down in fixed form 'once and for all', and the spectator can exert no influence on the course of events. Moreover, several of the films employ narrative forms that belong to filmic and literary storytelling genres and which are not usually associated with the world of games. John Hurt's anticipatory voice-overs in Dogville recalls 19th century melodramatic novels or American romantic melodrama of the 1930s and 40s, not today's computer games. We have already seen how the between-scene title sequences in Breaking the Waves recall the linking subtitles of early television opera broadcasts and of many classical and contemporary films. Fisher's history is a flashback narrative, and as such clearly inspired by classical American film noir. Even Max von Sydow's voice-over can be seen as the modernistic, self-reflexive staging of a pseudo-psychological metaphor in which the film is supposed to be seen as a dream. We noted in chapter 4 how the railway track sequence which punctuates the

different episodes in the story of Europa can also be read as representing the equally prevalent metaphor which draws an analogy between the unalterable, one-way trajectory of a train and the ineluctable course of a story.

It is certainly also the case that the films of the Europa trilogy were made long before computer games entered the mass market, and long before these games would present – thanks to ever increasing memories, fast processors, broadband networks, photorealistic graphics, and real-time action – serious competition for the film industry. But as was noted in chapter 2, long before the arrival of computer games there were filmmakers who saw their work as playful activity, and who set themselves arbitrary rules in the production of a film. David Bordwell (1985) has even proposed a 'mode of narration' based on the principle of setting a number of parameters. At any rate, Lars von Trier is one of these filmmakers who subject themselves to a number of limitations and rules for every film, preferably set out in a 'manifesto'. The Dogma 95 Manifesto is just one of a long series of comparable documents which have invariably accompanied his films. Even the production of Dancer in the Dark, a film which was seen by many as a break with the Dogma 95 aesthetic, was a game for von Trier. In the documentary, Von Trier's 100 Eyes (Katia Forbert, Dk 2000), he points out that:

> I had always wanted to make a musical, but I had no idea how they were made. I still don't, actually. But I've always been better at thinking games up than playing them! So, I just said, 'let's play "musical"'.

For von Trier, Dancer in the Dark is no less a game than Idioterne was, and his Dogma films are no less 'playful' than his more 'ambitious' earlier film productions, all of which are characterised by ludic approaches and arbitrary rules (see chapter 6).

Although the distinction between games and stories is an important and disputed one, it should not be treated as a categorical issue. Even ludologists, who are generally thought to dispute 'the common assumption that videogames should be viewed as extensions of narrative' (Frasca 2003a: 222), 'also love stories' according to Gonzalo Frasca (2003b: 92), one of the founders of ludology, 'a discipline that studies games in general and video games in particular'. In video games Frasca perceives a paradigmatic shift from story to simulation (see chapter 3), but at the same time he declares that for the external observer 'the sequence of signs produced by both the film (an aircraft landing – JS) and the simulation (a flight simulator – JS) could look exactly the same' (2003a: 224). Although the phenomenological experience of the external observer is very different from that of the active gamer, for these observers there is little difference between watching a scene from an action film and watching someone else play a computer game. In both cases, they do not know how the scene will end (pro-

vided they have not seen the film before), and in both cases, they will identify themselves with a character: in the film, either the protagonist or one of their helpers; in the video game, the avatar of the player with whom the observer sympathises. Watching others play video games, even when these are 'single player' games, is a widespread activity which often escapes the attention of researchers, most of whom have concentrated on the structure and function of text and interface in games and have overlooked the role of games as 'social space' (see Newman 2004: 149 et seq.).

Every actualised and completed game sequence becomes a story: the protagonist who embarked on the game with a certain aim or assignment has concluded the mission, either successfully or unsuccessfully, and is rewarded or punished accordingly (see Simons 2002). Just as in stories, the way that game players employ game strategies, use resources, choose routes, solve puzzles, and so on, can be subjected to evaluation, interpretation, and even moral judgement (Newman 2004: 157-158). This would seem to be exactly the position in which the viewer of a von Trier film is placed: as the observer of the way in which the 'players' (as in Dogville, for instance) or the 'single player' send their avatars into a strange and hostile game world and try to keep them going – usually without success. The public and the critics then have the task of subjecting the actions of the heroes/players/avatars to endless discussion.

Von Trier's films can therefore be seen as *saved games*, or perhaps better still as *saved levels*: recordings of the course of actions and events in a game sequence which allow a player to resume a game where he has left off instead of having to start the whole game over again. All of von Trier's films up to Dogville are the registrations of a failed attempt to get beyond the first level, and every new film is a *reset* in which the same game – with usually slight, but always systematic variations in parameter and detail – starts again.

If we approach von Trier's films as ludic forms, or, to paraphrase Gonzalo Frasca (2003a: 222) as 'the extensions of simulations' and of games in particular (for Frasca games are a special structuring of simulations, just as stories are a special structuring of representations), then this clarifies a number of phenomena which narratology has thus far failed to explain and which have been attributed either to von Trier's aesthetic weaknesses or to his personal idiosyncrasies. The ambiguous relationship between his narrators and protagonists, the blurring of narrative levels, and the relationship of simultaneity between the act of narration and the unfolding of the story are particular examples of such phenomena.

A ludological approach to von Trier's films also yields some illuminating insights into the point-and-shoot film style that von Trier first experimented with in his television series The Kingdom and developed further in his later films, a style which has often been described in terms of a 'home video' aesthetic or

those of a neo-Bazinian neo-neorealism (see chapter 1). At this level as well, radical breaks have been claimed between von Trier's technically and stylistically sophisticated films, such as The Element of Crime and especially Europa, his 'raw' Dogma 95 film Idioterne, the daring exploit of Dancer in the Dark, whose song and dance numbers were filmed with a hundred cameras, and the theatrical, Brechtian character of Dogville.

Home video aesthetics certainly do play a role in von Trier's work, but as just one of the possible initial parameters included in the game rules which define the production code for a given film. But generally speaking, the motivation for his point-and-shoot style is shared by the player of a *first-person shooter* game like *Doom* or *Max Payne*, who uses the camera to explore a space and who points it to wherever dramatic or game-relevant action might be taking place. For the lurker, this style – which allows the spectator to watch what is happening literally 'through the eyes' of someone involved in the action – raises the level of *immersion*. Thus, Von Trier's film style should be understood from a ludological perspective, as part and parcel of a *mode* which can best be designated as *virtual realism*.

6 Between Cinema and Computer

*As games continue developing and
film moves into the realm of computer graphics,
film may, in some ways, look to and follow precedents set by video games…*
Mark J.P. Wolf[1]

Filming the virtual

Chapter 4 described how von Trier's films are characterised by a remarkable paradox. His pre-Dogma films such as THE ELEMENT OF CRIME and EUROPA show us purely virtual worlds constructed out of lighting effects and physically impossible space-time relationships. Nevertheless, the images we see in these virtual worlds are photographic depictions of the situations that existed during the film shooting, in front of the camera lens. The lighting effects in both films, the multi-perspectivist spaces, the double exposure and overlay effects, and the physically impossible movements in EUROPA were not done in post-production but were achieved on-set during filming with the aid of lights, light boxes, mirrors, foreground and background projections, and so on (see Visy 2003). The images in EUROPA are therefore *indexical* registrations of *virtual* worlds that could never exist as such in the physical world. The film is neither the depiction of a virtual reality (the reality depicted was recorded by photographic means), nor the analogue registration of a physical reality (the reality depicted is physically impossible).

This is not the only paradox presented in these films. For example, they are both predominantly black-and-white, but elements of colour such as the yellowish (and occasionally blue or red) lighting in THE ELEMENT OF CRIME, and other colour elements in the otherwise strict black-and-white of EUROPA make it clear that these are not actually black-and-white films, but colour films in which the colour spectrum actually employed is almost entirely limited to black, grey and white (see chapter 4). The red 'Epidemic' logo which regularly appears in EPIDEMIC is also a clear sign that the black-and-white in which the film appears to have been made is actually a choice amongst the options that were available to the filmmaker, and not just a constraint made necessary by the extremely low budget with which the film was made.[2]

Another paradox is that many of the images in EUROPA consist of combinations of different, heterogeneous images, often taken from inconsistent or even conflicting angles, but at the same time that so-called 'analytical editing' is all but absent in EUROPA.

But perhaps the greatest paradox is that these contradictions are not intended to indicate to the viewer that film is 'invariably' an artificial construction, but are employed as unobtrusively as possible. The viewer is expected to create, on the basis of these images, a mental impression in which these images are perceived as constituting a 'whole'. This 'whole' is purely virtual, and it is not visible as such – indeed, it cannot be made visible as such – on the screen. Like Fisher and Kessler, the viewer is hypnotised by EUROPA's psychotherapist and voice-over and invited to take part in a mental trip through a virtual reality. But THE ELEMENT OF CRIME and EUROPA are von Trier's pre-Dogma films; while with BREAKING THE WAVES, the Dogma 95 Manifesto and IDIOTERNE von Trier seems to have embarked on an entirely different film style. Or is this also no more than the redistribution of a limited collection of stylistic hallmarks and film methods?

Spirituality and virtuality

From a stylistic viewpoint, IDIOTERNE, the 'ultimate Dogma film', is the opposite of EUROPA (see chapter 3). In IDIOTERNE, the camera follows and registers the characters' activities in a pseudo-documentary manner. Because the rules of the Vow of Chastity forbid the use of external props, special lighting and any sound not recorded simultaneously with the images, the cameras in this Dogma film do not record an artificially constructed reality, like that of EUROPA, but the physical world as seen by the human eye and the digital video camera. John Rockwell (2003: 9) notes the stylistic contrast between von Trier's pre-Dogma films and IDIOTERNE:

> Von Trier's own earlier films had often self-consciously experimented with colour and atmosphere (see THE ELEMENT OF CRIME with its persistent beige). No such danger here – no danger of one's attention being distracted by filmic virtuosity from character and dialogue, ideas and emotion.

In contrast to EUROPA (and in contrast to what a Bazinian realism would prescribe), IDIOTERNE makes extensive use of 'analytical editing'. But where the classical film regards continuity as the guiding principle of analytical editing, in IDIOTERNE, the shot transitions are abrupt; the unexpected leaps in time and space, discontinuities in position, pose, facial expression, movement, and even

the presence or absence of characters makes it abundantly clear that the different shots that comprise a scene were taken from different takes of different performances of the same scene (see chapter 3).

These deviations from classical film practice do not have the modernistic objective of *montrer le dispositif* (Metz 1991), that is, to show viewers that a film scene is invariably a construction of shots that were not necessarily filmed in chronological order or during one and the same performance of a scene. The discontinuity of the montage is not intended to attract the attention of the viewer to this stylistic device at all, but to allow the viewer to create the kind of mental 'whole' comprising these discontinuities which *cannot* be seen with the naked eye. This 'whole' is not the mental representation of a unique course of actions and events as recorded by the film camera, with the camera standing in for an 'invisible viewer'; neither is it the greatest common denominator of the various performances of a scene that were tried out during filming (as, for instance, in the modernistic pedagogy of a Jean-Luc Godard). The intended 'whole' is a virtual one which rises before the mind's eye of the viewer as a synthesis of a collection of heterogeneous takes.

Chapter 2 described how Dogma 95 sees a scene not as the 'analogue' representation of a unique course of actions and events, but as a 'state space' defined by the (in principle) infinite number of possible configurations of participating elements, characteristics and relationships, without the possibility of saying that any one performance is better, more authentic, or closer to reality than any other. Every performance is a possible 'state' of the model that is defined by characters and their various relationships, and which is continually fed with new 'input events' on the film set (for instance, a different set of required moods). Unlike the figurative representations with which photography and film are associated, models do not have to outwardly resemble, in all respects or in as many respects as possible, the objects being modelled. They only have to describe the relevant aspects of this object in a manner that permits experimentation (see Holland 1998: 11; Harrison 1999: 15). From this perspective, the performance of a film scene is therefore not an *imitation of a situation* that may have once taken place, but the *simulation of a state* in which the model finds itself when its entities and relationships are subjected to the experimental introduction of new input events or parameters. Each new input event or parameter yields a new state within the state space of the scene.

Considering a scene as a *simulation* has two important consequences. The first is that the filmed scene *is not obliged to display an iconic similarity* to the events being modelled in the scene – or, rather, in one particular performance of the scene. The fact that the Vow of Chastity forbids the use of external props, costumes, special lighting and added sound should be understood as a ban on any visual and auditory representations which distract the spectator's attention

from the relevant aspects of the model being tested in simulations. Thus, the Dogma 95 aesthetic is the opposite of Bazinian realism, in which apparently insignificant details rank as the hallmark of the *effet de réel* (Barthes 1984b: 172-173).[3] This is not to say that Dogma films cannot concern themselves with historical events; simply that the filming of these events would not aspire to a visual authenticity, but would be an investigative report of the behaviour of a model of that situation, boiled down for this purpose to its essential elements and relationships. THE KING IS ALIVE demonstrates that historical costume drama also lends itself to the Dogma approach.

The separate 'run-throughs' of a scene are therefore not visual and dramatic representations of the situations being acted out, but simulations or models of those situations, of which, in other words, only the relevant characteristics are incorporated into the model or the characters and their various relationships. In THE KING IS ALIVE, we see actors struggling with their roles in the Shakespeare play they are preparing to perform, but we see nothing about the characters they are preparing to act. These characters, the costumes they wear, the settings in which and the instruments with which they carry out their actions – all this remains virtual, or becomes (as is often the case in modernistic theatre) symbolised by objects which do not need to exhibit any particular similarity to the objects they symbolise. The Dogma 95 Manifesto encourages filmmakers to be like children, who often simulate fictional situations using the 'ready-mades' and *objets trouvés* they encounter in their play environment.[4]

The second consequence of the simulation approach to a film scene is that the 'unity' which emerges from the various run-throughs of the scene is *not* a version of the action and events as these originally took place or might have taken place in the *fabula* constructed by the viewer (Bordwell 1985: 49),[5] or the greatest common denominator of these various performances; if it were, this would level off the differences between the different states in the state space. The unity which emerges from the combination of shots taken from various scene run-throughs is a *pattern* that can be distinguished in every different actualisation of the scene, but which can never be actualised as such and which thus remains *virtual* (see Kwinter 2001). Just as von Trier's films can be seen as states in a state space defined by the combinatorial possibilities of a limited number of elements, but cannot be reduced to a common 'archetypal story', the different run-throughs of separate scenes in IDIOTERNE and in von Trier's Dogma and post-Dogma films cannot be reduced to a single archetypal version.

In IDIOTERNE, von Trier used completely different methods to achieve the same effect as in EUROPA, which is the evocation of a purely virtual reality. Or, more exactly, to call into existence a virtuality whose actual, physical reality is a contingent *state* taken from a state space comprising many other states. At any rate, the approach has little or nothing to do with the kind of realism that

equates 'reality' with the visual perception of physical reality and its 'representation' as meaning the fullest and most exact possible reproduction of this reality.

This pursuit of the evocation of a virtual reality may also be the key to the solution of another apparent paradox, which is von Trier's aversion towards the ultimate 'virtual machine', the computer.[6] For von Trier, the indexical relationship which film maintains with profilmic reality is essential in calling the virtual into existence. Thus this is why his approach can best be characterised by the term *virtual realism*.

Registrations of simulations

If in Europa and Idioterne the same effect is sought using entirely disparate means, then it raises the question of whether a 'von Trier system' exists, within which every film makes a selection from a limited repertoire of stylistic devices – not only at the level of story and narrative, but also at the level of style itself – which can be found dispersed throughout his films in different combinations. One dimension that distinguishes von Trier's pre-Dogma films from his Dogma and post-Dogma films[7] is that of 'virtual versus analogue'. The reality portrayed in films such as The Element of Crime and Europa is a virtual reality constructed out of intangible lighting effects, reflections, cinematographic effects, while from his television series The Kingdom onwards, the cameras record the reality of the material world, the world of visual and auditory perception. However, as we have seen, the relationship between his pre-Dogma and his other films is more complex. In calling into existence a virtual reality, von Trier's pre-Dogma films follow a strategy entirely opposed to that of his later films: the first films are the 'registration' of a virtual reality created using cinematographic means, while the Dogma and post-Dogma films do not register this virtual reality but allow it to emerge through the registration of material reality.

This distinction between von Trier's pre-Dogma films and his later work suggests a chronological development in his style, one manifested in all his work but which undergoes a turning point with the Dogma 95 Manifesto and Idioterne. However, this suggestion needs to be qualified. A comparison between Epidemic and Dancer in the Dark, von Trier's first post-Dogma film, is illuminating in this regard. Both employ a film-within-the-film style which emerges from a story-telling situation depicted by a framing story. In both films, the film-within-the-film portrays the fantasies of the protagonist in the framing story; and the narrator of the framing story allows this fantasy world to emerge out of

the raw material of their own reality. Both films depict the reality of the framing
story in a pseudo-documentary style, although in EPIDEMIC Lars and Niels are
filmed by a static camera and in DANCER IN THE DARK Selma's day-to-day rea-
lity is filmed using a moving, hand-held camera. However, notable and sys-
tematic differences between these two films also exist.

The framing story of EPIDEMIC is filmed in a style which, in retrospect, might
have earmarked it for a Dogma certificate. It is filmed in a location which ap-
pears not to have been especially prepared for the purpose, it uses available
light, and the sound was recorded on set. Because the camera is frequently di-
rected either at Lars or Niels, without being operated by either or a cameraman,
we can also say that while the camera does not actually 'follow' the actors,
neither does it interpret or organise the action. It simply stays directed at that
fixed point where either Lars or Niels can be found, and does not pan when
they shift to the left or right or even move completely out of frame. This indif-
ferent camera eye cannot be accused of having a 'personal taste' any more than
the cameraman who follows the actors with a portable video camera and a
point-and-shoot technique, as Robby Müller did in DANCER IN THE DARK and
von Trier did in IDIOTERNE and DOGVILLE. Once again, we see how seemingly
contradictory means can achieve the same end.

The most important difference between the framing stories in EPIDEMIC and
DANCER IN THE DARK (and the other Dogma and post-Dogma films) lies in how
they use montage. The framing story in EPIDEMIC uses analytical editing, and
since the Dogma Manifesto is silent on the question of editing, this is perfectly
permissible. This editing style suggests that the shot sequence corresponds with
the chronology of the filmed events, and modalises the filmic sequences from
this framing story as the *representation* of a single series of events. Moreover, in
EPIDEMIC's film-within-the-film the virtual reality which Lars and Niels call into
existence by means of the documents and characters they consult is kept sepa-
rate from the reality of the framing story (see chapter 5). Only at the end of the
film is the reality of the framing story overrun by the virtual reality of the film-
within-the-film; and this penetration by virtual reality is represented by the
spasms and screams of a medium, phenomena which are accessible to a film
camera and microphone.

Conversely, the part of DANCER IN THE DARK in which Selma's story is told
makes use of discontinuous editing, as does IDIOTERNE (see chapter 3). The
scene in which Gene (to Selma's initial disapproval) is given a bicycle for his
birthday by Kathy, Bill and Jeff consists of abrupt cuts between different shots
of the actors standing in different relative positions, continuous dialogues in
different vocal registers, and the repetition of certain lines ('I'm not that kind of
mother, Gene') or interrupted gestures (Gene embracing Selma). The scene ends
with Selma in fits of laughter one often associates with a blooper. The scene in

which Selma tells Samuel that she is giving up the lead role in *The Sound of Music* displays several transgressions of the 180° rule, such as sudden discontinuities in Selma and Samuels's relative positions, and irregularities in the rhythm of the dialogue. The most dramatic scene in the film, in which Bill forces Selma to shoot him and she finally beats his head in with a metal safe deposit box, also exhibits the same discontinuities. In all these scenes, the shots are *registrations* of *simulations* of the *states* which the model, in terms of the characters, characteristics and actions dictated by the script, can attain. The editing does not yield a representation of a continuous series of actions, but allows a combination of states to yield a virtual pattern that enables the viewer to create a mental impression of the *state space* of the scene.

The framing story of Dancer in the Dark further deviates from the Dogma 95 aesthetic in numerous other ways: The film makes use of costumes and props, shows 'superficial action' and even 'murder and weapons', and has been consciously conceived as a genre film (albeit that of the new and somewhat paradoxical genre, the 'social-realist musical' (Stevenson 2002: 149)). From this perspective, the film-within-the-film of Epidemic is 'Dogma' within a pre-Dogma context and the narration of Selma's adventures is non-Dogma within a post-Dogma context. But just as the Dogma rules do not prohibit the use of analytical editing, approaching a scene as a simulation model does not in itself prohibit the use of props, costumes, superficial action, or murder and weapons. Props and costumes are nothing more than accessories to the model; or in the lingo of game designers, its just 'colouring' (see Costikyan 1995; Simons 2002: 197). Superficial action is permitted as long as this does not bring conventional storyboarding with it (see chapter 2). Seen in this light, the framing story in Epidemic is less 'Dogma' than the framing story in Dancer in the Dark, made as it is of simulations.

The films-within-the-films also exhibit a number of notable differences. The musical numbers in Dancer in the Dark were filmed using static cameras and edited from takes filmed simultaneously using 100 digital video cameras in different positions (the 'making of Dancer in the Dark' documentary is called The 100 Eyes of Lars von Trier (Katia Forbert, Dk 2000)). This technique recalls Muybridge's 'chronophotography', a technique which used a number of cameras to sequentially record the movements of people and animals and which would later inspire the 'bullet time' effect used in The Matrix (the course of a bullet appearing to be seen in extreme slow motion) and the *Burly Brawl* from The Matrix Reloaded, a fight between Neo (played by Keanu Reeves) and endlessly cloned replicas of Agent Smith (played by Hugo Weaving) (see Silberman 2003).

In principle, this technique makes it possible to film continuous action simultaneously with a number of different cameras and to edit the resulting footage

in such a way as to simulate a camera movement which appears to follow the action in an equally continuous manner. This kind of 'virtual cinematography' could be used to achieve the same *plan séquence* effect as is created with a single moving camera in the opening sequence of Touch of Evil, for instance. However, instead of using this technique to produce a 'virtual', simulated *continuity* in the choreography of the musical scenes in Dancer in the Dark, the montage cuts between cameras located at completely different vantage points, the shots themselves corresponding in terms of direction of movement, dancer positions, and even movement transitions. In other words, virtual cinematography has been used here to create a *representation* of the song and dance numbers which can only be mentally actualised in Selma's fantasy.

The film-within-the-film in Epidemic also presents a virtual reality: namely, the film which Lars and Niels are scripting and for which, in the final scene of Epidemic, they apply for a subsidy from the Danish Film Institute. The film-within-the-film in Epidemic is recorded using a single, constantly moving camera, and the separate scenes are recorded together in a single continuous shot (such as the meeting of the medics early in the film, in which the camera, in a single, lengthy and complex movement, glides through the vaulting of the cellar in which the meeting is taking place). But what this film-within-the-film actually portrays by preserving the space-time continuity of the profilmic action is not the virtual reality of the history of Dr. Mesmer, but the way in which this virtual reality was created. For example, a shot in which Mesmer floats over the plague-ridden landscape then zooms out to reveal that von Trier/Mesmer is holding onto a rope suspended from a helicopter. Thus, it is left up to the viewer to create a mental image of the desired effect – Mesmer floating freely over the landscape – based on the registration of the way this special effect was achieved.

In the film-within-the-film in Epidemic, then, the registration of an *actual* event (the creation of a special effect) is *virtualised*, while in the musical scenes of Dancer in the Dark the *virtual* cinematography of a *virtual* event (the singing and dancing of Selma's imagination) is *actualised*, by means of analytical editing, as the representation of a unique series of events. In the framing stories, the situation is exactly the reverse: in Epidemic we are shown the *representation* of a unique actuality (the writing of a script, a journey to Germany, dinner with the film consultant), while the framing story in Dancer in the Dark shows *simulations* of the *states* which the models of a scene can attain under different conditions. Moving on, The Element of Crime and Europa are *representations* of *virtual realities* recorded by analogue means (see chapter 4), while Idioterne is comprised of registrations of *simulations* of *states* from the state space of the model of the scenes of which this film is composed.

This suggests that at the stylistic level, the 'von Trier system' is also logical and not chronological, and that Dogma 95 is not a departure from his work,

but represents just one of the possible *states* from the *state space* of a system organised around the tension between *actualised* and *virtual* reality, on the one hand, and the tension between *representation* and *simulation*, on the other. Unlike André Bazin's 'ontological realism', for instance, von Trier's *virtual realism* is not based on the postulation of an indisputable relationship between representation and referent, a relationship granted by virtue of the technology of the medium of representation; instead, it is a dynamic system that consists of a few simple components which can be combined in different ways to generate complex forms. This turns the system into a sort of game, and converts every new film into a new 'game turn' in which the possibilities of a new *state* are tried out.

This game has one rule which overrides every combination, and that is that there must be a balance between these components. A film should be neither entirely 'virtual' nor entirely 'actual'. So, THE ELEMENT OF CRIME and EUROPA are virtual worlds where the 'actualisation' is recorded on set by analogue means, while IDIOTERNE is the registration of actual events or *states* which summon up a *virtual* pattern in the mind of the viewer. This rule excludes the use of the computer to simulate virtual realities. After all, virtuality is not a dimension independent of actuality – virtuality and actuality are complementary aspects of reality. This is the 'reality' that von Trier seems to want to 'force out of his characters and settings', and not just in his Dogma film IDIOTERNE.

Virtuality

'Virtuality' and 'virtual' are broad and ambiguous concepts and we need not be surprised that they take various forms in von Trier's films. One of the most concise descriptions of 'virtual' is given by the *Webopedia*: 'Not real'.[8] The web ICT encyclopaedia elaborates further:

> The term *virtual* is popular among computer scientists and is used in a wide variety of situations. In general, it distinguishes something that is merely conceptual from something that has physical reality. For example, *virtual memory* refers to an imaginary set of locations, or addresses, where you can store data. It is imaginary in the sense that the memory area is not the same as the real physical memory composed of transistors. The difference is a bit like the difference between an architect's plans for a house and the actual house. A computer scientist might call the plans a *virtual house*. Another analogy is the difference between the brain and the mind. The mind is a *virtual brain*. It exists conceptually, but the actual physical matter is the brain.

Of course, in this sense, all films are virtual in that the 'film' that a spectator sees on screen is something other than the physical strip of celluloid that is passed

through the projector. The people, objects and locations seen on screen are not 'really' present, and therefore, Christian Metz (1980: 59) called all films, even documentaries in the pre-digital age, 'fiction films' and gave the signifier of the film the name *le signifiant imaginaire*.[9] In several of his films, at least, von Trier takes this general characterisation of the filmic signifier quite literally. THE ELEMENT OF CRIME and EUROPA project worlds in which the film's characters and its spectators are plunged into hypnosis; the films-within-the-films in EPIDEMIC and DANCER IN THE DARK emerge from the imagination of characters in the framing story; and while in BREAKING THE WAVES the viewer is not hypnotised, Bess's in-camera glance encourages us to identify with the camera, thereby taking the imaginary position of an all-seeing subject – who is also all-knowing, to the extent to which the reality of the film exists only as it is perceived by the viewer (Metz 1980: 63-64).[10] Not coincidentally, in the final scene of BREAKING THE WAVES the position of the all-seeing, all-knowing subject coincides with that of God. These films would seem to be staging several core ideas from the Lacan/Metz school of psychoanalytic film theory from the 1970s and 80s.

However, the hypnotic state in which Fisher and Kessler exist – and with them, the film viewer, who is addressed by a psychotherapist and a voice-over, respectively – is merely a special case of a more general sense in which von Trier's film worlds can be called 'virtual'. First and foremost, in THE ELEMENT OF CRIME, EPIDEMIC and EUROPA, the mental state of the protagonists and of the medium in EPIDEMIC (who also 'enters' a film) signals the fact that the worlds in these films are the mental projections of Fisher, the medium and Kessler; but no less importantly they signal that we, the viewers, will have to perform certain mental operations if we are to construct a 'world' out of the hallucinatory – and in the case of EUROPA, the unusual and alienating – space-time relationships (see chapter 4). This mental world is *ipso facto* virtual, and this applies not just to worlds into which the viewer is led under hypnosis, but to all films. Fisher's hypnosis, the medium and Kessler allegorise the virtuality of filmic worlds in general. However, in von Trier's films virtuality is given three different interpretations which are, in principle, independent of each other, but related: sampling, simulation and summoning.

Sampling

First, von Trier's film worlds may be virtual but they are by no means entirely divorced from the real world. As was noted in chapter 4, the images of his first trilogy presents a world which is called 'Europa' but which forcibly reminds us of Europe as we know it, thanks to a rich and heterogeneous collection of images drawn from film, literature, photography, painting, and so on. The postwar Germany in which EUROPA takes place is an eclectic collection of pictorial

and stylistic quotations from European film history and from Hollywood depictions of the same period (such as Carol Reed's THE THIRD MAN). The Europe in EUROPA is the result of an almost random sampling from a database of 'readymade' images and stylistic forms, which – as dreamwork does with dream fragments in the unconscious upon waking – are processed, modified, condensed, and assembled into new, 'synthetic' worlds. This kind of virtual world is *unheimlich* (see Freud 1982b), because it is simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar. Both Fisher and Kessler are also outsiders with their roots in Europe.

In EPIDEMIC, Niels even explains how such mental worlds are constructed. On the fifth day, when the script they are supposed to present to the DFI consultant that evening is finished, Niels remarks how seeing the film THE KING OF MARVIN GARDENS (Rafelson, USA 1972) has piqued his interest in Atlantic City. He explains that since he'd like to know more about it but has neither the means nor the inclination to actually travel there, he has decided to follow Kafka's example, who never went to America but who wrote the novel *Amerika* based on information obtained from an uncle. To form an image of Atlantic City based on this 'second-hand experience', as he puts it, he places a personal ad in an Atlantic City newspaper, pretending to be a 16-year-old Danish boy looking for an American pen pal. He laughs as he reads aloud to Lars parts of the responses he has received, shows postcards of Atlantic City and even plays a cassette tape on which a young girl has recorded her pen pal letter. In the meantime, they prepare for dinner with the DFI consultant, with Lars facing the mirror to give a rather bad rendition of Robert de Niro's *are you talkin' to me?* scene from TAXI DRIVER (Martin Scorsese, USA 1976). Von Trier's imitation of Travis Bickle can also be seen as a second-hand imitation, in turn, of Jean-Paul Belmondo's imitation of Humphrey Bogart in a cinema window reflection, in Godard's À BOUT DE SOUFFLE (Fr 1960).

This brief scene makes it absolutely clear that the impression we have of 'reality' is one which seldom relies on our own perceptions, but depends on second-hand information provided by films, photographs, postcards, newspaper articles, recordings, radio, music, tourists we meet in our own surroundings (there is a short insert in which we see Niels meeting one of his pen pals and her chaperone aunt in a Copenhagen café), much as Kafka learnt about America from an uncle and Godard did from watching American films. Such 'secondary experience' is based, moreover, not only on heterogeneous impressions and representations, but on fragmentary and incomplete information. The girls from Atlantic City write chiefly about themselves, and do so – at least, in the fragments that Niels reads out – in particularly uninformative and repetitive ways. 'I had to stop, I already had seventeen identical stories,' he says, foreshadowing the spassers' interviewer in IDIOTERNE who exclaims that he has just heard se-

venteen different accounts of the same thing, and all too fragmentary to be able to construct a coherent story (see chapter 3).

This method of creating the impression of a world on the basis of second-hand, fragmentary information is exhaustively depicted in EPIDEMIC in the framing story in which Lars and Niels create an impression of Dr. Mesmer's Europe on the basis of archival documents, the archivist's explanation, and Udo's story. They invite the viewer, as it were, not just to envision a special effect based on the indexical registration of the way it was achieved (Mesmer's floating), but to supplement (or even flesh out) the few images of the world that Dr. Mesmer possesses, which furnish precious little information about that world, with the information that Lars and Niels collect in the framing story – and with the impressions of nineteenth-century Europe that those viewers themselves have doubtless amassed from books, pictures, films, photographs, family stories and so on. In this regard EPIDEMIC also anticipates IDIOTERNE and DOGVILLE, because the film-within-the-film does not provide a *representation* of Dr. Mesmer's world, but a *model* in which this world is simulated using only its most elementary and relevant characteristics, forming a framework to which the viewer can attach details using the 'second-hand images' from his or her own memory and imagination.

In EUROPA, von Trier details this mental model of Europe with a colourful collection of fragmentary 'second-hand' images and stylistic quotes (it is not for nothing that a model train plays an important role in the crucial scene in which Katerina offers herself to Leopold), just as Fisher 'samples' his Europe from shreds of recollections during the journey through his memory, recollections which are also mixed with images drawn from war films (such as APOCALYPSE Now; the scene in THE ELEMENT OF CRIME in which a railway employee whistles *Lili Marlene* while inspecting a wagon of the type that was used to transport Jews to the concentration camps), and war documentaries, film noir, and so on, and just as Selma's musical fantasies are a mixture of her impressions of daily life (which, due to her visual handicap, she can hardly see), her remembered impressions of the Czech musicals of her childhood, and the Hollywood musicals she watches together with her friend Kathy in the local cinema (for which Kathy has to describe the dance numbers, or imitate them with her fingers in Selma's palm). Fisher and Selma therefore create their mental worlds by detailing a model of those worlds with images largely derived from a repertoire of images, styles and genres circulating in their cultural habitat.

Selma's concept of these musical numbers is doubly virtual, as it were, because the images of the Hollywood song and dance numbers that she uses to populate the musicals of her own imagination are themselves images that she has to mentally construct on the basis of verbal and tactical information she gets from Kathy. In the process she undoubtedly also makes use of her memories of

the Czech musical films of her youth. As the Selma Manifesto that von Trier drew up for Dancer in the Dark notes:

> So, popular music and the great musicals are all there on the shelves of her brain (von Trier 2000).

The Selma Manifesto demands that the images that portray Selma's daily life show:

> Super-realism! No less. Nobody should ever be able to tell that this is not a location film… and that these locations have even been touched before shooting.

In other words, the reality level of Dancer in the Dark is to simulate that of a Dogma film ('Shooting must be done on location. Props and sets must not be brought in'). However, Dancer in the Dark was not filmed on location in the US, but in Avedøre and in the Swedish Trollhättan (see Stevenson 2002: 149). Apart from a few 1940s-type cars there are few indications of time or place, so that the story could have taken place anywhere in the US between 1940 and 1970 (and perhaps not even necessarily in the US). Moreover, von Trier, who travels only if it cannot be avoided and then only by car, is not personally acquainted with the US, so in visualising this 'typical provincial town' he was obliged to use the 'Kafka method' which had already been demonstrated by Niels in Epidemic. The town is modelled on images of such American towns from feature films, documentaries, photo books, newspaper photos and so on. Thus, the town is just as much the result of sampling from a huge database of world images as Europa is – and it is just as virtual.

The locations in Dancer in the Dark are not the representations of a geographically and historically identifiable locality, but rather they are schematic or prototypical models of locations and environments which viewers will recognise from countless American films, documentaries, television programs, photo reportage and paintings, and which they can use to supplement Dancer in the Dark with detail. In this respect, the viewer is therefore in the same position as Selma, who has to supplement Kathy's rudimentary verbal and tactile information with images she remembers from other films. The world of Dancer in the Dark created by the viewer is as virtual as the musical numbers that Selma fantasises.

Simulation

Dancer in the Dark also demonstrates the second interpretation of the concept of virtuality: simulation. The Selma Manifesto has this to say about the musical numbers:

> Any prop that is there for use in dance or rhythm/music making… must be there because of the story or location or people. Here we go completely against the musical principle… there are NOT suddenly ten identical props for a dance. The same goes for the clothes… not a chorus of dancers dressed alike. The clothes represent reality and tell us about their owners in real life.

Within the reality of DANCER IN THE DARK, Selma, as the 'director' of the musical fragments, observes the first rule of the Dogma Manifesto. She visualises the musical numbers 'on location' and in the same location she is at that moment, and she uses no other 'props and sets' than those already on location. She puts the Dogma 95 scene approach into practice because she uses only 'ready-mades' – spaces, objects and characters – to *simulate* the song and dance numbers from the Czech musicals of her youth. She uses the ready-mades at the location as the components of a *model* for which the Hollywood musical scenes function as 'source systems'. Her imaginary world is, in the terms of the cognitivists Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner (2002), a blend of elements and relationships from two 'input spaces', her daily reality and the musicals she saw in her youth and at the local cinema. In this mix, structures and relationships are projected onto their equivalents in the spaces, people and objects from her daily life. In her imaginary world, Selma does not produce a *representation*, but a *simulation* of Hollywood numbers, using props which bear no relation to the scene being modelled. The characters and objects which Selma models her song and dance numbers on are mental props which support her imagination when she wants to recall a virtual impression of a Hollywood musical number in this way.

The same approach is at work in the Dogma film IDIOTERNE (see chapter 3). The spassers in that film not only behave like idiots, but the scenes in IDIOTERNE are themselves simulations of situations which, at the script or conceptualisation level, are defined only in terms of the participatory components (characters, attributes and relationships) and algorithms (the actions that will take place in a scene), simulations which are 'modelled' by the actors in different performances. Since the model of a situation does not need to exhibit any outward resemblance to the situation being modelled (as was shown in THE KING IS ALIVE, where the actors wear no special costumes and use found objects as props – see chapter 3), IDIOTERNE is actually a special case in which the actors and the sets *do* resemble the characters and locations we see in the film. But this is because the virtuality in IDIOTERNE lies elsewhere. Here a virtual pattern is *summoned up* in the viewer's mind by the combination of registrations of different run-throughs of the simulation. This summoning is the third form of virtuality.

Summoning

This form of virtuality is the product of linking and combining different takes of the same scene. The effect is to summon up in the viewer's mind the virtual image of an abstract, non-visualisable pattern, one cast slightly differently in each of the executions of a scene. Each actualisation realises a certain difference with respect to earlier actualisations and introduces differentiation, renewal and creativity, where representation would have introduced repetition, duplication and imitation. This form of virtuality is itself a new actualisation of the 'higher-order unity' that Eisenstein had in mind when he argued that intellectual montage would allow a unifying conception to emerge and rise above all the separate elements of a series of images: 'the image of a theme made concrete'. The fact that Eisenstein regarded the staircase scene in BATTLESHIP PO-TEMKIN as the most successful example of the 'montage representation of events' makes it clear that the unity that Eisenstein had in mind – an 'ideological concept' – is not the same unity as the virtual pattern that von Trier creates with the 'edited representation' of scenes using takes from different executions of that scene. Nevertheless, both approaches revolve around a virtuality that is never fully realised and which never appears in the same form as its actual manifestations (according to Eisenstein, the montage even has to transport viewers into a state of 'ecstasy' if they are to perceive this 'unity'). Like Eisenstein, von Trier regards cinema not just as a medium of reproduction but primarily as one of virtuality.

Distributed representation

These three forms of virtuality – the 'colouring' of a model by means of the *sampling* and synthesis of ready-made images in a database of impressions, model-mediated *simulation*, and *summoning* the emergence of a virtual pattern – all come together in DOGVILLE. DOGVILLE was filmed on location, but in a different sense than DANCER IN THE DARK: it was filmed entirely in a studio, in which the hamlet of Dogville was indicated by means of a map drawn on the studio floor in white chalk, with street names, public buildings and residents' names marked as they might be on a real map. Fragments of a radio address by Franklin D. Roosevelt make it clear that the story takes place during the Great Depression of the 1930s, as is later confirmed by the gangsters' cars.

Only those parts of the buildings which play a part in the story are actually built as part of the studio set, such as the bells that Martha rings to inform Grace of the result of the villagers' meeting and later to warn the residents of the approach of the gangsters' cars, and the front wall of Ma Ginger's shop in which Grace finds the seven porcelain figures she buys with her hard-earned money.

All of the other places, props and sets, such as Moses's doghouse and Moses the dog itself, are indicated by nothing more than chalked contours.

At first sight, DOGVILLE doesn't seem to be filmed 'on location' at all, and specially obtained 'props and sets' (albeit quite a bit fewer than is usual in a film) and even murder weapons and 'superficial action' are shown. But upon closer examination, these props and sets fulfil the same function as does the Dogma 95 Manifesto rule which *forbade* them. The map and the elementary, metonymic indications of the Dogville buildings form a *model* which *simulates* this village rather than representing it. The figurative visualisations of Dogville, such as the bell tower, the mine entrance, and the window of Ma Ginger's shop, fulfil a function which has often been called a 'Brechtian alienation effect'. This is undoubtedly because von Trier has cited the song 'Die Seeräuber-Jenny' from *Die Dreigroschenoper* by Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht as an inspiration for DOGVILLE,[11] and because of the unmistakably theatrical form of the film. But, in reality, these visualisations are intended to do just the opposite.

In DOGVILLE, it is up to the spectator to use the 'Kafka method' to get a clearer picture of this American village, which von Trier has decided to situate in the Rocky Mountains simply because the name alone stimulates the imagination:

> I decided that Dogville would be in the Rocky Mountains because if you have never been there, that sounds fantastic. What mountains aren't rocky? Does that mean these are particularly rocky? It sounds like a name you might invent for a fairy tale.[12]

The props are not there to distance viewers from the actions and characters in DOGVILLE, but to help orient them. They serve, as J. Hoberman (2004) has remarked, as 'the scaffolding on which a story might be constructed or the blueprint for a movie given form by the mind's eye'. It is assumed that the mind's eye of the viewer will fill in this blueprint by referring to the database of memories we all carry around because we have seen countless films, television programs, documentaries, photographs, advertisements, drawings, cartoons, novel book covers, and whatever else has ever told us something about modern American culture. This assumption is a pretty safe one because, as von Trier said in defence of his having made DANCER IN THE DARK without ever having been to the US: 'it's hard *not* to be informed about America'.

For contemporary viewers, America, like Fisher's Europe in THE ELEMENT OF CRIME and Leopold Kessler's Europe in EUROPA, even if they have never been there, is familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. Since America, as 'the biggest power in the world', also has the lion's share of the contemporary culture of *real virtuality* (Castells 1996), today's viewers have access to a 'virtual' America which they can project onto the model that simulates America in DOGVILLE. The long photo sequence plus David Bowie's *Young Americans* at the end of DOGVILLE, gives the viewers retrospective confirmation of the picture they have

formed over the previous three hours by showing part of the possible sources for this virtual Dogville. Many of these photos are taken from the multimedia presentation *American Pictures* by the Danish photographer Jacob Holdt (1985), who went to the US in the 1970s, bought a $30 camera in a pawn shop, and hitchhiked around the country, taking photos that later became his 'travelogue and exposé, hippie masterpiece and brimstone homily' (Hoberman 2004: 26). Another Danish photographer, Jacob Riis, famously published a similar photography book, *How the Other Half Lives*, in 1890. Holdt's images of the US are also those of an outsider, and because they shed light on the less glamorous aspects of the US, they were often at odds with the image of 'God's own country' that Americans themselves preferred to broadcast.

Of course, the image of America that DOGVILLE viewers create is not identical to the photographs in this sequence. However, the point is that a 'virtual' America emerges from these photos and from the network of associations they evoke. The image evoked by the props and set of DOGVILLE cannot be identified with any or all of the photographs from this sequence; neither does it consist of some sort of common denominator. It is a virtual whole, a holistic pattern that emerges from the combination of images and associations activated by each photograph, and earlier on, by the film's props and sets. In principle, this method of activating a virtual holistic image does not differ from the method used in IDIOTERNE, for instance, to allow a virtual pattern to emerge from a combination of shots from different run-throughs of a scene, a pattern which yields a holistic image of the simulated situation which does not coincide with any of the actualised simulations.

If the props and set of DOGVILLE function as theatrical signs, then it is not because – like a *pars pro toto* in a metonymic, one-to-one relationship – they point to an imaginary, complete and unique Dogville. It is because they function as stimuli, activating, along different dimensions, a network of images, stories and associations, which summon up a holistic impression of Dogville. This holistic impression is not attached to any single specific node of this network of associations, and no single node yields a specific, identifiable, or indispensable contribution to the whole. The props, sets and photos are metonyms, in the sense that each is a node in a dynamic network in which every node can excite another, strengthening and modifying effects in constant feedback loops. The props and sets in DOGVILLE do not 'stand for' a single corresponding image of an object or location from an imaginary Dogville (the *pars pro toto* relationship). They activate networks of images from which a holistic entity emerges that cannot be linked to any one of these stimuli or nodes in particular (just as a virtual holistic pattern emerges from the combination of different run-throughs in the IDIOTERNE simulations). Instead we may speak, with the connectionist cogniti-

vists, of *distributed representation* (see Churchland 1996: 46 et seq.; Cilliers 1998: 69 et seq.).

The principle of distributed representation is not limited to the basic visualisation of DOGVILLE or the editing style of IDIOTERNE. The impression of the small American town in DANCER IN THE DARK is also a product of the 'Kafka method', which effectively means developing, supplementing and activating the distributed representations of 'second-hand' impressions garnered either from specific informants or from media culture in general. Because the image of this American town is modelled on a holistic impression which emerges from such associative networks, the image is not particularly detailed; but for the same reason, this image functions as a new stimulus which in turn can activate new networks and impressions with which viewers can supplement their impression of this American town. In DANCER IN THE DARK and in DOGVILLE the viewer does just what von Trier himself seems to have done in EUROPA, but the eclectic collection of pictorial and stylistic quotations from which the Europe of EUROPA and of THE ELEMENT OF CRIME is composed is not the end point of a process of distributed representation. It is merely a starting point for the viewer from which he or she can activate associative networks and construct a holistic totality which enters into a relationship of continuous dynamic interaction with the images of the film.

The three forms of virtuality that can be distinguished in von Trier's films all depend on the same principle of distributed representation. The films supply 'models' as a stimulus for the activation of networks of recollections, impressions, images and associations, from which – in processes known to psychoanalysis as displacement and condensation, and to cognitivists considering conceptual networks as 'compression' and 'decompression' (see Fauconnier and Turner 2002[14]) – a holistic image or pattern emerges which, because it cannot be directly linked with the network-activating stimuli nor identified with a 'sum total' of the nodes in that network, is wholly virtual. Still, as the demonstration of the Kafka method in EPIDEMIC shows, just because it is 'virtual' does not mean that it has lost all relation to reality.

Virtual realism

Von Trier's films are not visualisations of virtuality; their virtuality is not projected onto the screen. The films are stimuli which activate networks of images and impressions in the viewer from which, in a process of dynamic interaction and feedback, holistic impressions and virtual patterns emerge which are wholly mental and virtual. The virtualities evoked in von Trier's films differ

from what is generally understood by the term *virtual realities* in two fundamental respects. Virtual realities may be 'fake' in the sense that they have no physical existence, but they are nevertheless the visualisations of illusory environments into which the viewer is immersed. In the words of Oliver Grau (2003: 6), they are 'immersive image spaces', comparable to the worlds in which Fisher in THE ELEMENT OF CRIME, the medium in EPIDEMIC, and Kessler in EUROPA are 'immersed' (see chapter 4). Virtual realities give the *immersant* – as VR artist Char Davies (1998) calls the users of her installation *Osmose* (1995)[15] – the illusion of being entirely immersed in an environment which presents itself to the visual, auditory, and sometimes even to the tactile senses as being 'real' (hence the oxymoron 'virtual reality'). However, for the viewer of a von Trier film these virtualities do not manifest themselves in the form of a sense-perceptible illusion, because they do not coincide with the visible images and audible sounds of the film; they emerge, instead, as mental worlds in the imagination of the viewer. The 'synthetic worlds' in THE ELEMENT OF CRIME and EUROPA, the discontinuous editing of IDIOTERNE and von Trier's later films, and the schematic representation of DOGVILLE offer viewers stimuli which they must themselves turn into a mental 'whole' or 'totality'.

A second important distinction between the virtualities of von Trier's films and virtual realities has to do with their relationship with the physical, material world. In virtual realities this relationship is a very uncertain one. Grau (2003: 231) wrote about promises of how virtual realities would restore a holistic relation between people and nature, noting that::

> It is highly questionable in this art how concept, as a matter of course, the ancients' elements, or matter, make their comeback; how computed material things, perhaps soon to even be experienced haptically, pass over into the digital sphere, immaterial but upholding the deception of being material. Apart from doubts as to whether models of the world based on Plato's elements doctrine, which disappeared at about the same time as alchemy, are either timely or meaningful, it is questionable whether virtual reality is an appropriate medium of reference for the real world. Materially, virtual reality image worlds are nothing, disregarding the technical equipment used to create them, and thus the excessive preoccupation with these worlds appears somewhat paradoxical, if it cannot find a new direction.

Of course, filmic realities are also virtual realities to the extent that in a material respect they are literally 'nothing' (which is why Christian Metz (1977) spoke of *le signifiant imaginaire*), and the imaginary character of filmic worlds is continually underlined in von Trier's films. The hypnosis under which the characters in the Europa Trilogy enter the film worlds, the chapter titles, interviews, voice-overs, and theatrical settings all emphasise the fictional status of the worlds depicted (see chapter 5). But von Trier's films do not fall into the category of 'films

of illusion' against which the Dogma 95 Manifesto is directed, or the sort of virtual realities that are generated with the help of computers. Von Trier's films maintain a relationship with the material world, however indirectly, and it is the notion of film as a medium that *registers* what takes place in front of the camera which plays a crucial role in the maintenance of this relationship. (Whether these registrations are 'analogue' or 'digital' is a minor issue; see chapter 2.)

In von Trier's films, the camera plays the same role as the medium in EPI-DEMIC, but reversed: where the medium imports elements from the virtual world of the film-within-the-film into the real world of Lars and Niels, the camera 'exports' elements of the reality in front of the camera into the virtual world of film, just as Lars and Niels move elements drawn from archives and stories into the reality of Dr. Mesmer. However, the visualisations of the virtual world of Dr. Mesmer are themselves *registrations* of the material reality that existed in front of the camera at the time of filming. The image of Dr. Mesmer floating over the landscape demonstrates how a virtual special effect is created by showing the *registration* of the way this special effect was obtained (see chapter 5). From a material point of view, the physically impossible worlds of THE ELE-MENT OF CRIME and EUROPA were also created on-set in front of the camera, and are therefore analogue *registrations* rather than post-production *manipulations*. In this sense, the Europa Trilogy films are not 'films of illusion' at all. On the other hand, in these films too the 'reality' of the virtual worlds does not coincide with the registered, profilmic reality. The registrations, to quote once again J. Hoberman (2004), are a scaffold on which a virtual world might be constructed by the mind's eye of the viewer.

This principle is radicalised in the Dogma and post-Dogma films, with the camera being used as an instrument with which to register simulations using models. These models can be stripped down to a minimum of actors and locations (IDIOTERNE), or they can be accorded considerable detail (DANCER IN THE DARK) or less detail (DOGVILLE) (the degree of detailing is not particularly relevant to the functioning of the model, as any computer game developer knows); but in all cases the registrations of these models function as the 'scaffolding' for the representation of a virtuality whose registered simulation is one specific actualisation. Unlike the simulated 'immersive image spaces' (Grau) of virtual realities, the virtuality in these films is not a 'pre-programmed' phenomenon but a holistic totality that emerges out of the complex interactions between the registrations of different simulations on the one hand, and between these registrations and the networks of associations and impressions that they activate in the viewer on the other. For this reason, the simulations that the film camera registers are not designed in advance in a mise-en-scène that determines the actors' positions, movements, attitudes, gestures, and expressions (the storyboard approach – see chapter 2), but are autonomous processes whose course is

recorded under different conditions, without, in principle, paying heed to the aesthetic and scenographic aspects of this process.

What is registered in these simulations is not so much the actions of the characters in these Dogma and post-Dogma films; these are part of the fictional, virtual layer which arises in the imagination of the viewer. What the camera registers is the actors and the way they try to get into the characters they are playing and the circumstances they are confronted with. The relationship between actors and their roles echoes a central theme in von Trier's films, namely that of the outsider who has to form an impression of, and attempts to comply with, the expectations and wishes of an unfamiliar (and not necessarily benevolent) environment. The actors in von Trier's films are 'models' who do not so much act out their characters as perform simulations under different conditions in order to discover how these characters would behave under these conditions, just as the spassers in IDIOTERNE turned themselves into 'models' of mentally handicapped people in order to discover how they would behave in different situations (see chapter 3).

Von Trier approaches actors in the same way as the French film-maker Robert Bresson (1983) did, who also approached them as 'models':

> Models: movement from the outside to the inside. (Actors: movement from the inside to the outside.) (1983: 80).

His 'Notes on cinematography' (Bresson 1983) speak the same language as the Dogma 95 Manifesto:

> No actors.
> (No acting direction).
> No roles.
> (No role studies).
> No mise-en-scène.
> But the use of models, taken from life.
> To be (models) rather than to appear (actors).

Bresson also describes a model as 'All those things that one cannot expect from it, not beforehand and not during' (ibid.: 101). His film actors, like von Trier's actors in his Dogma and post-Dogma films, are a kind of *automata* let loose 'in the thick of your film' and enter into specific relationships with the people and objects around them because they are not determined in advance. Actors are neither themselves nor the characters they play; they are visual representations or avatars of the intentions and affects that we may suspect are behind their outward appearance, but which are not necessarily expressed. The cinematographer limits himself or herself to registration, and does not yield to the temptation of directing the events 'in your film':

> Recording. Stick to impressions and observations. No intervention by the intellect, which is alien to these impressions and observations. (Bresson 1983: 93)

Von Trier would seem to have taken Bresson's remarks to heart. It is neither the characters, nor the personalities of the actors and actresses in his Dogma and post-Dogma films, which are subjected to the simulation tests, but the actors-as-models. In other words, they are components of the model of the simulated situation that is being tested (just as in an assessment, candidates may be tested in simulated conditions). For instance, during a rehearsal of *The Sound of Music* in Dancer in the Dark, when the director Samuel says that dog sounds would go well with the song *My Favourite Things*, Kathy (Cathérine Deneuve) spontaneously barks, and in the scene in which Gene, initially against Selma's wishes, gets a bike for his birthday, Selma (Björk) bursts out laughing. These are brief and unexpected moments during a simulation where an instance of behaviour unexpectedly emerges in a way that should not be ascribed to the character, nor to the actor or actress, but to the working of the model; and they are moments which make it clear that the outward, perceptible behaviour of the characters in the film should be seen neither as that of 'flesh-and-blood characters' nor as that of actors, but of actors-as-avatars or models.

In Dogville, the tension between actor and character is generated by the contrast between the star status of many of the actors (Kidman, Bacall, Gazarra, Baker Hall) and the impoverished status of their characters, but also by the ostentatious materiality of the set and the schematic depiction of the fictive world of Dogville which emphasise the physical presence of the actors. The actors are to their roles what the chalk marks on the studio floor are to the houses and streets of Dogville. The actors are not the characters they play, but neither should they be seen as no more than themselves, just as the chalk marks on the studio floor are more than just chalk marks – as in the old computer game *Space Invaders* (currently enjoying a comeback on the small screen of the mobile phone), whose elementary geometric figures were not just crosses and squares but models of spaceships whose form, size, colour and other perceptible attributes were not specified.

Thus the films are registrations of simulations which took place in front of the film camera in the physical and material sense, and (at least, ideally) without prior direction. Paradoxically enough, this is not a form of realism that sets out to achieve the most exact possible reproduction of profilmic reality; it is the evocation of a virtuality that is invisible to the physical eye and to the material camera, whose physical actualisation in front of the camera represents a possible, contingent, but not a necessary manifestation. This virtualisation of the actual, physical world would not be possible with a computer-generated virtual reality because, as Oliver Grau (2003: 231) has noted, 'virtual reality stands for

the complete divorce of the human sensorium from nature and matter'; or as Frances Dyson wrote about the promise of a 'supposedly unmediated experience of immersion', whereby the

> 'being-in' of cyberspace is a deliberate move away from the trope of the viewer as a witness to the world, as discerning judge of quality and truth as inherently separate from the environment (Dyson 1998: 31).

Virtual realities, like post-production effects achieved either with or without the computer, create an illusory virtuality exactly because they disconnect virtuality from, and therefore set it up in antithesis to, physical and material reality. In von Trier's films virtuality is a dimension inextricably linked to actual reality, and conversely, their material and physical reality is a contingent actualisation of a virtual dimension. This 'truth' has to escape the 'film of illusion' once and for all, and to cite the Dogma 95 Manifesto, can be 'forced out' only of such elementary physical and material elements as actors and locations.

Virtual realism assumes an entirely different conception of 'what film is' than what has been upheld by classical and modern film aesthetics, which considers film, as a photographic technology, to be ultimately a reproduction of reality. It can either be objective ('film as a window on reality'), or to a greater or lesser degree, subjective ('film as a language'; photographed reality as a symbolic system with which a filmmaker can express a vision of reality – see Simons 1995). In this way of thinking, the film screen is a window or mirror which offers an outlook on reality or reflects it (see Metz 1980: 63 et seq.). Von Trier's films, however, are not windows onto reality, nor mirrors of it, but are interfaces which give access to virtuality. Simulation, sampling, summoning, and distributed representation are the tools with which this interface transforms the discrete registration of special states testing models of simulated situations under given conditions (set by input events) into a portal to virtuality. Because this redefines actual reality as the contingent actualisation of this virtuality, film, as the objective registration of profilmic events (in this instance, the simulation of a situation), is ideally suited to this portal and interface function.

At first sight, this 'virtual realism' would seem to be at odds with the realism defended by Bazin (1984: 50-51); but did not Bazin himself see realism as a means of giving reality back its ambiguity?

The viewer as lurker

There are, however, dimensions of virtual reality that seem closed even to von Trier. Chapter 5 noted the relationship between simultaneity and permeability

which exists between the various intradiegetic or extradiegetic narrative enti-
ties. These do not so much *relate* a story that is known in advance, but instead,
produce the course of events in the stories they tell 'on the fly'; they do not so
much report their protagonists' adventures as manipulate them. The relation-
ship between narrators and their characters resembles the relationship between
players and their avatars, rather than the one between traditional storytellers
and the characters in their stories (see chapter 5).

The same relationship of simultaneity and manipulation appears to exist be-
tween von Trier as director and the scenes from his Dogma and post-Dogma
films. Although von Trier does not use the storyboard technique, and ap-
proaches the execution of a scene as an algorist who defines the parameters of a
model and then has the model work through different algorithmic procedures
(over which the director has no further influence), he is still the one who sup-
plies the model with new parameters with every new run-through of the simu-
lation (see chapter 2). A film scene then becomes a 'sample' of (parts of) regis-
trations of these various run-throughs. Director and narrator each then 'play' in
their own manner with the actors/characters and the events that they experi-
ence.

Nevertheless, the film remains a registration of events that, while they cer-
tainly took place in the *hic et nunc* of the film recordings (Gaudreault 1988), are
presented *a posteriori* to the viewer in a given, fixed order. Two dimensions in-
herent to virtual realities would therefore seem to be absent by definition in von
Trier's films: *immersivity* (the possibility of entering the world of the film) and
interactivity (the possibility of engaging with it; see Grau 2003: 15; Lunenfeld
2001: 87; Simons 2002: 241 et seq.). The question then arises: What place and
what role have been accorded to the viewer in the virtual world of von Trier's
games? The Dogma 95 Manifesto has nothing to say about the viewer, and the
rules of the Vow of Chastity are production rules aimed exclusively at the film-
maker. Ultimately, however, film is always intended for a public, which was
absent during filming and production.

Immersivity is simulated and stimulated in different ways in von Trier's
films. To start with, he employs the classic strategy of alignment in a number of
films:[16] the glance of the psychotherapist in THE ELEMENT OF CRIME in the direc-
tion of the camera/Fisher, the second person singular tense with which the
anonymous, faceless narrator of EUROPA speaks to both Kessler and the viewer
(chapter 4), and Bess's furtive glances toward the camera on several occasions in
BREAKING THE WAVES all align the viewer with characters in the film – and not
just the protagonists, but, in principle, even with an invisible witness in the
world of the film (the omnipresent, omnipotent observer from BREAKING THE
WAVES).

These kinds of alignment strategies no longer appear in von Trier's Dogma and post-Dogma films. However, immersivity is presented using another, less traditional technique, which is linked to the stylistic devices and strategies employed in video and computer games. Part of the third rule of the Vow of Chastity says:

> The film must not take place where the camera is standing; shooting must take place where the film takes place.

This rule forbids the storyboard approach, in which the actors' movements and actions take place according to a preconceived dramaturgy, in which the mise-en-scène is worked out with an eye to pre-planned camera positions (see chapter 2). In the simulation approach, a scene is a model for which the director/algorist at most provides a few parameters, but who then restricts him/herself to observing the subsequent behaviour of the model, which takes place freely and without further intervention. The Vow of Chastity insists that the director abandon any 'creative' role:

> Furthermore, I swear, as a director, to refrain from personal taste! I am no longer an artist. I swear to refrain from creating a 'work', as I regard the instant as more important than the whole. My supreme goal is to force the truth out of my characters and settings. I swear to do so by all the means available and at the cost of any good taste and any aesthetic considerations.

One consequence of this approach is the so-called point-and-shoot style which has become a characteristic of all von Trier's films since his television series RIGET – THE KINGDOM. In this series, the cameraman follows events as they take place, attempting to capture everything that appears to be important without pausing for aesthetic considerations such as framing, composition, lighting, or even if the lens is focused. This approach, which was inspired by the American police series NYPD BLUE and HOMICIDE: LIFE ON THE STREET (see Stevenson 2002: 82), undoubtedly raises the perceived realism of von Trier's otherwise improbable films (THE KINGDOM is a fairy tale, and the realism of IDIOTERNE and the others has been discussed at length in previous chapters). It also gives his films (along with Vinterberg's FESTEN) an unmistakable 'home video' quality.

An important effect of the simulation strategy and the accompanying point-and-shoot style is that neither cameraman nor actors have any idea in advance where the action will be taking place and from what angle it will be filmed. Thus, the cameraman finds himself in the position of an observer who can be surprised by the turn events take, and who must film events much as a bystander attempts to follow things when caught up in an unexpected event. The point-and-shoot style is therefore at complete variance with the mise-en-scène

technique of classical film in which actions and movements are carefully choreographed with respect to the camera. In the point-and-shoot style camera angle, framing, focus and lighting are determined not by aesthetic but by pragmatic considerations: not by how to depict an action to the greatest aesthetic and dramatic effect, but by how an unexpected event can best be captured.

In this respect, the point-and-shoot style used in the Dogma 95 films IDIOTERNE and FESTEN and in von Trier's later films is related to the way the virtual camera is used in video and computer games. This is because the camera in video and computer games is at the disposal of the player or of his or her avatar, who is not looking at the virtual surroundings for its aesthetic qualities but who is first and for all investigating the possibilities of, or the need for, action. The player/user points the virtual camera towards important objects or, as in shoot-'em-up games, towards any opponents or monsters that unexpectedly pop up (and for which the player literally has a point-and-shoot strategy). Despite the superficial similarities, the treatment of time and space in video and computer games is very different from that in films. For instance, continuity editing, the 180° rule, and other rules of correspondence are notably absent because the player or avatar operates a camera which can often be rotated continuously through 360° and zoom in or out whenever a closer detail or a wider view is needed. In contrast to the classical film, games seldom if ever display the ellipse used to pass over 'dead time':

> Time in games may be spent exploring (without always getting anywhere) or interacting with objects that do not have any significant bearing on the main tasks. Most films only give screen time to what is deemed to be essential to storyline, spectacle or the building of character or mood. Action-adventure-type games operate mainly in something closer to real time with ellipses occurring primarily at the end of chapters and levels. This creates a significant difference between the pace (and length) of games and that of films. Despite the shared use of some aspects of framing, *mise-en-scène*, dialogue and music, the handling of time and space are quite different ... (King and Krzywinska 2002a: 14).

The similarity between a video game or computer game player and a Dogma film cameraman is that, although the spaces are organised in advance and the required actions in the scenario or in the game are partly pre-programmed, neither know exactly how the actions will turn out, where the movements of those involved will lead, where or when important developments will suddenly occur, or even whether certain elements or events will turn out to be relevant or not. Jack Stevenson describes the situation of the cameraman Eric Kress during the filming of THE KINGDOM almost literally as that of a computer game player:

> Unlike THE ELEMENT OF CRIME and EUROPA, which had been carefully choreographed, here in THE KINGDOM Kress didn't even know beforehand where the actors

would be positioned when the action started, just as the actors didn't know where he would be standing. He was given minimal guidance by von Trier and co-director, Morten Anfred, and just told to shoot what he found best. Scenes were shot from start to finish with no cuts, and four or five retakes were done in which the actors were encouraged to improvise. He covered the action from all four corners of the room with full mobility, since there were no cables, sometimes spinning 360 degrees and prompting the soundman and an assistant to dive to the floor (Stevenson 2003: 63).

The point-and-shoot style makes it possible for the viewer – without necessarily identifying or 'aligning' with any given character in the film story – to align nonetheless, via what Christian Metz (1980: 67) has called a 'primary identification' with the camera, with a figure whose existence is a strongly contested issue in classical and modern film (see Bordwell 1985: 274), but which is almost palpably present in von Trier's Dogma and post-Dogma films: the ambiguous figure of the 'invisible observer'. This invisible observer, who Bess in BREAKING THE WAVES occasionally glances at and who we actually see from time to time in FESTEN and IDIOTERNE in the shadows, reflections and sound booms of the camera crew, has a position in the film not unlike that of the player or avatar in a computer game, who is both *in* the world of the game and *outside* it (see Aarseth 1997). This alignment with an invisible and yet strongly present observer, who, like an innocent bystander, is continuously surprised by the events which unfold around them, contributes towards the immersivity of the Dogma 95 films made by Vinterberg and von Trier and the latter's post-Dogma films, in the same way that a computer game player or avatar, continuously alert to the presence of obstacles, surprises or threats, becomes immersed in the game environment.

Viewers of a Dogma or post-Dogma film by von Trier, unlike the video game or computer game player, naturally are not in a position to explore the surroundings for themselves or to influence the characters' actions. The viewer sees a registration of events that took place in front of the camera at some earlier time 'when the viewer was absent' (Metz 1980). However, this is not fundamentally different from the position of the *viewers* of a video or computer game. The non-playing onlooker, whether in amusement arcades, at LAN parties or at home, is a frequent occurrence (see Newman 2004: 152 et seq.), and in the culture of online games, newsgroups and forums there is even a special term for the observer who does not actively take part in a game or a debate and does not make himself or herself known, but who follows all the players' moves or reads every contribution to the discussion: the *lurker*.[17]

To watch FESTEN is to witness the events unfolding on the screen with the same eyes, as it were, as the cameramen who are continually taken by surprise while filming on-set, and in this sense, it is the same position as the lurker who

follows the developments in an online game or discussion group with interest and curiosity, but without intending to take part in the action. However, the possibility cannot be ruled out that just as lurkers can influence the course of an online game or discussion by their presence alone, the presence of the camera – certainly when wielded by the algorist von Trier himself – may also influence the course of events merely by being the observer. At any rate, it is certain that the viewer/lurker is as ambivalent a figure as its counterparts, the player/narrator and the algorist/director.

The 'von Trier system' revisited

Just as the stories in von Trier's films appear to be the reconfigurations of a relatively small number of modules, the different styles that von Trier has developed in his films appear to be part of a modular system. In Epidemic, the use of analytical editing in the framing story is combined with the use of long, unbroken shots in the film-within-the-film, while in Dancer in the Dark the musical sequence uses analytical editing and the framing story uses discontinuous editing. In Europa and The Element of Crime, continuous shots are used with the synthesis of disparate and heterogeneous images. While in Idioterne and Dogville, discontinuous editing is linked with the registration of a homogenous profilmic reality, which is itself the modelled simulation of dramatic situations, however.

The system appears to be characterised by the pursuit of a certain balance. The musical sequences in Dancer in the Dark used 100 DV cameras, which enabled unbroken virtual camera movement, but this 'illusory' continuity is then undermined by the use of analytical editing. Nevertheless, it is precisely these 'virtual sequences' (that take place only in Selma's imagination) that are depicted in a classic, representational way, just as the virtual film-within-the-film (it has not yet been made) in Epidemic uses the unbroken camera movements that for Bazin are the hallmark of those filmmakers who wish to respect the space-time continuity of the reality being filmed. The virtual world of Europa, too, built as it is using an eclectic mix of heterogeneous stylistic and pictorial quotations and from synthetic images which are themselves composed of heterogeneous images with conflicting perspectives and dimensions, is filmed using continuous camera movements. The different levels of reality in von Trier's Dogma and post-Dogma films are indicated by discontinuous editing sequences which are intended to emphasise the contingent, commutable status of any and every actualisation of the model of a situation.

Different stylistic devices need not be deployed for the same purpose. Representational stylistic devices such as the *plan séquence* and analytical editing are employed for the depiction of virtualities (such as the not-yet-made-film-within-the-film in Epidemic and the musical sequences in Dancer in the Dark), while documentary or pseudo-documentary registrations like those of Idioterne, the framing story narration of Dancer in the Dark or the staging of Dogville are filmed in discontinuous editing sequences which provide a counterweight to the objective, realistic character of the images by repeatedly revealing the contingent character of the separately actualised run-throughs of the simulations. In this game, stylistic devices themselves are treated as modules combined in ever-changing configurations, thereby acquiring new values – ones often incongruous with their conventional status. The value and meaning of each stylistic device now strongly depends on the specific game – the specific configuration – in which it is being employed.

But the system does seem to have a certain goal: the *zero sum* is achieved by the 'realisation of virtuality' and the 'virtualisation of reality'. At the stylistic level, we see the same tendency to mix different reality levels as most of his narrators at the level of the film's narrative content. The von-Trier-system films are neither the representations of an actualised, non-recurring reality (whether one of fact or fiction) nor the depictions of purely virtual realities. They are the registrations either of *simulations* of virtual realities (as in his pre-Dogma films) or of the special *states* attained by models of scenes conceived of as systems (as in his Dogma and post-Dogma films). They are therefore anything but films in the classical or modernistic sense of the word, they – just as the Dogma 95 Manifesto is a parody of a rebellion, and as the spassers in Idioterne pretend to be idiots – are 'films that pretend to be films'. They are simulations of films in the same sense that new media simulate old media, or in the sense that players in a game environment simulate a game world.

This post-cinematographic approach to film remakes the relationship between the 'actual reality' of the extradiegetic viewer and filmmaker, on the one hand, and the 'virtual reality' of the film on the other, but in altering the space-time relationships – no longer those of representation, but of simulation – it also changes the relationships that exist between viewers, filmmakers, and filmic reality: the filmmaker becomes a model-builder and algorist, the narrator becomes a player and an avatar, and the viewer becomes a lurker, present and absent at one and the same time. These post-cinematographic relationships signify the reappearance of a dimension that has been suppressed in classical and modernistic film: the theatrical and performative dimension of the 'performance art' to which film also belongs.[18] This is why the ultimate Dogma film is Dogville, because theatre is the supreme domain of play and simulation.

7 Between Hollywood and Copenhagen

The Dogme95 Manifesto does not concern itself
with the economic aspects of filmmaking…
Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg (1995b)

Dogma, film and gaming

Modular narration, narrators as players, characters as avatars, distributed representation and virtual realism: in almost every conceivable regard, von Trier's films fall outside the paradigm of the classical and the modern film. But as registrations and partial models – the correlate of distributed representation (see chapter 6) – they also do not fit into the paradigm of virtual reality, which aims at the viewer's total immersion in *imagescapes* that are as full and as photorealistic as possible (see Bolter and Grusin 1999: 162). Von Trier's films are certainly remediated by new, computer-based media such as virtual realities, computer games and the cultural forms that new media have introduced (database narrative, algorithmic or rule-based processes and activities, interactive users and avatars, etc. – see Manovich 2001: 212 et seq.). They cannot, however, be placed in a teleological construction of media history which describes this history as the pursuit of an ever-greater transparency and immediacy in which any traces of hypermediacy are removed as far away as possible (Bolter and Grusin 1999: 5).[1]

Dogville demonstrates how von Trier uses irony to undermine concepts such as transparency and immediacy and their opposites, alienation (or critical distance) and hypermediacy. At one and the same time, the film is a concise summary and a demonstration of remediation. After all, Grace's story is a literary narrative read aloud in John Hurt's voice-over, but it is adapted as a theatre performance, played out by actors on a stage floor in a film studio, and finally filmed by von Trier. The steps from literature to theatre and from theatre to film have often been described as the asymmetric, irreversible stages of a linear development process. For instance, André Bazin (1984: 90) noted that 'we often see that a novel can be adapted for the stage, but almost never the other way around'. Theatre adds to a literary text the presence of the actors, and film adds the realistic (that is, the complete) representation of space. This development is

seen as the progression of immediacy and transparency, and for this reason, it is seen as irreversible.

DOGVILLE, however, omits the last step in this progression: the studio floor is clearly a theatre space in which chalk lines, a little décor and a few props give a very schematic and incomplete impression of the small town of Dogville. For this reason DOGVILLE is regularly described in terms of a Brechtian alienation effect, one intended to create a distance from the world of the story by revealing the means by which this world was built. But this construction is not necessarily hypermediate, as it also leads to a quite literal transparency: unhindered by walls, viewers can simultaneously see what is happening inside different buildings and rooms, which for the inhabitants of Dogville are closed, separate spaces. And because the camera is not tied to theatre's 'fourth wall', but can move around freely – as in film – through Dogville, it can choose camera angles which visually combine foreground and background events even though for the inhabitants of Dogville these events are separated by walls and partitions. For instance, in one scene, we see Chuck in the background raping Grace in his marital home while in the foreground the unsuspecting inhabitants of Dogville go about their daily business and Tom, would-be writer and Grace's *wannabe* lover, strolls to and fro on Elm Street.

The viewer is also regularly accorded the same 'God's eye view' of the horizontal plane, when the camera is pointed straight down at the studio floor; a transparency which would not have been possible on a realistic film set. This all-seeing spatial perspective is also mirrored in the temporal dimension, in the discontinuous editing with which shots from different takes of the same scene are brought together; this not only emphasises the contingent character of each performance, but also allows a virtual, holistic impression of the scene to emerge, in a way that would be impossible within the singular continuity of a theatre performance or the paradigm of classical film. Although the action in DOGVILLE does not take place in 'realistic' space, neither does it represent 'filmed theatre'.

Moreover, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, the Dogville map, frugal décor and props are not intended to thwart the viewer's imagination (as is the case in modernistic art cinema), but to stimulate it. The film offers a partial model of Dogville which activates networks of images and associations in the imagination of the viewer, and this summons up a virtual, holistic and mental impression of the town. DOGVILLE is not a theatrical performance of the events 'summarised' in the nine chapters given short introductions by John Hurt's voice-over; the scenes are simulations which visualise the situations designated in these verbal descriptions for the viewer's eye, using partial models which synthesise these visualisations with the viewer's activated associations in a virtual holistic representation.

In this light, the hypermediacy of DOGVILLE does not work against its immediacy, but actually *for* it, just as its immediacy actually demonstrates its hypermediacy. What the camera registers and 'makes present' is not the fictional space of Dogville, nor the virtual, holistic impression of Dogville that emerges from its simulations, but simply the components – the space, the props and the actors – of the simulation itself. In this and other films, von Trier is playing with the constitutive, complementary dimensions of immediacy ('film is a window on reality') and hypermediacy ('film is a language' – see Simons 1995; 1999) in the classical and modern arts and media, and undermining the distinction between these dimensions. In other words, the simulacrum of Dogville presents itself as just that, a simulacrum. Baudrillard will probably feel more at home in DOGVILLE than Bazin or Brecht would.

Von Trier's films are thus more related to computer games than to feature films. They display a continual mixing of narrative levels, in which narrators intervene in their character's experiences and the characters themselves are avatars whose appearance does not necessarily correspond with the identity concealed behind the visual representation (see chapter 5). They are also not the representation of a unique course of actions and events, but the registrations of simulations (see Frasca 2003: 223). In each film, the collection of modules in the 'von Trier system' is redistributed, reconfigured and 'started' (see chapter 5). Moreover, in the Dogma and post-Dogma films, the models of individual scenes are tested under different starting conditions (using different 'input events' such as 'moods'), much as a computer game player can play a game again and again in order to try out different strategies.

The Dogma and post-Dogma films also have in common with computer games the fact that the models with which systems are simulated need exhibit no outward similarity to the systems being modelled. In a computer game a character, whether this is an avatar or a character controlled by the computer, does not stand for an individual but for a set of capacities and capabilities (see Newman 2004: 130). In early computer games, the lower power levels of the computers and the lower resolutions of the screens meant that these action capacities were usually depicted via abstract, non-anthropomorphic figures (see Wolf 2001b: 94). The abstract representations of characters, objects and locations in computer games perform the same anti-Brechtian function as the partial models in von Trier's Dogma and post-Dogma films:

> The player's mind is forced to complete or imagine game details, which engages and involves them more in the game (Wolf 2003: 64).

Instead of alienating the game-world player, abstract representations in computer games are intended to stimulate the imagination, just as the use of distributed representation in von Trier's films is intended to activate networks of

images and associations in the minds of the viewers (see chapter 6). The Vow of Chastity rules, which forbid the bringing in of props and sets, with a view to simplification and abstraction, can be read in the context of Mark J.P. Wolf's observation that 'game design can usefully incorporate abstraction, resulting in new gaming experiences and game conventions' (ibid.).

But the most important resemblance of von Trier's films to computer games is that both offer indirect visualisations of virtualities. A game does not amount to its actualisations, but to the virtual system which governs play by describing the game's objects, attributes and behavioural rules. The same applies to von Trier's Dogma and post-Dogma films, whose combined montage of fragments from different scene run-throughs allows a virtual, holistic impression to emerge of the virtual system comprising the characters and objects, their attributes and relationships, which together define the rules for the actions and events that are possible within this framework. The actualised simulation of action and event in a von Trier film is permanently recorded on film, whereas in a computer game, actions are carried out in the present tense in order to achieve a goal located in an uncertain future; this is not an unimportant distinction, but neither is it a fundamental one, as von Trier's narrators' repeated interventions into the world of the story show. As the ludologist Gonzalo Frasca explains:

> To an external observer, the sequence of signs produced by both the film and the simulation could look exactly the same. This is what many supporters of the narrative paradigm fail to understand: their semiotic sequences might be identical, but simulation cannot be understood just through its output. This is absolutely evident to anybody who played a game: the feeling of playing soccer cannot be compared to the one of watching a match. … Video games imply an enormous paradigm shift for our culture because they represent the first complex simulational media for the masses. It will probably take several generations for us to fully understand the cultural potential of simulation, but it is certainly encouraged from different fields, such as the constructionist school of education and Boalian drama (Frasca 2003a: 224).

And, we can add, increasingly in film as well. For those who approach von Trier's films as a narrative sequence with a beginning, a middle and an end, the action in these films forms a causal-chronological sequence determined by its conclusion. However, this narratological approach overlooks the contingent character of the action and the virtual dimension which it actualises. It is no accident that the discontinuous editing and distributed representation which are both core elements in von Trier's films have either been ignored or disparaged (as a form of cinematographic 'spassing' – see chapter 3).

From a narratological perspective action sequences are described in terms of the abstract functions and actants that recur in every story and can be manifested in any figurative form whatsoever (see Greimas 1970: 157 et seq.). This

'figurativisation' is the fortuitous filling-in or 'furnishing' (*investissement*) of abstract narrative functions (*énoncés*) which is intended to enable the listener/reader/spectator (the *énonciataire*) to recognise the object of the narrative function as a 'figure' (Greimas and Courtés 1979: 147). But this figurativisation can take all sorts of forms: abstract figures in a cartoon, linguistic expressions in a novel, figurative representations in a painting, musical notes, graphic images, film worlds, and, of course, computer graphics. From this perspective, discontinuous editing is the arbitrary representation of an abstract function taken from the logical series of functions which a story comprises, and the temporal and spatial dimensions of a story are projections of an underlying logical structure which may be abstract but is nonetheless identifiable, definable and reconstructable.

However, the virtual dimension of games and simulations cannot be teleologically defined in terms of such a series of narrative functions, because the actualisations of virtual patterns (even if they are rule-based, like chess, for instance) are contingent and unpredictable (see Frasca 2003a: 227; Simons 2002; Wolf 2001b: 93). A game system does not consist of a sequence of narrative statements, but of a 'grammar' with rules and a 'lexicon' of items which can be combined according to these rules, although the combinations themselves are determined by the global strategy and local, contextual tactics of the player (and of the opponent).

This does not mean that von Trier's films do not tell stories, just as it would be absurd to claim that games are entirely non-narrative (see Frasca 2003b).[2] But it does mean that his films cannot be understood from a uniquely narratological perspective as the recorded report of a football match, so to speak. The contemporaneous relationship between the narrator and the story's events (in those films which have an explicit narrator) alone indicates that the narrator is to the story what a commentator is to a game (except that, unlike the commentator, the narrator can also intervene in the proceedings). Here, too, von Trier's films appear to sidestep the usual antitheses because his films are both stories and games and at the same time they are neither. They are both representations and simulations and, at the same time, they are neither. Von Trier plays a game in which these dimensions are played off against one another and undermined.

Enter the Matrix: Virtual Hollywood

Modular narratives, virtual realities, reality as a simulacrum and as a game world: these are notions which have characterised not only early American independent films but also some of the most successful Hollywood blockbusters of the last ten years. The MATRIX trilogy alone has inspired many a philosopher

to take up the pen.[3] Modular narration has long been a characteristic of the
classic Hollywood film, in the sense that industrial production techniques, the
need for cost control, and marketing strategies led to the idea of a film as a
package of stars, props, sets and spectacular action sequences, for which the sce-
nario merely provides a *raison d'être* (see Cowie 1998: 182). In post-classical Hol-
lywood this packaging approach has been intensified in the 'high-concept' film
with which Hollywood pulled itself out of crisis in the early 1970s. The high-
concept film, pithily characterised by Justin Wyatt (1994: 20) as 'the look, the
hook, and the book', consists of a number of rather disconnected but recognisa-
ble elements, characters with no psychological depth who stand for a certain
lifestyle, the use of clothing, props, vehicles and interiors circulating in contem-
porary fashion and design, references to images and styles from other films,
television shows and mass media, and simplified genre elements (Wyatt 1994:
53 et seq.). The high-concept film is also an easily dismantled composite whose
soundtrack, story, characters and stars, props and clothing can be distributed
and marketed via numerous other channels: CDs, videos, the-book-of-the-film,
gadgets, advertising images, fashion magazines, and so on.

This modularisation of film has only been strengthened now that 'Holly-
wood' has lost its role as an independent film-making industry and forms just
one part of all-embracing audiovisual, publicity and leisure conglomerates, and
the 'content' of a film is pushed to the consumer in numerous forms and for-
mats (video, DVD, CD, computer game, television series, toys, gadgets, adver-
tising, etc.). Film is just one of the formats in which content can be packaged
and distributed, and the content itself is increasingly taking the form of a collec-
tion of components ('units', in Wyatt's words) which can be reconfigured ac-
cording to the needs of each medium and each channel (see Maltby 1998: 39;
Simons 2002: 159-160).[4] The world of a video game often has little more in com-
mon with the film on which it is 'based' than a few characters and settings
which serve as the 'fill-in' for an entirely different product. Characters, objects
and locations from a film can appear in contexts that have little or nothing to do
with them, such as the life-size portraits of the protagonists of the LORD OF THE
RINGS series (Peter Jackson, NZ/USA 2001, 2002, 2003) with which the 'Lord of
the Wings' airline, Air New Zealand, has turned its aeroplanes into flying bill-
boards advertising the tourist attractions of New Zealand, where the films were
made.

In this process, the film itself is one of many possible 'actualisations' or states
from the virtual state space of the combinatorial possibilities offered by the da-
tabase of components and the rules governing their combination. In contempo-
rary visual culture, film long ago lost its status, so dearly desired by classical
and modern film theorists, as a fully-fledged and autonomous art form. The
film experience is no longer limited to the cinema; in fact, a visit to the cinema

is no longer a necessary or even a *sufficient* condition to experience the world of a film. A DVD often offers more information on the history of a film than the cinema version – the DVD versions of the Lord of the Rings films were judged 'demonstrably better' than the cinema versions (see Lebbing 2004) – while the game *Enter the Matrix* (USA, Warner Bros. and Atari, 2003) is given the following recommendation on its official website:

> The story-within-the-story – without the game, you won't see the entire Matrix Reloaded story.[5]

And the film experience goes further than the audiovisual derivations or extensions of that film. A limited number of 'Matrix' sunglasses were obtainable through sponsor Heineken, and were modelled in advertisements by Danielle Burgio, who doubled for Carrie-Anne Moss in the film's fight scenes. The experience of Lord of the Rings is incomplete without having visited the landscapes in which the film was made. In theme parks and theme restaurants, the world of films (or of film in general, as in the Jack Rabbit Slim's restaurant in Pulp Fiction (Quentin Tarantino, USA 1994)) is extended into the real world. In fast food restaurants, supermarkets and petrol stations, gadgets and toys export the experience or the memory of a film into the child's bedroom or the adult film-lover's living room or workspace. Specially edited versions of film scenes bring the sound track to the attention of potential buyers of the soundtrack CD via video clips on music programs and television channels such as MTV. Gadgets and sponsors advertise the film and the film advertises gadgets and sponsors, as is quite consciously the case in Jurassic Park (Steven Spielberg, USA 1993); the amusement park's souvenir shop displays gadgets that cinema viewers can actually go out and buy. In other words, the film is no longer a closed 'work' or 'text' but an 'energy centre' which creates countless horizontal and vertical connections (Elsaesser 2000b).

Film today therefore penetrates and interlinks numerous other domains, and, with this hybridisation of the everyday world, it contributes significantly to the virtualisation of everyday life; not only is this 'colonised', as it were, by filmic representation, but it becomes experienced and interpreted in filmic terms. A contemporary understanding of the Holocaust is probably more strongly shaped by films such as Sophie's Choice (Alan J. Pakula, USA 1982), Schindler's List (Steven Spielberg, USA 1993) and The Pianist (Roman Polanski, UK/FR/BRD/NL/P 2002), that of the Second World War by films such as Saving Private Ryan (Steven Spielberg, USA 1998) and the all-star movie The Longest Day (Darryl F. Zanuck et al., USA 1962), and that of the Roman Empire by films such as Gladiator (Ridley Scott, UK/USA 2000), than by actual historical documents, studies or documentaries.[6] In this respect he representation of the im-

mediate postwar Germany in von Trier's Europa is not greatly removed from its historical representation in the contemporary collective memory.[7]

Conversely, contemporary real-life events are made accessible in film by making them conform to the figures, entities and conventions we know from our acquaintance with audiovisual media. Even when these real-life events do not lend themselves to rational or psychological explanation, such as, for instance, the Colombine shootings, the unexplainable is made intelligible to contemporary media users by a film like Elephant (Gus van Sant, USA 2004), which turns the school building and its corridors into the labyrinthine environment of a video game in which future victims are stalked at arm's length like targets in a first-person shooter, or as if they were surrogate-based characters (Wolf 2003) propelled by game players safe behind computer screens. Van Sant's film looks like the walk-through of a game simulation of the Columbine shooting. This does not trivialise the tragedy ('It's only a game') but relativises it, turns it into the contingent actualisation of a virtual event which under only slightly different conditions may well have had a very different outcome.

Elephant could be seen as the Hollywood version of Tom Tykwer's Lola Rennt (BRD 1998), but it could also be seen as a Hollywood Dogma film. The film is made on location; it uses local, non-professional actors; with the exception of the boys' weapons no special props seem to have been introduced into the school building; and the lighting also *appears* to be 'natural'. As in Idioterne and in von Trier's Dogma and post-Dogma films, it shows events from simultaneous multiple perspectives, and as in Idioterne the story begins *in medias res*, ends abruptly, and leaves us in the dark as to the fate of the protagonists. It is left to us to fill in this 'open end' for ourselves with any knowledge we have of this outcome derived from television, newspapers and documentaries like Michael Moore's Bowling for Columbine (USA/Can/BRD 2002) or novels like Douglas Coupland's *Hey Nostradamus!* (2003).

The technique of distributed representation, as used by von Trier in (amongst other films) Dancer in the Dark and Dogville, therefore serves not only to fill the ellipses in feature films but also to fill in gaps in our memory or our understanding of historical and contemporary circumstances and events. The borderlines between fact and fiction, between material and virtual reality, and between imagination and reality begin to disappear, much as they also did, perhaps, for the two teenage marksmen in Elephant who stayed home watching videos and TV programs about Hitler and playing FPS video games on their laptop. Elephant refers, in turn, to the two ten-year-old Liverpool boys who in 1993 abducted and murdered the toddler Jamie Bulger, and who were allegedly inspired to do so by the horror videos which the parents of one of them kept in their home. Film, video, games and reality become inextricably entangled.

Virtualisation has become an important element in the contemporary Hollywood film. In blockbusters like THE MATRIX and the LORD OF THE RINGS series, but also in art house and independent films like MULHOLLAND DRIVE by David Lynch (USA/Fr 2001), ADAPTATION (Spike Jonze, USA 2002) or Spike Lee's 25TH HOUR (USA 2002), 'parallel worlds' are shown as the possible alternatives for characters if they had made others choices in their pasts. These parallel worlds are generated by computers and machines in THE MATRIX but by the minds of the protagonists themselves in the art films, and in the most extreme examples of these (such as Lynch's film) it is impossible to tell which version of reality is 'factual' and which 'counterfactual'. Critics and viewers alike have described the experience of seeing LORD OF THE RINGS as that of entering another universe, and the episodic structure and elastic time-space make of Tolkien's amazing world a universe that more closely resembles an immersive virtual environment, inviting exploration and astonishment, than the setting for an adventure story that asks only to be attentively *followed*.[8] In this environment, the distinction between analogue characters (played by actors and actresses) and synthetic characters (generated by computer) is by no means always a clear one. In the LORD OF THE RINGS series, large battlefield scenes made use of 'artificial life agents' which, once programmed with a few simple instructions, carried out the actions needed for the scenes independently. These, of course, are techniques similar to those that von Trier experimented with in *Psykomobile #1*, the television series THE KINGDOM, and his subsequent 'live actor' films.

It is worth noting that the techniques used to create special effects are openly demonstrated in the extra materials supplied in DVDs and official film websites. Today's Hollywood film asks of today's viewers not the traditional suspension of disbelief, but astonishment and admiration for the technical mastery and means that have made these special effects possible. Contemporary blockbuster aesthetics – the 'new spectacle cinema' (Darley 2000: 102) – have been called an 'aesthetic of astonishment',

> which amounts to the viewer's oscillation between illusionary immersion and technological awe (Mactavish 2002: 37).

It is exactly this oscillation between illusionary immersion and technological awe which von Trier used ironically in the scene in EPIDEMIC in which he had himself, as Dr. Mesmer, hauled across a pastoral landscape by helicopter at the end of a rope (see chapter 5).

Having arrived at this point on our *tour d'horizon* of contemporary visual culture – of which the contemporary film is an integral, but perhaps no longer a central part – it will have become clear that Dogma 95 and von Trier's film practices are not entirely alien to the contemporary 'film of illusion'. Modularity (database narrative), virtualisation, contingency and gaming, synthetic realities,

characters as avatars, and all of this aimed at a 'media savvy' public. At first sight, these are formal characteristics that von Trier's films share with much of what is now called 'contemporary Hollywood' (see Neale and Smith 1998; Elsaesser and Buckland 2002). But it will also have become clear that notwithstanding these formal similarities and overlaps, there are also large contrasts between them.

The Matrix unloaded: Virtual realism

The aforementioned example of a special effect from EPIDEMIC immediately illuminates the contrast between virtual Hollywood and von Trier's virtual realism (see chapter 6). The image of Dr Mesmer hanging on a helicopter rope has the opposite effect from that which the visual effects supervisor of THE MATRIX RELOADED, John Gaeta, and the Wachowski brothers had in mind when they designed and filmed the *Burly Brawl*. The Wachowski brothers' intention was to impress the viewer with 'impossible' images that the viewer knows can only be obtained using state-of-the-art technology and top-notch professional expertise ('impossible photography' – Darley 2000: 108). Films such as the MATRIX series or the LORD OF THE RINGS series continually amaze the viewer, but they also arouse our curiosity about the technical and technological means by which these 'impossible images' were actually created. They satisfy this curiosity by vouchsafing the viewer a look 'behind the scenes', on the website and, in particular, on the DVD (provided the viewer is prepared to buy or rent the DVD, of course). In EPIDEMIC the comparatively primitive technical 'how' of the special effect is openly demonstrated within the film, and this is not done to impress the viewer with von Trier's technical skill for creating a special effect in a film that – according to his bet with the DFI – would cost no more than a million Danish kroner to make (see chapter 4). On the contrary, showing how this 'special effect' was obtained is intended to allow the viewer to create his or her *own* image of how Dr. Mesmer floated over the pestilential landscape. While THE MATRIX RELOADED uses the explicit depiction of a special effect to excite our curiosity as to how it was done, EPIDEMIC uses the explicit depiction of how it was done to excite the viewer's own imagination of the special effect.

The websites and DVDs of films like the MATRIX series, the LORD OF THE RINGS series and many other blockbusters give detailed explanations of how such techniques as 'virtual cinematography', computer-generated virtual environments, artificial life and artificial intelligence, scale models, trick photography and of course live action sequences, derived from the most heterogeneous materials and sources, are sampled and combined to create a synthetic whole

(see Silberman 2003). The artificial, virtual worlds portrayed in these films are no different in principle from the virtual worlds portrayed in von Trier's THE ELEMENT OF CRIME and EUROPA or from the musical sequences filmed with 100 digital cameras in DANCER IN THE DARK (see chapter 6). In THE ELEMENT OF CRIME, but particularly in EUROPA, we are shown a synthetic world made up of different sorts of samples (colour, black-and-white, live action, animation, graphic, photographic, etc.), many of them filmed from several perspectives. But, whereas contemporary Hollywood blockbusters conceal the heterogeneous origins of the samples which make up their virtual worlds by merging them into a reality which looks homogeneous to the viewer, in EUROPA the viewer is openly confronted with the heterogeneity of these images and perspectives. The Hollywood blockbuster immerses its viewers in a rich, homogeneous, virtual environment which is intended to look real or, at the very least, possible:

> They simulate photography of the fantastic, offering us the semblance of a moving photographic image of the impossible. In other words, these digitally rendered images seem real, they appear to have the same indexical qualities as the images of the live action characters and sets with which they are integrated (Darley 2000: 110).[9]

Von Trier, however, does the opposite: EUROPA presents its images as the composites of different images and perspectives, and it is the viewer who must mentally forge these into a virtual whole (see chapter 6). Moreover, the film images of EUROPA do not simulate the indexical qualities of photographically produced film images, but are simply the photographic recordings of the on-set combinations of footage filmed at various different times and locations. The virtual reality of EUROPA is therefore not 'digital' or created in post-production; the post-production takes place in the mind of the viewer, who constructs the virtual reality of EUROPA (and the other pre-Dogma films) on the basis of 'photographic evidence'. While Hollywood blockbusters simulate the 'photography of the fantastic', the photographic depiction of impossible places in von Trier's pre-Dogma films stimulates the viewer's imagination of the virtual.

This is also the purpose of the distributed representation and model-based approach to scenes which von Trier went on to develop in his Dogma and post-Dogma films. As I have argued in chapter 3, the Dogma rules are designed to eliminate everything from the performance and registration of a scene that might distract attention from the most important elements of the action – 'characters and settings' – and everything that might impede the free course of the simulation of a scene: 'dramaturgy', 'predictability'. By combining footage of different states within the state space defined by a scene, the film allows the viewer to construct a holistic mental image of this state space, while props, sets, and locations serve as stimuli to activate networks of images, memories and impressions with which the viewer rounds out, supplements and complements

these stimuli. Von Trier's Dogma and post-Dogma films demonstrate three methods by which this has been achieved: stripping a scene down to its most elementary entities (IDIOTERNE), providing a less specified[10] image (DANCER IN THE DARK), and the theatrical minimalisation of props and sets (DOGVILLE).

In these films, the images projected onto the screen are also the *registrations* of profilmic events: the image is not the simulation of a 'fantasy world' (as is the case not only in Hollywood blockbusters, but in all fiction films), but the registration of a *simulation* of the special state which the model of a scene can attain under certain circumstances. The *realism* that the rules of the Vow of Chastity have in mind is not directed towards a 'pure' representation of the actions and events in a scene, but towards the non-manipulated performance of an authentically executed *simulation*, much as a laboratory experiment is not allowed to be influenced by improper aesthetic considerations. The aim of this approach is not embodied by the registered simulations themselves, but by the virtual pattern that is summoned up through these simulations and which can only be understood in the mind of the viewer.

The 'new spectacle cinema' aesthetic and von Trier's film aesthetic are opposites – but not, as is so often claimed, along a dimension which has illusionism at one end and realism at the other. There is even a sense in which one could speak of a contemporary Hollywood blockbuster as being more realistic than a von Trier film, because they simulate the photographic representation of impossible, fantastic worlds, overwhelming their viewers with the technology and the technical mastery with which these worlds were created. In these blockbusters, virtuality is presented as a product of their special effects department; in the final analysis it is, therefore, merely a dimension of the fictional world of these films, and could never form part of the 'extra-filmic' reality of the real world. The theme of virtuality in these films is called up only to ward it off: THE MATRIX films, the LORD OF THE RINGS series and the other blockbusters that have played with virtual realities fulfil the same function that Jean Baudrillard (1988b: 172) once ascribed to Disneyland:

> Disneyland is there to conceal the fact that it is the 'real' country, all of 'real' America, which is Disneyland (just as prisons are there to conceal the fact that it is the social in its entirety, in its banal omnipresence, which is carceral). Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation.

'New spectacle cinema' keeps virtual and actual reality, 'fiction and non-fiction', strictly apart; and in so doing, it conceals that which von Trier's films continually explore: the fact that reality itself is the contingent actualisation – a 'possible world', or *state* – of a virtuality, and as a function of this virtuality, is itself a

virtual reality (although not in the illusory sense of computer-generated virtual realities). Whereas Hollywood blockbusters present virtual realities in order to 'de-virtualise' actual reality, von Trier's films present registrations of simulated models in order to 'de-realise' reality (or in Baudrillard's terms, to 'hyperrealise' it). Where Hollywood blockbusters employ digital and other cinematographic techniques in order to simulate fantastic, impossible worlds (the 'trickery' of which the Dogma 95 Manifesto speaks), the cinema of Lars von Trier reverts, as it were, to the earliest applications of photograph and film technology. Like a latter-day Muybridge or Marey, he captures his models' movements to allow virtual patterns to arise – patterns that are ordinarily invisible to the eye or in 'realistic' photographic or filmic representation.

If Dogma 95 and the films of Lars von Trier are an alternative to the Hollywood blockbuster (the 'film of illusion'), then it is *not* because Dogma 95 and von Trier's films actualise a modern version of the long-standing antithesis between Hollywood and European film, one invariably defined in terms of 'illusion and escapism' versus 'realism and engagement'. As I have already noted, von Trier's films do not deal with social, cultural or political issues. Meanwhile, Hollywood blockbusters more than ever 'disillusionise' the fantasy worlds they present as the products of extraordinary technology and technical skill. So, both Hollywood and Dogma/von Trier have risen above the classic divide formed by this paradigm of representation. Both Hollywood and von Trier operate at the level of 'hyperreality', virtuality and simulation, but they work on different sides of the state space of this paradigm. In this sense, von Trier's films are neither 'Hollywood' nor 'European art cinema'. The same applies in a more material sense, in that of 'the movie game', as Martin Dale (1997) dubbed 'the film business in Britain, Europe and America'.

Dogma 95: Nouvelle Vague II?

The second part of the compound term 'virtual realism' places Dogme 95 and von Trier's films in a European 'art cinema' tradition in which the relationship between film and reality (however defined) has always been crucial. However, Dogma 95 has been described as a realistic movement not only in the aesthetic sense of the word, but also as a commercially realistic publicity stunt. Before Breaking the Waves, which had its world première in Cannes more than a year after the Dogma 95 Manifesto was launched, von Trier's films were known outside Denmark only to a small circle of film aficionados; and it is open to debate whether films like Festen, Idioterne, Mifune and The King is Alive would have attracted the same level of international interest and recognition if

Dogma 95 had not already stimulated people's curiosity. Mads Egmont Christensen (2003), PR manager of the DFI, believes that, within a European context Dogma 95, is a unique example of integrated concept, product and marketing.

The launch of the Dogma 95 Manifesto preceded by three years the 1998 International Film Festival in Cannes at which Dogma #1, Festen, and Dogma #2, Idioterne, had their world premières. Prior to that, a Dogma film only existed in virtual form, in the shape of ten rules that had to be observed in producing a film if it was to be eligible for a Dogma certificate. A key factor in the success of Dogma 95 was that these rules were formulated as a production code in purely formal terms, while the Manifesto failed to specify values with which the 'variables' in the formulas could be filled in (see chapter 2, and Hjort 2003b: 135; Mackenzie 2003: 52). Of course, this only made Dogma 95 into an even more intriguing mystery. After having read aloud and distributed the Manifesto, von Trier's refusal to provide any further explanation brought about scepticism, irritation and even a certain amount of animosity amongst the panel members at the Odéon Theatre in Paris (see chapter 1; Hjort 2003b: 134), but it also quickly led to all sorts of other manifestos in which Dogma was parodied or mocked – which naturally only made Dogma more famous still.

On the other hand, the purely formal production rules freed the Dogma film from any given national, cultural or ideological context, and Dogma 95 had become a top export article even before a single Dogma film had gone into production. Because the rules of the Vow of Chastity are not linked to any specific time, place or content (see chapter 2) but do make it clear that – in von Trier's words – a film does not have to look like Star Wars, they were soon followed by young filmmakers from other countries where to produce a film would normally have been a difficult undertaking for economic or political reasons:

> But then I'm very glad that some people in Argentina, I think, have suddenly done a whole lot of Dogme films – ten, I think. One of them in just two days. Just like, 'Let's go', you know? And if that is the only thing that comes of these rules, then I think it's fantastic – that people in countries like Estonia or wherever can suddenly make films, you know? Because they look at Dogme and think, 'If *that*'s a film, then we can make films too.' Instead of just thinking, 'Oh, if it doesn't look like Star Wars, then we can't make a film' (in Kelly 2000: 145-146).

The democratisation of cinema by 'technological storm' that the Manifesto welcomed was put into practice by filmmakers like the Hong Kong-based Vincent Chui, but also by filmmakers in the People's Republic of China who, thanks to the digital video camera, the DVD and the internet, were in a position to make films in the most distant corners of the country, distribute and show obscure foreign films without state aid,[11] and take part in lively discussions with like-minded film aficionados and filmmakers elsewhere (see Frodon 2004). Interest-

ingly, in this appropriation of the Dogma concept the formal production rules were linked, entirely in keeping with the tradition of the realistic film, to social themes and political critiques on which the Manifesto itself had been entirely silent and which did not appear in the Dogma films later made by the original Dogma group. Thanks to the Manifesto, the Dogma concept had circulated widely as a recipe for an alternative film practice long before the first Dogma films appeared. As Mette Hjort (2003: 31) remarked:

> The originally Danish cinematic project and now transnational movement known as Dogma 95 mobilises a manifesto form and practice of rule-following to articulate and circulate a stripped-down and hence widely affordable concept of filmmaking. While the aims of Dogma 95 may be multiple, an all-important ambition is to unsettle an increasingly dominant filmmaking reality characterised by astronomical budgets and by marketing and distribution strategies based, among other things, on vertical integration, stardom and technology-intensive special effects. What motivates this move (…) is a probing understanding of the implications of Hollywood-style globalisation for small nations and the minor cinemas they produce.

Paradoxically enough the purely formal production code of Dogma 95, not being bound to specific national contexts or ideological issues, formed at one and the same time a 'global' alternative for Hollywood and an inspiration for national and local cinema: Dogma 95 as a model for 'glocalisation'. In the history of European film only one other film movement has enjoyed this paradoxical success: the Nouvelle Vague.

Thanks to its purely formal, algorithmic description, the Dogma concept has not only been adopted internationally but has also performed a cross-over to other genres, disciplines and arts. In October 2000 three British dancers founded the Dogma Dance Movement[12] (see Banes and Carroll 2003); the American filmmaker Steven Soderbergh wrote a ten-rule manifesto for the candidate actors for his film Full Frontal (USA 2001); a Dogma manifesto appeared for computer game developers, the 'Dogma 2001: a challenge to game designers'[13] (Hjort and MacKenzie 2003: 207-209); there is a 'Live Action Role Play (LARP) Vow of Chastity' and a 'Documentary Manifesto 2000'; and von Trier (together with three new Brethren, Børge Høst, Tøger Seidenhafen and Jørgen Leth) has published a 'Manifesto and Vow of Chastity issued by the Dogumentary brothers' (see Stevenson 2003: 285-290). As Thomas Vinterberg remarked:

> In fact, Dogme has become almost a convention in itself, within Danish culture: now they talk about 'Dogme architecture', 'Dogme commercials'. In the commercials industry, you get this very expensive bad lighting, 'to look like Dogme'. I mean, that's not the point (in Kelly 2000: 112).

This cross-over of the Dogma 95 concept (however interpreted) can also be seen as a reiteration of the *politique des auteurs* first launched by the Nouvelle Vague. After all, the concept of the film *auteur* emigrated from European art cinema to Hollywood, where, by the 1970s, the name of the director was functioning as a brand name; before moving on to affect domains such as fashion, furniture and design, areas which shared with film only because of the fact that they had also previously been seen principally as industrial activities, or at best as applied art.

It was not so much the failure, but the success of the Nouvelle Vague that seems to have inspired von Trier to invite Thomas Vinterberg to start a movement:

> I remember calling Thomas and asking him if he wanted to start a 'new wave' with me. Those were the very words, as I remember. But I haven't really seen this wave yet; just a few ripples (in Kelly 2000: 137).

Dogma 95, for von Trier, was also an attempt to breathe new life into European cinema, and the Nouvelle Vague had shown the way:

> It is clear that during great periods, such as The New Wave in France, or New German Cinema with Fassbinder, Wenders, etc., a lot of people can suddenly become incredibly inspired and a great amount of exciting films can get made. And a wave is formed. But at present, the wave has washed over and we find ourselves up on the beach where a little wave laps up once in a while. It leaves some mucky, scummy water and then slowly recedes back to the sea. That is where we are right now. And the only thing one can do as a filmmaker in such a situation is to attempt to reach forward to a new and fruitful period. One must experiment (in Stevenson 2002: 103).

So, starting a new movement like Dogma 95 was certainly intended to herald a new and fruitful period in film. And, although the Dogma 95 concept was embraced with particular enthusiasm by young, independent filmmakers who saw the Manifesto and the Vow of Chastity as an instruction manual for making realistic films, this was not the (or not the only) 'movement' that the Dogma 95 Brethren had had in mind when they drew up the document. Von Trier and Vinterberg, on the official Dogma 95 website, make it quite explicit that 'The Dogme Manifesto does not concern itself with the economic aspects of filmmaking', and Vinterberg points to the fact that Festen cost only slightly less than average for a Danish feature film. While it was mostly independent or novice filmmakers like Harmony Korine with Dogma #6, Julien Donkey-Boy (USA 1999) or (a familiar face in all of von Trier's films since Europa) Jean-Marc Barr with Dogma #5, Lovers (Fr 1999) who sent their films to the Dogma secretariat for official certification, von Trier and Vinterberg had also invited such established directors as Steven Spielberg and Martin Scorsese to produce a Dogma film (see chapter 2).

The key to the success of the Dogma Manifesto was precisely that it was *not* an appeal for the realistic film or for a minimalistic film aesthetic, but that it was directed against a certain kind of film *production*, of which today's Hollywood is the most paradigmatic, but by no means the only exponent. The Dogma 95 rules were not even principally directed towards young tyros, but towards experienced film professionals 'who might need to have a "purifying" experience' and were prepared to 'go cold turkey' to have it. The rules were intended to redefine film production as a rule-bound, playful activity, and at the practical level to compel filmmakers to dispense with all the conventions of genre films and all the non-fundamental aids and techniques that modern film production makes available, so that they might reinvent filmmaking for themselves.

In other words, the Dogma rules wanted to create a *tabula rasa* of conventional film production practices and to allow new forms of filmmaking to emerge, without laying down anything in advance about the content or style of the films that were to be made as a result of this exploration. In a certain sense, the rules of the Vow of Chastity are themselves an interpretation of this Dogma project (the rules are arbitrary, and therefore commutable), and the Dogma films that were to be made by the Brethren are in turn no more than (different!) interpretations of the Manifesto. Von Trier's 'virtual realism', as a comparison with the other Brethren's films makes clear, is also just one of the possible actualisations of the virtual Dogma film described by the rules (see chapter 3). Because the Dogma concept was in circulation long before it was 'filled out' by actual films made by the movement's authors, the formal program could be (and has been) accorded widely varying interpretations, applications and appropriations. As Mette Hjort remarked:

> An important part of the genius of Dogma 95 has to do with the way in which the manifesto helps to generate, in what is a characteristically performative manner, the very publics towards which it gestures in anticipation of a cumulative effect that somehow warrants the designation 'movement' (Hjort 2003b: 134).

This certainly was to clear the way for the triumphal procession that the first two Dogma films, in particular, took around the international film circuit. On the one hand, the Manifesto created a certain reference framework within which the films could be interpreted, whether or not they were also appreciated, and, on the other hand, the films acted as vehicles with which Dogma 95 and the Manifesto could be brought to the attention of film professionals, journalists, critics, festival directors and, especially, other filmmakers and producers.

Nevertheless, the genius of Dogma 95 was its virtual dimension, which at once copied the Nouvelle Vague and overturned it. Dogma 95 not only continued where the Nouvelle Vague left off, as the Manifesto suggests, but it also reversed the history of the Nouvelle Vague, in that Dogma was launched as a

virtual project, whereas the Nouvelle Vague was a label coined to describe a far-advanced development *post festum*. The Nouvelle Vague never presented itself as a movement, and François Truffaut's 1954 article 'Une certaine tendance du cinéma français' was only identified as the 'manifesto' of this movement in hindsight. The term 'Nouvelle Vague' was provided by the journalist Françoise Giraud, who was writing a series of articles for *L'Express* on the emergence of a new youth culture, and was by no means specifically about the young directors Truffaut, Godard, Chabrol, Rivette and Rohmer, all of whom would nevertheless go into film history under this flag. A cursory examination of these directors' films makes it clear that the concept of the Nouvelle Vague did not represent films with a common style, theme or ideology, but simply represented a group with an urge to reinvent, at odds with the idea of a 'school' or a 'movement'; work which would ultimately lead to the making of individualistic and highly personal films (see Forbes 1998: 463). Dogma was equally dedicated to the reinvention of film but it rejected the individual and personal, and in contrast to the Nouvelle Vague, it was a planned movement that presented itself quite consciously with a Manifesto and a program that invited filmmakers to join the movement. The Dogma 95 project can thus be seen as a kind of reverse motion projection of the history of the Nouvelle Vague.

But Dogma wanted to develop a project similar to what the Nouvelle Vague had partly realised by the time it was recognised and named by people outside the movement. Like the Nouvelle Vague, Dogma wanted to instil a new way of thinking, writing and talking about film and wanted to shake up the practice of film production. The Nouvelle Vague was directed in particular against the hierarchical relationships that existed in the world of professional cinema between producer, scriptwriter, director, cameraman, actor, editor, and so on, while also turning against the 'predictable' subject choices of the *cinéma de qualité* and the lack of space given to improvisation and chance (see Forbes 1998: 463). Meanwhile, Dogma was directed against the technical apparatus which objectivised these hierarchical relationships and mechanised filmmaking itself, and against the predictability of genre formulas, but also against directorial 'vision' that imposed itself on the events in front of the camera in the form of a 'dramaturgy'. And just as the notion of *auteur* cinema and alternative approaches to the practice of film production encompassed a wide diversity of style, subject matter and ideology (some of which were unmasked as 'reactionary' after May 1968), the Dogma 95 Manifesto left the choice of subject, style and stance open to all sorts of applications and appropriations. This openness proved to be the key to the success of the Nouvelle Vague. Whether Dogma 95 will have the same impact remains to be seen.

Between new Hollywood and old Europe

Apart from their genesis, there are a number of important similarities and differences between the contexts in which the Nouvelle Vague and Dogma 95 sought to reinvent film. The Nouvelle Vague was part of the new youth culture that emerged in the Europe of postwar reconstruction and also in the United States, and which manifested itself strongly in many areas, particularly the media, music and fashion, but curiously, given its traditionally public nature, not film. Older generations in Europe had been faithful cinemagoers until the 1950s, but with rising ticket prices, suburbanisation and the depopulation of inner city areas, and the inexorable advance of television, they were now staying away in droves. It didn't help that the films offered were still more or less the same double bill: European 'quality film' and Hollywood family entertainment. By the 1960s, there had been a dramatic fall in cinema ticket sales; film was no longer a mass entertainment medium but 'the preserve of a learned, highly specialised culture' (Lev 1993: 13; Sorlin 1991: 155). This largely middle-class public of young intellectuals felt it had more in common with the emerging global culture of jazz, jeans and pop music than with their parents' regional and national cultures and traditions, and it was well served by the Nouvelle Vague and other new waves, which in turn found in this worldly and urbane public a small but international base. The Nouvelle Vague can justifiably be called the first truly international film movement, one which was able to fill the spaces that an old and estranged film industry had created – not just in Europe, but in the United States as well. The comparative success (never since repeated) of European art films in the United States during the 1960s, and the role of the Nouvelle Vague in the advent of a new generation of film directors, the 'movie brats' (Pye and Miles 1979) of the 'Hollywood Renaissance' – Altman, Scorsese, Spielberg, Lucas (see Kolker 1988) – can also be ascribed to the crisis Hollywood found itself in during the 1960s and which it was struggling to overcome with films like THE SOUND OF MUSIC.

It is hard to overestimate the influence of the Nouvelle Vague. As I have already mentioned, the *politique des auteurs* has profoundly influenced the way we think, write and talk about film. The '*auteur* theory' became the dominant paradigm of film criticism in general; film semiotics, which had emerged in the 1960s, took up the theoretical analysis of the cinematographic dimensions of film (mise-en-scène, framing, montage) to which the critics of *Cahiers du Cinéma* had drawn attention; and on Hollywood film posters, the name of the director began to supplant that of its starring actor or actress. The *politique des auteurs* in Europe was elevated to the status of guiding principle for the film finance poli-

cies of national governments. As Angus Finney explains in his diagnosis of the
state of the European film industry:

> In an *auteur*-dominated environment, feature-film development was an idea in a di-
> rector's head, rather than a team-driven process involving the producer's input, let
> alone a script editor or co-writer. Producers tended to become marginalised by the
> French *auteur* system, and their skills were largely reduced to raising money for the
> director (Finney 1996: 27).

Martin Dale, in his study of 'the movie game' also notes that

> Today European cinema has turned its back on its popular traditions, and decided to
> focus on 'culture'. The state-subsidized cinema seems to have neither the capacity, nor
> the desire, to provide more popular films (Dale 1997: 193).[14]

What von Trier learned from the ideological and political success of the Nou-
velle Vague and the *politique des auteurs* was that in order to be successful a film
movement should not so much produce good or interesting films but should
instead introduce a new way of thinking, talking and writing about film. The
concept of a Dogma film would have to be at least as important as the Dogma
films that were actually produced for Dogma 95 to succeed as a film movement.
But unlike the Nouvelle Vague, Dogma 95 was launched at a time when Euro-
pean film, and not the American film industry, was in deep crisis. There was not
the slightest sign of a new creative, viable impulse that might offer a counter-
weight to the hegemony of Hollywood, which had gained a market share of
well over 70% even in countries that had always had strong cinema cultures of
their own, such as France and Italy (see Dale 1997: 70 et seq.). Thomas Vinter-
berg sums it up well when he says:

> To compete in American terms is impossible. We shouldn't even try… The strength of
> American filmmaking is that it's an industry. European filmmaking is trying to be-
> come one, but it shouldn't. If you start to make these Euro-pudding things you'll just
> kill it. To be a success, Europe must maintain the individualism and irrationality of its
> cinema (in Kelly 2000: 24).

Ironically enough, Vinterberg, co-author of the 'anti-individual film' Dogma 95
Manifesto, was recommending the individualism of the Nouvelle Vague as a
survival strategy for European film at a time when European film policy circles
held the *auteur* film and the accompanying 'individual production mode' (Bord-
well and Thompson 1993: 22) responsible for the deep crisis in European film.[15]
However, if Dogma 95 does offer an alternative for Hollywood, then it is be-
cause it has *not* opposed it with the ideas of the Nouvelle Vague and other mod-
ern European film traditions, notwithstanding the many interpretations of Dog-
ma that have actually done so.

The Hollywood which contemporary European film finds itself opposing is not the Hollywood of the 1960s, but a 'New Hollywood' whose spectacular blockbusters have conquered the world once again, and is in the process of being horizontally and vertically integrated into all-embracing media and leisure conglomerates, within which film is just one format amongst many others delivering 'content' to the consumer. It is not for nothing that a collection of essays on American film in the 1990s was published under the title *The End of Cinema as We Know It* (Lewis 2001). And the same applies to European film, which has not only been marginalised in its home market by American blockbusters, but which is now largely dependent on American 'majors' for its international distribution and screenings.

In this New Hollywood, film has itself become a virtual 'content' that can neither be identified by its concrete manifestations nor is the name of the maker the hallmark of today's blockbuster. The blockbuster has become its own brand because its title refers not to a particular film, and not even to a potential series of sequels, but to a 'total experience' of virtual content delivered via DVD, games, gadgets, toys, theme parks, and other spin-offs. The real star of the film is no longer its leading actor or director, but the technology and the technical mastery with which the film simulates the 'photography of the impossible'. A blockbuster is no longer the expression of an *auteur*'s vision, but a demonstration of the state of the art in the special effects department. Hollywood pushed aside *auteurism* as a marketing concept long before the Dogma 95 Manifesto rejected the 'individual film' as decadent and renounced the director's 'personal taste'. In order to be understood, Dogma 95 has to be seen against the backdrop of this 'New Hollywood' and the crisis of the 'Old Europe'.

Today's Hollywood, today's Europe

If Dogma 95 is seen as a (reverse) replay of the Nouvelle Vague, then this is only because it also lifted this European movement to the level of contemporary film culture. Paradoxically enough, when regarded at the meta-level of the relationship between Europe and Hollywood, the criticism that the Dogma 95 Manifesto levelled at the individualism and bourgeois romanticism of the Nouvelle Vague (and of 'new waves' in general) can be read as a translation into contemporary visual culture of the Nouvelle Vague's intervention into 1960s film culture. With the *politique des auteurs* the 1950s critics of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* paved the way for the 'film *auteurs*' of the 1960s and 70s by identifying them where they were least expected: in the heart of the film industry itself. By identifying the Hollywood directors John Ford, Howard Hawks, Alfred Hitch-

cock, Raoul Walsh, Billy Wilder, Fritz Lang and others as *auteurs* they brought
about a sea of change in the perception, discussion and treatment of film which
encouraged the rise of 'art cinema' in Europe and of the Hollywood Renaissance
in the United States, and the start of a long period in which the director's name
had a prominent place in the film's credits.

Just as the *politique des auteurs* can be seen in hindsight as the sensitive seis-
mographic registration of an emerging tendency in film culture, its rejection by
Dogma 95 can also be seen as a result of the observation of a tendency in con-
temporary film in which the individual film, let alone its individual maker, is no
longer the 'entity' around which today's audiovisual and entertainment indus-
try revolves. Hanging on to the idea of an *auteur* in such circumstances can sig-
nify little more than nostalgic adherence to an outmoded romantic idea of the
film as an expression of the personal taste of the individual filmmaker, and, in
this respect, a literal repeat of the Nouvelle Vague would indeed be little more
than a farcical parody.

But the Nouvelle Vague did more than just pave the way for a new percep-
tion, reception and reflection of film in general and Hollywood in particular.
The Hollywood *auteur* was not embraced by the Nouvelle Vague in order to
ape the film-industrial context within which this operated, but precisely to take
the *auteur* out of that industrial context and to develop an entirely different,
more individualistic film production system around the director, in which – un-
like Hollywood – the director was indeed the kingpin. New technology played
an important role in this system; the arrival of portable 16mm cameras made it
possible to bypass the expensive film studios and go out with a small film crew
and film 'on location', and the relatively cheap materials allowed more room for
improvisation and experimentation.

Thirty years after the Nouvelle Vague Dogma 95 states that the concept of the
'film *auteur*' is played out, and it links this to a raging 'technological storm'
which in Hollywood has led to the special effects department moving to the
core of film production. Exactly as the Nouvelle Vague did in the 1960s, the
Dogma 95 Manifesto sees new possibilities for new forms of filmmaking in
these new technologies ('the ultimate democratisation of the cinema'). But it
does so only on condition that it takes into account the changing role and per-
ception of film in contemporary visual culture and the resulting changes in the
distribution of film production roles and tasks. This is why the Manifesto calls
for discipline ('we must put our films into uniform, because the individual film
will be decadent by definition!'): the individual and individualistic film is a
worn-out concept that can no longer win any battles.

Dogma 95 was by no means the only voice in the mid-1990s to assert that
'*auteur* cinema' was the cause of the crisis in European film rather than the solu-
tion. But unlike Angus Finney (1996), whose 'State of the European Cinema',

published at about the same time, recommended that European filmmakers adopt Hollywood production methods, Dogma 95 came up with an opposing strategy, typically postmodern in its parody and in its equally serious core. Four aspects to this opposing strategy can be discerned.

Firstly, the rejection of the 'individual' film was taken completely literally by Zentropa, the production company run by Lars von Trier, Aalbæk Jensen and Vibeke Windeløv, which wanted to hold Jytte Hilden, the then Danish Minister of Culture, to the promise she had ostensibly given Zentropa to provide 15 million kroner in support funding. This was interpreted by Zentropa as a lump sum with which to produce five, as yet entirely undeveloped Dogma films. This would have been a complete break in Denmark – not to mention in the rest of Europe as well – with the established tradition of funding separate, 'individual' film projects. Instead of following the policy, dating from the *politique des auteurs*, of subsidising separate films, this would be more like a Hollywood 'package deal' which did not subsidise an individual film *auteur* but gave a lump sum to a production company, in this case Zentropa. Although several European countries were considering such innovations in film funding policy, for Denmark it proved to be a bridge too far: Zentropa received a letter from the Danish Film Institute that announced that 15 million kroner in funding would be set aside for the support of low-budget productions, and that applications could be made for this subsidy on a film-by-film basis. The Dogma 95 Manifesto therefore turned out to have been misunderstood in two ways: as von Trier made it clear to the minister, Dogma 95 was not a recipe for low-budget films ('Dogme 95 is an artistic concept, not an economic concept' – in Stevenson 2002: 108-109), and in contemporary film culture the notion of the 'individual film' had long since become obsolete. With the publicity offensive surrounding the as-yet-entirely virtual Dogma project, and talks with financial backers about Dogma as a project rather than as individual films, Zentropa was playing the Hollywood major on a Danish scale, so to speak, and was simulating the sort of situation that might arise in European film in the future if film funding policy is ever directed towards film production houses rather than individual film directors (see Christensen 2003: 193).

Secondly, Dogma 95 was seeking to stand up to the Hollywood industrial superpower by putting its importance into perspective. Dogma 95 defines all filmmaking as a rule-bound activity, thereby demoting the importance of mainstream cinema practice to that of a *game* (see chapter 3), while also retrospectively depriving earlier European 'alternative' film movements of their gravity by playfully parodying them; in other words, Dogma 95 fights superpower strength with ludic subterfuge. And Dogma 95 itself must therefore also be seen as a move in the 'movie game', as a bid to be able to treat film as a game. The end of Dogma 95, with the official closure of the secretariat in June 2002 is

not, therefore, the end of the game, as the official press bulletin announcing the closure affirms: '(Dogma) is an idea and not a brand' – see Stevenson 2003: 291).

A third and equally important aspect that Dogma 95 appropriated from American film for its own purposes concerns the 'anti-individualism' of the contemporary blockbuster production. Dogma 95 did not reject the central role of the director to put the special effects supervisor in the saddle, as has happened in Hollywood, but to use special effects technology for radically new purposes, just as the Nouvelle Vague appropriated the *auteur* concept and linked it to a new technology in order to develop a new production model. As I have already described at length, Dogma 95 employed digital technologies – and von Trier still does – not to create fantastic and impossible virtual worlds, but to render visible the virtual dimension in physical, material, everyday reality. This demands the discipline necessary to exchange the role of 'director' for that of 'registrar', to follow the action instead of guiding it, and to point the camera where the action is instead of orchestrating the action for the camera (see chapter 2). Instead of realising virtualities with special effects technologies, as Hollywood blockbusters do, Dogma and von Trier virtualise reality. Dogma 95 and von Trier are located on opposing sides of the contemporary (and partly Hollywood-created) culture of 'real virtuality' (Castells 1996): virtual reality versus virtual realism, respectively.

Fourthly, von Trier's films put him and Hollywood at opposite ends of today's media spectrum in one more way. The film in Hollywood is just one of the forms in which virtual content is actualised. The content itself is a database of entities and attributes from which media objects can be generated according to the demands of the medium or the market; it is the virtual core of a centrifugal force (see Elsaesser 2001) which distributes this content towards different market niches via different carriers and channels. By contrast, von Trier's films are centripetal black holes in which different media forms converge and amalgamate. His films are themselves the different combinations of the same, relatively small database of entities and attributes; in his films, the narrator plays the role of a computer game player, and the characters are avatars either of this narrator or of other players unknown to the protagonist/player; the infrequent special effects in his films are revealed as such, and distributed representation and partial simulation mean that the 'behind the scenes' section of the DVD is, as it were, built into the film itself. Von Trier plays the Hollywood game – and turns it upside down.

8 The Name of the Game: Punish or Perish

Cinematic games: Games or movies?

Von Trier's films may have more in common with the aesthetics of new media in general and computer games in particular than with cinematic modes like those of European art movies, but what exactly does this entail? All of von Trier's films tell stories with a beginning, a middle and an end (and even in that order), they all relate the tragic fates of hapless heroes and heroines, and spectators cannot intervene in the inexorable course of events depicted by these films, nor can they determine or influence the choices of their protagonists. Instead, spectators are forced to watch powerlessly as Fisher, Kessler, Bess, Karin, and Selma meet their gloomy ends. Nor is there anything they can do to alter the sad endings of the other three movies in which the protagonists survive. So much for interactivity, nonlinearity and open-endedness, the features usually associated with computer games. Whatever else may set von Trier's films apart from 'hegemonic' film formats (Aarseth 1997: 109), it cannot be a property that makes them playable in any other sense than that films can be 'played' on a VCR or DVD player.

Does this mean that von Trier's films can only be called games in a metaphorical sense?[1] That is, does a term like 'cinematic games' characterise these films in terms of something they are not, and does it only highlight some partial similarities and analogies between these movies and computer games while at the same time downplaying differences between them (see Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 5)? Before looking further into the claim that von Trier's films are cinematic games, it is useful to distinguish between a *theoretical* claim that von Trier's films actually *are* computer games (which they are not), and the *methodological* claim that they can be treated *as if* they were computer games. In the latter case, one does not have to argue, demonstrate and prove the assertion that his films really are games, but it suffices to demonstrate that von Trier's movies can be usefully approached using the theoretical concepts and analytical methods that have been developed for the study of games.[2]

As a methodological claim, the assertion that von Trier's films are cinematic games means that his films can be usefully discussed in terms of theories devel-

oped for the study of games. For the sake of argument, then, the films of von Trier are accepted as games in order to see how far this approach takes us. The assertion that von Trier's films are cinematic games should be more carefully phrased as the claim that von Trier's cinematic innovation consists of his conceiving, producing, and executing his films *as a filmmaker* in terms of the new media format of the computer game. If a games approach with regard to von Trier's films turns out to be appropriate, that would be a reliable indication that his films are more commensurate with the new media format of the computer game than are other contemporary movies. Von Trier's parody of the *Nouvelle Vague* would then appear to contain a certain amount of seriousness: By remediating the aesthetics of new media and the new media format of the computer game in a period when these were still emerging (and largely emulating 'old media'), von Trier proves that he is a contemporary, postmodern, avant-garde filmmaker. The new media theorists who in the late 1990s argued that the new media were still waiting for their own equivalents of D.W. Griffith, Alfred Hitchcock, Orson Welles and Steven Spielberg (or William Shakespeare, James Joyce, and William Gibson for the more literary-minded)[3] may have been looking in the wrong place. According to Janet Murray (1997: 27 et seq.), the Holodeck, the virtual reality recreation room of *Star Trek*, has many harbingers. Von Trier, however, is not a harbinger, but an engineer of the Holodeck. Instead of pushing the medium of cinema to its limits, he breaks with classical and modernist concepts of representation and the real, and enters new aesthetic and ontological realms into which cinema has rarely if ever ventured before.

Game theory and games studies

If von Trier's approach to filmmaking and the films that result from this approach are so radically innovative, then why has hardly anyone noticed?[4] More specifically, why has the game dimension of his films so seldom been commented upon, critics who interpreted THE IDIOTS as an allegory of Dogme 95 notwithstanding (see Schepelern 2003)? There are several reasons why the gamelike character of von Trier's films has gone largely unnoticed.[5] First of all, from the point of view of an external observer, games and stories look very much alike (Juul 2001; Simons 2002). As Gonzalo Frasca (2003a: 224) observes, to the external observer 'the sequence of signs produced by both the film and the simulation could look exactly the same.' When, as in the case of von Trier's films, these 'sequences of signs' are indeed 'produced by' movies, it may be difficult to detect the game within the story.

Second, films do not report events in real time, but always with the interval necessary for the processes of development, editing, postproduction, distribution, etc. that separate the time of shooting from the time of screening. As every soccer fan knows, the experience of watching a live broadcast of a game is quite different from watching a summary or even a complete replay of the same game at some time after the event, the difference being the awareness that the outcome has already been decided. In the latter case, the spectator of a broadcast 'after the fact' shares with the film spectator the certainty 'that, in due course and at the most appropriate time, all will be eventually revealed to us' (O'Neill 1996: 46). Moreover, there is the sense that, as in a narrative, there is nothing that either the spectator or the players themselves can do to change this predetermined outcome.

A third reason is that once a game has already been decided, as is the case in the rebroadcast of a soccer game, the strategies, choices and moves of the players can be assessed and interpreted retrospectively from the perspective of the outcome of the game, just as an historical episode can become the object of a narrative once a certain event can be identified as the outcome of previous events, and prior events can be identified as significant with regard to later events and especially with regard to the conclusion of a sequence of events (see Danto 1985). This hermeneutic stance is not much different from the interpretative approach to a storyline. In fact, the game is treated as a narrative with a beginning, a middle and an end, which is the unavoidable result of binding choices.

Apart from these phenomenological reasons grounded in the experience of watching movies there are also some theoretical obstructions to the apprehension of a game dimension in von Trier's movies. The new and fast-growing academic discipline of games studies tends to emphasise the differences between narrative and game playing. The most radical amongst them call themselves 'ludologists', a term used 'to describe someone who is against the common assumption that video games should be viewed as extensions of narrative' (Frasca 2003a: 222).

According to Gonzalo Frasca (ibid.: 224), the difference between narratological and ludological approaches depends on the difference between the perspective of the external observer who apprehends 'what has happened' and that of the involved player who cares about 'what he or she is going to make happen'. This is, indeed, nothing but a difference in perspective. It can be rephrased as the difference between a narrator and listener who know that the story has already come to an end, and the protagonist of the story who does not know what will happen next. As Patrick O'Neill – a literary theorist who also loves games – writes, for the

internal actor/participant it (the story world – JS), reveals itself as a world that is entirely provisional, fundamentally unstable, and wholly inescapable. In considering the implications of this statement, we find much to support the contention that … narrative is always and in a very central way precisely a game structure, involving its readers in a hermeneutic contest in which, even in the case of the most ostensibly solid non-fictional accounts, they are essentially and unavoidably off balance from the very start (O'Neill 1996: 34).[6]

The difference and the tension between these perspectives accounts for an experienced sense of tragedy, but it does not affect the course of events itself and is not sufficient to ground a theoretical difference between stories and games. After all, a player who has lost a game might also feel like a tragic hero, moaning 'If only I had …'. That is probably why Frasca (2003b) ultimately dismissed the controversy between *narratologists* and ludologists as 'a debate that never happened'. The difference between narratives and games turned out to be more difficult to pin down. But the search for differences between both formats has certainly not encouraged games studies scholars to look for games in film narratives.

Not coincidentally, games scholars tend to be rather vague about what sets games apart from narratives. They mostly define this distinction in phenomenological and psychological terms such as immersion, 'the experience of being transported to an elaborately simulated place' (Murray 1997: 98), interactivity, the 'active, *shaping* role that is permitted in the game' (King 2002: 52) or a so-called ergodic function 'which implies a situation in which a chain of events … has been produced by the nontrivial efforts of one or more individuals or mechanisms' (Aarseth 1997: 93). The presumed distinguishing feature of games usually boils down to the actions and input required from the player (see Wolf 2001c: 13-14). However, since a narrative of any interest is also shaped by nontrivial actions of the protagonists, the term 'ergodic' is applicable to narratives as well. Game theorists would beg to differ, because, in their view, the non-trivial shaping actions should come from the player. The difference between a narratologist and a ludologist seems to be that the former is interested in a chain of events from the point of view of a 'lurker', whereas the latter seeks to study it from the point of view of the involved player. This rules out movies.

A wide range of disciplines and methodologies (including narratology and semiotics, along with anthropology, ethnography, cultural studies, and, of course, the works of classical games scholars like Johan Huizinga and Roger Caillois) is evoked in order to demonstrate the fairly elusive difference between narratives and games. Even when they admit that games have a narrative dimension, games scholars tend to restrict the narrative of a game to its 'non-playable' parts such as so-called *cut-scenes*. It is not surprising, then, that games

scholars have trouble recognising a game in a medium and a format they can only perceive as narrative.

Film scholars and narratologists, on the other hand, do not perceive the game dimension in a film for inverse reasons: since they are not theoretically or methodologically prepared for it to be there, they simply don't look for it, even though von Trier's films have a number of features that cannot be easily explained within the theoretical framework of narratology. However, given the current division of labour within the humanities, these features end up falling between two stools.

Narrative and game theory

Among the wide variety of theories and methodologies invoked by games scholars, one theoretical framework is surprisingly absent: game theory. In the indexes of games studies readers, textbooks and conference proceedings one can search in vain for the names of John von Neumann, Oskar Morgenstern, John Nash, and Robert Axelrod,[7] or terms such as payoff function, Nash-equilibrium, Bayesian games, maximisation and minimisation, or preferences and strategies. Although the theories, concepts and models of game theory have found their way into many other fields of research, such as economics, sociology, politics, history, complexity theory and biology, they appear to have completely bypassed game studies. Because the mathematics-based and the humanities-based approaches of games are worlds apart, the former will be referred to as *game theory*, and the latter as *games studies*. Game theory, rather than games studies, it will be argued here, can help to expose the game dimension in the narratives of von Trier's movies.

Game theory is not concerned with the distinctions dear to games studies, such as that between narrative and game, game and play, or serious and playful activity, distinctions which were essential to such early games studies scholars as Huizinga (1997) and Caillois (1977).[8] The aim of game theory in its most succinct formulation is 'to help us understand situations in which decision makers interact' (Osborne 2004: 1). These situations can be 'firms competing for business, political candidates competing for votes, jury members deciding on a verdict, animals fighting over prey, bidders competing in an auction, the evolution of siblings' behaviour towards each other, competing experts' incentives to correctly diagnose a problem, legislators' voting behaviour under pressure from interest groups, and the role of threats and punishments in long-term relationships' (ibid.). Game theory studies the interactions of decision-makers by modelling the situations in which they interact, often with conflicting interests,

mathematically and by computing the strategies and possible outcomes of the game (see Osborne 2004: 3-4; Williams 1982: 8-9).

In game theory, it doesn't matter whether a situation is fictional, simulated or 'real'; serious, mendacious, fake, or playful; whether precious goods, military victory, political elections or mating opportunities are at stake or just the thrill of winning – as long as the situation can be modelled as an interaction between decision makers or players, who each have a set of actions at their disposal, and who choose their actions according to their preferences. In fact, game theory has often taken stories, fables, and anecdotes as its point of departure, one of the most famous examples being perhaps the anecdote told by A.W. Tucker that spawned the idea for the 'prisoner's dilemma', the experimental game developed by Flood and Dresher that 'became the hackneyed synonym for social and thermonuclear traps' (Mehlmann 2000: 6). Game theory assumes that decision makers or players act rationally, which means that they choose their actions consistently in accordance with their preferences (though these need not be rational). It also assumes that decision makers assume that other players also act consistently according to their preferences. It is, of course, crucial that the outcome of the choices of actions – the payoff – for a player is affected by the actions of the other players, just as the chosen actions of a decision maker affect the payoffs of the other players.

Although game theory occasionally adopts the point of view of one of the players for analytical purposes, it generally models the interactions of the decision makers from an omniscient point of view. The aim of game theory is not to provide players with advice about best strategies, but to model the interactions of decision makers and to study the outcomes of the different strategic choices decision makers can make. Game theory is not concerned with the excitement, exhilaration, anxieties, frustrations or other sensations players might experience during and after the game.

One crucial difference between the model of a game theorist and the phenomenological experience of a game player is that time is absent from the former. First of all, this means that in the model a player chooses a final strategy which means he cannot change a plan as events unfold, and second, that the model simultaneously captures all possible outcomes of the possible strategic choices available to the players.

In game theory, the so-called normal or strategic form models a non-co-operative game as a timeless matrix which shows all players, the strategies available to each player, and their payoffs simultaneously.[9] The *Prisoner's Dilemma*, for example, is a game with two players who are suspects in a major crime. There is not enough evidence to convict either of them of this crime, say a bank robbery, but there is enough evidence to convict both of a minor crime, such as the illegal possession of firearms. They can only be convicted of the major crime if

at least one informs on the other. If both stay quiet, they will both get a light sentence for the minor crime ('reward for mutual cooperation' in Axelrod's (1984: 8) terms); if each informs against the other, both are convicted of the major crime but each will get a lighter sentence because they confessed ('punishment for mutual defection'). If, however, one finks and the other remains quiet, the former will be freed ('temptation to defect') and the latter will get the full sentence for the major crime ('sucker's payoff'). The dilemma is that for each player individually, defection is always the best strategy, no matter what the other player does (if the other player keeps quiet, you'd better defect, and if the other player talks, you'd better talk as well), but also that the outcome of mutual defection is worse than that of mutual co-operation. The outcomes are shown in this matrix:[10]

	Quiet	*Fink*
Quiet	2,2	0,3
Fink	3,0	1,1

The two rows correspond to the possible actions of player 1 (the 'row' player) and the two columns to those of player 2 (the 'column' player). The figures in the boxes represent the payoffs to the players, with the payoffs to player 1 listed first. The figures do not represent absolute values, but they reflect the *ordinal* preferences of the players, player 1 preferring *FQ* to *QQ* to *FF* to *QF*, and player 2 preferring *QF* to *QQ* to *FF* to *FQ*.[11]

This model shares some similarities with the atemporal models of structuralist mythology and narratology, in which 'the order of chronological succession is absorbed in an atemporal matrix structure' (Lévi-Strauss 1973: 165). Roland Barthes' (1977: 99) remark that 'from the point of view of narrative, what we call time does not exist, or at least only exists functionally, as an element of a semiotic system' applies to game theory as well. There is, of course, a crucial difference between the models of a narrative and a game. The corners of Greimas' semiotic square represent the nodes of the atemporal logic underpinning the sequence of events that constitute a story. The matrix of *The Prisoner's Dilemma*, on the other hand, represents the four possible *outcomes* of the game.

A   *B*

Non B   *Non A*
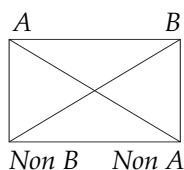
The semiotic square, that is, represents the logic of the algorithm that programs the transformation of an initial state into its reverse related by the story and the restoration of this reverse state back into the initial state.[12] The four boxes in the matrix of *The Prisoner's Dilemma*, on the other hand, do not represent the logic that organises a game, but the four possible final states of the game. This difference can be accounted for by the difference between a narrative that relates a unique sequence of events that has already taken place at the moment the narration starts, and a game in which players gauge their prospects. The semiotic square models a unique transformation, whereas the strategic form of a game models all possible outcomes of all possible combinations of the strategic choices of the players. Both models, however, represent the *atemporal* logic underpinning the histories of narratives and games.

The difference between the semiotic square and the strategic form of a game does not reflect an essential difference between narratives and games, but is more of a matter of perspective. Narratives are, after all, organised around the choices of their protagonists. Roland Barthes (1977: 93-94) identified the 'cardinal functions' of a story as the units that refer to actions which 'open (or continue, or close) an alternative that is of direct consequence for the subsequent development of the story, in short that … inaugurate or conclude an uncertainty'. Cardinal functions propel the story forwards and engage the reader or spectator by raising questions, delaying resolutions, suggesting alternative possibilities, triggering hypotheses and generating curiosity and suspense, all of which depend on the possibility of at least two alternative continuations.[13] Although the choices offered at each cardinal node are not made by the spectator or reader of a story, the logic of 'hermeneutic' and 'proairetic' (Barthes 1970: 26) codes in narratives is very similar to the logic of games (see O'Neill 1996: 41).

The chain of cardinal functions is often visualised as a tree of which the branches represent the alternative continuations of the storyline (such branching tree-structures were often used by the designers of early interactive narratives). Game theorists also use branching tree diagrams to represent all possible sequences of actions (or 'histories') that can occur in so-called extensive games. In extensive games, players take turns and make their moves one after the other. The branches at each node in the diagram represent the choices available to the player whose turn it is to make a move.

$$1$$

C   D

2   2

E   F   G   H

2,1   3,0   0,2   1,3
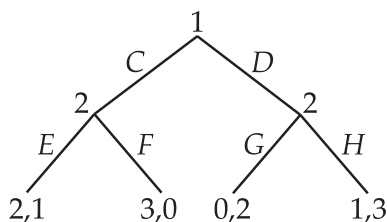
An extensive game, where player 1 moves first and chooses C or D, while player 2 moves after history C or D, and chooses either E or F, or G or H. The figures at the terminal points of the branching tree represent the (ordinal) payoffs of the players, the payoff of player 1 listed first (Osborne 2004: 159).

Because cardinal functions are usually methodologically identified by reasoning backwards and asking what prior events must have happened to cause later events, a storyline tends to appear like the only and necessary course the events could have taken instead of just one of the possible itineraries that were available (and only subsequently closed off) at each cardinal function. But this is an optical illusion and not a methodological necessity. Game theory uses a similar method, called *backward induction,* to find the optimal strategies of players by reasoning backwards from the terminal histories that yield the players the highest payoffs. However, this does not prevent game theorists from also including other, less optimal choices and their subsequent terminal histories into their models.

In the example above, after player 1's choice of *C*, the best choice for player 2 is *E* (which yields a payoff of 1), while if player 1 chooses *D*, player's 2 optimal choice is *H*. Given the optimal choices of player 2, player 1's best choice is *C*, yielding a payoff of 2 (whereas *D*, given player 2's optimal choice *H*, would have yielded a payoff of only 1). Although backward induction yields the sequence *C,E* as the optimal history of the game, it does not eliminate the possible alternative histories. In fact, in game theory, the optimal strategy pair is not just (*C,E*) but (*C,EH*) because *H* would have been player 2's optimal choice if player 1 had chosen *D* instead of *C*. In game theory a player's strategy specifies an action for every action after which it is that player's turn to move, '*even for histories that, if the strategy is followed, do not occur.*' (Osborne 2004: 160). The full strategy of a player of an extensive game includes histories that have not occurred, are very unlikely to occur or even impossible. A full strategy includes, in other words, virtual or counterfactual histories.

'Virtual history' is, in fact, a more recent branch of history which tries to better understand the past by not only looking at those events that actually occurred, but by also considering the probable and possible future developments that contemporaries were facing at 'cardinal' points in history. 'Counterfactual

historians' try to understand how in the past people imagined the possible outcomes of their own and other people's choices and actions. According to Niall Ferguson (1997b: 85), these counterfactual scenarios are not mere fantasies, but 'simulations based on calculations about the relative probability of plausible outcomes in a chaotic world (hence "virtual history").' Candidates for probable or plausible counterfactual histories are '*only those alternatives which we can show on the basis of contemporary evidence that contemporaries actually considered.*' (ibid.: 86). From this perspective, the difference between a factual account of American history in the 1930s and 1940s and a counterfactual novel like Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* (2004) becomes less categorical.

Ferguson argues that history should be regarded with more than just the hindsight of later knowledge, which tends to make histories that have actually occurred look inevitable. Historians should try to imagine the alternative possibilities and the uncertainties that contemporaries faced at cardinal nodes in history, just as game theorists take into account all of the histories and outcomes that the available strategic choices of players after each 'history' make possible. From this point of view, game theory, narratology and history have more in common than ludologists seem to be aware of.

The common ground of game theory, virtual history, and counterfactual narratology has been referred to on numerous occasions in the foregoing chapters: in game theory it goes under the name of state space. This is the set of all possible configurations that can be attained under the rules of a game (Holland 1998: 34). In narratives it consists of all the possible courses that events could have taken at each cardinal node in a storyline. In history, the state space consists of the alternatives considered possible or probable by contemporary 'decision makers'. What is the state space explored in von Trier's movies? What game is being played?

Punish or perish; exploit or be exploited

In spite of their differences in setting, period, and characters, von Trier's movies all follow a strikingly similar pattern. The protagonist in each of his films enters a world in which he or she is a stranger and where he or she is confronted with the task of finding out what laws, rules, customs, and conventions govern the behaviour of its inhabitants (see chapter 5). One rule that consistently governs the worlds of von Trier's films is a ruthless quid –pro quo. However, as von Trier's heroes and heroines experience time and again, not every *quid* equals a *quo*: their good faith and sacrifices are never returned and, except for Mesmer in EPIDEMIC and Grace in DOGVILLE, they all eventually lose their mental or physi-

cal health (Fisher, Karen), freedom (Grace in Manderlay), or even their lives (Kessler, Bess, Selma).

It is of course possible to consider each film from an *auteurist* approach, as an expression of von Trier's cynical world view in which idealists always lose and egotists always triumph. A more interesting possibility is, however, to approach each movie as an iteration of the same game. At first sight this might not seem to make much sense because almost all of von Trier's films share a similar ending, and thus seem to blatantly lack what is most characteristic for games: an open, undecided, and thus variable outcome. If von Trier's films actually relate iterations of a game, it seems unlikely that all but two out of the eight iterations of this game yield the same outcome. A game in which the chances of losing are at least 75% (Mesmer in Epidemic and Grace in Dogville being the only two non-losers in eight iterations of the game) hardly deserves to be called a game.[14] It might seem more reasonable to consider von Trier's films as variations of the same tragic story, driving home the same gloomy message over and over again: never trust anybody. So where's the game?

It is important to realise that the open-endedness of a game does not mean that its outcome is completely undetermined or random. The rules of a game not only specify the moves players can or cannot make, but also what outcomes a game can or cannot have, how the outcome is to be achieved, and how it is to be assessed. The rules of chess specify checkmate as the final state in which one of the players has won and the other has lost. For strategic games like the *Prisoner's Dilemma*, the possible outcomes and their ordering according to the player's preferences are given in a matrix that represents the possible combinations of strategic choices available to the players. The outcome of a specific game of chess or of the *Prisoner's Dilemma* may not be known in advance, but it is certain that there shall be no other outcome than the one specified by the rules of the game. In this respect, the outcome of a game is quite predictable. [15]

Moreover, games may have steady states. This is the case when each of the players chooses a strategy that is optimal, given the strategic choices of the other players, to the effect that there is no alternative strategy that would yield a better payoff. When this happens, a game reaches a so-called Nash-equilibrium, where no player can do any better by choosing a different strategy (see Osborne 2004: 22). For example, the Nash-equilibrium of the *Prisoner's Dilemma* is the state in which each player chooses to defect, since whatever move the other player makes, defection always yields a higher payoff than co-operation. This means that rational players, who not only consistently act to achieve their most preferred results but who also assume that other players will also act rationally, will always chose to defect and never to co-operate. In the logic of the *Prisoner's Dilemma,* co-operation is an invitation to be exploited by the other player.[16] In game theoretical terms, a Nash-equilibrium embodies a 'social

norm' from which no individual wishes to deviate if everyone else adheres to it (Osborne 2004: 22). It is important to note that in the steady state of a Nash-equilibrium, players do not necessarily obtain the optimal payoff. In the *Prisoner's Dilemma*, the optimal payoff is 'temptation to defect', and the 'reward for mutual co-operation' is second best. Mutual defection yields almost the worst result but it is the best payoff the players can expect *given the strategic choices of the other player*. The point to note here, however, is that in a steady state, the outcome of a strategic game is very predictable.

In a Nash-equilibrium, the players' own strategies are their best responses to the other players' strategies. But if von Trier's heroes and heroines are to be considered as players in a game, the least one could say is that their strategic choices cannot possibly be the best response to the strategies of the other players since almost all of von Trier's protagonists wind up with the 'sucker's payoff'. They could surely do better than that, and indeed not all of the protagonists in von Trier's movies are suckers, the most spectacular example being Grace in DOGVILLE, who retaliates for her abuse by the 'good and honest people of Dogville'. The other example is EPIDEMIC, in which the world of the plague strikes back and annihilates the world of its originators through the hypnotised medium.

Von Trier's movies until MANDERLAY seem to offer one of two alternative outcomes: either the protagonists perish (Fisher, Kessler, Bess, Karen, Selma, Grace in MANDERLAY), or they punish (Mesmer/the medium in EPIDEMIC, Selma (who kills Bill in DANGER IN THE DARK), and Grace in DOGVILLE). To perish certainly means getting the ultimate sucker's payoff, while to mete out punishment looks like an equivalent of the mutual defection equilibrium of the *Prisoner's Dilemma*. But if meting out punishment is the protagonist's best response, resulting in what looks like a Nash-equilibrium, why does this occur only twice in eight iterations of the game? And, again, what is the game in the first place?

A quick glance at the histories of von Trier's movies shows that they all involve situations that can be modelled as instantiations of the *Prisoner's Dilemma*. The *Prisoner's Dilemma* has become a staple of game theory because it is an abstract model of a very common problem, one that also confronts all of von Trier's protagonists: is co-operation possible in an environment in which everybody else is pursuing their own interests (Axelrod 1984: 9)? All of von Trier's protagonists seek and offer co-operation, only to be abused and exploited by their environments (see Chapter 5). Fisher takes on his master's murder investigation and faithfully adopts his methods, only to discover that he has been used by his master Osborne as a decoy to distract the attention of the police. Kessler comes to post-war Germany to offer his help in the country's reconstruction, only to become a pawn in the intricate political games of the factions of post-war Nazi resistance groups. Bess sacrifices herself for the sake of Jan's recovery,

only to be ostracised by the self-righteous religious community of her island. Karen firmly believes in the integrity of the *spassers* and puts what was left of her family relationships at stake by acting as an idiot. Selma trusts her neighbour and landlord Bill only to discover that he has taken advantage of her failing eyesight to steal the money she had saved from her hard and honest labour. Grace offers her labour to the 'good and honest people of Dogville', only to find herself increasingly exploited and sexually abused. Grace in MANDERLAY tries to introduce some sense of co-operation into a community of former slaves, only to find herself eventually locked into 'Mam's law'.

All of the films exemplify why in a *Prisoner's Dilemma* co-operation is not a very clever strategy: it makes the co-operative player vulnerable to the ruthless selfishness of others. The only character who gets this message ('Dad's law') is Grace, who after a history of being exploited in exchange for co-operation gets even by annihilating Dogville and its inhabitants: defection is answered with defection.[17] Grace might not have obtained the optimal payoff that corresponds to her preferences (freedom from 'Dad's law'), but she doesn't wind up as a complete sucker either. Given the strategy of the other players, the inhabitants of Dogville who responded to her co-operation with betrayal, Grace's best response turned out to be betrayal as well. Ultimately, Grace's strategy eventually leads the game into a Nash-equilibrium. As I will argue later, in game theoretical terms, Selma's fate in DANCER IN THE DARK is similar to Grace's, although she actually winds up on the gallows. But again, if von Trier's movies can be seen as instantiations of the *Prisoner's Dilemma*, and if the only strategy that yields a stable state is mutual defection, why does this stable state occur so seldom in his movies?

DOGVILLE provides a key to answering this question. Mutual defection is the only strategy that yields a Nash-equilibrium for the *Prisoner's Dilemma* as long as the game is seen in isolation and from an atemporal standpoint. That is to say: assuming that the players do not know each other and hence have no experience of each other's behaviour in previous games, and assuming that they have no reasonable expectation that they will be playing each other again in future games, and assuming that each player acts rationally and assumes that the other player acts rationally as well, defection is the best choice each player can rationally make. Defection is the best protection against the sucker's payoff (if the other player finks) while it keeps open the possibility of obtaining the optimal payoff (if the other player co-operates).

There are two points to make. First, as I mentioned above, a Nash-equilibrium does not necessarily yield the best payoff. In the *Prisoner's Dilemma*, mutual co-operation yields both players a better payoff than mutual defection. This is why Grace's initial strategic choice is not entirely irrational. The 'quid pro quo' she offers would relieve the inhabitants of Dogville of some of their chores,

while she would receive shelter in return, and both parties would benefit from this mutual co-operation. The inhabitants of Dogville however, make a 'rational choice' and respond to Grace's offer with ruthless exploitation, leaving Grace with the sucker's payoff while they gain the optimal reward for defection.

So far, Grace's fate is no different from that of the other heroes and heroines of von Trier's movies. Only *after* her co-operation has been met with defection does Grace punish the people of Dogville with defection on her part. Grace, that is, has learned her lesson and has changed her strategy, thus restoring – or rather, establishing – an equilibrium. This leads to the second point that unlike most other films, DOGVILLE does not consist of one game in which the players simultaneously chose one ultimate strategy, but two iterations of the same game in which players can change their strategic choices based on prior experiences. In technical terms, DOGVILLE represents an extensive game with two histories or subgames (see Osborne 2004). This sequence of two subgames introduces time and the possibility of learning and adaptation into the model. It also changes the conditions under which a steady state can be reached.

In an isolated game of *Prisoner's Dilemma*, the outcome in which one of the players co-operates and the other defects is not a stable state, because the co-operative player could have done better by defecting. In the twice repeated game in DOGVILLE the outcome of the final history, in which Grace responds to defection with her own defection, a stable state has been arrived at because Grace has adapted her strategy to the strategy of her opponent. A similar pattern is at work in DANCER IN THE DARK: Selma's co-operation (hard and honest work to save money for her son's eye operation; trust in her landlord Bill) is met with defection (Bill steals her savings), after which Selma is forced to change strategy (Bill makes her kill him) and she ultimately defects (she kills Bill). Selma's defection is then repaid by 'society's' defection (she receives the death penalty). But Selma doesn't wind up with the sucker's payoff because she does manage to give her savings to the surgeon who will, in due time, perform the vital operation on her son's eyes. Her eventual payoff is the 'punishment for mutual defection'. This is also the other players' payoff because they get their revenge for Bill's death, but do not get to keep the money he stole from Selma. Selma thus 'punishes' (kills Bill) and 'perishes' (receives the death penalty), but does not lose everything (she saves her son's eyes). Instead, she manages to restore an equilibrium in the same way Grace does in DOGVILLE by responding to defection with defection.

Despite the eventually established equilibrium in DANCER IN THE DARK and DOGVILLE, the outcome of these extensive games is somehow dissatisfying. After all, everybody would have been better off by mutually co-operating. Moreover, although Grace and Selma eventually get even, in game theoretical terms their overall payoff is less than the overall payoff of their opponents, since

both Grace and Selma wind up with the sucker's payoff (*S*) in the first period of the game, while the other players cash in on the 'temptation for defection' (*T*) (Axelrod 1984: 8): *S* + *P* ('punishment for mutual defection' – JS) < *T* + *P*. So, is defection invariably the most rational choice in a repeated game of *Prisoner's Dilemma*?

In repeated games of *Prisoner's Dilemma*, mutual co-operation seems to be the most profitable strategy because in the long run the reward for mutual co-operation (*R*) will yield both players a higher payoff than they would obtain by mutual defection: *R* + *R* > *P* + *P*. In a *finitely* repeated game, however, each player will be tempted to defect in the *last* round in the hope of getting the reward for the 'temptation to defect' and to leave the other player with the sucker's payoff without running the risk of being punished in subsequent rounds. But this strategy can only succeed if a player is the only one who defects, while the other player continues to co-operate. Since both players will be tempted to defect in the latter stages, each has an incentive to defect *before* the other player does, with the result that the temptation to defect trickles back from the last stage of the game to the very first. The conclusion here is 'that every Nash-equilibrium of a finitely repeated *Prisoner's Dilemma* generates the outcome (*D,D*) in every period' (Osborne 2004: 425). In a finitely repeated game of *Prisoner's Dilemma*, co-operation is as unwise a strategy as it is in a single period game. This is the lesson Selma and Grace learn in Dancer in the Dark and Dogville, which are both finitely repeated *Prisoner's Dilemma* games. Why do von Trier's protagonists consistently start off by offering co-operation even though this strategic choice turns out to be detrimental over and over again?

In order to answer this question, we should see these films not in isolation as single or as finitely repeated games of *Prisoner's Dilemma*. Instead, we should consider each film as a new episode in an *infinitely repeated* game of *Prisoner's Dilemma* where the best (i.e., the most 'rational') strategy is not as clear-cut as it is in the case of a single or finitely repeated game. Mutual co-operation yields a higher payoff than mutual defection, *R* + *R* > *P* + *P*, but co-operation makes a player vulnerable to exploitation. Defection, on the other hand, is advantageous in the short run, but becomes disadvantageous in the long run because it is more likely to be punished by the other player who might be provoked to turn from a 'nice', co-operative player into a 'grim' defector. To complicate matters, a player doesn't know whether the other player is being co-operative, a defector or a mixture of both, and the players don't know when (or even if) the game will come to an end. Thus the best strategy depends on factors such as the other players' strategies and the weight exerted by future moves on each player's decisions based on current moves. The temptation to defect will be larger if it is highly unlikely that a player will meet his opponent again in the future, or if a player cares little about future payoffs (see Axelrod 1984: 15).

This neatly sums up the predicament of von Trier's protagonists. They enter a new environment and do not know whether the inhabitants of this environment are 'nice' or 'grim'. The future, however, looms large in their strategic decision making. Fisher, for instance, wants to solve the mystery of the 'Lotto murders', Mesmer wants to save the countryside from the plague, Kessler wants to see Germany rebuilt, Bess wants to see Jan cured, Karen is looking for refuge, Selma wants to prevent her son's blindness, Grace is looking for shelter and protection from her father's gangsters, and in MANDERLAY she wants to substitute co-operation for the ruthlessness of 'Mam's law'. Moreover, most of the protagonists find themselves in a relationship where they are dependent upon the inhabitants of their new environment. In these circumstances, defection does not seem like a very wise choice.

'Nice' strategies do indeed thrive in multi-player versions of the *Prisoner's Dilemma* in which all players have different strategies (and no player knows the strategies of the other players in advance), and in which each player plays every other player. In 1979, Robert Axelrod (1984) organised a computer tournament to which he invited professional game theorists to submit strategies for an opening round. After this round, he invited the readers of microcomputer user journals to improve on the strategies of the first game. The idea was that the contestants of the second round could draw lessons from the first. The eight best performing strategies in the first round were nice strategies that opened the game by offering co-operation and they were never the first to defect (Axelrod 1984: 33). The most successful strategy turned out to be the simplest, TIT FOR TAT, which starts by offering co-operation and then does whatever the other player did in the previous move (thus returning co-operation with co-operation, and defection with defection). This is exactly the strategy that Grace and Selma eventually adopted.

But if nice strategies fare well compared to grim strategies, why do von Trier's other heroes and heroines fare so badly? Game theory offers a surprisingly simple explanation. In an infinitely repeated *Prisoner's Dilemma*, the best strategy depends on the strategies of the other players. Nice strategies need other players with nice strategies to achieve a high payoff. If a nice, always co-operating strategy meets another nice, always co-operating strategy or one that only occasionally defects, it can do extremely well. But if it meets a mean player who always or almost always defects it will consistently end up with the sucker's payoff. Even a 'tough' nice strategy like TIT FOR TAT that punishes defection with immediate defection runs the risk of getting locked into an endless series of mutual defections and collecting only the corresponding payoff if it plays against a 'meanie'. One could say that in this case TIT FOR TAT is forced to turn from a nice strategy into a mean strategy, as happened to Selma and Grace. It takes other nice players to be nice and do well…

The predicament of von Trier's protagonists now becomes clear: they are all newcomers in populations that consist only of mean players. In such an environment, a single nice player doesn't stand a chance because he or she will always be met with defection and always wind up with the sucker's payoff. As Axelrod (1984: 63) wrote: 'If the other player is certain to defect, there is no point in your ever co-operating. A population of players using ALL D ("always defect" – JS) will each get P per move. There is no way a player can do any better than this if no one else will ever co-operate. After all, any co-operative choice would just yield the sucker's payoff, S, with no chance for future compensation.' This is the fate of von Trier's heroes: In a world of mean players, the only choice you have is either to perish (receive the sucker's payoff), or punish (get even).

Von Trier's protagonists are not the victims of xenophobia. Although most of them are newcomers to a strange environment, they are not aliens because they are outsiders; they are outsiders because they are the only nice players in an environment where everybody else is mean. This point is driven home in MANDERLAY, where Grace tries to introduce a spirit of co-operation into a community where everybody abides to 'Mam's law', and where there are no other nice players to sow the seed of co-operation. 'Always defect' is called an 'ecologically stable strategy', by which is meant that if everybody adopts it, it cannot be invaded by any other strategy – as Grace learns. In other words, an environment with a population of only mean players has only one Nash-equilibrium, in which defection is always met by defection.[18]

Bess provides another interesting example of this principle in BREAKING THE WAVES. At first sight, she seems to be the 'insider' who is prepared to co-operate with an 'outsider'. She has fallen in love with Jan, and in spite of the less than enthusiastic response of the parochial and religious community of her island, she marries him. But her co-operation is met with Jan's involuntary defection: he is severely injured in an accident at work, and is no longer capable of fulfilling his sexual duties. He then encourages Bess to 'defect' as well and to seek erotic pleasure with other men. Bess co-operates again by obeying, but is rewarded with defection in the forms of sexual abuse, physical violence, and general ostracism on the part of the community that eventually rejects her altogether. Co-operation on her part is consistently met with defection on the part of the other players.

This film demonstrates two interesting points: First, a 'stranger' is not necessarily an outsider, and secondly, occasionally, an insider may turn out to be the exceptional 'goody' inside the 'mean' community. According to evolutionary game theory, these co-operative insiders can emerge via a process of random mutation that switches the 'gene' for defection to co-operation (see Axelrod 1984). However, these 'mutants' have no chance of surviving in a 'mean' world

as long as they are isolated. Bess is such a mutant and her tragedy is that she loses her co-operative outsider partner through an accident that randomly shifts his co-operative genes to defection: Jan's mutation cancels Bess's mutation and restores the predominance of the 'always defect' strategy. This gives rise to an interesting speculation: if Jan were a nice player who used the TIT FOR TAT strategy, would he have become locked into an 'always defect' strategy by the mean island environment, or would Bess and Jan have prospered so much that their co-operative strategy would have 'invaded' the island and replaced the self-righteous, mean players with a more co-operative community? Anyway, an important observation is that von Trier's protagonists are not doomed to perish via the xenophobic attitude of the inhabitants of the new environments they enter, but instead because they are the only nice players in environments populated entirely with mean players. Whether 'insider' or 'outsider', they simply cannot survive because the mean players they encounter are always mean to every other player they meet, whether outsider or insider. The only viable strategies in such an environment are, as Grace learns, 'Dad's law' and 'Mam's law', which both boil down to a single rule: TIT FOR TAT.

The second observation is that a 'genetic' approach is not completely out of place: from a game theoretical perspective it makes no difference whether a player makes a move voluntarily, deliberately, or intentionally – or by force, by mistake or without thinking. Just as in DANCER IN THE DARK, it doesn't matter from a game theoretical perspective whether Selma pulled the trigger on Bill intentionally, accidentally or under duress from Bill himself, the causes of or the reasons for defection by Jan and the community in BREAKING THE WAVES are not important. It is also not important what the particular content of an act of co-operation or defection *is*. Bess 'defects' against the values of the religious community of which she is a member, while Jan persuades her to 'defect' against him and to seek sexual satisfaction with other men. Meanwhile, Bess herself acts out of co-operation because she does not seek pleasure with other men but sacrifices her body and physical integrity for the sake of Jan's healing. Bess's behaviour counts as co-operation, whereas the self-righteous moral behaviour of the island community counts as defection. Game theory does not observe reasons, intentions or causes, or the intrinsic or intended values of an action, but is only interested in the question of whether, within the framework of a game, an action counts as co-operation or defection. From a theoretical perspective, all of von Trier's films display an inexorable logic: nice players always end up as losers.

Stories and games reconsidered: Probabilities and tragic endings

From the point of view of game theory, the films of Lars von Trier look more like a cinematic version of Axelrod's computer tournament, with the obvious difference that only one strategy is tested over and over again in different settings of place and time, but share populations of exclusively 'mean' players. Von Trier, one might argue, subjects his characters to the same experiment over and over again, like laboratory rats, to see how they will cope in a hostile environment (similar to how he subjected Jørgen Leth to a series of experiments in THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS).[19] It appears that game theory has something to say about von Trier's films which eludes narratology. It can explain why von Trier's films consistently end with their protagonists' defeat and it can even predict that future von Trier protagonists will face a similar predicament, assuming that the behaviour of the populations of his worlds will remain governed by the only ecologically stable strategy in his universe, the *always defect* strategy. Game theory reveals the logic underlying the interactions of the player's strategic choices in these films to be that of the general model of *Prisoner's Dilemma*.

Game theory can explain the apparent contradiction between the similar endings of von Trier's films and the presumed open-endedness of games. It shows that, given the players' strategic choices, the only possible outcomes are 'perish' or 'punish'. This points to the most important difference between game theory and narratology: game theory takes a *probabilistic* approach to a sequence of events and asks: Given the player's preferences and the action profiles available to them, what strategic choices can they make and what outcomes are possible given these choices? Narratology, on the other hand, takes the outcome of a storyline as a *given*, and looks backward for an explanation of the outcome in the particular events and circumstances that preceded it. Putting it crudely, in game theory, a particular history is just one possible path through a state space of a multitude of possible histories (some of which might be more likely to occur than others). For narratology, the storyline of a particular narrative is all there is.

Game theory does not look at a particular outcome in isolation but compares it to other possible outcomes, for instance, to see whether a game has Nash-equilibriums, to explain why the steady state of a Nash-equilibrium is not the optimal result for any of the players, or to predict into which steady state a game will eventually settle. Narratology, on the other hand, considers a single storyline in isolation and is generally uninterested in counterfactual ('what if') questions. Narratology looks for general and repeatable structures of which particular stories are instantiations (for instance, structuralist approaches to narrative).[20] It searches for the *invariants* of narrative structure, whereas game the-

ory builds models to experiment with variable parameters. Hypertexts, interactive narratives, and, of course, computer games might, however, force narratologists to take more seriously the notion of cardinal functions – the actions that cannot be deleted from a story without detriment to its intelligibility – as the turning points of a history, and to acknowledge that at each cardinal point, the history could have taken another turn. In other words, the story actually told is just one possible, actualised itinerary out of a vast space of 'virtual histories'. As von Trier's films show, the only way this vast state space can be reasonably reduced to just a few possibilities is by assigning strategies to the players whose outcome has a probability close to 1, as is the case with the evolutionarily stable strategy of 'always defect'. It might not be too daring to speculate that narratology could wind up as a special branch of game theory.

In a sense, one could say that game theory and the rules of the Dogme 95 Manifesto converge, inasmuch as both move abstractly away from the particular contingencies of series of events and the agents involved in them. Both take into account only the significant traits and relationships that model the general process of decision making and its outcomes, without regard to resemblance, likeliness, or similarity (see Osborne 2004; Holland 1997). In film, these consist of the inessential features such as costumes, props, and special lighting that were banished from the film set by Dogme 95 (see chapter 2). In this respect, Dogme 95 is closer to game theory than to narratology.

Having said all of this, it is also important to be aware of the limitations of game theory. Game theory certainly does not offer an exhaustive description or explanation of von Trier's films. Game theory deliberately abstract away from the particular circumstances, settings, and periods of the depicted events, and is not concerned with the particular motives of the players. It tries to find an explanation for a character's behaviour in terms of their strategic choices, but it is silent about the character's psychology, their ideological concerns, social status, affective involvements, historical background, ethnic identity, etc. It is not able (or even interested) in explaining why von Trier's 'historical' concerns shifted from post-war Europe to America, why this correlates with a shift from male to female protagonists, or why it is only in America von Trier's protagonist(s) learn that 'Dad's law' and 'Mam's law' rule their worlds and that they have to act accordingly. Nor does game theory deal with von Trier's references to films by other filmmakers; to genres and tendencies in film history; to literary, artistic, and cultural resources (like the fairy tale *Golden Hearted*); or to historical events (like the 1960s and 1970s communes drawn on in THE IDIOTS). These thematic as well as stylistic concerns are part and parcel of the domain of narratology, cultural studies in general and film studies in particular – just as they belong to the domain of games studies as far as computer games are concerned – and without any doubt are required for a full account of von Trier's films.

However, narratology has its limits too, and it takes game theory and a games studies approach to distil the radically innovative features of von Trier's cinematic games and to see how they were already venturing into the fields currently being explored by new media genres like virtual realities and computer games. And if the signs of the times are not entirely misleading, it seems not too wild to speculate that in the near future, narratology will become a special branch of games studies and game theory, just as cinema itself is on its way to becoming a less central format in an increasingly diverse and all-encompassing media and entertainment landscape. It was into this new and still largely open area that von Trier launched his cinema at the conference *Cinema in its Second Century.* Only from the point of view of the virtual state space of future media can von Trier's gesture and his films be appreciated for what they are: not the nostalgic re-enactment of the revolutionary pathos of the past, but a leap into an uncertain, if not completely undetermined future. Von Trier himself is not very likely to perish in this uncharted country.

Endgame

Lars von Trier's films turn out to be exemplary of a process one is tempted to call *lateral remediation*, or maybe even *premediation*, to use a term introduced by Richard Grusin (2004). Refashioning McLuhan's (1999: 18) dictum that the content of a medium is always another medium, Bolter & Grusin (1999) defined remediation as the process by which new media refashion older media by borrowing from, paying hommage to, absorbing, critiquing, emulating or repurposing them. This process is usually understood as linear, progressive and teleological: new media re-appropriate and refashion older media in a quest for always greater 'transparency' and 'immediacy'. Although McLuhan did not explicitly refer to an evolutionary process (he just stated that the content of a medium is another medium), his examples show that he had such a process in mind ('The content of a movie is a novel or a play or an opera. (...) The "content" of writing or print is speech'). In Bolter and Grusin's updated version of remediation, video and computer games figure as prime examples of this process because they 'remediate film by styling themselves as "interactive movies".' (Grusin 2004: 17).

In von Trier's movies, the logic of this process is reversed: his films do not remediate previous media, but rather incorporate formats and content of new media such as video and computer games into their predecessor, the 'old' medium film. Paraphrasing Grusin, one could say that his films 'remediate video and computer games by styling themselves as "non-interactive games".' From

the perspective of contemporary audiovisual culture, one might call this 'lateral remediation', because at first sight it seems that von Trier's films co-evolved with the nascent video game. However, as this book attempts to demonstrate, the structure of the prisoner's dilemma, the narrator as master of the game, virtuality, and simulation were already fully present in von Trier's first films THE ELEMENT OF CRIME, EPIDEMIC, and EUROPA, long before the video game reached its current 'cinematic' form and surpassed Hollywood blockbusters in audience numbers and financial turnover. In that sense, one might speak of 'premediation' because von Trier's films were already cinematic games before the rise of the video and computer game.

The use of the term 'premediation' might suggest premeditation: as if von Trier would have had some prescient knowledge about the future of media and worked this foresight deliberately into his films. However, there is no need to turn von Trier into the prophet he ironically simulated to be at the launch of the Dogma Manifesto in 1995. His cinematic games are the result of a convergence of a thoroughly playful attitude towards the practice of film production, and a number of conceptions and ideas that somehow or other had always already been around in the history of cinema. The conception of cinema as art of the virtual rather than art of the 'real' and a notion of editing as assembling a virtual 'space' rather than arranging a temporal sequence could already be found in the writings of Eisenstein, for example, or in the films of Jean-Luc Godard. In his books on cinema, Gilles Deleuze (1985) inventoried a wide range of examples of various kinds of virtuality in 'time-images' from many films. Moreover, virtuality and simulation are part and parcel of game play: in games players often use all kind of everyday objects as props in the fantasy worlds they model with 'found objects'.

All these elements could be brought together under a stubborn and ironic will to play, rather than by a grand vision on the future of cinema (as von Trier quite literally demonstrated with his Dogma-simulation game at the conference *Cinema in its second century*). His consistent approach of film making as a game allowed von Trier to generate films that jointly make up a cinematic version of Robert Axelrodt's computer tournament in which TIT FOR TAT proved itself to be the most successful and evolutionarily stable strategy; the approach of film making as a game also allowed him to make a paradigm shift from representation to simulation and its corollary shift from re-enactment of story events to modelling of emergent patterns in a virtual state space. And, maybe most importantly in a convergence culture in which an incremental flow of new media constantly keep on remediating other media, von Trier's will to play helps to remind us that virtuality and simulation are not dependent on high tech computer technologies and awesome special effects, and that realism and immediacy is not the Holy Grail of media technologies. Special effects are distracting,

but not very illuminating and eventually not even very entertaining. Virtuality is not a matter of state-of-the-art machines but of the mind. It takes players who are ready to take on some obstructions to discover it.

Notes

Notes Chapter 1

1. FESTEN was given the Jury Prize, while von Trier – who had been accorded the Technical Prize for ELEMENT OF CRIME in 1984 and for EUROPA in 1991, and who had won the Golden Palm in 1996 for BREAKING THE WAVES – left the festival in 1998 empty-handed.
2. Unless otherwise stated, 'the Manifesto' will henceforth refer to the Dogma 95 Manifesto and its accompanying Vow of Chastity.
3. For instance, Richard Kelly (2000: 4-5) writes that he first heard of the Manifesto and the Vow of Chastity when his attention was drawn to FESTEN shortly before the 1998 Cannes Film Festival.
4. The text of the Manifesto and the Vow of Chastity can be found on the official Dogma 95 website: http://www.dogme95.dk. They have also been printed as an appendix to (amongst others) Kelly 2000: 226-228 and Hjort and MacKenzie 2003: 199-200.
5. In the article, Truffaut turns against the 'psychological realism' – according to Truffaut, '*ni réel, ni psychologique*' – that held sway in the French '*tradition de qualité*', to his mind embodied by the films of Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost. The accusations levelled at contemporary film by von Trier and Vinterberg echo Truffaut's criticism of the *tradition de qualité.*
6. The subject of Bernardo Bertolucci's film THE DREAMERS (UK/FR/I, 2003). This film presents the uprising of May 1968 as the direct consequence of Henri Langlois's dismissal as director of the Cinémathèque Française by the then Minister of Culture, André Malraux. See De Baecque (2003); Lefort (2003b).
7. Richard Kelly (2000: 2-3) describes his feelings about cinema culture in the 1990s: 'To a viewer like myself (born in 1970 but hopelessly impressed by the radical culture of the late 1960s, which naturally imparted some of its galvanism to movies), everything pointed to a loss of aesthetic nerve, a lack of political nerve, and a pervasive absence of mischief. Cinema had come off the barricades and gone to work for The Man. Where were the likes of Glauber Rocha, to propose a pan-American resistance to Hollywood? Or a Bertolucci, to revive the tradition of the dialectical epic? There was at least some consolation in the knowledge that Jean-Luc Godard, undisputed heavyweight champion of the Nouvelle Vague, remained undefeated, if perhaps a little depressed.'
8. According to David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (1994: 412), postwar modernism in European film is characterised by an endeavour 'to be more true to life than they considered most classical filmmakers had been. The modernist filmmaker might seek to reveal the unpleasant realities of class antagonism or to bring home the horrors of fascism, war, and occupation. The Italian neo-realists, filming in the streets and emphasising current social problems, offer the most evident example.'

That said, practically every film movement has made an appeal to one or another form of realism, probably because film, as a visual medium, has an ineluctable perceptual relationship with the reality of the visible world. (see Thompson 1988: 200-201)

9.   Leaving in Sorrow (Vincent Chui, Hong Kong, 2001).

10. 'Neo-neorealism' is the term by which a number of contemporary Iranian films, including A Taste of Cherry by Abbas Kiarostami (Iran, 1996) and The Circle by Jafar Panahi (Iran, 2000), have been described. Dogma 95, however, is regularly mentioned in one and the same breath as Italian neorealism and its precursors and successors: 'Soviet cinema of the 1920s, the documentary movement of the 1930s, Italy and India's postwar neo-realist schools, 1950s working-class films from England, the international efforts of cinéma vérité in the 1960s, today's Dogma 95 films from Denmark and the neo-neorealism of Iranian cinema: all these march under the banner of realism. What this diverse array of filmmaking ideas and practices also shares is an antagonism for American politics and an aesthetic rejection of Hollywood' (Druick, 2001).

11. In Umberto Eco's terms, we might call this an example of 'overinterpretation'. This is the consequence of the overvaluation of certain readings, in this instance, the correspondences with aspects of the realist theories of André Bazin and with neo-realistic films (as seen through Bazin's eyes), compared to other readings. The overvaluation of certain readings generally arises from 'a propensity to consider the most immediately apparent elements as significant, whereas the very fact that they are apparent should allow us to recognize that they are explicable in much more economical terms' (Eco 1992: 49). See also: Eco (1990).

12. For a comprehensive description of the European art cinema mode of narration, see Bordwell (1985: 205-233; 311-334).

13. See also http://www.dancerinthedark.com.

14. 'Bazin concludes that the aesthetic basis of cinema and the driving force behind stylistic change both stem from cinema's reproductive power. Whereas other arts present reality through symbols, cinema's photographic basis permits it to reproduce tangible, unique events. From this capacity to recode the world springs the specific qualities of filmic "realism". The stylistic options selected by Renoir, Wyler, Welles, and the Neorealists harmonize with the essential nature of the medium. By exploiting deep-focus imagery, long takes, and camera movement, these directors respect the spatial and temporal continuum of the everyday world – exactly the quality that motion picture photography is best equipped to capture. Of course these directors employ artifice; how could they not? But the sort of artifice they press into service is consonant with cinema's mission of exposing and exploring phenomenal reality.' Bordwell (1997: 71-72).

15. If only because these days it is becoming increasingly difficult to find a laboratory able to process black-and-white film, as Henri Alekan, the cameraman of Wim Wender's films Der Stand der Dinge (BRD/Pg/USA, 1983) and Himmel über Berlin (BRD/Fr, 1987), discovered.

16. Stevenson (2003: 32), too, makes this observation: 'For its part, Dogma is in a technological sense just as much a product of the '90s as, for example, Warhol's Chelsea Girls was a product of the '60s.' On Rule 4 of the Vow of Chastity, which says that the film must be in colour, he writes: 'Today, it's cheaper to shoot in color stock

than black-and-white because so few film labs do black-and-white processing any more, but in the '60s it was cheaper to shoot in black-and-white. … Dogma's disavowal of black-and-white was of course based upon an understandable desire to avoid overt stylistic excesses, to avoid a single dominating aesthetic motif that can be seen in films like THE ELEPHANT MAN (1980), RUMBLE FISH (1983), and THE LAST PICTURE SHOW (1971), to name just three examples. However successful all these films were in their own right, by 1995 black-and-white was almost exclusively associated with a kind of petrified nostalgia that smacked of "obvious aesthetic" in capital letters.' (32-33) To these three films by David Lynch, Francis Ford Coppola and Peter Bogdanovich, we can add DER STAND DER DINGE (BRD/Pg/USA, 1983) and HIMMEL ÜBER BERLIN (BRD/Fr., 1987) by Wim Wenders, and also DOWN BY LAW by Jim Jarmusch (USA, 1986), which was shot on film left over from DER STAND DER DINGE.

17. The first series was launched in 1989 'and has spotlighted everyone from Nirvana to Eric Clapton to Mariah Carey. Now it's back, with brand-new acoustic performances by R.E.M., Staind, Lauryn Hill and Shakira.' A second series, UNPLUGGED 2.0, is in preparation; see http://www.mtv.com/onair/unplugged/.

18. MIFUNES SIDSTE SANG (Søren Kragh-Jakobsen, Dk/Sw/UK/Nw/Sp/BRD/Fr, 1999).

19. With sardonic, almost masochistic pleasure, Lars von Trier puts fellow filmmaker and countryman Jørgen Leth to the test in THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS. Leth agrees to submit himself to an experiment, and leaves it to von Trier to formulate the rules. The founder of the Dogma movement who does not make things easy for himself either (see DOGVILLE) devised a set of tough challenges for Leth, whom he greatly admires. The starting point is THE PERFECT HUMAN, Leth's short film made in 1967. 'Make the same film again, but now in Cuba, with a maximum of twelve frames per shot', von Trier says, for example. 'And this time provide answers instead of questions.' Film profile of THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS on http://www.idfa.nl (IDFA 2003).

20. Just as, for instance, the roles of 'customer' and 'waiter', the props of 'table', 'chair', 'menu', 'service' and 'cutlery', and the actions 'order', 'serve', 'eat' and 'pay' are provided for by a restaurant scenario, which depicts this commonplace event without specifying the type of restaurant, the meals available on the menu, and the individual attributes of the customer or the waiter (see Schank and Abelson 1977).

Notes Chapter 2

1. *Box Office Prophets*, 2004 http://www.boxofficeprophets.com, consulted on 2004-04-26.

2. 'Bordwell defines parametric play as occurring "when only artistic motivation can account for [stylistic patterning]." If a certain stylistic figure running through a work does not appeal to reality to justify its presence, if we cannot see it as necessary to the ongoing action, and if it does not refer to other artworks' conventions to allow us to grasp it, then that figure becomes what Bordwell calls an "intrinsic norm" of the parametric work, and one which solely exists to call attention to itself.' Thompson (1988: 248); see also Bordwell, 1985: 280 et seq.

3. In this respect, ELEMENT OF CRIME and EUROPA continue in the tradition of work by filmmakers such as Orson Welles and Andrei Tarkovski, both of whom were important influences on von Trier (see Stevenson 2002: 39). According to the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1985: 60), whose thoughts on the nature of time in film was also strongly influenced by these directors, Tarkovski rejects the idea '*que le cinéma soit come un langage opérant avec des unités mêmes relatives de différents ordres: le montage n'est pas une unité d'ordre supérieur qui s'exercerait sur les unités-plans, et qui donnerait aux images-mouvement le temps comme qualité nouvelle*'. In the 'classical film' (basically equivalent, for Deleuze, to what he calls the cinema of '*image-mouvement*'), time is a function of the way separate shots are linked by montage. In the *cinéma-mouvement* time, or different 'times', are made visible within the shot itself. The 'montage-in-camera' of EUROPA has the same effect. See also Marrati (2003: 89).

4. Up to a point, as 'transtextual motivation' played an important role in the styling of both films. Von Trier called ELEMENT OF CRIME 'the first film noir shot in colour' (in Stevenson 2002: 33), while EUROPA quotes extensively from early films, German Expressionism, the work of Orson Welles, and genres such as the war film, the horror film, etc. Transtextual motivations – that is, when the use of certain stylistic devices is prompted by the conventions of a certain genre or type of film (such as film noir or German Expressionism) – can subordinate narrative or realistic motivations. They do not attract attention to themselves, but signal that the film belongs to that genre, or (as is the case with ELEMENT OF CRIME and EUROPA) that it has a certain affinity with that genre.

5. As cameraman for HET DAK VAN DE WALVIS (Nl, 1982) by Raoul Ruiz, Henri Alekan applied age-old film techniques such as the use of painted glass plates, mirrors, masks, etc, to produce effects that today would be generated using the computer. Another example is ZELIG (USA, 1983) by Woody Allen.

6. Alas, nowhere does Cubitt say exactly what he means by 'the digital analysis of the mathematical foundations of movement'. Terms such as *pixel* and *vector* are used in the terminology of new (multi)media to describe, respectively, the smallest unit of a computer-generated image and a type of computer image generation (vector-based as opposed to bitmap-based), both of which are indeed mathematically defined. Peirce's triad, from which Cubitt's own trinity of 'pixel, cut and vector' are derived, are not mathematical or geometric figures; and when he does deal with mathematical concepts like *infinitesimal* and *asymptotic*, he does so in order to explain why a principal character in the comic novel *The Third Policeman* by Flann O'Brien, who studied a filmstrip one image at a time, understood little of the medium (Cubitt 2004: 72-72). Unfortunately, this exposition throws little light on his own approach.

7. Christian Metz (1983: 35) gave the following definition of a story: '*discours clos venant irréaliser une séquence temporelle d'événement.*'

8. Brothers Andy and Larry Wachowski are the makers of the films THE MATRIX (USA, 1999), THE MATRIX RELOADED (USA, 2003), THE MATRIX REVOLUTIONS (USA, 2003) and the computer game ENTER THE MATRIX (USA, 2003). They also wrote the scenario for THE ANIMATRIX (USA, 2003), a collection of short animation films giving background information for the Matrix films.

9. As a cybertext theoretician, Espen Aarseth (1999: 33) notes, on what he calls 'the ergodic work of art, such as a hypertext novel, or a three-dimensional computer game': 'Here, the experienced sequence of signs does not emerge in a fixed, prede-

termined order decided by the instigator of the work, but is instead one actualiza-tion among many potential routes within what we may call the event space of semio-logical possibility'. Ergodic 'implies a situation in which a chain of events (a path, a sequence of actions, etc.) has been produced by the nontrivial efforts of one or more individuals or mechanisms' (Aarseth 1997: 94).

10. Barry Atkins (2003: 103) wrote of *Close Combat*: '… it is possible to construct "end-ings" that in their obvious fictionality represent a considerable shift from the "facts". Arnhem can be taken with all the bridges intact, and Allied armour can prepare to drive to the heart of Germany. The Normandy landings can be stopped in their tracks, and the Americans … thrown back into the sea. The German armies can drive through the Ardennes and set off in a race towards Antwerp, potentially altering not just the course, but the outcome, of the Second World War.'

11. The Dutch 'no-budget' filmmaker Pim de la Parra, who in many ways can be seen as a Dogma 95 filmmaker *avant la lettre*, did not call himself a director but a 'de-signer'.

12. 'With Lars von Trier's gigantic 2 month experiment in an art museum in Copenha-gen, the ideal of Dogma 95 was born', announced an advertisement for the docu-mentary trilogy on Lars von Trier and Dogma produced by Jesper Jargil. *Psykomo-bile #1: The World Clock* is described in the documentary The Exhibited by Jesper Jargil (Dk 2000). The announcement of the screening of this documentary at the Sheffield International Documentary Film Festival 2000 sets out the links between this project and Dogma 95: 'Using the Dogma principles that later fostered the mo-vies The Idiots and Festen, von Trier transmitted images of crawling ants from New Mexico via satellite link to an art museum in Copenhagen. Actors portraying 53 characters and inhabiting 19 different rooms took part in two months of non-stop improvised theatre in which their moods were dictated by the movements of the ants'. Besides The Exhibited Jargil also made the documentaries De Ydmygede - The Humiliated (Dk 1998), 'the making of' Idioterne and De Lutrede - The Pur-ified (Dk 2002), in which he confronts the Dogma 95 Brethren with fragments of their later films and questions their loyalty to the rules.

13. 'Once again the project was an experiment with rules but it was also about the artist's absence and withdrawal. Although von Trier was absent, there was no doubt that he was the spirit of the ant-hill' (Schepelern 2003: 64).

14. Jack Stevenson is an American who has lived and worked as a film journalist in Denmark for more than a decade. He has published a book about von Trier (2002) and another about Dogma 95 (2003), and must therefore be extremely well-in-formed on the history of Dogma 95. However, in neither publication does he make any kind of association between this project and Dogma 95.

15. The 2002 press release announcing the closure of the Dogma secretariat also states explicitly: '"The Vow of Chastity" is an artistic way of expressing a certain cinematic point of view, it is meant to inspire filmmakers all over the world' (in Stevenson 2003: 291).

Notes Chapter 3

1.   *Aktuelt,* 16 August 1991, quoted in: Jack Stevenson's *Lars von Trier*, ibid., 39.
2.   This is not the only categorization of gaming, nor is it undisputed; see Juul (2003a: 22 et seq.), Juul (2003b: 31); and Lauwaert (2003).
3.   This is the level of rule design that 'is about anticipating and mapping all possible states of affairs – states of the state machine – in the game' (Järvinen 2003: 70).
4.   'I remember calling Thomas [Vinterberg] and asking him if he wanted to start a "new wave" with me' (Von Trier in Kelly 2000: 137; see also Stevenson 2003: 40).
5.   The *home movie* or family film, according to Eric de Kuyper (1995), is obsessively interested in recording and conveying the pleasures of the family. This brings home movies into the realm of the intimate, and therefore also into that of the obscene. '*Humaines, sans doute, mais trop humaines, insoutenables presque, ces images de la triviaité domestique qui semblent accuser directement la nôtre, prendre quasiment en dérision notre terne quotidien où le bonheur n'est que rarement tangible au présent, et jamis de façon aussi accumulative que dans ces bouts de films. C'est que l'intimité, en effet, se laisse partager, est faite pour se laisser partager, mais ne se communique que difficilement*' (Kuyper 1995: 17).
6.   Allegorical interpretations seek meanings other than those manifested explicitly in the text, by drawing analogies with other texts, with philosophical or ideological doctrines, or with extra-textual phenomena. Since it is always possible to find a perspective from which seemingly unconnected phenomena will show correspondences after all, it is always possible to put forward allegorical interpretations, and – as long as the chosen perspective is accepted – these are difficult or impossible to refute (see also Bordwell 1989: 195 et seq.).
7.   Gaut (2003: 98) writes of Mifune that the film 'manages to employ a hand-held camera (operated by Anthony Dod Mantle again) with a steadiness, and an editing style with a conservatism, that suggest that the film could have been a product of Hollywood International. (The film also manages to be generic – a romantic comedy; subgenre – whore with a heart).'
8.   Apparently, Jennifer Jason Leigh saw Festen and cried: 'Get me a Dogma film!' (Stevenson 2003: 114).
9.   Lev Manovich also 'rewrites' narrative structures in terms of databases and algorithms: 'In contrast to most games, most narratives do not require algorithm-like behavior from their readers. However, narratives and games are similar in that the user must uncover their underlying logic while proceeding through them – their algorithm. Just like the game player, the reader of a novel gradually reconstructs the algorithm (here I use the term metaphorically) that the writer used to create the settings, the characters, and the events. From this perspective, I can rewrite my earlier equations between the two parts of the computer's ontology and its corresponding cultural forms. Data structures and algorithms drive different forms of computer culture. CD-ROMs, web sites, and other new media objects organized as databases correspond to the data structure, whereas narratives, including computer games, correspond to algorithm' (Manovich 2001: 225-226).
10. Gaut uses the concept of the *apparent director* as analogous to Kendall Walton's (1976) concept of the *apparent artist*, by which he meant 'the artist who can be identi-

fied as the author of a work of art on the basis of its characteristics'. The concept is also comparable to the *implied author* of literary studies (Booth 1961), 'a conception of the author based on the style and manner of telling' (Martin 1987: 135). The *implied author* is not necessarily the first-person narrator of a novel, nor the author whose name appears on the book cover.

11. 'The film poses the question: does Stoffer want to know what … retarded sex feels like – or does he just want to fuck his friends, literally and thus metaphorically? If the spassers can be thought of as reviving a project of wilful Surrealist dementia, Stoffer is their André Breton' (Smith 2003: 115).

12. Sanford Kwinter (2001: 9) uses these terms to describe the artwork *Wellen und Schwingungen met ihrer Struktur und Dynamik* by Hans Jenny (1967). In this work, waves are created by passing crystal-oscillator-generated sine-wave sounds through steel plates. A mixture of sand and lycopodium powder on the plate forms patterns which correspond to the virtual outlines arising in the most strongly activated areas of the plate. 'One can discern a specific and uniform underlying pattern of texture "beneath" the resultant figure that is a joint property of the metallurgy of the sounding plate and of the tone that moves through it. This underlying pattern is itself never reproduced, but remains virtual. The actual pattern (the sand-lycopodium figure) always expresses a variation or development of its virtual form – built on the template but continuously variable and varying. Both the actual and the virtual structures are legible in the same image, though their ontological status remains perfectly distinct.'

13. The expression was coined by the Dutch poet Willem Kloos (1859-1938), leader of the *Tachtigers* (the Movement of the Eighties) who revitalised Dutch literature during the 1880s. In an article on the 'sensitivistic' poetry of Herman Gorter, he wrote: 'Art is the most individual expression of the most individual emotion'.

14. 'The script [of IDIOTERNE] was not just read and thrown away, but it was never intended to be a script in the traditional sense. In all of von Trier's idealism, it was meant to be just a blueprint, or not even that. It was more like a window frame without any glass and not attached to any wall. One that could be carried around. It was all about being ambushed by the moment… "Let's just *do* it," one can almost hear von Trier say, "Let's just go out and see what happens"'. Theory proved to be no match for practice, and because the actors were unable to work with nothing at all, IDIOTERNE was made using an increasingly explicit scenario. Von Trier's diary records that IDIOTERNE 'is of course a film that is not nearly as calculated as BREAKING THE WAVES, but nevertheless much, much much more calculated' (Stevenson 2003: 96-97).

15. '*Comme nous l'enseignent tous les théoriticiens du cinéma, c'est effectivement par le montage que le spectateur éprouve cette sensation de ne pas être seul à regarder cette histoire qui se déroule devant ses yeux. C'est par les déboîtements de caméra, principalement, qu'il perçoit le rôle de cet adjuvant (qi peut dans certains cas être un opposant!) que serait le narrateur filmique. Car, au même titre que le narrateur scriptural, celui du cinéma impose (en fait, peut imposer) au spectateur un regard*' (Gaudreault 1988: 109).

16. For instance, the chronology is not imperative as it is in a classical narrative in which temporal structure and causality are closely linked: *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, as Roland Barthes put it (1984). The film has a turning point after the group sex scene and the group falls apart. The preceding scenes have an episodic structure;

they are more or less self-sufficient and do not show a strict causal progression. Karen's character development is perhaps the one element that creates a linear consistency, but she by no means appears in every sequence. It also remains unclear how much time the group has spent on its intrigues: has it been days, weeks or months? One indication is the time which might have elapsed between the moment when Karen left her family and the burial of her child, at which event she was absent, but it is not entirely clear how quickly after the burial she went home. The few days that normally elapse between a death and a burial would seem to be too short a time to encompass all the events of the film.

17. A 'jump cut' is the opposite of a 'match frame'. The latter depicts the continuity of space-time and movement between two shots, and the former does the opposite. In the words of Jan Speckenback (2000), who holds that the jump cut puts location above action: 'By cutting out a part of the temporal continuity of a take, the acting person is found again in a different position in the same cadre. This jumping of the person does not correspond to a rational explanation. The pure form of the jump cut does not necessarily signify a lapse of time. It stands for a static vision of the world. The person is thrown into a space, which is extraneous to it. Its movement does not make any sense. It is absurd, contradicted by a space that cannot be changed by action anyway.'

18. 'A distributed representation is *not* a representation in the conventional sense of the word. It dispenses with all the components of a representational system. There are no symbols that "stand for" something, there are no grammatical relationships between them, and the system itself has no need of a semantic interpretation at all.' (Cilliers 1998: 72). The term 'representation' is not, therefore, particularly appropriate, because the separate nodes have no semantic interpretation. A node knows only a 'weight' that determines the threshold at which a signal from another network node will trigger a signal that is fired off towards other nodes. Semantic interpretation can only be performed at the higher level of the activated network. Each node can take part in different networks representing different items, and conversely, each item can be represented by activation patterns having different units. Such networks are not rule-bound, as are symbolic representation systems, but operate on the basis of a form of statistical calculations which yield an overall dynamic resulting in one or other, more or less stable situation. This accounts for the robust character of such distributed representation systems (see Franklin 1995: 131 et seq.).

Notes Chapter 4

1. He caused a scandal when in his acceptance speech for the Jury Prize for EUROPA he referred to the chairman of the jury, Roman Polanski, as a dwarf. Rumour has it that he threw the prize into the Mediterranean. For an overview of von Trier's fanatical character and phobias, see 'Lars von Trier: portrait of a madman', in: *Newyorkish. com*, 21 April 2004, at http://www.newyorkish.com/newyorkish/2004/04/lars_von_-trier_.html.

2. For each of the three films in the Europa trilogy, von Trier wrote a manifesto that begins with the ironic words 'Seemingly all is well' – a phrase echoed in the '*Jusqu'ici, tout va bien…*' with which Mathieu Kassovitz' film La Haine (Fr. 1995) both opens and closes.

3. As Peter Schepelern (2003: 67) cautiously suggests, '… we cannot totally exclude the possibility that this is an ironic provocation. The very tone of the Vow of Chastity, where filmmaking and celibacy converge, could be suspected of being another stunt by the "jerk-off artist of the film screen". Von Trier is generally evasive of the sincerity of his religiosity: "Although the film isn't an introduction to religion, it is an expression of my religiousness, but it's also, once again, an attempt to provoke myself".'

4. Jean-Marc Barr, famous for his leading role in Luc Besson's Le Grand Bleu (Fr/USA/It 1988), would become a regular in all von Trier's films after appearing in Europa. He does not appear in Idioterne because this is the only one (except for the framing film in Epidemic) that was filmed in Danish.

5. The '180° rule' holds that in filming a scene, an imaginary axis is created that the camera should not overstep. Adhering to the rule means that a certain physical overlap between shots is maintained, and a movement in a given direction is oriented from shot to shot. The 180° rule is supposed to help viewers orient themselves within the physical space of a scene (see Bordwell and Thompson 1993: 262-263).

6. In his enduringly edifying sketch of the development of virtual reality (VR) and his portrait of its most important pioneers, Howard Rheingold (1991: 128) writes: 'The field of VR began to crystallize when the right combination of sponsors, visionaries, engineers, and enabling technologies came together at NASA's Ames Research Center in Mountain View, in the mid-1980s. It was there that a human interface researcher, a cognitive scientist, an adventure-game programmer, and a small network of garage inventors put together the first affordable VR prototypes. It was there that a generation of cybernauts donned a helmet-mounted display and glove input device, pointed their fingers, flew around wire-frame worlds of green light-mesh, and went back to their laboratories to dream up the VR applications of the 1990s'.

7. The title of a famous etching by Goya, *El Sueño de la Razón Produce Monstruos*. This can be interpreted as meaning 'when reason sleeps, fear and superstition enter', but it could also be read as 'reason is a dream that produces monsters'. The same ambiguity characterizes the Europa trilogy.

8. Eddie Constantine would later play the role of Lemmy Caution again in Godard's Allemagne 90 Neuf Zéro (Fr. 1991).

9. The idea that *film noir* has its origins in German Expressionism is a myth that has been perpetuated by historians such as Lotte Eisner and filmmakers such as Wim Wenders in particular. Although most critics and historians of the *film noir* genre are agreed that German Expression is one of its sources, they have also repeatedly warned that this influence should not be overestimated. Borde and Chaumeton (1955), two of the first authors to have published a comprehensive study of film noir, point out that Léni, Murnau and Fritz Lang are possible influences, but they warn: '*on sera sur un terrain beaucoup plus sûr en cherchant des sources dans le film*

américain de 1932 à 1940'. The *Internet Movie Database* (http://www.imdb.com) has nevertheless classified Europa as 'film noir at its best'.

10. Some commentators on The Element of Crime: 'As is often the case with first-time directors, von Trier really wears his influences on his sleeve. The opening slow-motion shot of a donkey rolling in the dust is a direct quote from Andrei Tarkovsky's Andrei Rublev, and von Trier will go on to quote Tarkovsky repeatedly throughout the film. There are many slowly gliding tracking shots over shallow pools of water filled with litter and artefacts – a signature shot which appears in many of Tarkovsky's films, most notably Stalker. There are also quotes from The Third Man and countless other British and American film noirs, but von Trier uses them all to his advantage and lets them serve the story without burying his movie in an overload of nerdy film school references' (Wickum 2000). 'Imagine Blade Runner as rethought by the Delicatessen team of Jeunet and Caro (who no doubt studied Element), and you're on the right track' (Phipps). 'No film made by Lars von Trier is quite so mesmeric as this debut. Saturated with a kind of distilled evil, surreptitious in its narrative flow, this expressionist ritual could have been made by Murnau, Lang, Pabst or any of the masters of German silent cinema' (Cowie).

11. This is related to Gilles Deleuze's concept of the 'optic' image, in which a depicted object repeatedly calls new 'circuits' to mind which form new descriptions of the object. '*L'image optique … fait appel en revanche à une autre dimension des images et de la subjectivité: l'image optique actuelle s'enchaîne à une image* virtuelle *et ensemble forment un circuit.*' (Marratti 2003: 94)

12. There are clear parallels here both with Carol Reed's The Third Man and with Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In Reed's film, the criminal Harry Lime (Orson Welles) turns out not to be dead, and the protagonist, Holly Martins (Joseph Cotton), is dangerously attracted to him. 'The protagonist and narrator of the story, Holly Martins, resembles both a Jamesian innocent and a Conradian secret sharer. Like Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, Martins is an impetuous, sentimental romantic; also like Marlow, he searches out a villain who makes a delayed entrance, after being described by several people. Significantly, one of these narrators is a man named Kurtz, who, in a conversation with Martins, claims to have been Harry Lime's best friend – "after you, of course." In The Third Man, Lime is involved in all sorts of criminal activities, from black market penicillin to trade in dead babies, and Martins gradually begins to realize that 'his attraction amounts to a complicity with evil' (Naremore 1998: 76-77).

13. The 'Grand Imagier', a term coined by Albert Laffay, is '*celui qui ordonne les images et même les voix (et les voix comme des images), celui dont la démarche globalement extra-linguistique ne donne pas le sentiment net d'une présence énonciative personnalisée.*' (Metz 1991: 18). The voice-over in Europa is very definitely present, but remains anonymous.

14. The third edition of Jour de Fête was a fully restored original colour film from 1949. The film had been shot using a new colour film technology, Thomsoncolor, but there was no money to make colour copies of the original, so, in 1949 only a black-and-white version was released.

15. One is forcibly reminded of the closing scenes of Antonioni's Professione: Reporter, in which the camera leaves Nicholson's hotel room through a barred window. Shortly before the Jew's arrival, the camera performs an ingenious movement

around the table at which Hartmann, Harris, Lawrence Harmann, the priest, Leopold and Katharina are seated. This shot, too, recalls the complex circular movement which Antonioni's camera makes around the square at which the hotel was located and to which the camera returns after completing this round.

16. Because this 'analysis' ultimately has to be turned into a 'synthesis' in the editing room, shooting has to take account of later editing, which leads to the storyboard technique of filmmaking (see chapter 3) to which Dogma 95 takes such exception. This is expressed in the French term *découpage* which refers both to the 'analysis' of a narrative in separate shots and sequences before and during shooting, and to the temporal sequence which is constructed from the shots by the process of editing (see Burch 1981: 3-4).

17. These camera movements owe a clear debt to Orson Welles's Citizen Kane, in whose opening sequences the camera enters Kane's house, Xanadu, and later descends through the roof of the house of his ex-wife Susan Alexandra Kane (played by Dorothy Comingore).

18. This is nicely illustrated in the opening scene of Robert Altman's The Player (USA 1992), in which the camera, in a single shot lasting several minutes, follows a 'pitcher' across a parking lot as he tries to interest producer Griffin Mill (played by Tim Robbins), in the time it takes him to walk from his car to the studio, in a film containing a long, unbroken shot ('like in Touch of Evil').

19. In a nutshell: playing with the cinematographic attributes such as frame, proportion, relative movement, etc, which according to Rudolf Arnheim (1979), form the conditions which allow film to be art.

20. One might compare the spaces represented in classical films and in most virtual reality environments with the subjective, modifiable spaces of the Europa trilogy in terms of the distinction made by Henri Lefebvre (1991: 50) between, on the one hand, the *representation of space*, that is, of the abstract space of power, knowledge and technology, and, on the other hand, the *representational space*, that is, the subjective space of 'lived experience'.

21. Representatives of these optimistic expectations for cyberspace and virtual communities have included Howard Rheingold (2000), Pierre Lévy (1997), Michael Benedikt (1991) and Michael Heim (1993).

Notes Chapter 5

1. See http://www.dogville.dk.
2. See Stam (1992) on reflexivity in film and literature.

Notes Chapter 6

1. Mark J. P. Wolf (2001a: 75).
2. It is a mistake incidentally to suppose that black-and-white films are cheaper to make. Because black-and-white has fallen into relative disuse, black-and-white film stock has become more expensive than colour, and few laboratories are still in a position to process it. In a documentary on the making of Paris, Texas, we see how veteran cameraman Henri Alekan tries, in vain, to find a laboratory in the US able to develop black-and-white film.
3. In realistic art works, concrete and insignificant detail generally serves no other function than to express the 'reality' of the represented, according to Roland Barthes (1984b: 174): 'C'est là ce que l'on pourrait appeler l'illusion référentielle. *La vérité de cette illusion est celle-ci: supprimé de l'énonciation réaliste à titre de signifié de dénotation, le 'réel' y revient à titre de signifié de connotation; car, dans le moment mëme où ces détails sont réputés dénoter directement le réel, ils ne font rien d'autre, sans le dire, que le signifier; le baromètre de Flaubert, la petite porte de Michelet ne disent finalement rien d'autre que ceci:* nous sommes le réel; *c'est la catégorie du réel (et non ses contenus contingents) qui est alors signifié; autrement dit, la carence même du signifié au profit du signifié au profit du seul référent devient le signifiant même du réalisme: il se produit un* effet de réel, *fondement de ce invraisemblable inavoué qui informe l'esthétique de toutes les œuvres courantes de la modernité.'*
4. The art historian and theoretician Gombrich (1985: 4) has given this famous description: 'The "first" hobby horse (to use eighteenth-century language) was probably no image at all. Just a stick which qualified as a horse because one could ride on it. The *tertium comparationis*, the common factor, was function rather than form. Or, more precisely, that formal aspect which fulfilled the minimum requirement for the performance of the function – for any "rideable" object could serve as a horse. If that is true we may be enabled to cross a boundary which is usually regarded as closed and sealed. For in this sense "substitutes" reach into biological functions that are common to man and animal. The cat runs after the ball as if it were a mouse. The baby sucks its thumb as if it were the breast. In a sense the ball "represents" a mouse to the cat, the thumb a breast to the baby. But here too "representation" does not depend on formal similarities, beyond the minimum requirements of function. The ball has nothing in common with the mouse except that it is chaseable. The thumb nothing with the breast except that it is suckable. … Once more the common denominator between the symbol and the thing symbolized is not the "external form" but the function …'
5. The *fabula* – the chronological cause-and-effect chain of events that take place within a given timeframe and in a given space – is naturally also a virtual construction: 'The fabula is thus a pattern which perceivers of narratives create through assumptions and inferences. It is the developing result of picking up narrative cues, applying schemata, framing and testing hypotheses. … It would be an error to take the fabula, or story, as the profilmic event. A film's fabula is never materially present on the screen or soundtrack' (Bordwell 1985: 49).
6. Von Trier said this (2003) of Dogville: 'What do I say to those who say it's not cinema? I say they might be right. But, of course, I wouldn't say that it's "anti-cinema"

either. At the beginning of my career, I made very "filmic" films. The problem is that now it has become too easy – all you have to do is buy a computer and you have filmic. You have armies rampaging over mountains, you have dragons. You just push a button. I think it was okay to be filmic when, for instance, Kubrick had to wait two months for the light on the mountain behind Barry Lyndon when he was riding towards us. I think that was great. But if you only have to wait two seconds and then some kid with a computer fills it in… It's another art form, I'm sure, but I'm not interested. I don't see armies going over mountains, I only see some youngster with a computer saying, "Let's do this a little more tastefully, let's put some shadows in, let's bleach the colours out a little". It's extremely well done and it doesn't move me at all. It feels like manipulation to a degree that I don't want to be manipulated.'

7. If we can speak of a radical break in von Trier's work at all, then this is not embodied by Idioterne but by The Kingdom, in which von Trier broke with working methods that may, as Stevenson (2002: 78-79) suggests, have been part of his perfectionism and almost obsessive need for control, but which at any rate can be characterized principally as a storyboard approach (see chapter 2). Moreover, von Trier expert Peter Schepelern (2003: 66) is quick to put von Trier's new, 'liberated and liberating attitude' during and after The Kingdom into perspective: 'Ironically one could say that even when von Trier relinquishes control, he is still totally in command. He still makes the rules.'

8. *Webopedia* (16-03-04).

9. The French title of his essay on psychoanalysis and film is *Le signifiant imaginaire: psychanalyse et cinéma.* (Paris: 10/18, 1977).

10. On this process of primary identification Metz (1980: 63-64) wrote: 'In the film it is always "the other" on the screen: I'm just here to watch. In no sense do I form part of that which I perceive. On the contrary, I am *all-observant*, in the sense that we speak of being all-powerful, and this is the famous omnipresence which the film bestows on the viewer, all the more because I am entirely on the side of the observing instance: absent on screen, but present in the cinema, indeed, all eyes and ears. Without me, the observed would have nobody to be observed by. In actual fact I am the constituing instance of the film signifier (I am the one who makes the film).'

11. This is mentioned in the press pack production notes and also on the official Dogville website (http://www.dogville.dk): 'Then I was listening to "Pirate Jenny", the song by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill from *The Threepenny Opera*. It's a very powerful song and it has a revenge theme that I liked very much. The film needed to be set in an isolated place because "Pirate Jenny" takes place in an isolated town. I decided that Dogville would be in the Rocky Mountains because if you have never been there, that sounds fantastic. What mountains aren't rocky? Does that mean these ones are particularly rocky? It sounds like a name you might invent for a fairy tale. And I decided that it would take place during the Depression because I thought that would provide the right atmosphere.'

12. In: 'Interview with Lars von Trier', in 'Production notes Dogville', ibid.

13. Ibid. See also Bjorkman (2004b).

14. To illustrate the process of compression and decompression, Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 115-116) give the example of a story taken from the science section of *The New York Times*, 24 December 1996, in which the remarkable running capacity of the

American *pronghorn antelope* is explained with reference to its earliest need to be able to escape from prehistoric cheetahs and long-legged dogs. Although these natural enemies of the pronghorn have long since died out, the pronghorn has retained its running abilities, so that we might say that the pronghorn is being chased by ghosts. This is an example of 'compression', according to Fauconnier and Turner: 'In the blended space of this integration network, there is a single individual pronghorn and that pronghorn remembers the nasty predators that once chased it. It was conditioned by those chases, and so now, when any predator tries to chase it, it runs with its old speed. But wait a minute. Who is this pronghorn? Clearly not any individual animal, but also clearly not just a typical representative of the pronghorns in the world today. And it is not a representative of the modern American species, because no member of that species has ever seen any these nasty predators, and so none could "remember" them. What gives us a global insight into an evolutionary truth is a massive compression of identity over species, individuals, and time. The pronghorn from this "blended space" which remembers its old enemies does not therefore correspond with any single pronghorn from the evolution of this animal, nor is it the "greatest common denominator" of the generations over which this evolution took place, because for none of these examples can it be said that they have a conception of cheetahs or of long-legged dogs. We are dealing with a holistic image of a "virtual example".'

15. See http://virtualart.hu-berlin.de/searchAll.do?fulltext=CHAR+DAVIES&operand =AND.

16. The term *alignment* was introduced by Murray Smith (1995: 142 et seq.) to indicate the strategies by which a film couples the perceptions of the viewer with the perceptions of some of the film's characters: 'The narration, I will argue, may place the spectator in an alignment with a certain character or characters. Structures of alignment are produced by two, interlocking character functions, cognate with narrational range and depth: *spatio-temporal attachment* and *subjective access.* By attachment, I refer to the way a narration may follow the spatio-temporal path of a particular character throughout the narrative, or divide its attention among many characters each tracing distinct spatio-temporal paths. In this way, attachment may be more or less exclusive. By subjective access, I refer to the way the narration may vary the degree to which the spectator is given access to the subjectivities – the dispositions and occurrent states – of the characters.'

17. A self-named 'Lurker' gives the following (self-?)description of this kind of observer: 'Lurker does not participate in normal forum discourse, but he's out there... watching, reading every message. Generally, he is quite harmless. In fact, his silence usually reflects a natural reticence rather than any sinister motives. He is content to let the other people haul the conversational freight and, if a fight breaks out he will observe quietly. Occasionally, however, some mysterious impulse drives him to de-lurk and attack. Other Warriors regard his unexpected assault as an ambush, and invariably turn on him savagely. But Lurker seldom sticks around to fight it out, rather, after a brief exchange, he slips away, never to be heard from again.' (http://www.winternet.com/~mikelr/flame58.html)

18. Many, though not all, classical and modernistic film theorists and critics have continued to emphasize the differences and the distances between theatre and film. Eisenstein's ideas on montage are nevertheless strongly influenced by the theatre of

Meyerhold. Although he is his theoretical opposite, André Bazin has defended the 'impure film' that openly acknowledges its literary and theatrical sources of inspiration. Not coincidentally, academic film studies are beginning to appear in theatre and drama study departments.

Notes Chapter 7

1. 'Immediacy' and 'hypermediacy' are key terms in Bolter and Grusin's theory of new media. According to Bolter and Grusin, 'Our culture wants both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation: ideally, it wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying them.' Media, old and new, try to satisfy the audience's desire to experience events 'immediately', that is, without being reminded that the events are actually 'mediated' by the very media through which they are apprehended. 'Hypermediacy' is the opposite of immediacy: hypermediacy draws attention to the medium or media through which events are brought to the attention of the spectator, reader or user.
2. Computer games often start with an exposition which locates the game in a certain space and time, introduces characters, states goals and offers instructions for finding tools, information, and so on. Many computer games also offer so-called *cut scenes* comprising animations or film fragments which mark the points at which the player goes to a new game level and give the computer time to load that new level in memory.
3. In the Netherlands, these have included Jos de Mul (2003). The official website of THE MATRIX trilogy (http://www.whatisthematrix.com) includes a 'philosophy' section which has contributions from several renowned philosophers and cognitive scientists, including Hubert and Stephen Dreyfus, Andy Clark, and David Chalmer.
4. Thomas Elsaesser (2001: 19) describes the contemporary Hollywood blockbuster as a 'database': 'Yet as a generator of cultural capital, it is not only a moneymaking, but also a meaning-making machine. A third characteristic of the blockbuster is therefore that it is a movie engineered for maximum meaning, which is to say its different parts function as a cultural database, in a process that is both "analytical" (it breaks down culture into separate items and individual traits) and "synthetic" (it is capable of apparently reconciling ideologically contradictory associations).'
5. http://www.enterthematrixgame.com/.
6. The first thing the visitor to the *Musée Mémorial d'Omaha Beach* in Normandy actually sees and hears is a poster of, and the soundtrack to, SAVING PRIVATE RYAN. The actual historical location and the historical material and documentation displayed in this museum serve merely to endorse the impression of the invasion given by Spielberg's film, and, by the same token, the film 'brings to life' the materials on display.
7. 'For most of the population, film and television form the principal, if not the only, sources of knowledge of the past. Dramatized and non-dramatized productions have left their mark on the impressions that millions of viewers have of historical persons, episodes, and periods. Film and television affect how we think about the

past. In fact, film images are slowly but surely taking possession of historical repre-
sentation. The one-dimensional and non-reflective character of most films, their way
of making you feel you are actually there, and their incorporation of our powers of
imagination and association by means of thrilling film images will ultimately lead
to a radical change in the nature of historical awareness' (van Vree 1994; see also
van Vree 2004).

8. The fact that most of the older viewers of this film will have read Tolkien's books
    may well have contributed to the fact that the filmmakers concentrated on *showing*
    this world rather than *telling* the stories in *The Lord of the Rings*.

9. The description that Oliver Grau (2003: 16) gave of virtual environments also ap-
    plies to such blockbusters: 'With the means at the disposal of this illusionism, the
    imaginary is given the appearance of the real: mimesis is constructed through preci-
    sion of details, superficial appearance, lighting, perspective, and palette of colors.
    From its isolated perfectionism, the illusion seeks to compose from these elements a
    complex assembled structure with synergetic effects.'

10. 'Underspecified' or 'underdeterminate' means that an image, a sign, or a symbol
    does not contain sufficient specification to unequivocally identify its content.

11. Ironically enough, digital technologies are playing a similar role in assuring the sur-
    vival of the 'independent' film in the western world. A New York distribution com-
    pany, Emerging Pictures, distributes 'indies' and documentaries on hard disks that
    can be coupled to a cheap digital projector. Emerging Pictures hopes that indepen-
    dently produced films and documentaries can then be shown in more places than
    just a few art houses in the largest cities of the USA. 'The theaters are at museums,
    science centers and universities that not only have underused spaces but also built-
    in audiences through their membership lists. The idea is to show high-quality mo-
    vies to people who usually cannot see them because of the huge cost of movie prints
    and marketing budgets,' explained Ira Deutchman, a partner in Emerging Pictures.
    (Sharon Waxman, 'Films: have hard drive, will travel', in the *New York Times*, 1 April
    2004.)

12. See http://www.dogma-dance.org.

13. See http://www.gamasutra.com/features/20010202/adams_01.htm.

14. The politics of film financing which demanded that filmmakers make their films
    socially relevant or artistically innovative have driven a number of directors who
    have been commercially successful in their own countries, such as the Dutchman
    Paul Verhoeven, into the arms of Hollywood. See the interview he gave in the
    Dutch VPRO's *R.A.M.* on 28-03-04, available online at http://www.vpro.nl/programa/ram/afleveringen/16663710/.

15. 'The reasons for this agonising situation have been discussed at length. One plausi-
    ble explanation lies in the film community's own present understanding of how the
    production process should be undertaken. In Europe, the making of films has be-
    come a kind of cottage industry in which the considerable number of different
    players remain fundamentally estranged from each other' (Christensen 2003: 190).

Notes Chapter 8

1. In the sense in which Patrick O'Neill (1996: 24) speaks of narratology as a 'theory game', and of a 'text' as 'a space for the interactive play of author and reader'. This constitutes the 'textuality' of a 'text', where author and reader in interactive play explore the text 'as a *possibility of meaning*'. Interactivity, virtuality, and open-endedness are the characteristics that here inform the metaphorical sense of 'play'. As O'Neill (idem: 29) writes, 'Narrative theory, like all theory, can appropriately be viewed as a game, whose object is the *provisional* arrangement – for particular reasons in a particular context – of discrete data in locally or globally meaningful patterns.... Literary theory is indeed a game – or more accurately a game *system*, a supergame with many subgames – but it is a game with a very considerable and complex *extralusory* reach.' Adopting a certain theoretical position or perspective is, according to O'Neill (idem: 30), adopting 'a strategic essentialism, reading *as if* no other readings were possible, even though we know quite well that they are. To put it another way, we voluntarily agree or decide, for whatever reasons, to play a particular critical or theoretical game, operating by its own particular rules for its own particular purposes.' The 'arbitrariness' and interchangeability of the rules by which literary theorists operate are also characteristics of games that are metaphorically mapped onto literary theories.
2. John M. Carroll (1980: 34) pointed out the distinction between a theoretical claim and a methodological claim in a discussion of Christian Metz's claim that film is a 'language without a langue'. As Carroll writes, 'The theoretical claim that X is a Y must involve demonstration, proof, and argument, as well as careful and precise definitions of X and Y – something is being asserted about the nature of things. The methodological assumption that X is a Y, however, is only an orienting hunch: for the sake of argument X is taken to be a Y, and the consequences of this assumption are investigated.'
3. Janet Murray (1997: 28), writes in her study of 'the future of narrative in cyberspace', significantly titled *Hamlet on the Holodeck*: 'The technical and economic cultivation of this fertile new medium of communication has led to several new varieties of narrative entertainment. These new storytelling formats vary from the shoot-'em-up videogame and the virtual dungeons of Internet role-playing games to the postmodern literary hypertext. This wide range of narrative art holds the promise of a new medium of expression that is as varied as the printed book or the moving picture. Yet it would be a mistake to compare the first fruits of a new medium too directly with the accustomed yield of older media. We cannot use the English theatre of the Renaissance or the novel of the nineteenth century or even the average Hollywood film or television drama of the 1990s as the standard by which to judge work in a medium that is going through such rapid technical change.'
4. As I have argued in Chapter 1, Von Trier has been praised as a radical and innovative filmmaker mostly for the wrong reasons. To hail Von Trier as a 'neo-Bazinian' realist filmmaker or as a champion of low-budget filmmaking is actually to label him as a 'rear guard' filmmaker.
5. The game-like character of Von Trier's cinematic practice has, of course, not gone entirely unnoticed. Both Peter Schepelern (2003) and Berys Gaut (2003) hint at the

playful dimension of films like The Idiots. But they restrict their attention for the game dimension firstly to the Dogma 95 films, and secondly to the production methods used in these films. Gaut (2003: 95) for instance writes that The Idiots can 'in part' be interpreted as 'about the conditions of its own making, a kind of documentary of its own genesis'.

6. Or, as O'Neill (1996: 112) succinctly states elsewhere: 'The character's milieu is sequentiality, uncertainty, unpredictability; the narrator's milieu, as far as his relationship to the world of that character is concerned, is arrangement, certainty, predictability.'

7. For instance see Aarseth 1991; Copier & Raessens 2003; King & Krzywinska 2002; Meadows 2002; Wardrip-Fruin & Harrigan 2004; Wolf 2001; Wolf & Perron 2003.

8. The term 'early' needs to be qualified. Von Neumann explored the mathematics of games as long ago as the 1920s, and before him mathematicians like Benoulli and Cournod had come up with theories and models in the 18th and 19th centuries that turned out to have considerable importance for game theory. The historian Huizinga refers to none of these theories in his seminal study *Homo Ludens* (1997).

9. The *Prisoner's Dilemma* has become popular among game theorists because it 'is simply an abstract formulation of some very common and very interesting situations in which what is best for each person individually leads to mutual defection, whereas everyone would have been better off with mutual cooperation.' (Axelrod 1984: 9).

10. The two actions available to the prisoners are usually called 'cooperation' and 'defection'. Since cooperation can mean cooperation with the authorities as well as cooperation with the fellow prisoner, these terms are a bit confusing. I therefore follow Osborne (2004: 15).

11. Other authors represent the payoffs with other figures. Dawkins (1989: 204), for instance, 'rewards' cooperation (Q,Q) with $300, fines mutual defection (F,F) with $10, and awards the sole defector (F,Q or Q,F) with $500 and punishes the 'sucker' who alone stays quiet (Q,F or F,Q) with a fine of $100. Axelrod (1984: 8; 1997: 16) awards 5 points to 'Temptation to defect', 0 points as the 'Sucker's payoff', 3 points as 'Reward for mutual cooperation' and '1' as 'Punishment for mutual defection'. The exact figures do not matter, though, as long as they correctly rank the order of the players' preferences. It is not even necessary that payoffs have the same magnitude for each player: the payoffs for mutual cooperation or defection might not even be comparable (a journalist gets an inside story, the bureaucrat who leaked the story might get favourable publicity). The only requirement that must be met is that the payoffs rank the players' preferences correctly (see Axelrod 1984: 17).

12. This narrative logic has been represented in various ways by a great number of narratologists, some stressing the timeless logic of narrative (Lévi-Strauss 1973, Greimas 1968, Barthes 1977), some stressing the temporal order of narrative discourse (as in the sequence 'exposition', 'complicating event', 'resolution', 'coda' (see Branigan 1992; Labov 1972; Bordwell 1985: 35).

13. As David Bordwell (1985: 158) writes, the classical segment is 'causally open': '... the classical scene continues or closes off cause-effect developments left dangling in prior scenes while also opening up new causal lines for future development. At least one line of action must be left suspended, in order to motivate the shifts to the next scene, which picks up the suspended line (often via a "dialogue hook").'

14. As Juul (2003b: 36) puts it: 'For something to work as a game, the rules of the game must provide different possible outcomes.'

15. As Juul (2003b: 37) writes, '... quantifiable outcome means that the outcome of a game is designed to be beyond discussion, meaning that the goal of Pac Man is to get many points, rather than "to move in a pretty way". Since playing a game where the participants disagree about the outcome is rather problematic, this undergoes the same development as the rules of a game, towards unambiguity.'

16. 'In the idealised setting in which the players in any given play of the game are drawn randomly from a collection of populations, a Nash equilibrium corresponds to a *steady state*. If, whenever the game is played, the action profile is the same Nash equilibrium *a**, then no player has a reason to choose any action different from her component of *a**; there is no pressure on the action profile to change. Expressed differently: a Nash equilibrium embodies a stable "social norm": if everyone else adheres to it, no individual wishes to deviate from it' (Osborne 2004: 22).

17. 'Get even' might not seem to be a very appropriate expression to describe Grace's act of revenge, which seems disproportionately violent. However, in game theory 'the payoffs of the players need not be comparable at all', nor do the payoffs have to be symmetrical. 'The only thing that has to be assumed is that, for each player, the four are ordered as required for the definition of the *Prisoner's Dilemma*' (Axelrod 1984: 17).

18. This does not mean that mutual defection is the only possible Nash equilibrium in an infinitely repeated game of the *Prisoner's Dilemma*. This depends on the other players' strategies: if there are more nice players in the population, they will do better when they play each other than mean players, and they will eventually take over the population. Defection is only an ecologically stable strategy if and only if all players adopt it.

19. O'Neill's (1996: 41) description of a story world as 'the world of a laboratory rat' seems very apt for von Trier's movies: 'The world of story is an experiment, a provisional reality under constant observation "from above" on the part of those by whom it is discoursed. It is the world of a specimen in a display case, a prisoner in a bell jar, the world wished for by all authoritarian systems, a world whose inhabitants have no secrets – or the world of the religious believer, perennially naked before that divine experimenter's eye in the sky from which there is no hiding.'

20. Even a ludic-minded narratologist like O'Neill (1996: 48-49), for instance, describes James Bond movies as 'extreme formula fiction' in which 'there is a sense in which *everything*, including Bond himself, becomes the *setting* for a single ritually repeated story ...,' which 'is continually retold with interchangeable personnel, scenery, and plots'.

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