

# Introduction

The new filmic forms of realism, whose audience-involving aesthetic based itself on investigations of media in relation to both electronic and digital technology can, in Denmark, be related to Lars von Trier and his work with the TV film *Medea* (1988), the TV series *The Kingdom I* and *II* (1994 and 97), together with the Dogme 95 manifesto and its ten-year implementation (1995-2005).<sup>9</sup> Trier's work with the realistic intensity particular to this, which creates intimacy and a more direct form of influence on more senses than those that traditionally bind film to a classic audio-visual decoding, is made possible by, amongst other things, new, lightweight hand-held DV cameras. In the 1960s and '70s, where film and video cameras also became considerably easier to handle, one had a comparable experience of being able to get closer to the description of reality, in the sense of sensation and experience.<sup>10</sup> The hand-held camera and its reality-producing effect is thus nothing new,<sup>11</sup> but in the 1990s the camera's position became an acting in-

9 The TV medium's reality TV and new documentary formats in the '90s and '00s also rediscover the possibilities for 'intimacy' and 'intensity'. Cf. Anne Jerslev in *Vi ses på tv* (2004).

10 Naturally, Italian neo-realism should also be mentioned, which, because of the destruction of film studio facilities during the war, turned the city streets into scenography, and in which untrained actors acted in real surroundings. This was, in a compositional sense, part of modernising film language and setting it free from the organisational plot structures of literature and theatre (cf. André Bazin: *What is cinema?* Vol. 1 & 2 ([1958-62] 1967-71).

11 In *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (p. 192 f.), Deleuze describes how the French and Canadian *cinéma vérité* directors Jean Rouch and Pierre Perrault exploited, in various ways, the camera being capable of serially connecting here and there, past and future. When time gains precedence over the action linked to the space in this way, reality can be created and recreated, and notions of representative forms of truth can be undermined. In utilising lightweight, hand-held cameras, everyone had the possibility of being a cinematographer, and classical distinctions between camera operator (subject) and character (object) could be blurred. The *cinéma vérité* directors were not so much concerned with filming the poor and downtrodden; rather, this new form of realism was concerned with turning the camera into a creative instrument in the

terfacial account between a subject of vision and an object of vision to an overall principle, gaining physical effects. The Dogme films of the 1990s provoked faint and nauseous reactions, and people exited cinema screenings in droves. The swinging, fuzzy, pixelated images and the bad, unfiltered sound was a novum, and it took audiences a while to become accustomed to it. In short, the ways in which 1990s realism was created in film and video changed previous understandings of the relation between reality and representation. As the audience's physical sense perceptions and emotions take precedence over the reflexive decoding of a representational (and indexical) level, a totally different understanding opens up of what realism can be – namely an affective or performative realism.<sup>12</sup> It does interact with the experiments from the 1960s, but it also appears – in relation to Trier, in any case – as an aesthetic reaction to the new digital media and the interfaces<sup>13</sup> that make interaction and participation possible in an extended field. It is evident in the Dogme 95 manifesto and the following films that, consciously or not, a processing or *remediation* (Bolter and Grusin, 1999) takes place in light of digital media. For though the declaration calls to arms against digital possibilities, through post-production, to create (yet more) illusions backed up by rule number nine – that the film format should be Academy 35mm – *The Idiots* (1998) was

hands of those who were carrying out the depictions. Depicting subjective and objective aspects of a person's identity (fictive or real) is forsaken for creative simulations; a construction of identities, legends, and folk, which in Québec led to new common narratives: »Thus the cinema can call itself *cinéma-vérité*, all the more because it will have destroyed every model of the true so as to become creator and producer of truth: this will not be a cinema of truth but the truth of cinema« (Deleuze 1989, 151). Jean-Luc Godard, amongst others, was inspired by the free rein and reality-creating style in *cinéma vérité*, and used a hand-held camera in many of his film and video productions.

12 Cf. the results of the research project »Reality, Realism, and the Real in Visual Perspective«: Britta Timm Knudsen and Bodil Marie Stavning Thomsen (eds.): *Virkelighedshunger* (2003); Karin Petersen and Mette Sandbye (eds.): *Virkelighed, virkelighed!* (2003); Rune Gade and Anne Jerslev (eds.): *Performative Realism* (2005).

13 The word »interface« is used throughout the book as a term with a triadic combination, which has developed culturally from experiments with the possibility of feedback (in electronic music and video) in the 1960s. The body becomes an integrated part of the *human-computer interface* in that the actions (with tools such as, for example, camera, mouse, keyboard, microphones etc.) send electronic and/or digitally coded signals to a media format (for example, a computer game), which more or less simultaneously mediates and represents, giving feedback to the corporeal sensations and actions (cf. Andersen and Pold 2015). Forms of interfaces are a societal reality, which have meaning in the production of all culture and art, but some artists reflect this more than others. As a supplement to the broad definition of the interface, Anne Munster's definition is used in relation to the artistic forms of interfaces which reflect the overlap between »to be in the body and to represent the body from outside« as a recordable, inventive creation of difference (Munster 2006, 142).

(as the first of the Dogme films) shot completely on digital DV cameras. The rule on film formatting was thereafter changed pragmatically, so that it merely insisted that the film be distributed on Academy 35mm.

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin define *remediation* as the way in which new media assimilates and reuses older media, and the way in which older media assimilates the new, in order to answer the challenges of this media. With historical examples, Bolter and Grusin describe how the representation of reality has been the cornerstone for the development of genres and art types as well as media. The representation reflects the medium either as *hypermediacy* or *immediacy*, which involves a consciousness of the medium's setting of frameworks or taking aim at its eradication, respectively (for example, in the form of a sense of depth in an image). Both forms, so to speak, aim to heighten the degree of the user's affinity to the surrounding world; but where *immediacy* sets its sights on increasing the experience of realism as authenticity in the form of blurring the medium's techniques and approach, *hypermediacy* sets its sights on covering reality in the form of a presentation of the same. Bolter and Grusin do not concern themselves with the particular ›haptic‹ form of media reflection which is the aim of this book. On the one hand, this is prioritised by the surface of the canvas or screen rather than depth and can thus be said to belong to hypermediacy, but on the other hand it invites the audience to see as if with a gaze that is (all too) near-sighted, which rather borders on immediacy. The point, which will become clear in the analysis of Trier's production, is that electronic as well as digital media often work with mixed forms between hypermediacy and immediacy,<sup>14</sup> which is why we need new analytical approaches. The user's sensory preparedness is, to a higher degree than previously, involved in the visual process, by which it becomes more difficult to differentiate between what is representation and what is production. Consequently, the following analysis will include haptic, affective and diagrammatic dimensions.

14 Though Bolter and Grusin are aware of this, they do not follow through the consequences of this in the publication. Richard Grusin has later used the concept of affect in the book *Premediation: Affect and Mediality after 9/11* (2010).

In my opinion, Trier works through the entirety of his production, but most clearly from the TV production *Medea* and onwards, in an attempt to qualify the haptic field's affective potentials in audio-visual material, where classic film techniques can be mixed with electronic and digital methods and techniques. *Medea* and *The Kingdom I and II* in particular investigate how electronic signal noise and the possibility to edit several recorded tracks together in one image can give a special form of haptic sensation. In *The Idiots* (1998), which as mentioned is shot with digital video cameras, much work is done to underline the traces of reality through the form of improvisation, continuous recording and the use of this on existing, real locations. But the filming of, for example, sexual excitement and a random aeroplane passing by, which we normally associate with indexical traces of real phenomena,<sup>15</sup> is here partly digitally recorded (with a possibility for unseen post-production) and thus the entire film is, in and with the Dogme concept, framed like a staged experiment. In *Breaking the Waves* (1996) and *Dancer in the Dark* (2000), some use is made of haptic close-ups and the creation of extended or virtual landscape spaces and musical spaces, which remediate the digital real-time control. In *The Five Obstructions* (2003) with Jørgen Leth, experiments are carried out with classic forms of filmic editing, sampling techniques and documentary forms of reality traces. In *Dogville* (2003) and *Manderlay* (2005), the new hypermediated forms of control, which are recognisable from computer games, are clearly commented on, in that narrative forms of literature, film and the *Verfremdung* techniques of the cinema are remediated, and substantiate the more or less allegorical representations. Here classic haptic descriptions of skin without make-up are mixed with digitally overlaid images (of Grace and apples in the frame of the truck), and the 3D effect of the barking dog, Moses, gains a shock effect when it suddenly materialises from its sketched 2D existence. In *The Boss of it All* (2006), a hypermediated, digitalised image capture technique becomes a very visible part of an otherwise absurdly mundane, everyday representation. In *Antichrist* (2009) and *Melancholia* (2011),

15 For a closer analysis of this cf. Jerslev 2002.

digital forms of *special effects* are integrated in both an acoustic as well as a figurative level in ways that renew, and in which the compositional, as a symbolic layer, leads to a classic-filmic form of representation. In *Nymphomaniac* (2013) the digitally modulated symbolic form is toned down. In addition, an obvious diagrammatical level in the narrative makes it possible for the viewer to follow how Trier's accentuation of common human conditions can undermine classic, voyeuristic forms of desire. With this blending of indexical, iconic and diagrammatical signs, which elegantly overcome analogue and digital variations in perception, Trier creates narratives that depict inner states affectively in a motivic and stylistic manner, and in ways never before seen. Deleuze and Guattari's conditions of the non-dichotomous exchanges between rhizome and the tree structure, the smooth and the striated, the refrain's de- and re-territorialization and the diagram's modulating interaction are thus important theoretical inspirations for the book's analyses.

Based on the inspiration Trier finds in Dreyer's composition of images, Alois Riegl's description of »haptic« visuality and Deleuze's philosophical rethinking of the term will create the backdrop for a close analysis of how haptic gestalts of colour and spatiality noticeably break with the more traditional optic ways in which filmic narratives are organised. It is the thesis that Trier's experiments with clarifying the haptic composition in diverse audio-visual media formats (the analogue film in dialogue with electronic and digital forms) make it possible to describe non-representational forms of affect, in that filmic narratives are seen as – or actualise – events. The book aims to give a space for reflection to the sensorial forms of perception, which the films call for, and also attempts to accommodate Trier's own formulation (in the introductory quotation) on what happens if the analysis also takes account of the style being laid over the narrated story as a filter. When the style is so convincingly carried through, the aim of the analysis must primarily be shifted to the question of what Trier's film does, and not be content – as has often been the case in analyses of Trier's film – with discussing the political standpoint or ethical assertions in the represented content, the story.

Although Trier subscribes to the traditions of filmic realism and documentary, and in *The Idiots* positions himself close to forms of documentary representation (so-called indexical, documentable ›reality‹), the production of affect in viewers, in this film in particular, is contingent on the advanced projected position of the hand-held camera in creating forms of affect on the level of perception. Consequently, it is a hypermediated practice which, for example, intensifies the viewer's experience of actual dizziness or nausea. The hand-held camera disturbs the viewer's access to *fabula*, but in contrast makes one aware of the screen as a haptic surface that seemingly intensifies the actors' improvisation. The camera does not merely cover an indexical, recordable reality, but participates in the production of it. This propagates itself to the viewer's bodily, immediate affect experience of perceptive intensity, which as a result includes mediation. Furthermore, the digital film's pixelated, haptic materiality is rendered visible in the intermediate transfer from DV to the 35mm Academy screening format, as discussed by C. Claire Thomson with reference to Anthony Dod Mantle's ›breaking down‹ of the normal *high resolution* film image, which is capable of »intensifying the video noise to an interesting aesthetic dimension« (Thomson 2013a, 119). According to Thomson, the grainy images (porridgy images) of this media transfer, after and including *Medea*, become to a large extent part of the viewer's perception and affective sense perception (Thomson, op.cit., 20). This merging of the film's haptic level and the viewer's corporeal reality therefore, evidently, cannot be ascribed to in analyses of the film's themes and style. This renewing term causes realism to ›happen‹ on the level of intensity which belongs to the sense perception itself, in that it emphasises that visual sense perception cannot be limited merely to the sense perception of the eyes and the decoding of the brain. This type of realism involves the entire body.

My analysis does not follow on immediately from Bolter and Grusin's general observation that »immediacy implies hypermediacy« (cf. Bolter og Grusin, 118-19), as my interest goes beyond the effect created by the context of the medium. In my opinion, Trier uses the haptic image plane (cf. Riegl) as an invitation to the viewer to ›feel with the eyes‹, in line with the practice of hyperme-

diation which he developed in the Europa trilogy. So although *The Idiots*, for example, subscribes to aesthetics for the depiction of immediacy established in the tradition of 20th century realism and documentary, in Trier they clearly function as signs of hypermediacy. He emphasises the immediacy aspect, so it is clear that the signs can function stylistically detached from their original function (to disguise the medium). As a consequence, the haptic surface of the TV or cinema screen becomes somewhat emphasised. The medium's materiality is rendered visible in this way. When the surface becomes central to the perception, the viewer gains access to the film's self-reflecting, hypermediated meta-level, but at the same time the screen image is so saturated with material information (unsteadiness, blurring, pixelation, graininess, noise, and so on) that it creates physical-affective repercussions of immediacy. In Trier's film the distinction between immediacy and hypermediacy becomes almost unusable, in that the haptic image and sound spaces, which create direct consequences of affect, come to include both in themselves. The haptic field extends even further in the films from 2000 and onwards, in and with the digital possibilities with which to create new types of fusions and combinations of images and sound. With this extension, which affectively includes the viewer in the production and interpretation of the haptic field, it becomes possible to (re)think the filmic experience in the cinema as an interface which implicates the audience collectively. In the previous decade, Trier's films can be described as allegorical or philosophical test pieces, which only to a lesser degree accentuate the confrontation with or remediation of classic film forms and film genres, but which in turn establish a wealth of different, affectively involving types of interfaces, where classic subject-object relations are undermined.<sup>16</sup>

16 Trier's stylistically experimental film in this way contested the validity of the classic interpretation of film, which most often takes its starting point in the story's representational level. For the analysis of the creative potentials of the event for the exchange of actualisation, I could have chosen to use the term »immediation« in my analysis, which is developed by Erin Manning, Brian Massumi, Alanna Thain, Christoph Brunner, Anna Munster, and others. The term indicates the moment in a perceptive event, for example, where a relational exchange displaces the division between subject and object that benefits creative action. It belongs to the definition of the term that all media takes part in the creation of events, but immediation might as well occur unmediated. I have not made use of the term, however, as the majority of the book was written before I participated in Erin Manning's international research project »Immediations: Art, Media, Event« (2013-2020).

When Trier, along with other artists in the 1990s, makes realism haptic in this perspective, there is no radical split from the quotation-minded hypermediation that the Europa Trilogy films, in the first postmodernistic phase, abounded in.<sup>17</sup> As a continuation of the mythologising of Trier in the 1980s as an ironic master of concealment, one ought to understand the interplay with the diary form as a *backstage* performance (following on from *The Idiots*), and the ambiguous settings as deranged or works of genius respectively (following on from *Antichrist*), or as fascist or not (following on from *Melancholia*), or as more or less well-executed performative gestures in the public (media) space. It is not my intention here to look closer at uncovering how the formal mixing of diverse traditions of *immediacy* and *hypermediacy*, as well as the performative, so-called »fictional-biographic« gestures, contribute to Trier's constant renewal of the film medium.<sup>18</sup>

It is especially the relatively obscure haptic image composition of the twentieth century, where materiality on the surface of the screen makes it possible for the film medium to communicate affectively with its audience, which will be the recurrent element throughout the book. Though Walter Benjamin as early as 1936 (Benjamin [1936] 2005) analysed the tactile qualities of the film medium using Alois Riegl's analysis of the tactile/haptic as a background, and despite Carl Theodor Dreyer with *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928) creating a sustained haptic film for a large cinema audience (Thomsen 2006),<sup>19</sup> haptic forms of image composition were quite uncommon before the electronic video experiments in the 1960s placed the focus on the signal as a performative now (Thomsen 2012a). It is to Jean-Luc Godard's credit, amongst others, that the video medium signal has been introduced aesthetically in a qualitative interplay with the medium of film. It is to Trier's credit that he accentuates the haptic ele-

17 To these belong *The Element of Crime* (1984), *Epidemic* (1987) and *Europa* (1991).

18 cf. Louise Brix Jacobsen, who uses the TV series *Klovn* (2005-) and the film *Klovn: The Movie* (2010) as examples (Jacobsen 2008). I will use the terms *immediacy* and *hypermediacy* where evident, but my reading is, as mentioned, oriented on how Trier's production transgresses the classic representational level of the TV and cinema screen – and implicates the viewer.

19 On the contrary, a large amount of experiments with haptic art film and video are to be found. Here Maya Deren and Stan Brakhage should be mentioned. In the longer film format, Jytte Rex was also an innovator. Lars von Trier has himself named her films as an inspiration (Michelsen and Piil 2004).

ment with the integration of video noise in the film medium,<sup>20</sup> in which the experience of ›reality‹ increases. Furthermore, he utilises the affective potential of the haptic level to its full in linking with digital compositions.<sup>21</sup>

In reality, Trier's media-reflective artistic practice lies in a clear continuation of Walter Benjamin's enumeration on the potentials of the film medium in a culturally industrial era, where art is no longer part of a cultic relation. In »The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction« Benjamin maintains that the medium of film (in light of, amongst others, Dziga Vertov's and Dadaism's avant-gardist manifestations), with its direct tactile qualities, has the possibility to create culturally up-to-date forms of reflection for the new mass audience (Benjamin [1936] 2005). Trier's productions are avant-gardist in Benjamin's sense of the word, in that he is the leading light of the shock effect of tactility in the twenty-first century. He is aware of the French avant-garde of the 1960s and ›70s, which for its part remediated the film medium in relation to the electronic TV medium and the new consumer culture and pop culture. In continuation of this tradition, Trier remediates film in relation to the real-time interfaces and game-performances of digital media. He contributes, though, more with a productive than an aesthetic perception, and ›reclamation‹ of the field, in that he, as Benjamin, is interested in the tactile and affective involvement of the viewer. As this book aims to explain how haptic images and affective events are composed and work, the analysis will primarily be concerned with Trier's productions *The Kingdom I* and *II* and onwards; although my readings of these will take as their starting point an analytical exposé of the Europa trilogy, *The Element of Crime*, *Epidemic* and *Europa*, as well as *Medea*.

My readings of Trier's films will eventually conclude in some definitions – as a supplement to Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of filmic moving images and time images – of what one could call

20 Cf. introductory citation, where Trier discusses *Breaking the Waves*: video noise is integrated as an important, stylistic element (Björkman 1999, 166). The citation also forms part of my analysis of the film.

21 Cf. as mentioned in *Dogville*, where the dog Moses, which only exists as a 2D outline, later becomes a ›real‹ 3D dog creating affect, and barking with froth in its mouth.

affect images.<sup>22</sup> In Trier's case these lead to the eye's sensing in the direction of non-representational tracks, delineations and diagrams in the filmic, signaletic material. It is in this connection that Trier's dialogical remediation of earlier haptic-oriented filmmakers such as Dreyer and Tarkovsky can provide an analytical counter, in that the works, right down to the last detail, demonstrate an overall reflection of the status of the current film image. In the following, I will argue that this signature, amongst others, contains a critique of the current visual media, diverse joysticks, controllers and 3D glasses, collectively called »haptic technology«, in that they allow the viewer to obtain (renewed) immediate close contact with the screen's representations. Trier's films are haptic in the Deleuzian development of the term, referring to aesthetic composition and perception. They do not, however, remain formally reflexive towards material and media, in that they – viewed over a thirty-year period – are capable of creating an aesthetic breakthrough to affective, physical forms of sensation, which raise awareness of the body being an important part of the interface.

Trier's films, as with Dreyer's, praise the newly diversifying possibilities of abstraction in visual composition (cf. the book's introductory citation, Dreyer 1959, 91), and it is surely not without reason that one of the films he made in film school is entitled *Nocturne* (1980), as Dreyer had on several occasions expressed great admiration for the American painter James Whistler (1834-1903), who together with the Danish painter Vilhelm Hammershøj (1864-1916) had inspired Dreyer's style of images in *The President* (1919).<sup>23</sup> Whistler was, amongst other things, known for his series of nocturnal paintings of landscapes in mist and fog, which, not dissimilar to J. M. W. Turner's (1775-1851) paintings, potentiated

22 It is furthermore interesting in Deleuze's description of Robert Bresson's films as haptic that the diagrammatic level also almost unfolds as he uses examples of the work of the hands in *Pickpocket* where the optic and audio sign underlines the hands' haptic connection to the space: »The hand doubles its prehensile function (of object) by a connective function (of space); but from that moment, it is the whole eye which doubles its optical function by a specifically ›grabbing‹ [haptique] one, if we follow Rieg's formula for indicating a touching which is specific to the gaze« (Deleuze [1985] 1989, 13). See also Deleuze 2006, 315 together with the video from Deleuze's lecture from 1987 on film and its creative action: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7DskjRer95s>. (Last viewed 13 February 2015).

23 Cf. Jørgen Roos' documentary film *Carl Th. Dreyer*, 1966. cf. also Anne-Birgitte Fonsmark (ed.): *Hammershøj > Dreyer: Billedmagi*. Ordrupgaard Museum (2006), which contains several articles on the influence of Hammershøj on Dreyer.

the affective intensities in the surface of the canvas. However, one should make no mistake: Trier uses the haptic image style in a far more confrontational manner than Dreyer did. In this way, a very detailed copy of the glass door with bordered window panes, which had a central placement in Dreyer's *The President*, is, in Trier's *Nocturne*, perforated and destroyed as early as the opening scene, when a person (reportedly Trier himself)<sup>24</sup> casts himself through the pane from outside and directly into the audience's field of vision.

The book aims to research in describing how Trier's work with haptic images and their potential for affective involvement is developed further to also include diagrammatical components, whose effects reach beyond the iconic, indexical and symbolic sign categories in which we usually think when concerned with filmic representation. The book's thesis is that Trier in this way manages to stretch out the film medium's field to enable it to also reflect and include an interfacial folding between viewing and being emotionally touched; consequently, the affective involvement in Trier's films also comes to include that seeing always implies being seen.