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**DOGMAtic Iconoclasm:
Performative Aspects of Realism and Excess in Lars
von Trier's *Breaking the Waves* and *The Idiots***

Hanna Maria Laakso

**A Thesis in
The Department of Film Studies**

**Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
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Abstract

DOGMAtic Iconoclasm: Performative Aspects of Realism and Excess in Lars von Trier's *Breaking the Waves* and *The Idiots*

Hanna Maria Laakso

This study is an exploration of several aspects of performance in Lars von Trier's *Breaking the Waves* and *The Idiots*, focusing especially on the seemingly oppositional concepts of realism and excess. The emphasis here is on the new form of filmmaking that Lars von Trier, together with Thomas Vinterberg, initiated by writing the Dogma Manifesto as a set of filmmaking "rules" in 1995. A close analysis of Emily Watson and Bodil Jorgensen's performances in these two films illuminates the filmmaker's unique approach to performance and also demonstrates the strong impact this new kind of a cinema had on the actor's craft. Through an investigation of the use of performance, von Trier's filmmaking will be placed within the context of Scandinavian theatrical and filmic traditions. The study examines how von Trier's films show the prominent influence of the late nineteenth century Scandinavian theatrical tradition that is most fully embodied by Ibsen and Strindberg; this obvious influence aligns von Trier with other Scandinavian filmmakers like Dreyer and Bergman, whose work also shows the influence of modernist theatre. Von Trier's films, especially through the use of performance, redefine the traditional Scandinavian approach to cinema. This analysis of performance leads to a consideration of the significance of contextualizing performance culturally, historically and socially.

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**There is no overacting, only untrue acting.
--Stellan Skarsgård**

Introduction

The film actor is, perhaps uniquely, a site of human truth: an image of light, a bearer of enlightenment through which primal feelings, dreams, and desires flow (Zucker *Figures*, 7).

Since 1995, the year which witnessed the birth of the Dogma 95 movement, Scandinavian cinema has garnered worldwide attention. Danish filmmakers Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg wrote the Dogma Manifesto as a set of rules that were aimed at producing a new kind of cinema. The manifesto called for “character-driven” films which were simultaneously “instill[ed]...with a thoroughly cinematic feeling” (Müller quoted in Oppenheimer and Williams 18). While the Danish Dogma films have been widely regarded as constituting the latest new wave movement “protesting the decadent illusionism of contemporary cinema” (Matthews 39), only recently has the importance of the films’ cultural and national contexts been addressed, in studies like the one presented by Hjort and Bondebjerg.

Most of the attention that the Dogma filmmakers have received focuses on their method of filmmaking. This method entails recording performances using unobtrusive digital cameras, thus creating a physically close relationship between the camera and the actors. Although the authors that have written on Dogma acknowledge that this “new confluence of emotion and technology” which creates “intense, riveting immediacy” (Roman 49) is made possible by a redefined approach to performance, the actor’s role in shaping this new mode of performance has been largely ignored. This is symptomatic of the way in which the analyses of Dogma films align themselves with previous studies of Scandinavian cinema. These studies have been universally done from

the perspective of auteurism. Since these films are more than products of technology or of a director/auteur, the crucial role of the actor in a critical study of the Dogma film has to be examined.

In 1999, von Trier wrote a pamphlet entitled *Project "Open Film Town."* In it the filmmaker expressed his vision of a project that would be "an extension of production activities and internal communication into the establishment of a centre for external, non-commercial, open discussion and studies designed to benefit the medium at every level" (quoted in Hjort and Bondebjerg 225). The initiation of this project by the visionary filmmaker was intended not only to provide a meeting place for professional filmmakers and non-professional film enthusiasts, but also to establish a dialogue between film theory and practice. The purpose was to fulfil the critical interest Dogma Manifesto had previously created, to "sustain the project's positive influence, to provide a meeting place for those already making new Dogma films, and to exploit the international awareness Dogma 95 [had] attracted" (von Trier quoted in Hjort and Bondebjerg 226). This thesis is written in response to von Trier's call for a dialogue between films, film theory, and the filmmaker's as well as his actors' view of their own craft. My purpose here will be to enumerate and analyze the variety of changes von Trier's Dogma films, as representatives of contemporary Scandinavian cinema, have contributed in relation to their theatrical and filmic predecessors. The thesis will focus on examining the performances of Emily Watson and Bodil Jorgensen in, respectively, von Trier's *Breaking the Waves* (1996) and *The Idiots* (1998). Through an investigation of the use of performance von Trier's filmmaking will be placed within the context of Scandinavian filmic and theatrical traditions.

As a point of departure, my aim will be to explore the prominent influence that the late nineteenth century Scandinavian theatrical tradition brings to bear on contemporary filmmaking. The pioneering realism of Henrik Ibsen's (1828-1906) theatre has been something that Scandinavian theatre and film keep exploring. The quest for realism in its more provocative forms, as well as the radicalism of an individual's will have been at the heart of Ibsen's work as a playwright. This brand of realistic theatre has been a backdrop against which later theatrical and filmic practices have re-defined themselves. Although one could claim Ibsen wasn't a modernist as such, his complex representation of women led him away from previous staging techniques and forms of characterization. He was a catalyst for theatrical modernism through the realism of his female characters. Yet, Ibsen's proto-modernism influenced both modernist theatre and cinema, primarily through the figure of August Strindberg (1849-1912). Strindberg's modernism redefined staging techniques by simplifying the realistic stagecraft that Ibsen brought into vogue. He shifted the focus to new forms of characterization and modes of performance, whereby subdued expressions prevailed; this was an effort to break through the surface to the internal, hidden reality of characters. The theatrical modernism in the tradition of Strindberg subsequently influenced modernist Scandinavian filmmakers, such as Carl-Theodore Dreyer and Ingmar Bergman who continued Strindberg's process of de-theatricalization. The theatrical influence on their filmmaking practices can be accounted for through an analysis of their respective approaches to performance. I intend to use the filmmakers' view of the actors' craft as a basis for my discussion of the ways in which von Trier bases his filmmaking on these same filmic traditions, consequently redefining their approach to cinema for his own purposes. The focus will rest on two films: Dreyer's

Passion of Joan of Arc (1928) and Bergman's *Persona* (1966), which I will consider to be the respective culminations of each filmmaker's cinematic representations of female protagonists. It is important here to note that Dreyer and Bergman's modernist filmmaking practices lead to a simplification and dematerialization of theatrical chamber space. The space in these filmmakers' treatment literally and metaphorically transcends the presence of the female body in an evocation of their spiritual beings. The ways in which these filmmakers manipulate the close-up to demonstrate internalised feelings and to evoke spirituality has yet to be approached from the perspective of performance; that is, how the close-up, while attempting to create intimacy and concentration in the chamber space, came to restrict rather than enhance the expressivity of the actor's body. The way in which the physical is ignored in a quest for the spiritual leads, on a thematic level, to the manifestations of suppressed female sexuality. This suggests that the relationship between Ibsen, Strindberg and Scandinavian modernist filmmakers should be re-examined in terms of the effect of filmic style on performance and the representational status of women. This re-examination becomes possible by analyzing von Trier's unique approach to performance.

The focus of the first chapter will be on the use of space in von Trier's films. I will examine the ways in which simplified space creates an intimate form of filmmaking that focuses on the actors being closely observed by the director, the co-actors, and the spectator. My purpose is to demonstrate how Scandinavian predecessors have used spatial simplification to create intimacy that can be felt in the actors' performance. By comparing the performances of Bodil Jorgensen and Emily Watson, I will explore how von Trier depicts a variety of representations for heightened intimacy.

The creation of intimacy is linked to my discussion of intimate chamber space and the performance of marginality. To fulfil Dogma's demand for authentic space for creation of authentic performances, von Trier draws on a chamber space - a domestic interior setting - where realistic social dramas may be played out with relation to public space. By embodying "a truly radical new form of cinematic realism" (Kelly 11), von Trier's films ensured that contemporary Scandinavian cinema aligned itself with the strong tradition of "sociology in art" (Bertilsson and Therborn 18). By studying von Trier's use of "region behaviour" (Goffman *Presentation*, 106-140), I will argue that von Trier turns to the performance of madness to depict women's revolt against the space restricting their autonomy and free spirit, resulting in their marginalization.

The second chapter will continue to explore the ways in which von Trier's heroines express their individualism by taking possession of the spoken word. In my view, this parallels Dreyer and Bergman's female protagonists, whose troubled relationship to language has served as an underpinning for the construction of their individualism. Here, I will examine the fusion between the actor's silence and the filmmaker's use of close-up. Jorgensen's performance in *The Idiots* is the most overt example of the way in which the distrust of language has led to the use of silence as a way to depict "the inner drama revealed in the 'microphysiognomic' close-up" (Bálázs 73). I will compare Jorgensen's "silent monologues" (Bálázs 63) with Watson's verbal monologues in *Breaking the Waves*. Bess (Watson), as a parodic reincarnation of Joan of Arc, fights against the textual authorities by questioning the meaning of words and speaking against them. Bess's idiosyncratic view of spirituality and of God as a saviour and wrathful power are conveyed in her monologues. By creating her own speech, she

fights against the Word of God. Bess's use of words and her impersonation of God's voice is linked to her idiosyncratic view of spirituality. The performance of her monologues conveys Bess's consideration of the Word to be a mere utterance.

While the analysis of the use of speech demonstrates how von Trier moves away from some of the principles of Dogma filmmaking, in the third chapter I will outline and analyze "the collision between human and abstract" (von Trier quoted in Björkman "Juggling," 10). Von Trier's shift away from his original quest for authenticity can be compared with his Scandinavian predecessors, whose pioneering projects have similarly begun with a quest for the real. Yet, what is often dismissed is how they have simultaneously explored the extent to which the boundaries of realism can be stretched, thus focusing on the employment of excess within the limits of realism. Von Trier's approach to the depiction of sexual bodies and spiritual minds will reveal the interaction and collision between the opposing qualities of the human and the spiritual. The actors are required to embody the opposing forces of excessive spirituality and the earthbound dimensions of sexuality that are manifested in human behaviour.

In the fourth chapter, my aim will be to analyze the ways in which von Trier searches for realistic means to demonstrate the excessive, melodramatic feelings that these women, as child-wives and martyrs, exhibit. Von Trier's characters struggle to find believable ways to show that their excessive feelings are authentic. This is linked to my analysis of von Trier's contemplation of the childlike qualities in women and the ways in which the exploration of childlikeness is demonstrated in performance both on a formal and on a thematic level. Von Trier's urge to rediscover childlike qualities in oneself is linked to his contemplation of the loss of childlikeness and the tragedy of the

irreversibility of that loss. This brings me to question if von Trier's view reflects the changing status of women in the domestic sphere of contemporary Scandinavian social democratic societies.

About the filmmaker and his actors

Before he began his career in filmmaking, von Trier studied at the Department of Film and Media Studies, at the University of Copenhagen from 1976 to 1979. During this time he also joined the experimental Film Group 16 in 1977 where he was a member until 1979. In 1979, von Trier got accepted to the National Film School of Denmark where he studied until 1982. The short films von Trier made at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, such as *The Orchid Gardener* (*Orchidégartneren*, 1977), *Joyful Menthe* (*Menthe - la bienheureuse*, 1979), *Nocturne* (1980), *The Last Detail* (*Den sidste detalje*, 1981), and his graduation film *Images of a Relief* (*Befrielsesbilleder*, 1982) were "stylistically inventive explorations of themes and symbols which would later play a central role in his feature films" (Bondebjerg in Hjort and Bondebjerg 208). The filmmaker's early productions were largely ignored, despite the fact that the films *Nocturne* and *Images of a Relief* won Best Film Awards at the 1981 and 1982 Munich Film Festivals. His first trilogy *The Element of Crime* (*Forbrydelsens element*, 1984), *Epidemic* (1987), and *Europa* (1991), established his reputation as a filmmaker whose bold experimentations with cinematic styles, genres and thematic issues initiated what was to come later in the decade. *Element of Crime* was the winner of the Grand Prix Technique at Cannes in 1984, and *Europa* won Special Jury Prize for Artistic Contribution and shared the Grand Prix du Jury at Cannes in 1991. Von Trier's television

productions included *Medea* (1988), based on Dreyer's "Euripides-inspired script" (Bondebjerg in Hjort and Bondebjerg 209), and the television series *The Kingdom (Riget, 1994)* and *The Kingdom 2 (Riget 2, 1997)*, which, according to Ib Bondebjerg, "masterfully combines elements of horror, playful humour and biting satire" and was the filmmaker's "big popular breakthrough" (209).

What is striking about von Trier's filmmaking career is the profound change in his view of the role performance plays in film. Dogma filmmaking, which demands a filmmaker's total focus on the actor's performance and thus "gives cinema back to its actors" (Jorgensen. Personal interview. 26 June 2001), redefined von Trier's view of performance. Von Trier acknowledges this shift in his relationship to the actors, yet denies that there was a total lack of attention to performance in his earlier work. To answer Ib Bondebjerg's question about his neglect of the actor's craft and storytelling in favour of being a "masterful manipulator of images" (217) in his early work, von Trier recalls how he previously didn't want "to engage in a dialogue with the actor about their views on the psychology of a given character." He states, "I had my own, very precise interpretation of what I wanted, but that doesn't mean that I considered the acting negligible. The actors' presence was just as important as in other films, but the psychological dimension was of no interest to me" (quoted in Hjort and Bondebjerg 217).

Stellan Skarsgård, who plays Jan in *Breaking the Waves*, stated "When I saw *The Element of Crime* I said to myself I wanna work with this director when he gets interested in people. It took him a few films. I think *The Kingdom* was the first big step, but it's very courageous of him. He's a very successful, skilled director who's totally changing his way of working" (quoted in Floyd 28). Elsewhere, von Trier admitted that it

was his “conscious decision not to be too close to the actors” (quoted in Björkman “Naked Miracles,” 14). The proximity to the actors in *Dogma* filmmaking reflects the filmmaker’s discovery of “an emotional vulnerability and grasp of human feeling that were barely hinted at in his earlier work” (Floyd 28). With *Breaking the Waves*, von Trier won the Grand Prix du Jury at Cannes 1996, a César for Best Foreign Film, and the EFA award for Best European Film.

The production of *Dogma* films forced von Trier to question his previous filmmaking practices and his view of performance. Likewise, the novelty and inexperience in this mode of filmmaking is something that both actors, Jorgensen and Watson, shared. Von Trier describes typecasting Emily Watson for the role of Bess, “Emily was the only one who came to the casting barefoot and with no make-up at all! There was something Jesus-like about her which attracted me. She had had no earlier film experience. Which means that she was, to a great extent, forced to trust me as a director” (quoted in Björkman “Naked Miracles,” 14). *Breaking the Waves* (wherein Watson replaced Helena Bonham Carter who left the production at the last minute) earned Watson Oscar and Golden Globe nominations at the age of 29. Before beginning her acting career, Watson studied English at Bristol University and completed a postgraduate course in drama at The Drama Studio in London. Her first job was at the Royal Shakespeare Company at the age of 25. Her performance as Bess, in *Breaking the Waves*, has won critical acclaim and landed her roles ranging from the tragic to the comic, such as Maggie in *The Boxer* (1997), Jacqueline du Pré in *Hilary and Jackie* (1998), Angela McCourt in *Angela’s Ashes*, Trixie Zurbo in *Trixie* (2000), Elsie in *Gosford Park* (2001),

Mary O'Brian in *Equilibrium* (2001), Reba McClane in *Red Dragon* (2002) and Lena Leonard in *Punchdrunk Knuckle Love* (2002).

In *Breaking the Waves*, Watson plays the character of Bess, who lives in a Presbyterian Scottish village where strict ethical codes dominate the lives of the villagers. Bess marries Jan, an oilrig worker. Soon after their wedding Jan returns to sea. As Bess's desperate need for Jan's physical presence increases, she prays to God to return Jan to her. Her prayers are answered, but the reason for Jan's return is an accident at sea that leaves him paralysed. Upon his return, Jan asks Bess to make love to strangers. He tells Bess that hearing these sexual stories involving his wife with other men will heal him. When Bess acquiesces to Jan's wishes, her excessive behaviour makes her an outcast in the religious community. Yet, Bess's belief in her own virtue and the spiritual union with Jan make her fight against the disapproval of others, until she is told Jan is about to die. Bess sacrifices herself for Jan, believing that making love to strangers would make Jan better. However, Bess is taken advantage of and brutally raped on board a ship. Bess dies injured in her body and having lost her will to live with a lack of hope for Jan's recovery. After her death, Jan recovers as Bess has prayed he would. He steals Bess's body and decides to bury it in the sea, instead of letting the priest bury her in the ground and consign her to hell.

Lizzie Francke writes that "The close scrutiny of Bess's disintegration is at times so painfully raw and shocking that sometimes one doesn't want to look anymore – especially as Emily Watson's performance, in which she seems to empty herself out onto the screen is so believable" (37). Margo Jefferson describes Watson's acting as fearless and states that "She joins her physical and vocal resources to naked feeling in a way that

is astonishing. It comes down to the willingness to push yourself into emotional territory that may scare you as much as it scares your audience. It's the most mysterious and the finest quality an actor can have. Let's call it fearlessness" (E2). In Janet Maslin's opinion, Watson's "role calls for a trusting, absolutely unguarded performance, and the film would have been destroyed by anything less. Ms. Watson creates Bess with a devastating immediacy, and she deeply rewards the camera's penetrating gaze" (C12). Alex Kuczynski states that the characters Watson plays "call for someone small whose intellectual and spiritual presence eventually dominates the room. On screen, her face seems as fragile as a blossom; her eyes serene, confused little puddles of clear blue; her cheeks as cartoonishly full as those of a kewpie doll" (2A11).

Likewise for theatre actor Bodil Jorgensen, performing in *The Idiots* was a new experience that enabled her to explore the depths of both her character and herself as an actor. Prior to *The Idiots*, Jorgensen had acted in *Mirror of the Planet (Planetens spejle)* (1992), *Russian Pizza Blues* (1992), *Just a Girl (Kun en pige)*, (1995), *Sunes familie* (1997) *Agnus Dei (Nonneborn)*, (1997) and in television series such as *Strisser på Samsø* and in the episode titled "Biblioteket" of a series called *Alle tiders nisse* (12.3.1995). Apart from these film and television experiences, she acted mainly in the theatre after her graduation from The National Theatre School in 1990. She was granted a position at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen in 1997.

The Idiots pushed von Trier's exploration of the ways in which Dogma filmmaking can be "liberating for the actors" (von Trier quoted in Kelly 139) to the extreme. This made Jorgensen's acting experience unique. The Dogma filmmaking created a peaceful atmosphere, where the actor was able to retreat into her own mind, use

her inner resources and imagination and believe in the truth of the moment. Yet, this liberation that enabled the heightened internalisation in her performance, is different from the liberation in other actors' performances-something that has been understated in the reception of the film. The film's "ensemble of performance artists who base their allegedly subversive activities on a radical rejection of boundaries between spectators, performers, and performance space" (Sterritt 75), turned the focus to the physicality of the actors' performance. The focus was on relinquishing the control that would restrict physical and psychological expressions. Jorgensen's performance bears testimony to the methodologies which Dogma filmmaking also emphasizes: subdued expression in the evocation of the vulnerability in being human, "the exploration of human frailty in [von Trier's] filmmaking process" (Roman 47). A new mode of intimate filmmaking required Jorgensen to respond subtly to the intimate presence of the camera. Moreover, the emphasis on the actor's introspection helped to embody her character's fear of intimacy and hidden anguish.

In *The Idiots*, Jorgensen plays the part of Karen. She joins a group of people who have reunited to discover what they call "inner idiocy," that is inner authenticity- a condition not defined by the behavioural norms or social roles society has imposed upon them. Karen is the outsider in the group. She doesn't believe that the authenticity of being lies in externalised behaviour. For her, silence is a guarantee of her non-theatricality and authentic existence. The characters live in a deserted house, where they practice exceeding physical and psychological limitations through the performance of madness. The public spaces function as arenas where the behavioural codes are disrupted and their existence is made aware of. Yet, the strength of the characters' beliefs in their project will

be tested in the end, when they try to perform madness in more private spaces. The project is cancelled when nobody's actions can live up to this challenge. The film ends with Karen returning home, being the only one of the group who can perform madness in a private space.

It is this mode of von Trier's intimate filmmaking that demands an actor's total commitment to the project and willingness to expose one's deepest being to the penetrating gaze of the camera. As Jorgensen recalls, the close presence of the camera makes it impossible for the actor to lie and to pretend to be "in the moment." She recalls von Trier saying, "I don't believe you" if he felt the actor wasn't in the moment (Personal interview. 26 June 2001). It is the authenticity of being von Trier is searching for. The sincere exposure of one's deepest fears and desires - the purity of feelings. The actor is asked to let herself be humiliated by the camera's close gaze into the purest, unfiltered, emotional states - to surrender completely to the camera. To use her inner resources at the deepest level, the actor's mental strength is needed. To create these deeply moving and powerful performances takes a combination of strength and humble innocence, freedom and control. These are the qualities required of the actors, but also essential traits of the characters they portray.

1. SPACE

When Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg wrote the Dogma Manifesto in 1995, the question raised upon the reception of the manifesto was that of setting limitations on expression. According to the rules, “shooting must be done on location. Props and sets must not be brought in. The sound must never be produced apart from the images, or vice versa. The film must be in colour. Special lighting is not acceptable. Optical work and filters are forbidden” (von Trier and Vinterberg quoted in Kelly 227-228). The rules emphasize an authenticity of space used in order to create authentic performances. To prevent pretensions and to create the impression of immediacy - action taking place here and now - the specifications forbid “temporal and geographical alienation” (227). Authenticity of space helps the actor to live through his/her role and to create the truth of inner reality, thus enabling the Stanislavskian equation between the actor and the character. It is also used to highlight the actor’s performance. Portrayals of raw emotional states are openly displayed and are made the focus of the Dogma films.

According to the rules, the space chosen must be simplified and emptied of all the distracting elements. Due to the spatial simplification the focus is on the actors, who are closely observed by the director and the spectator. My purpose is to explore how Scandinavian modernist filmmakers Carl-Theodore Dreyer and Ingmar Bergman who, influenced by August Strindberg’s theatrical legacy, have used spatial simplification to pursue the goal of intimate acting. The comparative analysis of Bodil Jorgensen and Emily Watson’s performances serves to demonstrate that von Trier explores, by creating such opposing modes of acting, which mode best achieves the goal of intimacy. I will

then analyze how the dynamic use of various authentic spaces questions the nature of authentic behaviour in each place. The display of madness becomes the means through which von Trier shows the existence as well as the subversion of behavioural norms in both the domestic setting and in the public space.

Intimate acting

Von Trier's concern with space as a means of highlighting the actors is similar to Scandinavian playwrights and theatre directors, such as Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg, and to modernist filmmakers such as Carl-Theodore Dreyer and Ingmar Bergman, who have modified performances with their attention to space. The concept of space in these artists' *oeuvres* is viewed as inseparable from their redefinition of the actor's craft. If Ibsen's realism was based on bringing drama into the interior setting, specifically into the middle-class living room, Strindberg's modernism emptied the Ibsenian space of all the domestic signifiers. Both pioneering projects enabled the actor to assume a new role. Ibsen redefined the actor's craft, which had to be put into the context of realist social dramas and the theatre. "The playwright as thinker" (Bentley) and his new characters demanded "a new school of actors" (Adler 77):

Where the action is truly full of suspense or emotion, the acting must shock and leap over the footlights – but not by means of acting "tricks". The most important thing for the new actor is that his vanity has to go. Like Ibsen, he must think. He must ask questions. A play consisting of absolute reality requires great conviction to bring off. Poetic realism requires seeing a thing and taking it in – understanding and experiencing the problem. Saying something significant about life required a new technique. No actor before Ibsen had to truly *experience* his part (78; emphasis in original).

The novelty of Strindberg's aesthetics, used in his chamber dramas at the Intimate Theatre, centred around his reconstruction of space.¹ The spatial dematerialisation and scenic simplification minimized the amount of distractions: "With simplicity one wins the solemn calm and quiet in which the artist can hear his own part" (Strindberg quoted in Marker 216). The newly constructed space heightened "the magnetic and revelatory power of the actor" (Marker 290).

Strindberg created the simplification of theatrical expression for the actor's benefit. The quietness and solemnity enabled the actor to hear his/her own part (216). The model for Strindberg's chamber drama originated from Max Reinhardt's "Kammerspiele," a type of chamber play taking place in closed interior setting. The guiding principle that Strindberg adopted from Reinhardt was his emphasis on the actor's role. Reinhardt's first chamber play was a transformation of Ibsen's realistic drama *Ghosts* into a chamber piece by paring down and dematerialising the setting. The ultimate goal of this spatial transformation was that it focused the play's attention solely on the actor. It helped the actor to achieve the right emotional state. The Kammerspiele was Reinhardt's truly intimate theatre, where the actor and the audience could become united. For Reinhardt, drama was to be expressed through the actor: "Today and for all time, man must stand at the centre of the whole art of the theatre, man as actor" (quoted in Styan 16).²

¹ See Strindberg *Open Letters*, for more about Scandinavian experimental Intimate Theatre at the beginning of the 20th century.

² J. L. Styan further writes how for Reinhardt "on the technical side, the acoustics and sightlines could not be faulted, and the focus of attention was everything an actor could ask" (110). To make the theatre its best everyone involved, including the director, writer, designer and composer, each had to put themselves in the actor's place. Reinhardt's actor had to find "the style the play itself dictated" (16).

Strindberg aimed towards achieving the “power of poetic and spiritual expressiveness” (Marker 221) in his work. Simultaneously, he advocated a less theatrical acting style, one paradoxically filled with dramatic intensity. Strindberg’s modernism, embodied by his intimate and condensed chamber space, was adopted by modernist Scandinavian filmmakers who tried to find cinematic equivalents for his principle. Strindberg’s de-theatricalization came to influence modernist Scandinavian filmmakers and had a strong impact on their views on choosing the mode of film acting to be employed in order to achieve intimacy and dramatic intensity. Dreyer’s interest in “the spirit in and behind the things” (“Imagination” 184), and in the cinematic representation that becomes poetry, was modelled after Strindberg’s idea of simplification. Dreyer writes, “For since realism, in itself, is not art, and since, on the other hand, there must be harmony between the genuineness of *feelings* and the genuineness of *things*, I try to force the realities into a form of simplification and abbreviation in order to reach what I will call *psychological realism*” (“My Only” 145; emphasis in original). Dreyer used simplification to introduce abstraction in his films. Abstraction enabled his art to represent “the *inner* and not the *outer* life” (“Imagination” 179; emphasis in original). For Dreyer, simplification “purifies the motif of whatever doesn’t support the idea: But by this simplification the motif is transformed into a symbol, and with symbolism we are already in abstraction, for the idea of symbolism is to operate through suggestion” (179, 184). The abstraction-via-simplification became Dreyer’s principle in his use of space and colours, but more importantly in his view of acting. As an opponent of theatrical acting, Dreyer believed that the truth lay in quietness, in suggestive expressions. Feelings had to be hidden and external expressions avoided (Dreyer “Little,” 135). The “*only* right

expression” (141; emphasis in original) Dreyer searched for had to come from within, and was to be found beneath the surface. This psychological realism, which was built upon simplification, enabled Dreyer to emphasize “the immersion” into the image (123). The subtleties of expression in the actor’s performance were means through which this sort of absorption was accomplished.

In his book, *The Films of Carl-Theodore Dreyer*, David Bordwell analyzes Dreyer’s cinematic use of chamber-art tradition - the “tableau.” He gives examples from *Michael* (1924), *The Parson’s Widow* (1920), *The President* (1919), *Leaves from Satan’s Book* (1920), *Gertrud* (1964), and *The Bride of Glomdal* (1926).³ Bordwell notices that when Dreyer adapted the principles of chamber drama to his films, he also questioned movement as something essential to film. What is important to note is the way in which Dreyer also questioned the movement of the actor’s body. The stillness derived from the chamber drama led not only to the stability of frame space, but also to the lack of physical action in Dreyer’s tableau. Bordwell points out that “often characters force womens’ bodies into poses no less rigid than those of the tableau itself” (195). Bordwell’s close textual analysis enables us to understand how spatial patterns restricted physical action, while the cinematography helped to subordinate figures against the tableau setting. To create intimacy, Dreyer relied on the power of the face. Bordwell writes that

whereas in the tableau, the figure is subordinated to architecture, light, and décor, in the facial shots the human countenance triumphs over the surroundings. If the tableau continues the tradition of chamber art, the facial

³ The theatrical traditions that inspired Dreyer were combined with the influence of Danish painter Dane Vilhelm Hammershoi (1864-1916), whose examination of the interior as still life, and subordination of figure to architecture (Bordwell 42), characterized his oeuvre.

shot return to the tradition of portraiture... In the northern countries especially, middle-class aspirations and self-definitions find their representation in portraiture. Dreyer's aesthetic... explicitly appeals to the portrait tradition in its psychological conception of acting and the close-up. Thus the significance, which we intuitively assign to Dreyer's close-ups, has its source in a systematic principle whereby tableau and face constitute dialectical poles informed by two artistic traditions... In order to relinquish the tableau, Dreyer turns the face into a theatre. The face reveals what the tableau cannot. For dynamic movement in long shot is substituted dynamic movement in close-up; an acrobatic range of bodily behaviour (such as we find in Keaton or Eisenstein) is replaced by subtly nuanced range of facial behaviour (51).

The methods Dreyer used to explore the possibilities of chamber drama and their subsequent manifestations in performance link Dreyer to Bergman. The confined space, created by the use of chamber drama, led to a restriction of the actor's body. Bordwell states that the "tableau seldom permits the dynamic representation of emotional qualities; its abstraction creates an ascetic geometry. As a result, Dreyer's actors restrict their bodily movements" (51). Like Dreyer, Bergman relied on the actor's face in the projection of "the most intimate human qualities," the "soul" (Bordwell 51), which the tableau cannot reveal.

Marilyn Johns Blackwell studies Bergman's chamber trilogy: *Through a Glass Darkly* (1961), *Winter Light* (1962), and *Silence* (1963) in relation to Strindberg's chamber plays *Stormy Weather*, *The Burned House*, *The Ghost Sonata*, and *The Pelican* (all written in 1907). She notes the manner in which Bergman employed the chamber-like aesthetics in his film career- not truly achieving his goal of intimate filmmaking until he made *Persona* (1966). Johns Blackwell criticizes the means Bergman uses in his trilogy, to achieve filmic concentration. Strindberg's "simplicity of spatial presentation" (Blackwell 61) - the condensed space of the Intimate Theatre - enables a spectator's field

of vision to draw him/her closer to the actor. However, Johns Blackwell highlights how the explorations of “chamber-dramalike relationships” (61) need to be done in conjunction with a mobile, dynamic and free-flowing camera. In Johns Blackwell’s opinion, to draw a spectator closer to the actors and “involve the spectator emotionally” (60), the self-reflexive use of dynamic camera movements is required. Once the spectator is aware of the tension between flatness and depth, and the construction of a “cinematic kind of poetic reality” (60), he/she experiences a truly cinematic counterpart for intimate theatrical space. This gives Johns Blackwell reason for arguing that solely in *Persona* does Bergman find a cinematic equivalent for Strindbergian theatrical concentration. Thus it could be assumed that for Johns Blackwell, Dreyer achieves this same “cinematic kind of poetic reality” exclusively in *The Passion of Joan of Arc*.

What is left unmentioned in Johns Blackwell’s account is the way in which *Persona* also exemplifies the director’s exploration of intimate acting. In the works of Bergman and Dreyer, concentration is achieved through various cinematographic means, ranging from the stability of space aided by an immobile camera and length of shot, to the space created by the dynamic use of cinematography, as well as through the acting. If *Persona* is the culmination of filmic concentration, as Johns Blackwell suggests, then it demonstrates the filmmaker’s view of the acting mode which best lends itself to heightened intimacy. It is my assertion that these directors encouraged their actors to adopt a Strindbergian mode of acting, one based on subtle, yet intense facial expressions. The goal of this mode is to engage and absorb the spectator into the dramatic mood of solemnity. The qualities that characterize Liv Ullmann’s performance in *Persona* or

Renée Falconetti's performance in *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, were the means by which the filmmakers created filmic concentration, the impression of intimacy and intensity.

Johns Blackwell's discussion of cinematic counterparts to the Strindbergian concentration ignores the issue of acting altogether. In this way, her approach is symptomatic of the way in which the difference between intimate space in theatre and film has been studied. Scholars have traditionally highlighted the director's role over the actor's in the creation of intimacy within the cinematic apparatus. Thus, the difference between theatrical and filmic concentration in terms of acting is critically unexplored. The spatial simplification in Dreyer and Bergman's works lays the groundwork for a particular style of acting and the achievement of dramatic intensity. The performances are reflections of an intimate acting mode rooted in a specific time and space. What is overlooked is how cinematography and the actor's craft play a crucial role in the creation of intimacy. There has been no attempt to understand the ways in which they function in tandem with one another.

I've never been so close to what I love in acting [as when performing in *The Idiots*] (Jorgensen. Personal interview. 26 June 2001).

Lars wanted the characters and the emotions to be right at the centre of everything, and everything else was peripheral to that (Emily Watson quoted in Paterson 29).

Bodil Jorgensen and Emily Watson observe how the use of cinematography is subordinated to the actor's performance in Dogma filmmaking. The lack of distraction makes it easy for the actor to be "in the moment." Robby Müller's style of cinematography in *Breaking the Waves* is characterised by a wide-screen format, freely

moving hand-held cameras, out-of-focus scenes, and “grainy colours [that] point towards the effort to get *the* ‘moment’ - *the* best performance with no distractions” (Müller quoted in Oppenheimer and Williams 18; emphasis in original). The lack of aesthetization in Dogma, serves to highlight the actors and enhance the audience’s concentration on them. According to Müller, it forces one to “rediscover looking at things innocently” (quoted in Oppenheimer and Williams 20).⁴ In Jorgensen’s opinion, the high footage ratio and the unfelt presence of the cameras, enable a continuous, uninterrupted heightening of feeling to become possible: “In Dogma, there are moments when you are not aware of filming and you are still in the picture. Nothing disrupts the flow of the actor’s stream of consciousness. There is space for using your own memory and making pictures in your mind. I’ve never been so close to what I love in acting” (Jorgensen. Personal interview. 26 June 2001).

The essence of spatial simplification in Dogma is supported by cinematography that is consistent with the film’s focus on the actor. Von Trier, commenting on his film *Breaking the Waves*, says,

The actors were allowed to move within the scene as they pleased and they never needed to follow any determined action. When we later cut down scenes, our only thought was to increase the intensity in the performance, without regard as to whether the image is in focus, well composed or as to whether we cross the line. This has resulted in sudden jumps in time within the scenes that you perhaps don’t comprehend as jumps in time. Rather, they give an *impression of compression*” (quoted in Björkman “Naked Miracles,” 14; emphasis mine).

⁴ See more about Müller’s work for Wim Wenders and Jim Jarmusch, and his influences including Gianni Di Venanco, Giuseppe Lanci, Conrad Hall, Gordon Willis, and the late Nestor Almendros in Oppenheimer and Williams 18.

This spatial simplification, together with cinematography, aims at intensifying performance in Dogma filmmaking and giving the “impression of compression,” thus redefining Strindberg’s modernist use of space.

Both Watson and Jorgensen refer to the intimacy of filmmaking, yet their performances and their renderings of intimacy, are remarkably opposite. In what follows, I will analyze two scenes, one in *Breaking the Waves* and the other in *The Idiots*. In both of these scenes, intimacy is felt and achieved, yet through very different means. What differentiates these moments of intimacy in each film is the variance between the actors’ response to the surrounding space and to the close presence of cameras. The scene at the beginning of *The Idiots*, where Karen is standing alone by the window holding a phone, depicts the actor striving towards heightened introspection. This is further accentuated by her unawareness of the space surrounding her. This scene is an example of the way in which von Trier takes advantage of the actor’s background. Von Trier uses Jorgensen’s experience as a theatre actor and adjusts it to film by building intimacy through theatrical means. The chosen space mimics an intimate, theatrical chamber space. During the whole scene the camera is relatively static, as if recording the performance on stage. The emptiness and quietness of the room further enhances our concentration on the actor, who is performing for the privileged gaze of the camera. All distractions are absent from the room. Karen stands by the window. She turns to look towards the door, approaches it, then closes it. She comes back to the window, to her own spot, under the close scrutiny of the camera, and dials the number. Her face is filled with subtle, yet intensified expressions. She places the phone against her ear. She stares outside without moving her body, motionless except for her eyes which blink a few times. She is in her own world

that is being disrupted by the voice “Anders speaking.” The camera moves closer to her face, set against a white wall in an extreme close-up. Still, she stares outside, at a distance. After hearing a voice, her eyes become moist with tears and she tries to hold back her tears by stiffening her mouth. When the emotion overcomes her, she puts her head down, simultaneously hiding her face with her hands. We only hear her crying. The camera doesn’t move. She raises her head and we briefly see her tearful face, while she keeps looking outside, hiding from the camera. She then quickly turns towards the camera, but closes her eyes to retreat to her own world, immediately swinging her head to turn away from the camera’s gaze.

The previous analysis of Jorgensen’s performance leads one to consider von Trier’s direction of her performance as the clearest example of the adaptation of Strindberg’s modernist principles to film. Jorgensen is a Strindbergian modern actor, able to listen to her own performance due to the peace of the surroundings. The lack of agitation in the cinematography and the quietness of the aesthetic space add to this feeling of intimacy in the environment. This spatial simplification classifies Jorgensen as a Strindbergian actor who is “able to attend to the role, to concentrate all his thoughts on it, and not let himself be distracted from it” (Strindberg *Open Letters*, 22). She has “the imagination or the gift of imagining the character and the situation so vividly that they take shape” (22), thus becoming “the artist,” who “gets into a trance, forgets himself, and finally *becomes* the person he is to play” (23). Jorgensen’s subtle response to intimacy finds a counterpart in Watson’s performance and in her character’s unrestrained and fearless exploration of it in *Breaking the Waves*.

Breaking the Waves begins with an intimate portrayal of Bess in the church. The scene begins with a close-up of Bess's eyes looking down. She soon starts to roll them up, then quickly to the left. The smile appears on Bess's face and she rolls her eyes back down again. Bess raises her head far up and widens her eyes while saying: "His name is Jan." She acts out her uncontainable excitement. Bess puts her head down again, while the male voice is heard saying "I don't know him." She starts to roll her eyes and repeats the same eye movement witnessed in the very beginning of the scene. As a part of her child-like innocent excitement, her body is in constant motion. By this circling of her eyes, she surrounds the camera and thus makes us aware of its presence. Jorgensen achieves something similar, but through different means. While Karen's scene portrays her dissociating herself from the surrounding space into her own world, Bess's scene tells us from the outset of the film about her willingness to respond to – whether it be in opposition to or in embrace of - her surroundings. Karen's escape from the presence of cameras is in contrast to the way in which Bess actually "flirts" with the camera. Instead of taking refuge in her own private world, Bess enjoys performing and making others aware of her own imaginary world. She demonstrates her heightened awareness by self-consciously responding to the intimate presence of the camera.

When the male voice asks: "Can you even tell us what matrimony is?" we see a close-up of Bess from below, her eyes looking up. She then circles her eyes from left to right, saying: "it's when two people are joined in God." The voice continues to ask if she is capable of bearing the responsibilities in her own marriage. She slowly raises her head, circles her eyes, and answers without a second thought: "I know I am." The priest asks if she can think of anything of real value that the outsiders have brought with them.

Bess looks down then starts to raise her head and eyes. Without holding back her smile, she says: "their music," stretching the words and rolling the Scottish "r." After finishing her sentence, her eyes are still fixed on the priest and she keeps smiling openly. Bess exits the church. She is seen looking down, but she soon starts to roll her eyes from left to right. Next, we see a close-up of Bess's face. Her eyes are closed and she looks towards the sun that is reflected on her face. Abruptly, she turns to look at the camera and smiles. She closes her eyes but keeps facing the camera. The closed eyes are not a signal that she wishes to escape from the presence of the camera. Even when closed, we are aware of her open performance for the camera and her self-reflexive enjoyment of it. What inspires her feeling of enjoyment is the intimate presence of the camera that is devoted solely to her performance. This repeated motion of circling her eyes, punctuated by a crazy laugh, is a performance directed towards the camera. The culmination of this self-reflexivity being evident at the end of the scene wherein Bess is seen looking directly into the camera's lens.

What becomes important is the way in which both of these actors experience the intimacy of the camera. It becomes a larger metaphor for the intimacy the characters feel with other people and their surrounding space. Both of these films study the intimacy in physical terms. Karen is physically detached from other characters, whereas Bess's fascination with the physical intimacy with other people becomes a major theme that the film examines. Both of these characters display awkwardness caused by their inexperience with intimacy. This awkwardness is not hidden. Bess shows her fascination with this inexperienced intimacy whereas Karen enacts her fear of it. Both characters view intimacy as temptation; closeness they haven't previously experienced,

becomes afraid of, yet desire. For Karen, intimacy is an unknown territory. She learns to trust this feeling, and to let herself feel it.

Although Jorgensen's performance in *The Idiots* is considered an example of the psychological introspection that is attained by spatial simplification, the film also analyzes this process in a self-reflexive parody. The empty deserted house where the idiots go and find their "inner idiocy," takes the idea of simplified space to the extreme. Von Trier has chosen a space where the bare, white walls are enough to confine the space yet create an interior, domestic setting. This setting permits the actors to concentrate on the expression of their own emotional states. The film self-reflexively explores how this empty space enables the characters to find their inner authenticity, "inner idiocy." In the fictional, yet documentary-like sequences that disrupt the main storyline, the actors self-reflexively analyze the influence that this condensed, empty space has upon the exploration of their innermost psychological being. We see these characters manifest and externalise their madness in an effort to tap into that internalized psychological space, which is distinct from the portrayal of Karen's psychological complexity.

However, to draw a line between the emphasis on deep psychology in Jorgensen's performance and the lack of it in others would be to unjustly simplify the issue. Jorgensen analyzes von Trier's choice of the empty house, where the actors spent six weeks building their characters before the shooting of the film began. According to her, the empty space heightened one's self-awareness, causing nothing to disturb the concentration on oneself. Due to the lack of distracting elements, the actor became aware of his/her own limitations. These limitations were freely explored, just as the actors were encouraged to exceed them. This process of introspection changed the actors as people

(Personal interview. 26 June 2001). Jorgensen's analysis of the spatial simplification is further proof of how von Trier uses physical manifestations of intimacy in a complex way. *The Idiots* is an example of how spatial simplification aims at exceeding the limits in two different ways. On the one hand, Jorgensen's performance involves the actor's psychological introspection and the discovery of a hidden inner reality, brought to the surface by the subtlety of expression. On the other hand, the limits that are exceeded in others' performances are explored in more tactile, physical terms. In both acting modes, the authentic space makes it possible for the actors to live through their role and thus create their characters from within. The externalisations are also the result of actors having used their personal experiences for the creation of their characters. Thus, von Trier emphasizes the importance of an authentic setting for the purpose of creating authentic characters, but then works on that principle by moving towards more modernist principles and building a Strindbergian intimacy with spatial simplification. However, with von Trier, the spatial simplification also becomes imbued with physical, postmodernist manifestations. Boundaries become blurred and more ambiguous in the use of the actor's body and mind.

Von Trier's use of spatial simplification creates a continuum between himself, Strindberg, Dreyer, and Bergman in the common aim for concentration and intensity. Yet, von Trier's cinematography is subordinated to the use of performance, not vice versa, as previously in the works of his modernist predecessors. The cinematography that captures the actors' movements is what Johns Blackwell would describe as "self-reflexive." It studies the flatness and depth dichotomy, and the chamber drama-like relationships by surrounding and constantly observing the actors from various angles and

distances. What is important is the way in which fluid movements of the cameras are extensively used to create unbridled intimacy that encourages the actors' spontaneous expressions and gestures. They use their entire body to externalise emotions.

The performance of marginality

The first part of this chapter studied how von Trier redefined the intimacy of chamber space by exploring opposing manifestations of intimacy in the actors' performances. Now my aim will be to examine how von Trier works within a chamber setting to fulfil Dogma's demand for authentic space. By drawing on the theatrical practices of Ibsen and Strindberg, von Trier continues a long tradition of Scandinavian chamber drama. Von Trier aligns himself with Scandinavian (male) playwrights and filmmakers who are recognised as depicting womens' experiences, their need to belong, as well as their yearning for freedom and autonomy in the domestic space. The revolt against prescribed social roles and behavioural norms and the subsequent experience of marginality are what von Trier's protagonists share with their Scandinavian forerunners. Von Trier returns to a chamber setting and studies novel ways to portray filmic representations which explore female identity within the domestic space. The use of chamber space - which ranges from a self-reflexive parody to nostalgia - is used to redefine Ibsen's "poetry of feminism" (Templeton *Ibsen's Women*, 110) and to reconstruct the image of contemporary Scandinavian women.

Women's submission to, or revolt against, the prescribed social roles embodied by the domestic space was a major theme for Ibsen from *The League of Youth* (1869). By comparing the chamber plays *A Doll's House* (1879) and *Hedda Gabler*

(1890) by Ibsen, and *Stormy Weather*, *The Burned House*, *The Ghost Sonata*, and *The Pelican* by Strindberg, one can see the oppositional dynamic between Ibsen and Strindberg's depiction of women. Through the use of characterization and pioneering staging techniques, Ibsen and Strindberg articulated their conflicting views of female emancipation in their times, voicing their disagreement over women's identity in the domestic space. This was in response to the Scandinavian proto-feminist movement. Ibsen did so in more of a positive light than Strindberg. To what extent Strindberg was a "misunderstood knight of the weaker sex" (Uddgren 25) is debatable. Nevertheless he responded to Ibsen's radicalism in depicting women's autonomy, by defending the woman's place with his depiction of a "half-woman" (Strindberg *Miss Julie*, 175), such as the title character in *Miss Julie* (1888). Strindberg's plays stand as a reaction to Ibsen's, which displayed "the first signs of the rise of feminism" (Dukes 50). The way in which these playwrights engaged themselves in this sociological debate has led to the recognition that "the Nordic countries have produced some of the most penetrating analyses of the moral contradictions of modernity" (Bertilsson and Therborn 17), analyses such as Ibsen's *Doll's House*, "the most important Nordic contribution to modern social thought" (Bertilsson and Therborn 17). Contemporary feminist writers (such as Finney, Velissariou, Templeton) outline the ways in which these plays still give us the tools to study women's status within the domestic space.

Joan Templeton devotes her entire book, *Ibsen's Women*, (1997) to the examination of Ibsen's radical characterization of his female protagonists. They were already the target of her analysis in her essay about a woman's submission to her "place": *Fallen Women and Upright Wives: 'Woman's Place' in Early Modern Tragedy* (1994).

Templeton analyzes how Ibsen's *Doll's House* questioned the nineteenth-century ideology of the "two spheres" (*Ibsen's Women* 331). According to Templeton, Ibsen's keen perception of the two different spaces made us aware of the behavioural norms defined along gender lines in the private and public sphere. In Templeton's opinion, "In inventing the metaphor of the Doll House, Ibsen captured the quintessential nature of the 'woman's sphere'" (139).

For Templeton, Ibsen was a writer of feminist poetries for whom society stands as "the enemy" (325) and his radical depiction of rebellious female characters make his characters "the fullest embodiments" (335) of his modernism. Templeton considers the rebelling of Ibsen's women against their prescribed roles - defying and redefining their place imposed upon them by society - essential to the development of modern European drama. Ibsenism is "the drama of individualism" that George Lukacs finds to be characteristic of modern drama (quoted in Templeton *Ibsen's Women*, 332).

For Ibsen, madness was a tool used to explore the marginalized position of women - their rebellion and struggle towards autonomy. Ibsen used mental illness as "a metaphor for female revolt" (Velissariou 89). By analyzing such Ibsen characters as Hedda in *Hedda Gabler*, Rebecca West in *Rosmersholm* (1886), Ellida and Hilda Wangel in *The Lady from the Sea* (1888), and Aline Solness in *The Master Builder* (1892), Velissariou argues that "the psychological reactions regarded as manifestations of psychic disorder are in reality a form of revolt against the roles that these female characters would have to assume to comply with the prevalent notions of femininity" (68).

With the help of feminist studies, it is possible to clarify the extent to which von Trier draws on the Scandinavian theatrical tradition by continuing to analyze “the woman’s place.” Scandinavian modernist filmmakers not only continued to redefine chamber drama aesthetics, as previously mentioned, but also relied on the chamber space for their depiction of a variety of social interactions in that domestic setting. Filmmakers took part in the discussion on women’s domestic identity by using strikingly similar tools (to each other as well as to the theatrical pioneers) with which to depict women’s experiences. The performance of madness has been one of those representational tools with which heroines’ experiences have been depicted. This tool finds political resonance when it is employed with various authentic spaces, particularly with the domestic space, that metaphorically and literally have confined their elemental humanity. Von Trier continues to explore the dynamics of the private/public space, the rebellion against social norms and behavioural norms, and the performance of madness to depict women in the domestic space, which is at least partly a self-conscious act on his part. Von Trier has often claimed to be “more feminine than most women” (quoted in Hjort and Bondebjerg 220; see also, von Trier quoted in Smith 25). My analysis of performance has led me to study the ways in which von Trier uses performance and aesthetic practices to enable women’s experiences of marginalization to be seen and felt in authentic space.

I will focus on analyzing Jorgensen’s performance of marginality in *The Idiots*, with relation to authentic spaces, that range from the public space to the domestic interior setting. This analysis of the film best exemplifies how contemporary Scandinavian filmmaking continues to engage itself in sociological debates. In my opinion, *The Idiots* is one of the most striking instances of a filmmaker taking part in

these debates. The dynamic use of various spaces helps to structure the film in accordance with proper behavioural norms. The way in which the film concentrates on exploring “the social life that is organized within the physical confines of a building” (Goffman *Presentation*, xi), expresses von Trier’s interest in, as well as aligns him with, a long tradition of social drama in Scandinavian film and theatre. The filmmaker contemplates the protagonist’s revolt against the social norms that prevent her from discovering her authentic self, that is, her deepest desires and fears as well as her free spirit. The performances are set within a specific time and place, where social norms dominate. Thus, they can be most beneficially analysed with the help of sociological studies, such as Goffman’s *Behaviour in Public Places* and *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

The performances in *The Idiots* go hand in hand with Goffman’s analysis of “region behaviour” (*Presentation* 106-140), as the dynamics between “unfocused” and “focused interaction” (*Behavior* 33-148) are acted out. The film begins with a scene in the restaurant where Karen is having her lunch. The space is characterized by the stillness of a chamber-like, domestic-looking setting. The camera moves around Karen. We view her profile and see her from below. We see her closing her eyes to detach herself from her surroundings. She is in her own world. She looks further down when the camera moves closer to her face. Karen’s unawareness of her surrounding space is further enhanced when a waiter approaches her table. Her body remains still, she doesn’t respond to his presence in any way. She avoids eye contact by glancing away and being completely unresponsive to the waiter’s suggestions. She clearly acts out her non-belonging in that place. Yet, what the scene introduces to us is the way in which she is

not submissive. Instead, her way of being is filled with dignity. Finally, when we hear the waiter suggesting salmon, she confronts him by looking up at him and smiling slightly. She swings her body playfully and with a smile on her face confesses: "It sounds lovely, but I'm afraid I can't afford it." "Can we afford the mineral water? Or shall we use the faucet?" asks the waiter. "A mineral water? Certainly," answers Karen. We closely observe how Karen now rolls her eyes to the right. In the next shot we see Stoffer (Jens Albinus), who is one of "the idiots," performing madness in the public space of the restaurant. Karen's curiosity towards Stoffer's behaviour is contrary to her previous indifference to the waiter's presence. "Your salad, bon appetit," the waiter's voice interrupts Karen, who continues to study Stoffer.

The camera moves closer and closer towards Karen's face. We see her smiling widely and looking at the waiter. Her smile is more internal and not directed at him. The smile we see on her face tells us that Stoffer's behaviour has triggered feelings of warm sympathy from within. We see Stoffer being fed by Susanne (Louise Hassing), who is in the restaurant with the idiots. We see a close-up of Karen eating bread; however, she is more interested in looking at Stoffer than eating. Stoffer stands up and leaves the table yelling. He walks closer to other people's table and interrupts their meal, saying "hi" to them. He finally goes to greet Karen, who looks at him with an open smile, unlike the other diners. The camera moves closer to Karen's face, she is fascinated and open. Stoffer touches her face and grabs her hand. Karen pulls herself slightly away from him. She puts her head down and doesn't know how to deal with him. "You must keep him under control," says the waiter. Susanne tries to pull Stoffer away, but Karen's sudden, strong hold of Stoffer's hand is her way of showing her acceptance. Karen looks

at Stoffer, peacefully closes her eyes twice and stares at him, almost as if in love. Karen asks “You and me”? “Shall we go outside together”? Karen leaves the table, still tightly holding Stoffer’s hand. This opening scene demonstrates several important things about Karen: her courage and willingness to face the unknown; her questioning of authentic behaviour and where it is to be found; and her need for belonging, which is conveyed, while her sense of autonomy is still upheld. Throughout the film Karen struggles to maintain her independence, yet dreams of being accepted as well as recognized as an important member of a community.

The behavioural norms are destroyed by the idiots’ performance of madness in such public spaces as the office, factory, swimming hall, restaurant, and classroom. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman studies “region behaviour” by viewing it from the perspective of the theatrical performance. In another volume, *Behaviour in Public Places*, Goffman’s observation of the social life of the mentally ill is used to analyze the detachment from socially sanctioned behavioural norms. What is relevant for us here is the way in which theatrical performance in the form of madness is used as a means to critique the organization of social life. Von Trier uses the performance of madness as a self-reflexive device to explore the existence of social behavioural norms. What the performances of madness in *The Idiots* depicts are moral “requirements of decorum” that Goffman defines as “rules regarding non-interference and non-molestation of others, rules regarding sexual propriety, rules regarding respect for sacred places” (*Presentation* 107). The characters study how madness can be externalised through uncontrolled bodily movements and through speech which goes beyond the demands of communication. The theatrical performance of madness in public spaces

serves to make us aware of the existing behavioural norms and the extent to which these norms are relied upon in our social interactions. Madness, which is externalised and embodied in the physicality of the performance, makes von Trier's critique of existing behavioural norms and social roles explicit. The actors draw our focus to their externalized performances, which convey the process of those norms being broken down by the behaviour that resists being controlled. The public spaces serve as an arena where the characters do their "spassing," that is, their performances of madness.

Goffman analyses the changes in one's behaviour when the line, which divides "front and back regions" is being crossed. The idiots' spassing deals with a refusal to change the nature of behaviour when this dividing line is crossed. There is no "putting on and taking off of a character" (Goffman *Presentation*, 121). What the performance of madness brings to the public, that is, front regions, is

the backstage language of behaviour, ...which allows minor acts which might easily be taken as symbolic of intimacy and disrespect for others present and for the region, while front region conduct is one which disallows such potentially offensive behaviour. It may be noted here that backstage gives individuals an opportunity to regress or whether regression, in the clinical sense, is backstage conduct invoked on inappropriate occasions for motives that are not socially approved (128).

The characters' spassing project will be tested in the end, when it is time to see which of them can spass in the presence of family members or friends. The project will be terminated by virtue of the fact that none of the characters are able to deconstruct prescribed behavioural norms in a more private space. They cannot avoid putting on and taking off character when going from a more public, front region, to a more private, back region, that is dominated by the strictness of the behavioural norms. Karen becomes the

only one who can do this. Although Goffman finds examples from public and more private spaces, he considers the front and back regions and the subsequent region behaviour, particularly “the staging devices,” to be part of “the middle-class living” (123). Karen’s spassing at home is indicative of how the “rules of decorum” (109) dominate not only in public space but also, even more strongly, in domestic space.

The final scene depicts Karen’s spassing at home. Karen, family members and Susanne sit around the table and have coffee in the living room. The quiet living room, which embodies a domestic interior setting filled with domestic signifiers, hides conflict behind its harmonious surface. In that space, Karen acts like an outsider. She looks down and rolls her eyes around the room to avoid eye contact with her own family members. Karen’s way of avoiding eye-contact throughout the film is her way of acting out her rejection of the “focused interaction” that is strongly based on “face engagements as a sign of social closeness and relatedness” and where “the refuser rejects the other’s claim to membership in the gathering and the social occasion in which the gathering occurs” (Goffman *Behavior*, 104).

The stable camera enhances the stillness of the living room and focuses on Karen, who eats slowly and thoughtfully, constantly gazing down at the table. The camera starts to circle around and finds Susanne, who is patiently looking at Karen, waiting for her to spass. It then focuses on Karen, who holds a plate close to her mouth. The stillness of the room is shattered when Karen spits cream from her mouth and starts to spass. Karen fills her open mouth with more cake, looks down, and rolls her eyes to the left while simultaneously spitting out the cake. Karen is concentrated on her eating, on her performance. The camera captures the family members’ reactions to Karen’s

provocation and their disturbed, but silent gazing. The camera then pans swiftly back to Karen, who abruptly swings her head back. Her closed eyes register a trance-like stage. She opens her mouth, leans her head towards the right shoulder, then rolls her head down and swings it to the left. The quietness of the living room is further disrupted as Karen continues to fill her wide-open mouth with more cake. Anders, Karen's husband, stands up and we hear the sound of him hitting her on the cheek. Next, we see Susanne following suit, with tears in her eyes. The focus is back on Karen, who keeps on eating, holding back her tears. Susanne stands up and says: "That's enough now, Karen." Karen's mouth is dirty and closed, she is looking down. She cries and the spittle is dripping from her mouth. We see Karen's face in extreme close-up. The camera gets closer to her eyes, which are now full of hope when she looks at Susanne. Susanne responds back to Karen with a glance of promise and asks: "Shall we go?" Karen nods and says "yes." We see her from aside, still looking at Susanne. She puts her head down. She moves her whole body towards the family members, but remains distant and still refuses to look at them. While feigning her indifference, her head is proudly, confidently raised, while she looks towards the living room. She stands and clasps Susanne's hands. Susanne looks at the family and they leave.

Goffman discusses how "a very common form of involvement control occurs at mealtimes" (*Behavior* 61). He finds examples from mental patients or children, who break the behavioural norms by not concealing "'overeagerness' for oral indulgences" and "'oversatisfaction' while consuming them" (62). Karen's spassing, while bringing attention to the act of eating itself, is symbolic of a type of "overinvolvement" (62). Moreover, it becomes an example of Goffman's description of

a bodily kind of “occult involvement” (76) that he defines as a permissible dramaturgical device. Goffman implies that when employed in social situations, this overinvolvement appears as a sign of madness. The occult involvements don’t have “a degree of transparency, a degree of immediate understandability, for all persons present.” “it is this quality of not being present and not being readily recallable to the gathering, rather than the specificities of the improper conduct itself, that creates the disturbing impressions” (76-77). Thus, Karen’s spassing becomes “the situational self-sabotage... [where one] demonstrates at least to himself that his true self is not to be judged by its current setting and has not been subjugated or contaminated by it... [and] demonstrate some kind of distance and insulation from the setting, and behind this, alienations from the establishment” (Goffman *Behavior*, 225).

By separating Karen from the other characters throughout the film, von Trier establishes her as an outsider. Her willingness to join the group in the first place and then her refusal to assimilate herself within the group demonstrates her need to belong, but also her distrust and unwillingness to take part in their mere role-playing. Karen is the only one who finds meaning in the idiots’ project in spassing. The empty house where “everything is so good,” as Karen finally states, enables her to overcome her inhibitions. The emptiness of the house becomes an important metaphor. It signifies the release of all pretensions and demands for behavioural norms, unlike Karen’s home which is the embodiment of these. The idiots’ freedom to spass gives Karen the freedom to experience her previously suppressed emotions. The final outburst at home is Karen’s explicit statement of her rebellion against any norms that have previously defined her existence in that same domestic space. Moreover, von Trier contrasts the exaggerated provocation, the

idiots' performance of madness in the public space, to the small-scale provocation of Karen's spassing at home and the enormity of the disapproval she receives from her family members. The deviance from behavioural norms leads to marginalization not only in the public space, but also in one's home.

Karen aligns herself with Ibsen's female protagonists whose refusal to accept behavioural norms is a catalyst for them to face the unknown. "Nora does not leave the doll house to find some other role in society, but, on the contrary, to try to discover the self she refused in living a role" (Templeton *Ibsen's Women*, 325). In the documentary *The Humiliated* (1998), by Jesper Jargil, about the making of *The Idiots*, we see a scene in which von Trier directs Jorgensen in the spassing scene at Karen's home. We hear von Trier saying to her: "Leave as Nora did. Leave with dignity." Von Trier obviously is referring to Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and the shocking moment of a woman's departure: "When Nora walked out, the whole world heard the bang" (Adler 116). Liv Ullmann analyzes Nora's leaving and describes her as a society's victim:

She says goodbye to everything that is familiar and secure. She does not walk through the door to find somebody else to live with and for; she is leaving the house more insecure than she ever realized she could be. But she hopes to find out who she is and why she is. In this there is a great freedom: the knowledge that I have to part with my present life. I don't know for what. For myself. To be something more than I am now" (263).

The freedom Karen embraces at the end of the film is similar to the freedom Ibsen depicted in *A Doll's House*. It is about the character's free spirit and courage to face the unknown, and the need to discover the hidden self. The experience with the idiots strengthens Karen's discovery of herself and helps her to gain freedom, which she uses in the end. Von Trier contrasts the other characters' externalised, bodily freedom, to

Karen's internalised freedom - which is more serious. In the end we don't know where and for what reason Karen, like Nora, leaves. Yet we know we have witnessed an act of inner strength. Thus, a description of Nora's leaving in Ibsen's play, such as Templeton's, can serve to illuminate Karen's in *The Idiots*: "The poetry of Nora's leave taking lies in the hint of strength and the certainty of struggle as she shuts the door on the doll house to enter the night of the open world" (*Ibsen's Women* 145).

By performing madness in her home Karen not only acts out her unwillingness to stay in her place, but also makes us aware of the behavioural norm she wants to leave behind. Her refusal to accept the domestic role is imminent. It is only in the final scene that takes place at her home that we find out she has lost her baby and didn't attend the funeral. On that day she instead joined the idiots. The fact that Karen refused or could not do what was expected of her, leads to her exclusion from her family. The scene at home, similar to the one in the restaurant, shows Karen's strength, one that is needed for, in Templeton's words, "defying and redefining" the place that society has imposed upon her. For Karen, the performance of madness becomes an outlet for her real traumas that she is ready to leave behind. Her spassing frees her from the roles, which have previously bound her to her home and restricted her existence.

What becomes important in relation to his predecessors, is von Trier's redefined use of the externalised performance of madness, as witnessed in the final scene. In *Persona* Bergman most compellingly explores the performance of madness and its relationship to the quest for the authenticity of space that enables one to find the authentic being. Wheeler Winston Dixon in his essay "*Persona* and the 1960s Art Cinema," examines the use of space, on the island of Fårö, in *Persona*. Although he doesn't focus

on analyzing the use of performance in the film, Dixon emphasizes that Bergman uses space in order to convey to us the transformation in the character of Elisabeth (Liv Ullmann). Dixon implicitly refers to Elisabeth's mental breakdown and her recovery, which is the outcome of freedom of the socially defined behavioural norms:

Only with all other distractions removed can the self really come to the surface, and the world which is interiorised in daily social existence assume emotional center stage. In the austere beautiful, yet implicitly vacant location afforded by Fårö, Bergman found the perfect location for the drama between Elisabeth and Alma: a void waiting to be filled with the raw experience of human emotion. The emotional intensity of *Persona* thus comes not only from the performances, but also from Bergman's sense – that when things were going badly in the studio, there was really only one place to move the production: into the isolation of an uninhabited space, a vacation from ordinary social commerce which only serves to highlight the interior crisis of Elisabeth and Alma (56).

Bergman uses the mental breakdown to exhibit Elisabeth's rebellion against social roles, including her role as a mother. This theatrical role-playing becomes a larger metaphor for her refusal to play a role that precludes her authentic existence. Elisabeth suffers silently and searches for her authentic state of being where pretensions wouldn't dominate: the gestures and expressions she had practiced at theatre are for her mere performance, a lie. As Bergman expresses through Elisabeth's doctor's words:

I understand all right. The hopeless dream of "being". Really "being". At every waking moment, alert. What you are with others and what you are alone. The vertigo and constant hunger to be exposed. To be seen through...maybe even wiped out. Every inflection and every gesture a lie, every smile a grimace. Suicide? No, that's too vulgar. You don't do things like that. But you can refuse to move. Refuse to talk. At least you don't have to lie then. You can shut yourself in and stop playing games to show any faces or make wrong gestures. That's what you think. But reality is diabolical. Your hiding-place is not water-tight. Life trickles in from the outside. And you're forced to react. No one asks if it's true or false. If you're true or just a sham. These things matter only in theatre, hardly even there. I understand why you don't talk or more...why you have created of apathy, a brilliant part to play. I understand and admire. I think you should

go on with it until...you lose your interest. Then you can leave it...like you've left all your other parts.

Mental illness is used as a means to depict the protagonist's search for authentic self and thus, the revolt against social norms. It is important to notice the way that von Trier, like Bergman, studies and questions madness as a form of performance. Both filmmakers question the authenticity of the externalised and internalised performance of madness. As much as the idiots' performance of madness is an act, one could argue that Karen's silence is also one. It is a result of her mental breakdown, which we come to realize in the end. Karen's search for her authentic being prevents her from taking part in the other characters' spassing, but in the end, she is ready to use the externalised performance to set herself free. Karen's internal mental breakdown is transcended by her external performance of madness. If Elisabeth is tempted by the situation where "she is forced to act" and when "no one asks if it's true or false," then Karen is not only tempted but also ready to act out her disinterest in whether she appears true and false. If Bergman leaves unanswered whether Elisabeth is able to find her true being by staying silent and refusing to move, Karen comes to know the reality, which is "diabolical." She becomes ready to abandon her silent and immobile part that has thus far been her way of expressing her authentic existence. She comes to use the falseness of gestures, spassing, to find her authentic self. By doing so, she acts out her freedom to abandon the social role imposed upon her. Now Karen is well ahead in her search for her self, her true identity.

One can argue that the heroines' marginalization and its spatial depiction, is what links von Trier to Bergman and, moreover, to Dreyer. As previously discussed, in connection with *The Idiots*, the performance of madness depicts the way in which the "back region's" more private language of behaviour is being brought to the front-more

public-region. In *Breaking the Waves*, Bess's performance of madness demonstrates her unawareness of the boundary between private and public spaces and the subsequent behavioural norms prevailing within them. One cannot find the changes in Bess's behavior when she is crossing the dividing line; there is no "putting on and taking off of a character" when she moves from private space to public one. Bess's madness becomes a metaphor for her view of spirituality, a view that makes sexuality a tool by which she shows the existence of her spiritual beliefs. By breaking down the rules regarding sexual propriety and respect for sacred places that Goffman defines as moral "rules of decorum," one could argue that Bess aligns herself with Dreyer's "transgressors" (Jenssen 50). Jenssen states that

In Dreyer's fictive world the women are rebels and dreamers; they do not comply with the social norms. They are transgressors: falling in love outside of marriage, becoming pregnant out of wedlock, practicing 'witchcraft.' Their actions are generally the catalysts for the narrative: outsiders disturbing the equilibrium of the social order, women trigger the reactions, so that on the narrative level the male social order must attempt to recover the status quo (50).

Bess's madness is indicative of her image as a dreamer who believes in her magical powers to heal her husband and as a rebel who uses her sexuality to give body to her spiritual beliefs. She disregards the strict behavioural norms imposed by the religious community in which she lives.

Bess uses her sexuality to grant Jan's spiritual wish of saving him. The idea of Bess's making love to strangers keeps Jan alive. This unguarded sexuality leads to her blurring the line between private and public behaviour, as is evident in the scene where Bess runs to Doctor Richardson's (Adrian Rawlins) apartment with a wine bottle and

hands it to him, saying “I’ve come to dance.” Soon after we see Doctor Richardson opening his bedroom door, inside Bess is lying naked on the bed. She tells him “you can touch me now.” Bess spreads her arms and she continues to say: “You can have me now.” Bess’ conviction of being able to save Jan from dying by making love to strangers contradicts the strictness of moral standards of the religious community that she and Doctor Richardsson inhabit and displays Bess’s unawareness of the boundary between private and public behaviour. This will lead to her exclusion first from her home, then from the church, and in the end from the community. Von Trier’s depiction of Bess’s spatial marginalization bears similarities to Foucault’s analysis of madmen and their exclusion from the community in the way that Foucault makes a connection between the liminal space of open sea and madmen’s marginalized position. In *Breaking the Waves* Bess’s “wandering existence” (Foucault 8) as a result of the closing doors at her home and church, takes her to the sea. What is repeated are the scenes of Bess on the sea, in the sailor’s boat, talking to God. When the community has excluded her, we hear Bess relying on God. What these scenes demonstrate is how it is not the community’s, but Bess’s own view of her innocence that frees, even purifies, her. Bess continues pursuing her own spiritual beliefs and takes a boat to the sailors, to whom she makes love. Her going to the sea is not only the result of her exclusion from the community, but also her way of regaining faith in her own righteousness.

This is a redefinition of the “spatial marginalization” (Carney 89) that characterizes Dreyer’s heroines who are “poised precariously on the margins of social discourse – half within it, half somewhere beyond it” (Carney 88). The scenes when Bess is seen on a boat going to a ferry are emblematic of the “complex state of marginality –

being trapped within and yet simultaneously, to some degree, liberated from the expressive systems in place around” (Carney 90), and are also the ones that most clearly characterize Bess’s liminal position in *Breaking the Waves*. Bess “maintains expressive stance half engage with, yet half beyond the repressions of established social and moral categories” (Carney 90). Michel Foucault writes that

to hand a madman over to sailors was to be permanently sure he would not be prowling beneath the city walls; it made sure that he would go far away; it made him a prisoner of his own departure. But water adds to this the dark mass of its own values; it carries off, but it does more: it purifies. Navigation delivers man to the uncertainty of fate; on water, each of us is in the hands of his own destiny; every embarkation is, potentially, the last. It is for the other world that the madman sets sail in his fools’ boat; it is from the other world that he comes when he disembarks. The madman’s voyage is at once a rigorous division and an absolute Passage. In one sense, it simply develops, across a half-real, half-imaginary geography, the madman’s liminal position on the horizon of medieval concern – a position symbolized and made real at the same time by the madman’s privilege of being confined within the city gates: his exclusion must enclose him; if he cannot and must not have another prison than the threshold itself, he is kept at the point of passage. He is put in the interior of the exterior, and inversely. A highly symbolic position, which will doubtless remain his until our own day, if we are willing to admit that what was formerly a visible fortress of order has now become the castle of our conscience (10-11).

The final scenes show how Bess fights against that marginalized position, even if it means her death. These scenes exemplify how Bess is viewed as a rebel whose “exaggerated perverse form of sexuality,” as one of the judges states, is a reason for cancelling Bess’s funeral service. Only the burial can take place. What we then witness are priests consigning Bess, “the sinner,” to hell. Yet Bess was also a dreamer who was “good,” as Doctor Richardson replies, in response to the judges’ demand for clarification of Bess’s psychotic illness. The coffins have been exchanged and Bess won’t be confined

to hell, instead, she will be buried in the sea. According to the characters' religious beliefs, by burying Bess in the sea, her goodness and her purity will be maintained. Moreover, Bess remains an autonomous figure, be it a rebel or a dreamer - "on water, each of us is in the hands of his own destiny" (Foucault 11).

2. Speech

The performances in von Trier's films raise the issue of the female protagonist's troubled relationship to language, which has been a great concern for previous Scandinavian playwrights and filmmakers. My purpose in this chapter is to study von Trier's focus on the use of silence and its expressive counterpart, speech, all of which bears testimony to his interest in the nature of the spoken word. I will analyze the monologues of Emily Watson in *Breaking the Waves* and their self-reflexivity. On a thematic level, these monologues deal with the issue of the possession of the Word spoken, as well as that of God. Von Trier works on a Joan of Arc figure, which Bess's character embodies. It is this spiritual being who would rather die than deny the interventions of God in her existence, as well as the righteousness of her own spiritual beliefs. In the community's eyes, she hovers between being Satan's creature, the child of the Devil, and God's daughter. In *The Idiots*, Jorgensen's silence turns our focus to the presence of the imaginary. Moreover, Karen's autonomy and inner strength are built on her silence.

Both performances bear witness to von Trier's efforts to push through the surface to evoke a "drama in the realm of emotional and spiritual reality" (Brooks 4). Watson's monologues of imagination, the conversations with God, break the surface of the real to "open up the world of spirit" (2). Likewise, von Trier uses Jorgensen's silent soliloquies as tools, with which he "pushes through manners to deeper source of being" (4) and introduces us to the hidden, inner reality. The analysis of silence/speech

dichotomy and the inadequacy of the word in both films will convey to us von Trier's interest in the element of excess and in "hyperbolic figures" (3).

Battling with the Word and the active use of the imaginary

Karen has no words, she has the feelings
(Jorgensen. Personal interview. 26 June 2001).

You cannot love Words.
You cannot be in love with a Word.
You can love another human being.
That's perfection.

Bess in *Breaking the Waves*

In *Breaking the Waves*, Bess's conversations with God punctuate the film. These scenes take place in the empty church. Bess sits on her knees and bends over the pew. Her hands are clasped. In her monologues, Bess not only impersonates God's voice but also acts out her vision of Him. There is an internal rhythm in the scenes: when it's God's turn to "answer" her, Bess leans back, hits her clasped hands against the pew, lowers her voice, and closes her eyes. She is in her imaginary world, detached from her surroundings. When it's her time to answer Him back, she opens her eyes, rolls them far up, and exaggerates the sweetness, weakness and desperation of her own voice. The monologue, which is turned into a sort of dialogue, is a parody of God speaking through a saint.

In her monologues of imagination, Bess is simultaneously the performer and the listener. She introspectively studies her own performance. When she impersonates God's voice, she listens carefully to every word she delivers and takes

pleasure in every utterance. Watson's talent as an actor is highlighted during these moments in which we witness her character's enormous delight in performance. These are the moments when the audience's attention revolves around the performance itself, rather than their involvement in the story.

The self-reflexivity of Bess's monologues and her enjoyment of her own highly expressive imitations, are evident elsewhere in the film. For instance, when Bess visits Jan at the hospital and he is sleeping, she stares at his closed eyes and says: "I love you, Jan." She timidly places her ear against Jan's mouth and starts to smile when imagining Jan's response. With the imitation of Jan's dark voice, she continues enjoying her own imitation: "I love you too, Bess; you are the love of my life." Later on, Bess uses her monologues of imagination as a tool to heal Jan, who has wanted Bess to have sex with other men to help him recover from paralysis. There is a scene taking place at the hospital, where Bess sits on Jan's bed and begins to deliver her monologue, a product of her own imagination: "He is lying on my back, all naked. He comes in and he sees me..." While delivering her monologue, she pauses between the lines and glances to the sides. In those moments, we witness her thinking between the lines, inventing the story. When she comes up with the next line "and he kisses my breasts and he enters me," she is ready to look at Jan again, however she is not present, rather she is absorbed in her world of fantasy. Since Watson tells us that Bess is not "in the moment" by acting it out, (the fact that she retreats into her head to think doesn't make her fully present), we are not meant to believe in the truthfulness of Bess's performance. Instead, we realize that what she is saying is merely part of her performance - playing with the words. This play with the superficiality of words continues when Jan, incapable of talking, writes as a response to

Bess's monologue of imagination: "Who?" Bess answers: "It's Doctor Richardson." Jan is seen writing: "Not true."

Through the self-reflexivity of Bess's monologues, von Trier expresses his concern for re-appropriating language. The way in which von Trier explores the performative aspects of the monologues sets the tone for our interpretation of "God's words." Words are played with throughout the film; we don't believe in their authenticity. The words become symbolic material for parody, irony, and self-reflection.

The variations in tone that range from God's ironic voice reminding Bess "to be a good cattle" to the one punishing her of being guilty of selfishness, exemplify the stages in Bess's consciousness. They reveal to us how Bess is personifying her spirituality. She fights against the authority of words by redefining their meaning and making them material for her own imaginary world. It is the God within her - Bess's creation of her own God - that speaks through her. The enjoyment of her own performance throughout the film is demonstrative of the fact that for her, God's words are merely material for that performance. The deliverance of a word itself is a performance. The words are not meaningful outside the context of the performance in which they are spoken.

The possession of the Word is most compellingly depicted in the scene which takes place at the church. Bess is seen walking towards the church with her bike. She is coming back from the harbour. She enters the church dressed in stockings, miniskirts, wearing high-heels and lots of make-up on her face. Inside the church, she glances to the sides, while tiptoeing down the aisle, carefully listening to the priest, who is heard saying: "for there is only one thing... for the sinners that we are... to achieve

perfection in the eyes of god. Through unconditional love, for what is *written*, through unconditional love for the law.” Bess’s eyes are wide open, she pauses and starts to deliver slowly: “I don’t understand what you’re saying... How can you love a word?” She rolls her eyes up, then left, and down, and continues: “You cannot love words.” She pauses, stares blankly ahead of her as if questioning and contemplating what she has just said, listening to every one of her words echoing back to her in the church room. She raises her head and says confidently: “You cannot be in love with a word.” She looks ahead, briefly glances up, rolls her eyes down, then shifts them up again, then to the left. She squeezes her mouth to hold back her overwhelming feeling of recently discovered passion: “You can love another human being.” She looks high up, smiling and satisfied with her own speech, finally adds: “that’s perfection.” The priest announces: “No woman speaks here; Bess McNeale no longer has access to this church.”

Von Trier’s keen exploration of a heroine battling with the Word is inherent throughout the monologues, which play the major role in this film. These monologues are best understood in relation to the film’s thematic discussion of an individual’s view of spirituality and its relation to obedience to God’s authoritative voice. Watson’s monologues, which display the active use of imagination and the individual’s fight against the Word, evoke the issues that von Trier continues to develop through Jorgensen’s silence in *The Idiots*. Jorgensen’s silence points out the inadequacy of the word as a means of authentic self-expression. I will next study how through the use of close-up the filmmaker isolates Karen as autonomous, spiritual being and evokes the realm beneath the surface.

In *The Idiots*, von Trier further explores Bergman and Dreyer's fascination with film's unique ability to penetrate into "the micro-physiognomy" (Bálázs 65) of the actor's face, which alone can express something deeper and more truthful than language or externalised bodily actions can. In Bergman and Dreyer's films neither language nor body were relied on as a means of expression. Thus, the transcendence of the body as well as from speech was required of the actor. The facial expressions alone, while being "more subjective even than speech" and the "most individual of human manifestation" (60), were the filmmakers' primary means of building autonomous characters. Facial expressions were viewed as honest language, thus replacing the spoken word. Bela Bálázs states that

In this silent monologue the solitary human soul can find a tongue more candid and uninhibited than in any spoken soliloquy, for it speaks instinctively, subconsciously. The language of the face cannot be suppressed or controlled. However disciplined and practisedly hypocritical a face may be, in the enlarging close-up we see even that it is concealing something, that it is looking a lie. For such things have their own specific expressions superposed on the feigned one. It is much easier to lie in words than with the face and the film has proved it beyond doubt (63).

Close-ups are primarily used to focus on "the most delicate nuances" (77) of the actor's facial expressions. These are predominantly applied in the following films using silent acting, *The Passion of Joan of Arc* and *Persona*. In the former case, the actor's silence conveyed in close-ups, evokes emotional states that are inexpressible in words. These states of being can be defined as "the Strindbergian moods in the savagely antagonistic silences of human beings confined together in narrow spaces" (85) or as the passion pointing out the "expressed of the state of things" (Deleuze 103). The latter case,

where close-ups capture the actor's silent reaction, demonstrates a filmic counterpart to a Strindbergian dramaturgical device - the conflict of silence and speech. By comparing Jorgensen's silent acting to the other actors' externalised performances in *The Idiots*, von Trier, in a move similar to Dreyer and Bergman, links silence and the internal mode of acting with the quest for authenticity and its thematic discussion, which I will return to in the latter part of this chapter. Moreover, by emphasizing Jorgensen's silent acting, von Trier continues exploring "the fundamental link which unites the cinema, the face and the close-up" (99) and studying the realm hidden beneath the surface. As Carl-Theodore Dreyer says,

What interests me – and this comes before technique – is reproducing the feelings of the characters in my films. That is, to reproduce, as sincerely as possible, the most sincere feelings possible. The important thing, for me, is not only to catch hold of the words they say, but also the thoughts behind the words. What I seek in my films, what I want to obtain, is a penetration to my actors' profound thoughts by means of their most subtle expressions. For these are the expressions that reveal the character of the person, his unconscious feelings, the secrets that live in the depths of his soul (quoted in Sarris 142).

The influence of her Scandinavian predecessors is quite apparent in Jorgensen's depiction of her character's silence in *The Idiots*. The major concern, the "superobjective" (Stanislavski *Creating*, 77⁵), in Jorgensen's performance deals with the quest for the authentic being. To accomplish this superobjective, Jorgensen searches for a method other than the use of words to capture truth. Words cannot be trusted as a means for honest expression. Jorgensen's particular use of words encapsulates the essence of her

⁵ Konstantin Stanislavski states, "That is the inner essence, the all-embracing goal, the objective of all objectives, the concentration of the entire score of the role, of all of its major and minor units. The superobjective contains the meaning, the inner sense, of all the subordinate objectives of the play" (78).

minimalist performance. The few words her character Karen delivers have to be filled with meaning. According to Jorgensen, Karen's existence is speechless, like a child who is crying, laughing, and is *feeling* things. "The truth cannot be told in words. That is also why she [Karen] has fallen in love with her lost child [whose pure emotional states and the transition from one to the other is not to be expressed in words]. Karen has strong feelings she cannot describe" (Personal interview. 26 June 2001). Jorgensen recalls how there is much physical struggle to deliver the words when Karen finally says something (Personal interview. 26 June 2001). These moments capture a lot of hesitation in performance, which is not to be confused with hesitation as part of the spontaneity normally inherent in improvisational performances. What these moments depict is her constant doubt over the validity of every word uttered. Jorgensen points out how as an actor one has the opportunity to describe feelings that have no words. Jorgensen obviously refers to performance of a "dramatic state" and creation of a "dramatic tension to a mere state or condition, without any external event at all" (Bálázs 84):

It was able to make us feel nerve-racking the sultry tension underneath the superficial calm; the fierce storms raging under the surface were made tangible by mere microscopic movements, by the displacement of a hair. Such films were unsurpassed in showing the Strindbergian moods in the savagely antagonistic silences of human beings confined together in narrow spaces. The micro-tragedies in the peace and quiet of ordinary families were shown as deadly battles, just as the microscope shows the fierce struggles of micro-organism in a drop of water (85).

These moments of inexpressible emotional states, evoked by Karen's silent being in the absence of words or gestures, are captured with von Trier's use of "the affection-image" (Deleuze 87-101). Gilles Deleuze's theory of "the affection-image" is

strongly depicted in Liv Ullmann's and Renée Falconetti's performances. One can see how Jorgensen's performance and her own analysis of it reflect von Trier's continuation of the use of "the affection-image," where it refers to something that is intangible, unrealisable in the actor's words or gestures, something that is "felt, rather than conceived" (98). In creating "the affection-image," the close-ups capture Jorgensen's silent being, like that of Falconetti's or Ullmann's, by focusing on "the reflexive face" that "expresses a pure Quality" (90).

The scenes where the close-ups record Jorgensen's silent presence and the creation of Affection, demand from the actor a true talent and mastery of her craft that is "what finally transforms the dead factors into living ones – from 'theatrical' to human, artifice to art – through the secret ingredient: the actor's imagination" (Adler 102). The scenes where von Trier focuses on Jorgensen's face are "moments of decisions that camera has a privilege to witness" (Jorgensen. Personal interview. 26 June 2001). Jorgensen, the actress, is willing to remain under the close scrutiny of the camera in order to give the camera a chance to record raw emotional states, "pure affects as the expressed" (Deleuze 96). The director gives her a universe, which the actress fills in with her "inner pictures" (Jorgensen. Personal interview. 26 June 2001). For Jorgensen, these are the moments when pure fantasy and memory dominate, which she uses without limitations. "Lars [von Trier] knew what he wanted; I knew what the feeling inside her [Karen] was" (Personal interview. 26 June 2001). Those inner pictures/images that Jorgensen refers to are, according to Adler, the constituents of the actor's "active imagination" (Adler 103). The inner images are the actor's tools that she/he uses for the evocation of Affect which is "something expressed: the affect does not exist

independently of something which expresses it, although it is completely distinct from it” (Deleuze 97).

Jorgensen discusses her experience of performing monologues for Danish television. For the creation of “the affection-image” in *The Idiots*, Jorgensen used the techniques she developed when doing Jean Cocteau’s *Human Voice* for television: “the idea of making the absent present and felt” (Personal interview. 26 June 2001). Jorgensen gives an example of the scene where her character Karen phones her husband Anders (Hans Henrik Clemensen). In this scene, the camera remains stable. The white walls surround Karen and the ascetic setting focuses on her crying face placed against the phone. The scene shows how Jorgensen creates a scenario of two human souls reacting to each other. Moreover, by the use of the close-up on the actor’s face, it shows the possibilities film has in making a spectator feel the connection between two people. That scene is a culmination of what Karen’s silent soliloquies depict throughout the film: making “the invisible face visible” (Bálaš 76). The scene’s depiction of the virtual phone conversation is an extension of that principle.⁶

Both Watson and Jorgensen are asked to create performances where the realm of the imaginary is felt and made present. The major part of their performances

⁶ This principle of making the absent present is also strongly manifested in *Persona* when Bibi Andersson delivers her monologue of beach orgy and we switch from her face to Liv Ullmann’s responding but silent gazes in a close-up. For Pauline Kael states, “We do not need to see images of the of the beach and the boy and the return to the fiancée that she describes because the excitement is in how she tells it.... As she goes on talking, with memories of summer and nakedness and pleasure in her words and the emptiness of her present in her face, we begin to hold our breath in fear that Bergman can’t sustain this almost intolerably difficult sequence. But he does, and it builds and builds and is completed. It’s one of the rare, truly erotic sequences on film” (quoted in Michaels 170). Likewise, Susan Sontag states, “...what might be sexual in feeling is largely transposed into something beyond sexuality, beyond eroticism even. The only purely sexual episode is the scene in which Alma, sitting across the room from Elisabeth, tells the story of the beach orgy. Alma speaks, transfixed, reliving the memory and at the same time consciously delivering up this shameful secret to Elisabeth as her greatest gift of love. Entirely through discourse, without any recourse to images (through a flashback), a violent sexual atmosphere is generated. But this sexuality has nothing to do with the ‘present’ of the film, and the relationship between two women” (259).

deals with criticizing the inadequacy of words for one's self-expression. Watson's character doesn't use words to express her authentic self; words are tools for her to perform with. She creates her individual view of spirituality by fighting against the authority of the Word. Likewise, Jorgensen's character is able to reach the spiritual realm by staying silent.

The absence of the word and authenticity of autonomous being

As previously discussed, Dreyer and Bergman's focus on the actor's silence, using the close-up technique, demonstrates film's authenticity in depicting human experiences. Similarly, it also shows some of the ways in which these modernist filmmakers expressed their respect for theatrical tradition – tradition, whose influence can still be detected in von Trier's work. Strindberg emphasizes the important role silence plays in acting. One of the greatest emphases was outlined in his instructions to the actors of his Experimental Theatre on "the art of listening and silent acting" (*Open Letters* 29). According to Strindberg, "the one who is not speaking but who is listening to what someone else is saying must really listen... the one who listens is to remain what his role calls for, but his face must reflect what the other actor is saying, and the audience must be able to see what impression that is making" (30). Strindberg employed silence as a dramaturgical device, but also discussed its meaning on a thematic level. The attention Strindberg paid to silence and speech in his instructions was indicative of his growing concern over the nature of silence. In 1890, Strindberg wrote the play *The Stronger*. He was able to show how monologue - as a theatrical device replaced by the colloquial

language of Ibsen's realistic theatre - could be re-appropriated to function in a naturalistic play. More importantly, Strindberg's play is about two women: one of them stays silent and the other delivers an over-flowing monologue. Strindberg explores a silent being - the internal mode of acting - and its expressive counterpart on a thematic level. The play deals with "the problem of power" (Törnqvist 65) and the allocation of strength between the women.

By contrasting two extreme acting modes in *The Idiots*: Jorgensen's silence vs. the other actors' bodily movements and speech, von Trier favors one acting mode over the other in the conveyance of truth. The close-ups that capture Jorgensen's "silent monologues" (Bálázs 63) are juxtaposed to the other shots that, while in constant motion, avoid concentrating on the face. Von Trier suggests that truth lies in the acting mode that suppresses the use of verbal language, which simultaneously restricts the actor's bodily movements. The close-ups of Jorgensen's face are stable, tranquil and meditative. They speak to us "instinctively, subconsciously" (63) and are thus more truthful, since they do not rely on external means of expressions. The other shots of the idiots, recorded by free-flowing digital cameras, keep on finding and capturing externalised bodily movements, which do not conceal the fact that they are "looking [at] a lie" (63). The tension between these shots is remarkable.

While Strindberg demonstrated to us the possibilities of a monologue within a naturalistic play, Bergman in *Persona* continues to explore monologue both as a non-theatrical and theatrical device. Here, Bibi Andersson's monologues are repeated twice and directed towards the camera as well as towards the other actor. The various ways in which Bergman uses speech form integral segments of the film's naturalistic

performances. Moreover, Bergman examines the actor's silence and, like Strindberg, he juxtaposes it with "the form of a virtual monologue" (Sontag 267). Strindberg established the dynamics between silence and speech in his one-act play *The Stronger*. More importantly, both the playwright and the filmmaker also take part in the thematic discussion that the silence/speech dichotomy evokes. Bergman concludes that Elisabeth's silence "she imposes on herself is unneurotic. It's a strong person's form of protest" (quoted in Björkman, et al. 211). "The one who talks, who spills her soul, turns out to be weaker than the one who keeps 'aggressively silent'" (Sontag 268). I want to argue that a Strindbergian dramaturgical structure is explored in *The Idiots*. Just as Strindberg's Mlle Y's reactions "motivate and qualify Mrs X's statements" (Törnqvist 64) in *The Stronger*, the other characters' externalised, theatrical expressions accompanied by the use of speech are being judged in relation to Karen's silence and its authenticity in *The Idiots*.⁷

Karen's silence embodies her quest for honesty of being and her refusal to accept role-playing. It is symbolic of her autonomy and her pride in herself. For Karen, behind every gesture, expression, and word there has to be a meaning. What she expresses through her body or voice arises from deep within her and is carefully thought out. One can feel a mounting of tension preceding these rare moments when she expresses something with her body or voice. Throughout the film, her presence is strongly felt, but her being is silent. Both of these acting modes (Karen's internalisation and the others' externalisation) are prevalent, yet they compete for the dominant position

⁷ Mosley refers to the use of silence in Strindberg's *Ghost Sonata* where the Old Man says: "I prefer silence – then one can hear thoughts and see the past. Silence cannot hide anything – but words can" (128). He also states how "*Through a Glass Darkly* initiates this suspicion of language (David battles with 'winding sentences' and 'hateful words')" (128). In *Silence* it is the communication between Ester and Johan and the foreign language words they exchange that reflect and take part in the film's larger metaphorical discussion of silence and communication.

using different means. Karen's suppression of speech, coupled with extreme control over her body, is juxtaposed with the community of other characters whose behaviour is defined in terms of free experimentation of body and voice. The moral of the film is that the truth lies in silence. Karen is the only one for whom the whole idiot-project has a meaning. For the others, the project is a game that permits them to feel free. Karen's belief in the meaning behind the actions makes it difficult for her to let go; yet, in the end it is only Karen who will find the true meaning of freedom. Karen liberates herself whereas, for the others, freedom doesn't extend beyond the performance frame and remains a temporary experience. The idiot-project didn't encourage them to abandon the limiting norms of everyday life, which had restricted their free spirits.

In analyzing Ullmann's performance in Bergman's *Persona*, Bruce F. Kavin points out that Elisabeth's silence is voluntary in the sense that it is

a response to the pain and evil in the world: an almost saintly vow of silence and protest, a gesture that expresses her despair of improving the world and her determination in any case not to make matters worse. If she does not speak, she cannot lie; if she withdraws, she hopes she will not be held morally accountable for what others do (119).

Karen's silence in *The Idiots* is voluntary in the same way as Elisabeth's is. By believing in the validity of her autonomous position and by refusing to assimilate herself into the crowd, Karen makes herself an outsider and maintains her marginalized position with dignity. Karen criticizes the others' performances of madness, which for her is not justifiable. Her withdrawal makes her morally unaccountable for what others do. For her to stay silent and aloof - an outsider - symbolizes her refusal to lie and her quest for honesty.

Karen's silence is linked to Elisabeth's in another manner. Kawin refers to the "ontology" motif: Elisabeth "trying not to 'seem', but to 'be'" (120). He points out that "Elisabeth chooses silence as a way of avoiding all role-playing, including that of personality" (120). However, Kawin reminds us that Elisabeth's silence is merely another type of acting: "she has adopted the role of Silent Being, and will in time abandon this one as she has all the others" (120). Similar to Elisabeth's, Karen's silence embodies her refusal to adopt a role. She rebels against the prescribed social and behavioural norms. The failure of the idiot-project at the end of the film is an ironic demonstration of role-playing. The whole game has revolved around adopting a role - the role of an idiot. In the end, Karen's decision to act like an idiot at home is testimony to the fact that the whole experience has been real for her. Her silence has been her mechanism for distancing herself from others' concern over "trying to seem." Simultaneously, it has enabled her "to be" and to build up the strength needed to make the project something else, something more meaningful than mere role-playing.

It is evident that von Trier, like Bergman with Elisabeth, shows Karen's silence to be another type of acting. She has adopted "the role of Silent Being," which she abandons in the end. However, Karen's abandonment of this role is an act of freedom. It is important to note the way in which the silence transforms itself into an externalization, which becomes characteristic of the anguished and hidden inner reality of Karen. Karen's family members and Susanne witness her externalised performance of madness. She has finally gained freedom to pursue her own will, to the extent that she is able to openly defy the prescribed behavioural norms at home. At that moment, her autonomy is without limitations.

Kawin continues to analyze how Elisabeth's "'passivity' is provocative, dominating" (121) in the sense that it makes people react to it. In the end of *The Idiots*, there is a farewell scene and Karen delivers a farewell speech in the hallway. This scene depicts feelings of intimacy that haven't been conveyed in previous scenes, wherein physical intimacy between the other characters is explicitly portrayed. In the farewell scene, other characters respond to each other and reveal honest emotions for the first time. There is much more eye contact between the characters; a genuine connection is felt. The scene is demonstrative of how the dialogue between facial expressions has replaced the communication between bodies. Unlike before, the characters in this scene realize the seriousness of what they've been building up to and finally come to recognize the importance of their project. This can be seen by observing how the characters focus so intensively on listening to Karen's speech, portraying something close to the "art of listening." These scenes are examples of the "mute dialogues... the conversations between the facial expressions of two human beings who understood the movements of each others' faces better than each others' words and could perceive shades of meaning too subtle to be conveyed in words" (Bálázs 73). Karen has saved her words for this last moment. Her silence, up to this very moment, serves to intensify the meaning of her words. This scene depicts the other characters' realization that Karen has taken the idiot-project seriously. Karen's silence has served to encourage true feelings in others. What von Trier in *The Idiots*, similarly to Bergman in *Persona*, seems to be expressing there is that silence "speaks louder than words" (Steene "Bergman's *Persona*," 32). Karen's silence evokes reactions from others. Silence is given dramatic meaning and made

powerful. This empowerment finally encourages revelations of honest, yet hidden desires.

Susan Sontag analyzes the use of speech in *Persona* and argues that Alma, the one who talks, is “betrayed by speech itself” (268). Like Sontag, Philip Mosley claims that *Persona* demonstrates that “language offers no solution”, but rather “potential traps” (127). Likewise, in *The Idiots*, language is not used for characters’ authentic self-expression. Von Trier interrupts the fictional flow of narration, with scenes of documentary-like, self-analyses of the characters themselves. Since these are the moments where the characters talk directly to the camera and analyze their own behaviour these scenes unveil von Trier’s intention of providing us with insight into what is really happening, illuminating how language is used as an “instrument of unmasking” as well as “instruments of self-revelation” (Sontag 268). The fact that Karen is not included in these scenes, precludes the question of her performing or not performing. These scenes of documentary-like speeches serve to illustrate the fact that the characters’ performances throughout the film are mere showcases for acting. Von Trier’s use of documentary-like techniques in such scenes (voice-over interview, etc.) register the other characters’ self-revelations and highlight the authenticity of Karen’s performance. The fact that Karen is not analyzing her own performance, confirms that there is no separation between her and her character in other scenes. Von Trier relies on documentary techniques just to enhance the *illusion* of truthfulness. What the characters say in these scenes is no truer than what they say or do in other, more overtly fictional scenes. The difference between these speeches of self-revelation and Karen’s speech in the farewell scene that is an expression of her intensity, honesty, and timidity is worth noting. Karen’s

speech is a manifestation of her self-revelation, which has been building up to this climax in the film. Von Trier's use of speech as "art and artifice" (268) becomes apparent when comparing these scenes. One can argue that von Trier continues to examine the distrust of the word as Bergman examined it in *Persona*. As Sontag writes,

What *Persona* demonstrated is the lack of an appropriate language, a language that's genuinely full. All that is left is a language of lacunae, befitting a narrative strung along a set of lacunae or gaps in the "explanation". It is these absences of sense or lacunae of speech which become, in *Persona*, more potent than words, while the person who places faith in words is brought down from relative composure and confidence to hysterical anguish (268).

Von Trier works on this principle of "lacunae of speech," which is based on the distrust of language. Jorgensen's performance throughout the film demonstrates that Karen expresses doubts over the validity of words. Von Trier's examination of "the absences of sense" in the use of language culminates at the end of the film when Karen does spassing at home; her use of voice and speech is beyond communication.⁸ Her use of voice at that moment is another kind of truthful expression, desemantized speech, which expresses pure feelings and pure emotional states which can't be revealed by words. Words don't do justice to the authenticity of Karen's feelings at that moment. The lack of semantics in Karen's speech provokes her family members. It is an expression of

⁸ It is important to notice how differently this kind of speech is used in von Trier and in Bergman. In *The Idiots* it is a step toward something, it is Karen's way to express her freedom and that she is on her way to find her self, and to revolt against prescribed norms. Bergman depicts Alma's aggressions which "take on such enormous proportions she finds she can no longer use words. She becomes violently disturbed; loses her ability to express herself. She's like a machine that has gone to pieces but just goes on turning madly, and her words, without any ordered context, just come out tumbling out. Bibi found it frightfully hard to memorize those word-series. To learn a totally meaningless series of words by heart is said to be about the hardest thing you can do" (quoted in Björkman, et al. 203). See also how Bergman analyzes himself as a writer. He says: "...when I began writing, I was suspicious of words. And I always lacked words; it has always been very difficult for me to find the word I want" (quoted in Samuels 101).

her freedom and her willingness to abandon the restricting roles. One could view it as another kind of the “hysterical anguish” that Sontag discusses (268), a result of mistrusting language.

In *Breaking the Waves*, Bess’s monologues encapsulate her fight against the words by demonstrating their inadequacy in representing the truth, the truth she as an autonomous individual possesses. The film begins with Bess being asked by the priest if she can “think anything of real value that the outsiders have brought with them?” Bess looks down, but soon raises her head as a sign of her growing confidence. She rolls her eyes up, cannot hold back her smile, and finally says: “Their music.” Bess’s fixed gaze into the priest’s eyes and her open smile, her body language and facial expressions, shock the priest, who finds no words with which to answer her. Similarly, early on in the film, Bess and Jan stop the priest on a countryside road and ask why there are no bells in the church. Bess’s remark: “Let’s put them back there” ends the scene. Later on, we see Bess exiting the church and saying: “Stupid, only men can talk in the service.” The warning words of a priest: “Hold your tongue, woman” are heard when a man is seen walking behind her. These scenes are continuations of Bess’s monologues, which are all manifestations of questioning the power of the Word and re-defining its usage.

In order to demonstrate her autonomy and the righteousness of her individual spiritual beliefs, Bess fights against the authorities that are strikingly similar to the ones Dreyer’s female protagonists battle with. According to James Schamus, they are

not only male, but significantly, ‘textual’ authorities – legal, religious, artistic. They nearly always represent specific institutions that use language as a primary means of gaining authority and wielding power... Dreyer’s heroines are constantly doing battle with authorial figures – their

'transcendence' is almost always a martyrdom at the hands of a textual regime (61-62).

Schamus is one of the scholars who analyzes the role language plays in Carl-Theodore Dreyer's films, which centre around the constant battle between text and image. What makes Schamus's approach relevant here, is his aim at situating the dynamics between text and image in "a larger critical context" (59), that of the realist tradition of the Scandinavian playwrights and directors, including Ibsen and Strindberg. Schamus views Dreyer as the filmmaker who "extended the reach of that practise into film in a way in which he theorized the interplay between his characters and their textual roots" (60).

For Schamus, Dreyer's "textual realism" is an "aesthetic practice based on the authority of its documentary sources," which in the case of *The Passion of Joan of Arc* meant that Dreyer exceeded "the textual roots" (60) by basing the screenplay on the official records of the trial of Joan of Arc. By doing that, Dreyer increased the historical authenticity of the film's protagonist. According to Schamus, Dreyer's concern for the "real" is further reflected in his characters' own battles, which are depicted on both a thematic and formal level. It is often Dreyer's realist heroine who struggles "with the authority who controls the words" (61). Schamus states, "For the archetypal theme of the realist text itself is the hero's attempt to transcend his or her own textual status – to become a consciousness" (61)⁹. Here, we can begin to realize how von Trier's heroines',

⁹ See also, how Strindberg in his preface to *Miss Julie* writes, "My souls (characters) are conglomerations of past and present stages of civilization, bits from books and newspapers, scraps of humanity, rags and tatters of fine clothing, patched together as is the human soul. And I have added a little evolutionary history by making the weaker steal and repeat the words of the stronger, and by making the characters borrow ideas or 'suggestions' from one another" (*Miss Julie* 175). According to Schamus, Strindberg's statement implies that "the human soul itself is nothing but a collection of texts" (61). Moreover, the fact that for Strindberg, "the threat of the half-woman is the threat of the writing woman, the woman who makes 'a noise about herself'" has made theorists, such as Schamus, consider "the gender politics of Strindberg's realism... virulently misogynistic" (61).

like Dreyer's, battles with the textual authorities and how this battle reflects the filmmaker's quest for "the real." Schamus states,

The theme of the emancipated woman in Scandinavian realist theatre – it is equally prevalent in Ibsen, for example in *A Doll's House* and *Hedda Gabler* – is thus not just a theme, but a textual matrix through which is figured a whole complex of formal and ideological concerns. Realism creates the desire for real characters – characters like those of the "weaker sex" who struggle to produce language of their own – and so creates an internal tension about the adequacy of its own textual authority (61).

Von Trier's narrative style and use of cinematography highlight his self-reflexive search for authenticity, his "fight between the letter and the spirit" (64), and the inescapability from textual constraints. Von Trier describes the relationship between the style and the story in *Breaking the Waves*:

One normally chooses a style for a film in order to highlight a story. We've done exactly the opposite. We've chosen a style that works against the story, which gives it the least opportunity to highlight itself...What we've done is to take a style and put it over the story like a filter ...The raw, documentary style which I've laid over the film and which actually annuls and contests it, means that we accept the story as it is (quoted in Björkman "Naked Miracles," 12).

Von Trier's own battle with the textual is further depicted in his characters' search for authenticity, their "fight between the letter and the spirit." As we come to recognize the fictional nature of the story, we come to accept the fictional quality of the words. The fight against text, speech (the word), which the filmmaker examines, has to be reflected and studied in performance as well. The actor is asked to perform the fight against text by questioning the truthfulness of words. The film relies on the self-reflexivity of Watson's

monologues, where the utterance of the words is mere performance, an important indicator for understanding the film's interpretation of textual authorities.

While Dreyer focused on the methods with which "more often than not the woman simply resists the enforced textual regime" (Schamus 62), von Trier depicts how his heroines, unlike their predecessors, "write against it" (62). Schamus states that "Siri, the heroine of the fourth segment of *Leaves from Satan's Book* (1919), is a telegraph operator who dies rather than tap out a message for the evil communists who hold her children hostage. Her martyrdom – which takes the form of the refusal of forced writing – prefigures Joan's: Joan is sent to the stake for renouncing her signed confession" (62)¹⁰. Bess's monologues exemplify her resistance towards women's marginal positions in the community. The authorities that try to dominate her are embodied in Bess's impersonation of God's words. In her monologues Bess takes possession of, and has control over, them. The community's disapproval is expressed in her monologues that depict her as defending her autonomous position. In her monologues she fights for her own spiritual beliefs and for the righteousness of those beliefs.

Bess believes in her possession of "magical powers," as Doctor Richardson states, and uses her sexuality as an outward display of her spiritual beliefs. Bess's dissatisfaction with the pure spiritual connection between her and Jan and her desire for Jan's physical presence sets the tone for her monologues. The accident at sea forces Jan to return home, as Bess had wished. She views Jan's returns as an act of her spiritual

¹⁰ See also Schamus's analysis of *Gertrud* and *The Master of the House*. He states, "Gertrud... renounces life because her love is too strong to tolerate her lovers' allegiances to their writing careers.... Sometimes, as in the comic vision of *The Master of the House*, the woman's assumption of writing fluency wins her important victories. Here the wife's ambiguous letters help tame her tyrannical husband. But the threat of male backlash is still, albeit comically, pictured: after Ida is discovered writing, she is inexplicably chased by the gang of old men she nurses" (62).

powers yet punishes herself initiating his return impersonating God's intimidating voice, "You wanted Jan home." "I've changed my mind, why did I ask for that?" Bess answers back, simultaneously losing control over her impersonation. She begins to cry and covers her eyes with her fingers. She regains composure and with her eyes closed, through her tears, continues condemning herself: "Because you are stupid little Bess. I test you, your love for Jan is put to the test." What follows is a monologue where Bess deals with the desperation of her guilty feelings and fights for his love aiming to justify her individual view of spirituality. She raises her head far up and begs: "Don't let him die." She closes her eyes and lowers her voice while answering back and questioning the strength of her love: "Why shouldn't I let him die?" With her eyes wide open, she looks far up. Her shy smile postpones the answer, yet in its glow it already tells us about her strong feeling of love. This is confirmed when we hear her saying: "I love him." She squeezes her eyes and suddenly becomes serious, answering back in a lowered voice: "So you keep saying, but I don't see it." A close-up of her crying face and her wide-open eyes witnesses her desperation: "There is nothing I can do." She looks up and repeats: "nothing at all." She slowly looks down again and peacefully closes her eyes, saying in God's tranquillizing voice: "Prove to me that you love him and then I will let him live."

The monologues' themes are centered around Bess's repetitive questioning with regards to how to prove her love for Jan, as well as on her excessive *behaviour* that others don't view as her *feeling* of love. People's lack of understanding towards her idiosyncratic view of love and her spiritual beliefs causes Bess to question the extent of her own faith in the power of spiritual connection. Bess's search for the approval of her spiritual beliefs is later reflected in a symbolic scene taking place in the church. She

begins by looking up: "Dear father, what's going on?" She holds her breath, closes her eyes, and opens her mouth as if getting ready to act out the impersonation. However, she pauses and abruptly closes her mouth. Disappointed, she opens her eyes to return to the earthly reality surrounding her. She rolls her eyes to the left, up and down, and closes them. Turning somber, she lowers her eyebrows and head, and squeezes her mouth to hold back her tears. She opens her eyes again. She raises her head, looks further and further up, then repeatedly to the left and right, as if searching for something. Finally, in a desperate voice she delivers: "Father, where are you?" The next time Bess is seen on a ship, delivering her monologue, she has regained her own view of spirituality. We hear her beginning: "Father, why aren't you with me?" This time Bess closes her eyes and says: "I am with you, what do you want from me?" Bess opens her eyes and as if listening to God she raises her head and looks far up into the sky with a smile on her face. She keeps her mouth tightly closed to hold back her triumph when looking up. Her high-pitched voice tells us about her self-satisfaction - having regained belief in the truthfulness of her own spirituality. She slowly begins: "Where were you?" She closes her eyes and impersonates, however, this time, by exaggerating the darkness of God's voice and parodying the condemning tone of it: "Don't you think I have other people who want to talk to me?" She keeps her eyes closed and her head down for a moment. Suddenly and swiftly, she playfully shifts her head back out of the enjoyment of her own impersonation and with a smile on her face, continues: "Of course I have thought of that... but you are with me now?" Bess closes her eyes and says: "Of course I am, Bess, you know that." She opens her eyes, reflectively. We hear bells ringing. "Thank you," she says and stares straight into the camera. Bess views her monologues as moments

when she builds and regains her belief in the truthfulness of her own view of spirituality. In her monologues, she creates her own speech to fight against the authorities of the Word that try to control the righteousness of her belief in spirituality.

The melodramatic and the construction of a heroine's identity

The elements of excess in the performances of Jorgensen and Watson is an example of von Trier's shared interest with the melodramatists who "refuse to allow that the world has been completely drained of transcendence; and they locate that transcendence in the struggle of the children of light with the children of darkness, in the play of ethical mind" (Brooks 22). According to Peter Brooks, the melodramatic mode belongs to a modern sensibility and its "sense-making system" (xiii), where "there is a desperate effort to renew contact with the scattered ethical and psychic fragments of the Sacred through the representation of fallen reality, insisting that behind reality, hidden by it yet indicated within it, there is a realm where large moral forces are operative, where large choices of ways of being must be made" (21). The moral universe of Henry James or Honoré de Balzac - and a set of "attitudes, phrases, gestures coherently conceived toward dramatization of essential spiritual conflict" (20) that the authors' work deals with - lead to a very specific kind of characterization, as Brooks' comprehensive study makes one notice. However, Brooks's analysis of this characterization encourages me to examine the ways in which the performance can manifest recurrences of the melodramatic impulse. I will argue that Bess's monologues are examples of "melodramatic soliloquies," which are "pure self-expressions, the venting of what one is and how it feels to be that way, the saying of self through its moral and emotional

integers” (38). As my previous analysis of Bess’s monologues revealed, these monologues are delivered by a melodramatic heroine who “must express her continued identification with purity, despite contrary appearances” (38). Karen’s silent soliloquies are closer to “the soliloquy of tragedy, which... exteriorised a mind divided against itself, the dilemma of a situation where choice is both impossible and necessary, an anguished introspection” (38).

Through the characters’ soliloquies and monologues in his films von Trier explores “the locus of true drama,” that is, “the moral occult,” which Brooks defines as “the domain of spiritual forces and imperatives that is not clearly visible within reality, but which they believe to be operative there, and which demands to be uncovered, registered, articulated” (20-21). Brooks states that

The moral occult is not a metaphysical system; it is rather the repository of the fragmentary and desacralized remnants of sacred myth. It bears comparison to unconscious mind, for it is a sphere of being where our most basic desires and interdictions lie, a realm which in quotidian existence may appear closed off from us, but which we must accede to since it is realm of meaning and value. The melodramatic mode in large measure exists to locate and to articulate the moral occult (5).

For Karen and for Bess, the use of speech points to the inadequacy of the word. The characters struggle to reach the world beyond the tangible one, the realm where the true meaning is to be found. Likewise, Brooks questions the role words play in the melodramatic acting style. For Brooks, words are inadequate means to locate the “true drama” in the imaginary realm where our deepest dreams and fear lie. He states, “Words, however unrepressed and pure, however transparent as vehicles for the expression of basic relations and verities, appear to be not wholly adequate to the

representations of meanings, and the melodramatic message must be formulated through other registers of sign” (56). Brooks refers to the melodramatic acting style, which is “predicated on the plastic figurability of emotion, its shaping as a visible and almost tactile entity” (47). Brooks goes on to argue that the melodramatic use of gestures has been historically grounded in Diderot’s reformation of a classical acting style. Gestures, unlike words, “signify because they are the language of nature, the language to which all creatures instinctively have recourse to express their primal reactions and emotions” (67-68). Brooks’s analyses of excess in characterization, leads him to make the following statement:

‘character’ is itself generated as a simple sign from a set of bipolar oppositions and cannot arrest our attention by any illusion of ‘depth’ or ‘innerness’. If in a novel by Dickens or a play by Ibsen we may be tempted to talk about ‘identity’, the movement of the plot toward discovery of identity, and the moral anagnorisis that accompanies it, such terminology appears inappropriate in a theatre where persons are so very typological, and where structure is so highly conventional. Anagnorisis in melodrama thus has little to do with the achievement of psychological identity and is much more a matter of the recognition, the liberation from misprision, of a pure signifier, the token for an assigned identity (53).

The “hyperbolic” instances that take place in von Trier’s films revolve around the discussion of the replacements of the word. Brooks suggests that the excessive performance style should be historically and culturally grounded. According to Brooks, “the melodramatic rhetoric, and the whole expressive enterprise of the genre, represents victory over repression. We could conceive this repression as simultaneously social, psychological, historical, and conventional: what could not be said on an earlier stage, nor still on a ‘nobler’ stage, nor within the codes of society” (41). However, it would be misleading to explain the use of excess in von Trier’s film by historical references to

Diderot, coupled with Brooks's analysis. The various individual manifestations of excess have to be examined with relation to the context from which they originate. I would rather argue that the use of excess, throughout the performances of von Trier's films, doesn't lead to an absence of identity, as Brooks concludes. The inclusion of excessive and hyperbolic instances create more of a continuum with Dreyer's "notion of the potential plasticity of our imaginative identities, the energetic mobility of our desires, the fluxes and refluxes of our feelings" (Carney 92). As with Dreyer, von Trier examines "expressively divided" (86) characters caught between the social and moral norms and the imaginary world.

According to Carney, Dreyer's films "describe practical possibilities of imaginative performance in the world" and "test the ability of such energies to make themselves felt within the forms of chronological, sequential, realistic narratives. Dreyer's characters may be visionaries or dreamers in many respects, but the ultimate test he exacts of them is that they express themselves and their visions in words and actions in the world" (87). With the use of excess, von Trier, like Dreyer, explores the relationship between the individual imagination and "the forms of worldly (and artistic) expression available to it" (88). What is important is how this dilemma is strongly depicted through the various styles of performance. The battle between the imaginary and the real takes place in conjunction with the battle between the performances' excessive elements and the naturalistic elements. In von Trier's films the demands for the naturalism in acting do not overshadow the elements of excess as they previously did in Dreyer's films. In Carney's opinion,

The excitement of Dreyer's dramas, the incredible energy of his heroines, their unceasing expressive engagement and activity, emerge out of their precarious effort to translate the language of imagination and desire into the language of society, however limiting it may seem to be... Dreyer's heroines are driven by their dream that they can 'live' their imaginations in the world, that they can express their most mercurial ebbs and flows of feeling realistically (88).

Thus, what we need to focus on in von Trier's case is how the excess is portrayed through naturalistic performances, and how this is a way of constructing the heroine's identity. The dialogue between excessive and naturalistic acting styles is deemed important as an outlet for the experiences that were previously foreshadowed by the performance style. Von Trier strives for authenticity in his filmmaking and his direction of his actors. His consideration of hyperbolic instances and excessive elements to be crucial parts of the performances signifies a crucial change in relation to his predecessors. The use of excess denotes acknowledgement and recognition, acting out the imaginary realm so crucial in the construction of the heroine's identity.

3. Sexual Bodies, Spiritual Minds

While the first chapter of this thesis dealt with the exploration of von Trier's quest for authenticity and earth-bound realism, the second chapter suggested the filmmaker's move away from these initial quests. The characters' striving for the imaginary realm was revealed through the analysis of speech/silence dichotomy. In this chapter, I will develop my analysis of transcendental experience within a realistic framework. My argument will be that "the collision between human and abstract... the human and the artificial and the true and the untrue" (von Trier quoted in Björkman "Juggling," 10) is a part of von Trier's struggle to provoke himself as a filmmaker (von Trier quoted in Hjort and Bondebjerg 213). This provocation is demonstrated throughout the performances, where the opposing styles of realism and excess compete. In relation to his aim at provocation, von Trier has discussed the use of sexuality in his films, which he admits deal with "different kinds of sexual perversion" (quoted in Hjort and Bondebjerg 213). For instance, in *Breaking the Waves*, von Trier "establish[es] a problematic and take[s] things to their logical conclusion, which involves asking whether a sacrifice could be sexual" (von Trier quoted in Hjort and Bondebjerg 220). The exploration of this problematic provokes not only the filmmaker but also the audience in a way it forces both to view familiar issues from new perspectives. The aim of this chapter is to show that von Trier studies the dialectics of the human and the abstract through the juxtaposition of spiritual minds and sexual bodies. Von Trier's examination of these dialectics has led to confusion in the criticism of his films that thus demonstrates how excess often evokes "pejorative connotations" (Zucker "Concept," 54); the "analysis of systems of excess"

(Williams 3) is most often ignored in critical reception. Before analyzing the performances in von Trier's films, I will investigate the ways in which von Trier's forerunners, Strindberg, Bergman and Dreyer, have previously examined the limits of realistic representation.

Temptation to exceed the boundaries of realism

Stylistic dualism marks August Strindberg's work, which is characterized by the artist's "restless search for new forms capable of meeting the changing demands of consciousness of the times" (Marker 193). Scholars have (re)interpreted his oeuvre by explaining the sudden shift that took place in the artist's work. This shift has been examined by separating Strindberg's pre-Inferno (1869-92) works from the post-Inferno (1892-1909) ones. According to Egil Törnqvist, in the former period Strindberg is a "plot-oriented playwright" (217) exploring "interhuman relations" (216) and theatre's potential to rely on illusions of realism. In the latter period "illusionism has given way to 'half-reality'" and the conflicts are viewed as something "extrahuman, dramatizing a struggle between the protagonist and what Strindberg called the Powers" (217). For Frederick J. Marker, it is a shift that led him to explore "the mystical and visionary qualities of life that... Strindberg came to regard as the true fabric of reality" (194).

Lately, scholars have focused more on how the principles and artistic concerns of Strindberg's post-Inferno period are already a prominent influence in his pre-Inferno work. This awareness helps us to recognize that there is a shift away from the concern with the real, and that there lies an interest in exploring the conflict between the

real and unreal, “the collision between human and abstract” (von Trier quoted in Björkman “Juggling,” 10). Hence, this serves to demonstrate the extent to which realism allows the excessive impulses to appear within its constraints. Törnqvist emphasizes Strindberg’s “gradual progression from letter to spirit” (219).

In analyzing Strindberg’s use of cinematographic-like staging techniques and shifting “focal points” (Rokem “Camera,” 111) in his pre- and post-Inferno plays, such as *Dream Play* (1901), *The Ghost Sonata* and *Miss Julie*, Freddie Rokem aims to bridge the gap between the two stages in Strindberg’s career. According to Rokem, these staging techniques, the shifting focal points which are already present in his naturalistic plays, such as *Miss Julie*, reflect an “existential dilemma” (123) - an inability to place a focal point in the fictional world of stage as well as in a character’s life.¹¹ This leads to shifts between subjectivity and objectivity, internal and external, real and unreal- all of which are more prominent in the post-Inferno period plays, such as in *The Ghost Sonata* (Rokem 124).

Strindberg’s use of space enables Rokem to analyze the collision between real and unreal in his pre-inferno period which Benjamin K. Bennett studies through Strindberg’s use of time. For Bennett, Ibsen’s realism serves as a springboard to study Strindberg’s shift away from realistic time conception. According to the author, Strindberg’s major achievement- the main criteria that distinguishes his work from Ibsen’s - lies in the method he employs to show the “relativity of the idea of time” (71).

¹¹ Rokem notes how in Ibsen’s theater, one can find visual focal points reflecting a character’s past and present strivings, or their future dreams which are not only “physically present in the fictional world and in the consciousness of characters” (111) but also static. Rokem states, “Whereas Hedda Gabler’s lack of will to continue living was based on her refusal to bear offspring within the confines of married life, Miss Julie’s despair primarily reflects her unwillingness merely to exist” (112).

What is interesting to observe, is the way in which the author traces expressionist impulses back to Ibsen and suggests that his later work hints at the temptation to exceed the boundaries of realism. Marker also espouses a similar reinterpretation of Strindberg's work. He chronologically studies Strindberg's earlier work of folklore and history, tracing his move towards the domestic dramas and works which feature medieval settings. He arrives at the later dream plays and chamber dramas via the naturalistic plays. He notes Strindberg's way of "bursting the bounds of realism" (198). He argues that already in his early works, like *Lycko-Per's resa* (*Lucky Per's Journey*) from 1883, one can find a "magical realism of the unreal" that is a foreshadowing of Strindberg's later dream plays (196). He goes on to argue that Strindberg's naturalistic plays, such as *Creditors* (1888), *The Bond* (1892), *The Dance of the Death* (1900), or the marriage plays, which "in their depiction of a wrenching, nightmarish atmosphere...come closer in vision and approach to the modern school of magic realism in painting" (198). Strindberg has stated that

Realism, a working method elevated to art, or the little art, which does not see the wood for the trees; this is the kind of misconceived Naturalism which believed that art simply consisted in copying a piece of nature in a natural way, but not the greater naturalism which seeks out those points where the great battles take place, which loves to see what one does not see every day, which delights in the struggle between natural forces, whether these forces are called love and hate, the spirit of revolt, of social instincts, which is not concerned whether something is beautiful or ugly, as long as it is great (*Selected Essays*, 78).

According to Marker, Strindberg views realistic staging techniques as a "wasted effort" (197). He notes that for Strindberg, "external verisimilitude in the naturalistic style serve only as a means of achieving an intensification of dramatic mood

or conflict” (197). Strindberg’s own view of “the greater naturalism” raises questions about the naturalistic style of performance and its post-naturalistic counterpart. In which ways does Strindberg’s extension of the boundaries of naturalism reflect an exploration of the limits of naturalistic acting styles? What is interesting to highlight in Marker’s historical survey is the way in which the productions of Strindberg’s plays and his direction of them point towards the contrasting styles of performance in various productions. Strindberg combined aspects of naturalism with a “new, distinctly post-naturalistic direction” (201-2).

Life for the father of expressionism, is a dream, and so the dream (the play) is life itself – not a conceptual comment on “the dreamlike nature” of existence but a projected image of a psychic dynamism, an exteriorization of *what it feels like* to experience reality in this way. Hence the greatest challenge facing any interpreter of Strindberg’s later work on the stage is to articulate the fundamental doubleness of its poetic vision – the perception of the dreamlike quality of reality that is always conjoined with the sharply insistent reality of the dream (204; emphasis in original).

Someone studying sleep discovered that if you are prevented from dreaming you go crazy. It is completely the same with me. If I could not create my dreams – my films – that would make me completely crazy. Dreams are a sort of creative process, don’t you think? My films come from the same factory. They are like dreams in my mind before I write them down; they are made from the same material, from everything I have ever seen or heard or felt. I use reality the same way dreams do. Dreams seem very realistic – and my films, all my films, are dreams (Bergman “On Dreams,” 52).¹²

¹² According to Frank Gado, the lack of boundary between dream and reality in *Persona* is due to Bergman’s way of implying that the “suppositions on which the concept of reality rests are themselves unreal” (335). Likewise, Peter Cowie states when analysing *Persona*: “...there are no readily identifiable border posts between fantasy and reality. Cinema, Bergman may be saying as he shows one the carbons flaring into life, long ago established a unique and tantalizing compound of reality and imagination” (*Ingmar Bergman* 234).

Since the focus of this study is on film acting, I would like to stress the influence of Strindberg's post-naturalism on Ingmar Bergman. To a great extent, the filmmaker's use of film medium and performance deals with pushing the limits of realistic representation. It is important to note that Strindberg's advocacy of the "greater naturalism" became embodied through Bergman's fascination with the spiritual being, whose earthbound existence became secondary. In 2001, Bergman's work is still greatly influenced by Strindberg. He states that, "Strindberg runs like a steel column through my work" (quoted in Sohlman R6). Bergman's autobiography, *The Magic Lantern (Laterna Magica*, 1987), registers the strong influential presence Strindberg has had on Bergman, on his philosophy of life and art, throughout his life.¹³ The artists' individual works as well as personalities have become the basis for the comparisons between the two of them. The parallels between Strindberg and Bergman are obvious when one studies the dialectics between dream and reality, or existentialism (e.g. Ketcham), or religion (e.g. Blake *Lutheran*), in Bergman's work. What is interesting to note, is that the "fundamental transformation" (Blackwell 49) in Bergman's artistic career is also what characterizes his work and has guided analyses of it. Marilyn Johns Blackwell draws the parallel between the two, when she states that Strindberg began searching for an answer to the questions of existence in a "divine figure" in his post-Inferno period. Bergman, prior to 1961, had found an answer to these questions in "his Lutheran God as both one of mercy and one of

¹³ See also how Philip Mosley views Bergman and Strindberg as "fundamentally and typically Swedish, best understood in the context of that culture, dominated as it is by a harsh climate of long, dark winters and short, intense summers, and marked too by the severity of Lutheran worship overlaying a medieval Catholicism which itself only partially concealed paganism conquered relatively late in the Church's history. The bleakness of the climate and the sternness of the faith account for much in the Swedish temperament: its desperation in the taking pleasures, together with a well-developed self-control and corporate discipline; its dourness, its volatility, even its ever-present guilty conscience based principally on a guilt-dominated religion..." (23).

wrath” that led him to seek the answers in individual human beings and their relationships (Blackwell 50). For Birgitta Steene, it is Strindberg’s “new metaphysical conception of reality” that finds a counterpart in Bergman’s “metaphysically ‘reductive’ films” (“Bergman’s *Persona*,” 26) of the early 1960s.¹⁴ By comparing “existential angst of the midtwentieth century... the stoicism of Beckett, reminiscent of Schopenhauer... to the more personal torments of Strindberg” (27), Philip Mosley argues from a consideration of Strindberg as a “subjective exhibitionist” who finds a counterpart in Bergman, who is more of an “objective exhibitioner” (27). What is important for us is the way in which the collision between real and unreal - concrete and abstract - plays a crucial role between, as well as within, these artists’ works.

Likewise, Carl-Theodore Dreyer strongly believed that “there is a world outside the grayness and tedium of naturalism, namely: the world of the imagination” (“Imagination,” 186). Dreyer has stated, “reportorial photography has compelled cinema to keep down to earth, so that it has become addicted to naturalism. Only after it cuts these moorings will cinema have the possibility of rising to the heights of imagination. Therefore, we must wrest cinema away from the embrace of naturalism” (176-177).

Dreyer’s battle with opposing styles has modified the discussion of spirituality in his films. Von Trier approaches and redefines Dreyer’s “stylistic

¹⁴ It is important to notice that in his chamber trilogy (*Through a Glass Darkly*, *Winter Light*, *The Silence*) Bergman examines characters’ desperate need for love of another human being and for God. Yet both of these urges end up being failures. Sexuality and belief in God is impossible to find, both of which are seen in a negative light, something that leads to turmoil, inner angst and desperation. Richard A. Blake describes the sexuality of Karin in *Through a Glass Darkly*: “As she drifts further from the real world she again retreats to the attic, and at last imagines God has come to her but he appears in the form of a spider who attempts to rape her, crawls across her breast and face, and climbs up the wall.... Both God and love became repulsive for her and the tragedy for Karin, and one might imply for all men, is their desperate need for both” (“Sexual” 39). If in *Winter Light* Thomas’s loss of faith in God coincides with the death of his wife it is in *The Silence* where Bergman continues to study this silence of God accompanying it with “the sexual images [that] converge to underscore a theme of loneliness and inability to love” (40).

schizophrenia: the uneasy combination of definitely uncongenial styles” (Schrader 118). Paul Schrader’s study of the transcendental style in Dreyer’s films shows how, through the use of stylistic dialectics, von Trier continues to create a tension, the one evoked by “the disparity of transcendental style” (120). Schrader argues that Strindberg’s chamber drama (Kammerspiel) aesthetics and the German expressionism sweeping Scandinavia from 1910 to 1920, modified Dreyer’s examination of spirituality. “The spiritual dualism” (112) Schrader writes about refers to the battle between these two influences, which reflects the ways in which Dreyer battled with the question of the nature of spirituality itself (112). Dreyer contemplates the nature of spirituality in the way that questions whether it should be a character or a film as an artwork that expresses the transcendental. For Schrader, chamber drama stands in opposition to expressionism. He states that “Kammerspiel utilizes realism and understatement; expressionism utilizes exaggeration and overstatement; but both are dependent upon psychology, often of a complicated nature” (116). Schrader highlights the tension between these styles and goes on to argue that Dreyer’s “transcendental style” interacts with expressionism and chamber drama and “brings them a certain spiritual weight which they do not innately possess” (113).

Like expressionism, transcendental style in Dreyer’s films stems from the Kammerspiel and opposes it. But it also opposes expressionism and its right to control the Kammerspiel... Transcendental style prefers to undermine the kammerspiel rather than attack it. It doesn’t transform the external world; in stasis the mountain looks pretty much like it did in everyday. It transforms the rationale of the world without changing its exterior. It does not rely on objective “proof” – whether that be the slight gesture of an actor (Kammerspiel) or a transfigured universe (expressionism) – but on a carefully constructed phenomenology of faith (118-119).

Schrader views Joan of Arc as a typical Dreyerian character with a “psychological dilemma” (120). Schrader studies the “stylistic tension” (120) that is evoked by the clash between chamber drama (as evidenced in the naturalistic settings) and expressionism (as evidenced in camera work) explains the protagonist’s psychological dilemma, but not the other tension evoked by the element of transcendence¹⁵ (120). Schrader believes that this sort of “disparity (the Other within the physical) is the disparity of transcendental style. Dreyer not only creates disparity in the conventional psychological sense by contrasting chamber drama and expressionism, but he also creates disparity in the manner of transcendental style” (120).

In *Breaking the Waves*, von Trier explores the elements of transcendental style, by examining “the concept of a miraculous event within a carefully constructed banal reality” (120). Von Trier confronts humanity by questioning the existence of spiritual beliefs in modern world. The clearest example of this is seen in the film’s ending. This can be interpreted as an example of the transcendental style, of “the Other within the physical,” as described by Schrader (120). Throughout the film, the theme of Bess’s desire to put the bells back on the church is a metaphor for her aim to question institutionalised religion and to embrace the existence of spirituality within oneself. Bess is buried at sea and the following night Jan’s co-workers wake him up at midnight. They want him to go to the deck to listen to some miraculous sounds. Von Trier ends the film with an image of Jan and the others listening to the bells in the middle of the sea’s expanse. The last shot is a bird’s-eye view of bells far up in the sky. Throughout the film, von Trier sets up a parallel between Bess’s healing and Jan’s progress toward recovery.

¹⁵ Schrader refers to the tension Dreyer has spoken about and quotes his statement: “It is that latent tension, that smoldering discomfort behind the minister’s family’s everyday life that I have so urgently been trying

Bess's growing faith in her spiritual powers coincides with Jan's recovery from paralysis. In the end, we witness what Bess had prayed for before her own death - Jan's rising from the bed and walking. These miraculous events in the midst of banal reality are what create the tension similar to the one in Dreyer's work.¹⁶

Schrader's study is important in questioning how spirituality can be manifested in film. However, it ignores the question of spiritual qualities in character, by claiming how transcendental style doesn't manifest itself in characters as such. It is evident that von Trier examines questions about the nature of transcendence, as analyzed by Schrader, but is more interested in the human dimensions of spirituality.¹⁷ For von Trier, the collision between human and abstract is something fascinating rather than a cause of anxiety. This characteristic separates him from his predecessors, like Dreyer and Bergman. The spirituality demonstrated in Dreyer and Bergman's films takes part in depicting heroines' bodies as symbolic of something that restricts the freedom of spirit. Bodies are placed in the context of social norms and realistic representations, whereas spiritual minds are something that can escape these two realms. Moreover, the actor's

to bring forward" (120).

¹⁶ The ways in which film can manifest the element of transcendence and the extent to which it can be read as an authorial comment has led scholars to compare Dreyer and von Trier, more specifically *The Word* (1954) and *Breaking the Waves*. For example, see Sedakova et al. for the roundtable discussion that takes place in *Iskusstvo Kino* where theatre and literature critics, philosophers, and scholars of Scandinavian culture discussed the points of contact between these two films. Although one can find obvious similarities in these filmmakers provoking themselves as well as the spectator with questions of where transcendence is placed and who possesses it, confusions become more pronounced when Bess's carnality is coupled with her spiritual beliefs in *Breaking the Waves*.

¹⁷ Lars von Trier has described the underlying meaning he tries to convey through the use of hand-held camera and documentary techniques in *Breaking the Waves*. According to von Trier, these techniques give the film a human touch and the feeling that what we see is not planned and calculated. This strategy in the filmmaker's view has a lot to do with his religious beliefs. He states that "Religion to me is very much giving away control to some force that might be bigger than you." Giving away control is present in von Trier's camerawork: the camera is let free to move more or less as it wants to or it is free to move where the story takes it (von Trier in *The Directors*. Marc Gervais's interview. World Affairs Television Production, 1999).

physicality and realism are expressive channels that restrict, rather than enhance, spiritual aspirations. Raymond Carney describes this as follows: “although bodies can never ultimately be left behind or completely forgotten in realistic narrative films of the sort that Dreyer makes, he goes as far as he can in the direction of suggesting that his characters can move beyond the physical and social limits of embodiment” (93).

[Dreyer’s] figures exist somewhere beyond realistic appreciations, yet without having entirely left realism behind. They hover uncertainly between two realms: one in which to imagine something is the same as doing it, and another in which meanings and relationships are enacted practically, in the repressive structures of actual space and time. Their physical bodies (which they can never quite leave behind, without dying out of them) anchor them in the practical realm of human interactions, while their spirits and Dreyer’s stylistic transformations, distortions, and intensifications work to make them fluid and fluxional (96).

The excessive experiences and lack of means for their expressions are what Carney implicitly refers to in his discussion about Dreyer’s heroines and their spiritual experiences.¹⁸ Carney borrows Peter Brooks’ term “language of desire” to describe Dreyer’s efforts to go beyond realistic representation in his depiction of characters who are “too visionary, too emotionally energetic, too imaginative for the expressive situations in which they find themselves” (80). Carney’s discussion obviously runs parallel with Dreyer’s own discussion about his approach to acting, which obeys the laws of naturalism. The opposing cinematic styles characterize Dreyer’s filmmaking, as suggested by Schrader. Yet, I believe that this freedom of expression becomes more ambiguous than straightforward in Dreyer’s approach to acting. Dreyer’s discussion of performance is linked to the question of cinema as an art form: “Realism in itself is not

art; it is only psychological or spiritual realism that is so” (Dreyer “Little,” 134). To achieve realism, Dreyer taught his actors to stay away from “falseness and pure exteriority” (135) For Dreyer, externalisation leads to something “untrue,” “unreal” and “mimicry”- while the internalisation leads to something “true,” “real” and “art” (“Dreyer’s Reply,” 70). Dreyer has stated, “one would search long for material more tempting for presentation as exterior drama. I – and, I dare to say, also my actors along with me – have chosen not to fall for the temptation. We have been just as eager in searching out the false exaggerations and the establishing clichés. We forced ourselves to search for truthfulness” (“Little,” 134). Dreyer achieved spiritual realism via de-theatricalization, which demanded taming the body. The passage into spirituality was enabled by the stillness of the actor’s body.

Dreyer’s emphasis on naturalism in acting is crucial when considering how the naturalist acting style has been used to manifest the characters’ spiritual aspirations, influencing the portrayal of their physicality. In Dreyer, spirituality and female sexuality becomes intertwined: the lack of channels for sexual desires shifts the focus onto the spiritual realm of characters’ being.¹⁹ The excessiveness of both experiences - sexuality and spirituality - is toned down by naturalism. They are depicted as invisible entities. One notices a strong desire to push the boundaries of naturalism and exceed it as an expressive channel, one that is insufficient for self-expression. Naturalistic acting, the actor’s body, and social norms are all tools used to tone down the excessiveness of spirituality. In *Persona*, Bergman provocatively demonstrates the temptation to exceed

¹⁸ Carney’s arguments are based on his analysis of female characters mostly in *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, *Day of Wrath* (1944), *The Word* and *Gertrud*.

¹⁹ See also Mark Nash’s analysis on “the barred image” for the connection of women’s sexual repression and lighting effect (13-16).

'*physical existence*'- sharing Dreyer's concern with spiritual minds and sexual bodies.

Carney points out that

[Dreyer's] stylistic acts of imaginative displacement and de-realization are continuously counterpoised against narrative acts of bodily replacement and social realization. His characters' and his own imaginative energies are forced to be expressed practically and physically. That double allegiance generates the essential drama in all of his work... most important characters in the late films have an irreducible ontological indeterminateness about them. They shimmer uncertainly between being spirits and being bodies: between expanding imaginatively and emotionally outward beyond all bounds, and contracting inward to inhabit and be represented by their mere physical selves (91-92).

In *Persona*, Bergman strongly depicts the split between body and mind, by embodying these opposing entities in the characters of Alma - as personification of body, and Elisabeth - as personification of soul. Bergman's exploration of the dynamics between these two women focuses on the oppositional forces of body and mind. The conclusion leads to the union between them being impossible, yet desirable, leading to frustration and aggression. According to John Simon, this duality can be "embodied in two persons, as it is here, but it has a distinct relevance to the contradictory aspects of a single person. As complementary opposites, they need to seek each other out following the principle of polarity; but as conflicting, antithetical forces, they end up by clashing" (224). It is this attempt to fuse mind and body that gives Alma an urge for "wishful identification" (Steene *Ingmar Bergman*, 119),²⁰ Elisabeth being a symbol of what she lacks.

²⁰ According to Steene, "the image of God finds its psychological correlative in the naked but mysterious self of Elisabeth Vogler. She is being with 'severe eyes,' according to Alma; she is treacherous, detached and yet at times kind and patient; she allures and repels at the same time. She is half-benevolence, half "spider-god" (*Ingmar Bergman*, 118). Although Steene doesn't develop her analysis of the film's metaphysical aspects, she depicts Alma as lacking the same spirituality of being that the character finds in others. Steene argues that this is due to Alma's "growing awareness of herself as a physical being" (119).

Bergman's examination of the opposing forces of body and soul that refuse to be combined becomes inseparable from the film's tendency to transfer sexuality into the spiritual realm. Sexuality is dealt with in the characters' past remembrances and fantasy-like speeches, such as in the climactic scene where Alma's monologue of a beach orgy aims to evoke the eroticism between Alma and Elisabeth (as discussed in my second chapter)²¹ - or in their dreams. Moreover, the sexuality that is remembered or fantasized, inevitably leads to suffering and to bad conscience. "The deceptions necessary to their intimacy" (Gado 336), and the sexuality the characters struggle with, ultimately lead to the denial of intimate relationships. The way in which sexuality is given the dreamlike status in the film renders the experience of sexuality as unreal. It is transferred from the physical to the spiritual realm and depicted as '*intangible*' that results in deceptions (whether via cinematographic fantasizing or the characters' role-playing). Sexuality in the form of fantasies, dreams, or memories, becomes detached from one's earthbound physicality, which is structured by social norms.

Steene studies the dialectics between classical mainstream and modernist narrative devices in *Persona* and "the modernist takeover" ("Bergman's *Persona*," 34), the shift from naturalism to modernism. Steene refers to the world of dreams that become more prominent in the course of the film, sequences whose status as 'dream' or 'fantasy'

²¹ John Simon is suggestive of Carney's study of Dreyer, particularly the way in which the spiritual adventures of Dreyer's heroines' mind activates the viewer's mind. Simon analyzes the way in which Alma's monologue regarding beach orgy hints at the sexual relationship between Alma and the other girl; through Alma's monologue the spectator is asked to project this sexuality of the union between Alma and the other girl onto the relationship between Alma and Elisabeth. Simon notes that "the actress lies on the bed, as if absorbing the narrated sexual experiences into her own body" (274). It is the stability of the actor's body that evokes these spiritual occurrences between the characters as well as trigger those of the spectator. Bergman recalls his direction of the scene and implies the stability of the actor's body by stating, "I told Liv how she must gather all her feeling into her lips. She had to concentrate on placing her sensibility there - it's possible, you know, to place one's feeling into one's little finger, or one's big toe, or into one buttock, or your lips" (quoted in Cowie *Ingmar Bergman*, 238).

remains ambiguous begin to gain dominance. Steene is of the opinion that by doing this, Bergman aligns himself with Strindberg, who detaches himself from a “tightly structured and logically conceived dramaturgy, to a modernist – that is, subjective, associative, and fluid dramaturgy” (26).²² Thus, *Persona* functions as an “uncanny parallel to Strindberg’s dramaturgical course” (34).

In *Persona*, Bergman’s search for “somnambulist dramaturgy, that is, a form of dramatic vision where waking reality and dreamlike experiences were presumed to coexist” (Steene “Bergman’s *Persona*,” 34), his temptation “to transcend the world of outer action and penetrate into ‘the twilight land of suprareality’” (28), best exemplifies the degree to which he embodies excess in his characters. In order for the manifestations of excess to be pronounced, one has to move beyond the tangible world. This leads to the examination of sexuality in the context of the characters’ dreams. The characters’ spirits exceed the realistic boundaries that metaphorically and literally confine their bodies, creating transcendence - a required element for their spiritual existences.

Von Trier radically redefines this dialectical exploration of spiritual minds and sexual bodies. In what follows, I will examine how von Trier finds a solution for the problem of Dogma’s demand for naturalistic performances. Von Trier professes that naturalism, as a mode of acting, doesn’t restrict the manifestations of excess. Rather, excess and naturalism function within a dialogue in the most provocative ways. My following analyses of the performances aim to show how in von Trier the actor is

²² See also how Steene reminds the reader of the work by filmmakers representing earlier Swedish cinema, such as Victor Sjöström who experimented in taking a “realistic mise-en-scene *and* a reality beyond the tangible world, that is, into transcendent states of mind” (38). This is what gives Steene reason for arguing that Bergman, while studying “the non-realistic dimensions of the cinema,” is a part of “the same artistic syndrome that helped shape the work of earlier Swedish filmmakers” (42).

required to create a believable character from within and to use her body to express the excessive impulses of her character. This becomes crucial when we analyze the representation of spirituality. I argue that in von Trier “physical identity” and “imaginative identity” (Carney 95) become linked. Von Trier emphasizes spiritual, yet physical beings. The performances in von Trier’s films illuminate how the social norms and the physicality of being do not limit the experience of spirituality.

Sexuality as a conduit to spirituality

In *Breaking the Waves* Bess constantly ponders the disparity between her feelings, her “imaginative energy” (Carney 103), and her physical, sexual behaviour. Her expanding feelings of love for Jan and their outward manifestation are a theme in her conversations with God. Through Bess’s character, von Trier studies the confusing battle between body and spirit. The earthbound representations of the protagonist’s sexuality are coupled with her spiritual aspirations in the “mixture of *cinema vérité*, magic realism and kitsch melodrama” (McKenna 5). The externalised mode of acting in Watson’s performance emphasizes the physicality of being, which is inseparable from the film’s analysis of sexuality.

When we are introduced to Bess and Jan as a couple the camera’s focus is on Bess who is dressed in a white wedding dress. Dodo (Katrin Cartlidge), Bess’s sister-in-law, walks behind Bess, who keeps running away from her and refuses to listen to her warning words: “you are going to ruin your dress.” Bess ignores Dodo by pulling herself away from her and running towards a landing helicopter, repeating the words “he is late.”

Bess ignores Dodo's presence and her words: "at least he is coming" go unnoticed. Finally, the camera captures Bess's face in a close-up, looking intently at the helicopter. Once again, she repeats the words: "he is late." Bess is completely focused on gazing the landing helicopter. The sheer intensity of her concentration, demonstrates how Bess's surroundings disappear from her sight at that moment. As soon as the helicopter lands, Bess takes two strides, and when catching the first glimpse of Jan, runs towards him. She acts out her desperate longing for his presence by slapping him. Jan caresses her cheek to give her a kiss but she continues to slap him aggressively. Jan manages to force her to stand still long enough to give her a hug. Bess laughs a bit, out of sheer joy, and kisses him back briefly. She squeezes her mouth, holding back a smile, and begins to slap him again. Bess's aggressive slapping and hysterical cries are her way of demonstrating her emotions towards Jan.

Bess's unwillingness to tame her physical needs when in Jan's presence, becomes more and more prominent. Bess, Dodo, and Jan's friends drive to the harbour. First we see a close-up of Bess, whose face depicts her awakening desperation. She tries to stiffen her mouth to hold back the tears and laughs a bit to show she is fine, but her emotions soon take over and she runs away. She runs far away from the others and begins to slap the docks with a stick. We see her from the back; her hair is loose and wildly falling down her shoulders. The strength of her movement comes from her whole body. When Jan comes to stop her, Bess pulls herself away from him, turns around, and begins to hit him with both arms. Soon after, Jan is seen leaving Bess at the airport; Bess and Jan walk towards the helicopter holding each other. They kiss briefly and Jan is seen walking away from her. Once again, as in the beginning of the film, Bess stares intently at the

helicopter. The camera lingers on Bess, whose chest is heaving, her breath heavy. Soon her hysteria becomes manifest in her out-of-control yelling: “Nooo.” She suddenly runs towards the departing helicopter and opens its front door. Bess’s whole body is shaking and her eyes are fixed. Jan comes out, holds Bess in his arms, kisses her twice and hands her over to Dodo, who has run after her. To alleviate her hysteria, Dodo gives her some medicine. Bess is in an ecstatic state, humming to herself. From the open of the film, we are introduced to Bess’ desires, which are later portrayed as extremely physical and aggressive. Watson describes Bess’s character by stating that “She’s like a person without a skin in that she doesn’t know when to stop with any emotion” (quoted in McKenna 5).

In the scene that takes place after the wedding ceremony, Bess runs to the bathroom followed by Jan. Without hesitation, Bess takes off her shoes and lifts up her dress. We see her taking off her stockings and underwear and putting them aside. She stands in front of Jan, holding up her lifted dress and saying “have me now,” Jan asks “Here? Maybe you would want something more romantic.” Bess answers, her stare unwavering from Jan’s face: “This is lovely.” The shots where Bess’s dress is lifted run parallel to the ones that focus on her innocent-looking face. Jan moves towards Bess and slightly touches her shoulders, which we see reflected in the mirror. When Jan kisses Bess, she steps away from him, spreads her arms wide apart and asks: “What will I do?” Jan gets closer to Bess and gently pushes her against the wall. Bess keeps staring into Jan’s eyes, trustingly. Bess’s inexperience is depicted by her innocent openness, accompanied by her awkwardness. This awkwardness is seen in her robust bodily movements within the physical confines of intimacy. Her behaviour in that scene

registers her feelings, which range from excitement of the unknown to fear, that she withstands in the name of love. After their lovemaking, Jan asks Bess: "Okay?" Bess stays silent. The camera follows Jan, who puts his pants on and says: "There is blood on your dress." Bess is seen leaning towards the wall. She stands motionless and silent, as Jan kisses her and asks if he should go down and wait for her there. As soon as Jan has left the washroom, we see Bess washing the hemline of her dress. Dodo looks into the bathroom, but closes the door. When Bess leaves the bathroom, she finds Dodo waiting for her on the stairs. Dodo gives her a hug. This scene is an instance of the manner in which the earth-bound representation of Bess's sexuality is established, from the beginning. Thus, the link von Trier later establishes with Bess's spirituality becomes even more interesting.

The physical bond between the main characters and sexual needs that are developed within Bess become more prominent when Jan has to go back to sea. At the same time, Bess's conversations with God and her impersonation of God's punishing voice, demonstrate her wonder and awe about the way in which her own body and spirit are torn apart. She questions whether her actions match the feeling of love she confesses to have. When Bess confesses to God - that is to herself - that she loves Jan, she impersonates God's voice and says, "So you keep saying but I don't see it. Prove to me that you love him and then I will let him live." The parallel between Bess's prayers, where she begs for Jan's return, and his homecoming leads Bess to believe that she possesses magical powers. Bess visits Jan at a hospital, and Jan tells her: "Love is a mighty power, isn't it... If I die, it is because love cannot keep me alive. I can hardly remember what is it like to make love. And if I forget that, I will die. Do you remember,

when I phoned you from the Ricks, we made love without being together. Bess, I want you to find a man to make love to, then come back here and tell me about it... Like you and me, being together again, that... that will keep me alive." Jan's request initiates Bess's unwavering belief in her supernatural ability to heal Jan. Bess begins to view her sexuality as a tool she can use to heighten her spiritual beliefs that are qualities she believes God has endowed her with. What follows are a series of scenes, which best exemplify how von Trier transforms "private, inward drama of imagination and desire" (Carney 80) into public, externalised expressions of one's imagination and desire. Bess confesses to Doctor Richardson, looking straight into his eyes, "I don't make love with them, I make love with Jan." She slowly raises her eyebrows while continuing, "I save him from dying... Sometimes I don't even have to tell him about it... Jan and me, we have a spiritual contact." She pauses, but continues looking into Richardson's eyes, displaying her honest belief in the words she just delivered. She continues: "God gives everyone something to be good at. I've always been stupid, but I'm good at this. God gives everyone a talent." Doctor Richardson asks: "What is Jan's talent?" Bess pauses, looks up, and then reflects deeply on the question, searching for an answer. A smile appears on her face as she comes up with an answer: "he is a great lover." "What is mine then," asks Richardson, "I don't know," Bess admits openly, looking up and rolling her eyes to the left. She then stares directly into his eyes, riveting his attention on her, and says: "Haven't you found it yet?"

The first effort to "heal" Jan takes place at Doctor Richardson's apartment in the scene first discussed in Chapter one. Bess runs to his place, holding a wine bottle in her hands. She hands it over to him at the door, exclaiming: "I've come to dance." Bess's

dance of seduction begins, accompanied by free-flowing camerawork, recording Bess from various angles and distances. Bess dances, lifts her arms far up, stretches her neck back and moves around in a circle, pouring a drink in her glass. Richardson wants Bess to stop and talk to him. Bess obeys him, but says "Give me five minutes." Next, we see Richardson opening his bedroom door. Bess is lying naked on his bed and telling him: "You can touch me now." Bess spreads her arms wide apart and the camera focuses on her closely, as she continues: "You can have me now." Richardson tells her they are not going to make love and demands that she put her clothes on. Bess shows her lack of understanding by lowering her eyebrows and rolling her eyes. Her voice breaking, she wonders, "You don't want me? Don't you like me?" Her openness and excitement suddenly turns into a lack of understanding and disappointment. She pauses and says in a weaker voice: "You said you liked me... you don't understand that... I'll be good to you." She bursts into tears, rolls herself inside the blanket, and we hear her sob.

The scenes of sexual encounters taking place in a bus or ferry or in the harbour, show how Bess lives in her own world. Bess's child-like innocence towards her own sexuality exists beyond social norms, which conjures up guilt in relation to that sexuality. Bess's belief in the spiritual contact she has with Jan enables her to blur the boundary between private and public sexual behaviour. The scene at Doctor Richardson's place demonstrates Bess's demystification of private sexual conduct. The scenes where she makes love to strangers or satisfies them sexually in public places depict how Bess unveils private sexuality, publicly. In doing so, she separates pure physical acts from feelings of love, which leads her to feel confused and puzzled. The strength of Bess's

spirituality manifests itself in the extent to which she blurs those boundaries and is willing to combine the opposing forces within herself.

The fact that Bess's earthbound physicality is expressed through her dance of seduction and slaps aligns her with the heroines of Scandinavian realist theatre in the tradition of Ibsen and Strindberg. Women's hysteria such as Nora's in *A Doll's House* or Hedda's in *Hedda Gabler* was a form of their revolt against the roles and guidelines society had imposed upon women (Finney "Maternity," 161).²³ Moreover, it was viewed as a threat to be eliminated. As Rokem states, "This threat has to be manipulated out of the text, or *written out* of it... Women who raise their hands with the ambivalent gesture of attraction and aggression have in the end no place in texts where *men* have been writing *women*" ("Slapping," 241; emphasis in original).

Likewise in *Persona*, Bergman eliminates the threat of hysterical women. Alma's hysterical behaviour- her slapping Elisabeth's face - is a sign of erotic arousal among the two women for one another that climaxes in the film's dream sequences.²⁴ The realistic dimension of the film focuses on the aggressiveness of female behaviour. The "modernist takeover" that Steene argues for demonstrates that the focus is transformed and the climaxes will take place only in dreams. Thus, hysterical behaviour evokes the sexual tension that serves as a thread. Its climax is then resolved in dreams, in half-reality, where the earthbound physicality of being is transcended. It is evident that in *Persona*, while reflecting Strindberg's dramaturgical course, "the modernist takeover"

²³ See also, how this is what makes the difference between the sources of hysteria in Freud's female patients in the 1880s and 1890s and the hysteria depicted in Ibsen (Finney "Maternity," 159-161) The fact that Ibsen was writing his plays at the same time as Sigmund Freud was studying his hysterical female patients still provokes interest from feminist critics.

²⁴ See more about the connection between bisexuality and hysteria in Freud 194-201.

that Steene sees on a narrative level also reflects the way in which the hysterical expression of female sexuality was “written out” (Rokem “Slapping,” 241) of the text. This “modernist takeover” takes part in redefining Strindberg’s view of sexuality in his later work. It was believed that in order to endow oneself with spiritual qualities, one needed a self-transcendence, transcendence that simultaneously called for suppression of earthbound dimensions of sexuality. Thus, one could argue that within *Persona*, Bergman not only captures Strindbergian dramaturgical discourse, but also Strindberg’s changing depiction of female sexuality that is part of “modernist takeover:” the realistic dimensions of Alma’s hysterical behaviour are transformed into the modernist depiction of women’s spiritual qualities and the transcendence of the (hysterical) body.

Von Trier relies on the performance of hysteria, as a means of expressing one’s sexuality. Yet, I believe that it is the excessiveness of Bess’s hysteria that is contemplated, and even rendered a spectacle. The focus is solely on hysteria and its physical embodiment. What is not depicted is the threatening characteristic of hysterical behaviour. Moreover, hysteria is not coupled with evocation of sexual tension and the inability to reach fulfilment. Hysterical behaviour becomes rather a culmination of Bess’s excessive feelings of love, a representation of her desire to grant her total devotion to Jan. Her hysteria is demonstrated during episodes of hopelessness and desperation, brought on by her insatiable feelings of love for Jan. Her hysteria is an embodiment of her total devotion to him, how her love for him exceeds everything else in her life. Thus, Bess’s hysterical dance in Doctor Richardson’s apartment, obviously viewed by him as “sheer madness,”²⁵ is a part of her self-sacrifice in the way that at that moment she has let

²⁵ In act II of *A Doll’s House* there is a scene where Nora dances in order to prevent her husband Torvald Helmer from finding a letter that would reveal her true nature as an independent woman. Helmer’s words to

herself be led by spiritual powers. By performing the dance and displaying her desperation to Doctor Richardson, she believes that she heightens her spiritual connection with Jan, which will lead to his recovery. As Stellan Skarsgård has argued, *Breaking the Waves* is a “fairy tale about the power of love and faith, and it presents an image of pure love we should all aspire to but few of us will ever experience” (quoted in McKenna 84).

In *Breaking the Waves* the representation of Bess’s sexuality is something that gives von Trier the device to explore manifestations of what Linda Williams calls “bodily excess” (4). Williams defines the term as “a spectacle of a body caught in the grip of intense sensation or emotion” (4).²⁶ Williams’ discussion of excess is important when one examines the performances in von Trier’s films. For Williams, horror, melodrama and pornographic films function as “body genres,” belonging to “the extended rubric of melodrama, considered as a filmic mode of stylistic and/or emotional excesses that stands in contrast to more ‘dominant’ modes of realistic, goal-oriented narrative” (3). I view Bess as a personification of “bodily excess” in the sense that we (together with the character) contemplate the physicality of her being. Bess’s use of her body in the scenes I have previously analyzed, fulfill the demands of excessive film acting that Carole Zucker defines as “eccentric, theatrical, exaggerated, stylized, or over-acted” (“Concept” 54).

In *Breaking the Waves*, Bess’s hysterical bodily movements, ranging from depicting her desire for physical intimacy with Jan, to longing for his presence, to her

Nora “you are dancing as if your life depended on it”(48) precede his consideration of Nora’s dance as “sheer madness” (49). That scene registers how Ibsen links Nora’s hysterical dance, her quest for independence, and her threatening qualities that would shatter Helmer’s position in their household.

²⁶ For Williams “bodily excess” is a “form of ecstasy.” She states, “While the classical meaning of the original Greek word [for ecstasy] is insanity and bewilderment, more contemporary meanings suggest

desperate hopelessness in his absence share a “quality of uncontrollable convulsion or spasm – of the body ‘beside itself’ with sexual pleasure, fear and terror, or overpowering sadness” (Williams 4). It is this bodily excess, manifesting itself in the actor’s use of body, accompanied by the juxtaposition of “inarticulate cries of pleasure” with “sobs of anguish” (4), that the filmmaker conveys to us, all of which gives the film its deep-felt resonance.

I believe that von Trier’s exploration of a character’s spiritual aspirations and his interest in examining the representation of “different kinds of sexual perversion” (von Trier quoted in Hjort and Bondebjerg 213), thus giving manifestations to “bodily excess,” leads to a “re-examination of performance aesthetics” (Zucker “Concept,” 55) in relation to the filmmaker’s predecessors. Watson’s performance in *Breaking the Waves* is an example of the way in which one’s physicality doesn’t stand in opposition to spiritual aspirations unlike in Bergman and Dreyer’s films.

Spiritual being and suppression of sexuality

In *The Idiots* von Trier further studies the dialectics of human and abstract by contrasting one’s spiritual existence with earthly sexuality. If excess is understood as something that is “on the edge of respectable” (Williams 2) then von Trier continues exploring excessive manifestations of sexuality in *The Idiots*. The film’s explicit representation of sexuality led critics to consider it as an example of von Trier’s “skepticism toward traditional definitions of ‘good taste’ and ‘common sense’” (Sterritt

components of direct or indirect sexual excitement and rapture, a rapture which informs even the paths of melodrama” (4).

76). The film was thought to highlight the filmmaker's working principle of "no style except my style" (Rooney 61). The film was shown in the Cannes Film Festival where "for some reason the forces of propriety there were shocked that von Trier had his troupe engage in actual group sex, filmed the scene and included it in all its grungy hard-core glory" (Griffin C2). After Cannes, the film won the critics prize, the FIPRESCI award, at the London Film Festival, but encountered the censorship in US and Britain-the video release, also being banned in Ireland. Sometimes called a "disturbing" film (Rooney 61), it provoked a discussion about the extent to which it provoked its audience by "pushing the boundaries of notional good taste, liberating sexual representation" (Falcon 12), adhering to a part of a new European "transgressive cinema" that deals with an "aggressive desire to confront their audiences, to render the spectator's experience problematic" (12).

In *The Idiots*, the radicalism of sexual representation is achieved through the way in which the privacy of a chamber space, denoted by an empty house, is used as an arena for private reflections of one's sexuality. The privacy of a chamber space is pushed to the extreme, leading to the freedom of the externalized sexuality that turns an individual experience into a collective experience. As in *Breaking the Waves*, sexuality is *embodied* in the physicality of performance. *The Idiots* studies the split between spiritual mind and sexual body by comparing Karen's lack of freedom in her body - the stillness of it - to the other characters' liberal experimentation with their bodies. Karen is the opposite of "extrovert" Bess (Jorgensen. Personal interview. 26 June 2001), which is evident in the characters' respective depictions of sexuality.

There is a scene that takes place in a swim hall, a public place, where the characters engage in studying their own bodies as well as those of others. They gaze, touch, and wash each other's naked bodies. Karen is a spectator in the group, timidly gazing at the others' exploration of their body, from a distance. Whereas others exhibit their bodies to each other as well as to the camera, Karen constantly turns away from both of them.²⁷ In this scene, Karen's evasion and fear of physical intimacy is established. "In her body Karen is not free, while she is freest of all in other things" (Jorgensen. Personal interview. 26 June 2001).

Karen's timid behaviour is symptomatic of her physical self-denial and suppression of sexuality. This is compared to the way in which for others physical freedom leads to sexuality in the form of playful experimentation. The most explicit demonstration of this is witnessed in the scene where the characters give a party for Stoffer. Here, they all engage in group sex in the living room of the empty house. This scene shows that the practice of exceeding physical limits, which is the undercurrent in the characters' performances, is pushed to its extreme in the depiction of sexuality. The characters' private sexuality becomes examined and shared by the community members. But, Karen is seen withdrawing from the community that is about to engage in the sexual orgy. Karen leaves the room silently tiptoeing and hunching her shoulders. The seriousness of her face and her robust bodily movements echo her feelings of disapproval, discomfort, and fear of the others' spassing. She is an outsider who stays away from the group. Her individuality and dignity, which she portrays throughout the film, render her experience of sexuality a private issue.

²⁷ The fact that Karen is not seen naked was also the actor's way of demonstrating to von Trier the strictness of her own limits as an actor (Jorgensen. Personal interview. 26 June 2001).

On the level of character, Karen's ambiguity is based on the lack of means to comprehend her fear of communion, yet her desire to belong. The reasons for Karen's physical inhibitions and her suppressed sexuality are suspended until the very end of the film, when Karen's sister tells Susanne how she had only recently lost her child. Von Trier depicts how Karen's sexuality is strongly tied to her past. For the others, sexuality is a temporary experience, which endows it with the freedom of experimentation.

The message von Trier is conveying to us in *The Idiots* through the explicit representation of sexuality, the "bodily excess," is tied up with the issue of provocation and how it does not actually lead to anything. What Jorgensen finds provocative is the way in which the film, and the performance styles in the film, reflects the workings of today's society. According to Jorgensen, the freedom of sexuality in *The Idiots* captures the essence of a society where freedom of expression is liberal and unconfined. Although nothing seems to be hidden, there is an underlying shadow of fear and sorrow which cannot be expressed. The film is a hymn to what one can never say. Jorgensen views this inexpressiveness in people - the sorrow in Karen - as a sign of spirituality. According to Jorgensen, the film reminds us how it is a spiritual quality in human beings that is never diminished (Personal interview. 26 June 2001). Spirituality is rooted and innate part of every one of us, yet something one has difficulties in recognizing. Von Trier's film forces its recognition. The extreme control over her body suppresses Karen's sexuality and exceeds its earthbound dimensions. Karen's fears, desires, and dreams, lie beyond the tangible world and it is that world that she aims to reach.²⁸

²⁸ Thus, in *The Idiots* Karen's control over her body becomes a larger metaphor for a lack of communication for which von Trier finds an expression in Jorgensen's internalised performance. The way sexuality is a metaphor for the need to find expression for that which resists it links von Trier to Bergman. For Richard A. Blake, Bergman's examination of sexuality "fits into the larger meaning of his artistic

Von Trier's cinematography, especially his use of close-up, enhances Karen's transcendence of her body. The suppression of Karen's sexuality parallels the style of cinematography that, in its stillness, concentrates on her face. Karen is literally and metaphorically lifted up from her own body. By doing this, von Trier is aligning himself with Bergman and Dreyer. He attempts to demonstrate how the use of the close-up enhances the character's spiritual qualities. Simultaneously through the use of cinematography, the filmmaker engages, on a thematic level, in a discussion of the suppression of one's sexuality, highlighting the sexual strife, disgust of physical contact, and self-loathing. There is a quasi-transcendental element in Karen's existence. By denying her body, transcendence to a more spiritual level of existence is made possible.

expression; it is an image which reveals in a most powerful and personal way the value of communication and art in man's attempt to find meaning in his life. The human persona, according to Bergman, is not the atomic unit of society; rather he is a component seeking a reality beyond himself, either in love for another person or in artistic expression. In the enunciation of this theme, the sexual metaphor provides the most fruitful comparison" ("Sexual" 44). See also John Simon about the use of music in Bergman's *Persona* and how he states that "art cannot attack the most deep-seated problems frontally... but only by indirection, insinuation, abstraction" (253).

4. Looking for childlikeness

This chapter will be concerned with von Trier's exploration of childlike qualities in performance. Von Trier's Dogma films call for a specific mode of acting that emphasizes (re)discovery of childlikeness within the actor. Moreover, in his films the quest for childlike, innocent sincerity and an urge to regain the childlikeness in oneself become ideas that the filmmaker explores on a thematic level. By analyzing the use of performance in *The Idiots* and *Breaking the Waves* my aim is to explore how the formal and thematic issues of childlikeness in acting coalesce. First, childlikeness is viewed as an innate part of performance. Second, the films depict childlikeness in oneself that performance aims to recapture.

The art of acting originated in the earliest childhood of mankind... In children the nature of the actor is reflected at its purest. Their susceptibility is without example. And the urge to mold and dramatize in children's play is irrepressible and truly creative. They want to discover and create the world all over again themselves. With lightning speed they transform themselves into everything they see and transport everything into what they wish to be. Their imaginative powers are conclusive: This sofa here? A railroad! Obviously. And in no time at all the engine sputters and hisses, a whistle blows; through the train window strange and wonderful landscapes are seen flying by; a suspicious conductor demands a ticket; it is produced and, before you know it, the end of the journey has been reached; the first chair within grasp pulls away from the other taxis; an out-of-breath hotel porter huffs and puffs under the weight of a pillow he carries. And this footstool? And airplane floating through all the seven heavens! What is this? Theatre. Ideal theatre and exemplary acting. And all the while, the clear, ever-present awareness that it is nothing but play – played in dead earnest.

I believe in the immortality of the theatre. It is the happiest hiding place for those who have secretly put their childhood in their pocket and made off with it to play to the end of their days. (M. Reinhardt quoted in G. Reinhardt 52, 53)

Like Max Reindhardt, Konstantin Stanislavski believes that every actor needs to rediscover childlike qualities when creating his/her role. Stanislavski writes, “Just as a little girl believes in the existence of her doll and in the life in and around her, so the actor, the moment the creative ‘if’ appears, is transported from the plane of real life to the plane of a different kind of life which he himself has created in his imagination. Once he believes in it, he is ready to start his creative work” (*Stanislavsky* 23).

Von Trier’s intimate filmmaking creates an atmosphere of trust where the actors are encouraged to find new dimensions within themselves and to exceed physical and psychological limitations. For this, the actors are asked to go through a process that leads to a fresh approach to the art of acting; they are asked to return to an “infantile state” of examining bodily movements and vocal capacities. The films display this process. The actor is asked for total commitment to and faith in the project and where it may take him/her. The actor needs to have a sincere belief in the truthfulness of the “given circumstances” (*Stanislavsky* 36-38; see also *Building* 124), and willingness to conduct spontaneous, free experimentation of one’s body and voice. All this leads to the filmmaker’s search for the creation of what Stanislavski calls “the feeling for truth,” (*Stanislavsky* 23) in which “is contained the play of imagination and the formation of creative belief; in it is contained the best possible defence against stage falsehood, as well as the sense of proportion, the guarantee of a childlike naivety and the sincerity of artistic feeling” (23). Childlikeness in performance refers a lack of control, where unguarded responses to imaginary situations and the emotions they evoke prevail, a state of being where the actor lets herself be invaded by those emotions and where she develops a sincere belief, and child-like faith, in the director.

Before analyzing the performances in von Trier's films, I will take up two previous treatments of woman's childlikeness in Henrik Ibsen and in Ingmar Bergman. Like von Trier, these figures examine childlikeness as an innate part of performance, thereby linking its use to the notion of theatricality. The analysis of childlikeness in Ibsen and Bergman leads me to discuss what we are searching to gain, or even regain, when a mode of performance pushes childlike qualities to the forefront. Why does von Trier persuade the actor, and the spectator, to look for childlike qualities in today's world, and how does this search for childlikeness serve a different purpose than it once did?

A look behind Nora's "childlike façade"

In *A Doll's House*, Ibsen foregrounded the issue of woman's childlikeness as a theatrical mode of performance. Was Ibsen's creation of "a doll's house" an ironic statement of his heroine's theatrical role-playing as mother and as wife in her playhouse? Or were Nora's childlike qualities the witty tools with which she sheltered herself from cruel reality and protected her innocence and sincerity? Or, did Ibsen use childlikeness as an indication of Nora's growing effort to exceed the limits restricting her domestic identity and to grow into adulthood which would enable her to find herself? Was her childlikeness part of her naïve belief in her ultimate ability in being able to transcend her present existence?

For Lou Andreas-Salomé, it is Nora's "childlike façade" (46) that hides a growing sense of her own needs, her sense of self, and her shortcomings. Ultimately it is in Nora's childlike faith in being able to transcend her present self where one of the play's important messages is found. Andreas-Salomé describes "the wish for growth

[that] is a child's pleasure that trustingly demands self-transcendence" (44). In her "childlike idealism" (55) lies Nora's act of strength. By leaving the house Nora becomes an exemplary figure who shows us that it is possible to find the beauty of delimiting existence, and to recover the freedom of lost childhood.

It is Nora's "childlike façade," her theatrical performance of childlikeness, that becomes important for us here. For Joan Templeton, the repression of Nora's true self under the "child-wife" is suggestive of a typical Ibsen play, a "drama of disguise and concealment" (*Ibsen's Women* 139). It is this theatrical role-playing that conceals her dissatisfaction with the performance of other roles like those of mother and wife. Childlikeness is a crucial part of the character's resistance to step into adulthood. It is the female characters' yearning for lost freedom that Ibsen implies by bringing childlike qualities to the foreground; namely, the freedom that domestic roles like "mother" and "wife" restrict. Simultaneously Ibsen implies that the freedom defines the character's view of childhood. The search for freedom is concealed beneath the characters' performances of child-women. Ibsen's fascination with female childlike qualities calls for discussion about the ways in which these women acted out their resistance to these roles and embodied Ibsen's ironic statements about them. It is my assertion that Ibsen uses Nora's childlike qualities as a form of performance *within* performance; this is a part of Ibsen's meta-theatrical strategy. This becomes important for our discussion of von Trier's examination of the link between the notion of theatricality and childlikeness.

Alisa Solomon studies Ibsen's characterization of Nora and her associations with "secrecy, deception, and disguise" in relation to theatricality (57). Solomon examines women's performance within a performance and thus takes part in discussing a

woman as an “archetypal actress” (Fischer 74). She claims that Ibsen put previous forms of performance, and by implication, previous embodiments of women, under critical scrutiny by examining “the interplay between presentational and representational dramatic styles, between the mechanism of melodrama and the tarantellian promise of a new realist form” (54). When Solomon writes about how “Ibsen’s realism trembles to life in the tension between melodrama and metaphor” (57), she refers to Ibsen’s depiction of his female protagonist Nora as an actress within the play. The changes in Nora’s behaviour are marked by the transitions from theatrical performance where Nora is in the presence of others to non-theatrical performance, where she is seen alone. *A Doll’s House* lucidly manifests Ibsen’s critical exploration not only of melodramatic modes of representation in performance but also melodrama’s inadequate depiction of women’s roles as mothers and wives. Resistance to these theatrical roles on and off-stage was depicted through the character’s need to recapture the childlike qualities as represented in Ibsen’s characterization of Nora in *A Doll’s House*. The dominant desire this role-playing reflects is the character’s desperate urge to transcend the present existence.

Regressing to the infantile state

On one hand, the trauma of childhood has haunted the characters as the filmmaker’s alter ego in the films of Ingmar Bergman. On the other hand, the imagery of the lost paradise of childhood shows the filmmaker’s fascination with portraying a return to childlikeness. In his films of the 50s, such as *Waiting Women* (1952), *Dreams* (1955), *Illicit Interlude* (1954), *Brink of Life* (1958), we encounter “Bergman’s innocent ‘girl of summer’... [with] a pure childlike view of life”, a child-woman as “a true child of

nature” (Steene “Bergman’s Portrait,” 94). However, Bergman’s later work examines deeper psychological, even ontological questions concerning women’s experience of motherhood. Bergman contemplates these issues in relation to women’s urges to recapture the childlikeness within themselves. Women’s experiences as mothers becomes inseparable from Bergman’s exploration of their need to return to childlike beings and to what they experience as authentic existence. Steene notices that “there are relatively few actual children who appear in Bergman’s films. But metaphorically speaking many of his main characters are like children in search of a parent, unable to accept adulthood and fearing the loss of the autonomous self” (104).

“The mother-child syndrome” (101) is emphatically present in *Persona*. After the film’s introductory images the film depicts Elisabeth lying motionless on a hospital bed. Alma walks by and remarks that her face is like a child’s. Soon after we hear Elisabeth laughing at a melodramatic play on the radio, a moment which John Simon views as a rejection of “what seems to her melodramatic outbursts about love, maternity and God” (253). Thus from the very beginning, *Persona* focuses on Elisabeth’s return to an infantile, authentic state of pure being. Bergman studies her speechless/immobile existence in relation to her fear of not only melodramatic, theatrical modes of behaviour but also the roles it ascribes to women. Through the immobility of her body and the silence of her voice, she declines to play a role both on and off-stage. Steene views Elisabeth’s letter to her doctor, specifically where it says, “I rock like a foetus in the womb,” as referring to Alma’s role as a “protective parent who permits Elisabeth to regress to childhood” (“Bergman’s Portrait” 101). Elsewhere Steene has viewed Elisabeth’s desire to return to an infantile state as “a kind of rebirth. For her

reactions are, in a sense, those of a newborn child; her awakened hunger for life is primitive and egotistical like a craving baby's" (quoted in Björkman, et al. 117).

What is interesting for us here is the way in which Bergman uses performance to depict women's resistance to the roles of mother and wife and the subsequent need to return to childlike being. Once again woman is seen as a performer, merely acting the roles of a mother and a wife, roles which are viewed as standing in opposition to her childlike freedom and the authentic, non-theatricality of childlike being. In her book *Shot Countershot*, Lucy Fischer uses *Persona* as one example of a number of films where an actress is seen performing the role of an actress. For Solomon, Ibsen's *Doll's House* is a quintessential play manifesting the claim she made about women's theatrical performance on and off-stage. For Fischer, Bergman's *Persona* is a quintessential film examining a similar claim. In both the play and the film women's childlikeness takes part in the expression of their role as performers.

Elisabeth's role as an actress in *Persona* becomes paradigmatic of her role as a mother, another kind of performer, in her private life. Fischer refers to Alma's monologue where she expresses how she thinks Elisabeth regarded being a mother as a role to be performed. However, what followed was Elisabeth's mental breakdown, the outcome of her failure to act a maternal role (73). In this argument Fischer comes close to Steene's analysis of Elisabeth's attempt to play the role of a mother. As Steene notes, "As her pregnancy progressed, she [Elisabeth] became nauseated by it and wanted to escape from it. She tried to do away with the child (as she has throw off her mask as Electra), but in vain" (quoted in Björkman, et al. 115). Fischer argues that Elisabeth's performance of the roles (those of mother and wife) parallels Alma's transition from her aiming to fulfil

desired roles of a wife and a maternal nurse into her being more of a patient. This gives those mutating roles the status of mere performance. It is what Frank Gado refers to as “the transfer of the two women’s ‘identity masks’ through a recognition of their common relationship to a child” (326). Bergman fuses the experience of these women by blending their faces in a “composite image of maternal malevolence – a concept symbolized in the women’s blended, bisected faces” (Fischer 76). Fischer comes closer to E. Ann Kaplan’s study of “maternal melodrama” and her description of the “patriarchal myth of the self-abnegating Mother” (133)²⁹ by demonstrating how Alma and Elisabeth act out a “drama of Good Mother versus Bad” (Fischer 76). However, Fischer adds that the characters’ relationship is also defined by their dual roles as mother and child. Thus, not only do both Elisabeth and Alma share the revolt against their domestic roles, but also the need to return to an infantile state.

It is Elisabeth’s regression into an infantile state that for her stands as an authentic way of being. What it conceals is her rejection of domestic roles. It is this quest for authenticity of being, in opposition to inauthentic changing roles of mother and wife that links Alma and Elisabeth. Elisabeth’s authenticity slowly evokes a feeling of trust in Alma, which transpires into a confession of her secrets to Elisabeth. Only later does Alma find out about Elisabeth’s betrayal of her confidence and thus she becomes Elisabeth’s “rejected child” (76). It is this separation that the film tries to reverse. Fischer views the scenes where Elisabeth brings Alma face to face with a mirror, lifting the latter’s hair away from her face, as emphatically depicting the similar-looking characters as mother

²⁹ For Kaplan “the Good Mother,” is “all-nurturing and self-abnegating – the ‘Angel in the House.’ Totally invested in husband and children, she lives only through them, and is marginal to the narrative.” She also states, how “If the Mother reveals her desire, she is characterized as the Bad Mother (sadistic, monstrous) much as the single woman who expresses sexual desire is seen as destructive” (128).

and child. The irreversible loss of childhood now defines the characters' childlikeness. The frustration is evoked by the characters' desire, and subsequent inability, to return to the infantile state. The collision between this desire and the impossibility of its fulfilment adds another dimension to the film's tension. As Bergman has stated, "*Persona* is a tension, a situation, something that has happened and passed, and beyond that I don't know" (quoted in Simon 33-34).

The loss of childlikeness and the tragedy of its irreversibility

In relation to Ibsen and Bergman's contemplation of woman's childlike qualities, Lars von Trier's examination of his protagonists' childlikeness and the notion of woman's theatrical performance both on and off-stage becomes important. The desperation of rediscovering childlikeness within oneself manifests itself in *The Idiots* in the characters' excessive need to return to infantile forms of behaviour in the adult world. Von Trier portrays Karen against this crowd of characters that exhibit a desperate need to renew contact with their suppressed childlike qualities and to find unbridled channels of expression. Von Trier isolates Karen as the one for whom this return to an infantile state becomes real; the film follows this process. The community that Karen joins offers a secure, homely atmosphere where she begins to feel safe. Analyzing the changes in Bodil Jorgensen's use of her body to depict her character's transitions demonstrates that Karen's timid bodily actions, the awkwardness she feels within the others' close presence, slowly reveal her increased feelings of trust. In one scene the characters are gathered in a deserted living room in the empty house. While the others sit and discuss on a floor in a big circle, Karen falls asleep behind the others' backs. Like a child, she is

curled up on the floor holding her hands under her cheek. Von Trier's use of framing and shot composition in this scene focuses our attention on Karen's sleep and on her tranquil breathing that suggests extreme peace and calm. This moment provides evidence of her feelings of safety within the warmth of the community. The control over her bodily movements that we have previously examined slowly turns into a relaxation. Jorgensen's immobility captures the beauty of her peaceful sleep. For Jorgensen, Karen's childlike being is presented in her speechless existence that reminds Jorgensen of how a child expresses his/her *feelings* of things in cries and laughs (Personal interview. 26 June 2001). The regression into an infantile state that Karen's change in behaviour depicts is similar to Elisabeth's transition in Bergman's *Persona*. Philip Mosley writes that after "rejecting motherhood, [Elisabeth] switches to a posture in which, hopefully for her, roles do not apply" (130).

An important scene in *The Idiots*'s examination of childlikeness takes place in a swim hall. This scene follows the one in which Karen is seen sitting on a windowsill, where she briefly spasses for the first time. We see Susanne trying to coax Karen into a pool. Karen's back is towards the pool and she tightly holds Jeppe's (Nikolaj Lie Kaas) arms to stay away from the water. Next we see a medium close-up that shows Karen in a pool feeling the water. After that Karen is seen floating in the water closely surrounded by Jeppe and Susanne who tells her: "Look, you're floating all by yourself." The camera gradually gets closer to Karen and next we see a close-up of Karen's face that depicts the pleasure she enjoys when trusting herself to be carried by the water. Susanne is seen behind Karen as if slightly holding her. In an extreme close-up we see Karen's face depict the sudden transition from pleasure to anguish, leading to her bursting into tears.

Karen squeezes her eyes and we listen to her thin, whining cry. We see the faces of Susanne and Karen touching each other and Susanne gently stroking Karen's cheekbones and kissing her. Karen and Susanne's faces are contemplated in extreme close-up while Susanne consoles Karen by saying "It's okay." The pain manifested in Karen's face and in her cry depicts her desperate efforts to exclaim her hidden anguish. The water, which functions as a symbol of birth and femininity, marks this scene as Karen's rebirth, the beginning of her passage into self-discovery.

For Jorgensen, the film touches upon two related issues that refer to our discussion of childlikeness: on one hand there is a quest for finding the childlike qualities in oneself, on the other there is a love for a child that comes to define Karen's being. Jorgensen describes her performance in the final scene that takes place at Karen's home where she spits the cake out of her mouth. According to Jorgensen, the gesture of spitting the cake and letting the juice fall from her mouth is like a child's (Personal interview. 26 June 2001). The desperate effort to find the child within oneself leads to its discovery only in Karen. It is this desperate aim at self-transcendence that others try to achieve, reminding us of "the wish for growth [that] is a child's pleasure that trustingly demands self-transcendence" (Andreas-Salomé 44); yet as the final scene shows, it is only Karen who finds the child within herself and is ready to transcend her present being. Jorgensen describes a part of childlikeness in every human being, namely that there is a constant effort to be more what you are and to try to exceed your limitations in order to know where they exist. In the end all this makes you small and human (Personal interview. 26 June 2001). Whereas with other characters there is an effort to find the lost childlike qualities within themselves, to feel free enough to try to exceed those limitations, in

Karen it is more of a discovery of something previously inexperienced that von Trier conveys in her return to an infantile state. As Jorgensen states, “[Karen] becomes the child, as she has never been” (Personal interview. 26 June 2001). I would propose that von Trier’s message deals with the traditional family unit and more specifically women’s roles as mothers and wives within it. Von Trier’s films emphatically depict a transition in relation to Ibsen and Bergman’s linking of childlikeness and women’s domestic roles.

On one hand Karen’s childlike gesture in the final scene, as Jorgensen characterizes it, is a theatrical gesture. It is the “childlike façade,” the meaning of which lies in the way it points out the lost freedom of the character’s present existence. Yet, it would be wrong to assume that Karen’s childlike performance either depicts or conceals her resistance to the domestic roles of a mother and a wife taking part in creating a “drama of disguise and concealment” (Templeton *Ibsen's Women*, 139) similar to Ibsen’s project. It is part of Karen’s transcendence from her present life situation, but the sorrow of her existence lies in her inability to fulfil her domestic roles of mother and wife. At the end of the film we find out about the loss of Karen’s child. This is explained when Karen holds a photograph of her child in her hand and begins to cry, wiping away the tears. It is this experience that made her join the other characters in the first place. According to Jorgensen, the love for the lost child permeates Karen’s whole being. Although the child never existed for her, it fills her life with meaning; the absent child defines Karen’s whole presence. Jorgensen states that having a child changes Karen’s life and it is Karen who would have been an ideal mother (Personal interview. 26 June 2001). Karen has an unfulfilled desire to give her total devotion to the child. This extreme devotedness and love for the child is something Karen herself has never experienced. Moreover, her desire

is indelibly linked to the film's depiction of the process of Karen becoming the child she has never been.

The theatrical performance of childlikeness that the other characters' behaviour exhibits and that Karen in the end tries out, finds a counterpart in another kind of depiction of childlikeness that we witness in the swim hall scene, in Karen's rebirth. Previously both of those approaches (one theatrical as seen in Ibsen, the other regression into non-theatricality as seen in Bergman) took part in representing a woman's refusal to play the roles of mother and wife and her desire to return to her childlike being. In von Trier's depiction, one's regression into childlikeness becomes inseparable from a desire to be a mother who devotes her love to a child. Karen's desire is to give her lost child something she hasn't experienced until she experiences it within the idiots' community, which is after all, a surrogate family. All of this refers to the decline in the traditional family unit in Scandinavian democratic societies. The autonomous position women have gained over the years, including legal and social rights, has promoted their independence of and detachment from their traditional domestic roles. The parodic communal environment that is presented in *The Idiots* can be seen to refer to the increase in co-habitation in recent years. The film labels it as the replacement of the traditional family unit by depicting a community living in a one-family house. More importantly however, the film focuses on one's need to find a replacement for a family and one's need to belong even if it is through building a new, imaginary family. Karen's return to child-like being is inseparable from these issues. Through the character of Karen, von Trier implies a nostalgic look back towards traditional family roles. More specifically, the film

highlights the devotion of a mother witnessed in Karen's all-embracing love for her child that never existed.

It is important to note that von Trier searches for realistic acting modes for the expression of these excessive, even melodramatic, feelings of Karen. Throughout, the film foreshadows the fact that Karen is not a performer. As Stoffer notices when thinking about who can perform madness in private space, Karen has never presented herself as a performer. It is not even considered that Karen would ever take part in spassing, in performing. The theatrical gestures that the others so easily experiment with are something Karen cannot do or does not try to do. The performance she finally gives in the end scene is extremely tense and there is much physical struggle to give it a manifestation. The lack of theatricality in Karen's being endows her existence with authenticity. Von Trier endows this authenticity with the ardent feelings of a mother, usually described as melodramatic, which become deeply felt by his protagonist. In *Persona*, Bergman studies not only melodramatic, theatrical way of behaving, but also the feelings concealed beneath those theatrical gestures. These two reflect one another in the way in which Elisabeth's refusal to act melodramatically, that is, to employ theatrical expressions and gestures, precedes her discovery of the lack of melodramatic feelings of a self-abnegating and devoting mother within herself. In von Trier, Karen's non-melodramatic existence, emptied of all theatrical gestures, doesn't obliterate the character's overwhelming feelings as a mother.

It is in the crossroads of past and present that von Trier studies childlikeness and its contemporary manifestations in people. It is the filmmaker's fascination with attempting to recapture the childlikeness within oneself, as well as the tragic realization

of the impossibility of such attempts, and the damage that innocent childlikeness can perpetuate, that dominate von Trier films.³⁰ *The Idiots* emphasizes the tragic manifestations of childlikeness in today's art by demonstrating how it is something one cannot recapture or something one has never lived through. We come to realize this by following the idiots' desperate effort to find the childlike qualities in themselves and their desire to act out this discovery in the presence of the imaginary family.

Breaking the Waves aligns itself more with the strong tradition of children's storytelling Denmark has witnessed, most famously in the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen. The film creates a continuum with this tradition that has obviously inspired the filmmaker and his characterization of the protagonist in *Breaking the Waves*. Von Trier states

When I was little I had a children's book called *Golden Heart* which I have a very strong and fond memory of. It was a picturebook about a little girl who went out into the woods with pieces of bread and other things in her pocket. But at the end of the book, after she's passed through the woods, she stands naked and without anything. And the last sentence in the book was: 'I'll be fine anyway.' It expressed the role of the martyr in its most extreme form" (quoted in Björkman "Naked Miracles," 12).

³⁰ As a curiosity, yet beyond the scope of this analysis, I would note that in the mid-sixties and seventies when the government began to support filmmakers through the Danish film institute, the Danish cinema witnessed an increase in the examination of children on screen. These supported filmmakers of the generation tended to focus on children and the youth that made them separate from their contemporaries in the neighbouring countries (Cowie *Scandinavian*, 40-43). The depiction of children in the films of Nils Malmros, Palle Kjaerulff-Schmidt, Sören Kragh-Jacobsen, Morten Arnfred, and Bille August brought a new recognition to the Danish cinema and drew attention to the "spontaneous, unaffected performances" (41). For example, as Cowie states, "The Swedes and the Norwegians have made films about children, too but invariably their innocence is streaked with darker implications. The Danes perceive the true nature of childhood, a state of being in which anything is possible until it is proved otherwise, and in which fantasy prevails over adult rules and regulations" (41). Von Trier searches for childlike existence, where one would be free to follow one's impulses and be led by fantasies. Yet it is also this view that takes on a nostalgic tone, and can be seen as something ungraspable in today's world. It is the darker tone of childlikeness that dominates in von Trier's films.

It is this fairytale whose influence is best felt in *Breaking the Waves*, although von Trier's characterization of his "Golden Heart" trilogy (*Breaking the Waves*, *The Idiots*, *Dancer in the Dark*) draws on the fairytale. After making *Breaking the Waves* von Trier remarked how the origin of the film lies in that story and stated, "Golden Heart is the film's Bess" (12). It is Bess's childlike innocence and naivety that endows the martyr story with tragedy and darkness.

In *The Idiots* von Trier isolates Karen as the only one who comes to find childlike qualities within herself. The filmmaker compares her discovery to the other characters' wasted efforts to act out a similar process. The film portrays a return to the freedom of childhood and the frustration it engenders as a tragic impossibility. In *Breaking the Waves* childlikeness has equally miserable consequences. Drawing on the fairytale and its characterization of the protagonist, von Trier captures the lost freedom, childlike qualities of innocence, and sincere belief in unquestionable virtue. On the level of performance style, this is to a great extent accomplished by the actor's fearless response to the camera, which is also a result of Watson's first experience acting in a von Trier film. Innocence is created by using the actor's inexperience and her unguarded response to the camera, characterized by child-like faith and trust in the director. As Watson says, "Lars and I never talked much, but we understood each other somehow. To me it felt like Bess was Lars' child and I just opened myself up to it as much as I could" (quoted in Paterson 28).

Since my discussion deals with theatrical roles on and off-stage, and the return to childlike being, it is important to note the link between Bess's childlikeness and the question of theatricality. Throughout the film Bess is depicted as a performer. Bess

puts on a show, whether it is an imitation of God and the monologues she delivers to Jan (as analyzed in the second chapter), or her masquerade in the harbour scenes, or her dance of seduction (as analyzed in the third chapter). In other characters' eyes Bess becomes an ideal Stanislavskian actor who creates a childlike, naïve belief in the existence and truthfulness of imaginary circumstances. Dodo, her sister-in-law, who scolds her and tells her to stop creating "make-believe-worlds." It is her childlike faith in the truthfulness of these situations that others mistake for her performance. Yet, for Bess it is her authentic being. Thus one could argue that in Bess the idea of a woman as a performer is clearly manifested. Yet, one shouldn't dismiss how deeply embedded in Bess's theatrical behaviour her authentic feelings are. Because Bess is viewed as a theatrical performer resorting to melodramatic expression, so are her emotions viewed as melodramatic and theatrical, thus their validity is questioned. This doubt, which is created over Bess's true feelings, is expressed in relation to her total devotion for Jan. Her excessive love that culminates in her sacrificial death is viewed as a part of Bess's madness, rather than as an act of her own will. Bess's childlike sincerity comes to be seen as a part of her performance that others take advantage of, and that leads to her tragic death.

Von Trier examines the melodramatic, excessive feelings of a mother and a wife in these films, particularly the ways in which the character could embody these feelings in believable forms. Von Trier gives Bess opportunities for exaggerated forms of behaviour in *Breaking the Waves* and compares them with the overall quest for naturalism in acting. By doing this, von Trier forces us to consider our own evaluation of the melodramatic gestures, which may parallel the characters who evaluate Bess's

behaviour within the film. Do we view Bess's childlike creation of imaginary circumstances as manifestations of performance within performance? Are we thus asked to question the authenticity of those moments? Or is her innocent childlikeness rather a device that von Trier uses to show the authenticity behind her excessive feelings? If Ibsen questioned the representation of women by questioning the means of representation itself, that is, by criticizing the melodrama's view of women's roles and its artificiality by exploring melodramatic inauthentic modes of acting, then von Trier performs a similar sort of examination. Yet, I would argue that von Trier searches for forms in which excessive feelings, as authentic parts of a character, could be authentically, believably, portrayed.

I would also like to question whether the performer's return to childlike being (in her acting out the sincere, naïve belief in imaginary circumstances), becomes inseparable from the actor's return (at least within the confines of the film) to a state of innocence. It is an emotional state where the director confronts this unguarded state of being, the purity of emotions, on the part of his performer. It is the area where the relationship between the actor and director shows its most vulnerable face. It is through childlikeness that the actor's deepest being is laid bare; this laying bare is what enables the director to "discover what there is at the bottom of each being" (Dreyer quoted in Sarris 142).

Childlikeness is symptomatic of von Trier's quest for innocence and inexperience in his actors. This childlike innocence touches the most sensitive areas in the director/actor relationship and the quest for unfiltered emotions, for truth of being. As my previous analysis has tried to show, von Trier's films show the dark consequences of

childlike innocence. I would argue that simultaneously his actors' childlikeness, that is, their fragility and inexperience, shows how this very innocence can lead to damage. The tragic aspects of childlikeness culminate in *Breaking the Waves* in Bess's martyrdom. Bess is the provocative manifestation of von Trier's exploration of female self-sacrifice, and it is this long tradition of female actors portraying martyrs that has called for childlike innocence, "inexperience," and "non-professionalism," viewed by Robin Blaetz in her article "'La Femme Vacante' or The Rendering of Joan of Arc in the Cinema," as qualities that various screen representations of Joan of Arc have demanded. The self-sacrifice of von Trier's actor continues in the tradition of women portraying the sacrifices of Joan of Arc. It is within this "female acting community" (63), where the actors' innocence in its authenticity has had tragic consequences, posing a danger of the "actress as sacrificial virgin" (70). Blaetz argues that it is the male filmmakers that take over control by choosing inexperienced, unknown actors whose screen image is not linked to their past screen presences. Blaetz states, "For if any Everygirl can play Joan of Arc, then Joan of Arc is put into her place as an abstract quality; she is Chastity or Virtue rather than actant in time and space... As one might expect, this phenomenon in which the actress is the passive tool of the director in his supposed search for the mysterious, authentic Joan of Arc, often plays itself out in sadistic and dangerous ways" (71). Dreyer himself has denied (see for instance Dreyer quoted in Sarris 143) the "vulgar harassment" Blaetz finds in his treatment of his actor Renée Falconetti playing Joan of Arc (72). For Blaetz, it is in *The Passion of Joan of Arc* where the director chooses an inexperienced, unknown actor, who "relives the punishment exacted on Joan" (71).

It is the martyrdom of von Trier's heroines that aligns them with the tradition of female actresses Blaetz studies. In these films, the actors have needed to be willing to face unpredictable stages in the construction of her character while discovering material in her own psyche for the creation of these representations of female martyrdom. In von Trier's "Golden Heart" trilogy, his actors' explorations have been in part self-explorations. Emily Watson obviously refers to the damage her role in *Breaking the Waves* caused her when, after making the comedy *Trixie*, she says it was the first time she came away from a film "not feeling damaged" (quoted in Kuczynski 2A11). Likewise, Jorgensen confirms that a character like Karen doesn't leave you after the role; instead one can go on and on exploring who Karen is and still find no final answer (Personal interview. 26 June 2001). It is the sincere exposure of one's deepest fears and desires, and the innocence of feelings, that circulate in von Trier's depiction of childlike heroines. It is this infantile state of the character's being that parallels the innocence and humbleness of the actor; a state of being where she lets herself be humiliated by the camera's close gaze into her purest, unfiltered, emotional states. This process is especially noteworthy in von Trier's filmmaking since both Emily Watson and Bodil Jorgensen shared a lack of experience in film acting at the time these films were made. Two quotes from Ibsen actresses clearly depict the beauty and the danger in the actor's self-exploration. In 1917 the famous British actor Mrs. Fiske stated that in Ibsen's plays "there are such limitless depths to be explored... An Ibsen play is like a black forest, something you can enter, something you can walk about in. There you can lose yourself: you can lose yourself. And once inside you find such wonderful glades, such beautiful, sunlit place"(quoted in Schanke 179). In 1907 Alla Nazimova said, "Ibsen opens a window into the soul of his

characters through which you can look and see them as they are – and often see something of yourself, too” (203). Von Trier’s films offer an opportunity for the actor to explore the depth of the art of acting. The profoundness of this process calls for the actor’s inner resources and mental strength.

Conclusions

My focus on *Breaking the Waves* and *The Idiots* in this thesis has provided an opportunity to study the new form of filmmaking that the Dogma movement initiated in 1995. My aim has been to emphasize the effect this new kind of a cinema had on the actor's craft, which has thus far been largely ignored. Von Trier's approach to performance has served to illuminate changes his filmmaking represents within Scandinavian cinema. Simultaneously, the thesis has aimed at contemplating the influence Scandinavian theatrical and filmic traditions still have on contemporary filmmakers, such as von Trier. The analysis of performance has been my tool to explore the ways in which the filmmaker works within those traditions, as well as the strong impact this artistic and cultural background brings to bear on his filmmaking. Only by knowing the contexts out of which the films' characterizations of female protagonists emerge, can one fully understand the variety of meanings attached to those representations. Von Trier's films show how performances are reflections of a specific time and place, and tools with which to explore a (re)construction of identity.

Von Trier's unique approach to performance deals with combining opposing qualities of realism and excess in performance. That is why the thesis began with the question of authenticity and slowly moved on to explore the filmmaker's growing concern for the non-realistic, the excessive as manifested in the devices I have analysed: speech, sexuality, spirituality, and theatricality. The analysis of these two films shows von Trier to be a unique filmmaker whose talent lies in his ability to take part in sociological analysis while creating films that could even be characterized as magic realism. Moreover, it is important to note that these films offer challenges for the actors

who are asked to give authentic character portrayals while also depicting experiences that resist realistic forms of representation. Both Jorgensen and Watson's moving performances in von Trier's films showcase the great talent these actors possess as well as the filmmaker's rare skills at eliciting such performances from these relative newcomers to film acting.

The opposing natures of Jorgensen and Watson's performances (minimalism in the former case and theatricality/excess in the latter) reflect von Trier's interest in a variety of performance styles as well as his readiness to explore new forms of self-expression. Performance is the filmmaker's tool to get adjusted to a new kind of a cinema, one which necessarily demands new modes of expression. Moreover, through performance, the filmmaker searches for new representational forms for familiar thematic issues filmmakers, such as Dreyer and Bergman, or playwrights, such as Ibsen and Strindberg, have previously examined in their respective characterizations of female protagonists. All these predecessors have been recognized as male artists creating profound analysis of women's experiences in their contemporary societies. Likewise, von Trier's bold experimentation with performance styles as well as his new form of filmmaking reflects his keen effort to reconstruct the image of contemporary Scandinavian woman.

Both Jorgensen and Watson, through their respective performances, take part in this reconstruction of identity. They are asked to portray an individual woman's quest for self-reliance and autonomy that is in conflict with the community in which they live. The extent to which these characters fight for their dreams and are in touch with their deepest fears makes them marginalized in a society that is ruled by conventional behavioural

norms and social roles. Von Trier's depiction of his female protagonists thus turns our focus on the cultural and national context out of where the films emerge. Scandinavian countries have been recognized to be progressive, even the world's leaders, in terms of women's social, political and legal rights, which has subsequently enhanced their independence, particularly from, and within, the domestic sphere. Von Trier's films remind us that this evolution towards women's greater independence is something that has been, and is still being, negotiated in artworks. They also provoke us to contemplate whether women's independence is a myth, which has partly been maintained by the artworks (a myth that contemporary Scandinavian feminists think still exist) or whether it is something that the artworks have actually been responsible for making real.

My opening analysis of von Trier's use of space dealt with the influence of theatrical chamber drama tradition and the impact it had on the filmmaker's choice of space. The close analysis of the use of space leads me to acknowledge that the filmmaker creates an intimate space for the actor's benefit. The intimacy of chamber space in von Trier's treatment highlights the actors' performances. It neither restricts the actor's bodily movements (since it doesn't entirely focus on facial expressions as registers of internalised feelings, as was traditionally the case), nor prevents the actor from concentrating on the creation of the character's emotional states. My analysis of space has also tried to emphasize the extent to which the filmmaker's choice of space has a direct influence on the actor's construction of believable characters and subsequently his/her ability to create deeply felt portraits of human beings. The direct connection between the actor and the space should be appreciated, and the variety of shapes this interrelationship takes calls for further explorations.

The return to the chamber drama setting parallels the renegotiations of the changing status of women in the domestic sphere in contemporary Scandinavian social democratic societies. Von Trier's films align themselves with other Dogma films and filmmakers in depicting women's experiences in the chamber space. His films can be seen to set themselves in a dialogue with Thomas Vinterberg's *Festen* (*Celebration*, 1998) and Søren Kragh-Jakobsen's *Mifune Sidste Sang* (*Mifune*, 1999). The comparative analysis of these films would establish an oppositional dynamic between the filmmakers' depiction of female domestic identity. Yet, all these films raise an issue of how women's status in the domestic sphere has been previously represented and shaped by the use of cinematography, at the site wherein chamber drama is translated into film. They also lead us to consider how that relationship between women and domestic space has been examined in film and theatre, and renegotiated in the dynamics between these two mediums. The historical changes in the modes of performance, that is women's response to the chamber space and the evolution of chamber drama traditions, reflects the process of reconstructing women's identity in the domestic space. Von Trier's usage of externalised performance of madness in both *Breaking the Waves* and *The Idiots* is an example of these historical changes in the modes of performance. Madness as a form of women's revolt against the social roles and behavioural norms is apparent in the actors' use of body and voice. As madness is openly portrayed, instead of hidden and labelled as internal mental anguish, von Trier's critique of society becomes explicitly articulated.

Von Trier's use of silence and speech in his films has given me a chance to explore other examples of the historical changes in the modes of performance. By exploring the filmmaker's approach to silence/speech dichotomy in my second chapter I

have tried to strengthen my claim that there is a dialogue between von Trier's filmmaking and the Scandinavian theatrical and filmic traditions. Von Trier shares strikingly similar interests with Dreyer in his depiction of a female protagonist's troubled relationship to language and her battle against the Word of God. Likewise, the fact that women's silence has inspired von Trier to explore the absence of speech as a dramaturgical device aligns him with Strindberg and Bergman. My analysis of Jorgensen's silence in *The Idiots* gave me a reason for assaying methods earlier Scandinavian actors have used to convey experiences of an autonomous female protagonist. The crucial role that the absence of speech plays in these performances turns the focus to the tools the actors are asked to rely on when creating deeply felt performances. The analyses of both Watson and Jorgensen's performances leads me to recognize the major role not only female voice, but also its absence plays in film. Von Trier focuses on questioning the authenticity of words when depicting the depth of women's experiences. The filmmaker asks his actors to question the role of words in their performances and to look for other, more authentic, avenues of expression. The variety of ways absence of speech can be used in film and the meanings it subsequently creates can never be underestimated in film acting analyses.

I have also tried to emphasize how the acknowledgement of the cultural and artistic background makes meaningful von Trier's examination of silence/speech dichotomy on a thematic level. Through the exploration of silence/speech dichotomy, some prevailing themes regarding women's autonomous position and independence have been dealt with in Scandinavian theatre and cinema. In *The Idiots* von Trier discusses silence as a strong person's way of building her self-reliance in the manner of Strindberg and Bergman, whereas in *Breaking the Waves* he focuses on an individual's fight against

the textual authorities in the manner of Dreyer. Watson's monologues that focus on authorities, whether religious or legal, that women feel a need to fight against, find a counterpart in Jorgensen's silence, which is born out of an urge to find authentic forms of self-expression in a situation where one's individualism is being questioned. In both cases, silence and speech take part in questioning women's means of self-expression and -exploration.

Through my analysis of silence and speech I have also tried to point out the actor's active use of imagination. To analyze how the imagination plays a crucial role in performance, the inclusion of the actor's own view of her character construction becomes desirable. For instance, Jorgensen's analysis of her imaginary inner pictures when creating a believable and strong portrait of her silent character is useful for the understanding of the actor's tools when the absence of speech dominates in performance. Not only does von Trier turn the focus to the actor's use of imagination but he also presents characters who struggle to reach the imaginary realm where their desires and fears lie. This concern for the imaginary expresses von Trier's interest in melodramatic concerns. The way in which melodramatic discussion shows its relevance when analyzing von Trier's films simultaneously registers the filmmaker's move away from the original quest for authenticity that the Dogma Manifesto called for. One could even argue that the filmmaker examines the notion of authenticity in characterization on a deeper level as the real location of his heroines' truest desires. The melodramatic impulses one finds in von Trier's films don't prevent the filmmaker from exploring his heroines' depth psychology. Von Trier emphasizes how the imaginary realm and the melodramatic become crucial

parts of the characters' identity construction; an artistic decision that merits serious critical study.

In the third chapter I continued to develop my examination of the important dialectics between realism and excess, and tried to show the prominence of certain themes in Scandinavian cinema. Von Trier continues his forerunners', such as Strindberg, Dreyer and Bergman's, exploration of spirituality. Yet, the filmmaker's approach to performance shows how he tries to create innovative representational forms for previous thematic concerns, and to update a view of spiritual beliefs of human beings. The filmmaker's quest for opposing forces in performance is pushed to the extreme by depicting human dimensions of sexuality as part of the characters' spiritual aspirations. By showing how sexuality can work as a conduit for spiritual beliefs or how the experience of abstract spirituality finds a counterpart in earthbound sexuality, von Trier aims at a type of provocation that the actor is asked to take part in. The deeper meaning of this provocation is best understood when his films are viewed in relation to previous discussions of spirituality and sexuality in Scandinavian cinema. My analysis of historical changes in the modes of performance has led me to argue that Dreyer and Bergman's depiction of women's spiritual qualities have put aside the experience of sexuality. In von Trier's films, these opposing forces of sexuality and spirituality become recognized and openly discussed. The confusions expressed in the criticism of von Trier's films imply that his provocation has succeeded. Yet, the criticism refuses to find further explanations for von Trier's examination of these opposing qualities. The combination of sexuality and spirituality that creates the filmmaker's provocation is best understood in relation to cultural and national context.

In my last chapter I argued for a consideration of childlikeness as an innate part of performance and related it to my analysis of the notion of theatricality, which is one form of excess. Von Trier's examination of childlikeness in performance also implies historical changes in the performance styles through which childlikeness has been depicted. I argued that Ibsen's examination of woman's theatrical performance of childlikeness finds a counterpart in Bergman's depiction of a woman's regression into infantile state. Yet, in both cases, woman's childlikeness takes part in the discussion of women's experience of their social roles, particularly in the examination of women's resistance to those domestic roles. Von Trier, however, doesn't study childlike qualities in the context of women's fights against their domestic roles of a mother and a wife. He instead is more likely to imply that women's childlike qualities bring to the foreground their unfulfilled desires to be a beloved child, a devoted mother for a child, or a sacrificing wife for a husband. My fourth chapter has tried to further emphasize that von Trier searches after realistic forms of representation for the characters' excessive, even melodramatic feelings. Von Trier emphasizes the existence of those feelings in today's society that too seldom offers an outlet for them. The way in which the filmmaker constantly tries to combine excess and realism shows his view of women's extreme experiences that call for recognition and believable representations.

Von Trier's films forces us to recognize the stylistic changes in the performance tradition within Scandinavian cinema. His films show the importance of contextualizing performance culturally, socially, and historically. Understanding how von Trier's approach to performance reflects changes in expressions of women's identity is best accomplished by a comparative analysis with previous modes of expressions. Von

Trier's approach to performance further encourages us to examine how the quest for realism and authentic performances came to dominate Scandinavian cinema early on and the way in which the process of de-theatricalization culminated in the modernist filmmakers' demands for minimalist performances.

Particularly interesting is the question of the women in chamber space. What is dismissed in Scandinavian film analysis is the close analyses of performances in the chamber space and the changes in performance styles; that is, how the actors, through their use of body and voice, have responded to the intimacy of the chamber space and communicated the experience of female identity within that domestic space. These changes reflect the transitions in women's status on this space. The ways in which von Trier's films focus on the actors, who are then encouraged to externalise their emotional states, even to exaggerate them, marks a shift in the performance tradition. By studying the performance of excess and theatricality, which have overall become central to contemporary Scandinavian cinema, we could attempt to determine their relationship to artistic and cultural contexts.

Von Trier's films also raise the question of the possible existence of a female acting tradition within Scandinavian cinema and theatre. The recognition of this tradition would further lead to the discussion of the actor as auteur. One possible way to study this would be to explore how the actors performing in the chamber space can be seen to form a community of women artists building a female tradition of acting. The analysis of performance would ask how the women can be viewed as auteurs and how that position has changed over time. This would bring up an issue of how these women, through their performances, have shaped and taken control over their own domestic

space. Moreover, the ways in which that tradition of chamber drama can be analyzed and made meaningful from these women artists' perspectives, opens up latent meanings and reconstructs their domestic identity, begs for further examination.

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