A certain idea of reality

Possible worlds in the films of Michael Winterbottom

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Declaration

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the notion of realism and in particular its applicability to the visual and narrative strategies employed in eight of Michael Winterbottom's films. Realism is a term that has strong ties to the reality of the viewer, but this reality that governs the conventions for making a judgment on a work's realism is in constant flux. Likewise, on the side of the film's production, any number of tactics may be deployed to increase the viewer's sense of realism and the research undertaken here looks at a variety of approaches to the creation and assessment of realism in a film.

Many of the films discussed here are depictions of past events and the tension between the realistic reconstruction of the past and the necessary artifice that is inherent in such representations are studied in the light of the theories of possible and fictional worlds. Possible worlds are constituted by states of affairs that would be possible in the actual world; in the same way, realistic representations reflect the possibilities of the actual world without necessarily being an identical copy of reality. David Lewis's concept of counterparts plays an important role in the analysis of filmic components, especially when these components are representations of actual entities. In addition to a consideration of counterparts, this dissertation will also look at the role of the "fictional operator" which facilitates discussion about fictional truths.

While the fictional operator creates counterparts of actually existing entities and films remain always already fictional, the actual world retains an important role in fiction. In postmodern cinema the viewer is encouraged to use knowledge obtained from other worlds – either actual or imaginary – so as to enhance appreciation (analytical as much as emotional) of the film even more. The concept of realism has been thoroughly problematised, but many strategies continue to connect the events of the fiction either with the "real" world or with other worlds that rival the importance of the "real" world.

It is suggested that the so-called "real" world used to measure realism can refer to any world outside the realm of the particular fiction. Realism can be a product of a visual

style as well as the particular development of a narrative and in both cases the viewer measures the conditions against her own experience of other worlds. The world of the film is a fictional reality that is sometimes a representation of the actual world, but the relationship between the two worlds can never be completely transparent, in spite of the efforts that many filmmakers have made in this respect.

Opsomming

In hierdie proefskrif word die idee van realisme bestudeer deur veral te let op die term se toepaslikheid op die visuele en narratiewe strategieë wat agt van Michael Winterbottom se films op verskillende maniere aanwend. Realisme is gekoppel aan die kyker se werklikheid, maar hierdie werklikheid wat die konvensies bepaal vir enige uitspraak oor ’n werk se realisme is gedurig aan die verander. Op soortgelyke wyse kan ’n film enige aantal taktieke gebruik om by te dra tot die kyker se indruk van realisme en die navorsing wat hier onderneem is kyk na ’n verskeidenheid benaderings tot die skepping en assessering van realisme in ’n film.

Talle van die voorbeelde wat hier bespreek word is uitbeeldings van gebeure uit die verlede en die spanning tussen ’n realistiese herskepping en die noodwendige kunsmatigheid wat daarmee saamgaan sal toegelig word deur die teorieë van moontlike wêrelde en wêrelde van fiksie (*fictional worlds*). Moontlike wêrelde bestaan uit stande van sake wat in die aktuele wêreld moontlik is; op dieselfde wyse weerspieël ’n realistiese uitbeelding die moontlikhede van die aktuele wêreld sonder om noodwendig ’n identiese afbeelding van die werklikheid te wees. David Lewis se konsep van ewebeelde (*counterparts*) speel ’n groot rol in die ontleding van hierdie films se onderdele, veral wanneer die ewebeelde voorstellings van werklike entiteite is. Behalwe vir ewebeelde, sal hierdie proefskrif ook kyk na die rol van fiksie-operators (*fictional operators*) wat die gesprek oor fiktiewe waarhede heelwat makliker sal maak.

Hoewel die fiksie-operators ewebeelde skep van entiteite wat werklik bestaan en films uiteraard altyd reeds fiktief is, kan die rol van die aktuele wêreld in fiksie nie ontken word nie. In postmoderne films word die kyker juis aangemoedig om haar kennis te gebruik wat sy uit ander wêrelde – hetsy aktueel of denkbeeldig – opgedoen het en sodoende die film (op ’n analitiese en ’n emosionele vlak) meer te waardeer. Selfs al is die konsep van realisme reeds behoorlik geproblematiseer, is daar steeds baie

strategieë om die gebeure van die fiksie te verbind met die “regte” wêreld of met ander wêrelde wat die belang van die “regte” wêreld ondermyn.

Ek stel voor dat die sogenaamde “regte” wêreld wat gebruik word om realisme te meet eindelik kan verwys na enige wêreld buite die onmiddellike fiksie; realisme kan die produk van ’n visuele styl of die ontwikkeling van die verhaal wees en in albei gevalle meet die kyker die toestande aan haar eiesoortige ervaring van ander wêrelde. Die wêreld van die film is ’n fiktiewe werklikheid wat soms ’n voorstelling van die aktuele wêreld is, maar die verwantskap tussen die twee wêrelde kan nooit heeltemal deursigtig wees nie, ten spyte van talle pogings wat filmmakers al in hierdie opsig aangewend het.

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Introduction

Realism is not reality itself, nor is it the accurate reproduction of reality or of so-called historical facts. Rather, it is the viewer's perception, often but not necessarily shared or supported by other viewers, that the audiovisual object seems like something which could conceivably exist and behave in the same way in the actual world. The promoters of realism in film theory have insisted on a direct link between the film and actual reality. Actual reality does play a part, but the link is tenuous and the relationship often difficult to pinpoint. This last point explains why viewers may often disagree amongst each other about the realism of a certain film.

This dissertation focuses on eight films made by director Michael Winterbottom, released between 1997 and 2006. These films reflect the variety of possible approaches to the presentation and representation of events – mainly factual, but often also a product of imagination. In chronological order, these films are: *Welcome to Sarajevo* (1997), *Wonderland* (1999), *24 Hour Party People* (2002), *In This World* (2002), *Code 46* (2003), *9 Songs* (2004), *A Cock and Bull Story* (2005) and *The Road to Guantanamo* (2006).

These films, all in some way fictional (either because the story is invented, the characters are invented, or the events are restaged), often use documentary strategies to convey the impression that the camera, with which the viewer might sometimes associate, is really present at the event and therefore the images provide proof of the actual occurrence of the event. I shall look at the inherent problems of such an

assumption, which is closely tied to the perception of realism, while addressing the issue of artifice in realistic representation.

Winterbottom is not the only filmmaker to employ documentary strategies for the purpose of telling a fictional story in a realistic way and this dissertation will point to other movements in film that have also striven for realism: among others, the Italian films made shortly after the Second World War and the Danish films by the so-called "Dogme brethren".

An individual perceives a film as realistic when the film more or less accurately reflects the kinds of events that the individual either knows from life, or can conceive of in this way. There is not necessarily a direct relationship between an entity in the fiction and an entity in the individual's reality, but the similarities between the two "worlds" are strong enough that the individual (the viewer) may get a sense of "reality" from the fiction.

In this sense, the world of the realistic fiction is a possible world – a world not possible because of physical similarities with our world, but because the viewer judges the world to be similar in kind to her[1] own reality. At the same time, given that the world is always fictional, since it is limited to the facts of the film, it is also a fictional world. This fictional world can present events and individuals from the actual world, in which case the organisation of the material presents the viewer with a reconstructed version of the actual world that is not the actual world itself. The film, being necessarily restricted by its fragmented time and points of view, cannot present the actual world as it runs its course. This incomplete world may present events that are possible in the actual world, but the world itself would more appropriately be called a fictional world.

A film might offer a window onto a fictional world, but this world does not actually exist. In the same way, films that use documentary strategies (including documentary films themselves) do not and cannot offer the actual world as such, but rather present the

[1] In this dissertation, I shall use "she" and "her" as generic terms to refer to individuals who represent diverse groups of people, such as viewers or filmmakers.

viewer with a fictional world that does not exist except on film, even though it greatly resembles the actual world.

Possible worlds are possible relative to the actual world, in the same way that some films may be called realistic if they show certain similarities to the actual world. In both cases, the world outside the film (the world of the viewer) plays a role when making certain judgments about a film. However, possibility does not equal, nor does it imply, resemblance. These are two different terms applied separately, in a discussion on films, to a specific film world. When the term "diegesis" (or the narrated world) is used to refer to the world of a film, there is evidently more emphasis on the film's self-contained status as a world independent from the actual world. And yet, the fact that a diegesis can sometimes resemble the actual world to a remarkable degree (this is the case, though not limited to such examples, with recreations of historical events) may cause the viewer to question the fictional status of a given world. The issue of traces of the actual world in fiction, and of such a combination of actual and fictional elements, will be a major focus of this study.

In his films, Michael Winterbottom uses documentary footage for a number of different reasons – to prove, to support or to undermine the rest of the material in the film – and an examination of these films will reveal the various effects that documentary footage or documentary strategies can have on the viewer's perception of the film as realistic. While a judgment regarding a film's realism relies on the general properties and relationships between objects in the actual world, the introduction of the so-called "fictional operator", which qualifies an array of narrative elements – no matter their status as reproductions or representations – as "wholly fictional", leads to an arresting question: how might the discussion still benefit by incorporating any mention of the actual world?

Viewers necessarily watch a film in the actual world and while a film can only refer to the actual world via the fictional operator, a viewer's knowledge and interpretational capacity extends beyond the frame of the fictional world. The filmmakers, being actual themselves, may therefore construct a film with the aim of creating the illusion that the

fictional operator does not wholly apply, by virtue of the film's apparent references to the actual world.

In two of Winterbottom's films, there is a clear and deliberate problematisation of the actual world (the past in *24 Hour Party People* and the present in *A Cock and Bull Story*), even though there is no risk of anyone believing that the films themselves are documentaries. Some parts are clearly fake (for example, nobody acknowledges the presence of the camera, and cuts indicate that the scene was not shot in a single take, but from different camera positions), even though real-world individuals sometimes appear as themselves.

Even though the central chapters of this dissertation postulate an overarching fictional operator according to which all events contained in a film may be read as "fictional" and therefore something different from "actual" events, problems of reference persist in discussions about the fictional world. These problems of reference can result from the verisimilar relationship between the world of the film and the actual world; in many cases, the film's use of certain strategies elicits an acknowledgement from the viewer that the film demonstrates an apparent closeness to real life. In postmodern cinema, this verisimilitude becomes more difficult to describe – not merely because the possibility of "truth" becomes ever more dubious, but because the "actual" world itself (and actual history in particular) may not be accessible, having been replaced by images that pretend to reflect this world.

Postmodernism addresses this idea that the actual world has been replaced by texts about the actual world, including images that pretend to be reflections of this world. Conversely, the actual world is a composition of texts about (or images of) itself and other worlds, and it is this problematisation of the original that will be a focal point in my discussion of postmodernism as it relates to the relevant Winterbottom films.

The importance accorded to a copy or a simulation of the "original" should be self-evident in the light of the documentary strategies discussed throughout this dissertation. However, since the intentions behind specific strategies can change, and

documentary strategies or markers (like the names of real-world individuals) may be used for the purposes of subverting the so-called 'settled body of history', postmodern cinema poses yet more obstacles to the conventional interpretation of film as a mould of reality – sometimes, the viewer would be at great pains to apply the rules of the actual world to the world presented on screen, even if that world contains more similarities with the actual world than many other "realistic" fiction films.

24 Hour Party People approaches history from the perspective that the "real" facts about the past may not be known when perceived from the present. *A Cock and Bull Story* raises the issue of someone acting (*more or less*) as "herself", and with reference to the fun had with Julia Roberts's image in Steven Soderbergh's *Ocean's Twelve*, the discussion will conclude with examples of films in which it becomes clear that history as represented in film is essentially a creation, to some extent removed from the original. In both of Michael Winterbottom's films, therefore, knowledge about the actual "truth", past or present, is questioned and playfully challenged.

In André Gide's novel *The Counterfeiters* the character of Edouard makes an observation about the "rivalry between the real world and the representation of it which we make to ourselves" (1966:183); over the course of ten years Michael Winterbottom has mediated this tension in different ways.

This dissertation is divided into three parts comprised of seven chapters:

The first two chapters focus on the so-called realist movements in film and look at the different strategies, in terms of the choice of subject matter as well as the visual style, that filmmakers have used to make their films more "realistic". Chapter 1 provides an analysis of Michael Winterbottom's *In This World*, while Chapter 2, which focuses mainly on the influence of the Dogme 95 movement, looks at *Wonderland* and *9 Songs*, with some emphasis on the approach of a Dogme film, *The Idiots*.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 deal with possible and fictional worlds and the application of these terms to the production and reception of film. Chapter 3 defines and contextualises the two terms and then goes on to consider *The Road to Guantanamo*, an inevitably

fictional representation of the main characters' recollections of historical events. Chapter 4 compares the construction of *Code 46*'s fictitious world to the production of hieroglyphs promoted by Eisenstein as the representation of a concept which inheres in a combination of objects but not in the separate parts. In the same way, a new world is created by combining elements from the actual world. In Chapter 5 the actual world and its reconstruction in film start to overlap and *Welcome to Sarajevo* offers ample opportunity to reconsider earlier statements about the fictional homogeneity of a film.

The dissertation concludes with a look at postmodern cinema. In Chapter 6 *24 Hour Party People* is used to demonstrate that our perception of the actual world via its representation in a fiction must be approached with circumspection. Chapter 7 presents us with a much more immediate version of the actual world in the form of *A Cock and Bull Story*; however, the film contains characters and situations that cannot be validated in the actual world.

[R]ealism in art can only be achieved
in one way – through artifice.
(Bazin 1971:26)

Chapter 1

Realisms

1.1 Introduction

The movie camera is an eye through which the viewer sees a world, but this "world" should not be confused with *our* world, for while the two might overlap, there are significant points of divergence. Sometimes, the intention of the filmmaker is to deceive, to conceal the fact that the two worlds are not identical and to make the viewers believe that they are in fact watching images that reproduce the real world in its entirety. At other times, it is strikingly obvious that the world depicted is not (and cannot be) the actual world. It might be similar in important respects, and especially where such qualities as the representation of a specific segment of society is concerned, the tendency has traditionally been to label certain attempts at representation as "realist" or "realistic", even if much of this representation does not occur spontaneously (i.e. there is some staging) and is not captured in a documentary or observational fashion.

In this chapter I shall examine different movements in film that manifest properties which have come to be associated with some form of realism and after looking at the definitions and pitfalls of the term (in the light of an important article by Roman Jakobson, who examines realism in the context of "art"), I shall proceed to a brief examination of the kind of world presented by a given film and the problems it poses when this world is remarkably similar to ours. These are also issues that two of the best-

known authors on realism in film, Siegfried Kracauer and André Bazin, wrestled with and I shall look at their respective, and sometimes overlapping, points of view on this matter. The approaches of the realist film movements – neorealism in particular – will subsequently be compared to the filmmaking techniques of Michael Winterbottom in his representation of an Afghan boy's journey from Pakistan to the United Kingdom, in *In This World*.

1.2 The plurality of realisms

Since the inception of the cinematograph many different styles have been regarded as a sort of realism – by critics but often by the filmmakers themselves – and it is no easy task to look for common evidence of realism in this diverse group of films. Noël Carroll states that "realism" is a term used to denote a certain group of characteristics proper to a number of films, but that its application to one film should in no way be construed as a claim that it shares the same kind of properties with reality as another so-called "realistic" film: "To call […] a group of films realistic is to call attention to some feature that the items in question have that other films don't have" (Carroll 1996:243). Carroll doesn't specify the means for establishing this common feature.

The multitude of adjectives added to the core term "realism" indicates the many different approaches or qualifications of the central idea. Of course, "realism" remains as elusive as ever if considered on its own, but by restricting it to a sociological, geographical or other point of view, the filmmaker is better able to name her approach. "Because 'realism' is a term whose application ultimately involves historical comparisons, it should not be used unprefixed – we should speak of Soviet realism, Neorealism, Kitchen Sink and Super realism" (Carroll 1996:244). In an article on Italian neorealism published in 1952, Amédée Ayfre anticipated Carroll's statement when she stated that the term "is one of those words which should never be used without a determining correlative" (1952:182).

In many respects, the meaning of "realism" becomes even more diffuse when applied to different national and historical contexts to form terms such as "Italian neorealism" or

"socialist realism". Christopher Wagstaff notes the importance of reference to the actual world outside the film, but also acknowledges that the social function of the representation is often a crucial aspect of such films:

> [R]ealism in a work of art entails some 'reference' to what lies outside the aesthetic. […] Realist works are particularly exposed to evaluation on the basis of criteria surrounding 'reference': for example, truth accuracy, objectivity, and the social function of the representation. Hence, realist films not only straddle the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic by bridging art and commerce, but also because their aesthetic value is bound up with their reference to the non-aesthetic world of 'reality'.
>
> (Wagstaff 2007:48)

André Bazin, whose name is frequently associated with the concept of realism in film, also acknowledges the scope of the "realism" designator, in an article on director William Wyler:

> There is not one, but several realisms. Each era looks for its own, that is to say the technique and the aesthetic which can best capture it. […] To produce the truth, to show reality, all the reality, nothing but the reality is perhaps an honourable intention, but stated in that way, it is no more than a moral precept. In the cinema there can only be a *representation* of reality.
>
> (Bazin 1948:41; original emphasis)

All of the movements discussed in the following pages rebelled, whether deliberately or spontaneously, against false (rather: exclusive) representations of reality and their respective filmmakers strove to correct the discrepancy. Their films' "realism" was ultimately a composite of many different parts – a physical realism of resemblance, a psychological realism of character, or a realism built on the idea that details, omitted in other films but shown or revealed by "realist" directors, complement the otherwise sketchy (constructed) world portrayed by a filmmaker.

> In its broadest sense realism is an attitude of mind, a desire to adhere strictly to the truth, a recognition that man is a social animal and a conviction that he is inseparable from his position in society.
>
> (Armes 1971:17)

In section 1.3, Roman Jakobson will highlight the fact that this "attitude of mind" may belong to the sender or the receiver, and a discussion of realism should be aware of

these two possible applications. In this instance, Armes seems to insist on the sender, since the "desire to adhere strictly to the truth" can only be attributed to the sender: the filmmaker. However, the filmmaker's perception of the realism in her own work may be quite different from another viewer's perception or assessment of the degree of realism, just as the opinion of one viewer may (and very often does) differ from that of another viewer. This relativity of the viewing experience also underlines the relativity of the term "realism" itself.

In general, a work may be said to be realistic or not *in the eyes of a viewer*, based on that viewer's assessment of the work's success in representing a world that is similar to theirs, presenting characters and situations that "ring true" – in other words, that display a verisimilar relationship with their reality. Therefore, a fictional state of affairs, which cannot obtain in the real world (in other words, which is actually impossible), cannot be completely realistic, since it does not and cannot adequately reflect the real world. In these cases, it might be better to speak of a work's "credibility" – a term that concerns the consistency of the world that is presented.

"The simplest definition of a reality is […] 'that which we can perceive'" (Earle 1968:145-146). This definition's clearly subjective flavour is supported by Torben Grodal's claim that "there is an anthropocentric bias to our understanding of realism" (Grodal 2009:257). Realism indicates the faithfulness to a particular reality (our experience of the real world, which exists independently of us) and statements about realism are necessarily made on the basis of our own experiences, and the comparisons we make between our perception of reality and the representations of similar situations, for example on screen. The term is measured by a subjective judgment that something in a film (for example, an event or an action) is similar in kind to something else in reality, even though it might not have a denotable referent to back up this judgment. A fiction is realistic if it contains things that happen in the same way as in reality. Therefore, reality must be the cornerstone of any definition of realism.

> The "real" refers to both "that which exists by itself" and "that which relates to things". Reality, on the other hand, coincides with the lived experiences of this real's subject; it wholly belongs to the realms of the mind.
>
> (Aumont & Marie 2005:172)[2]

Realism is not dependent on a specific way of presenting reality, but on a number of different factors that change over time. Stephen Lacey, writing about the British realist theatre of the 1950s, makes the point that "there is no single, immutable realist genre fixed in aspic for all time" (1995:66).

A number of movements in filmmaking appeared in the second half of the twentieth century; in different ways, they all sought a more realistic portrayal of reality than their immediate predecessors, and therefore realism is very often a cultural construct. In the following pages, I shall briefly look at Italian neorealism, the French New Wave, the British New Wave and the Brazilian Cinema Novo. A more recent development was the work of a collective of filmmakers called the Brethren of Dogme 95, launched with much fanfare and press coverage in the mid-nineties. Their arrival signalled the most recent (and vocal) attempt to bring reality to the screen and their work will be discussed in Chapter 2.

1.2.1 Neorealism

"Neorealist cinema" primarily refers to the films made by a number of directors in Italy during and in the years immediately following the Second World War, although the fundamental characteristics of the films made during this time are also evinced by films made elsewhere, for example the films of Satyajit Ray in the 1950s. The style of filmmaking was shaped by the directors' limited resources and the conditions on the ground and the films told stories that related to the working class of Italian society.

In general, the films featured non-professional actors portraying people like themselves from the lower-income classes, coping with their daily circumstances. The productions often took place on location, instead of in film studios, and therefore the setting of the films was directly affected by the physical and social environment of the immediate

[2] My translation from the French.

socio-historical context: post-war Italy. Because of the damage done to the film studios, the filmmakers had to take their productions into the streets; however, as Christopher Wagstaff points out, the commonly held idea (even at the time) that the films were all shot in the streets, completely shunning the facilities of a film studio, is wildly inaccurate (Wagstaff 2007:36).

The choice to shoot on location, as opposed to a studio set, was therefore not made merely out of aesthetic considerations: for the filmmakers this was a necessity thrust upon them by circumstances. The use of real locations clearly ravaged by the war did, however, contribute to a sense that the viewer was watching fragments of reality.

The filmmakers whose names are most readily associated with the neorealist movement are Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio de Sica, Luchino Visconti, Giuseppe De Santis and Luigi Zampa.

Christopher Wagstaff emphasises the whole movement's desire to get closer to real life than before by quoting Cesare Zavattini, screenwriter of many of the films made by Vittorio de Sica between 1946 and 1952:

> Neorealism is concerned with "things rather than the concept of things," whereas "the need for a 'story' … and … the imagination, as it had been exercised, did no more than impose dead schemes on living social facts."
>
> (Wagstaff 2007:78)

According to André Bazin, who was an enthusiastic proponent of the neorealist movement, the latter's realism was ingrained in the films' humanism as opposed to a preoccupation with form. The films were shaped by the environment, and the stories depicted straddled the line between documentary and fiction by including many unwitting extras in the background unrelated to the production, who nonetheless contributed to the authentic presentation of society by virtue of their lack of deliberate participation in the artificial narrative.

> Neorealism is a description of reality conceived as a whole by a consciousness disposed to see things as a whole. Neorealism contrasts with the realist aesthetics that preceded it, and in particular with naturalism and verism, in that its realism is not so much concerned with the choice of subject as with a particular way of regarding things. If you like, what is realist in *Paisà* is the Italian Resistance, but what is neorealist is Rossellini's direction – his presentation of the events, a presentation which is at once elliptic and synthetic.
>
> (Bazin 1971:97)

While the camera was used to directly capture life in front of the lens, a great deal of the captured reality was still a fiction, an invented or constructed story played out in front of the camera and orchestrated by a director; this material was presented in black and white, with sound added in post-production, producing a disjunction between sound and image that does not accurately reflect the real-life association of these two elements. However, because of their use of black and white images (which at that time signified greater "realism" than, for example, the colour films that Hollywood was producing), and the interaction between the actors and their mostly real surroundings, the films were considered to be a relatively successful representation of real life – thus, the "realism" that constitutes the term designating these films.

> Like most realist movements in the arts, neo-realism was an attempt to get closer to reality by refusing old and outmoded conventions which inevitably falsify our picture of it.
>
> (Armes 1971:22)

This refusal, as other writers have pointed out[3], was far from absolute: the films generally used conventional means of lighting and many productions had some of their scenes shot on an artificial set. In the quotation above, Roy Armes's reference to earlier film conventions is reductionist not merely because of his reluctance to point to examples or elaborate on this statement, but because he uses the term "conventions" as a sort of short-hand for "the system against which we must rebel".[4] Noël Carroll

[3] E.g. Kristin Thompson (1988:212) and Hallam & Marshment (2000:16) refer to *The Bicycle Thieves*; Christopher Wagstaff (2007:100-104) focuses specifically on *Rome, Open City*.

[4] These conventions can correlate with the horizon of expectations cited by reception theorist Hans-Robert Jauss with regard to literature, as the work is always measured against an ever-changing set of assumptions. Consequently, the meaning of the work – and more specifically, the extent to which it may be called 'realistic' – is a result of this process of construction in which the text and the reader (or the

(1979:86) is right in claiming that conventions are arbitrary in nature – cultural constructs that have little or no direct connection to reality – but it needs to be added that this does not disqualify them from representing reality.

The main focus of the neorealist films was their verisimilar representation of the reality of a character from the working class; they would have a lasting influence on films of other realist movements in subsequent decades. The films had fictional narratives, yet their setting and social circumstances corresponded to a very recognisable reality.

The enthusiasm of Bazin (founder of the French film magazine, *Cahiers du cinéma*) for the neorealist films, and the neorealist filmmakers' desire to represent more verisimilar accounts of real life than the films that came before them, would have an important effect on the young film critics working with him at the *Cahiers*. These critics would also shoot most of their debut films on location, and while they were much less concerned with the working class, their desire for authentic representations of reality was just as pronounced as in the films of the neorealists.

1.2.2 The French New Wave

As early as 1948, the French film critic Alexandre Astruc published an article that would ultimately incite the country's next group of filmmakers to conceive and produce their own films. In the article entitled "The birth of a new avant-garde",[5] he urged filmmakers to utilise the camera as a means of expressing themselves. Comparing filmmaking to writing, he used the term *auteur* (author), which shortly afterwards would resonate with film critics in France and in the USA:[6] "The film-maker/author writes with his camera as a writer writes with his pen" (Astruc 1948:22). This has come to be known as the idea of the camera-pen ("la caméra-stylo") – a word he coined in the article.

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viewer) jointly participate. This dissertation acknowledges the fact that these conventions do change over time, and while the actual world, or the recipient's experience of this world, has an implicit role in the generation of these conventions, the focus will be on the possibility of assessing realism without ever having exact copies of the actual world.

[5] "La naissance d'une nouvelle avant-garde: la caméra-stylo"

[6] Andrew Sarris published an influential English-language overview of the theory in 1962: "Notes on the auteur theory in 1962". See Sarris (1962:515-518).

While the camera-pen does not automatically produce greater verisimilitude, it shares at least one common aim with other film movements of the current section: the representation of some truth about reality (in this case, close to the filmmaker).

In his oft-quoted article published in 1954, "Une certaine tendance du cinéma français",[7] François Truffaut launched a scathing attack on the state of the French film industry and rejected its so-called "Tradition of Quality" and symptomatic "psychological realism [that is] neither real nor psychological" (Truffaut 1987:223).[8] The article targeted screenwriters, in particular Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost, who "betray" (213) both the content and the spirit of the literary texts they adapt for the screen, and Truffaut accused the writers of being dishonest and unfaithful to the true (albeit fictional) stories.

Astruc's position was complemented by the views of the film critics at the magazine *Cahiers du cinéma*, including Truffaut; although they never formally framed their ideas in the form of a manifesto, the catchphrase "la politique des auteurs" asserted itself and would inform their own films once they started directing. These filmmaker-critics – François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol, Eric Rohmer and Jacques Rivette – all started production on their first films by the end of the 1950s and would collectively come to be known as the French New Wave, *la nouvelle vague*. The name of Alain Resnais, who had made many highly praised documentaries, is also mentioned in relation to this period: he was representative of the filmic counterpart of the unconventional *nouveau roman*, which had caused an upheaval in the literary world. These directors' films all represented a striking new departure for the French cinema.

In *Le dictionnaire Truffaut*, Michel Marie (2004:286) cites Truffaut himself reflecting on the *nouvelle vague*: "Each of us tries to find a certain truth to bring to the cinema, instead of living on an acquired truth […] For everyone, it's his personal manner of

[7] Reprinted in Truffaut (1987:211-229).

[8] My translation from the French.

seeing the world."[9] Of course, such an "acquired truth" is part of the conventional framework of the time and the rejection of such truths also represents a more general rejection of conventional representation. James Monaco made the following observation about the French New Wave, which highlights the position of the *auteur* theory in the work of these filmmakers:

> Movies must no longer be alienated products which are consumed by mass audiences; they are now intimate conversations between the people behind the camera and the people in front of the screen.
>
> (1976:8)

This personal approach to filmmaking was contrary to the conventional Hollywood picture, whose production was connected to a studio name rather than the name of a director. The exceptions, like Alfred Hitchcock and Orson Welles (as well as Jean Renoir in France), were the kinds of directors whom the critics at the *Cahiers du cinéma* would try to emulate in their own films. The camera-pen is meant to be a personal engagement from the filmmaker and the films are by no means expected to reflect the social reality of the time in a quasi-documentary fashion (characteristic of neorealist films before them, or the British films of the same period). However, the filmmakers of the *nouvelle vague* did go beyond the artifice of many studio productions by shooting on location, even if this meant sacrificing direct sound. The films were also made on small budgets: "The first principle of the group [was] economic freedom and the reduction of production costs"[10] (Marie 2004:286).

The images that the filmmakers captured were sometimes visibly manipulated or reworked in post-production; whether it was via the freeze-frame at the end of Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* (Les 400 Coups) or the playful, unconventional jump-cuts in Godard's *Breathless* (À bout de souffle), the personal expression that Astruc called for implied a much less observational stance towards the material than, for example, the social realist filmmakers of the British New Wave (see the following section).

[9] My translation from the French.

[10] My translation from the French.

The success of the 1959 films at the Cannes Film Festival in 1960, among them *Breathless*, *The 400 Blows* and Resnais's *Hiroshima, mon amour*, generated "an atmosphere which permitted no less than sixty-seven new directors to make their first feature films in the course of the next two years" (Robinson 1973:285). It is difficult to mark the end of the *nouvelle vague*, but its importance seems to lie as much in the way films were produced by these first-time filmmakers as in the films' ability to excite the general film-going public because they broke with the status quo.

The two articles by Astruc and Truffaut sparked the general rebellion against conventional narrative formulas in film that supposedly reflected the source inadequately, whether in life or in art. While the filmmakers did not explicitly state their intention to make realistic films, their visual and narrative contributions were in clear opposition to most of traditional French cinema, and closer to the work of *auteur* filmmakers who shared their affinity for authentic depictions of reality, like Jean Renoir and Robert Bresson. The filmmakers of the *nouvelle vague* were also instrumental in stimulating other gestating movements around the world to make new kinds of films; nearly all of these movements would carry the banner of realism.

1.2.3 The British New Wave: Kitchen-sink realism

In film history, the term "kitchen-sink realism" generally refers to the gritty British cinema of the late 1950s and early 1960s, including films by directors Lindsay Anderson, Karel Reisz and Tony Richardson. Their films sought to portray the British working class in stories focusing (predominantly) on hardworking young men and the issues they – and by extension, their real-life counterparts – faced in their daily lives. Anderson, Reisz and Richardson had all worked as documentary filmmakers and constituted the movement called "Free Cinema", launched by a short manifesto in 1956 that expressed the filmmakers' common "belief in freedom, in the importance of people and in the significance of the everyday man" (Free Cinema 2007).

> Among the common ideals held by [the filmmakers of the Free Cinema movement], two stand out as most significant: first, documentary films should be made free from all commercial pressures and, second, they need to be inflected with a more humanist and poetic approach.
>
> (Hayward 2000:143)

The British New Wave films were primarily based on plays and novels from the late 1950s that specifically dealt with individuals from the working class, mostly young people, and their experiences. *Look Back in Anger* by playwright John Osborne was an important theatre production that dramatised the experiences of this social class and was first performed in 1956. It set the stage for many likeminded British productions that would eventually find their way to the silver screen. The film adaptation of *Look Back in Anger* was released in 1959. Other adaptations from plays include *The Entertainer* (1960), A *Taste of Honey* (1961) and *Billy Liar* (1963). Many of the films were adaptations of novels that focused on characters from similar social circumstances: *Room at the Top* (1959), *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960), *A Kind of Loving* (1962) and *This Sporting Life* (1963). Tony Richardson also directed *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962), an adaptation of a short story by Alan Sillitoe (Lacey 1995:163).

Lindsay Anderson and Karel Reisz were writing for a film review, *Sequence*, which they had founded, in which they criticised British documentaries for their "conformity and apathy" while being equally critical of feature films for their "conventionality and lack of aesthetic experimentation" (Hayward 2000:143). In this respect the young directors shared a common point of departure with their contemporaries in France (film critics like François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard were equally critical of the conventional form of their country's film industry), while the gritty style of these new British films (using natural lighting and fast film stock that creates an effect very reminiscent of newsreel footage (Hayward 2000:50)) and the social relevance of their content were directly influenced by the documentary work of the British Free Cinema directors.

As early as the 1930s, the British documentarian John Grierson had adopted an approach that resembles that of the Italian neorealist filmmakers, and that would be

shared by the British directors whose films constitute the British New Wave; these productions would rely on "location shooting, ordinary people in place of trained actors and a degree of improvisation in word and gesture" (Armes 1978:19).

By the end of the 1950s, great progress had been made to improve the quality of the sound recordings and facilitate the simultaneous recording sound and image, and in respect of the faithfulness of the soundtrack to real life (i.e. the simultaneity of sound and image/movement), the British movements certainly offered a more faithful audiovisual rendition of reality than the Italian neorealist films. In this regard, the relativity of the concept of realism is clear: while the Italian films' realism lay in their opposition to conventional modes of representation (their focus on the working class and their natural setting), the British films' realism was further boosted by the direct connection between sound and image. In terms of content, these two movements both focused on characters in a segment of the population whose depiction on screen has traditionally delivered a strong impression of reality: "Historically, realism[11] has been associated with the representation of scenes from everyday life, especially the life of the middle and lower classes" (Grodal 2009:257).

Torben Grodal's assessment of realism in film, echoed in the Free Cinema manifesto which points to the "significance of the everyday man" (Free Cinema 2007), is supported by evidence from Italian neorealist as well as British New Wave films, both seeking to represent the social reality of the time. "By extending cinematic subject-matter [sic] to include the industrial working class [the British New Wave] also opposed the British cinema's traditional marginalisation of such a social group" (Hill 1986:127).

The representation of a social group that is marginalised both in society and on film became the central interest of the British New Wave films, which conveyed a great deal

[11] This line is from Chapter 11 in Grodal's 2009 book, *Embodied visions: Evolution, emotion, culture and film*. The chapter is an adaptation of an article that he published in 2002 and both texts are listed in the bibliography at the end of this dissertation. In the original text, "realism" reads as "realist representations" (2002:74).

of realism thanks to their focus on the working class and the unconventional presentation of their stories:

> By opting for location shooting and the employment of unknown regional actors, occasionally in improvised performances, it stood opposed to the 'phoney' conventions of character and place characteristic of British studio procedure.
>
> (Hill 1986:127)

Shortly afterwards, in Brazil, the dire political and socio-economic circumstances of the population would inspire a group of filmmakers to tell the stories of the poorest people in their societies who were hitherto completely ignored by the national cinema. Whereas the Free Cinema filmmakers "[followed] the pattern set by [British documentary filmmaker] Grierson in the 1930s […], the university-educated bourgeois making 'sympathetic' films about proletariat life, not analysing the ambiguities of their own privileged position" (Armes 1978:264), Brazilian filmmakers of the 1960s were militant about their desire to have the voices of their characters heard and thereby effect change in a country struggling with great social division and political turmoil.

1.2.4 Cinema novo

The principles of Cinema novo, embodied in the Brazilian director Glauber Rocha's 1965 text, "An Esthetic of Hunger",[12] were meant to counter the First World's stylised (and in his view therefore false) representations of Latin American culture – particularly in Brazil. Cinema novo was also a reaction against the Brazilian (musical) comedies, or *chanchadas*, that did not accurately reflect the suffering of the country's poor: "The young men of the *Cinema Nôvo* […] wanted a cinema which would acknowledge the political and social realities of a Brazil in which more than half the population were workless and half the population over fifteen illiterate" (Robinson 1973:323).

The two main inspirations behind the work of the Brazilian filmmakers that would constitute this movement were the French New Wave (their relatively small budgets) and the Italian neorealist films (which focused on the lower classes of Italian society).

[12] Rocha's text, translated by Randal Johnson and Burnes Hollyman, appears in *Brazilian Cinema*, edited by Randal Johnson and Robert Stam (1995).

Cinema novo was not initiated by anybody or any particular text. “Cinema novo has no birthdate. It has no historic manifesto and no week of commemoration. It was created by no one in particular and is not the brainchild of any group”, affirms the Brazilian filmmaker Carlos Diegues (1962:65) in his text, “Cinema Novo”. In the same article, Diegues refers to this movement as “part of a larger process transforming Brazilian society” (*ibid.*). Randal Johnson and Robert Stam primarily focus on the political emphasis of the films born out of this movement, stating unequivocally that Cinema novo’s initial project was “to present a progressive and critical vision of Brazilian society” and that “its political strategies and esthetic options were profoundly inflected by political events” (Johnson & Stam 1995:30).

Johnson and Stam roughly sort the different phases of the movement according to important political events in Brazil, thereby highlighting the relationship between the country’s political situation and the film industry. Glauber Rocha also touches on this relationship in his article: “[M]any distortions, especially the formal exoticism that vulgarises social problems, have provoked a series of misunderstandings that involve not only art but also politics” (Rocha 1965:69).

Rocha claims that Brazilian culture had not been faithfully observed or represented by outsiders, and asks his fellow filmmakers on the continent to reject this dominance of the artificial in favour of the promotion of the real by means of a grittier realism. Here, the socio-economically disadvantaged community comes into focus once more.

> Cinema Novo shows that the normal behavior of the starving is violence; and the violence of the starving is not primitive. […] From Cinema Novo it should be learned that an esthetic of violence, before being primitive, is revolutionary. It is the initial moment when the colonizer becomes aware of the colonized. […] Wherever one finds filmmakers prepared to film the truth and oppose the hypocrisy and repression of intellectual censorship there is the living spirit of Cinema Novo. […] Cinema Novo sets itself apart from the commercial industry because the commitment of Industrial Cinema is to untruth and exploitation.
>
> (70)

The ideas of “truth” and “untruth” are invoked in the passage above by a very simple association of physical reality with “truth”, while its representation by outsiders equals “untruth”.

The implication is that an approach, in which films are made by someone closer to the society represented on screen and not by a third party from the outside, would necessarily be more truthful, since the filmmakers would be driven by the necessary anger to project reality onto the screen and not settle for the facile simplicity of the inauthentic. This is what Diegues admires: “Brazilian filmmakers […] have taken their cameras and gone out into the streets, the country, and the beaches in search of the Brazilian people, the peasant, the worker, the fisherman, the slum dweller” (Diegues 1962:66).

The intention of the Cinema Novo filmmaker, in particular, was to present a version of real life that would be closer to the “truth” than other contemporary films that portrayed the same society.

Glauber Rocha, Carlos Diegues and Nelson Pereira dos Santos were some of the filmmakers intimately involved in the production of films that, while they were strictly speaking not always shot in a realist style, sought to combat the conventional portrayal of the poorest segment of Brazilian society and were acutely political.

Of course, a film’s realism does not depend solely on its creator’s intentions, but often lies with the final product itself. Roman Jakobson, in an examination of realism in art, looks at both sides and the following analysis of Jakobson’s text will inform further discussion of realism in film in particular.

1.3 Roman Jakobson: “On realism in art”

Realism describes the nature of the correlation between reality and a work that contains aspects of that reality; a work’s realism depends on the relationship between the work and the reality it seeks to reflect. This work might be “a work of art”, but such labelling will have no influence whatsoever on the possibility of qualifying it as “realistic”. Even

though it is still very vague, the general definition above should limit the use of the terms "realism" and "realistic" to works that reflect phenomenological reality in some way. In this dissertation, the concept of realism will be examined independently of any discussion about or judgment on the status of film as "art", since such an exclusive label is irrelevant in this conversation. However, a discussion of realism as it relates to art (or rather: artistic endeavours) will prove to yield important insights into the possible applications of the term.

Roman Jakobson's 1921 essay, "On realism in art" (1978:38-46), refers primarily to the spheres of literature and painting, but his breakdown of the different perspectives on realism and the inherent ambiguity of a term that can sometimes be used in contradictory ways provide a number of useful starting points for an exploration of cinematic realism.

Jakobson argues (1978:38) that anyone who wishes to talk about the "realism" of a work is faced with two possible meanings of the term. Respectively, the two meanings[13] relate to:

- the author (meaning A) and
- the person judging the work[14] (meaning B)

Meaning A relies on the author of a work[15] (the artist) and her desire to produce a work that displays verisimilitude – faithfulness to reality – and therefore avoids any consideration of the finished product. Such "realism" depends on the belief of the author that her work will be a faithful representation of reality and the author's process of creating this work of art will depend on her own belief in the current conventions for achieving verisimilitude. In this case, as Jakobson points out (1978:41), there can be either a deformation of, or an adherence to, the given artistic norms.

[13] In his text, Jakobson uses "A" and "B" to designate and refer to these two definitions.

[14] Also: receiver, perceiver, viewer, reader, etc.

[15] Also: artist, sender, etc.

Meaning B places the ball squarely in the court of the receiver, where a work's realism is judged within a frame of reference that is personal for the receiver. Jakobson applies the same division as with meaning A, when he states that the receiver judges a work's approximation of reality by her own views on the current conventions of "the artistic code".

In this dissertation, I will address both meanings A and B in discussions about the particular realism of a given film. Meaning A is associated with the filmmaker and generally has received more attention than meaning B, which applies to the works themselves and the impact of their aesthetic components on the viewer's impression of reality.

Jakobson uses expressions like "true to life" and "faithfulness to life" (1978:38, 39), but it must be understood that this "life" is always connected to one perceiver, for whom the realistic events of one work (e.g. a film) might be judged unrealistic by someone else: in A, the perceiver is the author (who is also a kind of viewer); in B, the perceiver is a viewer who is not also the author. While Jakobson implicitly acknowledges the problem with the use of the word "life", the scope of the term that he seeks to unpack ("realism") is still too wide: he speaks of a verisimilar relationship between a work and life, but fails to define this life. While it is very likely that "life" might be replaced with "reality", Jakobson does not perform this substitution himself and thus the subject of this "life" remains undefined.

An important point in Jakobson's article is the role that convention plays in the perceiver's assessment of the realism in a work.

> It is necessary to learn the conventional language of painting in order to "see" a picture, just as it is impossible to understand what is spoken without knowing the language. This conventional, traditional aspect of painting to a great extent conditions the very act of our visual perception. As tradition accumulates, the painted image becomes an ideogram, a formula, to which the object portrayed is linked by contiguity. Recognition becomes instantaneous. We no longer see a picture.
>
> (Jakobson 1978:39)

Verisimilitude does not simply entail a direct comparison between the work and reality: it is also influenced by the conventions of the mode of representation – in this case, cinema – and in particular, as we have observed in the discussion of realist movements in film in the twentieth century, the rejection of such conventions. It is no accident that the film movements discussed in the previous section are all qualified as something *new* ("neo-", "nouvelle", "novo"), relative to the conventions used by other works at the time.

However, this view only takes into account meaning B of realism, while ignoring the conventional view of a work's realism – the same conventions now rejected by a new group of artists.

Jakobson also cites the need for unessential details (1978:43) – "externally insignificant [events]" in the words of Erich Auerbach (1953:547) – in creating the impression of a less than perfectly streamlined storyline: the less "constructed" it feels, the greater the viewer's sense of "realism".

> In Realistic fiction […] the stage is always cluttered with *realia*. [One] is tempted to label much of this detail as irrelevant. Yet one must ask the question: irrelevant to what? To the movement of the "story itself," certainly […], but scarcely to the avowed intent of the realistic novelist […]
>
> (Erlich 1956:101)

These details ("realia") can certainly contribute to a scene's realism, but this is by no means an essential criterion for the generation of such an impression, as Victor Erlich acknowledges when he mentions the necessity of a plausible plot structure (*ibid.*).

The impression that anything in a book, a painting or a film displays a verisimilar quality therefore depends on different factors that are not fixed in time. While this brand of fiction, which tries to emulate real life, reflects a desire for a certain kind of realism, the intended duplication of reality can sometimes produce results that are more difficult to describe.

1.4 The world *in* the film and the world *outside* the film

While films often draw on reality in order to give the impression that they are somehow closer to real stories, individuals and situations (whether these films are explicitly labelled as "fictional", "documentary" or "based on real events"), they are never actual reality itself.

> If the theft of a bicycle in the real historical world is an event, and a film in which a bicycle is stolen is not the theft of a bicycle, then a film is a different 'thing' from the theft of a bicycle.
>
> (Wagstaff 2007:41)

In this quotation, taken from Christopher Wagstaff's book on Italian neorealism,[16] the example of the theft of a bicycle is a clear reference to one of the best-known Italian neorealist films, *The Bicycle Thieves*. Italian neorealism is allegedly a closer representation of reality than more classical narrative cinema; all the same, the quotation denies the event's status as a real event, since it occurs in a film. The theft is clearly a filmic theft and despite the very strong impression of realism that might be generated by a number of factors, including those enumerated above in the section on Italian neorealism, it is not considered a real theft, because it is not a real crime: the character may be prosecuted, but not the actor.

If the refusal of the event's status as "a real event", by virtue of its occurrence in a film, is to be accepted, another (much more nuanced, but equally important) implication should be accepted too: an event may occur in the real historical world during the production of a motion picture, without obtaining the status of a real historical event in the film. In other words, filming can result in the fictional depiction of a real event. Not all films distinguish equally well between the real world and the world of a film; to some extent, the Michael Winterbottom films which form the basis of the present dissertation all challenge Wagstaff's claim that the events of a film and the events of real life are two completely different things. By challenging this notion, the films create a number of

[16] Wagstaff, C. 2007. *Italian neorealist cinema: An aesthetic approach*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

problems in relation to "realism", that is the representational link between the world of the film and the world around us.

For our purposes, Wagstaff's quotation may be condensed as follows:

> The theft of a bicycle in a film is not the theft of a bicycle in the real historical world.

This assertion seems accurate *prima facie* and it clearly makes a distinction between the meaning of an action in a film and its equivalent in the real world. If a singular event, namely the theft of a bicycle in this or any other (real or fictional) world, is represented by *e*, then "diegetic *e*" and "real *e*" are two different things, since the real world (even if it is mechanically captured on film) is never the same as the world represented on screen. The fact that these two worlds are nonetheless sometimes conflated, because of the conventions of realistic representation, is an interesting phenomenon that I will examine in this dissertation.

For example, *Welcome to Sarajevo* openly challenges Wagstaff's contention by collapsing the spatiotemporal boundaries that would separate *fictional events* from *real-world events*, and *24 Hour Party People* playfully confuses these two categories to the extent that the importance of historical fact all but disappears. However, the *locus classicus* of the blurring of the "fictional" and "real" worlds would be Haskell Wexler's 1968 film *Medium Cool*,[17] which shows events in the real historical world *as they are really occurring*, even while they form part of the fictional narrative. In other words, in this particular film, it is difficult to determine whether "the theft of a bicycle" is real or not. The events are not restricted to the dramatic world of a fiction film, but neither is their presentation a sign of the would-be documentary status of the film; the distinction between documentary and fictional worlds may be very fluid indeed.

In general, fiction refers to staged elements, put into place for the purpose of being filmed, while the real world "happens" whether or not a camera is there to capture it. In

[17] The questions that *Medium Cool* raises concerning the homospatiality of staged and historically real events, or the action of placing fictional characters within a real (uncontrolled) setting, will be dealt with in Chapter 3.

Medium Cool, this distinction between "real" and "fictional" is problematised because its fictional plot was staged around an event that was spontaneous ("real") and uncontrolled – or uncontrollable, since it evolved independently of the film's production – and therefore the final result is not completely staged, but a curious combination of fact and fiction. This kind of filmmaking – the reality effect[18] generated by staging a fictional scene in a very real setting – and possible solutions to the problem of real existence in a fiction will be discussed in later chapters.

In the context of films that seek a great measure of verisimilitude, it is important to emphasise the fictional aspect of the presentation. Even when the particular representation is a direct copy of reality, captured at the time and at the place of the event's occurrence, the resulting representation is never reality itself, and therefore, whether the viewer sees a "documentary", a "fiction film", a dramatisation of actual fact or anything in between, the realism or lack thereof may be ascribed to the sounds and images on the screen. Therefore, the inclusion of historical (archive) footage in some of Michael Winterbottom's films, such as *Welcome to Sarajevo*, might contribute to a faithful representation of reality, but its realism is assessed on this and other elements in the film as a whole.

Siegfried Kracauer and André Bazin were two film theorists who considered the faithful representation of real life a fundamental component of cinema and a duty of the filmmaker. While absolute duplication is impossible (and therein lie the limitations of their demands), they both insist that filmmakers should give primary importance to reality.

[18] "Reality effect" in itself is a term that Barthes uses rather differently, in relation to the effect generated by objects that *signify* the real rather than denoting it directly. "[T]he very absence of the signified, to the advantage of the referent alone, becomes the very signifier of realism" (1986:148). In this sense, the term relates to the "realia" cited by Victor Erlich in section 1.3. However, I contend that a 'reality effect' may be caused by any number of factors and therefore I shall use the term more loosely than intended by Barthes.

1.5 The two realists: Kracauer and Bazin

1.5.1 Siegfried Kracauer (1889-1966)

Along with André Bazin, Siegfried Kracauer is considered a prominent figure in the field of realist film theory. His *Theory of film: The redemption of physical reality*, a meticulous study of the importance of recording "raw nature", appeared in 1960, a mere two years after the first volume of Bazin's influential *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma*? Its immediate publication in English, as opposed to the translation of Bazin's work that was not initiated before the middle of the 1960s,[19] made Kracauer instantly accessible to the Anglo-Saxon world. It is worth noting, however, that Bazin's name does not occur anywhere in *Theory of Film* and while Kracauer's book commands attention by virtue of its size and its sheer fastidiousness, this oversight goes a long way towards damaging the book's authority. Peter Harcourt and Dudley Andrew have characterised Kracauer as someone who worked in isolation (as opposed to the debates in which Bazin engaged all too regularly with his fellow *Cahiers du cinéma* writers) and was completely out of touch with the evolution of film theory and film practice taking place around him. Andrew hypothesises that Kracauer

> [was] the kind of man who decided after forty years of viewing film that he ought to work out and write down his ideas about the medium; so he went straight to a library and locked himself in. There, reading widely, thinking endlessly, and working always alone, always cut off from the buzz of film talk and film production, he slowly and painstakingly gave birth to his theory.
>
> (1976:107)

Harcourt finds "something noble in Kracauer's position, if also, ultimately, something a little sad" (1968:25), and according to Kracauer's many detractors, his own taste in films interfered with the systematisation of a coherent theory of realism, ultimately leading to many contradictions in the book: "Kracauer [turns] this way and that apparently in an effort to 'fit in' all his favourite movies" (Tudor 1974:82).

[19] Some of Bazin's ideas had been promoted by French-speaking film critics in the Anglo-Saxon world, like *Sight and Sound*'s Richard Roud (1959:176-179) and *The Village Voice*'s Andrew Sarris, but no official translation of his work appeared before the publication of Hugh Gray's first volume in 1967.

Kracauer believed that the film camera, like the photographic camera, has the ability to faithfully reproduce whatever is placed in front of the lens – to capture and preserve a moment in time that otherwise would be lost forever. Curiously, he somehow uses this valid point to make the unreasonable claim that the camera's ability to record such events puts it under an obligation to do exactly that:

> [Films] come into their own when they record and reveal physical reality […] And since any medium is partial to the things it is uniquely equipped to render, the cinema is conceivably animated by a desire to picture transient material life, life at its most ephemeral. Streets, crowds, involuntary gestures and other fleeting impressions are its very meat.
>
> (Kracauer 1997:xlix)

His primary thesis, that film can (and should) be used to capture "physical reality" (1997:28) or more precisely "actually existing physical reality" (*ibid.*), immediately becomes problematical since such a reality is not the domain of most fiction films. In Kracauer's book, this "actually existing physical reality" is equated with "camera-reality" three lines further, which is a much softer position, since it seems to allow for realities that are non-actual, but makes his specific views all the more difficult to grasp.

> The basic properties are identical with the properties of photography. Film, in other words, is uniquely equipped to record and reveal physical reality and, hence, gravitates toward it.
>
> (Kracauer 1997:28)

Film critics were among the most vocal in their opposition to Kracauer's insistence that the film medium was immanently inclined to record physical reality. Statements like the one above drew fire from Richard Corliss and Pauline Kael; both ridiculed Kracauer's pedantic approach to film theory and in her thorough review of the book, Kael wastes no time in decrying its author's laboriousness:

> Siegfried Kracauer is the sort of man who can't say "It's a lovely day" without first establishing that it *is* day, that the term "day" is meaningless without the dialectical concept of "night", that both these terms have no meaning unless there is a world in which day and night alternate, and so forth. By the time he has established an epistemological system to support his right to observe that it's a lovely day, our day has been spoiled.
>
> (1962:57)

Corliss deliberately exaggerates Kracauer's eccentricities and takes particular pleasure in poking fun at his persistent reanimation of an inanimate cinema: "He talks to the films: not only do they listen to him, but they tell him about their devotions, gravitations, affinities, predilections, preference and desires" (1970:15). Pauline Kael has the same objections to Kracauer's claim that the cinema prefers one kind of representation to another. In response to his statement that "the artificiality of stagy settings or compositions runs counter to the medium's declared preference of nature in the raw" (1997:60), Pauline Kael retorts: "How and when did the medium declare its preference, I wonder?" (1962:58)

Aside from these basic problems of vocabulary on the part of Siegfried Kracauer, his particular views lack precision because of an unresolved tension between the two main tendencies that he lays out in his second chapter: "realistic" and "formative", respectively exemplified in his text by the films of the Lumière brothers and Georges Méliès. This is a very superficial attempt to briefly encompass all cinematic endeavours (it is utterly simplistic to claim, as Kracauer does by citing Edgar Morin (1956:58), that the Lumière films represent 'absolute realism' and the Méliès films 'absolute unreality') and Kracauer's contention, actually borrowed from Morin (*ibid.*), that these two filmmakers "embody, so to speak, thesis and antithesis in a Hegelian sense" (1997:30) is a pointless generalisation.

Kracauer constantly comes back to the importance of reality in the production of a film, and while he does not insist on documentary instead of fictional film, in his opinion the camera should capture "reality" because it can.

> Imagine a film which, in keeping with the basic properties, records interesting aspects of physical reality but does so in a technically imperfect manner; perhaps the lighting is awkward or the editing uninspired. Nevertheless such a film is more specifically a film than one which utilizes brilliantly all the cinematic devices and tricks to produce a statement disregarding camera-reality.
>
> (Kracauer 1997:30)

Kracauer's use of the term "cinema-reality" is once again very vague, since it is never clearly stated what kind of reality is captured (or disregarded) in the second example.

André Bazin openly shares Kracauer's preference for reality in his discussions of films like *Kon-Tiki* and *Scott of the Antarctic*, but unlike Kracauer, Bazin does not pronounce a value judgment on the production's filmic specificity.

According to Peter Tudor, Kracauer's theory falls apart in the face of the necessary human interaction involved in the process of capturing reality on film:

> [It] is not possible to hold both to the position that there is an independent 'reality' which it is the *essence* of photography to reveal, *and* to the position that the 'reality' revealed by the camera must also depend on the photographer and, for that matter, the audience.
>
> (1974:86; original emphasis)

Siegfried Kracauer has not been taken seriously by film critics and theorists alike, who mocked his language, his stubborn "imposing Germanic seriousness" (Andrew 1976:106) and had him relegated to footnotes in discussions of realist film theory. Corliss accuses Kracauer of a lack of coherent theorisation, and the book of being "not only narrow, [but] also obscure, contradictory, and misleading" (1970:15). Kracauer certainly shares a penchant for 'reality' with many other critics and filmmakers, but his elaborate and contradictory assertions (or prescriptions) on the matter have generally diminished his impact on subsequent movements of realist film theory.

Whereas Kracauer wrote a book about realism in films of the past, André Bazin developed his own views in reviews and articles that related to films on general release at the time. Bazin, who has been dubbed the high-priest of movie realism (Matthews 1999b:22), because of his reputation in this regard as well as his view of filmic realism in moral terms, influenced by Catholicism, is generally considered to be one of the leading theorists in this field and I shall now proceed to an examination of his position on realism in film.

1.5.2 André Bazin (1918-1958)

> In 1931 the stars were living on grapefruit and hiding their bosoms. At the same time, the tidal wave of the Hays office censorship was breaking over Hollywood. The danger, though seeming to come from the opposite direction, was at bottom the same: *phoniness*. Cinematic eroticism wasted away in artifice and hypocrisy. Then came Mae West. The Mae West of the future will doubtless not have the generous curves of a Fifi Peachskin. But neither will she have to react against the same artificialities and shams; shocking or chaste, shy or provocative, all the American cinema needs from her is more authenticity.
>
> (Bazin 1971:162; my emphasis)

This excerpt from André Bazin's article "Entomology of the Pin-Up Girl", first published in French in December 1946 in *l'Écran français*, displays an adamant opposition to false representations of reality and makes a case for cinematic "authenticity". The English translation attenuates the distinction that the original text[20] makes between valid and invalid representations: in the original, Bazin uses the word *inauthenticité* (Barrot 1979:174) – which Hugh Gray translates as "phoniness" in the passage quoted above – to refer to the depiction of reality in films that were either censored by the Hays Office[21] or whose creators committed a form of self-censorship to portray the values espoused by the Hollywood Production Code. Alongside *artifice* and *hypocrisie*, Bazin's frustration with the cinema's version of eroticism is spelled out and placed in stark opposition to his wish for greater *authenticité*.

André Bazin conceives of the 'authentic' as the opposite of trickery; however, his usage of the term does vary from time to time. In a discussion of the process by which the viewer, while watching *Where No Vultures Fly*, overcomes her scepticism of the montage sequence in which a lioness follows a young child carrying a cub back to camp, Bazin refers to a shot that contains the animals and the actors, together, in the same

[20] The original French text appears in Barrot (1979:171-174).

[21] Will Hays headed the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), better known as the Hays Office; the Production Code that it enforced for more than three decades, starting in the early 1930s, played a significant role in the censorship of films distributed in the USA.

For a more comprehensive discussion of the period's censorship restrictions in the American film industry, see *The Dame in the Kimono: Hollywood, Censorship, and the Production Code from the 1920s to the 1960s*, by Leonard J. Leff and Jerold L. Simmons (1990).

frame – explicitly revealing real danger.[22] According to Bazin, this shot "gives immediate and retroactive authenticity" (1967:49) to the preceding montage (in the French, it "authenticates" said sequence). This process is facilitated by our belief that "trickery is out of the question" (*ibid.*): all the elements in the frame, with the implicit possibility of (real-life) danger, genuinely existed at the time of production.

Of course, there is more to realism than the editing of a scene: the example cited by Bazin in his piece on the pin-up girl lacks authenticity because it presents characters who do not conduct themselves in the same (relative) manner as their real-life counterparts. In short, if these characters existed in real life, they would not behave in such a way; in other words, the scene is portrayed unrealistically. This censorship of reality, for Bazin, necessarily subtracts from the authenticity (since it is unrealistic, it cannot be a faithful representation of reality) of the events portrayed.

However, Bazin was not a mere advocate of the illusion of reality: he sought a presentation of reality that had real life at its root: "[T]he important thing is not whether the trick can be spotted but whether or not trickery is used, just as the beauty of a copy is no substitute for the authenticity of a Vermeer" (Bazin 1967:46). Bazin's original phrasing is even clearer: "[…] the beauty of a false Vermeer wouldn't be able to prevail against its inauthenticity"[23] (Bazin 1958:122). Both translations provide us with evidence of Bazin's desire not only for realism, but for a certain kind of realism – one firmly rooted in real life. It is important to note that "inauthenticity" in the previous quotation signals any reproduction of the real. However, the scene from *Where No Vultures Fly* proves that Bazin does allow himself to label a reproduction as "authentic", as long as the reproduction is a visible mould of reality.

In Bazin's eyes, the mechanics behind the tracing of reality onto film are of great importance, and the viewer's recognition of the traces left by this process plays a big part in judging a particular film's representation of reality. Bazin stresses the significance

[22] This is a paraphrase from Bazin's article, "The Virtues and Limitations of Montage" (Bazin 1967:41-52, in particular the extended footnote on p.49).

[23] My translation from the French.

of aetiological knowledge of the camera's process of visual reproduction in the assessment of the degree to which a film or a photograph is faithful to its source in reality; this fidelity goes hand in hand with the camera's scientific objectivity. For Bazin, the mechanical nature of the (photographic or film) camera necessarily effects a visual reproduction of the original object and the viewer's awareness of this process that lacks any additional creative input contributes to a rendering more accurate than any other form of reproduction.

> The objective nature of photography confers on it a credibility absent from all other picture-making. […] Photography enjoys a certain advantage in virtue of this transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction.
>
> (Bazin 1967:13-14)

Notwithstanding the degree of resemblance between the reproduction (the photograph) and the object represented, the innate objectivity of the image produced by mechanical means takes precedence over any other reproduction, where "the creative intervention of man" is excluded from the process of image production. Roland Barthes calls this mechanical process, which does not involve "the hand of man" in the direct manner of the other arts, *acheiropoietos* (1984:82).

1.5.2.1 The three realisms

> Photography and the cinema […] satisfy, once and for all and in its very essence, our obsession with realism. No matter how skillful the painter, his work was always in fee to an inescapable subjectivity.
>
> (Bazin 1967:12)

With this statement (taken from "The Ontology of the Photographic Image"), Bazin seems to tie the concept of "realism" very firmly to reality, and implies that a film faithful to the spatiotemporal parameters of real life (the latter imprinted, as it were, onto film) would necessarily be realistic. Nicholas Wolterstorff takes issue with Bazin's terminology in this particular excerpt and the conclusions that he draws about a film's so-called "realism". More importantly, Wolterstorff points to the diversity of the term, by reminding the reader that many a non-realistic film exists in spite of its undeniably direct link to physical reality:

> What [Bazin] means is that photographs and films are (by and large) produced by rendering or copying something, mechanically so. But that has little to do with *realism* in the sense of that word which is relevant to art and aesthetics. This is clear from the fact that there are non-realistic as well as realistic films. The realism or non-realism of a film inheres in its representational dimension, not in its renditional dimension.
>
> (Wolterstorff 1980:20; original emphasis)

According to Wolterstorff, Bazin's understanding of "realism" tends more towards a visually faithful, non-interpretive rendering of reality. However, Bazin claims that our knowledge of the process by which reality is captured confers onto the material a status of "realism" that supersedes other forms of representation, like painting, even when some aspects of the result (like colour) are less representative of real life than a painting, for example (Bazin 1967:12).

Elsewhere, Bazin does qualify his use of the term "realism" and categorises its possible applications. The following is an excerpt from a text on Orson Welles's *mise-en-scène* and the realism that his use of composition in depth brings to the film, counter to the conventional breaking up of a scene into shots ("découpage"):

> Contrary to what one might believe at first, "*découpage* in depth" is more charged with meaning than analytical *découpage*. It is no less abstract than the other, but the additional abstraction which it integrates into the narrative comes precisely from a surplus of realism. A realism that is in a certain sense ontological, restoring to the object and the décor their existential density, the weight of their presence; a dramatic realism which refuses to separate the actor from the décor, the foreground from the background; a psychological realism which brings the spectator back to the real conditions of perception, a perception which is never completely determined a priori.
>
> (Bazin 1978:80)

The three categories of realism indicated by Bazin in this passage may be summarised as follows:

1. Ontological realism, facilitated by our knowledge of the process by which an object is captured on film, attests to the existential truth of that object. Roland Barthes has a similar view of the equivalent power of photography, claiming that "[t]he Photograph [says] for certain *what has been*" (1984:85). It might be more accurate to claim that the photograph says for certain *what is at the time of recording*.

Without this simultaneous physical presence of the camera and photographed object, the photograph (obtained by mechanical means) cannot capture the particular object.

2. Dramatic realism is reflected in the spatial (and temporal) coherence of a shot. Bazin's admiration of the deep-focus shots employed by Jean Renoir and Orson Welles is a result of this desire for dramatic realism; the relevant cinematography aids in the presentation of the scene as a unit, instead of highlighting or selecting a specific part of the action by means of camera focus or "analytical *découpage*", i.e. cutting up the scene into separate shots.

3. While a shot's dramatic realism is judged against the spatiotemporal coherence of reality, psychological realism shifts the focus back to the viewer and the effect that the aforementioned dramatic realism has on her interpretation of such a shot. Psychological realism is founded on the inherent ambiguity that reality possesses, in line with Bazin's personalist philosophy (Andrew 1978:106), and an accurate presentation of a shot/scene would have the effect of producing ambiguity in the viewer's apprehension thereof. In contrast, "montage by its very nature rules out ambiguity of expression" (Bazin 1967:36). For Bazin, this psychological realism has a moral dimension and he insists on the diversity of potential meaning, which would enable the viewers to decode the information themselves, instead of being confronted with a single meaning.

   Jean Mitry disputes this line of reasoning and contends that the viewer only has an impression of freedom: her uncertainty is associated with the unpredictability of the action, rather than some freedom supposedly afforded by the deep-focus cinematography.

> What Bazin assumes to be "freedom of attention" is nothing more than our uncertainty as to which of several events to look at – which is itself produced by an uncertainty in the behavior of the characters […] We can never predict the point at which the action will attract our interest, and this obviously forces us to be more attentive, to study the behavior of the characters in order to understand more fully each in turn; but this is because of their actions and not because of our free will.
>
> (Mitry 1997:197)

Bazin distinguishes between two other forms of realism in his article "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" and while he makes little effort to elaborate, the importance of intention is instantly recognisable in his position:

> The quarrel over realism in art stems from a misunderstanding, from a confusion between the aesthetic and the psychological; between true realism, the need that is to give significant expression of the world both concretely and in its essence, and the pseudorealism of a deception aimed at fooling the eye (or for that matter the mind); a pseudorealism content in other words with illusory appearances.
>
> (Bazin 1967:12)

Bazin's preference for brute reality, in opposition to reconstructions, is best developed in an essay called "Cinema and Exploration" (Bazin 1967:154-163): by focusing on the documentary *Kon-Tiki*,[24] he pays attention to the film's technical flaws, but considers the final product to be more "moving" as a result of these imperfections and prefers such a presentation to a more well-rounded film. For Bazin, the so-called mistakes reinforce the appreciation of reality.

> A cinematographic witness to an event is what a man can seize of it on film while at the same time being part of it. How much more moving is this flotsam, snatched from the tempest, than would have been the faultless and complete report offered by an organized film, for it remains true that this film is not made up only of what we see – its faults are equally witness to its authenticity.
>
> (Bazin 1967:162)

His premise is obviously a belief that there exists a directly proportional relationship between a film's authenticity and its capacity to move. The authenticity, the fact that the camera was present at that defining moment of history, trumps any subsequent

[24] The film, released in 1950, was shot by the leader of the expedition, Thor Heyerdahl, and other members of his crew. In 1947, they had undertaken the now-famous maritime voyage across the Pacific Ocean on a raft made of balsa wood and this film documents the journey of the team.

representation, even if the presentation of the original moment lacks clarity or coherence of form.

On this point, Bazin's position is similar to a quotation in Kracauer's *Theory of film* (1997:302), taken from an interview with the filmmaker Federico Fellini, who claims that perfection in life is elusive and therefore it must remain so in the cinema as well: "I believe that a good picture has to have defects. It has to have mistakes in it, like life, like people" (Fellini cited in Bachmann 1959:103). Fellini's position implies that life is somehow defective, and therefore a film that is lacking (in terms of technique, narration, editing, acting, or in some other way) would more faithfully reflect life's own imperfection. Fellini doesn't explain what this deficiency, on the part of "life", "people" or films, entails, and while his statement may be interpreted as a defence of problems in his own films specifically, and more generally in cinema as a whole, it falls apart in the face of any rational examination. However, although his comment cannot be an apology, it accurately formulates the relationship between life and film: the latter can never be a complete copy of the former, but if done attentively, it can approach the original, thereby displaying verisimilitude, or realism.

1.5.2.2 The analogy of the asymptote

> It is true that all of Bazin's work is centered on one idea, the affirmation of cinematic "objectivity", but it does so in the same way that geometry centers on the properties of the straight line.
>
> (Rohmer 1989:95)

Eric Rohmer's geometrical metaphor is employed by Bazin himself when he remarks on the intentions of director Vittorio de Sica and screenwriter Cesare Zavattini, who wrote the screenplay for *The Bicycle Thieves* and other films from the period of Italian neorealism: "[They] are concerned to make cinema the asymptote of reality […]" (Bazin 1971:82). In geometry, a function's asymptote is the linear equation which it leans towards without the possibility of reaching said straight line.

Bazin's comparison of the cinema to an asymptote postulates the following: reality is a curve that never touches the straight line of cinema; the curve represents objective

reality and Bazin acknowledges that the neorealist filmmakers, while striving towards the goal of meeting this reality, can never completely fulfil this.

> Since the expressionist heresy came to an end [….] one may take it that the general trend of cinema has been toward realism. Let us agree, by and large, that film sought to give the spectator as perfect an illusion of reality as possible within the limits of the logical demands of cinematographic narrative and of the current limits of technique.
>
> (Bazin 1971:26)

His praise for the neorealist filmmakers in particular is directed at their desire to approach the curve that is reality by minimising the distance (this can signify many different aspects of the world on screen) between film and real life. Such an effort to construct a film with maximum verisimilitude, by relying to a great extent on uncontrolled action, especially in the background, is evident in Michael Winterbottom's 2003 film, *In This World*.

1.6 Neorealism goes digital: *In This World*

The attacks on New York's famed Twin Towers on 11 September 2001 resulted directly in a bombing campaign on Afghan soil, carried out by American and British military forces in what came to be known as "Operation Enduring Freedom". The 2001 invasion of Afghanistan increased the size of the refugee population that had existed since the Soviet Union invaded the country in 1979. The journey of *In This World*'s two protagonists is mapped out against this historical backdrop.

In This World presents the story of the sixteen-year-old Jamal and his cousin Enayat – two Afghans who decide to leave the Shamshatoo Refugee Camp in Pakistan, where they have spent most of their lives, and journey to England. Along the way, they are "handled" by a number of intermediaries, who smuggle them into containers, onto trucks and ships and across borders.

According to Marcel Zyskind, the film's director of photography, the cameras used during production on *In This World* were all digital video cameras (DVCams) and there was very little or no additional lighting (Holben 2003:14). The film was shot in its

entirety on location in the countries where the action takes place (Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Italy, France and the United Kingdom), mostly in low-income residential areas. The characters are portrayed by non-professional actors, and most of the cast consists of real-life refugees; Jamal and Enayat are played by Jamal Udin Torabi and Enayatullah Jumaudin[25] respectively. In these respects, Winterbottom's film appears to be shot with the same authenticity of cast and location as Bazin claimed for *The Bicycle Thieves*:

> The techniques employed in the *mise en scène* […] meet the most exacting specifications of Italian neorealism. Not one scene shot in a studio. Everything was filmed in the streets. As for the actors, none had the slightest experience in the theater or film.
>
> (Bazin 1971:50)

In fact, as Kristin Thompson points out in her discussion of *The Bicycle Thieves*, this praise is rather inaccurate in its assessment of the film's link back to real life (1988:211), because studio production facilities, including back projection, were visibly called upon in the making of the film.

In This World contains no archive footage (that is, shot for the purpose of being included in this or any other fiction film) and while the film conforms to all the basic requirements for neorealism, the film does contain a number of exceptions regarding the images, notably the fact that they were shot with digital cameras and sometimes switches from colour to black-and-white, and the addition of a few computer-generated graphics. Unlike Winterbottom's *The Road to Guantanamo*, which deals with roughly the same time period but was shot two years later, this film is set in the present,[26] thereby enhancing the narrative's sense of urgency and organic spontaneity. This point in relation to *The Road to Guantanamo* is an important one, because it reflects the loss

[25] The film and most press material simply credit the second actor as "Enayatullah", but Jay Holben's article in *American Cinematographer* attaches the present surname.

[26] Here, "the present" indicates that the film's narrative is contemporaneous with the film's production (the actual shooting). Therefore, in the case of *In This World*, "the present" refers to the first six months of 2002. A recreation, by definition, takes place after the fact; it would be virtually impossible to shoot a recreation contemporaneously with the events being recreated.

of the present in the reconstruction or the recreation, as opposed to the immediate reality of the documentary which *In This World* aspires to.

The initial voice-over informs the viewer of the surge in the refugee population following Afghanistan's invasion by foreign powers in 1979 and in 2001, and while the relevance or validity of the statements is debatable, the influence of the wars on the socio-economic conditions of the film's protagonists is a central component of the narrative. The social conditions depicted in the film remind one of the Italian neorealist films, in spite of a visual presentation that is admittedly quite different. The voice-over that situates *In This World* in a time and place – 2002; a refugee camp on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border – makes a point of contextualising the refugees and reminds (or informs) the viewer of the past invasions of Afghan territory that had contributed to this current state of affairs. In the neorealist films of the late 1940s and early 1950s (for example, Rossellini's *Paisà*), such voice-overs generally occurred together with footage that was of a strictly documentary nature, and the voice-over narration referred to actual events.

Michael Winterbottom's film is shot in colour with synchronous sound, on both accounts a significant departure from the practice of Italian neorealist filmmakers, and unquestionably closer to visual reality than its stylistic predecessors. Of course, the respective contexts in which these films were produced differ greatly and a closer rendering of life, in its audiovisual aspects, does not necessarily yield greater realism: at the time of Italian neorealist cinema, black and white films were perceived as more realistic than colour films (Bordwell & Thompson 1990:200).

In his discussion of neorealist films' soundtracks, Bazin defended their techniques (sound and dialogue were recorded from scratch in post-production, sometimes resulting in a very noticeable discrepancy between real-life sound production and sound production on film, asynchronous with the mouths forming the words), especially the liberation of the camera that was achieved as a result, with the following statement: "Some measure of reality must always be sacrificed in the effort of achieving it" (Bazin 1971:30). *In This World*, whose camera movements are at least as free as those of the

neorealist cinema, has no problem with the faithful recording of sound during the production stage and seems therefore to provide a more accurate rendering of audiovisual reality than the one offered by the neorealist films.

The processes by which sounds and images are recorded for the purposes of cinema have changed over the course of history and this evolution has undeniably led to improvements in renditional accuracy. The *Variety* film critic Derek Elley, in reference to the physical yet relatively unimposing presence of the camera (compared to the bulky cameras of the post-war neorealist filmmakers) in such extreme socio-economic circumstances as well as the superbly credible acting, calls the film an "[u]ltra-realist pic, shot on DV in docudrama style […]" (2002). The realism of a film relates directly to the success of the filmmaker in representing a character, a situation, an event, and so on, and indirectly to the audiovisual renditional accuracy of the representation, as Wolterstorff pointed out in section 1.5.2.1, "The three realisms".

1.6.1 The illusion of coincidence

In her examination of the impression of reality imparted by one of the key neorealist films, Vittorio de Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*, Kristin Thompson highlights three points that most significantly contribute to the film's realistic nature and these same points are applicable to the ways in which *In This World* conveys the experience of capturing (instead of staging) reality. While these points do not necessarily contribute to an impression of reality, they are often mentioned in connection with "realist" approaches in cinema.

The three elements that Thompson (1988:205) emphasises are the following:

- A concentration on the working and peasant classes;
- The use of non-actors and location shooting;
- A considerable number of peripheral events and coincidences.

The first and second points have already been covered in my discussion of *In This World*, but the final remark about peripheral or coincidental events is considerably more vague

and examples would be difficult to pin down. “Coincidences”, in particular, signify a borderline case of realism and credibility, since many films contain coincidences that seem improbable and contrived to audiences. This point about peripheral events is tied to statements made by both Roman Jakobson (1978:43) and Erich Auerbach (1953:547), who underline the necessity of (seemingly) irrelevant details in order to raise what Bazin refers to as the “reality coefficient”[27] (1971:30). Obviously, such “unessential” (Jakobson 1978:43) or “useless details” (Barthes 1986:142) generate a sense of redundancy, of a narrative that is less than perfectly rounded and contains objects that are “neither incongruous nor significant” (*ibid.*). In an article on Vittorio De Sica, Bazin touches on the idea of coincidence as well while discussing the merits of *The Bicycle Thieves*:

> Though this *mise-en-scène* aims at negating itself, at being transparent to the reality it reveals, it would be naïve to conclude that it does not exist. Few films gave been more carefully put together, more pondered over, more meticulously elaborated, but all this labor by De Sica tends to give the illusion of chance, to result in giving dramatic necessity the character of something contingent.
>
> (Bazin 1971:68)

Thirty years later, Serge Daney would make the same point about the importance of so-called “chance events” in the impression of reality that Kenji Mizoguchi’s *Ugetsu* produces when Miyagi is killed:

> [I]n the Japanese countryside travellers are attacked by greedy bandits and one of them kills Miyagi with a spear. But he does it almost inadvertently, tumbling around, pushed by a bit of violence or a stupid reflex. This event seems so accidental that the camera almost misses it. And I am convinced that any spectator of that scene has the same superstitious and crazy idea: if the camera had not been so slow, the event may have happened off-camera and – who knows – may not have happened at all.
>
> (Daney 2004)

Considering the three points discussed above, taken from Kristin Thompson’s analysis of *The Bicycle Thieves* and neorealist cinema, *In This World* exhibits remarkable similarities

[27] Bazin coins this term when he praises the mobility of the cameras used by the neorealist filmmakers, a mobility that was made possible by the decision to record sound in post-production instead of during the actual shoot.

to the post-war Italian films and may be said to display, at the very least, a neorealist quality.

1.6.2 Politics

The film's opening (and only) voice-over narration, which introduces the viewer to the character of Jamal and serves to contextualise his story within the history of the refugee population living in the Shamshatoo Camp, has been widely criticised (Kelly 2003:40 and Ebert 2003, among others) for its ideologically suspect assessment of the refugee situation. Mention of the Americans seems almost gratuitous: the American attacks on Afghanistan had nothing to do with the fact that Jamal was born in the refugee camp more than a decade earlier. Nonetheless, the film clearly reminds the viewer of this military action by even noting the date on which it commenced:

> Fifty-three thousand Afghan refugees live in Shamshatoo Camp [near] the city of Peshawar in Pakistan. The first arrived in 1979, fleeing the Soviet invasion of their country; the most recent came to escape the US-led bombing campaign which began on October 7th, 2001. Many of these children were born here, like Jamal; he is an orphan, he works in a brick factory and gets paid less than a dollar a day.

In the course of this voice-over, the film shows scenes from everyday life in the refugee camp: Jamal making bricks and children playing outside. More important are the real people who look directly into the camera, clearly attracting the description of documentary objects. The voice-over continues, and while it underlines the dismal socio-economic situation of the refugees, including by implication the situation of Jamal, the statements are misleading at best:

> It is estimated that $7.9 billion were spent on bombing Afghanistan in 2001. Spending on refugees is far less generous. The daily food ration is 480 grams of wheat flour, 25 grams of vegetable oil and 60 grams of pulses. Every family is given a tent, a plastic sheet, three blankets and one stove.

From these opening lines, material minimalism is put front and centre, and so is the apparent imbalance between the budget for military attacks and the expenditure on aid to refugees. However, the film's focus on social hardship is shored up by its fudging of the facts: the comment above, related by an authoritative voice-over, implies that part

A (the bombing campaign) and part B (spending on refugees) are disproportionately funded by the same source. Of course, this is incorrect, in spite of the sober seriousness with which the information is conveyed. The leap from a statement about military expenditure to one about social generosity serves to emphasise the dearth of aid to the refugees in comparison with the "generous" expenditure on military operations.

Even so, this is not an historical-political film in the vein of Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers*, for the simple reason that the two refugees fill the narrative space. Pontecorvo's film featured both sides of the fight – the French soldiers as well as the Algerian resistance fighters – but while the Americans and the British are mentioned in the opening voice-over monologue to *In This World*, they remain unseen. In this respect, Winterbottom's film reflects the setting of the neorealist films in its presentation (importantly, in the present) of the effects of war on a social level. These effects on the main characters are very different compared to *The Road to Guantanamo*, in which the American forces are painted as antagonists, who use political ideology to ravage the lives of the "Tipton Three". *In This World*'s antagonist, if one is to be selected, is the uncertain journey from Pakistan to England that forever changes the lives of Jamal and Enayat. The villains are not the military forces, but the diverse individuals who impede Jamal's and Enayat's progress.

1.6.3 The use of the actual

According to Derek Elley, *In This World* had originally been released as "M1187511", a number that refers to "the U.K. Home Office's file number for the real-life Jamal's application for refugee status" (2002). This piece of paratextual information might not have amounted to much if the final title card of the film hadn't inflated the importance of Jamal Udin Torabi, the lead actor, in relation to the story. The film's supposedly fictional status is destabilised by a final hint that the film is in fact a re-enacted presentation of events that really occurred, when the following information appears on screen:

ON THE 9TH AUGUST 2002
THE ASYLUM APPLICATION OF
JAMAL UDIN TORABI
WAS REFUSED
* * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
HE WAS HOWEVER GRANTED
EXCEPTIONAL LEAVE TO ENTER
* * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
AND IS NOW
LIVING IN LONDON
* * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
HE WILL HAVE TO LEAVE BRITAIN
ON THE DAY BEFORE HIS EIGHTEENTH BIRTHDAY

The entire film had been premised on the fact that the story is fictional, albeit very likely based on similar journeys that many refugees have undertaken in the past (therefore, realistic in its narrative composition), but this final title card has significant narrative implications. Either:

a) the film is a documentary; or

b) the film is a reconstruction of past events.

Either way, the individual called Jamal Udin Torabi (*ex hypothesi*, he plays himself, insofar as that is possible) had really travelled from his refugee camp to London in an effort to escape his circumstances back home. This final remark on Jamal Udin Torabi (the title card reprinted above) shifts the film's categorisation from fictional to factual, although the shift is far from smooth, since the ambiguous mixture of real and represented doesn't correlate well with specific events. We have already established that, while containing documentary footage, the film is not a documentary. At no point in the course of the film is there any interaction between the camera crew and the main actors; there are no interviews, no running commentary. Although the film was shot with a screenplay, written by Toni Grisoni, which indicated the basic storyline, dialogue was improvised for the most part and in a way this film is a kind of direct cinema.[28]

[28] In direct cinema, the filmmaker points her camera and shoots the scene whilst trying not to be involved, as opposed to *cinéma vérité* in which the filmmaker often provokes a reaction from the filmed object.

> What makes the film astonishing is that it follows a real boy on a real journey, and the boy is in England at this moment. What's real and what's fiction in the film is hard to say, but we trust that the images are informed by truth […]
>
> (Ebert 2003)

Roger Ebert makes a number of mistakes in his discussion of the "real" as opposed to the "fiction[al]" elements contained in the represented story, but his view reflects the general understanding of the film. He seems to imply that these two particular terms are mutually exclusive (his slight qualifier "informed by" in the quotation notwithstanding), when in fact there is plenty of room for overlapping. Jamal Udin Torabi is, of course, a real boy, but he is a real boy play-acting, pretending to be someone close to himself, albeit someone with whom he shares a name. The character is not a real boy, because he has been created by the actor and shaped by his interpretation of this role. The film therefore features, in the words of Raymond Williams (1977:73), "people […] 'playing themselves' – but 'playing themselves' as roles within a script." As long as there is "play", however, there is necessarily a departure from reality, even when the characters and the respective actors are similar in many respects.[29]

The "real journey" refers to the journey undertaken by the entire film cast and crew, and can't refer to the one portrayed in the film, since life-changing situations like the death of a main character would have to happen "for real", which it did not. Lastly, it is correct that Jamal Udin Torabi, according to the epilogue, resided in England at the time of the film's release, but "the [real] boy" is not the Jamal of the film. The apparent fusion of the two Jamals (one fictional, one real) is made all the more problematic by Enayat's fate.

With the exception of so-called "snuff films", containing scenes of graphic real-life torture or executions, scenes of death and violence always occur in simulated fashion in fiction films. In this regard, the suffocation of Enayat while holed up in the container

[29] Films like *A Cock and Bull Story*, *Ocean's Twelve* and *The Dreamers* raise many more questions about the possible distinctions between real and make-believe and this point will be developed in much greater depth in Chapter 7.

travelling from Turkey to Trieste is an event that will serve as a springboard for much analysis and discussion regarding the problem of a real-life referent in this film, due to the manifestation of such an action that cannot be real. I shall return to such actions, which the filmmakers of the Dogme 95 movement called "superficial", in Chapter 2.

Enayatullah can't really have made this journey, because he would have died and consequently wouldn't have been able to act in this film. And if Enayatullah isn't portraying himself, then the relation between Jamal the actor and Jamal the character must also be questioned, for (if this is indeed a reconstructed sequence of events) the very existence of Enayat must be examined.

The film ends the way it began – with shots of anonymous individuals who look directly into the camera. These bookends contain moments of incontrovertibly documentary images, and certainly serve towards blurring the line between the real and fictional worlds. The images' documentary quality is a result of their contrast with the rest of the film: the individuals that the viewer sees in this section look straight at the camera and acknowledges its presence. They do not "pretend" to look at the audience: their look is directed at the physical equipment that records them.

Another moment whose documentary nature is undeniable (the fact that it happens as such) is the slaughter of the bull (0:07:25).[30] Here, the viewer sees the animal's vital transition from "alive" to "dead" without any change of shot. It is not the content alone, but also its visual representation, that contributes to the viewer's realisation that the scene is genuine. Even if the viewer has never seen such an action in real life, the presentation is realistic, at least due to its spatiotemporal coherence.

In "Cinema and Exploration", an article contained in *What is cinema? Volume 1* (Bazin 1967:154-163), André Bazin wholeheartedly prefers the documentary form, no matter what its aesthetic qualities, to a reconstruction. Bazin's excitement about the documentary form has a lot to do with the thrill produced by the "faults" (162) that

[30] In this dissertation, all indications of time in this format are meant to refer to the Region 2 DVDs of the particular films.

prove the truth and the actual presence of the filmmakers at the recorded event; a reconstruction puts (some of) the pieces back together but cannot wholly reflect the events. Bazin uses much in the way of paratextual information to defend his argument that the method of reconstruction is always inferior to a film documenting the event at the actual moment it occurs. In reference to *Scott of the Antarctic* (Charles Frend, 1948), Bazin remarks:

> Here is a film so lavishly and carefully made that it must have cost as much as the original expedition. [I]t is also a Technicolor masterpiece. The studio reconstructions reveal a mastery of trick work and studio imitation – but to what purpose? To imitate the inimitable, to reconstruct that which of its very nature can only occur once, namely risk, adventure, death? […] The simple snapshot of Scott and his four companions at the pole, which was discovered in their baggage, is far more stirring than the entire Technicolor feature by Charles Frend.
>
> (1967:158-159)

The example of the snapshot in the quotation is further proof of Bazin's preference for physical reality to the form of make-believe, focusing on the intrinsic credibility of the mode of production rather than the faithfulness of the reproduction.

Some examples from *In This World* contain visual presentations of the events that do not seem objective, firstly because the images do not correspond to human vision in similar conditions, and secondly because of the visibility of technical aids, such as supplementary light sources, whose presence is diegetically impossible, or unjustifiable within the context of the narrative, and in fact they emphasise the artificial components of recording an event.

Specifically, the visual quality of scenes shot at night time, or in otherwise dark spaces, is worth examining for our purposes. The decision to employ little or no artificial lighting on this project produces results that are actually very different from human vision. For the scene shot on the boat to Trieste, an extra light bulb has clearly been attached to the camera, because a bright field of light hovers at the centre of the image throughout. Furthermore, in this scene, and in two others – the trek across the Turkish-Iranian border, shot with the infrared mode of the camera (Holben 2003:16), and another sequence (0:51:18 - 0:53:45), shot at night in black and white – the images in no way

compare to the colours of reality. While this is a significant point to make, it is not something that concerned Bazin when he praised the black-and-white neorealist films for their otherwise visually accurate portrayals of reality. The resemblance between an event and its recording therefore does not seem to be of primary importance to Bazin – what counts is proof that reality was captured under circumstances that are as natural as possible (in other words: unstaged).

From time to time, the images in Winterbottom's film do not appear as they would in such situations in real life, perceived by someone with relatively normal visual capacities. However, in Bazin's view this deviation from reality does not violate our impression of reality, despite some visual interference or manipulation, since it is evident that the images are not only reality-based, but secured to reality – obtained in the presence of reality.

1.6.4 The line between fiction and documentary

To some degree, the same may be said of the traces of the physical presence of the film crew that make their way onto film: at one point (0:23:00), the vehicle carrying the film camera tracks in front of another on the open road and the shadow of this vehicle, with extradiegetic origins (since we have established that it is not a documentary), appears on the film. On the level of the diegesis, this is a completely impossible occurrence: the vehicle transporting the camera is unaccounted for in the fictional context.

These remarks about the perceptible presence of the film crew and the traces that remain on the fictional film bring to mind André Bazin's glowing article on Thor Heyerdahl's *Kon-Tiki*. Bazin had argued (1967:162) that the film's technically deficient camerawork (compared to a better funded, staged production) was "moving", because the viewer has a conscious realisation that the events on screen were really taking place at the moment of recording, without any evident intermediary manipulation. The indexical traces of the extradiegetic film crew's presence might remind the viewer that she is anachronistically watching an event unfold, removed from the original action, but the truthfulness of the event is nonetheless retained.

It becomes apparent that different points of view need to be differentiated in a discussion of "realism" or the relevance of a "witness's" presence at the moment of capturing the scene on film.

Firstly, there is the matter of extradiegetic intrusion. If the camera's presence at an event is not invisible, then the camera intrudes upon the fictional world, for it has no place there, with the single exception of the documentary, where the camera's presence or its visibility to the (admittedly real) individuals is permissible. On the other hand, a trace of the camera in the form of a shadow or a boom microphone underlines the homospatiality and homotemporality of the camera with the events, thereby enhancing the camera's status as witness, instead of creator.

Secondly, there is perspective. Neorealist films rarely contain point-of-view shots that place the viewer in the position of a character. While POV shots might seem to encourage the viewer's immersion in the fiction, the observational nature of the documentary would be lost and, along with the loss of observation, there would necessarily be a loss of objectivity. In certain situations, like the black-screen burial of Beatrix Kiddo in Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill: Vol. 2*, the point of view might be slightly transferred so that, while the physical distance between the subject and the object is maintained, the subject (the viewer) has the same vision – or, in the present example, lack of vision – as the object (the character). I shall come back to this point about the realistic presentation of an obviously subjective reality in my discussion of Winterbottom's *Wonderland* in Chapter 2.

Colour film is unquestionably closer to reality than the black-and-white images of post-war neorealist films (we may safely assume that the viewer sees the world in colour rather than shades of grey) and in this respect it may easily be said to have more renditional accuracy than its Italian predecessors. However, as we have mentioned, such renditional accuracy would not have translated as completely realistic in the eyes of the post-war filmgoer, since black-and-white images signified greater realism. Furthermore, any additional alterations of the image, either in its production or during post-production, including changes of the depth of field and any conspicuous use of filters,

should be examined carefully to gauge the realism added to or subtracted from the original image.

1.6.5 Actments and re-enactments

In This World's end credits conclude with the following disclaimer:

> The characters and incidents portrayed and the names herein are fictional and any similarity to the name, characters or history of any persons living or dead is entirely accidental and unintentional

Documentaries have often been taken to be unaltered reproductions of reality, recorded at the moment something occurs "for real", even though the director and editor have the prerogative to shape the material into a creative presentation (for example, by means of montage) that deviates from the evolution of actual events. A problem arises, however, when documentary meets re-creation; this was the case with Errol Morris's *Thin Blue Line* (1988) and more recently *Man on Wire* (James Marsh, 2008), a film marketed as a documentary that nevertheless contained numerous examples of events restaged and recorded thirty years after the fact. These films are documentary insofar as they relate very strongly to real events, but they are in fact a kind of hybrid of different styles, mixing footage shot in the past (archive footage) and the present (interviews with participants in, or spectators of, these historical events; re-creations of the events of the past in the present). Regarding the Oscar eligibility in the documentary category of recent films (specifically, *Man on Wire*) that contain staged actions or events, Bruce Davis, executive director of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, had the following to say:

> Recognizing that doc filmmakers themselves have varying degrees of tolerance toward re-enactments (asking […] real people to do things that they had done in the past over again for the camera), "actments" (employing actors to re-create events), stock footage, distressed footage (manipulating images to make them appear "historic"), scripted sequences, and computer-generated images, the rules now place those kinds of eligibility questions in the laps of the individual nominations voters.
>
> (cited in Ebert 2008)

I shall use the terms "actments" and "re-enactments" as defined by Davis in the quotation above for the duration of this dissertation, because their definitions are straight-forward and leave very little room for misunderstanding. Re-enacting is therefore a variation on acting, in the sense that the (almost invariably amateur) actor is expected to use his own historical experiences to portray himself. This tighter than conventional definition of "re-enactment" is at odds with many writings on the subject of the restaging of historical events, since the latter is often qualified as a re-enactment even when the actors are not the original participants. In this manner, Michael Chanan, in a 2007 article published in *Sight and Sound* magazine, describes *The Battle of Algiers*, a restaging of historical events with a cast of mostly non-professional actors, many of whom did not participate in the original events, as "Gillo Pontecorvo's 1966 re-enactment of the Algerian liberation struggle of the preceding decade" (Chanan 2007:38). On the other hand, Saadi Yacef, who was implicated in the original Battle of Algiers, does appear in the film, but he appears as someone else, namely El-Hadi Jaffar, whose function within the narrative is in some respects similar to Yacef's during the struggle for independence (Rainer 2004).[31] There is an imitation of the self, of historical facts, without attributing the same name to both personalities. As a result, the character does not denote the historical character, and this certainly leaves greater freedom for interpretation.

In This World pretends to be a re-enactment, in which Jamal Udin Torabi, starring as himself, journeys from Pakistan to England again, recreating the events of the past, framing it as a kind of documentary which allows the filmmakers to generate a sense of immediacy and presence with the viewer, whilst the content and presentation of this "documentary footage" raise questions about the possibility of recording such material.

The film takes great care to indicate with precision when and where events take place. This approach of positioning an event in space and time is important within the context of historical accuracy and its truth outside the framework of a fictional (even a faithfully

[31] This same kind of actment/re-enactment hybrid exists to a far greater extent in Michael Winterbottom's *24 Hour Party People* and *A Cock and Bull Story* and will be analysed in Chapters 6 and 7.

reconstructed) story. Usually this is done in filmic recreations of past events to confirm the exact date on which a certain important event really took place; it firmly places the event within the framework of history. In reality, the film is a complete fiction, but the manner in which the film was shot has played a very definite part in the illusion of dramatic reconstruction.[32]

1.7 Conclusion

Being a fictional film that employs a documentary approach to tell a very human story, *In This World* closely resembles the kind of films made by the Italian neorealist filmmakers; the film's particulars do not directly represent real (or actual) particulars, but rather actual universals – the same kind of relationship that is the aim of any work of fiction that strives for realism. At the same time, not unlike the films of the *nouvelle vague*, Winterbottom's films are made on a relatively small budget. With *In This World*, he chose to comment explicitly on the war in the Middle East and accordingly his film is much more politically oriented than the Italian films of the late 1940s.

The characters at the centre of *In This World* are similar, in terms of their socio-economic status, to the characters of previous realist movements in the cinema, and it is obviously a film that its creators sought to imbue with a high level of realism. We have established that this realism is a product of both the approach of the filmmakers (the visual style of the production, the use of non-professional actors) and the viewers' perception of this approach and of the final film, based on their appreciation of, or resistance to, the prevailing conventions regarding realistic representation.

Beyond the expression of a personal vision of the world, the Danish film movement called Dogme 95 would explicitly reach for the truth obscured by convention and seek to present the world as it is, instead of our perception of it. Their formula for revealing this truth is a ten-step process, called the Vow of Chastity, which will be a major focus of Chapter 2.

[32] The re-enactment will be revisited, with a twist, in Chapter 7, with particular focus on its applicability to Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Dreamers*.

Chapter 2

Representing fiction as reality

2.1 Introduction

In This World is a fictional film, even though the images and the spontaneity of the background action is reminiscent of (some forms of) documentary filmmaking. Throughout this dissertation, I shall come back to the fact that films are essentially fictional; however, the presence of images captured "directly" on film within this fiction does affect the viewer's interpretation of the events on screen, and an analysis of the cohabitation of such images with other clearly constructed elements (narrative, visual, etc.) will bring together the discussions of realism and possible/fictional worlds.

One of the most vocal advocates of realism in recent history, in the sense of moving close to reality as we perceive it instead of merely a reality that is represented on film, is the Dogme 95 movement and in this chapter I shall examine their criteria for a more truthful representation of reality – their idea of realism. The directors of Dogme 95 produced interesting films in respect of their adherence to certain rules that allegedly showed a reality that was unconventionally raw and unpolished because it seemed to be shot in an unmediated documentary fashion. Michael Winterbottom's *Wonderland*, which does not follow the rules in every respect, displays a similar approach to representing reality and certainly seems to want to convey an impression of real life in the process. Lars von Trier's Dogme film, *The Idiots*, is a good example of the Dogme criteria enacted, but the film's subject matter is itself a comment on the process of

simulation and therefore problematises the very rules that it supposedly follows. *The Idiots* also demonstrates the visual hybridisation that may occur in a film and the effect that a combination of different approaches has on the entities (characters, events, etc.) that are visible in these sections. Finally, Winterbottom's *9 Songs* is a documentary of sorts, in a much more explicit fashion than the Dogme films, since it incorporates sections of actual footage into its fictional story, not unlike Haskell Wexler's *Medium Cool*.

Christopher Wagstaff distinguishes a documentary from a feature film as follows:

> A documentary film is indexical: the signs recorded are directly produced by the referent. A feature film is iconic: the signs recorded are indexical recordings of iconic signs of the referent. In other words, a documentary directly records whatever is being represented, while a feature film records an imitation or reconstruction of its referent, or of an imaginary referent. At first sight, therefore, what distinguishes a feature film from a documentary is the nature of the profilmic, rather than the characteristics of the filming itself. It is not immediately obvious that you would film an icon of a referent any differently than you would film the referent itself.
>
> (Wagstaff 2007:98)

It is important to note that Wagstaff redefines the term "feature film", more commonly used to designate a film of any kind longer than (approximately) 60 minutes. It would be more appropriate to apply his definition above, meant to exclude documentary films, to *fiction* films. In the quotation, the "profilmic" refers to the scene as it appears in front of the camera in real life at the moment of recording and indeed it is the property of this scene (either artificial or real) which has conventionally been essential when defining a recording as documentary or not. The viewer, however, rarely has access to this profilmic dimension and usually deduces such a property from the presentation itself – a process that does not always yield accurate conclusions.

2.2 Dogme[33] 95

It happened during the centenary celebrations of the birth of cinema, held in Paris on 20 March 1995: a manifesto[34] distributed to members of the press laid out the guidelines for an approach to cinema that would reject the superficial nature of contemporary Hollywood films and eventually inspire a new approach to filmmaking, starting in Denmark (Hjort & MacKenzie 2003:1). Signed by the Danish filmmakers Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg[35], the manifesto caused an instant sensation around the world, even though the first films certified by the group wouldn't be released until three years later.

Ten essentially technical "rules" accompanied the manifesto and formed part of the self-imposed "Vow of Chastity".[36] These rules were widely thought to be prescriptive or "dogmatic" (a misconception deliberately exploited and perpetuated by members of the group, who baptised themselves "Dogme 95" or "The Dogme Brethren") and had the aim of wiping out all that was artificial from modern filmmaking by going "back to basics", as it were, with handheld cameras and minimal post-production work. The manifesto contains the filmmakers' ten commandments of sorts – a list of ten rules or guidelines that should be adhered to as strictly as possible, in order to avoid the pitfalls of contemporary cinematic trickery and a certain gloss that has supposedly suppressed the material's real humanity by moulding stories and actions to fit expectations and camera movements. At first glance, this manifesto looks like an oath that the filmmakers who wish to participate in the project are required to observe. It is no coincidence that the ten rules are dubbed the "Vow of Chastity", a title with austere connotations that

[33] The terms "Dogme" and "Dogma" are often used interchangeably; while they mean exactly the same, I shall use the former (Danish) term for the sake of continuity and to attenuate the air of rigidity conjured up by the English term.

[34] The Dogme manifesto and Vow of Chastity are reproduced in their entirety at the end of this dissertation as Addendum A.

[35] They would also be responsible for the first two "Dogme 95" projects: *The Celebration* (Dogme #1 – Festen) and *The Idiots* (Dogme #2 – Idioterne).

[36] Henceforth referred to as "The Vow"

ironically creates the impression of restricting rather than liberating the filmmaker. These apparent restrictions were imposed by the group in order to curb any desire to make personal films and therefore the concept of *auteur* filmmaking is rejected. The manifesto mentions the *nouvelle vague* in passing, describing it as a failed attempt to revitalise the cinema:

> In 1960 enough was enough! The movie was dead and called for resurrection. The goal was correct but the means were not! The new wave proved to be a ripple that washed ashore and turned to muck. […] The anti-bourgeois cinema itself became bourgeois, because the foundations upon which its theories were based was the bourgeois perception of art. The auteur concept was bourgeois romanticism from the very start and thereby… false!
>
> (cited in Bainbridge 2007:170)

2.2.1 The rules on paper

In at least eight of the ten rules that make up the Vow[37], the implied goal of realistic representation, in the sense of "being true to reality", is made evident:

Rule #1: Shooting must be done on location. Props and sets must not be brought in.

Rule #2: The sound must never be produced apart from the images or vice versa.

Rule #3: The camera must be handheld.

Rule #4: The film must be in colour. Special lighting is not acceptable.

Rule #5: Optical work and filters are forbidden.

Rule #6: The film must not contain superficial action. (Murders, weapons, etc. must not occur.)

Rule #7: Temporal and geographical alienation are forbidden. (That is to say that the film takes place here and now.)

Rule #8: Genre movies are not acceptable.

These rules all encourage a more faithful presentation of the indisputable, *shared* experience of the real than did the Hollywood status quo, and not some artificial or personal variety of real life. This is the fundamental position of the Dogme filmmakers; however, as we shall presently see, a minimum amount of equipment does not

[37] The Vow is reproduced in its entirety in Roberts (1999:141-142).

necessarily render a version of reality that is closer to the real, despite the apparent theoretical soundness of such a claim.

The first rule highlights the desire to present reality "as such": even as backdrop, it may not be altered to better serve the purpose of being filmed. The application of rules two, four and five would facilitate the representation of reality as it is experienced by the viewers under normal circumstances; in other words the prescriptive guidelines are supposedly rooted in the viewer's own experience of reality. Conventional wisdom would suggest – and the advent of the home movie camera inevitably plays a role here – that images obtained by a (shaky) handheld camera are closer to human experience than smooth movements, and at first glance, rule three fits with the aforementioned rules that explicitly seek a representation of reality as perceived by the average viewer. However, this is a very dubious assumption, seeing that (the eye of) the camera does not have the same capabilities in stabilising the image as the eyes of a human being; for example, since there is no vestibulo-ocular reflex to compensate for the physical movement of the subject, at least not the same as in the human eye, even the tiniest jerk of the camera is picked up as a tremor, while this would barely be noticed by a human counterpart. If our eyes were fixed in our sockets, unable to make any lateral movement, the movements of the head would have caused vision similar to the handheld video aesthetic, but the eyes' ability to focus on an object, the movements of the head and the body notwithstanding, makes for a significant difference between the two modes of perception.

Rule five, which prohibits the manipulation of the image by means of filters (during shooting) or any other optical work (in post-production), is underpinned by a belief that the recorded image:

> a) resembles reality more closely than anything one would produce by applying the aforementioned procedures; and
>
> b) generates an image physically "closer" to reality (by virtue of its mechanical production) than any image constructed or manipulated during or after the fact.

Rules six and seven return to the prohibition on a transformation of meaning by presenting something with a narrative meaning that is different from its inherent "real" meaning. While events are to be portrayed the way the viewer would supposedly experience them in real life, at least audio-visually, the narratives of Dogme films are restricted by certain limitations (rule number six, for example) that prohibit the false representation of a possible event.

Rules one and seven add further confusion to the distinction between respect for the real and respect for realistic representation. These two rules, specifically, attach some importance to objects already in this world, to their place and function and the fact that they are *this* and not some fictional *that*. Things must have the appearance of happening *for real*, even when the concomitant intention isn't really there (for example, one actor might really hit another across the face, despite a lack of animosity between them in real life). Predictably, characters and their relation to the actors portraying them (name, occupation, etc.) were exempt from this condition.

Lastly, with rule number eight, the Dogme brethren resist narrative formulas and expectations in pursuit of apparently realistic story development: the stories should avoid conventional storytelling formulas.

Of course, the films produced by the Dogme brethren are by no means documentaries and don't pretend to be anything other than fiction – fiction presented with as great a "reality effect" as possible. This is the goal of rules one through eight of the Vow.

Rule nine insists on the use of the Academy ratio (1.37:1) and 35 mm film stock, while rule ten states that the director must not be credited, lest the film be thought the product of one individual with a singular vision, an "auteur". While many of the films have been shot on video, to facilitate the shoot and liberate the camera, it has been distributed in 35 mm format[38] (Rundle 1999). The thinking behind the final rule was pure provocation and had no association with the representation of reality: "I felt that it

[38] The wording of rule nine is ambiguous, stating merely that "[t]he film format must be Academy 35 mm". Therefore, the approach of shooting the film on video before transferring it to 35 mm does not explicitly violate the rule.

was quite noble to submit to the idea of the film being more important than whoever made it", says Von Trier (*ibid.*).

2.2.2 The rules in practice

Below follow excerpts from both the Vow and the manifesto that indicate the group's dissatisfaction with the artifice displayed by many of the products of film industries around the world. According to the authors of the manifesto, technological advances (which, ironically, have enabled Von Trier and company to shoot their films with great mobility instead of dragging about the 35 mm cameras) have obfuscated the truth and this cosmetic mask of visual and narrative vanity should be removed, for the product has become predictable and "the result […] barren".

Quotation from the Vow of Chastity:
"My supreme goal is to force the *truth* out of my characters and settings."

Quotation from the Dogme manifesto:
"The 'supreme' task of the decadent film-makers is to fool the audience. Is that what we are so proud of? […] *Illusions* via which emotions can be communicated? […]

As never before, the *superficial* action and the *superficial* movie are receiving all the praise.

The result is barren. An *illusion* of pathos and an *illusion* of love.

To DOGME 95 the movie is not *illusion*!

Today a technological storm is raging of which the result is the elevation of cosmetics to God. By using new technology anyone at any time can wash the *last grains of truth* away in the deadly embrace of sensation. The *illusions* are everything the movie can hide behind.

DOGME 95 counters the film of *illusion* by the presentation of an indisputable set of rules known as THE VOW OF CHASTITY."

(My emphasis)

It is interesting to note that words like "reality", "realism" and "authenticity" are absent from the Dogme manifesto, and have instead been replaced by a quest for "truth" and words warning against "illusion" – terms that are arguably even more problematic in meaning, since their usage doesn't point to a verisimilar representation of reality, but rather implies the possibility of accessing the real, and furthermore of representing it

faithfully. Bazin resisted such an ambitious claim when he spoke of authenticity in the cinema; even if he had the same kind of "objective" reality in mind, he never equated its faithful representation with words like "truth", unlike the Dogme brethren.

A quick examination of the work of two of the founding fathers of Dogme 95 (Thomas Vinterberg and Lars von Trier) will reveal that the intentions of the manifesto itself are suspect, at least as far as the idea of "authenticity" is concerned, and furthermore the directors have an attitude that is tongue-in-cheek rather than dogmatic: "Suspicion is already stirring that the so-called vow of chastity taken by members of the *Dogma 95* group, if not an outright scam, is at least intended with a pinch of irony", writes Peter Matthews (1999a:39) in his *Sight and Sound* review of *The Celebration* (Festen) at the time of the film's UK release. According to Mette Hjort, violations of the Dogme rules abound (Hjort & MacKenzie 2003:31). Both Vinterberg and Von Trier "cheated" in their films – respectively breaking rules four and five (42, 54-56). Naturally, the vast majority of viewers would be unaware of these seemingly insignificant deviations, imperceptible to anybody who wasn't present during the shoot.

Even though the rules have been disregarded by the very individuals who formulated them, their films were certified as conforming to the Vow.[39] It would seem that the "rules" were in fact guidelines, followed for the most part in an effort to minimise the unjustified extravagance, the "refinement and distanciation" (Hjort & MacKenzie 2003:8) that, in their opinion, was threatening to derail cinematic authenticity.

> [V]on Trier was a highly proficient film-maker with proven mastery of most of the technical aspects of his profession when he initiated Dogma 95. Von Trier's idea […] was precisely to place a ban on the very techniques that he had spent years carefully mastering.
>
> (*ibid*.)

[39] Both films are preceded by a copy of the relevant certificate, which states the following: *This is to certify that the following motion picture,* [Film Title]*, has been produced in compliance with the rules and intentions set forth in the Dogma 95 Manifesto.*

The Vow focused on the working methods of the brethren and was supposed to be a self-imposed minimalism through which the directors might strip their films of what they saw as artificial aesthetics that didn't reflect reality (well enough).

Neither Lars von Trier nor Thomas Vinterberg has repeated the exercise of making a film in accordance with the Vow,[40] but this unwillingness to make a more enduring commitment to the movement should in no way be construed as a disavowal of its principles. The stated intention of the founders was never to provide a long-term cure, but rather to kick-start an industry that, according to them, had become bogged down by old genres and new technologies that "wash [away] the last grains of truth […] in the deadly embrace of sensation."[41]

Like so many realist movements before them, Dogme 95 was out to resist the filmmaking conventions of the past in order to create films whose essence was not hidden by some bourgeois veneer of formula or technology, but films that would be as close as possible to (a fictional version of) raw reality. The Dogme filmmakers intended to steer clear of personal involvement so as to capture a purely realistic version of real life. While the manifesto inspired a certain amount of creativity within the constraints that the filmmakers laid down primarily for themselves, the fictional narratives are constructed by handheld cameras and may therefore at best be described as fictions portrayed through means associated with documentary recording. However, while there is an assumption with documentary filmmaking that a human being is operating the camera and bears real witness to the events on screen, the films of the Dogme filmmakers are much more challenging in this regard since they are inherently fictional but present the viewer with instances in which a cameraman is clearly physically present at a scene.

[40] A complete list of all the Dogme films is available via the archived version of the Dogme 95 website (http://www.dogme95.dk/dogme-films/filmlist.asp), accessible through the Internet Archive at http://web.archive.org.

[41] A quotation from the filmmakers' manifesto, reprinted in full in Bainbridge (2007:170-171).

Furthermore, the difference between the human eye and the shaky "eye" of the camera must be stressed: the viewer's knowledge that the camera is physically being held and the fact that the image resembles a home movie are two factors that significantly contribute to the impression of a physical presence, even though the result often deviates much more from normal human vision than a well lit and controlled shot produced on 35 mm film. These points are closely tied to the Bazinian notion of authenticity, since they underscore (or at least make a compelling case for) the actual presence of a human being at the events.

The Dogme manifesto and the Vow are certainly not products of a group of directors with purely aesthetic objections to the contemporary film industry. These objections are quite explicitly tied to their frustration with the expectations of a bourgeois audience and indeed Von Trier's *The Idiots*, whose eponymous group might in some ways be compared to the Dogme brethren themselves, is guided by very strong anti-bourgeois sentiments.

From the perspective of a technical minimalism and the use of handheld cameras to tell a purely fictional story, the Winterbottom film that comes closest to the Dogme aesthetic is *Wonderland* – there are obviously a number of differences, but the successes and failures of the Dogme films in their pursuit of realistically presenting events and settings are equally evident in much of Winterbottom's film.

2.3 *Wonderland*

Set in London over the course of a weekend, Michael Winterbottom's *Wonderland* interweaves a number of different stories – all anchored in the shattered nuclear family of father Bill, mother Eileen, daughters Debbie, Nadia and Molly, and their brother Darren. The film's temporal setting is the present and the plot is not based on any particular real-life events, nor does it pretend to be a faithful depiction of a specific family in this world.

Wonderland was shot digitally (Brooks 2000:62; Brooks 2002:55) and while the images are even grittier than the visuals of *In This World*, the film is also more overtly imagined,

or 'fictitious', primarily because of the inclusion of many recognisable actors and actresses in the cast. Shirley Henderson, Gina McKee and Molly Parker – cast as the three sisters who provide the film's main narrative focus – are all actresses by trade and their personal stories have little or nothing to do with the characters they portray in the film.

The film was shot with handheld cameras, without exception, and the images all have a very grainy quality, the result of shooting digitally mostly with available light, even at night (Jeffries 2000). This approach is close to the guidelines of the Dogme 95 manifesto, which prescribes a handheld aesthetic and the elimination of additional lighting. However, while the visuals in Winterbottom's film are obviously reminiscent of this style, the film does not always adhere to the Dogme rules and Winterbottom has stated that his choice of a gritty aesthetic "wasn't a question of following Dogma" (Kaufman 2000). Clearly, he was aware of the movement, but there is no evidence to support any claim that he subscribed to their ideology. *Wonderland* features (extradiegetic) Michael Nyman music on the soundtrack (in contravention of rule #2), an acceleration of the image when Nadia flees from the bar during the film's first scene (*contra* rule #5), the death of the dog next door (*contra* rule #6) and conventional crediting of the cast, crew and director in particular (*contra* rule #10). "Think of it as *Dogma*-lite", suggests *Sight and Sound*'s Xan Brooks (2000:62).

Featuring professional actors in scenes where background (or foreground) individuals are present but oblivious to the actual production, *Wonderland* shares its approach with both Dogme and neorealist cinema, producing results that are similar to *Medium Cool*, although the scenes that combine fictional characters with individuals who are not consciously involved in the production are far less spectacular than those recorded outside the 1968 Democratic Convention Centre in Haskell Wexler's film.[42] The football

[42] Of course, this more or less "documentary" approach, with scenes in which actors commingle with non-actors who have no connection to the production, is available to the Dogme filmmakers as well. For example, such a scene occurs in Harmony Korine's *julien donkey-boy* (a Dogme film), in which the title character takes a dead baby onto a public bus, populated with individuals who had no connection to the production of the film. However, as far as this particular point is concerned, Dogme films in general have

match at Selhurst Park in Croydon, London, the fireworks display and the street scenes were shot around people who were not aware that a film was being made, and so were the scenes in the bar and the café, according to Winterbottom (Jeffries 2000).

Neorealist films, shot in black and white, did allow for fluid camerawork and their location shooting afforded them the possibility to include faces of "real" people who do not pretend to act a part. On the whole, this is not the case with the Dogme films, in which a realistic reality, populated by a small group of players cast for the purposes of the production, seems to be created inside the real world.

Wonderland is not devoid of "unessential details", like the close-ups of peripheral characters playing bingo[43] or the shots of random people walking down the street. These are tiny moments of the (recognisably) real world that have been added to the fictional story to further emphasise the setting and minimise the feeling of fictional isolation relative to the real world. Since neither Auerbach nor Jakobson distinguishes between "unessential details" that are imagined or entirely fictional and those that have their source in real life, let the term encompass both domains. The fact that these "details" might have referents in real life does not change the fact that they do not serve the narrative, except for creating exactly this impression of being superfluous, and therefore realistic. These "details" might even be staged, but their presence in the film (their seeming irrelevance to the plot) generates an impression of observation with the viewers. This was also Victor Erlich's point about "realia" (1956:101), discussed in Chapter 1, at the end of section 1.3.

However, despite its visual quality, *Wonderland* is not always purely observational: at times the images on screen are clearly in conflict with the rules of physical reality, because at times they suggest the psychological state of a particular character. I shall examine two examples of such a presentation in the film relating to Nadia, as well as the confusion that is visually depicted when Jack, Debbie's son, is assaulted in the park.

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tended to rein in control over the action, setting the action on a family estate or a rich uncle's house, as opposed to the immanently risky presence of real life in a more public space.

[43] 0:38:30

The first scene where the camera seems to make visible Nadia's state of mind occurs right at the beginning of the film, when Nadia has left the bar and is wandering the streets of London. The transition is gradual: the loud chatter in the bar becomes softer and Michael Nyman's music starts on the soundtrack; the music replaces all diegetic sounds before Nadia's walk picks up speed (a moment underscored by a very audible 'cello) and she whizzes through a maze of people accompanied by gentle extradiegetic music. The flow subsides, the motion becomes normal again and the music dissipates.

> [T]he film's use of time-lapse photography to capture hyperrealistically the city's restlessness instantly removes it from, say, the sustained dankness of the neo-Dickensian London in Gary Oldman's *Nil by Mouth* or the uninflected, workaday London of [Ken] Loach's *Riff-Raff*. (Loach would no more use time-lapse than he would Meg Ryan.)
>
> (Fuller 2000:77)

This highlights a point that the signatories of the Dogme manifesto do not sufficiently address: can the so-called "grains of truth" mentioned in the manifesto only be retained by strict adherence to the rules of the Vow, or can a representation be equally truthful by using special technology, sidestepping the rules in the process? The Dogme filmmakers seem to be interested only in the presentation of individuals as seen "objectively" (from the outside) and subjective reality does not have a place in the world of Dogme filmmaking. Filmmakers like Von Trier and Vinterberg, in their respective Dogme films, approach events in a near scientific fashion: the camera observes everything in front of it, but refuses the so-called subjective approach, which would be effected by showing the scene from the point of view of one of the characters, for example, by means of a point-of-view shot.

The Vow's rule number five, which states that no optical work or special filters may be used, rules out the possibility of slowing down or speeding up the image in post-production. As a result, the twenty-four frames per second seem ill equipped to faithfully represent shifts in a character's consciousness (at least, visually), as do many other restrictions placed on the camera's recording of reality. The experience of time is not fixed, but this rule from the manifesto hinders the faithful representation of

subjective reality – what might be called "emotional realism". Every theorist discussed so far in the context of "realism" in film (Carroll, Bazin and Kracauer, and Jakobson more generally in the context of works of art) has acknowledged the polyvalence of the term, and the examples from *Wonderland* serve both to prove the legitimacy of this view and to point out the ways in which the representation of reality might change over time in order to accommodate the shifting conventions of the audience.

Compared to her getaway in the opening scene, the opposite process occurs after Nadia's first encounter with Tim (0:17:40) at the coffee shop. Having said goodbye, Nadia crosses the street with her back to the camera. She looks back at Tim once more and carries on walking, before there is a cut to Nadia's smiling face, in a slow-motion close-up. This change in speed might be interpreted in a number of ways: it is a reflection of some internal peace on the part of Nadia; Nadia is experiencing reality differently than usual; the filmmakers wish to present to us a world moving in slow-motion.

The possibility of the last interpretation is ruled out by the conventional understanding of the slow-motion image in film – in other words as a representation of what an event would have looked like had it moved slower than it actually did; images are usually slowed down so as to highlight a particular gesture that the viewer might otherwise have missed or (in the example taken from *Wonderland*) to emphasise the state of mind of the character.

The first two interpretations are both very strongly associated with the character herself, and impress upon the viewer something of her state of mind. By presenting the same shot at a different speed, the sense is created in the viewer that the world of the character is moving more slowly. In this way, even though the camera does not pretend to embody the character's perspective (it is not a point-of-view shot), the presentation of the image is affected by the character in the shot, and not by the physics of real life. This is a clear case of the realistic presentation of a moment whose realism depends on the internal reality of the character. Furthermore, the viewer must accept this condition and realise what the shot represents (a shift from the recording of external reality to the

manifestation of an internal reality) before judging the shot as realistic, both credible in the fiction and phenomenologically similar enough to the way the viewer might experience reality in order to be perceived as realistic. In a similar vein, the black screen in *Kill Bill: Vol. 2* has been mentioned in Chapter 1. Another example of such an internal reality or state of mind that is manifested visually without the use of a point-of-view shot may be found in Darren Aronofsky's *Requiem for a Dream*: at many points during the film, the characters' drug-induced state is made visually evident with the fast-motion cinematography that shows all the participants in the shot. The characters' perspective is shared and communicated to the viewer by means of a shot that is not a point-of-view shot; it is not "observational", since it is clearly manipulated (compared to the convention of photographing at 24 frames per second), yet it does not reflect the point of view of the characters either: it is a hybrid, which manages to convey the affected perspective of the character and is therefore authentic in this emotional sense. The internal reality of a character is reflected not by a point-of-view shot, but by an external shot that is clearly affected by the character and somehow makes visual or otherwise communicates her reality to the viewer.

Likewise, in *Wonderland*, the confusion of the assault on Jack, Debbie's son, is strikingly accentuated by the deliberately shaky camerawork, which nonetheless does not pretend to present the events as they unfold to Jack from his point of view. While it is "realistic", the presentation of this scene does not follow the criteria of Bazinian realism. According to Bazin, psychological realism[44] is a result of the coherence of time and space, facilitated by deep-focus cinematography, but not one of these criteria is met in this sequence, even though the ambiguity of exactly what is going on is certainly sharpened by the very badly lit exterior of the park where the action takes place. The camera is at the same height as the boy, but does not pretend to be the boy, nor does it pretend to show us what he sees, and the confusion is compounded by the strobe lighting that accompanies the assault. The camera focuses on his face, emphasising his reaction to the violence, but remains outside the action.

[44] See Chapter 1 for a discussion of André Bazin's different categories of realism in film.

These examples have shown how a certain reality may be presented realistically (the presentation closely resembling an experience in the real world) in ways that sometimes conflict with the film movements discussed thus far. This does not mean that *Wonderland* is better or worse able to portray its characters realistically, but it does point to the particular nature of realistic characteristics. *Wonderland* has shown that some technical manipulation, which strictly speaking produces images not reflecting physical reality, may bring the film closer to a serious representation of some attributes of a character's (inner) reality.

And even though the visual quality of the images in *Wonderland* is often worse than most commercial film productions (even, or perhaps especially, the least realistic narrative films), the reality effect of the images is stronger nonetheless. Just as neorealist films were in black and white, but signified greater realism than colour films, the films shot with handheld cameras – even when the resulting image quality is relatively poor – suggest a spontaneity and a lack of prior construction that make the film seem more real on at least one level.

According to the manifesto of the group, all Dogme films must be shot with handheld cameras; however, the visual presentation alone does not produce a realistic film and in Winterbottom's *Wonderland* we have already seen some of the possibilities of attaining realism beyond the restrictive scope of the manifesto. Lars von Trier's self-conscious treatment of the theme of make-believe in his contribution to the Dogme project, *The Idiots*, displays some of the (deliberate and unforeseen) pitfalls of their approach to realistic representation.

2.4 *The Idiots*

According to the Dogme brethren, their films would exemplify a certain realism thanks to a number of do-it-yourself technical guidelines set out in their Vow of Chastity. From the perspective of portraying a more authentic fictional reality, the Vow's guidelines are certainly a move in the right direction, but the final product necessarily remains

removed from the elusive ideal, never mind the mere possibility of its realisation, since the stories are all completely fictional.

Lars von Trier's Dogme film, *The Idiots* (Idioterne), is a very interesting example of a simulation that seemingly mixes different levels of reality in its fiction, while using the very subject of realistic performance as its central theme.

> *The Idiots* is a film about acting and role-playing. One of the themes is the relation between playing a role and being a person. In what way can one be without 'playing'?
>
> (Christensen 2000)

And indeed, in what way can one *be in a film* without playing? By raising this question about appearance in fiction (for all Dogme films are always fictional, being films that are not based on any particular historical events), Lars von Trier seemingly acknowledges the difficulty of truthful representation and the impracticality of the Dogme project's ambition of truth.

The Idiots opens inside a smart restaurant, where Karen, a timid middle-aged woman, witnesses the antics of two retards called Henrik and Stoffer. When Stoffer latches on to her and drags her out to the car, she doesn't resist; nor does she show any sign of repulsion on discovering that it was all a sham, an instance of "spassing" in which certain individuals live out their "inner idiot". Karen moves in with the rest of the group and accompanies them on excursions – to a factory, the municipal swimming pool, the park or a very affluent neighbourhood where they peddle candles at ridiculous prices; the situations are often tense, caused by the conflict both within the group and between them and the public. The opening and closing credits are written in chalk on a parquet floor; the cast and crew are listed together under a single heading: "Made by".

The Idiots's structure consists of two intertwined parts, formally comparable to Michael Winterbottom's *The Road to Guantanamo*[45]: the action proper is intercut with footage of interviews Lars von Trier conducted with many of the main players, in order to get

[45] See Chapter 3.

them to talk about their own experiences, and get to the truth behind the action. However, in this regard, there is an important difference between Winterbottom's and Von Trier's films: the content of Von Trier's film is essentially imaginary, not based on real events, although the interviews retain a puzzling, ambiguous quality. By contrast, the interviews in Winterbottom's film feature the real-life protagonists of a story which, in the rest of the film, is reconstructed from reality (and not constructed from scratch). The particular questions that the reconstruction in *The Road to Guantanamo* raises will be dealt with in the next chapter.

The "ambiguous quality" of the interview segments in *The Idiots* is a result of the off-screen presence of an interviewer whose voice belongs to Lars von Trier. Von Trier is never seen during the interviews; he does not feature in the rest of the story and his role and the purpose for which the interviews are conducted are a mystery, but it is easy to recognise that the voice belongs to him. These interviews seemingly take place some time after the end of the story (when the group has disbanded), but Karen's absence from the interviews is left unexplained. The possibility of being "real" within the framework of a fictional narrative will be dealt with in the following chapters, but *The Idiots* already poses a big problem in this regard and the question of whether Lars von Trier is acting as a real or a fictional character is never answered.

> The interviews are endowed with a high degree of authenticity and appear as unprepared. It becomes plausible that the characters are not reading lines from a manuscript but simply answering questions in relation to a fictitious character. The authenticating effect emphasizes the documentary tone. This is, however, contradicted by the alienation effect caused by the interviewer being the director, which totally breaks the illusion of documentary as well as the illusion of the filmic make-believe.
>
> (Christensen 2000)

Von Trier's film contains a number of incidents where "real life" seems to intrude, and the process of filming becomes visible; the fictional world is invaded by the real world. Indices of the real world appear instead of remaining off-screen, beyond the boundaries of the frame. These include the visibility of the boom, reflections of the camera in car

windows[46] and very noticeable shadows of the film crew (1:04:58) in the image. At one point (0:34:50), another cameraman even briefly makes an appearance shooting the current scene from a different angle, in the process inserting himself into the frame and into the action. "The whole thing runs on a kind of whoops!-accidentalism" (Brooks 1999:34-35).

In This World also contained a number of very recognisable traces of the real world in the fictional world. However, it is necessary to distinguish between accidental and deliberate 'real world presence' in the world of the fiction; while some of these traces might be accidental, the appearance of the cameraman is highly problematic, since it reminds the viewer of the filmmaking process and therefore provokes a feeling of alienation.

These intrusions seem completely credible because of their supposed spontaneity; their function is not to reveal that sometimes there are things that can't be controlled, but working on the assumption that such an invasion of the fictional world is almost always unintended, everything reminding us of the world beyond is (relatively speaking) documentary, "real". Is Von Trier presenting us with truth when reality seemingly interrupts the production?[47] This is a complex question that will be dealt with in depth in the final part of this dissertation, complementing the discussion of postmodern cinema.

At the beginning of the first Dogme film, Thomas Vinterberg's *The Celebration*, the camera moves in so close that it grazes the hand of one of the lead characters, Michael, who looks towards the camera, surprised, while flinching back his hand. The presence (or intrusion) of the camera is acknowledged, even though its exact meaning is enigmatic – much like the visible cameras in *The Idiots*. There is a palpable tension between the real and the artificial, and especially since the film's supposed reality is

[46] 0:04:28; 0:09:09; 1:25:30

[47] The assumption seems to be that objects like a roving boom or a visible second camera have no business being in the world of the fiction, therefore they must be of some other order – this "other order" is assumed to be the actual world.

already artificial (fictitious), it creates very problematic conditions for talking about realism in this film. At the very least, these conditions underscore the fact that realism is not a result of the direct recording of reality and Ove Christensen suggests as much in a reference to the appearance of "the cameramen" in *The Idiots*:

> On the one hand it indicates documentary and realism, a recording of something, which exists independent of its filming. On the other hand it has the meta-filmic effect of breaking the film's illusion.
>
> (Christensen 2000)

It is not clear what exactly this recorded "something" is meant to be and in this way, the representation itself, either of a fictitious (imaginary) or the actual world, is unclear. Either world may be presented in a way that encourages a response of recognition (or realism) in the viewer, but if the viewer is unsure whether to interpret the events as actual or fictitious, it might be difficult to assess the realism of the presentation.

Despite the handheld camerawork, the natural lighting and the use of props that are only found "naturally" in a particular space, the films of Dogme 95 are still scripted in advance, staged and shot with a crew that is present during the shoot. These are not documentaries, even if they sometimes look and sound like home movies. But even home movies are shot by actual individuals, and the idea of an invisible camera is unique to fiction filmmaking (in fact, it is a convention in the majority of fiction films) and implicit in the suspension of disbelief.

The Celebration, like the Dogme films in general, does not pretend to be happening for real and it generally ignores the presence of a cameraman: it follows the fictional convention that the camera is an invisible witness that does not interfere with the world it reveals and therefore the characters in the film generally do not acknowledge the presence of the camera. However, the aforementioned example from Vinterberg's film, as well as the cameras and cameramen that appear in *The Idiots*, pose important obstacles to the viewer's comprehension of the world of the film.

Like all other Dogme films, *The Idiots* was shot with handheld cameras; minimal lighting results in a grainy visual quality and wobbly camera movements give the impression of

real-world immediacy. The self-conscious treatment of the idea of make-believe in this film has been discussed in great detail by Caroline Bainbridge (2007:93-97), so I shall move on to another important point related to the perception of filmic realism: the use of nudity continuous with the actors and unsimulated sex to reinforce the "reality status" of the footage.

The Idiots contains some full frontal nudity and a scene devoted to the explicit presentation of an orgy. Using André Bazin's notion of continuity – unity of space, in particular – as a measurement, we would struggle to label Von Trier's representation as realistic, because of his choice to cut together two shots of which the spatial coherence cannot be verified, which is a form of montage that Bazin would reject on the grounds that the two shots together imply one specific reading (the actor or actress is engaged in sex) as a consequence of its construction, when such a meaning does not inhere in the two shots considered separately.

During the scene at the swimming pool, Stoffer, in a state of "spassing", is taken to the ladies' showers to get washed down. He is photographed above the waist, until a couple of girls sneak a peek at his groin. This action is followed by a cut to a close-up of an erect penis, very likely Stoffer's. Whereas the girls walking past Stoffer were in the nude and shown from top to bottom, Stoffer was presented in a fragmented manner that leaves the possibility open that a shot of an aroused stand-in was inserted.

During the orgy, a similar presentation disrupts the spatial coherence of the event. While a close-up clearly and resolutely reveals that sex is actually happening in front of the camera, the only recognisable faces are in the background, removed from the physical act and the genitals in the foreground are disconnected from a recognisable source. Lars von Trier has subsequently admitted to using stand-ins for this shot (Rundle 1999), but even if the actors portraying the characters in the film were in fact solicited to perform these acts, doubts would have lingered in the mind of the viewer precisely because of the way the material is presented (i.e. two shots that abstractly connect two body parts, instead of one shot that shows the entire body). The fragmented presentation of the characters' bodies hinders the realism of the suggested actions,

even if these actions are staged faithfully, in other words, even if these actors were really having the sex we see onscreen. Once more, however, it is important to note that such an approach is but one part of the assessment of a particular scene's realism.

2.5 Sex and simulation: *9 Songs*

Amusingly, the question of whether penetration takes place at all in Von Trier's film seems to be answered, albeit incorrectly, by the censored videotape version of this film distributed in the USA. Linda Williams describes how this particular version contains "ludicrous large black rectangles obscuring male and female genitalia floating ridiculously over the middles of every exposed performer" (2001:20). These rectangles reinforce the reality effect of the scenes, which by themselves do not contain graphic depictions of the particular performers engaging in real sexual activity, but their presence contributes to the sense of realism and the impression that such acts are really taking place, since these black rectangles must be hiding something.

Michael Winterbottom's 2004 film, *9 Songs*, contains at least two scenes that show the two lead actors clearly engaging in unsimulated sex with each other. The presentation of these "real" sex scenes within the context of the fictional narrative will be examined, as well as the concerts that form the backdrop to the characters' relationship.

The film's plot, set over the course of a year in London, revolves around the relationship of a British climatologist, Matt, and an American exchange student named Lisa. The nine songs of the title are played during concerts that Matt and Lisa attend. These concerts had been scheduled ahead of time by the individual performers and had nothing to do with the production of the film – a skeleton crew attended the concerts to film the musicians, the actors and the audience members who happened to be there on that particular night of shooting.

The film is divided into two parts: concert footage is interspersed with intimate scenes between the two main characters, Matt and Lisa. Both parts are presented as Matt's

memories.[48] This is an important property of the visual material on the screen, since this qualification might influence the representation of a past event, and explain the deviation from objective, historical accuracy: an event might, with justification, be represented in a way that is at odds with the original event: as a memory.[49] The concerts took place "for real", but their appearance in the film is difficult to justify, since it is implied that a fictional character remembers a real event (the concerts actually took place independently of the film's production schedule) and yet these concerts are the basis for a relationship with a girl, with whom he (the character and the actor) has unsimulated sex, while both characters remain at the centre of a fictional tale.

We can already perceive one of the problems of representation, whether it is the filmic representation of an historical event or of someone's recollection of the event. The basic difference between the "real" and a "reality", as stated in Chapter 1, is the objective nature of the former in contrast to the subjectivity of the latter. Even within the fictional construct that is the world of the film, the relative objectivity of the one (the diegetically "real") compared to the other (the diegetic reality of the main character) is not without import, but there seems to be a decisive difference between these two concepts as they are applied to this film, as opposed to their application in a film that seeks to represent events from the actual world, as in *The Road to Guantanamo*, which will be dealt with in the following chapter.

The sex scenes do not consist of single takes; however, the total number of shots in these scenes is minimal. Furthermore, the slight use of music (or none at all) on the soundtrack on these occasions certainly contributes to a more intimate, less overtly manipulated setting, not least because they contrast with the spectacular music concerts. In his review of the film, film critic Roger Ebert mentions two reasons for the prevalent description of the film as somehow more "real" than most fiction films:

[48] The film's only point-of-view shot occurs at 0:26:40 and is indeed meant to be interpreted through Matt's eyes.

[49] This approach has been used throughout the history of the cinema to insist on the contrast between the subjective realities of individuals. The most quoted example in this regard is Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon*.

> It is real sex. Real, in the sense that the actors are actually doing what they seem to be doing, and real, in the sense that instead of the counterfeit moaning and panting of pornography, there is the silence of concentration and the occasional music of delight.
>
> (Ebert 2004)

However, the decision to fragment the sex scenes into different shots, instead of using one single take, is an important point, since the editing dramatises the event and manipulates its presentation. And there is sporadic use of extradiegetic music in the film: the "music of delight" that Ebert mentions is not real in the sense of naturally occurring in the world of the film.

The fragmentation may be a result of its "human" source – the memory of the main character, Matt. Matt is present in every single scene; nothing that happens on screen takes place in his absence, without his knowledge or his imagination. The existence of all the events on screen is founded on his own recollection of such events. The possibility that the fragmented nature of the sex scenes is a result of his fragmented memories is therefore quite conceivable; since the film's presentation is so closely bound to Matt's point of view, the fragmentation does not necessarily lessen the realism of the film. This gentle disruption of the spatiotemporal framework does indeed present a manipulated version of the real, but the very visibly coherent content counters any argument that the act is some sort of illusion.

Bazin suggests that montage detracts from the inherent ambiguity of reality – an ambiguity that is restored, or at least aimed for, by the filmmaker, when montage gives way to the long take. According to Bazin, this approach enables the viewer to look around in the frame without being directed by cuts or changes in focus and in the process these long takes create a greater sense of observation on the part of the viewer than *découpage*, but Patrice Chéreau, whose *Intimacy* was another non-pornographic film that presented very explicit sex scenes, staged and shot the film in a way that clearly eliminates the idea that it is "documentary" in nature.

> [Chéreau:] I wouldn't use a handheld camera as this would be voyeuristic and the actors wouldn't be able to hide from it. […] The actors didn't improvise in these scenes: each gesture was discussed and they knew exactly where the camera was – a matter of respect – so they could hide parts of their bodies if they wanted to.
>
> (Falcon 2001:24)

The question of voyeurism in relation to Winterbottom's handheld camerawork in *9 Songs* is beyond the focus of this dissertation; however, it is worth mentioning that voyeurism is certainly very closely tied to the impression of being present, yet absent. It is indicative of some success in presenting the world as somehow familiar or close.

It is useful to recall Serge Daney's reaction to the killing of Miyagi in *Ugetsu*: "This event seems so accidental that the camera almost misses it" (Daney 2004). Daney makes the point that the impression of reality that an event produces in the viewer is provoked by a sense that the event is essentially real and incidentally recorded by a camera. Interestingly, Daney misrepresents the particular shot in Mizoguchi's film: the scene is played out in a single take, but the action takes place both unseen and centre screen. During the scuffle, there is very little camera movement, since the entire scene is essentially framed as a medium long shot. When Miyagi is stabbed with a sword, we do not see the sword enter her body, since she is turned away from us and faces the soldier. It is a contentious claim that the event *seems* accidental, but it is true that the realism lies in the construction of a scene that does not flaunt the essential (the killing), but insists on the ambiguity of the details, by means of both camera position and the length of the take.

In a discussion of the sustained takes that comprise some dance sequences in classic film musicals, Laurent Jullier and Michel Marie emphasise the point that this presentation demonstrated that the dancer was really capable of such movements, that it was no illusion and the unchanging spatiotemporal perspective serves to support this claim:

> [At the time of the golden age of genre], the director had the obligation […] to prove to us that they [the performers] could do it. The cinema has one single solution: cut the number into as few shots as possible and sustain the long take.
>
> (2007:89) [50]

This solution – cutting the source material as little as possible and thereby creating the impression (or proving) that the entire performance takes place as such, in its virgin totality – is inevitably associated with the notion of capturing reality by means of the direct recording device that is the movie camera. Together, a multitude of shots, even if they are taken directly from reality, constitute a different presentational whole, since the hand of the editor implies manipulation and therefore a departure from reality. Today, even though the audience often knows that the action contained in an unbroken take is not necessarily real, simply by virtue of the seemingly non-manipulated (unedited) nature of the recording, such presentations do still matter, in both commercial and independent cinema, and filmmakers consciously make these choices because of a desire to make it appear as true to life as possible.

It is true that the single take is defined by its grip on actual time[51] and Bazin used this fact to back up his claim that single takes can significantly sustain the realism of a scene. However, in certain circumstances, a scene might benefit from emotional realism that lies in the opposite approach: when it comes to scenes of action or violence, a fast-paced montage of shots generally has a greater emotional impact than a single take. These two approaches and their respective realisms again underline the fact that "realism" is not the consequence of one specific approach to filmmaking.

Realism in film is not defined exclusively by the spatial integrity of its characters and events, nor is it defined by the editing of a given scene or sequence: the visual composition may preclude or contribute to the impression of reality that a film

[50] My translation from the French.

[51] There are important exceptions to this definition, which serve to undermine the expectations of the viewer, as may be seen in a number of "single takes" in George Clooney's 2002 film *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind*. This film contains a number of shots within a confined space that nonetheless communicate effectively the passage of time in a way that is both continuous and elliptical. Of course, in this case, the actual recording takes place in real time, while the recorded events are staged so as to give the impression that time is passing much more quickly.

generates in the viewer, but this impression may also be the result of belief on the part of the viewer that a certain action would happen "in this way", were it to happen in the real world.

> [T]here's a big difference between the process being observational and the film being a documentary. And regardless of how live or explicit the sex is, it is still a performance.
>
> (Turk 2005:20)

The two actors in *9 Songs*, Kieran O'Brien and Margo Stilley, were not in a relationship before or during production on this film[52]; the story is fictional, even though it has the look of a documentary and the action does highlight one single authentic action (amongst many others). Furthermore, the names of the characters (Matt and Lisa) differ from their real-life counterparts.

My interest in the spatially coherent presentation of sex and nudity in *The Idiots* and *9 Songs* lies with the extraordinary controversy that these unsimulated acts of sexual intercourse stirred in the media; my intention is to show that the underlying cause for this outcry is the unity (at least in Winterbottom's film) of the actors and the action. While audiences are more readily prepared to accept certain "real" actions constructing a fictional character or storyline (the actors are walking, breathing, speaking, just like the characters they portray; the figure on screen has a real and a fictitious side – it is both the actor who portrays and the character who is portrayed), they struggle to reconcile other unsimulated actions with the world of the narrative. In such cases, the viewer's attention is no longer on the fictional events, nor on the realistic quality of these events, but on the very real actions that are presented as fiction.

Of course, labelling the story as fictitious becomes all the more difficult if footage of real events (for example, the concerts) is included in the film and these fictitious characters commingle with real-world individuals, unrelated to the film. On the face of it, such

[52] This is a minor point, but one which is worth mentioning, since the actual world is often the focus of discussion when the film seems to be unsimulated in "major" respects. However, had the actors been in a relationship, the relationship as presented by the film still would have been fictional, given the fact that it is contained in a film.

scenes appear more realistic than the scripted plot developments of *Wonderland*, which at times could be described as theatre on the street.

However, even though the actors do not have any dialogue during the music concerts, the reality status of their appearance is just as dubious, since their appearances at the concerts form the basis of the film's narrative. Furthermore, they attend the concerts with the intended purpose of appearing as their characters in these scenes in the final film. The intention of the filmmaker is clearly to show Matt and Lisa at the concert, continuous with the rest of the diegesis, and not Kieran and Margo.

Matt and Lisa (with the exception of the latter's absence from one event) are shown in attendance at every concert during the course of the film. In Chapter 3 I shall be looking at such characters' fictional status under similar circumstances, but for the moment it is worth pointing out that it is unclear whether Matt and Lisa are attending the concerts: one could easily make the argument that it is the actors, respectively Kieran O'Brien and Margo Stilley, who are shown at these events. Both readings are valid, and in the following chapters we will establish that the factual or fictional nature of one element generally affects the nature of all the other elements in the world of the film.

2.6 Simulating authenticity

The term "realism" is used to express a certain link between the reality of the world of the fiction and the reality outside the world of the fiction. It is a term used to emphasise an element's similarity with, but not equivalence to, something in the actual world. At the beginning of this chapter I discussed the confusion regarding the fluctuating status of objects as either real or realistic, as far as the Dogme 95 "Vow of Chastity" is concerned. While the actors are acting out a role, all their actions must be happening for real, in other words, the actors themselves must do exactly what we see them do; deception is not allowed. Of course, this is just one kind of deception outlawed by Von Trier and Vinterberg: it has already been stated that the Dogme films tell fictional stories, which pretend to take place even though they are not real.

While this resistance against deception is understandable, there are situations in which the viewer (for various reasons, depending on the specific action) does not expect the actors to perform, but rather expects them to *pretend* to perform.

> Whereas if [the actors are] running down the street and you might assume the actor did run down the street, when they're in bed making love you assume they're *not* making love.
>
> (Turk 2005:19; original emphasis)

Because of well-established cinematic conventions, viewers expect sex to be presented as an illusion: in the back of our minds, we know that the actors on screen in non-pornographic films are not really having sex, but that the film creates or constructs the illusion by means of a filmic synecdoche, presenting sounds and close-ups of body parts that reflect the tension or the excitement of the moment, without showing the actual penetration. Such a presentation very often appears realistic, because it is constructed according to certain conventions.

Films that feature graphic depictions of full penetration, but whose cast does not have pornographic credentials, are usually mired in controversy; this is the case especially when such films are shown in non-pornographic venues, such as multiplexes, alongside much less graphic productions. Apologists for these films tend to focus on the distinction between pornography and non-pornography, the former having the explicit goal of sexually exciting the viewer.

In the same way, the viewer expects much of the violence in a film to be a pure simulation and not involve the actual death of individuals. It deserves to be mentioned that, when it comes to the portrayal of violence, the speed of the action often makes it much more difficult for the viewer to establish whether it has taken place for real or not. The illusion of sex is irreparably shattered when the film conforms to Bazin's principle of spatial unity and the penetration is shown to be continuous with the actions of the actors in the film.

> Acting implies artifice […] To 'act' a scene in which the action is sex is, in these explicit moments, to really engage in sex. It is not quite the same as acting an emotional scene in which, for example, one weeps over the body of one's dead lover. […] This may be one of those occasions where the word *performance* […] is more appropriate.
>
> (Williams 2001:22; my emphasis)

A character who cries is often really crying (the actor is crying) – even though the intention is fictional, the effect is real. This is the same with penetrative sex: the actors might have fictional reasons for engaging in sex, but the physical acts are very real. The difference between acting and performing, therefore, has nothing to do with the fictional status of the intentions. If the act is a remarkably close reflection of an actual state of affairs, perceived from the point of view of the viewer, it is a simulation:

> Whoever fakes an illness can simply stay in bed and make everyone believe he is ill. Whoever simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms.
>
> (Baudrillard 1994:3)

In the words of Baudrillard, the actor who does not engage in penetrative sex, or who cries without shedding a tear, is faking, whereas the actor whose sex act entails penetration, or whose fictional grief triggers the production of tears, is simulating a very realistic state of affairs. The simulator is a performer, who does not merely pretend to be, but *is* physically involved in the performance. In contrast, the individual who relies on editing that implies the sex, rather than showing it, is a pretender as far as the particular act is concerned. Of course, in other aspects, such as breathing, speaking, and so forth, as Turk highlighted above, the actor is incidentally performing many other actions. Based on the public reaction to *9 Songs*, it is clear that many viewers are stunned when a realistic film deploys simulations in the depiction of sex, since such a presentation of the sex act seems 'too real'.

"The important thing is not the authenticity of the materials but the authenticity of the result", says Richard MacCann (cited in Hughes 1976:57). Material obtained through a documentary approach – in other words the recording of events not staged for the purpose of being recorded, or not staged at all – may be edited to signify a variety of different things. "[T]he authenticity of the material" refers to the documentary origins

of the footage as well as its renditional accuracy, while the "authenticity of the result" is defined by the faithfulness of the representation to the original events. Such authenticity, however, is not equated with realism, since authentic material may be used to construct an unrealistic whole, as Wolterstorff pointed out in Chapter 1. Therefore, the realism of a fiction film lies not in the film's renditional accuracy, but in the resemblance between fictional life and real life.

While the sex acts may indeed be real, if they are not shown in the film, the actor cannot claim to be engaged in a performance in the current sense, because the film does not provide any evidence with which to support such a claim. On the other hand, the world of the film has its own reality; this reality is indeed constructed on the basis of our audiovisual perception of it, but also on the basis of the diegetic characters' common understanding of this world: the "performance" or lack thereof by an actor does not have any significant impact on our perception of the world of the film, since it has to do with *our* perception of reality, which strictly speaking shouldn't influence the reading of the diegetic events themselves.[53] In this sense, performance is not a prerequisite for any action in a fictional world to obtain, to be "true".

2.7 Conclusion

Based on this assessment of fictional truth, and the concomitant presentation of the world of the fiction (the fictional world), it seems inevitable that this discussion will end up in Bishop Berkeley's forest, where it is uncertain whether falling trees make any noise in the absence of a witness. Nicholas Rescher firmly opposes the slippery slope argument according to which the thesis that "This (real) stone I am looking at would exist even if nobody ever saw it" serves to prop up the claim that "This nonexistent but possible stone I am thinking of would be there even if nobody could imagine it" (1979:171). I shall look at Rescher's argument for possible worlds (and a similar concept, more relevant to film: fictional worlds) in the next chapter, but for the moment his

[53] However, in cases of moral questions about the events portrayed on screen, for example the violence committed against the individuals or the animals concerned, the viewer leaves the fiction and focuses on the actual event at the time of filming.

opposition to events that lack "that objective foundation in the existential order which alone could render them independent of minds" (*ibid.*) is very relevant to the current line of reasoning.

Fictional worlds contain many elements that lack this "objective foundation in the existential order": they are of a different order from those elements that are actual. While the latter do not need to be seen in order to exist, fictional elements absolutely need to be conceived for them to exist (at least in the mind of the creator of the fiction, if not in some other reality). The same applies to any statement about the fictional world. Whereas reasonable statements about the actual world, based on credible evidence, merely substantiate reality, statements about a fictional world create and shape the fictional reality itself. If extrafilmic knowledge is dispensed with, the cues provided by the film can only provide the viewer with evidence as to the fictional events and any conclusions drawn will be conceptual. The handheld style of the camera work in some fiction films therefore seeks to override this idea of conceptual existence in favour of creating the illusion that the events portrayed already exist "as such" in this world. Dogme 95 exploits this idea that handheld is necessarily closer to the real, but as we have established, this style alone cannot ensure realism.

Films shot with handheld cameras, such as those of the Dogme 95 collective (*The Idiots*), films shot in a palpably real setting that exhibits many background characters who might not even be aware of their appearance in the film (e.g. *Wonderland* and *9 Songs*) and films that contain many single takes push for realism in their own different ways. There is a relationship between editing and the viewer's perception of the events as *realistic*, but a claim that one kind of editing elicits a specific response as to the realism of a scene or a shot is simplistic and unwarranted.

Having looked at the way in which some of the twentieth century's self-proclaimed realist movements in filmmaking have rebelled against convention in order to represent a more accurate picture of reality, and the way in which their actions might affect our reading of realism in film, I shall now move on to the theories of possible worlds and, in particular, the concept of fiction: both possible and fictional worlds are to some extent

detached from the actual world, but while they can be very different, they can just as well resemble our world and it is this resemblance that often creates confusion. A work of fiction, including any and all films, must be discussed as an entity separate from the actual world. However, films are not completely isolated artefacts, since they usually draw on the actual world in their construction and most importantly, they draw on the actual world to produce a similar version (truthful in important aspects, but not identical) that may consequently be described as realistic.

Dickens is perfectly capable of creating women […]; he is, however,
incapable of creating *existent* women.
(Van Inwagen 1977:308; original emphasis)

Chapter 3

Fiction film

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2 we looked at Michael Winterbottom's *9 Songs* and Lars von Trier's *The Idiots*, films which deviated, in their visual presentation, from the conventional representation of cinematic fiction: the instability of the camera and the use of visibly "documentary" footage, where the viewer would usually expect a simulation (specifically: the sex act), played a significant role in grounding these films in real life.

André Bazin believed that the physical presence of the camera ensured that the images obtained a representational status truer than that of any other form of representation (or at least rendering). An image obtained by a process more mechanical than painting, for example, not only resulted in a more faithful rendering of the original object, but at the same time bore veridical witness to the actual existence of the object recorded at a specific moment in the past. In his theorising on photography, as it is presented in *Camera lucida*, Roland Barthes makes a similar observation: "The Photograph [sic] does not necessarily say *what is no longer*, but only and for certain *what has been*" (1984:85; original emphasis).

The viewer would hardly be naïve enough to believe that events on the screen are taking place *as such* in the present, but the causal link between the images on screen and the act itself contributes to a very strong belief that these events did in fact take place *as such* in the past, during the film's production. The events might be staged, the

intentions of the players might be spurious, but the images were recorded by tracing reality onto film. The viewer is guaranteed an imprint of reality, thanks to the mechanical, photochemical process of film recording, and apparently this imprint is a visual affirmation of the state of affairs at a moment in the past, even if this state of affairs is a matter of show or construction. Today technology, and in particular the ability of filmmakers to change the images in post-production or even create images of objects that were never captured by a camera, has discredited this time-honoured notion that the cinematographic image may somehow be used to prove the actual existence of an object in the past.

While mostly shot in the real world, films are typically artificial in the sense that they are constructions that do not show what would have been without the presence of the camera, or the film's cast and crew. Films are at best realistic in that they can convey an impression of the actual (real) state of affairs: it is a world different from, though in many respects similar to, the actual world. The world of a film is never the actual world, but a world unto itself – a world containing a state of affairs that is unrealised in actuality. Such unrealised states of affairs are commonly called "possible worlds". In this context, the terms "realistic" and "possible" are not unrelated, since we have established that a scene may be termed "realistic" if it accurately reflects a situation that could conceivably take place in the actual world. Thus, a realistic scene is also a scene that is actually possible. However, films do not only consist of such scenes and therefore the term "possible world" will be examined more closely.

Works of fiction present us with further difficulties, since they may convey images that belong to impossible (or inconceivable) states of affairs. It is not always possible to map out the worlds represented; however, the term that I shall use to designate the space in which the events operate – the "fictional world" – will cover both possible and impossible worlds. "Possible worlds" have been widely discussed in philosophy and I shall broadly look at the application of this term, before moving on to discussing "fictional worlds", a similar but more useful term that can be applied to most (narrative) films. The first film that will be used to demonstrate the application of these terms is

Michael Winterbottom's *The Road to Guantanamo*, which is not a documentary but a supposedly faithful representation of historical events through the eyes of individuals who were present in the past at these events. The prospect of telling the truth in fiction will also be examined by focusing on the hybridism that occurs when fictional characters are present in otherwise "real" historical circumstances on film, for example in Haskell Wexler's *Medium Cool*.

3.2 Possible worlds

Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz was not the first philosopher to examine the notion of non-existent possibles,[54] in other words the possibility of entities that do not exist in our world but may be referred to, but his views have been central to the development of the so-called theory of possible worlds. According to Leibniz, there is an infinite number of possible ways that our world could have been, but ours is the only one that exists or is actual because it is the best (it has "greater perfection" compared to the other alternatives (Rescher 1967:58)), and was therefore the one chosen by God for actualisation.

> God chooses as the actual universe that whose compossible elements admit of the greatest amount of perfection or reality, that is to say, the fullest and most complete essence. […] God makes this choice because, being omnipotent, His choice is unlimited, He may create any possible world; being omniscient, He contains all possible worlds in His understanding and perceives that which is best; and, being perfect in goodness of will, He chooses the best.
>
> (Leibniz 1965:66)

However, these worlds do exist in a different way, since "Leibniz accords nonexistent possibles a secure foothold in reality by according them the status of conceptual complexes in the mind of God" (Rescher 1969:88).

> From God's point of view—assuming with Leibniz that God is not an inhabitant of any world—all of the possible worlds are on a par. There is no special world that is singled out as *actual*. Of course, from our point of view, our world is special.
>
> (Chihara 1998:77; original emphasis)

[54] For a detailed overview of the history of this concept, see Nicholas Rescher's *Essays in philosophical analysis*, 73-109.

The theory of possible worlds advanced by the American philosopher David Lewis, who speaks of literal but non-actual states of affairs, draws on Leibniz's concept of "possible worlds" to claim that there are many, many alternate worlds. According to Lewis, these worlds all exist in a very physical sense, although they do not form a part of our (actual) world: "[A]bsolutely *every* way that a world could possibly be is a way that some world *is*" (Lewis 1986:2; original emphasis).

Although philosophers differ on the existential status of "possible worlds", it is worthwhile to quote the definition of these worlds as formulated by David Lewis, since this is a common point of departure for most discussions of possible things:

> I […] believe in the existence of entities that might be called 'ways things could have been'. I prefer to call them 'possible worlds'.
>
> (Lewis 1973:84)

David Lewis believes that possible worlds do in fact exist somewhere, being actual where they are, but without forming part of our actual world.

Although Leibniz's general view of possible worlds is the source of contemporary discussions on this matter, God no longer features as a necessary generator of possible or alternate worlds; the important point about Leibniz's theory is the essence of all subsequent theories that postulate possible worlds in some form: "Leibniz tells us that the actual, existent world is only one of infinitely many possible worlds that *could* have existed" (Mates 1968:508). What form these worlds take is another matter entirely.

Nicholas Rescher, who adopts a more moderate position, claims that these alternate worlds are mind-dependent and not independent, as claimed by Leibniz and Lewis. According to Rescher, one has to conceive of a state of affairs *S* at possible world *W* for there to be a state of affairs *S* at possible world *W*: "For such possibilities 'exist' insofar as they can be stated or described in the context of their being supposed, assumed, posited, or the like" (Rescher 1979:175). Leibniz speculates that God has created a world where the measure of unity between compossible elements (such elements that can exist together, without contradicting the existence of each other) is at a maximum. On the other hand, possible worlds may present the simultaneous existence of elements

that contradict each other in the actual world, i.e. worlds that contain actually incompossible elements.

For both Lewis and Rescher, while their theories about the physical being of possible worlds are different, possible worlds are always of the same kind: they are always non-actual with respect to our world.

Alvin Plantinga shares Lewis's initial view of what the term signifies, but instead of a focus on possible "entities", he speaks of states of affairs that contain these possible entities. He also emphasises the idea that the actual world – the world that exists in our reality – is one of many possible worlds:

> [A] possible world is a *state of affairs* of some kind – one which either obtains, is real, is actual, or else *could have obtained*.
>
> (Plantinga 1977:245; original emphasis)

There are cultures where one does not speak of things that are no more, where one does not utter the name of the dead, but this is a cultural convention, since even in those cases there would be a definite referent, albeit deceased. In possible world theory, we are dealing with things that are not, but *could have* been. In general, one is capable of understanding statements about objects or events of the past. Willard Quine succinctly expresses the ontological problem of non-being as follows, dubbing it *Plato's Beard*: "Nonbeing [sic] must in some sense be, otherwise what is it that there is not?" (1953:1-2).

The fact remains that in both cases – whether we refer to something that could have been but is not, or to something which is no more – our present world does not contain a tangible referent. Robert Adams would disagree (in part) with this assessment, since he has stated that the actual world contains events past, present and future. The following section will discuss the concept of "actuality".

3.2.1 Actuality

According to Robert Adams, if…

> [the] actual world […] includes what has actually existed or happened and what will actually exist or happen, as well as what now exists or happens […] and they all count as actual
>
> (1974:211-212)

…then actual "means only 'occurring in *this* world'" (214). For Adams, the coherent temporal properties of a single possible world is of primary concern, even if some of the properties cannot yet be validated, since they are as yet inaccessible.

While Adams restricts himself to actual assertions made in this world (the *actual* world), I propose that statements ostensibly made from within a fiction (i.e. in which fictional actuality replaces the actual world as a point of reference for all assertions) are equally valid if the world of discourse is made clear. David Lewis takes a similar tack, using "actual" indexically to distinguish the fictional world – whence a statement is made – from any other worlds, including the non-fictional world of the viewer:

> [The] meaning we give to 'actual' is such that it refers at any world *i* to that world *i* itself. 'Actual' is indexical, like 'I' or 'here', or 'now': it depends for its reference on the circumstances of utterance, to wit the world where the utterance is located.
>
> (Lewis 1973:86)

Possible characters and the events in which they are embroiled at world *W* are therefore actual at *W*; however, in this dissertation, when "actual" is not complemented by a predicate (e.g. "at *W*"), it should be understood as immediately indexical for the reader: actual in *this* world. I make this distinction between actual and fictional (that is, actual-in-the-fiction) in order to emphasise the ontological difference between them. Even while a visual representation of an event may be misleading to the point of persuading the viewer that the images are actual, they are in fact always actual-in-the-fiction.

3.2.2 Resemblance and identity

The temporal difference between archive footage and a re-enactment of the same event may be summarised as follows: archive footage, shot at a moment in the past, spatiotemporally homogeneous with the real-world event recorded, is *present-in-the-past*; it is therefore a record of the actual world at a particular point in time. On the other hand, a re-enactment, despite the fact that it employs the same individuals who were present in the past during the real-world event, places a past event before the camera in the (camera's) present and even though the action takes place in the actual world, the particular event is a re-creation, and therefore fictional. A re-enactment is *past-in-the-present* and its recording is at least temporally (if not always spatiotemporally) heterogeneous with the real-life event portrayed.

It is a fact already established that an object and its copy are not the same – they are similar to a considerable degree, but not existentially interchangeable.

> Everything is identical to itself; nothing is ever identical to anything else except itself. […] And there is never any problem about what makes two things identical; two things never can be identical.
>
> (Lewis 1986:192-193)

This statement is reminiscent of Leibniz's "Principle of the Indiscernibility of Identicals", according to which:

> […] in nature there are never two beings which are perfectly alike and in which it is not possible to find an internal difference, or at least a difference founded upon an intrinsic quality.
>
> (Leibniz 1965:222)

According to Lewis and many other possible world theorists, possible worlds being similar but independent from the actual world, it may be the case that a person or a thing exists in a possible world that shows remarkable similarities with a person or a thing in the actual world. Such objects are counterparts of each other.

> My counterpart, if I have one, in another world w_1 is someone who is pretty much like me in qualitative respects and who is such that no one else in w_1 is any more like me than he is.
>
> (Currie 1990:136)

A clear example of such counterparts is the representation of an actual world entity that exists in a reconstruction of a past event; another example of a counterpart would be the appearance of someone as "herself" in a film, since the particular character would be necessarily fictional. Michael Winterbottom's *The Road to Guantanamo* contains both of these kinds of counterparts. While many worlds portrayed in a film are possible states of affairs in the actual world, it can also happen that they do not share certain important properties and for this reason it might be more worthwhile to speak of "fictional worlds", a concept that will be developed in the rest of this chapter.

3.3 Fictional worlds

Some philosophers, like Gregory Currie, have sought to contrast possible worlds, roughly defined as complete worlds containing a state of affairs that might logically have obtained, with "fictional worlds", but Currie's definition for the latter remains contentious.

> Possible worlds are *determinate* with respect to truth; every proposition is either true or false in a possible world. They are *consistent*; nothing logically impossible is true in a possible world. But fictional worlds are always indeterminate and sometimes inconsistent. Fictional worlds are indeterminate because there are questions about fictions that have no determinate answer.
>
> (Currie 1990:54; original emphasis)

It would seem that fictional worlds are entities of which certain properties will necessarily remain eternally opaque. However, I hold that it is an inescapable conclusion that possible worlds also be incomplete, for the simple reason that no amount of space would ever enable the author to elaborate on every single aspect of the story and its objects.

Currie's position is similar to Lewis's claim that possible worlds literally exist independently of the actual world, but in *Naming and Necessity*, Saul Kripke famously claims that possible worlds "are stipulated, not discovered by powerful telescopes" (1972:44). While this statement primarily refers to the creation of worlds *by stipulation*, it is especially relevant to fictional worlds, whose authors can never reproduce all the details that would make the world maximally comprehensive.

David Lewis asks (1978:42) whether Sherlock Holmes had an odd or an even number of hairs on his head at the moment he first meets Watson – a question that can never be answered, since this property is left unmentioned and is therefore absent from any world (created by Arthur Conan Doyle) in which Sherlock Holmes meets Watson for the first time.

Nicholas Wolterstorff shows that while we know that Lady Macbeth had produced at least one child, there is no way for us to know how many children she had in total, since the text in which she appears does not provide a definite answer:

> So we shall never know how many children Lady Macbeth had in the worlds of *Macbeth*. That is not because to know this would require a knowledge beyond the capacity of human beings. It is because there is nothing of the sort to know.
>
> (1980:133)

In this case, the use of the term "the worlds of Macbeth" emphasises the fact that the world of the text is non-comprehensive, since it may just be one section of a variety of worlds that are different in many other respects which have no bearing on the text as such. Wolterstorff refers to these eternally non-comprehensive worlds as "segments" of possible worlds (1980:132); they signify exactly the same things as Currie's "fictional worlds", but stripped of the problem of strictly demarcating the fictional world's territory relative to that of a possible world. This means that a particular fictional world represents a state of affairs *S* inside many possible worlds where *S* is true without being a maximally comprehensive representation of any particular possible world.

> Of course, the world of a fictional work is rarely if ever a possible *world*. Possible worlds are just too large. If a possible state of affairs S is to be a possible *world*, it must be maximal; that is, for every state of affairs whatsoever, S must either include or preclude it. Few if any worlds of fiction are like that.
>
> (Wolterstorff 1989:248; original emphasis)

Kendall Walton proposes that fictional worlds "be understood as collections of fictional truths" (Walton 1978:15).[55] This definition of fictional worlds seems the least problematical, since it avoids the problem of fixing a boundary between possible and fictional worlds.

A last word on the supposed comprehensiveness of possible worlds is in order, since the possibility of such comprehensiveness seems ever more debatable. David Lewis himself confesses doubts on this point and with respect to the example of the work of fiction, it is simply impractical to stipulate the properties of every single element present in (or absent from) the fiction, and elaborate on its relational properties with any other entities present or absent: this would include a legion of details irrelevant to the narrative, as Wolterstorff points out (1980:131); for example, the truth value of the proposition claimed by something like "Jimmy Carter being elected President in 1980" in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*.

> [A]ny narrative fiction is necessarily and fatally swift because, in building a world that comprises myriad events and characters, it cannot say everything about this world. It hints at it and then asks the reader to fill in a whole series of gaps.
>
> (Eco 1994:3)

This notion of saying what is necessary to emphasise on which matters the world of the fiction deviates from the actual world of the reader is what Marie-Laure Ryan refers to as the *principle of minimal departure*: "[W]e will project upon the [unreal] world of the statement everything we know about the real world [and] make only those adjustment which we cannot avoid" (Ryan 1980:406).

[55] Walton uses the term "fictional truth" to mean a statement that obtains in the fiction: if *p* is a proposition about the fiction and *p* obtains, then *p* is a "fictional truth" or a "fictional fact" (Walton 1978:15).

Whether we are speaking about distinct possible worlds, or possible worlds that are non-comprehensive (and therefore, according to Currie above, "fictional"), their relation to the actual world is nonetheless of great importance to our current investigation. Since the possibility exists that so much of the actual world may be reproduced in the fictional world, are these worlds strictly removed from actuality, or can there be some sort of interaction?

3.3.1 Imagining and being

> If I imagine this orange to be an apple, I imagine it *as an apple* and not as an *imaginary* apple. But this does not gainsay the fact that the apple at issue *is* an imaginary apple that "exists only in my imagination."
>
> (Rescher 1979:171; original emphasis)

It is important to state that, in the quotation above, the visible orange that serves as a representation (and takes the place) of the apple is very real, even though the apple itself is imaginary. Films produced by traditional photographic means, i.e. unaided by digital technology, amount to the same mental exercise, by which the viewer takes a (pro-)filmic object to represent something beyond its immediate identity. This is particularly evident when the object (a character, an event) is based on an historical object. The real existence of the object on screen is not in doubt, but the viewer, via cues given by the film itself, assigns different properties to the object that essentially differ from its real-life qualities. In the same way as Nicholas Rescher (or his fictional/imaginary counterpart) in the quotation above imagines an orange to be an apple, the viewer of Michael Winterbottom's *Road to Guantanamo* will imagine (or will be required to imagine) the real-life character on screen and not the visible actor portraying the character.

Speaking on the subject of an imagined state of affairs containing individuals that, at the time of the utterance, were fully realised in the actual world, namely the former U.S. presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, Nicholas Wolterstorff looks at the status of real world individuals in fictional statements. He imagines a state of affairs where Reagan, on assuming the office of the presidency, invited Carter to the White House to

discuss foreign policy. Wolterstorff assures us that the statement has no validity in the actual world, but if the statement is a fiction (untrue in the actual world), do the component parts necessarily lose their real-world identity, as Lubomír Doležel, who is cited in the following quotation, would have it?

> I know, of course, that the canonical view in 20th century literary theory is that existent particulars do not enter in the way I have suggested into worlds of fiction. The modern tradition says that we must distinguish the real Reagan from Reagan-in-my-fiction, and that only the latter enters my fiction's world. Prof. Doležel accepts that tradition. He speaks of the "sovereignty" of fictional worlds and of the "boundary" between them and the actual world. But neither he nor the tradition gives what, in my judgment, is a cogent reason for claiming that the entities of fiction cannot be existent entities. If I can speak falsely, and even lyingly, about Reagan, claiming things to be true of him which are not, why cannot I also *imagine* him to be other than he is? […] Fiction does not require fictional elements.
>
> (Wolterstorff 1989:246; original emphasis)

Wolsterstorff is quite convincing in the argument that leads up to his final claim, but unfortunately it doesn't hold up against the view of possible worlds expounded thus far. If Wolterstorff were to speak "lyingly" about Reagan, he would be attributing properties to Reagan that are not true in the actual world. They would be true in an imaginary world, which Wolterstorff is creating in the process and this imaginary world would indeed be a fiction. However, the Reagan of the actual world would merely be a counterpart of the Reagan in the imaginary world: identical in all respects, except for having the property of being actual relative to the actual world, while the other is imaginary (that is, a part of the imaginary world, or actual in the imaginary world). Furthermore, the property of "having discussed foreign policy with Jimmy Carter in the White House on his first day in office" is true of the Reagan in the imaginary world, but not of the Reagan in the actual world; the same applies to the Carter of these two worlds. The actual individuals cannot authenticate the sentence as true; only their imaginary or fictional counterparts can do that, and these counterparts are therefore distinct and separate from the actual entities that they closely resemble.

A fiction attributes the quality of being fictional to all its component parts, distinguishing them from their counterparts in the actual world – if there are any to be found.

Imagining a world different from the actual world is to posit a fictional world. The same is true of any world that serves as a referent for a statement which, while false in the actual world, would be true in another possible world.

3.3.2 The fictional operator

In reference to the truth value of a prototypical fictional statement of the possible worlds theory ("Holmes is a detective"), Kendall Walton points to a common solution, claiming that "such statements [are] preceded implicitly by something like 'It is true-in-the-fiction that'" (1991:274).

This implicit "something" is termed a *story prefix* by Gideon Rosen (1990:331), a *silent sentential operator* by Stuart Brock (2002:5), and I shall refer more generally to such a prefix as a 'fictional operator'; the fictional operator incorporates the statement into a fictional framework, within which its truth value can be assessed more judiciously. Since the statement makes no claim about the actual world (while a fictional statement may seem to refer to the actual world, the truth value of an actual world state of affairs has nothing to do with the fictional statement that refers to it), the actual world may not be called upon to verify or falsify the proposition of such a statement.

> Let us not take our descriptions of fictional characters at face value, but instead let us regard them as abbreviations for longer sentences beginning with an operator "In such-and-such fiction…". Such a phrase […] may be prefixed to a sentence ϕ to form a new sentence. But then the prefixed operator may be dropped by way of abbreviations, leaving us with what sounds like the original sentence ϕ but differs from it in sense.
>
> (Lewis 1978:38)

In the quotation above Lewis designates a story prefix to create an inclusive fictional context that could set the scene for better evaluating the validity of a particular statement. Such a story prefix, however, in no way invalidates the truth value of the statement in the real world and ultimately the addition of this prefix (fictional operator) precludes an evaluation of the statement's validity in the actual world. Gideon Rosen, writing on the function of the story prefix, claims that one "can believe 'According to the

fiction *F*, $\exists xPx$' without believing '$\exists xPx$'; for as a rule, the former does not entail the latter" (1990:331).[56]

In works of fiction, operators such as the ones discussed above permit the assignment of truth values to objects that have no referents in the actual world; words no longer refer to their actual world manifestations, but to objects of the fictional world that serve as proof of their existence. In this way, some have argued that the language used in fictional discourse refers to a reality separate from actuality. John Searle maintains that such a point of view creates a big problem for the comprehension of fiction: if the meaning of words changes with regard to their meaning when applied to the actual world, then it would be impossible to understand anything expressed in fictional discourse (1974:323-325). While this is a sensible argument against the idea that fiction functions independently of real-world discourse, there is a difference between a description of this fictional world and the world itself. Since any fictional world is always expressed by the same discourse as the actual world, there is no problem with understanding. The qualities attributed to this other world produce content that is different from the actual world and while the entities are often clearly independent of the actual world, they are comprehensible nonetheless.

> Fictional discourse is parasitic on ordinary discourse, but is, in a vital sense, independent of it; parasitic because it feigns most of the characteristics of ordinary discourse; independent because it is not bound by obligations to a reality it is not intended to describe.
>
> (Pollard 1973:68)

Is fiction *completely* removed from and incommensurable with the actual world, since the world of the fiction is never (identical to) the actual world? Gideon Rosen's focus is on the possibility of truth within the world of fiction itself, although the claim might be true in the actual world, but the sentence is incapable of making such an assessment: "[W]hen you assent to 'In *F*, *P*' you incur no obligation to assent to '*P*' by itself" (Rosen

[56] In this example, "x" refers to a possible world where *P*, a state of affairs claimed by fiction *F*, would obtain. Lexically, the expression would translate as "According to the fiction *F*, there exists a possible world x, such that in this possible world x, a state of affairs *P* obtains".

1990:332). Even if *F* purports to be faithful to reality, it is no such thing as reality, and the omission of the story prefix must not lead the viewer/reader to suppose unquestioningly that *P* in the actual world.

The explanation for the meaningfulness of sentences containing claims about non-actual states of affairs, provided by David Lewis above (1978:38), is very insightful and helps greatly to sum up the process by which the viewer makes sense of a film, its characters, objects and events, especially where such things are the representations of historically real particulars. "What is true in fiction is what is fictional, what is *part of the story*" (Currie 1990:56; original emphasis).

3.3.3 The fictional operator in film

Is there evidence of such a fictional operator, or conversely of the omission of such an implied fictional operator, specifically in the films under discussion, or more generally in any other films?

The only hint of such an operator is provided by the mode of the representation, in other words the property of film as inherently distinct from real life and its events never identical to real-life events; the average viewer's reaction to the events on screen serves to support the idea that a film, by nature or by convention, elicits a different kind of reaction than the events of the real world do and therefore is perceived as another kind of reality.

> [T]he representative [the object on screen], while seeming real to us, is never confused with the represented, that is *really the real thing* that constitutes the object of the viewer's thoughts and fixation![57]
>
> (Michotte van den Berck 1948:251; original emphasis)

Few films take the pre-emptive measure of stating that the events portrayed are fictitious or fake, although it is not unheard of.[58] If there is no fictional operator, then it

[57] My translation from the French.

[58] For example, some cuts of Alejandro González Iñárritu's 2000 film *Amores perros* are preceded by a disclaimer stating that no dogs were harmed in the making of the film (San Filippo 2001), an explicit admission that the dog fights, in which dogs certainly seem to be physically harmed, were staged.

should be taken as implicit in the material itself; however, many films (including some of the works investigated in this dissertation, like *In This World* and *Wonderland*) present their material in a mode more often associated with the documentary genre, which in turn is intended to be much closer to reality than fiction films. When such films are presented in this way, the viewer might be tempted to believe that some of the events in the film really happened as such in the actual world.

On the other hand, instead of simply suggesting that x, some films explicitly state that "It is actually true that x". However, even such claims should not be taken at face value, since any film, being necessarily fictional in the sense of not being pure reality, functions within the parameters of an over-arching fictional operator F(x) and the aforementioned statement *S* ("It is actually true that…") may be rephrased as F(*S*), or: "It is fictional that it is actually true that…". Examples of such abbreviated forms that pretend to express actual truths are not uncommon and may be found in films as diverse as the Coen brothers' *Fargo* and the cult horror film *The Blair Witch Project*. These two films present themselves, respectively, as an actment[59] and a documentary. In truth, both are completely original constructions not based on any real events, in spite of their textual prologues that state the contrary; the films' events are merely actual-in-the-fiction.

It is not always immediately obvious what the intentions of the filmmakers are, and viewers may be led to believe that the film is being serious when it states that the events really took place in this or a very similar way. Some of the films referred to may be perceived as truthful (and extratextually propagated as such, for example, in press interviews), while others are clearly meant to be ironic, but the viewer needs other tools to make this distinction.

[59] In Chapter 1, using Bruce Davis's terms reproduced in Ebert (2008), I draw a distinction between "actments" and "re-enactments" in reference to the re-creation of past events.

3.3.4 Fictional characters

> We can grant that fictional characters are as right, from their point of view, to affirm their fullblooded [sic] reality as we are to affirm ours. But their point of view is fictional, and so what is right from it makes no difference as far as reality is concerned.
>
> (Stalnaker 1976:69)

Characters in a fiction are not only fully realised at their fictional actuality, but their actions obtain (they are true) at this other world. In the actual world, any statement about such characters not framed by a visible or an invisible story operator such as "In the fiction, it is true that…", and interpreted as such, will be nonsensical, as Bertrand Russell claimed, since their names do not refer to actual beings. "Russell's answer to the metaphysical question consists in denying nonexistent individuals any ontological status, and in proving that statements about such individuals are false on logical grounds" (Pavel 1986:14).

These characters are different from actual world individuals, but reference is possible by virtue of their similarity to actual individuals and their clear existence in another world. Stalnaker's use of the term "fictional characters" should be clarified for our purposes, since *The Road to Guantanamo* and *Welcome to Sarajevo* (discussed in Chapters 3 and 5) both contain characters who have direct ties to actual reality: they are representations, or fictional counterparts, of their real-life sources, but necessarily possess counterfactual properties, with specific regard to the film format. I should like to define "fictional characters" more pertinently as "characters in a fiction", where "fiction" is any story that does not take place spontaneously in the actual world, or as suggested by Christopher Wagstaff to distinguish "a feature film" (rather: a fiction film)[60] from a "documentary film", it "records an imitation or reconstruction of its referent, or of an imaginary referent" (2007:98). Therefore, Stalnaker's "characters in a fiction" might very well refer to actual individuals, but within the context of a film, their presentation is merely representative and they are never identical to the original individuals, even when such individuals are supposedly portraying themselves.

[60] The substitution of "fiction" for "feature" was explained in section 2.1.

Frequently the fictional operator is hidden – imbedded in the proper name – and consequently verbal referents can cause confusion, because the name no longer has a clear denotation. There are clear and immediate differences between an actor portraying himself in a film, a person recorded in documentary fashion (this person acts for the first time and does not "re-enact" anything from her past), and a written description of the person and her actions in a faithful, historical account.

Where actments (and even re-enactments) in film are concerned, the difference between actual history and fiction is often immediately perceptible, since the images the viewer has of the real-world individuals will differ from their on-screen counterparts. The filmic character is a fictional embodiment of the actual person; this means that while the character presented on-screen draws on an actual individual, absolute fidelity may be discarded since the image lacks iconicity. However, this does not imply a lack of credibility, since different kinds of representations "characteristically bring with them different means of checking the truth of statements" (Heintz 1979:89).

3.4 Discourse about fictional worlds

> A fictional world does not exist prior to its text; as a result, every single literary text must construct its own domain of reference and bring its own fictional world to life.[61]
>
> (Doležel 1985:8)

John Searle claims that the author of a fictional text *pretends* to make "serious" assertions (or illocutionary acts) and thereby creates a fictional world in which these acts obtain (i.e. 'are true'): "[By] pretending to refer to a person [the writer] creates a fictional person" (1974:330).

Searle goes on to say that, when we (the readers, the viewers) make an assertion about such worlds, when we refer to these worlds and their contents, we do not *pretend* to talk about things that are real – we *really* talk about things that are fictional. Even so,

[61] My translation from the French.

John Heintz points out that it "is important […] to distinguish between using a term to refer, and referring to something that really exists" (1979:88-89).

Peter van Inwagen (1977:301) says that there is no problem using language to refer to a fictional entity that has been created by its fiction, for such statements may be validated or falsified by the fiction itself, even though the fictional entities themselves do not exist in the actual world. However, the statements made in the fiction cannot be judged as true or false, since their presence in the fiction automatically *makes* them true.

Films necessarily fictionalise real events. In other words, a film is at best a specific kind of *copy* of reality and whether it is news footage, or documentary material, or a reconstruction of real events by means of actments or re-enactments, the product by its very nature is a fiction and the assertions made within it must be understood against this background.

Are fictional stories that somehow originate in the real world of a different order than stories that have no obvious ties to reality? Thomas Pavel, discussing verbal representation, says that both kinds of stories are different from the real world, but perhaps the literary example is more self-evident:

> [A] treatise on the history of early nineteenth-century England is not to be trusted any more than Dickens' [sic] *Pickwick Papers*, since in its own way each text simply describes a version of the world.
>
> (1986:12)

Linda Hutcheon, in a comparison between the two very different worlds of J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy epic *Lord of the Rings* and Émile Zola's arch-naturalistic *L'assommoir*, makes the following claim:

> From the point of view of the reader it is no easier to create and believe in the well-documented world of Zola than it is for him to imagine hobbits or elves: the imaginative leap into the novel's world of time and space must be made in both cases.
>
> (1980:78)

There is certainly an imaginative leap in both cases, and this separation between the actual and the fictional worlds (no matter the degree to which the latter resemble the

former) has been a continuous point of interest in the current chapter. However, in the two examples given by Hutcheon, the leap is bigger or smaller relative to the actual, depending on the particular world that is presented; while both examples present the reader with fictional worlds, Zola's world presents a visibly possible state of affairs relative to the actual world and therefore potentially possesses much more realism than the world of Tolkien. Whatever this realism, the stories themselves remain fictional, particularly because the specific situations are imagined.

Sometimes a work of fiction contains situations which are not imagined, but based on real events and the filmmaker stages a recreation of these historical (actual) events. This is the case in *The Road to Guantanamo*.

3.5 *The Road to Guantanamo*

The Road to Guantanamo opens with footage taken at a news conference held by the 43rd President of the United States of America, George W. Bush, in 2003; the material has a pixellated televisual quality, like a close-up from a television screen. Next to him, the viewer sees the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair. It is worth pointing out that Bush and Blair appear as real-life characters – their actions and words recorded at a moment in history quite separate from the fiction, even the artifice, of the rest of the film. Furthermore, to most viewers their identities as real-world individuals do not need to be confirmed in some way. At the press conference, President Bush makes the following assertion: "The only thing I know for certain is that these are bad people".

Of course, Bush's "these" cannot be interpreted as an indexical reference to the three Pakistani individuals also known as the "Tipton Three". The footage is manipulated, by means of editing, more specifically by juxtaposition, to equate the three men with the "these" of President Bush's announcement, whether the viewer takes the words seriously or ironically. A face is put to the name of an unknown entity; there is a baptism

of sorts, even though the words originally referred to Guantanamo detainees in general, with no mention of the particular British nationals.[62]

In the following scene, the first of the three protagonists, Asif, is introduced by way of his fictional counterpart, played by Arfan Usman. The real Asif ($Asif_{real}$) is already present, on the soundtrack in the form of a voice-over, and once he is shown (in the words of Michel Chion (1994:130), once the voice has been "de-acousmatized"), the name label "Asif" appears superimposed on screen.

The film's narrative develops in these two "worlds", the one populated by unique fictional representations of Asif, Ruhel, Shafiq *et al.*, the other being the actual world in which interviews are conducted with $Asif_{real}$, $Ruhel_{real}$ and $Shafiq_{real}$. The immobile one-shots of the interviewees contrast very clearly with the scenes, shot with handheld cameras, of the dramatised section of the film.

This separation of worlds takes a different form in Steven Soderbergh's *Full Frontal*, a film that maintains, from a certain perspective, its parallel real and fictional tracks and a clear boundary between the two spheres until the very end, before allowing it to disintegrate and admitting that both tracks were equally staged for the purposes of filmmaking. *Full Frontal* clearly had postmodern intentions with its metatextual narrative content and its desire to blur the line between the real and the fictional, but there is no trace of such playful creational intentions in Winterbottom's film.

While *Full Frontal* ultimately admits that both "worlds" are completely fictional, this is not the case in *The Road to Guantanamo*. Winterbottom's film relies heavily on the actuality of the one world, in which the interviews take place, to support the credibility and the historical fidelity of the recreated dramatised world. The dramatised narrative track of the film is not entirely removed from the actual world (α). It is interesting to

[62] "Question: Do you have concerns that they'll get justice, the people detained [at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Camp]?

Bush: No, the only thing I know for certain is that these are bad people. And we look forward to working closely with the Blair government to deal with the issue."

(CNN.com 2003)

note the presence (at regular intervals and for different reasons) of α in W (the fictional world of the film), in the form of archive footage.

The Road to Guantanamo is not prefixed; the film's link to the real world and its classification as a reconstruction depend heavily on the interviews conducted. Using Lewis's notation (1978:37-38), the reconstructed events can be designated by ϕ, but since there is no prefix, it is perhaps unclear whether ϕ might be construed as *actually* or *fictionally* real: the references do exist, but in the film they can only be perceived as second-degree representations, visual manifestations of the restaging of historical events. The film's images do, however, provide a more direct representational link (because of their quality of iconicity) than the words of a literary fiction would accomplish.

Do the interviews constitute a *de facto* operator? They definitely serve a certain function of establishing a context, but the fictional operator (according to which any event in the film is fictionally true) is attenuated and in this case it can be formulated more accurately as a claim that *It is true in our recollection of the actual facts that…*. I shall label this prefix R(x), so that the abovementioned ϕ, read within this frame, is transcribed as R(ϕ). R(ϕ) is true if the speaker (i.e. $\text{Asif}_{\text{real}}$, $\text{Shafiq}_{\text{real}}$ or $\text{Ruhel}_{\text{real}}$) believes it to be true and has access to knowledge about ϕ.

One of the problems of reconstructed reality relating to memories, which surfaced in Chapter 2 regarding *9 Songs*, appears once more in this case, since the reconstructed events seem to be generated by the interviews. Of course, a major difference between *The Road to Guantanamo* and *9 Songs* is the truth value of the characters in the actual world: the Tipton Three actually exist, while Matt, the protagonist of *9 Songs*, is a character in a fiction without a counterpart in the actual world.

The reconstructions are fictional visualisations of the events as they are remembered by the Tipton Three. Within these reconstructions, they appear in counterpart or fictionalised form, transformed from real to fictional, and the film doesn't obscure the

double identity (the one actual, the other fictional relative to α) of Ruhel, Asif and Shafiq.

In a way, the representation of these characters by their fictional counterparts is another admission that there is necessarily a difference between a) the actual and the fictional, or b) the actual and the recollection of the actual. The film contains scenes, inserted into the flow of fictional imagery, that constitute flashbacks, but these are flashbacks of the fictional characters.

I have stated that the truth value of R(ϕ) relies on the speakers' beliefs and memories. R(ϕ) is close to the real events, but for two key exceptions, very important to the issue of rendering in filmic representation. Firstly, for the simple reason that none of the characters is omniscient, R(ϕ) cannot be maximally comprehensive. Secondly, the film's events and characters are always just representations or even projections.

Many films have undermined the notion that memories are faithful to historical events: Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* remains the *locus classicus* in this domain, but one can just as easily point to more recent films, like *One Night at McCool's* or *Pulp Fiction*. The viewer's belief in the truth of the images relies on the credibility of the Tipton Three and, just like a statement under the dominion of a fictional story operator cannot be validated by the facts of the actual world, so any expression that takes the form R(ϕ) is another kind of fiction and should be considered something separate from the actual world.

This film is different from *Welcome to Sarajevo* in one major respect and that is the presence/absence of some sort of operator that signals whether the events portrayed actually happened, are recollections, or have been invented. In *Welcome to Sarajevo*, there are no interviews to back up the fact that the events really happened and therefore its authenticity (the film is a post-factual account of historical events) might be damaged; conversely, *The Road to Guantanamo*'s frequent use of interviews with individuals that may be verified as $\text{Asif}_{\text{real}}$, $\text{Ruhel}_{\text{real}}$ and $\text{Shafiq}_{\text{real}}$ confirms both the dramatic (as opposed to documentary) aspect of ϕ and pretends to be an accurate

historical representation of events, but since the events on screen are, to a large degree, the result of their recollections, the accuracy can't be verified either even though the tone is very serious.

3.5.1 Identical proper names

The film's main characters are all introduced by means of text: the names of Asif, Ruhel and Shafiq are superimposed over the images of them separately addressing the camera during an interview session. Having been exposed to acted footage already, in which their filmic counterparts appear, a relative distinction is made between the real (designated by means of on-screen text) and the counterpart. Two other men, Monir and Zahid, are introduced in the same fashion, but here the line between actual and fictional is blurred: the name labels indicating them as such appear over the fictional versions of these individuals. In this way, it is unclear whether the labels specifically designate the actual individuals or their fictional representations.

The film's use of proper names becomes problematic, since we see one name referring to two entities: for example, "Asif" can be used to designate either the real or the fictional Asif. While the characters in the representation don't physically resemble their real-world counterparts in any great measure, they inhabit a world very similar to the actual world in which the Twin Towers fell on 11 September 2001, Afghanistan was invaded by British and American forces, and the Tipton Three were incarcerated at Camp Delta in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. This world with which the viewer is presented is not the actual world, but in many respects a (more or less faithful) copy of the actual world. Being limited by time and space, the world is a fictional world and many questions regarding the world's component parts remain unanswered, indeed unanswerable, but Marie-Laure Ryan's principle of minimal departure, cited at the end of section 3.3, provides an explanation for the constant intelligibility of a world that is necessarily different from the actual world.

In the film two groups of characters exist that both qualify as referents of "the Tipton Three", and while both groups are in a sense fictional by virtue of their appearance in

the film, it is important to note that they do not belong to the same diegetic space, i.e. the two groups of characters are *not* homodiegetic relative to each other and any meeting between them is impossible. Of course, it is possible for the real Asif, Ruhel and Shafiq to meet the actors portraying them, but this meeting would not entail a meeting, for example, between the fictional Shafiq and the actual Shafiq, because these designations apply to different worlds. Rather, it would be a situation in which the actual Shafiq meets the actual actor who portrays him, Riz Ahmed.

3.5.2 Archive footage and the illusion of immediacy

While films like *The Idiots*, *The Blair Witch Project* and *Series 7: The Contenders* present entirely fictional material in a way that contributes to a visual sense of real-world presence, of the cameraman and correspondingly of the viewer, *The Road to Guantanamo* latches onto the actual occurrence of events in the past and seeks to recreate them, albeit within the necessarily fictional context of a reconstruction. An important scene that exhibits the amalgamated nature of the film's visuals and its narrative occurs 26 minutes into the film. After the massacre in Kunduz, Ruhel, Shafiq and Asif are walking around the scene of the bloodshed, when there is a cut to what appears to be historical footage of the actual event: six shots of inferior quality are inserted into the flow of Winterbottom's pristine reconstruction images.

A comparison with a scene from *Welcome to Sarajevo* is appropriate here, since the level of hybridism between documentary and fictional is very similar in both films. In Winterbottom's 1997 film a sequence[63] in which a United Nations official and other dignitaries arrive at a news conference contains many different sorts of images: there are imprints made from the real world at the time (historical, archive footage), images that resemble historical reality in their visual texture, but are in fact just reconstructions, and there is 35 mm footage that aims to show what is happening "behind the cameras", but is in fact entirely fictional. It is worth noting that the fictional character of Flynn seems to share diegetic space with fictional characters *as well as* the

[63] 0:26:45 - 0:27:55

real-life individuals themselves, like the British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd and French President François Mitterrand: though not all of these individuals interact with each other, the fiction firmly suggests that they are present at the same place and time in the same world.

In another scene in *The Road to Guantanamo*, Ruhel, Asif and Shafiq are taken on an open vehicle across the Afghan landscape and see parts of the landscape consumed by fireballs, as the American and British forces bomb the countryside. These three individuals are never in the same shot as a particular bombing, but their sightlines and reactions suggest that they share the same space. In the same way as the example from *Welcome to Sarajevo* that was cited above, the fictional individuals are intercut with and react to events shown on (archive) footage that clearly belongs to another production process.

Recalling the bombings near Kandahar in Afghanistan, Ruhel makes the following statement in an interview (0:11:52): "You see something like that in the movies only." First, it seems like a coda added onto the preceding sequence (the "something like that"), in which fictional characters are apparently affected by real events, but then the elusiveness of a strict fictional/real dichotomy really hits home: $\text{Ruhel}_{\text{real}}$ comments on the fact that the events he saw resembled a movie in their spectacular intensity. The footage presented has a documentary character and therefore seems to attest to the historical authenticity of the events; however, this material is doubly inscribed within a fiction: firstly, it is part of "a movie" (*The Road to Guantanamo*), and secondly it is both a representation of the fictional characters' point of view and complements the real individuals' memory of events.

At another point (0:18:56), while Ruhel, Shafiq and Asif are driving in a car, a shot is taken from the windscreen – a fast-moving forward tracking shot on a dirt road. This might be a point-of-view (POV) shot of one of the passengers, perhaps one of the three main characters. As a rule, however, a change in format does not signal a change in perspective (for example, from objective to subjective), as indicated by the harrowing

POV shot of an inmate at the Guantanamo prison (0:54:20)[64]; the intended goal rather seems to be the very visible manifestation of the actual world (designated by the inferior visual quality that one traditionally associates with documentary images), where possible, in the fiction film.

It should be clear that while a certain visual aesthetic contributes to an impression of reality (the more shaky, grainy – in short: imperfect – the images, the more credible they are as an imprint of reality), the truth status of the footage cannot be judged on the basis of the images' presentation alone. William Hughes mentions the work of Raymond Fielding, who claims that "there was not a single major producer in the period 1894 to 1900 that did not fake newsfilm as a matter of common practice" (Fielding cited in Hughes 1976:58). These films were perceived as an objective account of real events, largely because of the difficulty of authentification (still relevant to filmmaking today) and the fact that the finished product *appears* real.

> These fakes generally consisted of re-creations of news events (sometimes using actors, at other times using the original participants), or outright manufacture of unverifiable activities (for example, shots of off-duty soldiers pretending to be in battle were sold to the public as scenes of actual Boer War combat). According to Fielding, these early news fakes succeeded because they were very brief and of poor optical quality so that it was difficult to observe enough detail to judge their authenticity.
>
> (*ibid.*)

The case of Haskell Wexler's 1968 film *Medium Cool* is quite different, since it is well known that the climactic events of the riots in Chicago really occurred. What makes Wexler's film so interesting for this discussion is the fact that he adds a fictional character to a very actual situation and in the process, even though the character is portrayed by an actual human being of flesh and blood, the combination is difficult to describe.

[64] In terms of its visual quality, the specific shot that is referred to, taken from the point of view of one of the prisoners at the detention facility, is not any different from the other shots in the scene.

3.6 *Medium Cool*

Medium Cool famously contains a sequence shot amidst the violent riots of the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. The film's director and cameraman, Haskell Wexler, had had experience in the field of *cinéma vérité* filmmaking and the lead actress, Verna Bloom, in the role of Eileen, was put in some very risky situations at the time of the actual events, walking past riot police and mixing with the demonstrators. A fictitious story, featuring Robert Forster as a news cameraman, was constructed and shot, culminating in the actual protests on the streets of the Windy City.

The film must be considered within the context of modernism (the influence of Jean-Luc Godard is instantly recognisable), a movement in film that strove for the truth and the eradication of cinema-as-illusion. The idea behind the modernist movement in film was that "cinema [had] lied too much, [had] *staged* reality too much; it [was] time to *show* reality"[65] (Jullier & Marie 2007:143; original emphasis); it took aim at the artifice that cinema had become and focused on laying bare the real world, even if this meant admitting to the immanent deception of the filmic universe and the film's own construction.

> [W]e quite naturally understand fictional statements as unitary statements, depicting coherent states of affairs, even when they include mixed sentences involving both fictional and actual entities.
>
> (Pavel 1983:84)

The aforementioned sequence, in which Eileen strolls through Chicago in search of her son Harold, is crucial in a discussion of spaces that exist as combinations of actual and fictional components. Such combinations are, of course, a commonplace in a majority of films, in that they use actual locations as a backdrop for the development of fictional stories populated by some fictional characters, but the case of *Medium Cool* presents the viewer with a unique historical event during which a fictional character engages in a fictional act (looking for her son) among the otherwise actual events.

[65] My translation from the French.

Wexler's *Medium Cool* impresses because its historically significant footage, which would usually be interpreted as documentary or archive material, includes fictional characters. This homospatiality of staged and historically real events – the action of placing fictional characters into a real (and therefore uncontrolled) setting – is reminiscent of the music concerts in *9 Songs*. But can such scenes that take place in the real world, independent of their being recorded, contain fictional characters, like Eileen? The problem is the fact that two fields of existence and, more importantly, two fields of "play" in which different rules apply, are presented simultaneously and therefore it seems like entities from different worlds can exist in a single space simultaneously – a notion that would undermine the autonomy of worlds.

The actual scene must either be fictional in nature, or the intruding component is de-fictionalised (stripped of its fictional properties) and appears actual and unitary, of the same kind as the actual space. Since she is wholly fictional, it wouldn't be the character of Eileen who is present at the riots, but Verna Bloom. These two options, either wholly fictional or wholly actual (both implying homogeneous scenes), are very attractive and Thomas Pavel, quoted above, supports the notion that fictional statements often contain a great deal of actual material, which does not deprive them of their fictional status.

It is patently impossible for a fictional character to appear at a "real" event: an examination of the scene from *Medium Cool* reveals a diegetic character at a diegetic event and therefore they are both fictional. Extratextual knowledge about Verna Bloom's representation of the fictional character Eileen at the actual event does not apply, because the combination, transpiring as it does outside the film, is not covered by the fictional operator.

J.O. Urmson makes a claim similar to the one put forward by Pavel when he states the following regarding the presence of historically accurate facts in the otherwise fictitious narrative of Tolstoy's celebrated novel:

> [If] we are considering *War and Peace* as a novel does it matter to us whether the Legion of Honor was given on the occasion mentioned, whether it is an element of history introduced or the product of Tolstoy's imagination? […] I think we may say that the historical elements in a novel should be read as mock narrative, and the fact that they have a basis in reality, that they could be asserted as true, is irrelevant.
>
> (Urmson 1976:157)

This assessment resonates with the homogeneous solution proposed by Pavel, in which all elements are painted with the broad brush of fiction, whatever their actual origins and existence, if at least one of the elements is fictional. But is this a warranted response to the problem of *Medium Cool*'s unusual assortment of entities?

> In "Medium Cool," Wexler forges back and forth through several levels. There is a fictional story […] documentary footage […] a series of set-up situations that pretend to be real […] There are fictional characters in real situations […] There are real characters in fictional situations (the real boy, playing a boy, expressing his real interest in pigeons). The mistake would be to separate the real things from the fictional. They are all significant in exactly the same way. The National Guard troops are no more real than the love scene, or the melodramatic accident that ends the film.
>
> (Ebert 1969)

In the quotation above, Roger Ebert mentions "fictional characters in real situations", most likely referring to the character of Eileen looking for her son at the very real protests in Chicago in 1968. However, since a fictional son can no more be lost in a real protest than a fictional mother could be looking for him in the actual world, the only possible solution must be that Eileen is looking for her son in a fictional world where events, comparable (though never identical) to events in the actual world, are taking place. If the protests are interpreted as real events, then the Eileen at the protest should be interpreted as Verna Bloom, but since we have no reason to suspect the actress Verna Bloom is looking for her actual son (who would have to be Harold, for the sake of continuity), the woman must be Eileen. In turn, the presence of the fictional element "Eileen" fictionalises, among other things, the protests themselves and what we end up with is a (homogeneously) fictional film, in spite of its incorporation of actual events. Of course, these real protests are only fictionalised *on film* (i.e. they are only fictional in the

film and this position should not be used to infer anything about their status in the real world).

If f(x) is used as a fictional story operator, we may state the previous position as follows:

> 1) If it is clear that event x in film ϕ is governed by a fictional story operator (in other words, that f(x)), then ϕ as a whole is also fictional.
>
> 2) Alternatively, for all instances y, where y is perceived as actual but used in conjunction with an f(x) – that is, where x is declared as a fictional event in the same film ϕ as y – y must be preceded by the same story operator governing the fictional event x.

Therefore, taking x and y as constitutive parts of ϕ, if either x or y is established as fictional, it follows that ϕ is fictional. Consequently, the fictional status of ϕ transforms all of its parts, making them fictional as well:

$$f(x) \Rightarrow f(\phi) \Rightarrow f(y)$$

In short, if anything in a particular film ϕ is not actual, then everything is fictional.

However, the previous discussion on the power of fictional properties notwithstanding, the practice of designating something as fictional can sometimes be quite complicated. In Wexler's film, "Harold" can refer to both $\text{Harold}_{\text{fictional}}$ and $\text{Harold}_{\text{real}}$, and while it should be obvious that his fictional properties are restricted to the fiction (the film) and his actual properties belong to the actual world, there are points at which $\text{Harold}_{\text{fictional}}$ seems to overlap with $\text{Harold}_{\text{real}}$; properties may be shared, but the two entities can never be identical (all things being equal, the two entities will not be of the same world: one will be actual and one will be fictional). In the case of *Medium Cool*, the Harold we see is not the same entity as the actual Harold, whatever their shared properties, since the former is always already fictional.

> As non-actualized possibles all fictional entities are ontologically homogeneous. Tolstoy's Napoleon is no less fictional than his Pierre Bezuchov and Dickens's London is no more actual than Lewis's Wonderland.
>
> (Doležel 1989:230)

I have already pointed out the necessity of an operator that signals any statement as beholden to the fictional world, but it is very tempting to analyse a statement F(*S*) simply as *S* if the state of affairs (or world of) *S* resembles the actual world to a large degree.

It should be obvious that, given the wide-ranging effect of the fictional operator, a character can never tell the truth (that is the actual truth) in a fictional world, since the actual truth, preceded by the necessary fictional operator, equals the actual-truth-in-the-fiction, a statement true-at-the-fictional-world that is of no direct relevance to the actual world; if the statement is also true-in-the-actual-world, it would be coincidental and a fact independent of the fiction.

3.7 Distrusting the documentary

Much of the news footage[66] presented in *The Road to Guantanamo* is accompanied by different voice-overs that are supposed to convey authority. The authority of the voices lies in their being examples of a disembodied extradiegetic voice-of-God proper to the expository mode of presentation (Nichols 1991:34). While the authority or the credibility of the government's line of reasoning is (retrospectively) undermined from the outset by George W. Bush's press conference, the continual use of media reports that project an image at odds with our apparent knowledge of the events challenges the reliability of the media to an even greater extent.

Michael Winterbottom doesn't limit his film to a strictly binary opposition of his own material and archive footage to contrast the difference between "real events" (a highly contentious term in the current circumstances, given that the "real events" are always, strictly speaking, the object of a representation that necessarily presents a fictional account) and their presentation in/by the media; by transposing sounds and images

[66] In this section, I shall take "news footage" and "documentary footage" to overlap to a great extent. The material might be shot for different purposes, but the way in which the material is acquired (the contemporaneous presence of the cameraman at the scene of the spontaneous event) is very similar in both cases.

from different sources or contexts, he produces a much more complex perspective on the truth.

An example of sounds and images stitched together to form something different appears during the introductory scene at the Sheberghan prison (0:36:30): A voice-over describes the conditions in the overcrowded prison in the present tense, and the images shown are clearly of an inferior quality compared to most of the footage that shows the actors. At the end of the excerpt, the voice-over continues over a shot that is of a different quality altogether, and must have been shot during the production of this film, under the supervision of director of photography Marcel Zyskind. Given the real-world quality of many of the images, it is natural to assume that the voice's origins are not merely extradiegetic, but extrafilmic. Such hybridism – the combination of archive footage, archive voice-over and diegetic characters – supports the idea that the representation of an event (in particular, in the media) is always mediated by someone else and cannot be taken at face value.

The manifest schism between the real and its representation in the media has been exploited by many films over the years (*Natural Born Killers* and *Wag the Dog* among them), but curiously *The Road to Guantanamo* also opts for a voice-over near the end of the film, in this case not to satirise the mass media's ignorance of the facts (a theme that also lies at the heart of *Welcome to Sarajevo*), but to be serious in its presentation of the fictional facts. By this stage, the voice-over has little credibility left, especially since it is similar to the news agencies' omniscient voice-of-God, and consequently a large question mark hangs over "the facts" as reported by *The Road to Guantanamo*'s "Voice". One sequence of voice-overs (1:12:35 – 1:13:00) in particular stands out: first, the film's "official narrator" speaks of the Tipton Three's transfer to the Guantanamo Bay Prison in the past tense, before handing over to someone else, who supposedly spoke the words at the time (in the present tense). Both voice-overs are accompanied by archive or real-world footage, but the second, slightly longer audio excerpt is played over some fictional images as well – images in which $\text{Shafiq}_{\text{fictional}}$ is present, not unlike the composition of the scene at Sheberghan prison, discussed above.

This wholly audiovisual hybrid illuminates the problem of distinguishing between fact and fiction, even when the fiction is supposed to be based on actual facts, and it is a problem compounded by the fact that the credibility of the "factual" media accounts is (very deliberately) undermined by the film itself. Ultimately, the viewer's expectation that the documentary approach should reveal more truth about the actual world and its contents than a more overtly fictional approach is frustrated even though realism itself may be achieved in the process. This realism proves that a documentary approach does not always result in a realistic portrayal. The hybrid effect of the film's acted footage with originally documentary shots is useful in problematising the issue of the accuracy of representation, particularly in the media, even while it simultaneously emphasises the "real" events, inasmuch as the contemporary film viewer is willing to accept their existence based on photographic reproduction.

3.8 Conclusion

In the discussion of the first scene in *The Road to Guantanamo* it was suggested that actual scenes may be edited together in such a way that their meaning changes – a fact that underscores the importance of editing in the process of signification. The concept of possible worlds facilitates discourse about unactualised or non-real characters, situations and chains of events that nevertheless maintain a very strong link to the actual world. Whenever this link is emphasised, through the use of well-known/historical characters or events, and if, moreover, such entities are presented in a way that reminds the viewer of the documentary format, the specific entities gain in realism since they seem very close to the actual world.

In this chapter we also introduced the fictional operator: a reminder that all events contained in a film, whether they represent actual historical events or not, are somehow fictional since they form part of the always fictional world of the film. In this way, an event recorded from real life can and does change its meaning; this point will be central to the discussion of *Code 46* in Chapter 4, since the focus is on the fiction that results from a restructuring of the recorded real.

Chapter 4

Possibilities and diegeses

4.1 Introduction

The world of *The Road to Guantanamo* points to the actual world, but is not the actual world itself: it is a world created, shaped and narrated by the filmmakers and this specific world that is formed by the events of a narrative is referred to as the "diegesis"; by the same token, the sounds, objects and events that belong to this fictional space are all "diegetic". A diegetic sound is perceived to be emitted by an object belonging to the world represented by the story, though not necessarily present in the particular scene's visible space. Off-screen sounds are still diegetic, because they occur in the diegesis; by contrast, an omniscient narrator exists outside this space and is qualified as "extradiegetic".

In this chapter, we shall look at Michael Winterbottom's *Code 46*, a science-fiction film that presents a very different world from the present, even though the component parts of the composite diegesis originate in the actually present world.

The contents of filmic diegeses may be similar to the content of the actual world, or they may be organised according to an entirely foreign logic, but in essence the term has traditionally been understood to refer to a world different from the actual, for the simple reason that the events portrayed therein are fictional, or alternatively the presentation of actual events as "filmic" is necessarily fictional, because of its format and the narrative structure imposed onto it.

Marketa Lazarová,[67] arguably director František Vláčil's best-known film, contains a peculiar instance of implied transdiegetic presence by a narrator who belongs to a realm outside the diegesis, but nonetheless has the ability to perform in the diegesis itself. Perceived as an extradiegetic figure, the narrator addresses the viewer throughout the film, but at one point he also speaks to the character Bernard. This is a very unusual phenomenon (it removes the boundaries that exist between the narrator and the diegesis on the one hand, and the narrator and the viewer on the other hand), which serves to imply that the narrator shares space with both the viewer and the character, in the process indicating that all three parties operate in the same space.

This differs from the conventional intra-diegetic narrator insofar as an intra-diegetic voice speaks only to the viewer, while the same character is visibly present in the diegesis and interacts as such with other entities of the diegesis (or, as in the infamous case of Robert Montgomery's *Lady in the Lake*, this character, though not visible, can interact in a way that makes it explicit that he belongs to the diegesis as much as any other visible character). The narrator of *Marketa Lazarová* is not a diegetic character and yet he manages, albeit without visually manifesting himself, to directly address a diegetic character while still carrying out his duties as an invisible narrator. Such a situation is highly unusual in the cinema and easily qualifies as a postmodern moment, since the conventional boundaries between worlds are brazenly torpedoed.

It would serve this discussion well to examine the concept of "diegesis", since it is more deeply ensconced in film theory than the related terms "possible world" and "fictional world". The use of all terms will be examined or re-examined in this chapter, for they play a certain role in the construction of a film's fictional world and may be used to different ends to evoke a sense of reality in the viewer, especially where such material is directly traced from the actual world.

[67] While there exists some disagreement about the correct spelling of the title (the original novel has been published as *Marketa Lazarová* as well as *Markéta Lazarová*), the film itself presents the current spelling in the opening credits.

4.2 The contribution of Souriau

Étienne Souriau is widely credited with the introduction of the term "diegesis" into film vocabulary at the beginning of the 1950s and in an article entitled "La structure de l'univers filmique" (The structure of the filmic universe) he elaborates on his proposed application of this term and its derivatives to the fields of film theory. I shall make use of two important qualifiers that Souriau defines in this text: "afilmic" and "profilmic". "Afilmic" refers to the actual world existing as it does, "independently of the activity of cinematography" [68] (1951:240), and "profilmic" designates the physical world in front of the camera at the moment of recording.

The recording of the actual world (the afilmic reality) gives an image of profilmic reality: that particular segment of (stylised) reality as it looked with the film camera turned upon it, moulded into a rectangle. The world through the lens looks and is different from the world as it exists without the intervention of the film's production. However, it is also possible for the world as it appears on the screen to be similar in diegetic and profilmic respects, but different in terms of its screenic properties. For example, a film in black and white has this screenic property, but no viewer would presume to claim that the narrative world is black and white as well. These terms are used to express a diversity of properties and may refer to different kinds of worlds.

> All that is taken to be represented by the film may be called diegetic, and in the type of reality that is implied by the meaning of the film: what one may be tempted to call the reality of the facts; and this term doesn't even have any drawbacks if one bears in mind that it is a fiction-reality.
>
> (Souriau 1951:237)

The difference between the profilmic and diegetic realities is evident when considering sound in particular: often the sound that ends up forming part of the diegesis is added in post-production (also known as foley: a door creaking, wind howling). It should therefore be clear that the diegesis is not simply the segment of actual reality recorded at the moment of shooting the film.

[68] The translation from the original French of this and all subsequent quotations attributed to Étienne Souriau are mine.

In the quotation above, that which is "represented by the film" is not the re-presented image of profilmic reality – it is rather the fictional world, of which certain constituent parts are present in the particular film. This fictional world, whose contents seem to be united in fictional time and space, is the diegesis, although not everything in a film is necessarily diegetic.[69] A film may contain elements that stand *outside* the diegesis, or whose relationship to this space is ambiguous: the voice-over in *Marketa Lazarová*, whose identity remains a mystery insofar as it is not assigned a value (a body) within the diegesis itself, would be "extradiegetic". If an identity or a source within the diegesis is assigned to this voice-over, but the instance of producing the voice-over is not seen (in other words, an *acousmêtre*, according to Michel Chion 1994:129), the voice is intra-diegetic. "Intra-diegetic sound, then, at its simplest refers to the inner thoughts or voices of a narrator whose story we are witnessing" (Hayward 2000:86). More broadly, we may say that an intra-diegetic narrator is actual in the film's diegesis, but can somehow address the viewer directly; this is usually done off-screen, although Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* opens with such a to-camera address by the main character.

If the voice were de-acousmatised – in other words, if a mouth were seen producing these words within the fictional space of the narrative – it would become overtly diegetic. While the voice of a diegetic character is allowed access to the extradiegetic space, this is not the case with music. Music produced or played inside the diegesis remains diegetic, whatever its purpose might be for the rest of the film; in other words, in the example of music, the use of the adjectives "diegetic" or "extradiegetic" is dictated by the provenance of the music.

This is the case in *Wonderland*, at the end of the scene where Debbie has sex at the hairdresser's[70] and starts to dance to a song by the band *faithless*, titled "Don't Leave", playing in the background. When the scene ends and the camera shows life elsewhere in

[69] This statement will be revisited in Chapter 7, with examples from some postmodern films that clearly suggest this distinction; in the current chapter, *Code 46* will serve as a point of departure for a discussion of fictional worlds constructed from purely actual components.

[70] The second half of the DVD's Chapter 5, at 0:28:10 - 0:30:55

London, the song continues on the soundtrack – it becomes an *acousmêtre*, but there would be little justification in saying that it has suddenly lost its diegetic properties.

Souriau mentions what he calls "the universe of the discourse" and explicates this term by using the following example: "The proposition 'No dog can speak' is true in the universe of the discourse of zoology, but not in the universe of the discourse of the fable" (1951:232). The same idea is expressed by a term used elsewhere in English literature, namely "domain of discourse", and the similarity in usage is clear in the following example from John Heintz (1979:89): "Different domains [of discourse] characteristically bring with them different means of checking the truth of statements."

In the interest of consistency, I shall retain Souriau's vocabulary.

This "universe of the discourse", applied to narrative film, is synonymous with "diegesis". Without calling filmic universes by such a name just yet, Souriau claims that "any film, once projected, postulates a universe" and elaborates on this assertion by stating that "all films […] essentially postulate their own universes (with their characters, their beings and their things, their general laws, their time and their space, all peculiar to them)" (1951:232).

These universes have an implicit closedness, even if they demonstrate similarities to the actual world, since the discourse is confined to the fictional universe. Étienne Souriau has said that the "diegesis" refers to a "topography of the space *where the story takes place*" (1951:233) and Christian Metz, in the quotation below, also emphasises the use of the term within a fictional context.

> It designates the film's *represented* instance […] the fictional space and time dimensions implied in and by the narrative, and consequently the characters, the landscapes, the events, and other narrative elements, in so far as they are considered in their denoted aspect.
>
> (Metz 1974:98; original emphasis)

"Diegesis" seems to have little or no meaning outside the scope of a narrative:[71] it refers to narrative space, and even though the fictional space and time of a film might refer to

[71] In fact, the Greek *διήγησις* (diêgêsis) means "narration".

and reflect the actual world (α) with astonishing precision and fidelity, it cannot be equal to α since it is necessarily limited by the constraints of recording material, time, point of view, and so forth. Diegesis is an "imaginary world", says Noël Burch (1982:19). While filmic representations resemble reality to a greater extent than their literary counterparts, by virtue of the filmic image's immanent resemblance to objects found in real life, they are still always different from the original.

In short, we can contend that filmic diegeses begin and end with the films that provide the particular visualisations of their workings. Even when such films ostensibly point towards the actual world with clearly comparable events, the world of the film is never the actual world, and if claims about the actual world are made in or by the film, they might be false if measured by events in the actual world, but – save in the case of internal contradictions – they will be true in the film.

Filmic representations of historical events are intrinsically different from actual truth, since an event of the past is defined by its presence in the past and cannot be resurrected *post factum*, except in another form, and the two instances will be ontologically distinct from each other.

A diegesis, fictional by definition, is not constrained by the actual world, whereas possible worlds are more or less defined by their deviation from the actual world, since their existence depends on the possibilities of this world; a possible world is "possible" relevant to the actual world and if a state of affairs is logically impossible in the actual world, it cannot constitute a possible world. I see nothing in the definition of possible worlds that would deny any of them the status of a diegesis; however, the overarching term "diegesis" may be applied to more states of affairs than the string of possible worlds. The implication of this subdivision – diegeses exist that are not possible worlds – will be dealt with in the final chapter of this dissertation.

Code 46 will serve as a very interesting example of the kind of world that may be created by combining parts from the actual world, in the process forming something quite different. This transformation will be emphasised as one case of many in which

the meaning of the actual world changes as a result of its recording. This film by Michael Winterbottom also contains numerous instances of hybridism, on a visual and a linguistic level.

4.3 *Code 46*

I think about the day we met
I suppose you would have arrived *par avion*
Maybe you were the first to get to security
You didn't intend to stay

You only had twenty-four hour cover
So, luggage *a mano*

And they probably had a driver waiting
So you didn't need to find *un coche*

You'd never been to Shanghai before
It was all new to you

This excerpt from *Code 46*'s opening voice-over illustrates the film's peculiar linguistic blend; the diversity of the speech's roots exemplifies the narrative's larger mix of cultures and geography: William flies to Shanghai and at the checkpoint of the Chinese city he meets an Arab who peddles his goods in perfect English and responds with "*Gracias*" when William wishes him good luck. On the outskirts of the city, there are vast open spaces, covered in sand. The actual Shanghai is not surrounded by desert and the geographical disorientation is immediate; the different locations are not presented separately, but even though they are shown by means of actual footage, they constitute a fictional whole.

I should underscore the fact that this approach is prevalent in most film productions (with the exception of Dogme 95) and the fact that different real-world locations are often used to create a singular diegetic location shouldn't come as a surprise to anybody who has watched more than a handful of films. In the same way, many films use a set for interior scenes and actual locations existing independently of the film production to shoot exterior scenes, but in diegetic space they exist in fictional unity. Both the artificial sets and the (otherwise afilmic) actual locations become profilmic at the moment of

being recorded by a camera. What is different in the example from *Code 46* is that the meaning of an image that has not been tampered with differs greatly, because of its combination with other images, from the actual world.

Code 46 is set at an unknown date in the future and one could rightly argue that certain representations of places of the future might eventually be identical to the actual – not the actual *present*, but the actual *future*. However, even though the images might conceivably reflect the actual future or an actual past state of affairs, they cannot be a direct imprint of such a reality and therefore cannot serve as a recording of the camera's present. The images are always already representations, and consequently, fictional.

4.3.1 The world of the voice-over

Code 46's opening narration is provided by Maria Gonzalez, an otherwise diegetic character, but she does not utter these words while visible, nor is she conceivably present in the images that accompany the voice-over; the narration is therefore intra-diegetic. Maria's voice-over at the beginning of the film seems to cross over from the fictional world to address the viewer in the actual world, but it is not only this apparent dual existence that is problematic: the voice-over reveals information that Maria could not possibly be in possession of, given the memory wipe operation she undergoes halfway through the film. The character seems to be endowed with a degree of omniscience that does not befit her diegetic persona. Maria is a character of the diegesis, but there is no clue that might persuade us to think that her speech in the voice-over was pronounced in the diegesis, and therefore an argument may be advanced that the narration is intra-diegetic. However, since the kind of information she relates to us in the voice-over is different from the information that is accessible to her – that she *can* be in possession of – the voice-over is an example of an intra-diegetic narrator that is *enabled*, in other words such a narrator possesses knowledge that eludes the conventional intra-diegetic narrator, who obtains knowledge based on her

experience of the diegesis alone. In the process, the exact identity of Maria becomes all the more ambiguous.

Such an apparent replication of a character from the diegesis in extradiegetic space periodically occurs in the cinema (the narrator is intra-diegetic), but in this case, the information divulged by the narrator on the voice-over contradicts her status as a purely diegetic character whose properties are very similar to the actual world – there is no reason to believe otherwise. Or is Maria just an unreliable narrator? If the first part of the film is shown from Maria's point of view, even though she has no memory of it, then it is a pure invention by Maria with no diegetic truth beyond that of a story-within-a-story – true in its own world, but false in the diegesis.

The fictional Maria somehow gains access to the film's soundtrack and is able to express her thoughts on the matter and this transcendence, usually taken for granted by the film viewer, also enables her to know more than she would be able to; such a character shift would affect her standing as a realistic character with whom the viewer shares similar properties.

> The first half of the film […] is provisional – it's [Maria's] interpretation of events of which she has no recollection, piecing together a jigsaw with no more than half the pieces at her disposal.
>
> (Gilbey 2004:34)

Maria ultimately possesses properties of both a diegetic and an extradiegetic nature. The use of the intradiegetic narrator has long been a convention in the cinema, but in the case of *Code 46*, Maria has two different manifestations, since her knowledge as narrator does not rely on her experience in the diegesis.

4.3.2 Representation as a composite of the actual

What is the difference between the representation of a possible non-actual world and the future actual world (that has not yet come to pass)? According to Robert Adams (1974:211-212), the actual world is made up of its complete chronology of past, present and future events. While it is actually possible that Shanghai might be surrounded by

desert (someday) in the future, a credible consequence of the climate change tendencies evident at the beginning of the twenty-first century, such an extreme shift in the global climate[72] has not yet taken place. In a certain sense this Shanghai does not exist outside the realm of a projection, or the imagination, and thus it is analogous to a "possible world": a possibly future world. However, no image of the future can ever be a direct mould of reality; a mould can only be obtained of the present: there can exist no directly captured image if the capturing of the object on film does not occur simultaneously with the capturing of the light reflected from the same object. Of course, since the 1970s computers have often been used to generate images that have no actual referent and this fact constrains the realism of the object less and less as the physical rules of the actual world are applied to the construction and representation of the particular image.

> [Perceptually realistic images] display a nested hierarchy of cues which organize the display of light, color, texture, movement, and sound in ways that correspond to the viewer's own understanding of these phenomena in daily life. Perceptual realism, therefore, designates a relationship between the image or film and the spectator, and it can encompass both unreal images [which are referentially fictional] and those which are referentially realistic. Because of this unreal images may be referentially fictional and perceptually realistic.
>
> (Prince 1996:31)

In *Code 46* many of the images accurately reflect the actual world. Both the scenes in the desert and the scenes that show the city of Shanghai were shot in the real world, but since their relational meaning has changed, their connection to actual reality should be questioned as well. Shanghai is no longer the actual Shanghai, but on the contrary a fictional Shanghai in most ways identical to the actual Shanghai, except for being surrounded by desert. *Code 46*'s Shanghai is not only less actual because of such relational differences; it is less actual because it is the setting of a fictional story and therefore subject to the fictional operator. Even if the film's Shanghai was identical in all respects visible to the viewer, it would still be subject to the fictional operator. The

[72] The characters in *Code 46* shield themselves from the harsh sunlight: when William enters his hotel room, the windows are blown and he has to press a button on a remote control to dim the light coming through from the outside.

same is valid for the archive material in *The Road to Guantanamo*: the fictional operator is not influenced by the original intent of the material; if the material features as part of a diegesis, and suggests itself to be diegetic, then it is necessarily subject to a fictional operator.

As shown in the introductory quotation from the voice-over, and as much is evident in the film's dialogue, many commonly used words aren't spoken in English (the predominant language of the film's characters), but have been replaced by their equivalents in other languages and assimilated into the vocabulary of the film. This is a very apparent linguistic hybridism: words from, among other languages, Spanish ("*gracias*"; "*palabra*"; "*lo siento*") and French ("*pourquoi*"; "*comme ça*", "*à bientôt*") to Mandarin Chinese ("*ni hao*") are uttered during the course of the film between speakers of English. The greeting "*khoda hafez*" – a Persian-Arabic hybrid loanword used in some languages on the Indian subcontinent, i.e. a case of double hybridism – even makes an appearance in the film. Regarding the composition of the fictional world, Winterbottom explains as follows:

> From the beginning, we wanted to combine elements of the real world in a strange way rather than create an artificial world, to create something that's very familiar and has a lot of texture, but at the same time doesn't quite correspond to anything that really exists.
>
> (Davis 2004:57)

This quotation is also applicable to the variety of English used in the film, since the particular kind of English spoken in the film does not exist in our actual world: the version used in the film is the fictional counterpart of actual English, as it applies to *Code 46*.

Winterbottom clearly doesn't have any intention to create a fictional world from scratch, as it were: in *Code 46* and most of his other films discussed up till now, he bases his (fictional) stories in the actual world, impressing the quality of actuality on his viewer by many different techniques, but the direct recording of reality onto film (as opposed to digital addition) is always a primary concern, even while it is obvious that the original meaning might change considerably in the process. The final product is therefore firmly

rooted in real life, most of the images directly captured on film, but the arrangement of these building blocks assigns a wholly different meaning to the original. Even if a sequence such as the film's opening consists of images captured directly onto film, may the combination be called realistic? In spite of the guidelines for realistic representations, their point of contact with a structuring narrative could result in a divergence from the actual world.

4.3.3 A sum of a different order

I am borrowing the idea of a hybrid (though not the term in particular), whose meaning transcends that of its component parts, from Sergei Eisenstein, who is adamant about the possibility of meaning constructed beyond the simple recording of objects. He illustrates his point by drawing on hieroglyphics, and thereby aims to justify his desire for meaningful montage in the cinema:

> The point is that the copulation – perhaps we had better say the combination – of two hieroglyphs […] is regarded not as their sum total but as their product, i.e. as a value of another dimension, another degree: each taken separately corresponds to an object but their combination corresponds to a *concept*. […]
>
> (Eisenstein 1999:16; original emphasis)

Lev Kuleshov's experiments with montage are widely seen as supportive of, if not the inspiration for, Eisenstein's case. The "Kuleshov effect", as it has been dubbed, is produced by alternating the same image (in the most famous example, of a man's expressionless face) with other images that would "contextualise" the first. In this way, the viewer would "interpret […] even perceive differently the shots of the face: after a table laid out with food, the face seems to express hunger, after an image of a child, tenderness, after a naked woman, desire, and so on…" (Aumont & Marie 2005:64).[73] The juxtaposition of certain images therefore creates a certain transcendent or abstract meaning that, strictly speaking, was absent from both the component parts, but generated by their combination. In the same way, shots of Shanghai within shots

[73] My translation from the French.

originally filmed elsewhere combine to create a new city: the fictional Shanghai of the future.

In *Code 46*, William and Maria leave for the zone *on the outside* ("*al fuera*") and enter the town of Jebel Ali. While the location initially shown in the film greatly resembles the actual Emirati town of Jebel Ali, the two characters eventually end up at a hotel in a rural district where all the signs are in Hindi – not Arabic. When William flees with Maria by car from the hotel, the landscape abruptly changes from subtropical wasteland to sprawling desert, complete with camels. Following the climactic car crash in which William is involved, the establishing shot of the (unnamed) city where he receives treatment shows a very recognisable Hong Kong with its iconic Central Plaza skyscraper.

The film's opening credits are presented in a number of different languages (the title alone appears in English, Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, Arabic and Russian), and I shall briefly focus on the transition that takes place from one language to the other by examining the moment when the name of Michael Winterbottom appears on screen, when he is credited as the director. The written text is but one visible manifestation of this hybrid; it is further developed by the content of the image, namely William engaging in a virtual boxing match (his point of view shows up on screen as well).

William is (or is making-believe that he is) interacting with a reality that is nonetheless of a different type than his own.[74] In fact, he is the source for the virtual character he portrays in the world of the boxing match; his virtual counterpart can act in the virtual world, on his behalf.

At the same time, the text on screen transitions from one language to the other, halting at intermediate stages, during which the two languages' writing systems seem to fuse, generating a completely new combination that consists of familiar elements but is different, on the whole and in combination, from its essential building blocks. These new entities, formed as a result of the combination of parts from actual world, are

[74] I am referring to the different types of reality that William perceives in his capacity as a diegetic character. From the viewer's point of view, of course, the two types of realities are equally fictitious.

necessarily fictional, but in experiencing or referring to them, the viewer often draws on her own actual world experience.

4.4 Realism in the possible world

Can subjective realism be evaluated on different grounds than pure reproduction of the real world, or faithful reproduction of its general workings? Realism is assigned on a subjective basis and relies on personal reality, not the real world, but how is realism to be assessed if the subject is fictional? The subject, inasmuch as it shares common properties with the viewer, would act unrealistically if those properties allowed it to perform in a way that deviates too much from the actual world. Describing a given action, situation or event as realistic makes clear that the particular object is similar but not identical to the real world – it is, however, an exact reproduction of the world in which this fictional state of affairs obtains, without being 'the thing itself'.

In his conversations with François Truffaut, Alfred Hitchcock makes the following observation:

> [I]f you're going to show two men fighting with each other, you're not going to get very much by simply photographing that fight. More often than not the photographic reality is not realistic. The only way to do it is to get into the fight and make the public feel it. In that way you achieve true realism.
>
> (Truffaut 1967:202)

Here "realism" is meant not to refer to faithfulness to reality, but to the success of presenting the artificial such that the spectator's empathy or impression of presence is primary. Realism is a kind of honorific term which indicates that a certain action possesses the qualities that make it seem, in the eyes of the spectator, plausible in the world of the fiction, yet also feasible as a real-world event. Realism therefore entails credibility, but in the case of cinematic fiction, the term "credibility" only refers to the internal logic of the fictional world. Admittedly, in the case of fictional worlds, viewers are often expected to use their knowledge of the actual world, for example, when assessing logic and causality in the fiction.

Hitchcock would seem to defend the kind of immersion that is prevalent in postmodern cinema – films whose images feed off other images, rather than reality. "[P]hotographing that fight" is either documentary or, if dealing with fictional events, it is an approach that captures images similar to those of documentary films. The desire for objective truth that suffuses modernist cinema and manifests itself in the so-called "breaking of the fourth wall" has little to do with realism as it is discussed here, including Hitchcock's comments, because the cinematic illusion that includes realism is shattered if there is any effort to pull the curtain and reveal the "real" world, because in that case, the revelation of the film crew is not "the kind of thing" that happens in the actual world.

We have established that the criteria for realistic representation can and do change over time, or from one context to another, based on the viewers and their experience of reality, including the reality of images. However, if the world depicted on screen does not agree on important points with the reality of the viewer, it is likely that the viewer may not experience the events as realistic; on the other hand, if these events are presented coherently (again, perhaps, a qualifier that relies on the particular viewer), the events may well be perceived as credible.

> The diegetic location of *Bluebeard*'s castle is in France; the real (profilmic) geographic location of the castle is in Bavaria. A diegetic Tahiti can be profilmically represented by the Iles d'Hyères. The viewer has no interest in knowing this, except for the sake of curiosity. In order to understand and appreciate the film, it is enough that the filmophanic [screenic] appearance sufficiently meets the requirements of the diegesis.
>
> (Souriau 1951:237)

David Lewis addresses the issue of contradiction in possible worlds with the well-known example of Watson's war wound in the stories of Sherlock Holmes as written by Arthur Conan Doyle, and defends the idea of union or intersection as a solution to these common inconsistencies:

> Suppose two fragments disagree: ϕ is true in one, not-ϕ is true in the other. Then ϕ and not-ϕ both are true in the fiction as a whole. But their inconsistent conjunction is not, though they jointly imply it. […] It is true in the Holmes stories that Watson was wounded in the shoulder; it is true in the stories that he was wounded in the leg. It is simply not true in the stories that he was wounded in the shoulder and the leg both—he had only *one* wound, despite the discrepancy over its location.
>
> (Lewis 1983:277-278; original emphasis)

This highlights the inherent quality of truth in fiction, whatever the discrepancy with the actual world or its rules of conduct. Truth in fiction operates the same way as truth in the actual world: if a particular situation is described or shown, then it is true by virtue of its obvious fictional existence.[75] Given the fact that the two fragments have different properties, they are distinct and therefore not identical. Lewis would have it that the two fragments are identical in all respects except the one property under review, namely the exact location of Watson's war wound. If the dominant fragment, the world in which Watson's wound is located on his shoulder, is referred to by *W*, then this is the world at which all of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories take place *and* in which Watson's wound is on his shoulder. On the other hand, the fictional world *W*′ refers to a world, in all aspects identical to *W*, save for Watson having the wound not in his shoulder but in his leg.

Putting the situation like this, it is clear that *W* and *W*′ are two distinct worlds with their own rules and properties, which overlap almost entirely, and a given story that makes use of these worlds (that is, a story that features Sherlock Holmes and was written by Arthur Conan Doyle) uses either the one or the other. Watson is defined by his

[75] In the case of fantasy or hallucination, the event must be reframed within the context of such particular changes of the domain of discourse. While a hallucination on screen might not be true of the diegetic world, it is true of the reality of the character through whose eyes the viewer perceives this event because it exists (or somehow subsists) in that particular reality.

properties in both worlds, but at any given moment, as a diegetic character, he may only have the properties available to him in that world; in other words, his wound can only be found in *one* of the two places. Watson may be described as a hybrid with a phantom wound, whose conceptual existence is indisputable, even though its exact location depends on the context.

4.5 Conclusion

Even though *Code 46* contains many shots taken of our actual surroundings, the film is characterised by a number of departures from the actual world, both past and present: the voice-over belongs to a very human character, yet this character, in the world of the voice-over, seems to be omniscient; the story takes place at some point in the future; the language of the diegesis is English spoken with the use of many foreign words. The diegesis is clearly a hybrid or a composite of image and sound originating in the actual world, whose combination in the film produces a different world altogether. This same process occurs, often imperceptibly, in most films, and Souriau's contention that the viewer does not need to know the "real" circumstances of the production is generally valid. In the case of *Code 46*, however, the fact that some of the images clearly denote very different places in the actual world engages the viewer in her attempt to comprehend the diegesis.

The notion of the composite is founded on Eisenstein's praise of montage as the cinematic form of a hieroglyph, whose parts signify different things depending on whether they are shown separately or as a combination. While the result might sometimes consist of parts taken directly from the actual world, as in the case of *Code 46*, the sense of realism is still contingent upon the *viewer's* evaluation of this combination. The same applies to any actual event recorded by the camera: the recorded object's evident existence in the real world is separated from its representational dimension, which might very well have an unrealistic quality. The actual world and its influence on the construction of fiction will play a significant role in the following chapters.

Chapter 5

Hybrid realities

5.1 Introduction

In Michael Winterbottom's *Welcome to Sarajevo*, the viewer is confronted with a real-world event, the war in Yugoslavia, whose existence is undeniable. Some footage that seems (and generally is) documentary in nature, in other words recorded at the time, is used here to show the historical events *directly*. But the film also contains many fictional elements – aspects of the plot have been invented and characters are portrayed by actors – that appear side by side with the documentary footage.

In Chapter 3, in reference to *Medium Cool*, I mentioned Thomas Pavel's statement about the unitary nature of fictional statements that contain both actual and fictional entities, and the fact that the reader (or, in the case of a film, the viewer) can readily understand such states of affairs. In the current chapter I shall look at the use of actual footage in a fictional story, and to what extent the use of actual facts can support or destabilise the coherence of the fictional world.

5.2 "Mixed-bag" claims

Jerzy Pelc argues that language of literary works consists of two parts: empirical and intentional (1977:266). He goes on to say that the process of the interpretation of a claim, as well as the judgment of its validity, is based on the claim's status as an assertive statement. John Searle (1974:321) makes a similar distinction when he speaks

of serious (actually true) and non-serious (fictionally true) utterances. According to Pelc, the reader constantly performs an operation of comparison against real-world (empirically sound) data if the statement is meant to refer to the real world. Otherwise, if the statements (or "judgements", as Pelc calls them) are meant to be interpreted in a context removed from the real world, then they are qualified as "quasi-judgements" whose truth value may be determined by another set of rules.

> By pronouncing quasi-judgements we behave as if we believed what we say, but not seriously: we do not take responsibility for what we have said, we do not intend to verify nor substantiate that. […] [M]aking quasi-judgements results from creative acts which are intended not to comply with the existing state of things, but to go beyond that state of things, and even to create a new world by a «*sic iubeo*».
>
> (Pelc 1977:247)

Lubomír Doležel calls these kinds of claims, measured according to two different sets of rules, "mixed-bag claims" (1989:231). Although Pelc focuses on literary worlds, the more general concept of fictional worlds and its application to film is equally useful in this regard. In the quotation above Pelc's position is close to those of Searle and Van Inwagen,[76] insofar as Pelc suggests that some sentences should not be taken seriously (i.e. they are not propositions of actual truth); however, his proposal of a bimodal process of interpretation (1977:261) is problematic. Firstly, Pelc fails to set out any clear criteria according to which a certain set of rules should be applied to a certain situation. Secondly, even if a mixed sentence, containing a real individual making a fictional statement, was to be examined and both parts were found to be truthful (the real individual exists in the real world, while the fictional statement is true in the fictional world), the sentence would likely be false or not make any sense at all, since the state of

[76] Peter van Inwagen (1977:305) recommends that qualities be "ascribed" to fictional entities, instead of claiming that they "are", since this would avoid the pitfalls of a) implying that fictional objects exist, and b) directly assigning actual qualities to such fictional objects. By means of ascription, the viewer looks through a window at the fictional world, without transgressing the boundary that separates the two worlds of very different existential status.

Van Inwagen's method has the advantage of keeping the worlds separate while making possible the description and appreciation of the fictional world in terms that are generally employed in relation to the actual world. In this way, a meaning might be ascribed to the fictional world that is true of the fictional world, therefore context-specific. The properties, usually reserved for actual objects, are suggested by their ascription to the fictional objects.

affairs in which a real character makes a fictional statement does not relate to the actual world, unless the character is already involved in some form of "play". The same logic applies as in the case with lies, raised by Wolterstorff and examined in Chapter 3, where we established that, while a statement made about real things in the real world often doesn't obtain, it can obtain in a possible world that contains the counterparts of the individuals, but never their actual selves. The world of a film, the diegesis, is such a possible world. The representation of historical events is an instance where the facts of the actual world play an important part in the construction of the diegesis, but the conflation of these two worlds can provide interesting challenges to anybody who wishes to talk about one or the other.

5.3 *Welcome to Sarajevo*

Welcome to Sarajevo is an adaptation of the real-life drama involving ITN reporter Michael Nicholson, who spent time in Sarajevo in 1992 covering the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, and who adopted a young girl from an orphanage in the city. This saga is detailed in his book, *Natasha's Story*, first published in 1993. Winterbottom's film, released in 1997, looks at the day-to-day life of an ITN news crew in Sarajevo during this time, headed by a Michael Henderson, and centres on the story of Henderson's decision to take a young girl, here called Emira, back to England with him. Much of the film was shot in Sarajevo in 1996, barely a few months after the end of the war (Elley 1997; Black 2002:120).

Built on a foundation that seems very firmly rooted in real life, the film raises the same questions as *The Road to Guantanamo* regarding the media's penchant for presenting events in a very different light from actual historical fact, if not altogether falsely. In addition, this film contains an even more generous use of archive footage interwoven with fictional representations; events take place more or less the way they actually did, as documented by Nicholson and the media, but the name changes of this supposed actment of historical fact, or at least historical recollection, contribute to a sense that fact and fiction are meshed together. These complications are the result of the film's

steady blend of archive footage, clearly fictional footage, and so-called distressed footage,[77] meant to resemble television footage. Here, an apparent change in the mode of presentation (from film to television) sometimes involves a jump across the temporal divide. This so-called television quality that many of the film's images possess entails the presence of very evident scan lines producing images completely unlike those usually projected by a film projector onto a movie screen. Daf Hobson, the director of photography on *Welcome to Sarajevo*, achieved the effect by playing the material on a high-quality monitor and filming it in 35 mm. "We shot well within the TV frame so that we were exaggerating the feeling of the scan lines you get on television" (cited in Oppenheimer 1998).

5.3.1 Distressed footage

Already in the very first sequence, which culminates with the opening credits' documentary footage of a Sarajevo in happier times, there is evidence of stylistic hybridism and visual manipulation to blur the boundary between the fictional/filmic and the actual/documentary. Like most of the sequence to which it belongs, the opening shot is delimited by the borders of a 1.33:1 frame and its complete discolouration (it is shown in black and white) hints at, even if it doesn't strongly suggest, archival origins. However, the image suddenly changes colour; this transition accentuates the fluidity – therefore the manipulability – of the images, and in so doing the documentary status of this colour footage is unexpectedly in dispute. The next shot features the actor Stephen Dillane looking directly into the camera, in character as Michael Henderson, a news reporter for ITN. As Michael Henderson, he is addressing the diegetic television viewers and not the viewers of *Welcome to Sarajevo*.

Shortly before the film's title appears on screen, the 1.33:1 frame expands to 1.78:1, displaying more of the image already on the screen (a view over the Bosnian capital). In

[77] I am borrowing this term from Bruce Davis, quoted in Ebert (2008), who uses this qualifier to designate the action of "manipulating images to make them appear 'historic'". This is a practice propagated in a number of other films, with different purposes, from *Citizen Kane*'s famous "News on the March" sequence resembling newsreel footage to Oliver Stone's *JFK*, which contains numerous shots clearly designed to evoke a documentary feel of the events of 22 November 1963.

this way the borders of the image presumably shift to include more and exclude less, but the pliability of the image is highlighted again and even more so by the simultaneous appearance of the film's title, superimposed onto the image. The actual images are modified and the fictional images (containing action that was specifically staged for the film) are made to look actual/documentary, at least initially.

An early scene in the film[78] shows the aftermath of the infamous Sarajevo bread queue massacre that historically took place on 27 May 1992. It is shown from three different points of view:

a) the original news footage, shot on that day during the siege of Sarajevo;

b) a restaged version of the events, featuring some of the film's characters, such as Michael Henderson and Risto Babić, shot on 35 mm; and

c) this restaged version presented as inferior-quality TV camera footage with scan lines.

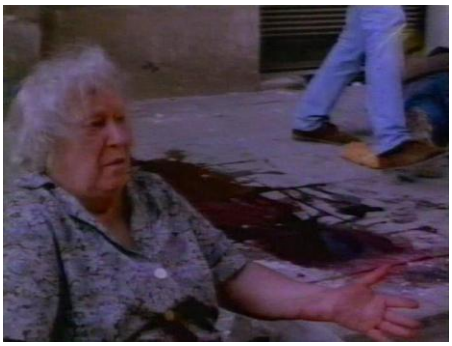
For much of the first part of the scene, the two "worlds" (one where the actors reside, the other where actual history is recorded) remain separate, and we are led to believe that only points of view *a* and *b* are present on screen and the viewer may distinguish one world from the other with the aid of the format used. The differences in the visual look of the film serve to indicate the differences in world status.

This separation between the two worlds implies that the actors remain on this side of the temporal divide. Consequently, since the scan lines have a more "historical" connotation, this material, which contains no actors, seems to be as historical as it looks, at variance with the artifice of the fictional representation that does contain actors. Warren Buckland (2002:211), in his discussion of *Jurassic Park* and *The Lost World*, speaks of "a seamless fusion and interaction [between digital dinosaurs and live-action characters]" that contribute to the realism of the two films in particular and claims there is an implied loss of realism if the scene lacks such interaction; such a

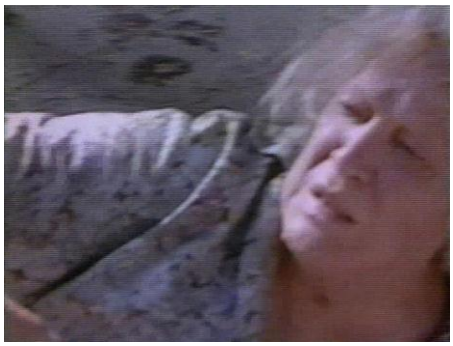
[78] 0:17:40 - 0:20:03

desire for homospatiality inevitably calls to mind Bazin's example of the child and the lioness in *Where No Vultures Fly*.

But then there is a moment that challenges the viewer's perception of point of view. An elderly woman is shown sitting on the pavement, desperately pleading for help; the image looks very similar to the others before and after, showing the bloody carnage of the attack. Later the 35 mm camera shoots the character of Michael Henderson. He encounters the same woman – with whom he evidently shares cinematic space and equally fictional existence. In this way the original point of view *b* is shown to be comprised of two different forms of presentation: clean 35 mm (*b*) and distressed (*c*), the latter being the documentary-style presentation of the fictional by means of a handheld camera.



35 mm footage (*b*)



Distressed footage (*c*)

In the film, this is the only example of a shot where Winterbottom reveals his hand and shows, albeit retrospectively, that a specific bit of footage was indeed distressed: manipulated to appear original. Often there isn't any distinction to be made between the different kinds of footage obtained in these two ways (technical measures were applied to ensure this blurring of the ontological lines) and the viewer has no way of disentangling the distressed from the documentary, unless individuals are shown whose presence in archive footage would be historically inaccurate. This blurring of the ontological lines can be used for artistic purposes to render the events more immediate for the viewer, as in the current example, or it may be used for more political ends, as Oliver Stone does in his film *JFK*.

This example recalls the argument that visual appearance alone cannot be trusted in order to ascertain the reality status of an image. A shaky image with the properties of television material can just as easily be an accurate as an inaccurate representation of an historical event. One image of a woman wounded in the attacks, carried away with her foot hanging from her leg by a thread of bloody skin, feels positively authentic and the format of the presentation contributes a great deal to this perception. The very graphic, visceral content of the image, coupled with a presentation that originates in real-world news situations, creates the impression that something on screen is a faithfully documentary recording of an actual world event, and it is very likely the case. However, it often happens that the viewer cannot validate the particular footage as being directly recorded onto film at the moment of its spontaneous occurrence and in other similar cases, where the content is indeed staged, the combination of presentation and content would imbue the material with a sense of realism that, for the viewer, could seem like actual reality.

Visually, another very interesting scene with regard to the process of "distressing" film shows the character of Flynn watching the arrival of a UN convoy, with recognisable individuals such as the British Foreign Secretary and the French President appearing to inhabit the same space as he does, were it not for one detail: this footage of the delegates is shown in television format (the images perceptible in television scan lines), while the group of journalists, including Flynn, is photographed directly onto normal 35 mm film stock. However, another fictional character makes his appearance on the TV footage and reveals it as distressed (the mere presence of the actor, a fictional element, makes the world in which he appears equally fictional), mixing real archive footage with a re-creation shot on both TV and film formats – similar to the scene showing the aftermath of the bread queue massacre earlier in the film.

> [O]ne may question the honesty of a movie in which a seamless wave of existing news footage and original fictional material makes it appear that the actual documentary images are seen and shot by the fictional television reporters in the film. […] But for Winterbottom and other directors, it is both necessary and acceptable to resort to special effects and fictional sleight of hand in order to make things (appear) real.
>
> (Black 2002:120)

Referring to the editing of the bread queue massacre scene, Winterbottom asserts that "[w]hen you don't see any journalists in the scene, i.e. the actors portraying the journalists, it's actual newsreel footage" (cited in Oppenheimer 1998).

His quotation may be applied to much of the film, to establish whether a particular shot is distressed or originates in the actual world, outside the immediate sphere of the film's production; however, it was shown above that this criterion does not always produce clear-cut groupings of "real" and "staged", and this combination of real and staged material often does not make it easy for the viewer to speculate on the origins of the different formats and, consequently, the representation of the real is questioned. In a news report covering the orphanage both Michael Henderson and Risto are shown in the television footage, visually indistinguishable from the actual reports of bombings and shootings shown earlier.

5.3.2 Traces of the actual in fiction

At 0:23:20 Henderson looks out through the window of his hotel room onto the streets of Sarajevo. What he sees – the mortars fired into surrounding buildings – is presented by means of footage that is of a visibly documentary nature: it is actual newsreel footage, like the shot from inside the taxi employed in *The Road to Guantanamo*. In the case of this hotel scene in *Welcome to Sarajevo*, unlike many other shots in the film, there is no reason to suspect a fictional (diegetic) cameraman shooting the images; it is much more reasonable to conclude that the visual presentation of Henderson's point of view (which is, admittedly, fictional) is supported by historical footage with great ontological sturdiness, albeit originating in an extrafilmic context. I contend that this peculiar combination of historical and fictional footage pursues a powerful connection

between the events of the past and the recreation in the present, even while the actions and the names of the characters should not thoughtlessly be ascribed to actions and individuals in the past.

Shot (35 mm)

Henderson's point of view (archive footage)

Welcome to Sarajevo contains at least one scene[79] in which a boom microphone is visible at the top of the screen. The importance of the intrusion of the boom in diegetic scenes is more problematic than its appearance in *The Idiots*, since Winterbottom's film does not examine, nor aspire to problematise, fictional representation in the way that the Danish film does. *Welcome to Sarajevo* generally seeks to present its story as true to life and does not explicitly examine the border between real and copy.

The appearance of the boom is not an unusual phenomenon in the cinema and many films contain traces of the filmmaking equipment which one would expect to be absent from the particular diegeses; however, in the scene in *Welcome to Sarajevo* in which it is appears, the question of the existence of such an element from a world outside the diegesis may be resolved by viewing the boom as a diegetic entity. Since the boom appears in the visible diegesis, it would make sense to provide a reason for its existence that stems from the diegesis itself. In other films, such reasons are often difficult to find in the diegesis and such cases may prove to be problematic for coherent discourse about the world of the film. If justifications for such appearances of objects were sought in the extrafilmic world, a discussion of the world of the film quickly becomes very challenging.

[79] 0:30:29

An investigation of the significance of such appearances inside the diegesis is beyond the scope of this dissertation; however, given the thrust of the current discussion, it may be argued that a world in which a boom does appear, but which is very similar to the actual world in other respects (and therefore may even be called 'realistic'), would almost certainly need to be redefined as a specific kind of fictional world.

Winterbottom acknowledges the original story by adapting the factual account of events as told by someone who was present at the time and shooting in the same war-torn location almost immediately after the end of conflict, "where the smoke seems still rising from the latest shellings" (Ebert 1998). Despite its apparent affinity to the neorealist films' war-torn settings, there are many (technical and narrative) differences between *Welcome to Sarajevo* and the films of post-war Italy. Contrary to both the neorealist and the Dogme movements, *Welcome to Sarajevo* does not take place here and now, but is based on historical events that occurred prior to the shooting of the film. Shot in 1996 and released in 1997, the film's story takes place in 1992, when the conflict in Yugoslavia had barely started. However, it doesn't explicitly state – except for the customary notice at the end of the final credits – that the events really occurred.

This notice claims that the film…

> […] is a dramatisation inspired by certain actual events. Some of the names have been changed and some of the events, characters, dialogue and chronology have been fictionalised for dramatic purposes.

The statement recognises the discrepancy between the real events and those portrayed in the film, because the film is (essentially) a fiction. The link with reality is retained, and there seems to be an acknowledgement that the film was influenced in its conception and/or development by factual events. Thus, some distance is introduced between the actual and the dramatised (the fictional), but the chronic use of actual news footage within the fictional story remains a procedure worth exploring, since it undoubtedly secures the fictional more tightly to the actual.

In the history of film there are many treatments of historical events that do not use documentary footage, but instead prefer to visually recreate the past in all its fictional

totality; examples range from *Raging Bull* (1980) and *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975) to *Downfall* (Der Untergang, 2004) and *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967). These fit easily into the category of the "recreated" or the "fictional", even though they are based on actual events. What sets Michael Winterbottom's film apart from such examples is his constant engagement with original materials, clearly associating the media footage from the past with his own actual footage of a fictional event, staged for the benefit of the production.

Any restaging, even the most minutely faithful, of an historical event would at best (though not necessarily) be realistic; however, it can never be actual. What is most interesting in this regard is the filmmaker's intention of presenting the material as an acceptable or suitable replacement for the actual event, according to the viewer, within the film. The willingness of the viewer to surrender to a feeling of acquiescence towards the realism of the footage relies in part on the content of the images, but also on the presentation itself. While there is nothing inherent in handheld footage that would attribute greater realism to its content than the more stable (or purposely lit) variety, the similarity that the result bears to well-known examples of "real world footage", like newsreels, *cinéma vérité,*[80] or the home video, certainly plays a big part in the elevated reality status of such material; in the case of *Welcome to Sarajevo*, this strategy is assisted by the footage shot at the time in the same style of on-the-spot news reporting.

There is a very definite ontological difference between documentary and other fictional footage (obtained by restaging the event and presenting it in a format similar to the conventional documentary), since the former was recorded at the exact moment when the events transpired. The importance of the visual quality of the material lies in the presentation of fictional footage as analogous to the documentary format, and because the form is associated to direct recordings of the actual world, rather than recordings of staged performances, the viewer reads the material either within the framework of "It is actual that…" or "It is fictional that it is actual that…" – both of which are preferable, when seeking a sense of immediacy, to "It is fictional that…".

[80] Referring to *Welcome to Sarajevo*, Xan Brooks notes that "[t]he film's *vérité* ambience teeters at times on the verge of documentary-style realism" (1997:57).

At 0:37:35 Flynn mentions the Omarska and Trnopolje concentration camps by name, and this remark is followed by material in television format that would be familiar to the viewer who followed the events of the conflict in Yugoslavia and saw these images, showing the prisoners of the camps, beamed around the world at the time. Such familiar images are arguably even more accessible to the viewer than any other kind of archive material, even if the viewer has no actual experience of the event portrayed: in this case, the viewer might have extrafilmic experience or knowledge of the events (the images). Although the narration over the footage is provided by the fictional character of Annie McGee (the real footage was shot by journalist Penny Marshall, whose fictional counterpart more or less corresponds to McGee), the images of the prisoners' emaciated faces have great authority as being truthful visual representations, a document of evidence, of the particular state of affairs.

The question arises, in the light of the discussion about fictional worlds in this section, whether such material must also be subjected to a requalification as fiction, in spite of its quality as an indisputably direct mould of reality. This is an important question, and one that also affects other films whose impact often relies on the viewer's unconditional acceptance of the veracity of such material, for example Oliver Stone's *JFK* in general and particularly the film's metatextual analysis of the famous 8 mm recording of the Kennedy assassination shot by Abraham Zapruder, also known as the Zapruder film. Broadly speaking, Stone relies on the viewer's recognition of the events in the film as events in the actual world and therefore wishes to comment directly on actual events. However, the illocutionary force of his statements, made either implicitly or explicitly in the film, depends on the viewer's perception and interpretation, firstly, of the arguments advanced by the main character in the fiction and secondly, of their applicability to the actual world.

The final sequence, set on a hilltop overlooking the city of Sarajevo, shows off the film's stylistic diversity by combining many different visual formats, including at least a dubbed actment, documentary (news) footage and distressed footage. The sequence revolves around an actual historical incident: the performance of Tomaso Albinoni's

"Adagio in G minor" by a lone cellist. The cellist in question was Vedran Smailović, a former member of the Sarajevo Philharmonic Orchestra, but it is not Smailović himself who appears in this scene, neither is it explicitly Winterbottom's intention for the musician to represent Smailović. It is in fact the character called Jacket, a friend of Risto; earlier in the film, Jacket had made reference to this event, announcing that he would "make a concert here in Sarajevo" (0:32:48). According to the final credits, Jonathan Williams performs the music and this is backed up by sound mixer Martin Trevis (1998). The sequence contains some unequivocally documentary footage, showing former French President François Mitterrand laying flowers, and the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, appearing in UN gear. The format in which these shots appear clearly designates them as television (or documentary), but the montage sequence contains other examples of very similar footage in which the actors' presence signals that this particular footage (containing the actors) is distressed rather than documentary. Furthermore, the sequence also contains some fake home video footage showing the fictional Emira in London. These different components that make up the film's final 90 seconds are gelled together by the music, ostensibly produced on location but in fact added in post-production, fusing the diverse group of snippets with entirely different factual statuses into a coherent entity that is wholly filmic.

By this stage it should be clear that the format of the material can be manipulated to appear to have documentary origins. This point has been made in Chapter 2, with specific reference to the Dogme films, but it is worth quickly noting that *JFK* bursts with this kind of filmmaking. The film is based on actual events and presents them in a fashion as documentary as possible, since the ultimate goal is the accumulation of material that pretends to be "visual evidence". Oliver Stone and his director of photography, Robert Richardson, adopted many different approaches in an effort to create an immersive atmosphere that draws on the viewer's knowledge of the history of images and throughout the picture there are many instances where a documentary style was adopted to produce images that have an air of historical transparency about them, in spite of the methods by which they were captured or constructed. As a result, based

on their own experience of the history of images and their knowledge of conventions in this regard, many viewers would perceive such images as being closer to the actual events (contrary to many others, this presentation is not anachronistic if compared to the technology of the time) because they seem to have been shot at the time.

5.3.3 Can a fictional statement be serious?

John Searle, in his article "The logical status of fictional discourse", states that "if the author of a novel tells us that it is raining outside he isn't seriously committed to the view that it is at the time of writing actually raining outside" (1977:321) and therefore such a (prototypically fictional) statement about the weather in a novel is "nonserious" (*ibid.*). Searle indicates the role of the author's intention in this regard, but sometimes such intentions cannot be readily inferred by the reader of the novel, nor the viewer of a film. *Welcome to Sarajevo* has a very peculiar postscript, informing the viewer, in a manner similar to the end of *In This World*, that "Emira still lives in London". Let us call this claim x.

Given the original story as detailed by Michael Nicholson, it should be easy to assess the truth of x, except for one problem: the film's character is called Emira, whereas the name of the Bosnian girl adopted by Nicholson is Natasha. In view of the film's fictional property, at least three approaches are available in order to help the viewer gauge the validity of x:

1) If Emira is a designator within the fiction that refers to the actual Natasha (i.e. Emira stands in a relationship to Natasha such that "Emira" may be replaced by "Natasha" in a sentence without changing the truth value of the particular proposition), we can easily arrive at x', consistent with x: "Natasha still lives in London". This claim x' can be verified as true in the actual world, while x is limited to the fictional world. It must be said, however, that the referential relationship between Emira and Natasha is not reciprocal; while "Emira" references "Natasha", the reverse does not hold, for "Natasha" does not represent anything except itself. The referential transparency is therefore

primarily unidirectional (from “Emira” to “Natasha”) except for the trivial case where “Natasha” may be substituted by “Emira” if and only if this substitution does not change the truth value of the particular proposition.

But this argument can be problematic because of the substitution of a fictional designator with an actual designator. While a fictional designator might stand in a referentially transparent relationship with an actual designator, the two designators are never identical (they have different relationships to other entities and these entities themselves are different from their actual counterparts) and if the truth value of the initial claim was determined by looking at the actual world, it would have no value, because in that case “Emira” is an empty term.

2) There is another interpretation available to the viewer: if we take the entire film to be fictional, then x does not depend on the extradiegetic facts and may very well be fictionally true. In the same way, according to David Lewis’s memorable example (1978:37), *it is fictionally true that* Sherlock Holmes lived at 221B Baker Street, whatever the actual validity of such a claim, or of any of its parts, might be in the real world. The state of affairs indicated by x is stipulated by the film and cannot be false, since the claim, by its mere presence on screen, is necessarily *fictionally* true. In other words, if the narrative ϕ is fictionally true, then any part of it would also be fictionally true, by virtue of belonging to ϕ. Therefore, if we take F(ϕ) to mean *it is fictional that* ϕ, and x is a subset of, or belongs to, ϕ, then it should be self-evident that F(x).

This would mean that – even in the event that x is a piece of documentary footage – it is fictional if it belongs to this fiction and may be placed in the scope of the fiction operator. Everything in a work of fiction is fictional, even if it actually happened, but its occurrence in the actual world and its occurrence in a fiction are two different things. If the film is taken as fictional, then the final text

also belongs to the world of the fiction and is therefore necessarily true in the fiction.

3) A final interpretation that may be inferred from x, given the statement's lack of reference to a family name, is that it is Emira Nušević, the young girl who plays the character of Emira in the film, who "still lives in England", in which case *Welcome to Sarajevo* would generate the same complications as discussed in Chapter 1 on the topic of *In This World*.

In This World contained at least two different Jamals, both pretending to refer to (be denoted by) the same real-life Jamal Udin Torabi. $\text{Jamal}_{\text{real}}$, the actor, portrays the role of $\text{Jamal}_{\text{fictional}}$, supposedly based on his own life experiences, or an amalgamation of his story and others that are similar. Thus, $\text{Jamal}_{\text{real}}$ is apparently playing himself, and viewers are led to believe that they are watching a re-enactment; but since the events never really happened, $\text{Jamal}_{\text{fictional}}$ and $\text{Jamal}_{\text{real}}$ have a referentially opaque relationship to each other: $\text{Jamal}_{\text{fictional}}$ has no referent in the real world, even if the film pretends otherwise and $\text{Jamal}_{\text{real}}$ does not denote $\text{Jamal}_{\text{fictional}}$ either, since he never actually performed the actions of the character he portrays in the film.

If *Welcome to Sarajevo* is indeed remarking on the current status of the actress Emira Nušević, the information before the end credits would be utterly pointless, since the film is not supposed to be about the actress (the film is not a re-enactment), but about the Natasha that she represents in the current fiction.

While the problem of identical proper names generated by *In This World* isn't the same in *Welcome to Sarajevo*, the latter film's main character has some of the same polymorphous qualities where her relation to the real world is concerned. $\text{Emira}_{\text{fictional}}$ is portrayed by $\text{Emira}_{\text{real}}$, but unlike $\text{Jamal}_{\text{fictional}}$, $\text{Emira}_{\text{fictional}}$ denotes a very definite real-world entity, namely $\text{Natasha}_{\text{real}}$.

The film's final credits are preceded by a number of statistics relating to the Bosnian conflict, listing the number of Bosnian casualties and fatalities and the number of

children injured and killed. Beneath these factual data, the claim (either fictional or irrelevant) appears that Emira still lives in England.

If the final claim is fictional, then Winterbottom achieves a textual hybrid of fact and fiction – a very likely proposition. If, on the other hand, x is about the young amateur actress Emira Nušević, then all of the film's final statements may be verified (or falsified) in the real world, but within the context of this film, x would be a *non sequitur*.

Earlier in the chapter, the concept of "mixed-bag claims" was shown to be lacking in many respects, and the current example clearly shows what such claims look like as text. If the former claims are evaluated according to actual statistics and the last claim about the fictional Emira is measured against the world of the fiction (this film being a fiction, the text necessarily generates the state of affairs it is asserting), then the reader does switch back and forth between different modes of validation and it would seem to corroborate Pelc's position. If this is indeed the case, then it must be applied to the film as a whole, in which some parts would be compared to reality, while others are left to the realm of fiction and assessed within that frame of reference. This approach generates too many problems, since the viewer either cannot distinguish between different footage of staged and real events, or does not possess the knowledge to compare the fictional events of the film with the actual events. And while many events might appear to be "realistic", this does not contradict the fact that some parts are in no way direct reflections of the real world.

I have stated that real-life objects appearing in a fiction cannot be identical to the objects of the actual world. This statement is preferable to Pelc's "mixed-bag" theory, since it produces a more elegant, homogeneous combination of the objects present in a film (all of them are fictional), but more importantly, real-world objects inevitably acquire different relational qualities as soon as they are added to a fiction. We saw this line of reasoning in Nicholas Wolterstorff's example of Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan (Wolterstorff 1989:246), whose fictional counterparts are allowed to meet on Reagan's

first day in office, and it is clear that neither 'Carter' nor 'Reagan' would refer to the same individuals as in actuality if they acted differently in a fiction.

The reason why Pelc's theory is appealing is the indisputable fact that, its appearance in a fiction notwithstanding, the particular information given at the end of the film is extradiegetically true. These facts are understood as actually true, not measured within the framework of the fiction, but as the real-world referents of the fictional facts; therefore, while the fictional facts themselves cannot validate the actual facts, the latter may be referred to by the fiction.

If the fictional operator is applied, which generally provides a homogeneous mass of entities, the statistics must be viewed as fictional, even if they may be verified in the actual world. In this case, the fictional Emira, as stated by the film, still lives in London – a fictional London.

5.4 Conclusion

Welcome to Sarajevo tries to be a transparent representation of actual historical events, but its reference to these events, by definition not merely outside the frame of the fiction, but part of another world entirely, poses problems for anyone who wishes to pin down the world of the film, i.e. the diegesis. This diegesis, a thoroughly hybrid reality, is formed by combining documentary footage with recreated scenes as well as purely scripted or imagined (fictitious) scenes, some of them presented in a more "documentary" format, like the supposed home video footage of Emira playing in London. Textual references also pretend to refer to the real world, even though the Emira of the film does not belong to that world.

Postmodern cinema will continue to blur the boundaries between the actual and the representation of the actual and goes about this in a playful, self-consciously transgressive way. In both *Welcome to Sarajevo* and many postmodern films, the distinction between different kinds of representations (documentary, fictional, re-enacted) is no longer clear and in fact such films seek to elide any obvious differences.

To investigate the transparency of the image is modernist but to undermine its reference to reality is to engage with the aesthetics of postmodernism. For while modernism may be regarded as a detached 'scientific' (Brecht) scrutiny of the means of representation, postmodernism raises the question of the very possibility of representation itself.
(Wilson 1990:396)

Chapter 6

Worlds of images

6.1 Introduction

In the last three chapters we witnessed a shift away from the idea of strict truth (or fidelity to the real) towards a domain where the rules of the real – according to which we can judge whether something is "realistic" or not – are no longer essential in the representation of the world of the fiction, since the viewer's frame of reference now includes not only actual reality, but also the reality of a multitude of other worlds of images. This inevitably signals a transition towards a world that is isolated, independent from the actual world; yet, as we shall see in these last two chapters, the narrative potential (or importance) of the actual world in the postmodern world is far from exhausted.

The following chapters will examine the usefulness of a term such as "realism" in a context where the actual world has ceased to occupy a place of primary representational importance, but is itself merely one of many worlds of images. In effect, it will become clear that the actual world is neither independent nor isolated from the other worlds of images, but is one of these worlds and exhibits information that may be true in many worlds, though not necessarily true of one specific diegesis. The impact of such a claim on our postulate that the facts presented by a film necessarily obtain in the world of the film will be important in this regard.

Modernist films insist on being taken seriously and sought to reflect the real world by accentuating certain aspects that classical cinema had done away with for the sake of elegance. Laurent Jullier and Michel Marie (2007:142-143) list three important points about modernist cinema: the modernist filmmakers were generally "wary of the star system"[81], with the consequences of cult of personality still fresh in their minds; they were equally "wary of a polished style", because "the absence of accidents, improvisation and blunders […] reveals an ideological rigidity"; nor did they want to tell "stories" because "telling stories means lying".

> This refusal to tell lies often leads filmmakers to reflexivity (they put the medium of cinema itself on the screen) and distanciation (a technique that comes from the theatre of Bertolt Brecht and prevents the spectator from becoming too deeply absorbed in the cosy world of the fiction).
>
> (143)

Many of Jean-Luc Godard's films from the 1960s would feature an individual who is presented as the actual actor or actress, as well as the character he/she is portraying. This individual would sometimes address the viewer directly and this action is perceived as breaking the wall between diegesis and extradiegesis, supposedly allowing the actual viewer to gain access to the real.[82] Such a strategy seems to aim for an increased on-screen visibility of the real, but viewers, insofar as they can, need to distinguish between "pretended real" and documentary real. While the argument may certainly be advanced that the representation of the "real" world is already fictional, or is manipulated by the director (by means of his choice of perspective, editing, or in some other way), the intention of the modernist filmmaker seems to be a desire for the truth, in other words, a faithful representation of the real – or at least, this filmmaker's reality.

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[81] This and all the following quotations from the book by Jullier and Marie are my own translations from the French.

[82] At least, that is the inferred position of such films. In *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* (2 or 3 Things I Know About Her, 1966), Godard's voice-over presents a character first as the actual actress, Marina Vlady, who is looking directly at the camera, then as her character, Juliette Janson. *Le gai savoir* (The Joy of Learning, 1969) ends with the character of Émile saying that the film they are in is a failure, before he and Patricia say goodbye to each other using the respective actors' real names (Jean-Pierre Léaud and Juliet Berto): "Godspeed, Juliet. // God is dead, Jean-Pierre."

In postmodern cinema, however, this "real" is either absent, amorphous or otherwise problematised. Even where an individual might break the fourth wall with a direct address to camera, the viewer knows that she doesn't necessarily gain any access to the real (it is, at best, a reality framed by a fictional operator) and rejects the idea that the speaker's words refer back to actual reality. Instead, the words refer to some other world and if there are coincidences between the actual world and this other world, they are purely coincidental. Modernist texts regard reality with a scientific eye and often use spatiotemporal continuity as proof of their fidelity to reality. An example of this process is the rigidity with which many of the modernist filmmakers (most visibly the films of Jean-Luc Godard and the work of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet) "respect the procedure of simultaneously recording image and sound"[83] (Jullier 2004:129). The often very audible change in the soundtrack, an abrupt shift that occurs exactly on a cut, is evidence of this respect for the audiovisual integrity of a shot.

While realism cannot be equated to modernism, the central modernist desire was the search and representation of the truth, even if sometimes this "truth" consisted of both diegetic and extradiegetic parts. The postmodern strategy will be a disavowal of the importance of any kind of *actual* truth (that is, propositions that would be true about the "real" world). Postmodern cinema seeks a thrill ride of sensations, instead of aiming for the "truth" that modernist cinema had as its goal; it rejects the law of the excluded middle (according to which a proposition is either true or false) and favours an approach towards its content that complies with a statement like "it is neither true nor false". In a manifesto written in 1966 the architect Robert Venturi (1977:16) had already indicated such a desire:

> I like elements which are hybrid rather than "pure," compromising rather than "clean," distorted rather than "straightforward", ambiguous rather than "articulated" […] I am for messy vitality over obvious unity. […] I prefer "both-and" to "either-or".

[83] My translation from the French.

This is a very valid approach when it comes to describing the kinds of mixtures one may identify in postmodern cinema. Many of our previously discussed film sequences, like the protest in *Medium Cool* that contains apparently real riot police with fictional characters, may be expressed in this way, and this is often the course taken by the viewer. However, the fictional operator that was used in the previous chapters does not disappear and remains an important point of departure to explain the various examples of such mixtures, even if the components are clearly of different ontological natures.

In this chapter, Michael Winterbottom's 2002 film *24 Hour Party People* will be used to demonstrate how postmodern films engage with the actual world and what issues arise when the notion of realism is applied to films that no longer *represent* as much as *engage* in a very different way with actuality.

Postmodernist films' subversive use of modernist strategies, like the to-camera address, satisfies Venturi's appeal for "both-and", because the conventional meaning of such an address (at least, its implicit truth, whether actual or fictional) can be either playful or serious, and it is not self-evident that the film would make its stance unambiguous.

6.2 What does a to-camera address really mean?

The to-camera address (an act that appears to break down the wall between diegetic and extradiegetic worlds), which means that a character looks straight at the camera and seems to address the extradiegetic[84] viewer directly, has been used in a wide variety of films, with different intentions: these range from the films of Chaplin, where an occurrence underscores the theatrical aspect of the performance, through the period of modernism to more postmodern adventures, including those of Winterbottom under discussion in the current and following chapters, namely *24 Hour Party People* and *A Cock and Bull Story*. The effects of such an address are, however, quite different depending on context: whereas Godard often uses it to create distance between the viewer and the film, in the tradition of Brecht's epic theatre, Steve Coogan (in *24 Hour*

[84] In other words, characters addressing a diegetic camera, for example, footage from *The Blair Witch Project*, are excluded from this discussion.

Party People) encourages the viewer to go along on the wild ride that is about to commence.[85] Compared to its use by modernist filmmakers, the purpose of the to-camera address is slightly different in the playful context of postmodern cinema. For example, *24 Hour Party People*'s intention is clearly one of immersion, in spite of its outright artifice, and this difference of intention is arguably one of the most clear-cut distinctions between the two approaches to storytelling in film.

The to-camera address has been used to make the viewers aware of the fact that they are watching "a film" and such self-reference, and more generally the reference to the medium of film, is a metafictional act. Modernist cinema contained such metafictional acts, used to alienate the audience and serve a function of reflection and self-reflexivity, in accordance with the modernists' desire to lay bare "the device" (MacCabe 2003:158), i.e. the filmmaking process itself. According to Lubomír Doležel, metafictional utterances

> [deprive] the speech act of its performative force. […] Fictional worlds constructed by self-voiding narratives lack authenticity. They are introduced, presented, but their fictional existence is not definitely established.
>
> (1989:238)

Four years earlier, Doležel had questioned the solidity of such worlds that seem determined to implode by focusing on the fact that they are (linguistic) constructions: "Inauthentic fictional worlds are self-destructive since they undermine the very bases that support them: in other words, fictional existence"[86] (Doležel 1985:16). But such a statement seems to be rejected by the critical and popular acclaim of many films that contain these kinds of references to their own construction and, especially in postmodern cinema, metafictional statements do not prevent the viewer from nonetheless following the plot and enjoying the film. One of the best-known moments in Jean-Luc Godard's *Pierrot le fou* (1965) occurs while Ferdinand, played by Jean-Pierre Belmondo, is driving down a country road with his girlfriend Marianne and turns to the

[85] Another example of such an invitation directed at the viewer to "play along" can be seen in Michael Haneke's *Funny Games*, in which one of the villains turns to wink at the camera, suggesting that the viewer is complicit in the events. Kurt Russell's wicked smile at the viewer in Quentin Tarantino's *Death Proof* is a similar gesture signalling that the fun is about to start.

[86] My translation from the French.

camera to make a comment to the effect that Marianne always wants to have fun. When she asks him whom he is speaking to, he mentions the film's audience – a comment that she blithely accepts. Such an inclusion of the viewer in the world of the film, without any pretence that the world of the film is also the "real" world, is a central postmodern manoeuvre.

6.3 The conflation of boundaries

The postmodern film's use of the to-camera address (or the playful acknowledgement of the viewer) blurs the boundaries of the fictional/(f)actual dichotomy, whereas the modernist film breaks the fourth wall to establish a clear break between fictional and factual. The same is true of the strong use of intertextuality, whereby the diegesis undermines its own solidity by constantly pointing to and borrowing from other worlds, sometimes actual but mostly fictional, either case subsisting outside the world of the immediate diegesis.

Ihab Hassan, in his article entitled "The Culture of Postmodernism", schematically compares the characteristics of modernism to those of postmodernism (1985:123-124). In a linguistic comparison between the two movements, Hassan claims that modernism privileges hypotaxis (one part is subordinate to another), whereas postmodernism is all about parataxis (two parts, or more, are on an equal footing). This analogy is well illustrated by the pairing of the real with the fictional. In modernism, the two are quite distinct, but in postmodernism they may seem to overlap and this collapse of the former structure has led to an interpretation according to which postmodern "anarchy" is opposed to modernist "hierarchy" (123).

> Perfect simulation is the goal of postmodernism; thereby no original is invoked as a point of comparison and no distinction between the real and the copy remains.
>
> (Hayward 2000:281)

The opening credits of David Fincher's film *Panic Room* are a very good example of the kinds of images that blur the distinction between events and objects (like individuals in the films discussed in this chapter and the next) belonging to the world of the diegesis

or to some other world of which the outlines are never made crystal clear to the viewer. The text-based opening credits of Fincher's film seem to be integrated into the diegesis itself, as made visible by traces of the letters on reflective surfaces in the diegesis and the shadows of the surroundings onto the letters.

A similar merging of the boundaries between real and fictional appears elsewhere, especially in scenes of violence, where filmmakers seek the total immersion that defines postmodern cinema: the sequence in *Saving Private Ryan* showing the Americans arriving on Omaha beach and The Bride's swordplay with the Crazy 88 in a Tokyo night club in *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* both feature drops of blood that reach the lens of the camera – suggesting that the camera has some sort of (undefined) diegetic presence.

6.4 The postmodernist approach to history

Postmodernism also applies to a certain kind of approach to history, or rather an outright rejection of "the settled body of history"; it rejects the idea that history is something that can be fully comprehended. The truth of actual history, and by extension of actuality, is a convention that is not absolute and may be subverted.

In a letter to Michael Köhler the *Village Voice*'s John Perrault writes the following:

> Postmodernism is not a particular style, but a cluster of attempts to go beyond modernism. In some cases this means a 'revival' of art styles 'wiped' out by modernism. In others it means anti-object art or what have you.
>
> (Köhler 1984:5)

Perrault's assessment of the scope of postmodernism is very applicable to the many different films that have been lumped together in spite of their diversity. The assertion is admittedly a vague one, but it is useful. On the other hand, Linda Hutcheon focuses on the fact that postmodernist literature often consists of historiographic metafiction.

> [Linda Hutcheon] has come to identify postmodernist fiction pre-eminently with what she describes as 'historiographic metafiction'; a mode […] which self-consciously problematises the making of fiction and history. […] [P]ostmodernist fiction reveals the past, she says, as always ideologically and discursively constructed. Its irony and use of paradox signal a critical distance within this world of representations, prompting questions not about 'the' truth, but 'whose' truth prevails.
>
> (Brooker 1992:229)

History becomes an unstable text that can be read from various points of view and with which the current text (the film) is in conversation, producing an intertextual dialogue that primarily problematises the accuracy of received history. "The past [has become] a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum" (Jameson 1984:66). Jameson's view of the past will be relevant in my discussion of the way in which Michael Winterbottom's *24 Hour Party People* approaches history; however, this is but one part of postmodernism: many works of postmodernism are set in the present and have no desire whatsoever to deal with the past. In Chapter 7 I will look at *A Cock and Bull Story*, whose diegesis corresponds *more or less* to the present of the actual world.

> Postmodernist fiction [violates] the constraints on "classic" historical fiction: by visibly contradicting the public record of "official" history; by flaunting anachronisms; and by integrating history and the fantastic.
>
> (McHale 1987:90)

In reference to a number of postmodern novels, Linda Hutcheon emphasises the fact that "there is no dissolution or repudiation of representation; but there *is* a problematising of it" (1989:50). Postmodernism may therefore not be defined as a strict reversal of the modernist approach that claimed to be a more self-assured representation of (or quest for) truth; while works of postmodernism might be outright denials of the possibility of truthful representation, many merely problematise the issue by subverting the suppositions. Postmodernism cannot be strictly defined as anti-realist, anti-truth or anti-modernist; it rather entails a pluralism, in contrast to the strictures of modernism and structuralism in particular.

In postmodernist cinema there is no longer the kind of problematisation of representation which laid bare the cinematic composition of the construction, as was the case in modernist cinema, but a problematisation of our perception of the real. "Here not the signifying process but the fixed nature of *reality* is questioned" (Lash 1988:329). Films like *24 Hour Party People* and *A Cock and Bull Story*, both dealing in their different ways with the permeable nature of actual reality and its representation on screen, will be of note in this regard.

6.5 The slippage of meaning

Postmodern images usually point not to everyday reality, but to a reality that is already a substitute, consisting of more images. This is done self-consciously and with the aim of being "recognize[d] and enjoy[ed]" (Jullier 1997:7) and *24 Hour Party People*'s use of historical footage in unexpected ways will display this approach very well.

Within the context of this dissertation, since the images of postmodern films (in particular, those with plots set in the recognisably actual world) have a much more indirect relationship to the real than the realist film theorists envisioned, the question arises whether postmodernism implies a departure from realism. On the other hand, as we have seen, it is by no means certain that access to the "real" is possible at all, even though the film is measured against this "real" (or, rather, the viewer's perception of the real, in other words, his or her "reality") in order to assess its realism.

> If much of modernism appears hieratic, hypotactical, and formalist, postmodernism strikes us by contrast as *playful*, paratactical, and deconstructionist.
>
> (Hassan 1985:123; my emphasis)

Can postmodern films still be realistic? They do not pretend to say anything truthful about the actual world, but in their approach to actual history, they do insist on using the recognisably actual world as an element of the constructed fiction. However, the intended use of the actual world is to read it playfully, without historical seriousness or pretence of telling the truth.

> It is 'a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself'[87]. This is effectively to deny a relationship of correspondence: discourse cannot correspond to the non-discursive because there is only one discourse. [R]eality is reduced to the *simulacrum*.
>
> (Wilson 1990:391)

Tony Wilson defines the postmodernist aesthetic as a context in which "the experience of the image is detached from acquiring a knowledge of the real. Or, alternatively, the experience of the images becomes *ipso facto* the experience of reality" (Wilson 1990:392). In other words, we can no longer trust that reality is a perception of the real, but rather a perception of substitute signs (a simulation) of the real. The source of the representation is a world of images and the only knowledge available to the viewer is in the context of a fiction constructed from images that might duplicate and replace the original, but can never be identical to the original. "In a postmodern ontology of television and the world, 'reality' for the viewer is to be identified with a conjunction of images" (Wilson 1990:396).

In *24 Hour Party People* this "conjunction" is the visual fabric of the film itself – it is the totality of images woven together and thus the film's 'reality' consists of much that is extradiegetically sound, but it includes a great amount of material that has nothing whatsoever to do with historical authenticity. The film is composed of scenes where characters admit to the falsity, or question the truthfulness, of the representation of the past, or scenes that misrepresent past events, with or without the intention of doing so.

> To signify via figures rather than words is to signify iconically. Images or other figures which signify iconically do so through their resemblance to the referent. And signifiers (figures) which resemble referents are less fully differentiated from them than signifiers (words, discourse) which do not.
>
> (Lash 1988:331)

[87] Wilson quotes from Baudrillard, and the extended quotation is worth repeating here:

> It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double, a programmatic, metastable, perfectly descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes.
>
> (Baudrillard 1994:2)

This resemblance between the figure and the referent in the cinema is important; still, it is worth pointing out Christian Metz's claim that the cinema is positioned at an optimal point that enables it to generate the greatest impression of realism of any form of representation (Metz 1974:13).

> A representation bearing too few allusions to reality does not have sufficient *indicative* force to give body to its fictions; a representation constituting total reality, as in the case of the theatre, thrusts itself on perception as something real trying to imitate something unreal, and not as a realization of the unreal. Between these two shoals, film sails a narrow course: It carries enough elements of reality– the literal translation of graphic contours and, mainly, the real presence of motion– to furnish us with rich and varied information about the diegetic sphere. […]
>
> (13-14; original emphasis)

Scott Lash describes the relationship between the figure and its referent as "less fully differentiated" (1988:331) than is the case in other discourses. This point is very relevant to postmodern cinema, since the latter readily exploits such problems of individuation, as we shall see in this chapter (with *24 Hour Party People*) and in Chapter 7 (with Winterbottom's *A Cock and Bull Story* and in particular Steven Soderbergh's *Ocean's Twelve*).

Lash argues that postmodern cinema "foregrounds spectacle over narrative" (1988:328) and in so doing it is "figural", as opposed to the "discursive" cinema of modernism, which "draws attention to the rules, the norms and conventions of cinematic signification itself".

Whereas modernist cinema was first and foremost concerned with the viewer's intellect, and positioned the viewer so that he/she could reflect on the representation itself, postmodern cinema stimulates the viewer's senses and aims for complete immersion. Scott Lash's concept of postmodern cinema as an immersive sensorial spectacle is expanded by Jullier's notion of the "sound bath" (Jullier 1997:58-61) that has enabled recent filmmakers to physically affect the viewer by means of targeted audio effects. Of course, the foregrounding of sounds and images does not take precedence over the discursive aspect of the film and the inclusion of the one does not

require the exclusion of the other, as we shall see in both of Winterbottom's more postmodern films, discussed in the current and the next chapter.

In postmodern cinema, the transparency that was so dear to André Bazin has disintegrated, since the accessibility of the actual world is very visibly questioned by the film, and while the immersive production values might entice the viewers to believe that they have indeed been absorbed into a realistic fiction, the possibility of a direct link back to reality has become very dubious. "[T]here is no transparency, only opacity", says Linda Hutcheon (1989:47) and this opacity applies to representations of the past and the present. "[The] past as 'referent' finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts" (Jameson 1984:66).

6.6 *24 Hour Party People*

"I'm being postmodern before it was fashionable."
Tony Wilson in *24 Hour Party People*

The narrative action of Michael Winterbottom's 2002 film is set between 1976 and 1992, and mostly corresponds to particular incidents at the time, even though some of the flash-forwards contain material from much later; in the process there occurs a conflation of different segments of the narrative chronology. However, at the same time, because of the unreliable narrator who is self-consciously reflexive and even anachronistically retrospective (the quotation at the top of this section exemplifies this temporal hotchpotch), and the fact that most of the material is (re-)staged, the film takes place in an artificial diegesis that is often consistent with the events and characters from the "real" world which it points towards, but which it does not intend to represent completely accurately.

24 Hour Party People takes a look back at the Manchester music scene of the 1970s; the film is set in the past, but there is a deliberately quirky approach to the presentation which produces the uncanny suspicion (in fact, this scepticism is sometimes suggested by the film itself) that what we see might not really have happened like this. Frederic Jameson's view, not of the representation of the past, but of the past itself, is that it has

become "nothing but texts", "a vast collection of images" (1984:66) – in other words, the past has come to signify not (just) the "real" past, inasmuch as it may still be used as a reference, but rather the recorded past. In *24 Hour Party People*, the events are narrated by one of the main players, Tony Wilson,[88] who really existed (although in the film Wilson is portrayed by someone else), but the truthfulness of this narration is often questioned by other characters. The very first scene even contains an admission by the already artificial Wilson (played by Steve Coogan), cognisant of the fact that he is starring in a film, that the events unfolding on screen are not always true. Having just manoeuvred a hang glider, Tony Wilson touches down on land and assures the viewer:

> You're gonna be seeing a lot more of that sort of thing in the film. Although that actually did happen, obviously it's symbolic, it works on both levels. I don't want to tell you too much, don't want to spoil the film, but I'll just say 'Icarus'. If you know what I mean, great; if you don't, it doesn't matter. But you should probably read more.

The scene's soundtrack playfully borrows from *Apocalypse Now* – strictly speaking, this is an anachronism, since the film wasn't released until three years later, in 1979 (the film clearly states that this first scene takes place in 1976). Of course, the music from Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" already existed at the time, but the reference to the approach of the helicopter squadron in time to this music would instantly be "recognize[d] and enjoy[ed]" (Jullier 1997:7) by anyone familiar with Francis Ford Coppola's film. The helicopters (which bring death to the Vietnamese villagers) and, by extension, the original Valkyries (who decided who would die on the battlefield) have been replaced by the image of a man in a hang glider, Tony Wilson. This pastiche is postmodern double coding, for if the viewer does not recognise (and subsequently fails to enjoy) the reference, the soundtrack still functions on a first level of accompanying the action, albeit (or moreover) in exaggerated fashion. Furthermore, the use of this music flagrantly utilises its meaning from another context without taking the original meaning or the context seriously: an intertextual link is indicated and subverted. Music

[88] Not to be confused with the postmodern film theorist Tony Wilson, from whose writings this chapter has quoted on occasion.

is used in a similar way in Winterbottom's *A Cock and Bull Story*, a film that will be discussed in Chapter 7.

The opening, pre-credits sequence is already composed of different formats with different origins. Some archive footage, featuring the real Tony Wilson, who put on this hang gliding performance for Granada television channel in 1976, is intercut with Steve Coogan's actment of the event. In the commentary by Tony Wilson, available on the Region 2 DVD, Wilson points out the many incidences of original footage showing him on the hang glider (instead of Steve Coogan portraying him).

6.6.1 Visually dissimilar overlaps

In one of the film's first scenes, Tony Wilson (Steve Coogan) introduces the characters around him in knowing, clairvoyant fashion, ("Behind me: the 'Stiff Kittens', soon to become 'Warsaw', later to become 'Joy Division', finally to become 'New Order'"), while footage is shown of the Sex Pistols performing on stage – a flash-forward of sorts: if the current scene is to be taken as a fictional counterpart to events of the actual world, then the footage shows the actual world at a point in time later than the actual counterpart of this fictional scene. However, most of the scene consists of material that looks like (and is) archive footage of the actual Sex Pistols performance which this scene represents. A measure of separation is retained for much of the scene (the actual shot of the performance is countered by a shot of the actment of the audience's reaction); however, at a certain moment, the two worlds visually overlap, and this happens with the very clear intention of being noticed: while the (real) Sex Pistols are performing on stage, some of the actors appear in front of this clearly manipulated backdrop and start dancing along to the music – in slow motion, while the concert is carrying on at "normal" speed. The viewer can see that it is fake, but the diegesis seems not to take any notice, and it is precisely this tolerance of the image in the background as an equally diegetic element that makes this scene representative of the postmodern condition.

A similar incident occurs at 1:05:05, when Steve Coogan walks through the nightclub, speaking directly to the camera, while the people around him are moving in slow

motion: the character's desire to communicate the "truth" about events is miserably hampered by the very manipulated scene around him. The simultaneous difference in motion is only realisable on film, and similar to a scene in Winterbottom's *A Cock and Bull Story*, in which the action (containing Tristram Shandy) freezes temporarily to allow Tristram Shandy to appear in front of the action and comment on the proceedings, to camera.

In contrast with the examples from Winterbottom's films discussed earlier, where the actual and the acted did not visually overlap, even if they did interact with each other, here the two "worlds" (one diegetic, the other extradiegetic or actual) overlap in the same frame and there is no attempted dissimulation to mask the artificial nature of the result. On the contrary, the artifice is highlighted very noticeably.

In another to-camera address Steve Coogan points out the people who really participated in the historical events now represented on screen: he calls them "real". However, some of them, like the "real" Tony Wilson, play other characters from their actual selves, and in the end, all of them are still just acting. "Real, compared to what?" asks Brian McHale (1987:84). In his subsequent discussion of historic characters migrating to imagined stories, McHale says that "an ontological boundary between the real and the fictional [is] transgressed" (1987:90) and compared to the original entities, insofar as they may be discerned, there is a difference between specific entities that have referents in the actual world and others that do not but which originate in the fiction itself. Even though the fictional operator is always in play and any event occurring in the fiction is above all fictional, the postmodern work engages with the viewer and her awareness of these referents in the actual world; this interaction between the "real" and the "fictional" world leads to a situation where, in the words of McHale, the "ontological boundary" is indeed transgressed and the status of the "real" becomes unclear.

6.6.2 Can the real penetrate (and judge) the fictional?

Does *24 Hour Party People* pretend to be faithful to the actual world (i.e. a reflection of the real)? The film's narrator or guide, Tony Wilson, cannot be trusted, and yet he is supposedly involved in the action, even though his authority and credibility are constantly undermined by other players, including Buzzcocks band member Howard Devoto, who portrays (one version of) himself. (The actual) Howard Devoto categorically refutes the veracity of one scene's representational aspect when he states: "I definitely don't remember this happening."

"This" refers to an incident in which Tony Wilson's wife, played by an actress, of course, engages in a sexual act with Howard Devoto (the character, portrayed by another actor) in a toilet cubicle, while the "real" Howard Devoto, played by Howard Devoto, at the other end of the restroom, is a witness to these events. Clearly, by choosing to include the real Howard Devoto in a fictional film, Devoto would have the ability to make paratextual statements about a fictionalised account of real events, and in weighing up the fictional events against actual history (rather, his memory of the "real events"), he finds them empty; however, Devoto cannot call the representation fake, since it is true within the diegesis. At best, he could make the argument that the fictional event has no actual historical counterpart, namely an event in the actual world that would be similar enough to serve as a counterpart. Devoto, as "Devoto", belongs to the world of the diegesis and can only make statements about the diegesis itself; therefore, his statement is utterly nonsensical, since he claims that "ϕ, happening now, doesn't happen" or "ϕ, which clearly is, is not".

Devoto relies on his supposed status as an actual entity to comment on the diegesis, but since he appears in the diegesis and is therefore a diegetic character (the fictional Tony Wilson acknowledges his presence) he cannot step out of the world to comment on the world. Since everything contained in a fiction is fictional, the act of commenting on the fiction itself may only be accomplished from outside the field of fiction, in other words outside the film, which is not the case with Howard Devoto. He has the ability to make

these statements outside the context of the film, but in the film itself, the "real" can only be seen through the filter of fiction and cannot be accessed via the film.

Tony Wilson also interacts with Devoto's fictional counterpart, who clearly shares diegetic space with the real Devoto and in so doing the very identity of "Devoto", who is represented by two different individuals in the same space, is problematised. Insofar as Wilson nods at the "real" Devoto within the film's fictional space, Devoto's status as an extradiegetic entity, who already visibly shares continuous diegetic space with the other diegetic (and fictional) entities, is further compromised. In the process, while the exact nature of this entity is difficult to define, the representation itself becomes dubious, since the viewer cannot readily say what is going on: it is an exceptional situation, because the events of a film usually obtain when they are shown and yet in this particular case, the events are not only questioned by apparently comparing them with the actual world, but they are also suspect because their accuracy is questioned by a character who, by virtue of appearing in the diegesis, seems to have diegetic existence.

The events in the diegesis seem straightforward: we see Wilson's wife having sex with Devoto in a stall. This action is true in the diegesis. However, the weight that the viewer accords to someone in the know (Devoto), who judges this representation (and the viewer is reminded that she is not watching an actual action) as inaccurate, would probably influence the viewer's notion of the reference, though not the diegetic referent. The collapse of the border between real and fictional provokes a sense of confusion in the viewer because there is an uncertainty about the truth value of the actual things the viewer is indirectly witnessing.

As far as any truth about the actual world is concerned, the viewer does not have access to the real Howard Devoto, but merely to a fictional version of this individual and therefore his statements must also be interpreted within the scope of the fictional operator – they are possible but do not necessarily obtain in the actual world.

The relevance of Devoto's "realness" is an interesting matter. Evaluated through the modernist lens, this character instantly receives ontological weight as a real-world

entity, and his words therefore carry more authority than a fictional character's; the latter can only refer to the world of the fiction. Devoto's appearance in this scene as a kind of disparaging coda to the events is imbued with humour, since his presence (as a real-world individual who appears alongside his fictional counterpart) is entirely unexpected and his words contradict the action witnessed by the viewer, thereby claiming in effect that "what you have just seen is not true in the real world".

What is most perplexing about this scene in *24 Hour Party People* is the difficulty of grasping exactly what is going on, as far as the actual world is concerned. There is a clear misrepresentation of the actual facts, according to the person who would know (Howard Devoto), but at the same time the fictional and the factual seem to cohabitate in the same take.

Ultimately, it is diegetically trivial that this "real" Howard Devoto *really* is Howard Devoto. But, as we shall see in a discussion of *Ocean's Twelve* at the end of Chapter 7, the role of such individuals "playing themselves" on the viewer can be significant, and these individuals may be deployed for a number of reasons, not least of which is the disorientating nature of their unconventionally "actual" appearance in a fiction film.

This matter of the simultaneous presence of an original and its copy (both in some way already fictional images) will recur in *A Cock and Bull Story*, when Tristram Shandy is an onlooker at the representation of his own recollections – a scene in which the five-year old version of himself (an actor, the viewer is informed) is also present. Another example is the flashbacks of Diane Keaton's character Annie Hall in the eponymous film by Woody Allen, although here the diegesis is problematised, since both versions of Annie are supposed to be (diegetically) real, and yet Annie, accompanied by her boyfriend Alvy (Woody Allen), observes her memories as a bystander.

6.7 Conclusion

24 Hour Party People serves as a good starting point to consider not only postmodern fiction, but also the relationship between this kind of fiction and the actual world, as well as the viewer's knowledge of the actual world and the strategies used to

undermine or question this knowledge by eschewing former distinctions between actual and imaginary (or imaged) reality.

The same storytelling element can yield very different results depending on the approach of the filmmaker and the tone of the presentation; in this way, the to-camera address of modernist cinema was used to create the illusion that the viewer is granted access to the real world, whereas the to-camera address in postmodern cinema does not allow the viewer into the real world, but into the world of the film, which is never and does not pretend to be the real world.

However, this world on screen can reflect afilmic reality to a great extent and the postmodern film uses the viewer's perception of her world, supported in large part by the use of real-life signifiers, like well-known proper nouns, to immerse the viewer in the fictional world before acknowledging that the world is an artificial construction. Individuals from real life may also be used to create the impression that they are playing themselves, but their presence in the diegesis, often highlighted as incongruous in relation to the world of the fiction, is generally meant to destabilise the fictional coherence of the world in unpredictable ways that prevent the distanciation of modernist productions.

Chapter 7

Actual world fiction

7.1 Introduction

Unlike *24 Hour Party People*, many postmodern films do not propose to problematise "actual history", since they are not based on any prior events or they are not set in the past: examples are varied and range from *Pulp Fiction* and *Natural Born Killers* to *Funny Games* and the *Shrek* films. A film such as *A Cock and Bull Story* uses the actual present in a way that integrates many other texts, both factual and fictional, in the process of representation and does not pretend to be a wholly accurate reproduction of the actual world; in fact, the possibility of such accuracy is openly questioned.

This final chapter will attempt to show how the actual world is utilised in many different ways to entertain the viewer and create a world that is not isolated from the actual world, but is nonetheless clearly an artificial creation. The real world cannot be accessed via the film, and this is particularly evident when the film's approach to history is postmodern, since the view of history cannot be separated from other related texts.

A Cock and Bull Story will be the focus of the first half of this chapter and contains numerous examples of characters whose supposed real-world identities are undermined by the film's representation of them. In the second half of this chapter, more specific problems of identity will be tackled in four other films: *Ocean's Twelve* and *Full Frontal* (both by Steven Soderbergh), *The Dreamers* (Bernardo Bertolucci) and *American Splendor* (Robert Pulcini and Shari Springer Berman). All of these films contain "real"

individuals who interact with their own representations in the film, similar to Howard Devoto's appearance in *24 Hour Party People* discussed in Chapter 6.

7.2 Actual meets fictional

Whereas *24 Hour Party People* develops from the original events in Manchester and subverts our grasp of those events, Michael Winterbottom's *A Cock and Bull Story* has a slightly different approach to reality. It is plotted out by means of elements that have referents in real life, namely many of the actors themselves, but the film has little interest in the past. In fact, the so-called past is clearly fictitious, if measured against the actual state of affairs in the fictional present; the film's "present" and its similarity to the actual present is open for discussion and will be dealt with in this chapter. The film rejects the notion of fidelity to the original (that is the actual) by deliberately distorting the actual facts, even while the initial presentation of the fictional world seems to reflect the actual world rather accurately. The lack of seriousness in the approaches of both the diegetic and extradiegetic filmmakers towards the source material, Laurence Sterne's novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, is equally revealing of the decline of the significance of any kind of original.

Furthermore, in a self-referential fashion similar to Spike Jonze's film *Adaptation*,[89] though not as elaborate, the film blatantly refers to its own creation. This self-reference is done playfully and clearly draws on other texts (including Winterbottom's own *24 Hour Party People*) to nourish its own construction. The diegesis intentionally contains many signs of the actual world (the world that would otherwise exist outside the film; such signs include the names of real-life actors, in this case seemingly portraying themselves, as well the names of actual films, in which these actors played), to such an extent that the two may be confused for one another, and in this confusion, it becomes clear that there can be a major *intended* ambiguity in the process of signification. These are very postmodern attributes.

[89] *Adaptation* is a film whose plot folds back onto itself by presenting the story of its conception and development. The title is written with a full stop (*Adaptation.*), which I have decided to omit for the sake of legibility.

By means of many prominent indicators (films and actors) signposted throughout the film, the diegesis situates itself as a very close reflection of the actual world and by the same token, the viewer might be inclined to believe that Sterne's novel in the film refers to the actual novel, but in fact no such assumption should be made about the relationship (or similarity) between an object in the diegesis and an object outside the diegesis. Preconceived notions about this and many other signifiers that are not thoroughly defined as distinct from their eponymous signifiers in the actual world serve to greatly complicate matters of interpretation and this approach is most definitely intentional on the part of the filmmakers.

For the sake of clarity, it must be stated once more that there is only one world present in a film: the world of the fiction. However, as this dissertation has demonstrated at many turns, the connection back to the real world – established by means of signifiers whose signifieds are well-known, be they events or characters, historical or current – can lead to misleading (albeit sometimes very credible) representations of the world outside the film. While cinema permits the rewriting of history, in which case the result diverges from the actual events, the resulting representations in postmodern cinema can be ambiguous since the real world may be called upon in order to knowingly be subverted. The postmodern filmmaker has no intention of revealing something truthful about the actual world, but rather seeks, in the words of Ihab Hassan (1985:123), "anarchy" instead of modernism's "hierarchy". This is a sentiment echoed in the words of Patrick, the fictional curator of Shandy Hall:

> The theme of "Tristram Shandy" is a very simple one: life is chaotic, it's amorphous. No matter how hard you try, you can't actually make it fit any shape.

The film's lively obfuscation of real life – it constantly reminds us of real life, but points towards a version of it that is quite different – is decidedly postmodern. *A Cock and Bull Story* produces a vertiginous feeling of uncertainty regarding our knowledge of the events and indeed problematises the possibility of knowing the actual events, if indeed anything can be known about them. Jim Holden argues that the actors, who are supposed to be playing themselves (Steve Coogan portrays Steve Coogan in the diegesis,

for example), are part of a "fictional real" which is "virtually as fictitious" as the filmic adaptation of the novel:

> The audience knows [the action] is staged, but are led to believe, because they are watching Steve Coogan playing 'Steve Coogan', that this is the truth and the real.
> (Holden 2006)

Steve Coogan is called "Steve Coogan" in the diegesis and he is called "Steve Coogan" in the actual world. He has played the roles which the diegetic characters attribute to him, for example "Alan Partridge", and he has starred in *Around the World in 80 Days*. On the other hand, he is the father of a child by Anna Cole (Sandall 2008), while his girlfriend in the film, and the mother of their child, is named Jenny and played by the actress Kelly McDonald. Therefore, the Steve Coogan of the film has some of the same properties as the actual Steve Coogan, not least of which is their identical appearance, but in other respects they are not the same. When viewers, whose knowledge of the signifier "Steve Coogan" comes from the actual world, are confronted with information that coincides with the knowledge they already possess, but diverges from it on other matters, the rigidity of the meaning of "Steve Coogan" (at least in the film) is undermined.

"The effect of Winterbottom's casting is that the shoes are real, but it isn't always clear when we're supposed to see them as pretend ones" (Romney 2006:37). The qualifier "real" is problematic, but it certainly conveys the idea that an entity's meaning can be opaque even if its physical manifestation on screen is indisputable.

7.3 Tristram Shandy: Ready for his close-up

The opening credits sequence plays out over a man, dressed in eighteenth-century costume, who approaches and speaks directly to camera. He explicitly mentions a statement made by Groucho Marx, but the reference is clearly out of place: this Marx brother was born in 1890, much later than the time at which the plot is set. Such an obvious anachronism immediately encourages the viewer to read this film as postmodern and more particularly, in the words of John Searle (1974:321), as "literal but not serious", a tactic that accentuates the film's "fictional" aspect.

The character Tristram Shandy is a purely fictional creation of the eighteenth-century author Laurence Sterne, but is in fact the central character of a film inside a world where "real" twentieth-century actors like Steve Coogan and Rob Brydon are seen preparing and discussing this production.

Following the lead of Debra Malina (2002:16), who examines multiple levels of narration in the novel *At Swim-Two-Birds*, I shall use her term "hypodiegesis" to refer to a noticeably fictional world, inside a diegesis that pretends to be relatively less fictional, or even non-fictional. As a general rule, the hypodiegesis exists in relation to the diegesis as the latter exists in relation to the actual world. That means: while the diegesis operates according to certain inherent rules, these rules do not apply to the world of the hypodiegesis, just as the rules of the diegesis are independent of the rules of the actual world.

These "rules" refer to the internal structure of the narrative – the backdrop against which any statement about the particular diegesis may be judged as true or false. While the hypodiegetic costume drama is clearly distinct from the diegetic movie set of the present day, the resemblance of the diegesis to the actual world, coupled with the use of proper names that seem to designate actual individuals, makes for a diegesis that pretends to be a very accurate reflection of the actual world. However, it is the hypodiegetic film (*Tristram Shandy*) that employs a character who speaks directly to the camera.

7.4 Literal but not serious

In modernist cinema the to-camera address (also known as "breaking the fourth wall") is used to share information with the viewer in a direct way, as opposed to the obliqueness, or even artifice, that is the rest of the film. In this way, an opposition is highlighted between the pretence of the film and the "truth" of the to-camera address. Such an address is usually deployed to imply that the information communicated is true. In the opening scene of *A Cock and Bull Story*, however, this address can't be taken seriously, because of the flagrant anachronism of the opening lines and the general tone

of the opening scenes, which can in no way be confused for documentary footage of a man called "Tristram Shandy" in eighteenth-century England. In the previous chapter we saw the to-camera address used to great effect in *24 Hour Party People*, in which the veridical force of the utterances made under such circumstances relies more on the immersive quality of the narrative, whatever its lack of fidelity to the real world, than on the conventional contract of direct, unmanipulated transmission between a viewer and a character who directly addresses the camera.

In *A Cock and Bull Story*, it is curious to observe that this to-camera address only appears in the hypodiegesis (the film-within-a-film is called *Tristram Shandy*), while there is no to-camera address from the supposedly "real" Steve Coogan nor Rob Brydon during the rest of the film. From a modernist perspective, this would seem to indicate that the information shared with the viewer is true not only of the hypodiegesis (as Shandy pretends), but also of the world in which the production came to be (in other words, the diegesis). However, this cannot be, since the information does not relate to the diegetic world, but to yet another text, namely the novel by Laurence Sterne. This is a very obvious example of Branigan's paradox (the impossibility of speaking the actual truth from within a work of fiction), which will be dealt with presently. For the moment, it is important to note that the supposed division between a real world from which information is communicated and an artificial world that functions as the setting of the story is in fact a complete fabrication, since the worlds are all fictional.

7.5 "Branigan's paradox"

A Cock and Bull Story bears witness to Joseph Anderson's contention (1996:123-124) that any instance of collapsing the fourth wall does not carry along with it the possibility to communicate anything whatsoever about the truth or the real world. Even the supposedly real is always immediately re-qualified as unreal (fictional), and reinserted into the diegetic flow. According to Anderson, any attempt to pierce a film's fictional veil, in order to get at the real world, results in a reframing of the narrative – as a continually fictional diegesis in which it is possible to look directly into the camera's lens

without this act implying a view of the so-called real world. This is linked to the idea that the camera necessarily attributes the status of fiction to the profilmic state of affairs (unless some textual *caveat* is provided to try and frame it as "documentary"), however much they seem to be actual. Anderson calls this Branigan's Paradox:

> Edward Branigan's argument is that even if you break the diegesis, you do not thereby gain a glimpse of reality. You simply create another formal element in the narrative (of lights, cameras, cables, and microphones) or another embedded "world" within the film. It is all occurring inside the framed event, which we already know is of a different order than the reality outside the frame.
>
> (*ibid.*)

In fact, Branigan's Paradox is just another way of putting forward an idea we have already advanced: the filmic text is always either removed from the actual world or may be conceived of and interpreted as a fictional version of the actual world. If any truth is to be found, it will be first and foremost of the fictional variety – diegetic or some subdiegetic variant – but it would be naïve to expect that a fictional truth is necessarily an actual truth, even when the film pretends to be a documentary, by using strategies of the documentary form.

7.6 Texts referring to other texts

A Cock and Bull Story engages in intertextual dialogue in a number of ways, presenting the viewer with a vast array of textual references: based on a novel, by Laurence Sterne, the film also incorporates references to other films (some of the films that are referenced include: *Spartacus*, *Cold Mountain*, *Lancelot du Lac*, *Fellini's 8½*, *The Draughtsman's Contract* and *24 Hour Party People*) by either referring to the films in the dialogue, quoting the films' dialogue in an attempt to recreate or parody a moment from the films, or by using snippets from these films' musical scores.[90]

Another text may be used in a way that is whimsical, generating humour from the clear disconnect between the original context and the current context of the representation. But often the thing that the image refers to is yet another image or cluster of images.

[90] Michael Winterbottom confirms that "[a]ll the music in the film is from other films" (Porton 2006:30).

For example, a crew member refers to the model of a giant uterus by dubbing it "A Womb with a View", clearly calling to mind the period drama *A Room with a View*. The title of the Merchant-Ivory production is savagely decontextualised, and there is a great deal of parody: the past is not respected, but used in a way that serves to benefit the present – in this case, for the purposes of humour by means of a clear intertextual reference. Of course, the reference is self-conscious, and to some extent this self-consciousness is embroidered upon when Steve Coogan, hanging upside down inside the cardboard uterus, declares that the entire situation lacks realism.

Barry Lyndon, an historical drama directed by Stanley Kubrick that is also set in the eighteenth century, is frequently utilised by Winterbottom's film. Besides the very familiar "Sarabande" by Handel, used at many points during both films, the film's last scene is a candle-lit dinner party, calling to mind a scene in Kubrick's film. The final image closes with an iris wipe on the candle in the centre of the scene; this attention-grabbing detail evokes the scenes in *Barry Lyndon* that were famously shot with candle light only and contained no extra lighting.

Earlier in the film the viewer will have noticed the same room, with very obvious additional lighting sources. In this way *A Cock and Bull Story* pretends to show us the real world, but only points to another fiction (the real world of the fiction: the diegesis). The viewer does get to see "behind the scenes" of the production, but the glimpse is of the diegetic and never the actual world, the latter of which was the source of truth for the modernists.

7.7 Realism in the face of postmodern exhibitionism

> If there is any realism left here, it is a "realism" that is meant to derive from the shock of grasping that confinement and of slowly becoming aware of a new and original historical situation in which we are condemned to seek History by way of our own pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach.
>
> (Jameson 1984:71)

"What is this story all about?" asks Elizabeth Shandy, exasperated, in the final scene of *A Cock and Bull Story*. By this stage the story itself has become very muddled and the viewer cannot readily understand where this scene fits in. It is shot in the candle-lit dining room that features as a clearly marked set in Winterbottom's film, but rather appears to be a scene imagined by the screenwriter of *Tristram Shandy* – his words, preceding this scene, would substantiate such a claim. Consequently, the scene may best be described as imaginary or fictitious and therefore belongs to a different reality within the world of the fiction.

After the screening of *Tristram Shandy* that supposedly takes place in the diegesis, Steve Coogan says to his diegetic girlfriend that he thought she was "fantastic". He can only be referring to the film they have just seen, but even though she isn't an actress (according to earlier diegetic cues), she must have appeared in the film nonetheless: this means that the film they watched was in fact *A Cock and Bull Story*, in which she does appear, as witnessed by the film itself. This moment, when the diegesis reveals itself as a fiction of a diegesis (that is: the diegesis becomes a hypodiegesis, submitting to a new diegesis), is comparable to the final shot of *Full Frontal*:[91] while the diegesis and the hypodiegesis do not overlap, they share the quality of being complete fictions, removed from the actual world, in spite of recognisable signifiers (proper names of actors and films) that originate in the actual world and are recognised as such.

However, compared to *Full Frontal*, Winterbottom's *A Cock and Bull Story* ups the ante by inscribing the actual film into the framework of the fictional world, not unlike the screening of *Blazing Saddles* in Mel Brooks's *Blazing Saddles*. In *A Cock and Bull Story*'s epilogue, shown during the film's closing credits, Steve Coogan and Rob Brydon discuss scenes from the diegesis of *A Cock and Bull Story*, and refer to their own performances, as themselves, and to the performance of Naomie (Harris), who portrayed the diegetic Jennie. Having apparently done away with the fictional representation of the real world

[91] The final shot of Steven Soderbergh's *Full Frontal* reveals that the scene takes place not inside an airplane, as shown, but inside a cut-out of an airplane on a soundstage. This scene and the world of the characters had been presented throughout as "real", since it was shot with handheld cameras, as opposed to the central "film" plot that was not shot in this way. See section 7.9.2 of the current chapter.

(the diegesis), *A Cock and Bull Story*, in its closing moments, pretends to speak of itself while it is still in progress. This is self-referential, but Branigan's paradox still obstructs any view of the actual world. The film cannot speak of itself from the inside and cannot step out of itself, even during the final credits, to speak of itself, since that would imply a change of world, from the imagined to the real – a prospect made impossible by two interrelated factors that we have already established in this dissertation:

a) where there is any initially heterogeneous mixture of fictional and supposedly non-fictional material in a film, the fictional component dominates and "fictionalises" whatever might be non-fictional. All things being equal in this regard, the mixture is to be interpreted as a fictional whole;

b) the film, in its totality, is always under the domain of a fictional operator, no matter to what extent any particular element of the film reflects certain elements in the actual world.

A Cock and Bull Story, in its persistent desire to designate itself, while being unable to step beyond its identity as being the designation itself, displays the characteristics of a *mise en abyme*.

> *A Cock and Bull Story* shows an interpretation of the real (the making of the film), but one that is completely fictitious. It is thus real in a postmodern sense, as it assumes the viewer knows they are watching fiction, but makes it as real as possible, so much so that these two opposites virtually collide and become one.
>
> (Holden 2006)

At one point during the film, an anonymous narrator suddenly makes an appearance: when Steve Coogan is interviewed by Tony Wilson, both playing themselves in the diegesis, the narrator states that the full version of this interview will eventually be available on the DVD of the film. Of course, it is no coincidence that Tony Wilson is the interviewer: Steve Coogan portrayed Tony Wilson in Michael Winterbottom's previous venture into explicitly postmodern territory, *24 Hour Party People*, in which Tony Wilson, in turn, portrayed someone other than himself.

7.8 The "perpetual present"[92] of postmodernism

In *A Cock and Bull Story* the attitude towards the character of Ingoldsby, the *Tristram Shandy*'s production's historical advisor, is another example of the general postmodern lack of interest in representations of the past that would be acknowledged as authentic: the past is pillaged in order to construct a present that prioritises entertainment over accuracy. The flippancy with which historical accuracy is considered by the makers of the film-within-a-film leads Ingoldsby to exclaim: "I don't understand why I'm here, then!"

The historical feeling that is sought by the filmmakers does not mean that the details need to be historically accurate; they are not obliged to fit with the realism (the kind of people and their kind of habits) of the time, but rather they are faithful to the image one has of the past, an image generated by a legion of other media sources, including other images. "[The] postmodern creator […] proceeds […] as if he doesn't have any kind of chronological heritage"[93] (Jullier 1997:29). This "historical deafness" (Jameson 1991:xi), represented by "multiple historical amnesias" (170), should not be seen as a denial nor a refusal of the past, but rather as an indifference towards the use of elements in their historical context. As Jameson (1991:x) puts it, there is a "loss of historicity". Postmodern creators often make use of the past for their own purposes and do not view a given object's actual past as an essential criterion for its representation.[94] As a result, especially in view of the many references to the past that do appear in postmodern films, such films display "not only a re-reading of past film styles, but also a re-reading of the past itself"[95] (Jullier 1997:26); in the process, the film can shape the viewers' view of the past, and therefore affect their sense of history. In other words, actual history changes its meaning according to the reader, and Jameson's "loss of

[92] Jameson 1991:170

[93] My translation from the French.

[94] A recent and much discussed example of this approach is the appearance of Converse shoes in the cupboard of the eighteenth-century Marie Antoinette, in the film of the same name directed by Sofia Coppola.

[95] My translation from the French.

historicity" therefore indicates a decline in the autonomous significance of actual historical events, for the benefit of new readings with different interpretations of the past.

Ingoldsby's position as historical advisor is challenged by the actors who seem to prefer the more egotistical, or the more interesting, version of history to the facts. The characters' indifference towards the past is again evident in conversations with Naomie, the production assistant, who adores a scene from Robert Bresson's *Lancelot du Lac* – a film that no one else has heard of. When Ingoldsby asks the crew what their impression was of the battle scene in *Cold Mountain*, nobody seems to care about its historical inaccuracies; it is sufficient that there *is* a battle scene.

Winterbottom insisted on handheld camerawork and the use of mostly natural lighting in both the hypodiegesis and the diegesis (Porton 2006:30-31), thereby eliminating any visual distinction between the two worlds and, at least on a visual level, preferring a paratactical approach to a hypotactical one.

7.9 To recognise and to enjoy – both in this world and the next

24 Hour Party People and *A Cock and Bull Story* both contain characters played by actors who pretend to represent themselves in the portrayal, in other words the character and the actor playing the part seem to overlap to such an extent (including, critically, being called by the same proper name) that the viewer is invited to somehow reconcile knowledge of the actual world with the story of the fictional world. In Chapter 6, I referred to Howard Devoto's appearance in *24 Hour Party People*, and in *A Cock and Bull Story*, Steve Coogan, Rob Brydon and Gillian Anderson appear as themselves in the general diegesis, with other "actual" appearances by a number of other players in the "post-screening scene" discussed in section 7.6. Usually, the appearance of someone playing herself is not a particularly problematic issue for the viewer, who, given a number of cues, is willing to accept the character as a fictional duplicate of the actual individual, in the same way that she accepts, for example, the fictional Paris as a fictional duplicate of the actual Paris, despite any other objections regarding the plot.

Robert Altman's 1992 film, *The Player*, is a good example of the application of this kind of designation on a large scale. The film contains a number of fictional characters, who often speak to well-known actors and actresses, ostensibly portraying themselves (there is nothing to make the viewer think that this is not the case). In this way, for example, Tim Robbins and Whoopi Goldberg portray the fictional characters Griffin Mill and Detective Avery, respectively a studio executive and a police detective, while Anjelica Huston, Malcolm McDowell, Burt Reynolds, Julia Roberts and Bruce Willis, among many others, portray themselves and only themselves, i.e. the individuals (actors) that correspond to them in the actual world.

In the next two sections, which focus on two films by Steven Soderbergh, *Ocean's Twelve* and *Full Frontal*, I shall briefly look at the problem of real-world existence in films that only support fictional existence, and the different varieties of double existence with distinctly postmodern flavours.

7.9.1 *Ocean's Twelve*

Linus: "Did you ever notice that Tess looks exactly like…?"
Rusty: "Don't ever ask that. Ever. Seriously. Not to anyone. Especially not to her."

In this quotation Linus means to ask whether Rusty agrees with him that Tess looks like Julia Roberts. Tess is played by Julia Roberts and therefore the fictional Tess does indeed look like Julia Roberts. The question arises, however, who exactly this "Julia Roberts" is, since the fictional Julia Roberts is never seen – she is never visually realised, but remains an aural spectre: only her voice is heard over the telephone. From the context, we might surmise that she shares many of the same properties with the actual actress, among others her date of birth. However, the very fabric of the fiction starts to unravel once the viewers (and it is indeed very likely that they would know who Julia Roberts is) recognise this homospatial combination of real and fictional referents for one character. Bruce Willis, who portrays himself, does not provoke the same uncanny situation, because his identity is not problematised, unlike that of Julia Roberts.

The film very clearly refers to the actual world, with the goal of making us take notice of (and recognise) the reference, but in the process these references, in a similar fashion to

A Cock and Bull Story, are subverted since the apparent duplicate is not a completely faithful copy of the original. In this way, even if we interpret the whole from a fictional perspective, our reading of the original is affected. The foregrounding of elements that the viewer would sooner associate with the actual world, in spite of their presence in a fictional setting, causes not only a problematisation of the real, but also a problematisation of the fictional and its relationship to this problematised real.

Now, it is necessary to take note of one important point: Julia Roberts, playing the part of Tess, exists as Julia Roberts in the actual world even while she is performing in the fictional world of *Ocean's Twelve* narrative. At the moment of filming (*in vivo)*, the profilmic world is actual, even though it contains most or all of the elements that constitute the fictional world or diegesis. But once the profilmic has been recorded onto film by the film camera, the resulting world (as it appears on screen) is completely diegetic and the viewer does not have access to the actual. The same is true of any subdiegetic worlds, as in the case of Steven Soderbergh's *Full Frontal*. While facts about the actual world should be irrelevant to the world of the fiction, the two worlds being distinct entities, such extratextual knowledge on the part of the viewer does play a role in the process of interpretation.

7.9.2 *Full Frontal*

The main character of "Rendezvous", the film inside *Full Frontal*, is an actor called Nicholas, and when he participates in the filming of a film inside "Rendezvous", which does not have any visible title, he is shown with Brad Pitt in a world inside the hypodiegesis – a world that Debra Malina (2002:12) calls the hypo-hypodiegesis. The change in image signals a change in world, but it does more than that: it *creates* the world, separating it at the outset from the other, which is captured by handheld cameras. However, this initially strict division between worlds falls apart in one single shot.

The final shot in *Full Frontal*, which shows the actors on a sound stage, is self-consciously accompanied by a voice-over that states: "It was like out of a movie." In

these final words, there is no acknowledgement of the artifice we are clearly witness to, but the female character who delivers the (intradiegetic) voice-over does seem to be uncertain about her own status as a fictional character. The viewer can no longer rely on the image alone to indicate the boundaries between the actual and fictional worlds, but confusion is even manifest in the minds of the characters, who compare their own situation to that of a film.

At the airport Nicholas is shown with a magazine that displays Brad Pitt on the cover and mentions him by his name. This would mean that Brad Pitt is also referred to as Brad Pitt in the hypodiegesis and, like Julia Roberts's appearance in the fictional world of *Ocean's Twelve*, forces the viewer to somehow reconcile Pitt's actual existence with the world he fictionally occupies. During the shoot of the film within the hypodiegesis, Brad Pitt is also addressed as "Brad" and actual director David Fincher, who directs the film, is addressed as "David". On the aforementioned magazine cover, Brad Pitt wears a T-shirt that mentions Fincher by name, implying that he is the director and therefore stars as himself (that is, his hypodiegetic and diegetic personas are identical; the fact that he is also David Fincher in the actual world is irrelevant for the moment). Just like the hypodiegesis of *A Cock and Bull* Story, namely the film called *Tristram Shandy*, the hypodiegesis of *Full Frontal* shows many visibly postmodern traits, when analysed either from within the diegesis or from the actual world. An analysis from within the diegesis, however, presupposes the capability of the actual viewer to break the diegetic barrier and somehow become a part of the fiction – a possibility that has been refuted.

We cannot say for certain to what extent the diegesis and the actual world overlap. Whether the hypodiegetic Brad Pitt and David Fincher are in fact more or less the actual Brad Pitt and David Fincher, or some other kind of themselves (i.e. a fictional version, in some way separate from their actual selves) is a much more interesting dilemma, since the former proposition would imply the possibility of living in two worlds at once – as themselves, with the same properties in both manifestations – and the latter would entail examining the possibility of double existence in two fictional worlds.

The issue of double existence is closely tied to the problem of individuation, which deals with the clear separation of entities. The boundaries that contain the single entity designated by the term "Julia Roberts" presuppose the simultaneous existence of two identical entities, even though Leibniz rules out the possibility of such a phenomenon. But Roberts does not exist as two separate entities: it is the viewer who ascribes her identity to the character of the performance; within the diegesis, (the diegetic) Julia Roberts only exists as a voice over the telephone.

7.10 Possible in the fiction

It has been suggested, in reference to *A Cock and Bull Story* and *Annie Hall*, that it is possible for two entities, who are in fact the same person, to be present on screen at the same time. The genre of science fiction has exploited this idea of one being's double presence in the world, most famously in films that involve time travel, such as Robert Zemeckis's *Back to the Future, Part II*. In the latter, however, some emphasis is placed on the role of time in acquiring knowledge about the world and therefore, even though various characters are actually the same at various points in history (in the Zemeckis film, for example, Marty McFly is shown in 1985 and as his future self in 2015, but his 1985 character also makes an appearance in 2015), their various manifestations, affected by chronological leaps, are not identical, neither physically nor intellectually. Roderick Chisholm makes a very similar point in his discussion of the possibility of transworld identity:

> How can Adam at the age of 930 be the same person as the man who ate forbidden fruit, if the former is old and the latter is young? Here the proper reply would be: it is not true that the old Adam has properties that render him discernible from the young Adam; the truth is, rather, that Adam has the property of being young when he eats the forbidden fruit and the property of being old [at the age of] 930, and that these properties, though different, are not incompatible.
>
> (1967:2)

Chisholm is correct in pointing out the outer discrepancy in appearance, and among other things, this is certainly a major concern for equating two entities with each other. However, Chisholm seems to overlook the fact that the young Adam may be identified

or equated with the old Adam if and only if the latter is merely the younger Adam at a different point in time in the same world. An entity is the sum total of its past, present and future, provided that the timeline remains continuous and the world remains the same. In this way, if two states of affairs – one in which I am ill and another in which I am healthy – are separated in time, that is, not occurring simultaneously but at different times on the same timeline of my existence, they do generate two entities with different properties and while I am not identical to myself at another point in time, the two entities are both correctly denoted by me. The two entities do not share all their properties with each other and therefore they are not identical. More importantly, they are not the same entity.

Film is an iconic medium that can be manipulated in order for the whole to signify something other than its original parts. The divergence of fictional worlds from the real world is most evident in passages where the fictional action is impossible in the real world, for example, the simultaneous existence of two states of affairs that are separated by time in the world relatively actual to the action.

Of course, there are states of affairs, described in words rather than images, that are simply impossible, whatever the world (actual or fictional). David Vander Laan provides the following examples: "9's being even, motherhood's being transitive, something's being identical to something with different properties" (Vander Laan 1997:600). Such examples, or Willard Quine's "round square copula on Berkeley College" (1953:5), are not simply unactualised in this world: they are unactualised because they are impossible entities in all possible worlds. In Quine's case, the contradiction in terms is strong enough to rule out any possible existence; this is similar to Vander Laan's example of a state of affairs where "Socrates is taller than himself" (1997:602).

Steven Soderbergh's use of Julia Roberts in *Ocean's Twelve* relies heavily on her having a known signified in the world of the viewer, that is the actual world. The viewer is asked to pretend that a near-identical counterpart for Julia Roberts exists in the fictional world: a counterpart in all ways identical, except for having the property of being fictional. However, the viewer is very likely to know that Roberts is already performing,

pretending to be Tess. The sudden simultaneous presence of Roberts (as Tess) and Roberts (as herself) leads to an ontological conundrum: which (if, indeed, either) is the real Roberts?

Furthermore, why, when Julia Roberts, who pretends to be Tess, pretends to be Julia Roberts, does this act feel so subversive? The answer, of course, lies in the fictional status of the various components and the self-consciousness with which the underlying artifice is revealed, without generating any kind of distance, but on the contrary being part of an immersive, albeit slightly disorientating, experience for the viewer.

The answer to the question raised above, regarding the nature of "the real Roberts", depends on the viewer's approach to the interpretation of fiction: in the fiction, neither representation is real, for they are both fictional. However, both representations are extradiegetically interpreted by Julia Roberts, but in the fiction the person who is designated as "Julia Roberts" is the voice over the telephone. On the other hand, the viewer, from her vantage point in the actual world, sees Julia Roberts performing the role of Tess.

The film goes even further in its subversion of expected representation or role-playing: the end credits state that the film "introduc[es] Tess as Julia Roberts", implying that the actress "Tess" played "Julia Roberts". It must be added that this text also has an intertextual association with the previous film, *Ocean's Eleven*, at the end of which, in equally playful fashion[96], Julia Roberts was introduced "as Tess".

It has clearly been shown that double existence – that is the use of two representations to refer to one unique being at the same time in the same world – is possible on film and produces a clearly fictional world. There are some situations where the entertainment value, the playfulness of this double existence, is augmented by the film's use of individuals that seem to portray themselves and therefore the film would appear to refer back to the real world. However, it is important to keep in mind that

[96] The intention is playful, since actors and actresses are usually "introduced" only when it is the first time they appear on film – hardly the case for Julia Roberts, who was already an Oscar-winning actress by the time she appeared in *Ocean's Eleven*.

these references to the actual world are not always made by the film itself, but rather by the viewer, who does have access to the real world, or at least to a reality outside the film, as in the case of *Ocean's Twelve*, whose diegesis remains coherent and unproblematic.

7.11 Reconciling the possible with the fictionally possible

Films show many things that do not or did not happen in the real world, but which nonetheless, because of a certain similarity with this world, are interpreted as possible states of affairs. When these fictional states of affairs share many of the properties of the real world, this fictional world is labelled "realistic" by the viewer.

Having made reference to the differences between the real and the fictional world, as well as the similar way in which "the world of a film" and "the diegesis" are often used, it is worth pointing out some examples in which the "fictionally possible" diverges from the "diegetically possible". In the case of the cinema, the "fictionally possible" is a qualification that also concerns a film's supradiegetic level and mostly refers to actions that take place in the film but outside the fictional world, for example a voice-over. On the other hand, the "diegetically possible" strictly refers to the possibilities of the narrated world itself – the world constructed by the film and populated by the characters on screen.

While viewers generally accept the use of different kinds of voice-over in a fiction film, even (or, in the case of documentaries, *especially*) when the voice does not belong to the world on screen, another kind of extradiegetic intrusion is slightly more cumbersome: the double existence of a character, especially where such a character is recognised as a "real-world" individual.

An instance of "light" double existence in the film *Ocean's Twelve* was put forward earlier in this chapter[97]: Tess, a character portrayed by Julia Roberts, seems to interact

[97] The adjective "light" is used here since, according to the fictional world in the film, "Julia Roberts" denotes only one character: the character whose voice we hear. The fact that Julia Roberts portrays another character, Tess, is at best an extradiegetic truth and does not fall within the domain of the fiction. On the other hand, in some of the following examples, a single character will directly denote more than

with a character (also portrayed by Julia Roberts) who is designated as "Julia Roberts" and is referred to in a way that makes her seem very close to the Julia Roberts of the world outside the film. However, within the world of the film, these two characters are Tess and "Julia Roberts" and there is no intra-world problem of individuation. This problem would only be evident to a certain type of viewer in the real world: the viewer who knows that Julia Roberts is portraying two different characters, of which one is very similar to herself.

All information contained in a film is fictionally actual (in other words, in the fiction it is possible and it obtains because it appears in the film), but this does not mean that all elements are a part of the diegesis, as we have established in particular through reference to extradiegetic elements like the voice-over. The pervasive use of the voice-over over the course of film history has resulted in its position as a convention even in films that are otherwise generally realistic and thus it normally does not pose any obstacle to the viewer's interpretation of the film.

In other circumstances, like the anonymous voice-over in *Marketa Lazarová* (mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 4) that can communicate with characters in the diegesis, or when one character is represented in two different ways, talk about the world of a film becomes problematic if the diegesis is equated with the combination of sounds and images that compose the film. As a result, discourse about possibilities in the fictional world should be adjusted accordingly.

We have looked at the notion of an "impossible world", used to refer to a world which is self-contradictory and therefore cannot exist as a possible world. In the rest of this chapter, different kinds of worlds will be examined that clearly show what a world might look like when it exists on screen without being "possible" relative to the actual world. It will be difficult to label them either as possible or impossible, and therefore I will make evident the advantage of identifying these and other worlds as "fictional".

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one figure or representation, and it is this multiplicity that will be central to the discussion regarding the distinction between fictional and diegetic worlds.

I shall look at more problematic instances of double existence and examine specific but diverse examples from other films in which one single (real-world) character is represented in different ways on screen. Such representations are produced in a way that, while admitting to a degree of artifice in the representation of someone non-fictional, the film seems to aim for realism because it includes documentary footage integrated into the world of the film. Over the course of this dissertation, we have seen a number of films that display some of these properties and the postmodern films of Michael Winterbottom in particular have demonstrated a very complicated relationship with the world of the viewer. The analysis of Winterbottom's strategies and their effect on his films' portrayed reality will be of great help in this current investigation into some rather unique cases of representation.

Films that display postmodern qualities do not pretend to be faithful representations of reality and in fact, many of these films question the possibility of such authenticity. Some films clearly do not wish to depict reality directly, but rather choose to evoke aspects of reality in a different way, or go their own way completely; this has been the case since the cinema of Georges Méliès, with notable examples including the films of the expressionist and surrealist movements. By contrast, postmodern films often use the viewer's knowledge of the real world for the purposes of subversion or disorientation. On the topic of double existence, I shall look at examples from *The Dreamers* and *American Splendor* to identify in what ways a film can deploy double existence to (deliberately) complicate a representation – especially in cases where the representation also refers to events outside the film.

Other films provide similar cases of the real and fictional representations of a single individual, but their aim is very different from the films that will be considered here. As a kind of coda, many films based on real events in which an actor portrays an historical personage contain a final shot of the "real" individual. Examples range from Che Guevara's travel partner Alberto Granado in *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Diarios de motocicleta, 2004) to the incarcerated drug smuggler George Jung in *Blow* (2001). *City of God* (Cidade de Deus, 2002) provides an interesting example of this phenomenon: the

final credits are superimposed over a television broadcast that seems to be the "original" or the "historical" broadcast in which one of the film's main characters is interviewed. This same interview is also shown earlier in the film, though in truncated form, at which point the film's version of this character (i.e. as portrayed by an actor) is on screen.

In all these examples, the final shot is used with the intention of reminding the viewer that the rest of the film is merely a representation of the facts, whereas this particular individual is "real". Other films, like the ones discussed here, do not always make such a clear distinction between the historical and the fictional. In recreations of past events, realism and fidelity are two different aspects of the representation.

The concept of realism is generally applicable to film: viewers compare a character or an event to their own experience of the world (here, the postmodern tendency would be to include the worlds of images) and judge whether the kind of thing that happens is similar to real life. On the other hand, when more or less exact comparisons are made between the representation and the historical event (mostly focusing on specific actions by specific characters), it is a question of fidelity to what is considered historical fact.

The protests outside the Cinémathèque in *The Dreamers* in particular and the general plot of *American Splendor* in general are based on historical facts and contain different kinds of representations of the historical participants. Both films are governed by the implicit operator of fiction (a fact that is explicitly conceded in *American Splendor*), but dialogue about the worlds' closeness to the actual world is hampered by the kind of combination of "real" and "diegetic" that we discussed at the end of Chapter 5.[98] *The Dreamers* contains a unique example of a re-enactment by an actor who participates in a real event and then recreates the real event years later for a fiction film that makes visual both his original and his re-enacted performance in one sequence.

[98] In Chapter 5, the case of *Welcome to Sarajevo* was raised, in which an actress portrayed a real-life character and the film's epilogue, amidst statistics about the Bosnian war, refers to current (real-world) status of the fictional individual, whose fictional name is different from her real-world counterpart.

7.11.1 *The Dreamers*

One of the first sequences in Bernardo Bertolucci's 2004 film, *The Dreamers*, is a mixture of restaged footage of the 1968 riots against the dismissal of Henri Langlois as head of the Cinémathèque, in colour, and the documentary footage shot at the time, mostly but not exclusively in black and white. In this respect, a comparison with a film like *Welcome to Sarajevo* – in particular, the scene that presents the aftermath of the bread queue massacre – seems reasonable. There is, however, one important difference: at a given moment in the sequence, the documentary footage shows the young actor Jean-Pierre Léaud delivering a speech to the crowd; moments later, this footage is intercut with colour footage of Léaud, looking much older, who enacts his earlier delivery of the particular speech. While he is recognisable as the same individual, it is also clear that the two appearances have been recorded 35 years apart from each other. In some way, the two Léauds are the same (they are both the same individual who portrays himself), but it is also not exactly the same Léaud since the footage was shot at different points in time with different intentions both of the filmmaker and of the filmed subject who is re-enacting his original performance.

One representation (Jean-Pierre Léaud in 1968, as well as any of the other events shown in black and white in the same sequence) seems to be "real", while the other (Jean-Pierre Léaud in more recent times, performing for the benefit of the film's production) is a copy – moreover, by means of juxtaposition, the copy is easily recognisable as a copy.

The film does not overtly differentiate between these two representations: they are more or less on an equal footing and the way in which they were edited together creates the impression that the event may be represented by both. However, this event, within the context of the world of the film, is not the same as the "real" event, since the viewer should not rely on the film for final knowledge about the real. This fact was a focus of the chapters in this dissertation that dealt with possible worlds and fiction, but contrary to most of the films discussed earlier, this particular event's intelligibility as a diegetic component is equally debatable.

The identity of the fictional Jean-Pierre Léaud (i.e. as he appears in this fiction) is very difficult to reconstruct from the disparate parts in which he appears, especially considering the fact that the diegesis reflects much of the actual world. The different kinds of images – one sequence presenting a young version of him in black and white, the other a much older version in colour – are supposed to denote the same event, and yet the representations of the event (and of its participants) present completely different versions. Current conventions might dictate that the use of black and white film signifies historical footage, but the film's many other black and white sequences, taken from fiction films, would invalidate such an interpretation.

In section 7.10, which dealt with entities or events "possible in the fiction", I qualified Roderick Chisholm's reasoning for the postulate that an entity, having one property at a certain point in time and a different property at another point in time, is still the same entity by stating that this is true if and only if the two points in time occur in the same world.

A comparison of the worlds specifically inhabited by the two representations of Jean-Pierre Léaud would reveal a number of important discussion points. For the purpose of this comparison, I shall label the two worlds presented on screen as W^1 (in black and white) and W^2 (in colour). The aim of this comparison will be to assess to what extent the two worlds are compatible and, if they are actually two representations of the same world, what kind of world this might be:

- Between the two representations of Jean-Pierre Léaud's speech, there is a difference in form (W^1 and W^2 appear, respectively, in black and white and in colour) and in content (in W^1 he is young, and in W^2 he is relatively, but noticeably, older).
- Neither W^1 nor W^2 is presented from the point of view of a specific individual. For this reason, while the change in colour may be attributed to the equipment with which the footage was shot, the change in Léaud's physical appearance is

not produced by the perspective and one may safely assume that it is Léaud himself who looks different.

- Extradiegetic knowledge about the historical protests of 1968 enables the viewer to recognise that the black and white footage is (very likely) historical footage recorded at the time. However, the inclusion of historical footage in a film with an otherwise imaginary plot does not usually inhibit the viewer's comprehension (or mental reconstruction) of the diegesis as it does in this case. The fact that W^1 and W^2 pretend to represent the same event in the film's diegesis is problematic because it is not logically coherent and requires the possibility of temporally heterogeneous representations that can exist simultaneously. As a science-fiction film, *Back to the Future* permits this kind of double existence, but *The Dreamers* is a realistic film that makes no allowance for such an explanation.
- In W^2, Jean-Pierre Léaud re-enacts his role in W^1, and it is indeed the same actor who appears in both worlds. We have noted that an entity can denote itself across time, even if its properties change, if and only if the two points in time occur in the same world. The fictional world includes both representations and therefore Léaud denotes both representations. However, on this point it is unclear which representation may be assigned to the diegesis and it is this tension – a product of the two worlds' parataxical relationship – that creates a postmodern disorientation.

This asymmetrical presentation of the sequence's two constituent parts renders the diegesis problematic, even though it enables the viewer to clearly compare the image of history with the reproduction of this image. The viewer's comparison of the two representations has no bearing on the diegesis since these particular images in black and white do not seem to belong in the diegesis; at best, a comparison could be used for a judgment on the accuracy of the film's recreation of historical images.

Jean-Pierre Léaud's dissimilar appearances suggest that there is a time difference between the two worlds. While Jean-Pierre Léaud was indeed in front of the camera on both occasions, the Léaud of W^1 is not the same as the Léaud of W^2 for the simple reason that the two worlds would contradict each other: the Léaud of W^1 has different properties than the Léaud of W^2 and while they both denote "Léaud", two seemingly identical characters cannot share existence in the same world and therefore W^1 is not the same as W^2.

Since Jean-Pierre Léaud does not appear anywhere else in the film, either one of the scenes may be labelled a component of the film's diegesis and ultimately the viewer decides which scene is diegetic and which is extradiegetic. However, for the reasons enumerated above, it is impossible for both (fictional) scenes to obtain simultaneously in the diegesis.

In fact, this particular scene is even more complicated, for it is not only Léaud who delivers the speech in the two different versions of the past, but he is joined (simultaneously) by the present-day French actor Jean-Pierre Kalfon in this recreation of the events of 1968. On the commentary of this film's Region 2 DVD, Gilbert Adair, the screenwriter of *The Dreamers*, refers to this simultaneous appearance of the three characters (the young Jean-Pierre Léaud, the older Jean-Pierre Léaud and Jean-Pierre Kalfon), by all accounts appearing as themselves:

> In fact, Jean-Pierre Léaud read that tract, which was written by Godard, in '68, but not at the Cinémathèque…somewhere else… and it was Kalfon who read it at the Cinémathèque – simultaneously, as it were. And Bernardo [Bertolucci] thought it would be fun and touching to have the two of them both at the Cinémathèque, which is historically inaccurate, reading the same tract.
>
> (*The Dreamers* 2003, Commentary track, 0:05:59 - 0:06:25)

In this quotation, Adair acknowledges that historical accuracy was eschewed for the sake of "fun": this is a decidedly postmodern decision on the part of the filmmaker Bertolucci, who puts together a sequence (one of the only sequences, except for the final moments of the film, that are directly based on a specific historically documented

event) which disregards historical fidelity and instead opts for a much more layered representation that does not reflect events exactly as they occurred.

7.11.2 *American Splendor*

"Here's our man. Yeah alright, here's me. Or the guy who plays me anyway."
The "real" Harvey Pekar in *American Splendor*

A change in a character's appearance is usually attributed to a diegetically motivated cause; if no reason is provided, a diegesis can lose its resemblance to the real world, in other words lose its realism and – in cases where the story is based on real events – its historical fidelity. *American Splendor* uses the frame of a television set to highlight the fact that this sudden shift is another representation, although in this case the representation enjoys historical status in the actual world. We shall presently examine the effect of such a presentation on the diegesis.

American Splendor has many different representations and representational strategies. The narrative focuses on the life of the real-life cartoon writer Harvey Pekar and this life is presented mostly as recreated fiction in which Pekar is portrayed by the actor Paul Giamatti. The film constantly makes reference to the cartoon format in which Pekar's life was first represented; this is accomplished by using a freeze frame of a film image that transforms into or dissolves to a cartoon, or framing the moving image within the borders of a cartoon frame. This kind of presentation is one of many strategies in the film that ultimately reassess the relationship between the different kinds of representations. Also, it is important to note that such presentations of the diegesis serve merely as visual devices or frames and no viewer would interpret them as components of the diegesis, in the same way that any text superimposed on a fictional image does not by implication belong to the diegesis.

Except for the two live-action representations of Harvey Pekar (Paul Giamatti and the "real" Harvey Pekar), this character is also signified by a number of other cartoon representations, mimicking the way in which his own appearance varied according to the personal style or interpretation of a particular cartoon artist. Having established

what the "real" Harvey Pekar looks like right at the beginning of the film, all the other representations – both live-action and cartoon – may be read as "non-real". This distinction is kept up during scenes in which Giamatti and Pekar appear together: in such circumstances, the film firmly implies that one of the Pekars is real and therefore Giamatti cannot maintain his status as "Pekar" in this space.

This emphasis on the "real" status of one of the representations (at least in a relative sense) is also the implication of the appearance of Harvey Pekar in the opening credits sequence, who means to distinguish himself from the versions portrayed by Giamatti or sketched by numerous cartoon artists when he claims that he is the "real guy". While the cartoon figures do appear inside the film and seem to interact with Pekar, they are easily interpreted as imaginary manifestations that do not have any diegetic reality but only appear to the diegetic Pekar, like hallucinations. As a result, these cartoons are "voiced" by the diegetic Pekar (i.e. Paul Giamatti's voice).

The fictional operator notwithstanding, Harvey Pekar does appear as himself in the film – at first, "outside" the fiction in a completely white, almost supernatural, environment which functions as the studio where his voice-over for the film is recorded. Later, Paul Giamatti's presence in this space would seem to "defictionalise" his status as Harvey Pekar (in other words, in these scenes, he is Paul Giamatti), but it is a fictional Paul Giamatti. At any rate, none of these cases puts forward the idea that Harvey Pekar has double existence.

But the film contains an unexpected scene in which the diegetic identity of Harvey Pekar is thoroughly destabilised, by means of an instance of double representation. The scene occurs in the second half of the film[99] and starts with Pekar waiting in the studio's green room before going on stage to join David Letterman on his television talk show. As interpreted by Paul Giamatti, Pekar is accompanied out of the green room by a stagehand, while his wife stays behind to watch his appearance on a television – all in a single take. However, when Pekar appears on the television, it is not Giamatti, but the

[99] Starting at 1:05:40

real Harvey Pekar who is shown (the logical implication being that we are watching historical footage of Pekar's real appearance on Letterman's show). This event is quite unique in fiction film (although Buñuel's *That Obscure Object of Desire*[100], in which one character is randomly portrayed by two different actresses, comes close to duplicating this kind of presentation) and the film's roots in the actual world compel the viewer to make sense of this double existence. This sequence is a case of double existence since Harvey Pekar (as portrayed by Giamatti) as well as Harvey Pekar (as portrayed by Harvey Pekar) have both come to designate the fictional Harvey Pekar.

The viewer can interpret the sequence without much difficulty: the original Harvey Pekar appears on the David Letterman show (this is a re-broadcast of the show), while the diegetic version of Harvey is played by Paul Giamatti. However, this combination is very difficult to explain within the realistic framework of the film's diegesis: since the film is realistic in almost all other respects, Harvey Pekar should look the same when he appears on television as when he appears elsewhere in the film. Though there is a difference in exact continuity, this scene may be compared to Steven Spielberg's *Munich* (2005), in which there is also a kind of double existence of historical and fictional: inside the Israeli compound in the athlete's village at the Munich Olympics, a masked terrorist steps onto the balcony of an apartment where hostages are being held. While the camera is placed so that the viewer can see this person from the back, a television next to the balcony shows "live" pictures (well-known historical footage) of the terrorist taken from the front, as he appears on the balcony. The individual is disguised and therefore the contrast is not as visible as is the case in *American Splendor*; however, the two films' transition between (even: conflation of) the historical and the fictional, or the recreated, is the same.

In these cases, historical footage was preferred over recreated scenes, and most viewers would realise that the particular footage had some historical weight (they appeared as such on television at the time). *American Splendor* does not downplay the fact that

[100] *Cet obscur objet du désir*, 1977

scenes present the historical in a way that does not always (if ever) accurately relate the facts of history. This metatextual acknowledgement that representations should be treated with suspicion is clear in a scene at the theatre, where scenes from the film (or from Pekar's life) are recreated by different actors in a play entitled "American Splendor".[101]

The inclusion of this play and the very calculated choice of a scene that loosely recreates an event that we have already seen in the film provide an implicit recognition that representations are different from the things they represent.

7.12 Conclusion

This chapter established that playful self-reference in a film does not seek to represent the truth about the production but rather encourages the viewer to approach the representation with caution, especially if much of the film reflects specific individuals of the actual world. Things may happen in a film that are impossible in the actual world and an important reason for this is the use of sounds and images for their own sake, without any desire to represent the actual world with its physical characteristics. The world that the film presents, in its totality, is the diegesis, or the fictional world and this fictional world is presented to the viewer as an equal to the actual world.

The characters of *The Dreamers* characterise this interplay between the actual world and the world of images very well since they imitate other films and thereby the field of "play" becomes less well-defined, even though it is clearly an activity which the characters engage in for the purpose of fun. In fact, the characters play the intertextual game of "recognize and enjoy" with many films – recreating a gesture from a film which another character must recognise by name. In the film, Jean-Pierre Léaud acts in a similar manner, except that he is imitating himself and here the matter of actuality becomes very tricky indeed.

[101] 0:58:30

As Anderson stated with his notion of “Branigan’s paradox”, the real remains beyond the grasp of the film viewer, and even though films like *The Dreamers* or *American Splendor*, like Winterbottom’s *Welcome to Sarajevo* or *24 Hour Party People*, include footage that is documentary in nature, the material is still (at best) a representation that occupies the place of the original in the fiction.

Conclusion

By their integration of events that took place in this world independently of the particular films' production, or of characters whose identities precede the film itself (like Steve Coogan in *A Cock and Bull Story*), the eight Winterbottom films in this dissertation utilise the actual world to bolster or, in some cases, deliberately undermine the viewer's knowledge of reality in these films.

However, the direct mould of reality onto film does not necessarily produce an impression of reality; the staging, recording and presentation of the action contribute significantly to the perception that the events, though not being entirely real, are similar in kind to the actual world, and thus they can be called 'realistic'. "The realism or non-realism of a film inheres in its representational dimension, not in its renditional dimension", says Nicholas Wolterstorff (1980:20).

In Chapter 1, Noël Carroll was quoted as saying that realism "should not be used unprefixed" (Carroll 1996:244) and in this dissertation we saw many different approaches for attaining and perceiving realism in a film. A film's realism is generally measured against the conventions indicated by the term's prefix and, according to Roman Jakobson, either the artist or the viewer can appreciate the realism in a work based on its adherence to or rejection of the conventions of realistic representation. Jakobson best illustrates the multiplicity of criteria that lead to a work being considered "realistic" and makes evident the subjectivity of the judgement. Some tendencies in representation have been accepted as more accurate approaches to the depiction of reality and in this regard Torben Grodal mentions the "scenes from everyday life,

especially the life of the middle and lower classes" (Grodal 2009:257) which form an important part of most of the realist movements in film. Carroll's point is valid, but this dissertation has done away with prefixes since it is understood that the term would be qualified on every occasion for every kind of viewer.

Documentary strategies such as the use of handheld cameras were advocated by certain filmmakers who sought a feeling of immediacy in their work and it is true that such devices can simulate in the viewer the assumption that the cameraman, an actual individual like the viewer herself, was present at the recorded event and therefore the recording contains verifiable historical occurrences. This assumption that the events are seized by the cameraman, rather than performed for the purpose of being recorded, is central to the Dogme 95 filmmakers' determination to present their films with this visual aesthetic. Referring to the ways in which a fight might be depicted on film, Alfred Hitchcock observed that "[m]ore often than not the photographic reality is not realistic" (Truffaut 1967:202) and in order to achieve some sense of realism, the filmmaker must control the representation and not mechanically record reality; furthermore, artifice is always already present in the process of representation since the representation is something different from the thing represented.

Thus, realism relates to the actual world (or, more precisely, to the viewer's subjective experience of this world: her reality), but it is not the direct reproduction of this world. This dissertation analysed the ways in which the actual world, represented with the aid of different techniques, may be used to convey realism and shown what the most effective discourse would be when speaking of hybrids that combine "actual" and "fictional" elements. The importance of simulation was highlighted in the discussion of Michael Winterbottom's *9 Songs*, a film which sparked outrage from many viewers who did not appreciate the fact that it showed actors engaged in sexual intercourse *for real* as opposed to creating the *illusion* of sex.

Wonderland provided an opportunity to discuss the shortcomings of the Dogme movement's quest for truth or realism and in particular the difficulty of representing emotions, alongside the emotionally realistic effect on the viewer that may be achieved

by different means. The fictions that were presented as either realistic or reality-based lent themselves to an analogy with the notion of possible worlds – worlds that are similar to the actual world, but can be completely different as long as this difference is possible in this world.

Chapter 3 introduced the "fictional operator", which renders the world of a film and all the entities it implies fictional. Films still contain characters or locations that are recognisable because they exist more or less *as such* in the actual world, but in a film they often appear alongside entities that exist only in the film and have no existence in the actual world. The inclusion of such real-world entities can either undermine or contribute to the realism of a film and this dissertation has discussed numerous strategies that aim to accomplish either one of these goals.

While possible worlds are dependent on the actual world, being exemplifications of all the possibilities (either realised or imaginary) of our world, the term "fictional world" covers the world that is present in a fiction: this fictional world is never identical to the actual world and can have properties that are incompossible in the actual world, such as simultaneous existence and non-existence. It is important to note that possible worlds and fictional worlds are by no means mutually exclusive categories, but that possible worlds in fiction are always fictional worlds as well. In Chapter 4 "diegesis" and related terms were discussed as defined by Étienne Souriau and in Chapter 7 it is made clear that the term also covers worlds that are strictly speaking possible on film but impossible in the actual world and therefore "diegesis" (the narrated world) is very similar to "fictional world".

Hybridism is a theme addressed throughout this research. It is not only the combination of clearly fictional and clearly actual elements that is analysed, but also the kind of mixture that results when images that are all immediately representative of the actual world are put together in a certain way. These images were not changed in post-production and during production no effort was made to change their appearance in any fundamental aspect, but the way in which they were edited creates a world that is

quite different from the actual world. In the case of *Code 46*, this result is a potentially possible world that makes visual Eisenstein's analogy of the hieroglyph.

The Road to Guantanamo and *Welcome to Sarajevo* present the viewer with representations of historical events, combining documentary footage with staged action, sometimes even in the same scene. These traces of the actual in the fiction can easily be covered by the fictional operator, but considering the events and their coverage in the media were fairly recent, the viewer might not necessarily be inclined to view everything as "fictional", in other words as components, first and foremost, of another world. In *Welcome to Sarajevo*, as in *In This World*, written texts inform the viewer of actual facts and the inclusion of such information relating to the actual world gets in the way of the viewer's assessment of the world on screen as purely fictional. The combination of actual and fictional fields of meaning can complicate fictional discourse, especially when the viewer is constantly reminded of the actual world. Since the actual and fictional worlds seem to intersect at some points, it may be said that they exist alongside each other rather than above or below one another.

If we support the notion that realism is immanently tied to our experience of the world, then strictly speaking realism in the fictional world becomes more and more difficult the less this fictional world corresponds to the actual world. But this is not the case, since the actual world is but one of many worlds that the viewer uses to determine a film's so-called "realism" and postmodernism pushes the argument that the actual world has lost its conventional status as measure for what is realistic.

The implication of such a loss in confidence of the authority of the actual world was discussed in the final two chapters of this dissertation, with particular focus on the shift in meaning of certain devices, formerly representative of actual truth, like the to-camera address. These techniques are now treated with much more circumspection, since it is clear that the actual world is perceived through the filter of fiction and it cannot be assumed that the fictional, while perhaps very similar to the actual facts, is identical to them.

24 Hour Party People is a very postmodern treatment of historical facts about the music culture in Manchester since the mid-seventies, while *A Cock and Bull Story* engaged with images of the actual present in the form of celebrities and films that are a part of contemporary culture. These films' use of intertextuality makes evident the network of interconnected worlds that we can see on screen, even when many of its parts appear to be "real". The occurrence of real individuals who "portray themselves" – Howard Devoto in the bathroom scene in *24 Hour Party People*; Steve Coogan, Rob Brydon and Gillian Anderson in *A Cock and Bull Story* – becomes more problematic in other films, discussed at the end of Chapter 7, in which their status, either real-world or fictional, is totally ambiguous.

Films such as *The Dreamers* and *American Splendor* depict worlds whose construction makes them at times fictional and impossible, but whose workings are understood in the light of events in another world: the actual world. The world of the film, always covered by a fictional operator, is indeed distinct from the actual world, but postmodern cinema has encouraged the viewer to look to other worlds outside the immediate fictional world, to recognise the traces of these foreign worlds and find pleasure in this recognition. In terms of realism, the viewer's experience of worlds, in the plural, is called upon to measure the events on-screen and therefore a comparison with the actual world is no longer the only way to gauge a work's realism.

This study has focused primarily on fiction films, in the sense that they do not pretend to be straightforward documentaries; while many of them contain footage that is incontrovertibly documentary in nature, the recording of action that would have taken place regardless of a camera's presence, they all maintain a fictional quality because they are clearly engaged in a form of play, a fact continually acknowledged in the closing credits: the addition of characters, events or interactions that do not have counterparts in the actual world, or the restaging of past events which inevitably produces a representation that is not identical to its actual world counterpart. The fictional operator is another reminder of the impossibility of referring to the world of the fiction

in exactly the same way as one refers to the actual world, and documentaries provide a fertile ground for further study of the implications of such a claim.

Films are not real life; not when they pretend to be real life, not when they call on historical participants, and obviously not when they flagrantly disregard the actual facts. They can strive towards the asymptote that is real life, but they always remain fictional and the world they present is itself completely fictional. If it contains entities which the viewer can recognise because of their similar appearance or behaviour in the actual world, then the specific actual and fictional entities are counterparts of each other, but they are never identical. “In one sense, all images are fictions of the real”, says Caroline Bainbridge (2007:93).

Ultimately, the world of the film is a fictional reality that is sometimes a representation of the actual world, but the relationship between the two worlds is never completely transparent, in spite of the efforts that many filmmakers have made in this respect. This fictional aspect of the film does not, however, preclude the viewer from interpreting the fictional events within the framework of her knowledge of the actual world, and in films such as those discussed in Chapter 7, these kinds of interpretations are encouraged, even when the worlds become more enigmatic as a result of the viewer’s extratextual knowledge.

Filmography

2 or 3 Things I Know About Her. (Original title: *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle*). 1966. Jean-Luc Godard.

24 Hour Party People. 2002. Michael Winterbottom.

400 Blows, The. (Original title: *Les 400 coups*). 1959. François Truffaut.

8½. 1963. Federico Fellini.

9 Songs. 2004. Michael Winterbottom.

Adaptation.[102] 2002. Spike Jonze.

American Splendor. 2004. Robert Pulcini & Shari Springer Berman.

Amores Perros. 2001. Alejandro González Iñárritu.

Annie Hall. 1977. Woody Allen.

Apocalypse Now. 1979. Francis Ford Coppola.

Around the World in 80 Days. 2004. Frank Coraci.

Back to the Future, Part II. 1989. Robert Zemeckis.

Barry Lyndon. 1975. Stanley Kubrick.

Battle of Algiers. (Original title: *La battaglia di Algeri*) 1966. Gillo Pontecorvo.

Bicycle Thieves, The. (Original title: *Ladri di biciclette*). 1948. Vittorio de Sica.

Billy Liar. 1963. John Schlesinger.

Blair Witch Project, The. 1999. Daniel Myrick & Eduardo Sanchez.

Blazing Saddles. 1974. Mel Brooks.

Blow. 2001. Ted Demme.

Bonnie and Clyde. 1967. Arthur Penn.

Breathless. (Original title: *À bout de souffle*). 1960. Jean-Luc Godard.

[102] The title is written with a full stop, i.e. "Adaptation.".

Celebration, The. (Original title: *Festen*). 1998. Thomas Vinterberg.

Citizen Kane. 1941. Orson Welles.

City of God. (Original title: *Cidade de deus*). 2002. Fernando Meirelles & Katia Lund.

Cock and Bull Story, A. 2005. Michael Winterbottom.

Code 46. 2003. Michael Winterbottom.

Cold Mountain. 2003. Anthony Minghella.

Confessions of a Dangerous Mind. 2002. George Clooney.

Death Proof. 2007. Quentin Tarantino.

Dog Day Afternoon. 1975. Sidney Lumet.

Downfall. (Original title: *Der Untergang*). 2004. Oliver Hirschbiegel.

Draughtsman's Contract, The. 1982. Peter Greenaway.

Dreamers, The. 2004. Bernardo Bertolucci.

Entertainer, The. 1960. Tony Richardson.

Fargo. 1996. Joel Coen.

Full Frontal. 2002. Steven Soderbergh.

Funny Games. 1997. Michael Haneke.

Hiroshima, mon amour. 1959. Alain Resnais.

Idiots, The. (Original title: *Idioterne*). 1999. Lars von Trier.

In This World. 2002. Michael Winterbottom.

Intimacy. 2001. Patrice Chéreau.

JFK. 1992. Oliver Stone.

Joy of Learning, The. (Original title: *Le gai savoir*). 1969. Jean-Luc Godard.

julien donkey-boy. 1999. Harmony Korine.

Jurassic Park. 1993. Steven Spielberg.

Kill Bill: Vol. 1. 2003. Quentin Tarantino.

Kill Bill: Vol. 2. 2004. Quentin Tarantino.

Kind of Loving, A. 1962. John Schlesinger.

Kon-Tiki. 1950. Thor Heyerdahl.

Lady in the Lake. 1947. Robert Montgomery.

Lancelot du Lac. 1974. Robert Bresson.

Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner, The. 1962. Tony Richardson.

Look Back in Anger. 1959. Tony Richardson.

Lost World, The. 1997. Steven Spielberg.

Man on Wire. 2008. James Marsh.

Marie Antoinette. 2005. Sofia Coppola.

Marketa Lazarová. 1967. František Vláčil.

Medium Cool. 1969. Haskell Wexler.

Motorcycle Diaries, The. (Original title: *Diarios di motocicleta*). 2004. Walter Salles.

Munich. 2005. Steven Spielberg.

Natural Born Killers. 1994. Oliver Stone.

Ocean's Eleven. 2001. Steven Soderbergh.

Ocean's Twelve. 2004. Steven Soderbergh.

One Night at McCool's. 2001. Harald Zwart.

Paisà. 1946. Roberto Rossellini.

Panic Room. 2001. David Fincher.

Pierrot le fou. 1965. Jean-Luc Godard.

Player, The. 1992. Robert Altman.

Pulp Fiction. 1994. Quentin Tarantino.

Raging Bull. 1980. Martin Scorsese.

Rashomon. 1950. Akira Kurosawa.

Requiem for a Dream. 2000. Darren Aronofsky.

Road to Guantanamo, The. 2006. Michael Winterbottom.

Rome, Open City. (Original title: *Roma, città aperta*). 1945. Roberto Rossellini.

Room at the Top. 1959. Jack Clayton.

Room with a View, A. 1985. James Ivory.

Saturday Night and Sunday Morning. 1960. Karel Reisz.

Saving Private Ryan. 1998. Steven Spielberg.

Scott of the Antarctic. 1948. Scott Frend.

Series 7: The Contenders. 2000. Daniel Minahan.

Shrek. 2001. Andrew Adamson & Vicky Jenson.

Spartacus. 1960. Stanley Kubrick.

Sporting Life, The. 1963. Lindsay Anderson.

Taste of Honey, A. 1961. Tony Richardson.

That Obscure Object of Desire. (Original title: *Cet obscur objet du désir*). 1977. Luis Buñuel.

Thin Blue Line, The. 1988. Errol Morris.

Ugetsu. 1953. Kenji Mizoguchi.

Wag the Dog. 1997. Barry Levinson.

Welcome to Sarajevo. 1997. Michael Winterbottom.

Where No Vultures Fly. 1951. Harry Watt.

Wonderland. 1999. Michael Winterbottom.

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Addendum A

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The Dogme 95 Manifesto

DOGME 95
…is a collective of film directors founded in Copenhagen in spring 1995.

DOGME 95 has the expressed goal of countering 'certain tendencies' in the cinema today.

DOGME 95 is a rescue action!

In 1960 enough was enough! The movie was dead and called for resurrection. The goal was correct but the means were not! The new wave proved to be a ripple that washed ashore and turned to muck.

Slogans of individualism and freedom created works for a while, but no changes. The wave was up for grabs, like the directors themselves. The wave was never stronger than the men behind it. The anti-bourgeois cinema itself became bourgeois, because the foundations upon which its theories were based was the bourgeois perception of art. The auteur concept was bourgeois romanticism from the very start and thereby ... false!

To DOGME 95 cinema is not individual!

Today a technological storm is raging, the result of which will be the ultimate democratisation of the cinema. For the first time, anyone can make movies. But the more accessible the media becomes, the more important the avant-garde. It is no accident that the phrase 'avant-garde' has military connotations. Discipline is the answer ... we must put our films into uniform, because the individual film will be decadent by definition!

DOGME 95 counters the individual film by the principle of presenting an indisputable set of rules known as THE VOW OF CHASTITY.

In 1960 enough was enough! The movie had been cosmeticised to death, they said; yet since then the use of cosmetics has exploded.

The ‘supreme’ task of the decadent filmmakers is to fool the audience. Is that what we are so proud of? Is that what the ‘100 years’ have brought us? Illusions via which emotions can be communicated? ... By the individual artist’s free choice of trickery?

Predictability (dramaturgy) has become the golden calf around which we dance. Having the characters’ inner lives justify the plot is too complicated, and not ‘high art’. As never before, the superficial action and the superficial movie are receiving all the praise.

The result is barren. An illusion of pathos and an illusion of love.

To DOGME 95 the movie is not illusion!

Today a technological storm is raging of which the result is the elevation of cosmetics to God. By using new technology anyone at any time can wash the last grains of truth away in the deadly embrace of sensation. The illusions are everything the movie can hide behind.

DOGME 95 counters the film of illusion by the presentation of an indisputable set of rules known as THE VOW OF CHASTITY.

13 March 1995

The Dogme 95 Vow of Chastity

'I swear to submit to the following set of rules drawn up and confirmed by DOGME 95:

1. Shooting must be done on location. Props and sets must not be brought in (if a particular prop is necessary for the story, a location must be chosen where this prop is to be found).
2. The sound must never be produced apart from the images or vice versa. (Music must not be used unless it occurs where the scene is being shot).
3. The camera must be hand-held. Any movement or immobility attainable in the hand is permitted. (The film must not take place where the camera is standing; shooting must take place where the film takes place).
4. The film must be in colour. Special lighting is not acceptable. (If there is too little light for exposure the scene must be cut or a single lamp be attached to the camera).
5. Optical work and filters are forbidden.
6. The film must not contain superficial action. (Murders, weapons, etc. must not occur.)
7. Temporal and geographical alienation are forbidden. (That is to say that the film takes place here and now.)
8. Genre movies are not acceptable.
9. The film format must be Academy 35 mm.
10. The director must not be credited.

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

Thus I make my VOW OF CHASTITY.'

13 March 1995

On behalf of DOGME 95,

Lars von Trier
Thomas Vinterberg