

***Dogville* Characterized by *The Grapes of Wrath*: European Identity Construction through American Genre Conventions**

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Dogville's (Lars von Trier, DK, 2003) widely recognized anti-Americanism is most apparent in the end credits, a montage of documentary photographs of American deprivation, accompanied by David Bowie's "Young Americans." American critics have reacted strongly to the film and to the credits' photomontage. Many photographs are of the Great Depression of the 1930s, the time frame of *Dogville's* story. The Farm Security Administration's photographs in *Dogville's* credit sequence particularly recall another fiction film set in the Depression years, *The Grapes of Wrath* (John Ford, US, 1940), based on John Steinbeck's novel—both Steinbeck and Ford were inspired by the FSA photos. A closer look at the FSA pictures and a specific analysis of some crucial scenes in *The Grapes of Wrath* may help to explain what it is about *Dogville's* European outlook on America that is so disturbing for Americans. More significantly, a closer look at *The Grapes of Wrath* helps to focus on *Dogville's* "Europeaness."

Both *Dogville* and *The Grapes of Wrath* are critical about the narrow mindedness of local communities, notoriously unable to deal with the arrival of refugees into the relative quiet of their own circle. *The Grapes of Wrath* explicitly depicts the fate of Oklahoman victims of capitalist agricultural reform, and ultimately legitimizes Roosevelt's New Deal federal policies overcoming regional protectionism. *Dogville* allegorizes the contemporary plight of economic refugees and political asylum seekers and ultimately represents the revengeful consequences of misunderstanding the intruder's motives for fleeing. *The Grapes of Wrath* is a road movie depicting the construction of identity of the American people, a newly created self-invention in a settler society. *Dogville*, on the other hand, with its dead-end community, may metonymically depict the

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disintegration of American identity, but at least also presents us with the reluctance of Europeans to overcome their own nation-state confines.

Dogville's Credit Sequence

Dogville the DVD includes coverage of the press conferences in Cannes 2003 and other PR materials. The film's production notes and von Trier's ironic statements about the legitimacy of his judgments as an outsider regarding American mores, both in *Dogville* and in his media-hyped performances at the Cannes film festival, have generated attention beyond the scope of film journalism. The production notes and the Cannes events relate *Dogville* to *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, US, 1942). In von Trier's own words:

I went to Cannes with *Dancer in the Dark*, and I was criticized by some American journalists for making a film about the USA without ever having been there. This provoked me because, as far as I can recall, they never went to Casablanca when they made *Casablanca* . . . Although I must say, I am better informed about the USA than the people who made *Casablanca* were about Casablanca.¹

Hollywood never really bothered about the actual Casablanca before releasing Curtiz's *Casablanca* in 1942, so why should von Trier be required to check whether or not his depiction of small-town America would be an accurate representation of moral crisis during the Depression of the 1930s? This jester-like gesture, of course, was meant as a provocation, and it should not be taken all too seriously as an argument qualifying von Trier for moral judgment or political criticism. And of course, *Casablanca* has not been canonized because of its accurate representation of Casablanca, but because it is recognized as a great Hollywood studio film. Even though representations may appear to be questioned here, then, representational accuracy is not von Trier's major issue. Not that accuracy is beyond von Trier's interest; his concern for a narrative, voiceover solution to the fact that there are no elms in the Rocky Mountains and thus no elms on Elm Street in *Dogville* proves otherwise. But then again, Elms are not important for moral judgment, American appropriations of the so-called universal human condition are.

To be sure, relating *Dogville* to *Casablanca* based on the premise that both films are poorly informed caricatures of far-away societies would not amount to anything substantial. But von Trier's joke is not that he is simply repeating a filmmaker's folly from a reversed angle. His probable suggestion is somewhat more difficult to rebuff: *Dogville* is not the same as *Casablanca*; *Dogville* is a consequence of *Casablanca*. Being an outsider *vis-à-vis* American morality—being Danish—does not disqualify one from moral judgments about American culture, precisely because Danish popular culture, the television programs and films with which any Dane of von Trier's age has grown up, are thoroughly and

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determinedly American. Again, von Trier does not imply that he is identical to an American; he does imply that he is also who he is as a consequence of a serious understanding of what it means to be American. His next provocation, therefore, is not so much a new one, it is a paraphrase of his *Casablanca* reference: “*Ich bin ein American*” is a rehearsed, provocative imitation of president Kennedy’s clumsy intimation of wanting to overcome the outsider’s perspective in postwar Europe (“*Ich bin ein Berliner*”). From early on in his career, at least since *Europa* (also known as *Zentropa*, DK, 1991), von Trier has not explored the parallels between European and American culture so much as he has actively researched their entanglement.

Among von Trier’s research material for *Dogville* was the grand collection of the Farm Security Administration (FSA), with black and white pictures by Russell Lee, Dorothea Lange, Jack Collier, A. Singel, Ben Shan, Carl Mydans, J. Vachon, and Arthur Rothstein, all credited in *Dogville*’s notorious credit sequence: a montage of Depression-era photographs and more “up to date” photos, mostly by von Trier’s countryman Jacob Holdt. *Dogville*’s DVD extra-audio track, with the collaborated commentary by the director of photography, Anthony Dod Mantle, and von Trier himself, has von Trier elaborating on why the FSA photographs were shown. Von Trier explains that first they were research material, then they became the theme of the film.² Finally, they were updated by using Jacob Holdt’s pictures. The credit sequence resembles a slide show with a few seconds for every photograph. It does have some zooms and pans, though, mainly explorations of photographic detail. Very briefly, there also is some film footage of an American flag moving in a summer breeze.

In sum, the FSA photographs, together with American popular culture more or less flooding Danish mass media and “a good knowledge of Steinbeck,” have informed von Trier’s depiction of the bleak 1930s town called Dogville.³ These photographs, all except one—a presidential picture of Richard Nixon—are representations of American deprivation. Their appearance in the credits seems to function as the coming to life of *Dogville*’s broadly-outlined characters, most of which have been one-dimensionally portrayed almost as film-based diagrams of the Great Depression. Critic J. Hoberman confirms that von Trier’s depiction of Dogville is based on film versions of American culture:

Dogville . . . is set in a more universal America—an America one might abstract from Hollywood movies. Like *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Dogville* evokes Depression-era America with a few cloche hats, Model Ts and a bit of FDR over the radio. Von Trier populates his isolated Rocky Mountain community with stock figures ranging from the boy inventor and the black mammy to the town doctor and the big-city gangster.⁴

Just like Moses the dog, whose chalk lines come to life after almost three hours of film, these portraits of the American poor appear to warn us that

reality bites, that there is a trajectory of deprivation that extends from the Depression era, through the Nixon years, and towards the present. Some critics, especially American critics, were offended, if not by the film as a whole, then by the credit sequence in particular. Robert Sklar describes his repugnance both over film theorists' crowning "a new Scandinavian Sage" and over von Trier poking him in the chest, hammering home the message: "America bad."⁵ Similarly, Harlan Jacobson calls *Dogville* "a Euro offensive, a celebration of the certainty of European moral superiority."⁶

Von Trier's use of Jacob Holdt's photography in particular must have unsettled many Americans in the audience at Cannes. These pictures, mostly from the seventies, were first incorporated in Holdt's multi-media presentation *American Pictures*, currently available as a website commending itself by the following phrases: "An outsider looking in. A Danish vagabond's personal journey through the American underclass."⁷ As J. Hoberman explains, Jacob Holdt is not as well known in America as he is in his native Denmark. Hoberman writes:

Although Holdt is scarcely a household name, his influence on von Trier's sense of America could hardly be exaggerated. No Dane of von Trier's generation could have been unaware of Holdt's critique. More horrifying than *Night of the Living Dead*, the movie *American Pictures* played continuously for years in Copenhagen. . . . Holdt's visceral sense of America as an unjust, racist violent society . . . lurks beneath *Dogville's* surface to explode with maximum force after the movie is over.⁸

Hoberman's extensive review generally defends *Dogville* against sometimes belligerent responses from American critics; yet, in the seemingly off-hand reference to George Romero's 1968 cult classic, Hoberman has found a remarkably strong rebuttal to von Trier's provocations. Contrary to von Trier's proclamations, not an American but a Danish production may have been the major inspiration and justification of von Trier's moral judgment. In von Trier's own argument, Holdt's outsider's perspective does not make von Trier "ein American" so much as Romero's zombies would. Moreover, the trajectory of remediated photographs appearing in *Dogville* is not the sequential reflection of images made in America by American photographers and filmmakers, then projected all the way to Denmark and back again to American audiences. Von Trier's obvious pride in understanding American morality is not the mere mirror image of arrogant rays of lights with which American popular film has illuminated Danish culture. *Dogville* is also at least a reflection of Danes constructing their own moral judgments, undeniably influenced by American culture but always also a self-reflexive inquiry into the processes of moral identity formation.⁹

Shelley Rice, one of the American critics offended by what she calls a "photographic diatribe," claims that in the "final montage [of still photogra-

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phy] venerated images of our history collide with their foreign reflection.”¹⁰ FSA photographs do not avail themselves to being updated by Holdt’s indicting pictures of America, Rice seems to argue. To be sure, Rice acknowledges the propagandistic function of the FSA photos: they “are hardly objective records of our collective past.” Nevertheless, “they do represent . . . a national self-image”:

Our compassionate response to the demands made on us by these photographs is part of our national mythology, our proof of the inherent goodness of the American character. We’re proud that our forbears agreed to be the saviors of their fellow citizens—a pride that is venomously mocked by von Trier’s visual tirade.¹¹

Rice is probably right about von Trier’s intention to criticize American pride. The long moral deliberations by Grace (Nicole Kidman) and her father (James Caan) in the back of the gangster car about “arrogance,” reveal that what Rice describes as virtuous pride will turn into the vicious spite of revenge.¹² To Rice and other Americans’ dismay, von Trier appears not to differentiate between American pride related to national issues invoked by Roosevelt’s New Deal, effectively changing the internal, constitutional identity of the United States, and pride related to America’s war on terrorism affecting the world theater of international law and United Nations. In this way, he remains an outsider to American foreign policies as well as to the interiority of American identity formation. Von Trier and any other Dane seemingly well-versed in American culture—but not finding a position in which New Deal photography is distinguished from representations of post-war crises in America—appear to lose themselves in their relative outsider-ship after all. According to many Americans, von Trier may be right about America’s war on terrorism, but wrong about New Deal policies; however, a moral judgment about both in what appear to be the same terms cannot but result in the *tu quoque* reproach that *Dogville* is an example of European moral superiority, i.e., pride.

FSA Photography

A closer look at the institutional background of the Depression-era photographs reveals that the Farm Security Administration was well informed about the ideological impact of images when it commissioned a range of well and lesser-known photographers to document the Depression in the 1930s. The FSA was part of Roosevelt’s New Deal policies and there was no doubt about the photo project being funded by the government: this was going to be a political project even if the photographers were hired to be independent artists. To warrant the suggestion of an autonomous photo documentary project, it was important for the FSA director, Roy Stryker, to sign Walker Evans,

who was by that time an already famous photographer, known for his independence and general antagonism to governmental bureaucracy.¹³ Alan Trachtenberg suggests that it was Roy Stryker who got the idea of a “photographic editing of society” from Evans’ pictures and not the other way around; indeed, “the FSA provided the material conditions for [Evans’] work, not its purpose or rationale.”¹⁴ Evans’ fame as a social critic, and the reception of his pictures and those of the other FSA photographers had a strong effect on the American self-image, “particularly in the 1960s, when many college students turned to the 1930s in search of a radical heritage.”¹⁵ Trachtenberg explains that hindsight constructions concerning the 1930s reinforced the iconic American power of Evans’ and other FSA pictures. It was these photographs and their subsequent status as icons of American identity that made the 1930s seem like “an era of dissent and revolutionary politics.”¹⁶ Trachtenberg argues that the photographs in fact determined the ideological perception of Roosevelt’s New Deal as a whole:

Evans’s sharecroppers and Dorothea Lange’s migrant workers had made the FSA seem to have mounted a campaign on behalf of the dispossessed—rather than doing what it more accurately was meant to do: be a publicity agency for New Deal farm programs, which on the whole favored the average farmer or the large “agribusiness” combines, more than the propertyless tenant farmers of the South.¹⁷

Roosevelt’s New Deal was strongly dependent on image in the most literal sense. Americans themselves are still discussing the complexities of commissioned photographs and their effect, not always according to program, on the American self-image. And even though Lars von Trier proclaims an interest in the workings of images on identity, he does not contribute much to an understanding of the intricacies of image projections in relation to the construction of identity internal to the USA, in and through pictures like the ones commissioned by the FSA.

Differently put, the identity in question that may or may not be appropriately constituted by the expression of American popular culture via the images of *Dogville* is not an American identity, but the cultural identity of a specific European filmmaker. The prospect of generalizing from this specific cultural identity, then, is less interesting for an American audience than for a European audience. For the cultural-identity question von Trier raises is not so much specifically American, nor is it properly characterized as his probing the universal, human condition. Rather, it relates the identity of European audiences to what is given on their own screens: American identities mediated by film. American audiences that take von Trier’s representation of the American communal identity of *Dogville* as an accurate depiction of American cultural identity have been fooled by von Trier’s orchestrated ruses surrounding the presentation of his film. These ruses are part of the media game

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von Trier is playing, and the credit sequence does belong to that game. Von Trier, however, is not the inventor of that game.

With a reference to Hannah Arendt's description of Walter Benjamin's work, Holger Römers calls von Trier's use of the FSA pictures a "surrealist montage."¹⁸ Römers convincingly shows that at least within the history of photography von Trier is not the first to change the meaning of pictures by re-using them. In fact, Römers describes the effect of von Trier's remediation of the *FSA* pictures in concomitance with the practice of recontextualizing pictures in photo books, epitomized by a 1989 book called *And Their Children After Them*, by an American duo—journalist Dale Maharidge and photographer Michael Williamson.¹⁹ Methodically more explicit than von Trier's credit sequence, this book is an update of the FSA pictures. Römers explains that "some of Evans' classic pictures have been reprinted opposite Williamson's new versions of the same subjects," to which Maharidge added specific reports. In a most disturbing example, one of Evans' praised and famous men is said to have horse-whipped his children and to have had an incestuous relationship with his daughter, "this new context effectively and dramatically changing one's perception of the original photos."²⁰ An American critic offended by *Dogville's* photomontage, then, may or may not be offended by the forced change in perception effectuated by Maharidge and Williamson's recontextualization of the FSA pictures. But it would appear that the outsider's perspective with which von Trier and Holdt present themselves and their moral judgments makes a difference.

Scenes of Jurisdiction

A reading of *Dogville* through the scenes of another film that has remediated the FSA pictures, albeit in a way less noticeable for contemporary audiences and certainly not radically changing the common perception of the photos, may shed some contradistinctive light on the necessity of being an outsider for the constitution of identity. John Ford's 1940 *The Grapes of Wrath*, based on John Steinbeck's 1939 novel of the same title, is a film about the Joad family, who after an exodus of biblical proportions from their drought-plagued fields in Oklahoma, come home to Roosevelt's New Deal California—here a government camp called "Wheat Patch"—thereby becoming an original American family. Both Ford and Steinbeck were inspired by the FSA pictures, and Ford's director of photography Gregg Toland was able to emulate the stark black-and-white aesthetics of the FSA documentary photographers,²¹ in combination with stylized, almost non-realistic lighting emphasizing the darkness of the Depression.²² *The Grapes of Wrath* is a road movie, and for Bennet Schaber it is a paradigmatic prewar road movie because it is a prime example of a film in which "the road presents the community to itself, becomes a vehicle of self-presentation constitutive of the people."²³ The Joads are even more than an original American family; they come to stand for the American people as

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such, always dynamically moving towards its destiny. Unlike the American citizens of Dogville, the Joads are not at the end of their road. And unlike Grace's violent gangster family, the Joads do not need crime and violence to survive. The Joads embody the American standards of moral life and do not let themselves be torn by moral dilemmas invoked by mortal sin.

To wit, Steinbeck's novel and the original script for *The Grapes of Wrath* did not make the Joads comply with the genre conventions of Schaber's pre-war road movie. There is some controversy about the authorship of *The Grapes of Wrath's* final scene, but it is clear that the closing scene with Ma Joad's (Jane Darwell) speech quoted by Schaber, "we'll go on forever, 'cause we're the people,"²⁴ was added under pressure of the movie's producer, Darryl Zanuck. Ma Joad's spirit is strong enough to withstand even her son's decision, parolee Tom Joad (Henry Fonda), to abandon his family. Thomas Pauly points out that the Joads' conviction "was not to be thwarted by the 'no help wanted' originally indicated in Nunnally Johnson's screenplay, so [Zanuck] gave them an open road."²⁵ Remarkably then, Von Trier's dead-ended citizens of Dogville resemble the Joads of the original script more than the Joads of the generic road movie. As indicated, however, unlike the Dogville citizens in Von Trier's allegory, the Joads of the film will not be stuck in a dead end. The Joads will not be allegorically obliterated from history, like Dogville and its citizens; instead, they will actually find the strength, matriarchally inspired, to stand for, i.e., become the American people, toughened up by the hardship on their way.

The obstructions the Joads encounter, even if already within the geographical space of the promised land—that is, after the Joads, cross their own river Jordan—actually enable the Joads to cross yet another boundary. Tom appears to refer to it as the transcendence towards becoming part of "one big soul," allowing him to "be everywhere." Overcoming hardship is the Joads' way of reaching a transcendental road to the one big soul that is the American people.²⁶ This way is practical and pragmatic, and is epitomized by Ma Joad, who understands that the rich and their weakly offspring are not tough enough to survive inevitable hardship, as the Joad family will. Even more practical and factually political are the boundaries of jurisdiction crossed in a carefully built *mise-en-scene* of three different (studio) sets, where the relations between authority and trespassing are subsequently reversed. In a conflict over authority, the local representatives of the law finally become trespassers on what used to be their own land, effectively reversing one of the early scenes in the film in which Tom was said to be trespassing while being in his "own place."²⁷ The Joads' transcendence towards becoming the American people, then, is preconditioned by strife over legitimate authority.

The transient camp, just beyond the "city limits" of the town where the Joads stop for gas, is a place to which the Okies and other migrant workers are referred. After crossing the Mojave desert, migrants are welcomed, then, by being banned. When the Joads arrive in this town (over the Tehachapi

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Mountains), the first person to whom they speak, a police officer with Oklahoman roots himself, tells the Joads about the curfew for migrants: “don’t try to park in town tonight . . . If I catch ya in town after dark, I gotta lock you up.” It is the Joads’ second encounter with the law in California (agricultural inspectors were the first), and again the law’s representatives protect and serve the land of milk and honey for Californians only. The transient camp beyond the city limits is the place that most looks like the refugee camps shot by the FSA photographers. Toland’s tilted subjective camera shows shacks and tents, raggedy clothes, emaciated children, and their desperate parents from the perspective of the Joads in their rattling truck. He adds slow movements, creating the haunting atmosphere of a personally experienced nightmarish hallucination.

This camp is the first of three California camps where the Joads stop on their way to work. It is also the place where, after their disillusion in Oklahoma, they again learn about the entanglement of the interest of land contractors with the law. Here, the sheriff and his deputies come to rid the contractor of a so-called agitator, a man who publicly questions the contractor’s job offerings. The man wants to see the contractor’s license and doubts the promise of thirty-cent wages. He accuses the contractor of rounding up more workers than there are jobs in order to lower the wages. The contractor—with his ostentatious suit, driving a matching luxurious convertible in this camp of devastation—calls in the assistance of the uniformed sheriff in the passenger seat to get rid of this “agitator.” In the idiom of *Dogville*, the call of the contractor indicting his opposition would be qualified as arrogant, the ensuing callous shooting by the sheriff as self-righteous to say the least. The trespassers here are Tom Joad and his traveling companion Casy (John Caradine), a former priest. Casy is arrested for protecting the agitator; Tom flees.

The second California camp for the Joads is a fruit-pickers’ camp on the grounds of what is called the Keene Ranch. Tom finds himself facing representatives of the law again. The sheriff’s deputies are siding with the landowners, as in the transient camp, but this time they are not in uniform. Their authority is expressed by the guns and the mere badges they wear and by the lists of information they carry. Casy calls them “tin-shield men.” These watch guards appear to protect the ranch from “agitators” who try to convince the fruit pickers on the inside that they should go on strike. The tin-shield men also form groups of vigilantes, strike-breaking thugs targeting the one who they believe is the leader of the organized workers: Casy. At night, they chase Casy down from the privacy of his tent, just outside Keene Ranch, into the shallow waters under a bridge. In this place that is neither land nor water, neither outside nor in, the watchmen catch up on Casy and beat him down. Tom, in a frenzied attempt to avenge Casy’s murder, kills one of the guards, but suffers a serious blow to his face, a wound that will trace Tom to the killing. Toland’s camera in this scene registers the extreme contrast of reflected light on the water and impenetrable shadows under the bridge. We

are shown an underworld river of death in which the authority of violence rules; Casey and Tom are still the trespassers here, and they have to pay dearly. Before, though, in the intimacy of the friendship with which Casey welcomes Tom into the tent, Casey and Tom are at home in a discussion about Casey's insights into the reasons for the tin-shield men to keep the fruit pickers separate from the workers outside. In this space, Casey's face is lit from above and photographed from below, making his wage predictions appear like ghostly prophecies. Jim Sanderson remarks that this way of lighting recalls the expressionism with which Muley, Tom's former neighbor, was introduced.²⁸ Later, Tom refers to these prophecies as moments of enlightenment, in which Casey's insights became his guiding lantern. Intruding upon this intimacy, breaking a strike even before it becomes a strike, obviously is yet another form of trespassing. This second time, however, it is not Casey and Tom who are the trespassers. The lack of official attire, compared to the sheriff and his deputies in the transient camp, proves to be Ford's preparation for a questioning of jurisdiction. These tin-shield men have no authority over Casey; they are silhouetted underworld figures, trespassing themselves.

The third California camp is modeled after a Franklin Delano Roosevelt New Deal farmer's camp. The film's Wheat Patch is an FSA camp, hence run by the government. When the Joads hit the speed bump upon entering the camp and appear to perform a comedy-caper entry into new grounds, they are welcomed by a man with his hands in white slacks, almost a photo negative of the tin-shield men of the Keene Ranch. This man (Grant Mitchell) actually resembles FDR, or better yet, is more like the FDR image without the wheelchair than Roosevelt himself. More importantly for the film, this FDR authority figure does not need local cops in the camp, because, as FDR explains, the campers make their own laws and elect their own representatives: "no cop can come in here without a warrant." For Tom this means that he cannot be arrested at will within the confines of the camp. But there is a more symbolical significance to this careful *mise-en-scene* of jurisdictions, particularly when the local sheriff attempts to extend his authority to the community of campers as well. It will amount to an attempted but prevented act of trespassing in this, the third camp for the Joads in California.

The sheriff and his deputies conspire to arrange a fight at the camp's dance night. The fight would be the excuse for the sheriff to take control of what then would become a rioters' camp. Ready to overrule the need for a warrant in order to gain access to the camp, i.e., allegorically ready to declare the state of emergency over the camp, the Sheriff and his deputies await the scheduled moment. What they don't know, however, is that the campers were able to thwart the conspiracy by smothering the fight before it could start. FDR confidently assures the sheriff that there is no fight, and thus no need for state violence. The camp will remain the safe place for the Joads in which they can become the all-American family that *The Grapes of Wrath* wants them to be. State violence, or *Staatsgewalt*—the prerogative of those

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who are able to declare the state of emergency, i.e., the sovereign powers of the nation state—does not belong to the local authorities of California after all.²⁹ To be sure, establishing this particular relation of jurisdictions did not come about without a struggle for power; it took three allegorical campsites to accomplish that the federal authority could legitimately make the local authority a trespasser on what the local authority thought to be its own land. *The Grapes of Wrath* thus sets up a questioning of three jurisdictions and finally establishes a highest authority. The Joads' position has changed: they are no longer trespassing outsiders; they have become the ultimate insiders, at home in their own land. As a matter of fact, the film's representation of judiciaries is probably highly contestable. Significantly though, the ambitions of *The Grapes of Wrath* go beyond legal accuracy. As expressed by Ma Joad's speech, the history of this particular family should be taken as the history of America. In this sense, *The Grapes of Wrath* belongs to the ideology of the FSA photography project, as it grounds the federal government's New Deal firmly in the imagination of its audience.³⁰

Dogville *Related to The Grapes of Wrath*

The *mise-en-scene* of jurisdiction in Dogville is literally transparent. Only briefly challenged by representatives of the law from outside, the citizens of Dogville seem willing to welcome Grace, the refugee, into their community. Compared to the American Wheat Patch community of *The Grapes of Wrath*, the community of Dogville experiences less existential anxiety over interference from the outside by tin-shield men. However, the transparency of city council meetings appears not to be a sufficient condition for the protection of a minority within the jurisdiction of Dogville's citizenry. Grace is raped and tortured. *Dogville's* *mise-en-scene*, particularly in the rape scene, makes painfully clear that Grace is not protected by the idea that the morals of Dogville are transparently constituted. The sound-stage set with chalk-line walls demarcating Dogville's main constructions allows everyone who wants to see it a plain view of Grace's rape. Yet, no one in Dogville does. Transparency turns out to be veiled. Unlike Wheat Patch, Dogville does not make the refugee a citizen. Dogville only seemingly accepts the stranger into the community as it grants no claimrights to Grace, and no freedom to obey the law that she, as a member of a sovereign community, would have given to herself. Grace remains a foreigner, never at home in Dogville. No wonder then that Dogville remains vulnerable to trespass. By confining, not welcoming Grace to Dogville, the citizens of Dogville harbor a trespasser amongst themselves, and the consequences will be devastating.

Dogville has an apocalyptic ending. The film has the "Young Americans" of Dogville devoured by Grace's wrath; she doesn't even spare the children.³¹ In this apocalyptic tone, the film complies with the conventions of the post-war road movie as described by Bennet Schaber. "The people" will no longer

come into its own as an entity; instead, the road movie will “produce visionary images in place of the people.”³² The road itself no longer is a place of dynamic destination, as it was for the Joads’ transcendence towards becoming the American people. Contradistinctively, “the disappearance of the people yields an image of the road as marginal territory, as a perpetual in-between.”³³ The citizens of Dogville are killed, their town is burnt down, their disappearance complete. In place of the community, the audience is left with the vision of the characters of Grace and her gangster family, on their way to Manderlay—von Trier’s second stop on the way to completing his America trilogy. No less biblical, and no less visionary, is the coming to life of Moses the dog, prefiguring the update of the Great Depression in the credit sequence’s extension of the FSA pictures towards a contemporary America of deprivation. Note, though, that despite the references to road-movie genre conventions, and more particularly, to the iconic Exodus in the credit sequence—and also despite von Trier’s emulation of the FSA-inspired look Ford gave to Steinbeck’s characters—that *Dogville* is indeed almost the direct obverse of the prewar road movie in its dead-end figuration and stage-bound *mise-en-scene*. Still, generically it belongs to the road movie, although not exclusively.

Dogville also belongs to the gangster movie. More specifically, von Trier appears to explore the conventions of the gangster movie by actualizing them. Contrary to the *Dogme* manifesto, von Trier does not dogmatically distance his film from genre conventions. He looks them up, exercises them, and encroaches upon them. The fugitive gangster sweetheart fallen out of grace is recognized on the basis of what we know about the gangster movies of the 1930s and 1940s. It is only late in the film, when we realize that we are watching James Caan as Grace’s father, that we wise up to the fact the conventions have changed. At least since *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, US, 1972), also starring James Caan, the gangster film has become even more entangled with the family melodrama than in the thirties and forties. Contemporary genre explorations like *The Sopranos* (HBO, US, 1999-) are well informed by conventions relating the gangster to two families at once: both the bourgeois family of moms and dads, sons and daughters, and the extended family of gangsters, of godfathers and godsons-and-daughters. Grace is not a gangster sweetheart, she is a family member complying to the cliché of being pulled back into the gangster family at large. In a way, the citizens of Dogville make the same mistake we do: not paying attention to the ways in which the world makes sense according to the genre conventions of Hollywood.

Dogville, then, refers to the conventions of the gangster movie as it has become entangled with the family melodrama. As an exploration of conventions it is von Trier’s next installment on a filmic research project that explores not only different Hollywood genres in particular but the interrelations of these genres as well. In this sense, von Trier comes remarkably close

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to the research project on “Hollywood realism” outlined by Frederic Jameson. Von Trier appears to side with Jameson in the latter’s opposition to the idea that the Hollywood genre film is antithetical to realism. In this perspective, both Jameson and von Trier are theorists of “Hollywood realism as a socio-aesthetic construction of reality,” emphasizing that the genre system as a whole harbors the “truth content” of Hollywood film.³⁴

Von Trier’s position of a relative but intimate outsider to Hollywood generates a research project in which dogmatic documents, sardonic obstructions, impositions on camera movement, authoritarian actor probes, diagrammatic staging, and even fear of flying all work as ever so many real opportunities for transgressions towards an overall picture of the system of genres. Von Trier’s USA trilogy appears to literally map out the extension of what it means to be “*ein American*” in chalk lines. The research project that belongs to this trilogy, as much as to the Gold Heart trilogy before it, indeed requires a thorough grasp of not just one Hollywood genre, but rather, “the meaning of the *system* of the genres” as a whole.³⁵ Von Trier’s chalk lines, therefore, are less an abstraction from genre conventions than a formal concretization of them. The chalk line *mise-en-scene* of *Dogville* is a formal expression of the insight that Jameson formulates as follows: “what the project of a genre system for film implies is that the reality socially constructed by Hollywood ‘realism’ is a map whose coordinates are parceled out among the specific genres.”³⁶ *Dogville*, then, is not just an allegory that lets a particular community stand for America as a whole; *Dogville* also stands for the way in which genre conventions are mediators of our sense of world. Or in Jameson’s words:

The “world” is then not what is represented in the romantic comedy or in film noir: but it is what is somehow governed by all of them together—the musical, the gangster cycles, “screwball comedy,” melodrama, that “populist” genre sometimes called social realism, the Western, romance, and the noir (but the enumeration must be closely and empirically linked to a specific historical moment)—and governed also . . . by their implicit generic relationships to each other.³⁷

For von Trier and anyone else who has grown up with generic images of America, the world is what it is because, in Jameson’s words, “it is governed” by a constellation of genre conventions. An intimate understanding of these conventions and not so much physically traveling through the world, as von Trier rightly insists, is a precondition for coming to grips, practically and morally, with the world. With *Dogville*, von Trier shows us that he actually complies with what Jameson would describe as world-governing generic traditions, just as Ford has with *The Grapes of Wrath*. Along the lines of cinematic genre conventions, then, the iconography of the Great Depression is taken to the test of identity construction in both *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Dogville*. *The*

Grapes of Wrath's social realism coming to terms with the Great Depression, as Jameson and von Trier's genre research informs us, was always already linked at least to the character construction of the family melodrama, the lighting of the gangster *noirs* and the biblical connotations of the Western. However, for *The Grapes of Wrath* the link to the specific historical moment to which Jameson refers is the identity-constructing myth that belongs to the Great Depression; for *Dogville* it is post-Cold War globalization epitomized by America's war on terrorism after 9-11.

But in addition to the genre-system that lets *The Grapes of Wrath* become the mythical ground for American identities, the Joads' transcendental position as the American family *par excellence* is also made possible by the specific film-internal sequences of jurisdictions differentiated by Ford's *mise-en-scene*. In other words, the cultural identity of the American people in this film is preconditioned by very specific, ideologically charged depictions of authority. *The Grapes of Wrath*, then, seems to ask: What does it mean for *Dogville* to represent its people as not preconditioned by an ideologically charged depiction of authority? What does it mean that the authority of *Dogville*'s communal council, embodying Tom Edison's enlightenment, must pay for its moral failure by having the violent authority of the gangster family erase it completely?

Remarkably, von Trier's differentiation of authorities does not reflect the political conflict over European authorities, which would resemble Roosevelt's federalism conflicting with regional and state authority as depicted by *The Grapes of Wrath*. Von Trier, the Dane, emphasizes that globalization is a process not confined to the geographical and conceptual space that is called Europe. The comparison between *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Dogville* would imply at least the question of whether von Trier's position would be typical for the cultural identity of the Danes, as it is not so much constructed in contradistinction to other European identities—for example, the Dutch or the French—but rather as European *vis-à-vis* America. To be sure, *Dogville*, like *The Grapes of Wrath*, is about the redistribution of the jurisdiction of authorities as constitutive of identity. Yet, *Dogville*'s Europeaness is not settled allegorically by a European central authority over against the regional authorities of nation-states; on the contrary, *Dogville*'s Europe is determinedly threatened by the vigilante gangsters about which *The Grapes of Wrath* warned us. Von Trier obviously suggests that now, towards the end of *Dogville*, it is the gangster family that stands for an America no longer satisfied to rule its own dogged communities. For von Trier the Dane, however, not Europe, but the world order at large—of which Europe as a whole is just a part—is the mythical “one big soul” that in *The Grapes of Wrath* was America. This idea may be hard to fathom for other Europeans like the French and the Dutch, who proved reluctant towards the unification of Europe, let alone towards the processes of globalization beyond the confines of Europe, in their 2005 referenda on the European constitution. Nevertheless, this idea appears to be the concrete political position explored by this filmmaking Dane. The old ideological

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project of world citizenship appears to be supported by the jester; von Trier the outsider to America can still become an insider at home in the world.³⁸ Of course, we can and should be doubtful about the viability of the cultural identity thus proclaimed. What we can be sure of, however, is that von Trier's research project, along self-imposed rules of conduct, has already begun to report in different installments—like *Dear Wendy* (s. Lars von Trier, d. Thomas Vinterberg, DK, 2005) and *Manderlay* (Lars von Trier, DK, 2005)—on the state of globalized filmmaking, determined as it is for this particular European filmmaker by Hollywood genres.

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Notes

1. *Dogville* Production Notes, www.dogville.dk. Accessed June 1, 2005.
2. The FSA pictures are still available through the Library of Congress: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fsahtml/fahome.html> (accessed: October 12th, 2005).
3. When D.P. Anthony Dod Mantle asks von Trier about his anti-Americanism on the extra DVD audio track, von Trier reassures Dod Mantle that he is informed quite well by the American culture present in Denmark during his youth, and by “a good knowledge of Steinbeck.”
4. J. Hoberman, “Our Town,” *Sight & Sound* 2 (2004): 26.
5. Robert Sklar, “*Dogville*,” *Cineaste* 29, no. 3 (2004): 47.
6. Harlan Jacobson, “. . . the Land of the Damned,” *Film Comment* 39, no. 6 (2003): 21.
7. www.american-pictures.com/english/index.html. Accessed: October 12, 2005.
8. Hoberman, 26.
9. In his BFI monograph, *Lars von Trier*, Jack Stevenson—an American film writer living in Denmark since 1993—characterizes Danish culture as follows: “On the surface, Danish culture appears to have been as successfully ‘Americanized’ as any in Western Europe. Danes in general speak good English. They don’t share the official French antipathy to it, and they imbibe American pop-culture on a par with anyone. But below the surface, Danish social norms and language (. . .) are relatively impenetrable, and Danes exhibit a lot of traits that run very much counter to the codes of behavior common in America and Britain, for example.” Jack Stevenson, *Lars Von Trier* (London: BFI, 2002), 14.
10. Shelley Rice, “*Dogville*: the American Effect,” *Art in America* (April 2004): 51.
11. *Ibid.*, 51.
12. Robert Sklar, 48. However, Hoberman did find the biblical reference to the deadly sin of pride: “*Dogville*’s fascination with the sin of pride . . . has for some,

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a particular resonance, and not only because von Trier himself is often so characterized. . . . Von Trier's Rocky Mountain town may be a superpower writ small, but it is explicitly a realm of self-righteous fantasy and proud delusion." Hoberman, 26. David Fincher's *Seven* (US, 1995), which also uses David Bowie over the closing credits, presents another interpretation of pride, similarly preceding a vengeful finale in which sin turns inside-out and Brad Pitt's character (detective David Mills) "becomes" wrath.

13. Remarkably, there is not a single Evans photograph in *Dogville's* credit montage.
14. Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History. Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 245.
15. *Ibid.*, 247.
16. *Ibid.*, 246.
17. *Ibid.*, 247.
18. Holger Römers. "'Colorado Death Trip': the Surrealist Recontextualization of the Farm Security Administration Photos in *Dogville*," *Senses of Cinema* 34 (2005), http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/05/34/dogville_farm_admin_photos.html. Accessed October 12, 2005.
19. *And Their Children after Them* is a reference to Walker Evans and James Agee's book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941). It was the latter book's second edition (1960) that was significant in the construction of the Great Depression as an iconic myth of America in the sixties, discussed earlier in reference to Alan Trachtenberg. The term "remediation" has been suggested as one of the key traits of the development of new media by Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin: new media always refashion, re-use prior media. Bolter and Grusin point out how media have always been interrelated in this way, undermining both the idea that only digital media should be called "new," and the idea of a clear-cut teleological chronology in new media development. See Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999).
20. Römers.
21. The connection between *The Grapes of Wrath* project and the FSA pictures goes back to at least 1936, when Steinbeck visited the FSA camps in California. Steinbeck wrote a series of seven articles for the *San Francisco News*, published in October 1936, entitled "The Harvest Gypsies." The articles became Steinbeck's research material for his fictional account of the Joad family. He stayed at a camp called Weedpatch, the name he used for the camp in the novel; it is Wheat Patch in the film. The newspaper publication of the articles featured FSA pictures by Dorothea Lange. Five of these *San Francisco News* articles are downloadable at <http://newdeal.feri.org/nchs/docs02.htm>. Accessed: October 12th, 2005.
22. Jim Sanderson points out how *The Grapes of Wrath's* protagonists formulate their insights in the dark. "Ironically, they [the protagonists] can only see in the dark. The daylight perhaps reveals too much. They are susceptible to appearances: Depression America." Jim Sanderson, "American Romanticism in John Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath*: Horizontalness, Darkness, Christ, and F.D.R.," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (1989): 240.
23. Bennet Schaber, "'Hitler Can't Keep 'Em that Long': the Road, the People," in *The Road Movie Book*, eds. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 20.

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24. *Ibid.*, 23–24.
25. Thomas H. Pauly, “*Gone with the Wind* and *The Grapes of Wrath* as Hollywood Histories of the Depression,” *Journal of Popular Film* 3, no.3 (1974): 202–218. Zanuck’s end to the film directs Ma Joad’s speech to Tom. The novel directs it to Pa, and delivers it earlier in the narrative. The novel ends in a biblical scene in which Tom’s sister, Rosasharn Joad—who had to endure being abandoned by her husband and losing her baby—offers her maternal breast to a starving man. Jim Sanderson relates the difference between the novel and the film to Zanuck’s commercial talents and his understanding of censorship in Hollywood: “Zanuck . . . knew which parts of the novel would alienate American viewers and more important which would alienate the Hays commission.” Sanderson, 233.
26. Sanderson’s first reference for transcendence is the American Romanticism of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882). In agreement with Janey Place, Sanderson remarks that the Joads are not so much an archetypal family, but rather, are “moving toward a consciousness not restricted by familial or landed boundaries.” Sanderson, 243, note 5. In 1976, Place was one of the first writers who presented an in-depth *mise-en-scene* analysis of *The Grapes of Wrath* in “*The Grapes of Wrath*: A Visual Analysis,” *Film Comment* 12, no. 5 (1976): 46–51. In his concluding paragraph Sanderson quotes Place to emphasize that Ford’s film should also be characterized as “a radical critique of individual action, [expressing] the need for new concepts which are difficult, painful, and leave certain traditions behind.” Sanderson, 243.
27. In the opening scenes Tom finds the Joad home abandoned. Tom’s former neighbor Muley tells Tom about the evictions in the area. The farmer’s tenant system has collapsed, and the Joads are among the evicted. Tom is warned to hide. When Tom asks why, Muley explains: “Well, you’re trespassing Tom. This ain’t your land no more.”
28. Sanderson, 239–40.
29. In 1922, in his book on *Political Theology*, legal philosopher Carl Schmitt (1888–1985) defines the sovereign as the one who has the power to declare the state of emergency. Since then discussions about state violence—instigated by Walter Benjamin, Hans Kelsen, and Hannah Arendt among others—have referred to Schmitt’s definition as the ultimate test of highest political power. Schmitt’s notorious adherence to the Nazi Party, however, always also requires a qualification of sovereignty in democratic contexts. In the context of the debates on a constitution for the European Union, these discussions have regained currency. Should there be a European version of *Staatsgewalt*? What legitimizes it? Do the United States of America proffer a viable democratic version of it? Opponents of federalism in Europe point out that there is no equivalent to an American cultural identity legitimizing *Staatsgewalt* in Europe, if only because there is no constitutive, foundational myth for it. Arguably, *The Grapes of Wrath* is at least a part of such mythology in the USA.
30. Keith Windschuttle, in “Steinbeck’s Myth of the Okies,” (2002) is among many commentators who have pointed out that Steinbeck’s novel was not accurate about the Great Depression: “almost everything about the elaborate picture created in the novel is either outright false or exaggerated beyond belief.” See Keith Windschuttle, “Steinbeck’s Myth of the Okies,” *The New Criterion* 20, no. 10 (2002),

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<http://host171.ipowerweb.com/~newcite/cgi-bin/printpage.php>. Accessed May 26, 2005. Elsewhere, it has been pointed out that Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother* apparently had been a Californian for years before her picture was taken. And an analysis of the shadows in an iconic picture of a shack in a dust storm, in Miles Orvell's recent book on *American Photography*, shows that the sun is actually shining in this photo, which should be impossible in a "duster." See Miles Orvell, *American Photography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 112. Notwithstanding these and other inaccuracies, the FSA pictures and John Ford's version of *The Grapes of Wrath* are part and parcel of the iconography of America, so much so that the contestation of the meaning of the FSA pictures by von Trier offends American critics, Shelley Rice, as quoted above, among them.

31. On the extra DVD audio track, von Trier claims that at first he thought the Bowie lyrics said "she was a young American," and that only afterwards he realized that the line is in fact "she wants the young Americans." Given von Trier's willful play with layers of irony in what one could call the hypermedia game, it is not clear whether or not he speaks the truth about his misunderstanding.
32. Schaber, 35. One of Schaber's prime examples of an apocalyptic postwar road movie is *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, US, 1969), in which the vision "in place of the people" is a nostalgic longing for what America used to be (before the Vietnam War, we might add): "what the film discovers is not the people but a kind of memory." Ibid.
33. Ibid., 34.
34. Frederic Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 175.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., 175–176.
38. In his book on Lars von Trier, which predated the release of *Dogville*, Jack Stevenson refers to the problems von Trier encountered with the Danish Film Institute's reluctance to fund an English language film like *Dogville*. As Stevenson points out, von Trier was able to convince the DFI to subsidize *Dogville* with a "very large sum," Stevenson, 189. At the same time, though, Stevenson reports that it remains unclear what exactly convinced the DFI. See his final chapter, "Dogma—the Next Generation and *Dogville*," 164–190. He quotes von Trier in the latter's interview with the Danish journal *Film* (published in issue 15, 2001): "I think that a film should be individual, not national. It should speak to the world, in the world's language, but with the voice of the person who made it." The reference to a world language may certainly be taken as an argument against Danish as a precondition for DFI subsidies. It can also be interpreted as referring to the genre conventions of film beyond narrow definitions of language, obviously not corresponding to nation-state boundaries.

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