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Playing the Waves

The Name of the Game is Dogme95

Jan Simons

Dogme95: Movement or Mimicry?

In hindsight, Dogme95 has been a spectacular but short-lived experience. The Danish film movement was launched in March 1995 at the conference "Cinema in its second century" in the Odeon Theater in Paris where Lars von Trier presented the Dogme95 Manifesto.¹ The closure of the Dogme95 secretariat was officially announced in June 2002.² If one takes into account that the first official Dogme films *FESTEN* (Denmark: Thomas Vinterberg, 1998) and *IDIOTERNE* (Denmark: Lars von Trier, 1998) were premiered at the 1998 edition of the Cannes Film Festival, one could argue that Dogme95 lasted for only four years. Considering that each of the four founding *brethren*, Lars von Trier, Thomas Vinterberg, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, and Kristian Levring, made only one official Dogme film,³ the movement starts to resemble an ephemeral *hype*. Some critics indeed saw the Dogme95 movement as nothing but a publicity stunt with the aim "to advertise one and only one item: Von Trier himself as a directorial value on the cultural stock market."⁴ If so, one can only say that this PR stunt has been astonishingly successful. It raised Lars von Trier to international celebrity status, and between 1999 and 2000 some 35 films submitted by mainly young filmmakers from all over the world were awarded an official Dogme certificate.⁵

Dogme95 also achieved considerable critical success, though more because of its manifesto than its films. One may even wonder if films like *FESTEN* and *IDIOTERNE* would have become international hits if they had not been preceded by the manifesto. After all, Von Trier's earlier films *THE ELEMENT OF CRIME* (Denmark: 1984) and *EUROPA* (Denmark/Sweden/France/Germany/Switzerland: 1991) were not very successful even in Denmark and abroad they drew mainly the attention of a few Parisian *cinephiles*, while *MIFUNE'S SIDSTE SANG* (Denmark/Sweden: Anders Thomas Jensen, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, 1999) and *THE KING IS ALIVE* (Sweden/Denmark/USA: Kristian Levring, 2000) scarcely received any distribution at all outside the international festival circuit. Nevertheless, books were published that celebrated the Dogme95 Brotherhood as "the gang that took on Hollywood,"⁶ and in which the Dogme movement was held up as an example of "a small nation's response to globalization."⁷ Essays were

written that attributed no less than “film purity,” “a neo-Bazinian ideal” and “humanism” to Dogme95.⁸ Lars von Trier’s newly acquired international reputation was authorized by the publication of a monograph in the series “World Directors” of the British Film Institute.⁹

Dogme95 was perceived as an alternative to mainstream cinema that was dominated by the star and special effects-driven blockbusters of Hollywood. And this was, indeed, how it had presented itself. The Dogme95 Manifesto rejects the “illusions” the contemporary cinema produces with “trickery” and by “using new technology” which enables “anyone at any time (to) wash the last grains of truth away in the deadly embrace of sensation.”¹⁰

Dogme95 was either vehemently rejected as a mere publicity stunt, or enthusiastically embraced as a viable alternative to the commercial blockbuster. Those who endorsed the Dogme95 program welcomed it as a call to arms for a new realism in cinema. They perceived Dogme95 as a replay of the oppositional stance of the movements of post-war modern European cinema, like Italian neo-realism (championed by André Bazin), the French Nouvelle Vague and other “waves” that followed in its wake. Richard Kelly, author of the first book on Dogme95, not only called the rules of the Vow of Chastity “surely the most audacious and conspicuous attempt to reinvent the cinema since, well, Godard”, but even went so far as to write that “[l]acing between every line was a red thread, linking these Rules to Godard’s pronouncements and actions, across four decades.”¹¹ From Bazinian (neo-)realism to Godard, Dogme95 looked to many a critic and practitioner like a reincarnation of the European modernist cinema.

This is not surprising since the Dogme95 Manifesto itself reiterated much of the rhetoric of modernist artistic and political manifestos. Its opening sentence, “Dogme 95 has the expressed goal of countering ‘certain tendencies’ in the cinema today” is an explicit reference to François Truffaut’s article “Une certaine tendance du cinéma français” published in the *Cahiers du Cinéma* of January 1954, which came to be considered the “manifesto” of the Nouvelle Vague.¹² Phrases like “In 1960 enough was enough! The cinema was dead and called for resurrection!” echoed the rhetoric of the Futurist Manifesto,¹³ whereas the phrase “Today a technological storm is raging” also brings to mind the first sentence of the Communist Manifesto, “A spectre is haunting Europe.”¹⁴ The very rejection of “illusionism” is itself a recurrent trope in the rhetoric of the movements of modernist European cinema, which raises the question whether the “anti-illusionism” of the Manifesto should not be seen on a par with the references to other modernist manifestos: as a postmodern pastiche?

Von Trier’s presentation of the Manifesto, which he read aloud and then threw into his audience printed on red leaflets, was a performance that echoed

the actions of the Internationale Situationiste. Von Trier's gesture not only echoed a Situationist performance formally, but also in spirit. By summoning and summarizing the history of political and artistic modernism, Von Trier also accomplished a Situationist *détournement* of this history, including the Situationist gesture itself. As Karl Marx once remarked, history only repeats itself as a farce and this seems to be exactly the point Von Trier was making when he launched the Dogme95 Manifesto. According to its authors themselves, the Manifesto and the Vow of Chastity, had been "actually written in only 25 minutes and under continuous bursts of merry laughter...".¹⁵ If then, as Von Trier and Vinterberg themselves claim, the Dogme95 Manifesto is at the same time deeply ironic and "most serious meant [sic],"¹⁶ it is not to be taken seriously at the level of its literal content or the substance of its rules, but at the level of its form.

The form of the Manifesto and Von Trier's performance were a simulation, a playing out of a model of modernist avant-gardism which no longer existed. It turned modernism into a play of mimicry and the foundation of a film movement itself into "a kind of play, a game called 'rule-making'."¹⁷ That is, if Dogme95 is to be taken seriously as an alternative to Hollywood, it should not be interpreted from the perspective of the modernist movements of half a century ago but from the point of view of mimicry and mocking. Dogme95, I will argue, turns filmmaking itself into a game. Isn't Hollywood after all increasingly becoming a part of the games industry?¹⁸

Realism or Rules

The rules laid down in the Vow of Chastity are a call for a rigorous "back to basics." As the Manifesto puts it, "DOGME 95 counters the film of illusion by the presentation of an indisputable set of rules known as THE VOW OF CHASTITY [sic]."¹⁹ The rules forbid the filmmaker from bringing props onto the set, using "special lighting," recording sound separately from the images, staging a scene for the camera ("The film must not take place where the camera is standing; shooting must take place where the film takes place") or to film "superficial action" ("Murders, weapons, etc. must not occur"). On a more positive note, they prescribe the use of mobile, handheld cameras (that must follow actions of the actors) and that the film "must take place here and now." Since the rules forbid any embellishment or any transformation of a film set, any manipulation of images and sound in post-production ("Optical work and filters are forbidden"), any conventional plot ("Genre movies are not acceptable") or what is somewhat mysteriously called "temporal and geographical alienation," they have been largely interpreted as a recipe for an unadorned, raw realism.

Words like “real,” “reality,” or “realism,” however, do not occur in the Manifesto and in the Vow of Chastity. The “chastity” the rules require from the filmmaker is an abstinence from “trickery,” but the Manifesto and the Vow of Chastity are silent on matters of representation, subject matter, themes, and content. The rules are not concerned with the film as it will appear on the screen, but the manner in which the film will be produced: they are production rules. The rules are not concerned with the film spectator but with the filmmaker. The Dogme95 rules do not prescribe certain film aesthetics but a therapy for professionals who, through Dogme, could forget the heavy load of the modern film production machinery for a while and instead develop and exercise their creativity.²⁰

Abiding by the rules of the Manifesto, the “professional” filmmaker forces himself to go “back to basics” and to re-invent the practice of filmmaking. However, the rules do not commit the filmmaker to realism. The rules, for instance, do not preclude special effects or supernatural events – there is, for instance, a ghost appearance in *FESTEN* – but they forbid the use of certain “tricks” to produce them, like postproduction manipulation. If the use of special effects is necessary or desirable, the Dogme95 filmmaker must find ways to produce them within the constraints of the rules (or else confess cheats).

This is a far cry from a neo-Bazinian approach to filmmaking. André Bazin did not object to special effects either, and was also more concerned with the way they were recorded than with their “unrealistic” appearance. In his essay “Montage interdit” Bazin discusses the short children’s film *LE BALLON ROUGE* (France: Albert Lamorisse, 1956) in which a red balloon follows a little boy around the streets of Paris “like a little dog!”²¹ Bazin is well aware that the balloon is “truqué” – the film is not “a documentary of a miracle or of a fakir at work”²² – but according to Bazin the trickery is convincing because Lamorisse refrains from editing:

“Essential cinema, seen for once in its pure state, on the contrary, is to be found in the straightforward photographic respect for the unity of space.”²³

The aesthetics of Bazin is aimed at a perceptual realism which “obtains to the degree that perceiving a cinematic representation of some thing or event is like perceiving that thing or event in salient respects.”²⁴ That is, however the effect is achieved, even an improbable or impossible thing or event must look on the screen as it would look when perceived in reality. The Dogme95 aesthetics, which might be called “productional realism” is the exact reverse of this: however whatever a thing or event looks like on the screen, its image must be produced by abiding by the rules of the Manifesto. Since productional realism is not concerned with perceptual realism (nor with “content realism”), the question “why does Dogma not have a rule requiring unobtrusive editing and very long takes...?”²⁵ is beside the point. The purpose of productional realism is not

to provide the spectator with a convincing representation of filmic objects and events, but to stimulate the creativity and inventiveness of the filmmaker.

The final scene of the Dogme3 film *MIFUNES SIDSTE SANG* is a nice example of how the rules stimulate the creativity of the filmmaker in order to find ways around the constraints imposed by the rules. The film ends with a party where Kresten (Anders Berthelsen) and Liva (Iben Hjelje) dance while embracing and kissing each other, witnessed by Liva's son Bjarke (Emil Tarding) and Kresten's mentally retarded little brother Rud (Jesper Asholt). Rud, who is filming the scene with a digital video camera, is pulled away by Bjarke, who says, "Let's get out of here, before it becomes pornography." "Idiot" Rud, using a digital video camera to film a love scene that has every chance of turning into hardcore porn is, of course, an ironic allusion to Lars von Trier's *IDIOTERNE*. But the scene is also an ironic comment on the Dogme rules themselves. A camera movement reveals an orchestra playing in the middle of the room where Kresten and Livia are dancing. As rule 2 of the Vow of Chastity decrees, the music "occurs where the scene is being shot."

This scene clarifies a few things about the rules. First, they are not geared towards a realism of any sort. The presence of the orchestra – and of Rud's digital video camera – is completely unmotivated and given the preceding story even quite improbable. Nor is Rud's digital video camera there as a self-reflective device to remind the spectators that they are "just watching a movie." Second, the rules are not repressive because they forbid the filmmaker to resort to conventional film practices, but they are productive because they challenge the filmmaker to find new ways to achieve his or her goals: the rules force the filmmaker to invent and develop new film practices, and by doing so, to make new kinds of films. Third, the rules are not to be taken (too) seriously and strictly obeyed, but to be mocked and to be played with light-heartedly. Whereas the final scene of *MIFUNE* mocks Von Trier's *IDIOTERNE*, this "ultimate Dogma work" (Peter Schepeleern) itself can be seen as a demonstration, a parody, and a ridiculing of the Dogme rules.²⁶ Fourth, and most importantly, the purpose of the rules is not to add to the burden of filmmaking, but to transform the "heavy load of modern film production" into a joyful, pleasurable, and cheerful game.

The Dogme95 rules have all the characteristics of game rules. By prescribing what the player is obliged, forbidden or allowed to do, they set limits to how the player may achieve her goal.²⁷ Rules of games often allow a player to reach a goal only by using the least efficient means available, just as Dogme95 forbids the filmmaker to use the usual apparatus, methods and procedures of his trade. But, as computer game theoretician Jesper Juul says, "rules specify limitations and affordances" since they also set up potential actions and allow the player to make moves and find ways to achieve his goal.²⁸

Dogme95, then, turns filmmaking into a game, and, as game rules, the Dogme95 rules are not aimed at a serious, “extra-ludic” goal, like achieving a “pure” representation of a bare truth. The main, and perhaps only function of the rules of a game is to make the game possible: they exist only for the sake of the game. As Juul points out, the rules of a game only make sense within a game, but are meaningless outside it.²⁹ Because nothing serious apart from the game itself depends on them, the rules of games are arbitrary: changing the rules may change the game or create a new game altogether, but they will still define “just a game.” Any game is in principle as good as any other and a preference for one game rather than another is eventually a matter of personal preference. For Dogme95, too, the rules of the Vow of Chastity are just one particular set of arbitrary rules out of a vast, even infinite set of different sets of rules that specify different but equally valid games of filmmaking. As Von Trier said:

But I still think that Dogme might persist in the sense that a director would be able to say, “I would feel like making that kind of film.” I think that would be amusing. I’m sure a lot of people could profit from that. At which point you might argue that they could just as easily profit from a different set of rules. Yes, of course. But then go ahead and formulate them. Ours are just a proposal.³⁰

Dogme95 thus defines filmmaking at a higher level first and foremost as a “rule-making game.”³¹ The particular set of rules that specifies a particular game of filmmaking is secondary to the primary principle that filmmaking – including Hollywood, art cinema and Dogme95 itself – is a playful, rule-based practice. A good demonstration of filmmaking as a rule-based game is provided by the film *THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS* (Denmark/Sweden/Belgium/France: Jørgen Leth, 2003), in which Lars von Trier gives his former mentor, filmmaker Jørgen Leth, a number of arbitrary rules for each of the five remakes of his 1967 film *THE PERFECT HUMAN* (Denmark: Jørgen Leth, 1967). The rules are arbitrary, and “following” them means finding ways around the constraints Von Trier imposed on Leth, who is subjected to the sort of therapy Von Trier and Vinterberg said Dogme95 was intended to be for professional film makers.

This also means that nothing particular depends on the Dogme95 rules as such, and the Brethren have been the first to exchange these rules for others. Asked whether either of his next film projects after *FESTEN*, *THE THIRD LIE* (Canada: 2000) and *ALL ABOUT LOVE* (USA/Japan/Sweden/UK/Denmark/Germany/Netherlands: 2003) was going to be a Dogme film, Thomas Vinterberg answered: “Definitely not. I mean, that’s the whole point.”³² And although many critics have described Von Trier’s musical *DANCER IN THE DARK* (Denmark/Germany/Netherlands/USA/UK/France/Sweden/Finland/Norway/Iceland: 2000) as a break with Dogme95 aesthetics, in the documentary *VON*

TRIER'S 100 ØJNE – VON TRIER'S 100 EYES (Denmark: Katia Forbert, 2000), Von Trier himself explained the conception of this film as just another game:

I always wanted to make a musical, but I didn't know how to do it. I still don't know. But I'm very good at inventing games. I'm not good at playing games, though. This game was called "Let's make a musical!"

For *DANCER IN THE DARK* Von Trier wrote a "Selma Manifesto" in which the "rules" of this film are laid down.³³ In fact, the Dogme95 Manifesto is just one of the many manifestos Von Trier has written. Each of his films before and after the launching of Dogme95 was accompanied by a Manifesto in which he laid down the principles and rules for each particular film.³⁴ From this perspective, *IDIOTERNE* was just one film game among others.

Simulation

Although the Dogme95 Manifesto is silent about classic topics of modern film manifestos like subject matter, themes, or the relationship between film image and reality, Dogme's approach to filmmaking as a rule-based game is more than a formal redefinition. The Manifesto offers a radically new answer to Bazin's famous question "What is film?" which has been largely overlooked because the Manifesto has mostly been interpreted from a Bazinian point of view. This is all the more astonishing because the Manifesto very explicitly marks its distance from the modernist film movements. In fact, the Manifesto denounces any notion of film as an aesthetic object and the director as artist:

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.³⁵

These enigmatic but certainly "provocative" sentences are strangely enough the ones least commented upon. If, however, one reads these lines and the rules of the Vow of Chastity that precede them in the light of the game approach to filmmaking, one starts to see the contours of a completely new conception of film that owes more to new media and computer games than to the classical and modernist cinema.

It is, of course, possible to see the denouncement of the status of artist and of the "individual film" either as "pure provocation" on the part of Von Trier, who

usually has his name written in extra large type in the credits of his rather idiosyncratic films, or on a more positive note as the ultimate consequence of a realistic aesthetics that wants to make “reality speak for itself.” But although the Rules deny the director a mention in the credits, they don’t dismiss the director from the set. Rather they assign a different status and role to the filmmaker from that of the “individual” artist who has to “recede to the background”³⁶ in favor of “the truth of characters and settings.”

To see what the altered status of the filmmaker is, one should read these lines in the spirit of the Dogme95 Manifesto, which addresses production methods and not the effects of these methods on the screen. In practically every mode of feature filmmaking, the basic unit of a film story is the scene, which is thought of as a correct, a probable or in some way effective representation of a unique (series of) event(s). Since the events are already “known,” the task of the film director is to plan, design, orchestrate, and choreograph the re-enactment of the events in such a way that their representation on the screen is correct, convincing, and in the case of the “individual” *auteur* film, also expresses a “view” on the event. *Mise-en-scène* and framing are generally seen as the hallmarks of the film *auteur*.

Scenes, moreover, normally consist of several shots, which have to be staged and framed with the preceding and next shots in mind. Individual instances of a film are thus conceived, staged, framed and filmed from the perspective of the film as a whole. From Eisenstein to Hitchcock, from Godard to the contemporary Hollywood blockbuster, almost all filmmakers have taken this *storyboard* approach to filmmaking. The motivation and legitimization for this storyboard approach is the above-mentioned idea that a film is a representation of unique events that make up a story that has taken place before its narration.

Dogme95 proposes a completely different approach, which is partially expressed in the third rule which requires the camera to *follow* the action instead of the action being staged *for* the camera. Other filmmakers, like John Cassavetes, practiced this approach to filming a scene as well, while remaining firmly within the realm of representational filmmaking. Improvisation, which opens up the possibility of chance, the unexpected and spontaneous, has certainly become an important part of Von Trier’s film practice after his Dogme95 experience, but is not crucial to the difference the Dogme95 approach makes.³⁷ As in a game, the rules only make sense when taken together. And, like game rules, they also only make sense within the context of the particular game they specify. Improvisation and following the actors with a camera have been practiced before, but in the context of a different game where these practices take on a different meaning and value.

First of all, for Dogme95, a scene is not a representation of unique events that must be reconstructed on the film set and eventually on the screen. The prohibi-

tion on specially made or brought props and sets (rule 1), non-diegetic sound (rule 2), artificial lighting (rule 4) and the use of “optical work and filters” (rule 5) are an injunction to keep the set cleared of everything that might suggest that what happens in front of the camera is a representational reconstitution of a fictional or historical past event. The only tools the rules allow are the set where the filming takes place, the actors who will embody the event, the story which specifies the event, and of course the “handheld camera” with which the action is to be recorded. With these tools, the filmmaker and the actors must bring about an enactment of one or some of the many ways the story event might evolve. The setting and the actors are the materials with which the director builds a *model* of the situation specified by processes and relationships as described in the script.

The Dogme director, that is, is not to create a *representation* of an event, but a *simulation*: the enacted and filmed event is a state in which the *model* of a situation described by the script settles. In science or in engineering, a model is not necessarily a representational simile of the “system” it models. Newton’s mathematical equations do not “look like” the orbits of the planets. Lorenz’s famous “butterfly graph” does not “look like” the changes in the weather conditions he was studying. The Newton’s equations and Lorenz’s graph capture some quantified properties of the systems the behavior of which they wanted to model for explanatory and predictive purposes. Models are also often used to study the behavior of “systems” under circumstances that are very unlikely to occur in reality, or are too dangerous or too expensive to carry out in reality. Models that simulate systems are radically different from representations of events: first of all, they do not necessarily have any visual or analogical similarity to the source system they model, and secondly, they do not necessarily, and in fact hardly ever, reconstruct events that have actually occurred but simulate events as they could or might have happened.³⁸

Computer-based models in general and video games in particular are interesting examples because computer-generated virtual realities are visualizations of mathematical models (they are defined in terms of numbers, relations between numbers, and changes in numbers over time³⁹). For reasons of clarity, designers may decide to give the mathematical model a visualization that is similar or analogous to the appearance of its source system. Weather forecasts on television, for instance, visualize the weather with images of clouds moving over a map, and game designers often visualize the mathematical models in which the game is captured with images of familiar environments (landscapes, cities) or well-known historical events. But these visualizations are not required by the model and can readily be exchanged for another visualization, provided that this visualization renders the relevant properties and behaviors. Game designers call the particular design of a visualization the “coloring” of a game.⁴⁰

Games also reveal a third difference between simulations and representations relevant for an understanding of the Dogme95 approach to filmmaking. The model of a system's behavior reacts to certain stimuli according to a set of conditions or rules included in the model. Game players feed the model of the game they are playing with data by pushing buttons, moving a joystick or manipulating some other input device; an engineer may test the behavior of an airplane by feeding the model with various parameters like temperature, pressure, speed, height, weather conditions, etc. Simulations, whether in games or in scientific experiments, are used to explore the kinds of states a model gets into under certain circumstances. Models are generally not used to reconstruct events that have actually occurred (although that might be one of the applications of a model) but to explore and experiment with states the modeled system has never been in or in which it has very little chance of getting into.

Simulations, then, generally do not retrospectively reconstruct past states, but generate prospectively and hypothetically virtual states. The past actual states of a system are from the point of view of a simulation only a contingent subset of the vast "state space" of the system which contains all possible, actual and virtual states. Other than with representations, the states the model of a simulation will evolve into, are more often than not unknown to its designer/builder and user. The states the model of the system falls into, are not the *creations* of the designer or the user, but follow from the algorithms or rules that govern the behavior of the model and the parameters or variable conditions that are fed into the model. Computer artists who write algorithms and then feed them into computers to allow the computer to execute the steps, generally do not know what results the computer will produce. Since they only write the algorithms, they call themselves "algorists." They are a good example of "creators" who do not claim to be artists, and who do not let matters like "personal taste and aesthetic considerations" get in the way of the processes that generate the image.⁴¹

Simulation is also the *modus operandi* of the Dogme director. As argued above, the Dogme Rules oblige the filmmaker to keep the set cleared of anything that might "color" the model and distract from the elementary units from which it is built, "the story and the acting talent."⁴² Dogme#4 *THE KING IS ALIVE* gives a nice demonstration of the modeling the Dogme95 rules impose: a group of tourists who are stranded in the Namibian desert and decide to rehearse Shakespeare's *King Lear* can only use the props they find on the spot and the natural light of the blazing sun. As is not unusual in (modern) theater, they "model" the world of Shakespeare's play, just like Von Trier in his film *DOGVILLE* (Denmark/Sweden/France/Norway/Netherlands/Finland/Germany/Italy/Japan/USA/UK: 2003) "modeled" the town of Dogville on a stage in a film studio with chalk lines and a few props. In Dogme#3, Kersten enacts one of the warrior roles of the Japanese actor Mifune using kitchen utensils found on his father's farm. The

spassers in Von Trier's *IDIOTERNE* do not use any special props for their simulations of idiots.

Second, unlike the storyboard-filmmaker, the Dogme95 filmmaker does not know in advance how a scene will be executed. Like an alorist, the Dogme director disposes of an "initial state," specified by the story, some algorithms which are in his case a sequence of events specified by the script, some "building blocks" of his model in the form of actors and settings, and some external parameters he can feed this model like "mood." Just as an alorist lets the computer run his program, the Dogme95 director lets the actors "run the program" specified by the script and some variable parameters ("cheerful," "sad," "angry," "tender," "aggressive," etc.⁴³). And just as the alorist must wait and see what state(s) the algorithms will generate, the Dogme95 director just registers the actions of the actors and waits and sees into what "state" the model formed by his settings and actors will settle into. The "coloring" or the "visualization" of the model is, like in modern theater, left to the imagination of the spectator.

How effective this procedure is in a media- and image-saturated culture of "real virtuality"⁴⁴ is nicely demonstrated by the photo sequence that closes *DOGVILLE*, which is accompanied by David Bowie's song "Young Americans." These photos from (among others) the Danish photographer Jacob Holdt's multi-media presentation *American Pictures* appear on the screen, as if only to confirm the visualizations with which the spectator had "colored" the scarce model of Dogville offered by the film using the knowledge of America the (non-American) s/he has acquired through photographs, films and TV programs. This photo sequence, however, points to another dimension of the simulation approach of Dogme95: it is not primarily focused on actual reality, but rather on the virtual.

Virtual Realism

Maybe because the Dogme95 Manifesto makes no comments on editing, most critics seem to have overlooked Dogme95's, or rather, Von Trier's radically innovative use of editing. Contrary to the Bazinian injunction to respect the spatio-temporal unity of the pro-filmic event, the editing in *FESTEN* and to various degrees, all of Von Trier's Dogme and post-Dogme films, is the very opposite of continuity editing. Not only are these films filled with jump cuts and mismatched shots, but more importantly, scenes are *sampled* by editing takes from different executions of the same scene and placed next to each other. In the scene in *IDIOTERNE* that leads up to Stoffer's challenging the others to *spass*, characters change places from one shot to the next, one character that was not

present in one shot suddenly appears in the next, Stoffer is sitting in a wheelchair in one shot and standing in the back of the room in the next, etc. Similar breaks and discontinuities can be observed in *DANCER IN THE DARK* and *DOGVILLE*.

This editing style is a flagrant violation of the rules of classical cinema (an altogether different game), but entirely consistent with Dogme95's simulation approach to cinema. From the perspective of this simulation approach, the initial situation and the algorithms that govern the transitions to subsequent states define a so-called *state space* that consists of all the possible configurations that can be arrived at from the initial state by applying the algorithms.⁴⁵ For the Dogme director every execution of a scene is just one state out of a vast state space of possible versions of the events specified by the script and modalized by the parameters defined by the director. From a simulation perspective, no state is more "true," "authentic," "better," or "closer to the facts" than any other. As Von Trier explained his attempt to "dismantle psychological continuity" in his television mini series *RIGET-THE KINGDOM* (Denmark/France/Germany/Sweden, 1994):

Each scene is filmed with as many different expressions and atmospheres as possible, allowing the actors to approach the material afresh each and every time. Then we edit our way to a more rapid psychological development, switching from tears to smiles in the course of a few seconds, for example – a task that is beyond most actors. The remarkable thing about this cut-and-paste method is that the viewers can't see the joints. They see a totality, the whole scene.⁴⁶

Again, Von Trier was not the first in film history to use a "cut-and-paste method." In *DEUX OU TROIS CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE* (France: 1967) Godard also shows several different executions of the same scene, but in order to emphasize the different meanings, modes and modalities that correlate with different types and genres of film (documentary, TV-report, feature film, etc.). Von Trier's cut-and-paste style wants the spectator on the contrary to gloss over the breaks and discontinuities and to synthesize them into "a totality."

Paradoxically, the discontinuities in Von Trier's films and in Vinterberg's *FESTEN* therefore seem to be a manifestation of the anti-montage aesthetics Lev Manovich identifies in new media practices ("where old media relied on montage, new media substitutes the aesthetics of continuity"⁴⁷). More important than this perhaps superficial convergence with the aesthetics of new media, is that the "totality" this editing style aims at does not coincide with any single execution of the scene, nor is it a lowest common denominator. The totality that emerges from the sampled shots is, like the "America" that emerges from the photo sequence in *DOGVILLE*, a purely virtual pattern that underlies the state space but that is never fully actualized in any of the individual states.⁴⁸ If

Dogme95, then, focuses on “reality,” it is a virtual reality, or rather the real as an actualization of the virtual. This “virtual realism” of Dogme95 is closer to Deleuze than to Bazin.

Dogme and Hollywood

Dogme95’s virtual realism can be seen as a response to the special effects-driven Hollywood blockbusters. Hollywood certainly has promoted virtual realities as one of its main themes: from the MATRIX trilogy to LORD OF THE RINGS, from STAR TREK to MINORITY REPORT, the virtual seems to be ubiquitous. However, Hollywood also carefully keeps “reality” and “the virtual” firmly apart by always presenting the virtual as a computer-generated, illusionary technological effect. Paraphrasing Jean Baudrillard, one might say that by presenting virtual reality as a technological product, Hollywood makes the spectator forget the “real virtuality” of the “postmodern condition.” Dogme95 does not “claim the real” against the spectacle of the virtual in Hollywood, but, instead, by refraining from advanced computer technologies, “trickeries,” or artificially produced special effects, Dogme95’s simulation-approach to cinema and Von Trier’s virtual realism open up the virtual dimension in the real. The real as an actualised virtual, the virtual as part of the real: *bye bye Bazin* and *Stay Out of the Matrix....*

Notes

1. Von Trier, Lars, Thomas Vinterberg. “The Dogme95 Manifesto.” 13 March 1995. <<http://www.dogme95.dk>>. There are several versions of the Manifesto in circulation, some of which are more elaborate than others. The version referred to in this chapter is the one published on the official Dogme95 website.
2. The closure of the secretariat was officially announced on the Dogme95 website. <<http://www.dogme95.dk>>. See also Stevenson, Jack. *Dogme Uncut: Lars von Trier, Thomas Vinterberg, and the Gang That Took on Hollywood*. Santa Monica, Ca: Santa Monica Press, 2003: pp. 291-292.
3. The other two films made by the “Brotherhood” are MIFUNE’S SIDSTE SANG (Denmark: Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, 1999) and THE KING IS ALIVE (Denmark/Sweden/USA: Kristian Levring, 2000).
4. Willemsen, Paul. “Note on DANCER IN THE DARK.” *Framework: The journal of cinema and media*. no. 42 (summer 2000). <<http://www.frameworkonline.com/42pw.htm>>.
5. The list of films officially acknowledged as Dogme films can also be found on the official Dogme95 website. Lists of Dogme films are also published in, amongst others, Stevenson, Jack. *Dogme Uncut*: pp. 271-280, and Hjort, Mette and Scott

- MacKenzie (eds.). *Purity and Provocation: Dogma 95*. London: BFI Publishing, 2003: pp. 210-224. It is unknown how many Dogme films have actually been produced, because on the 9th of March 2000 the Brotherhood decided that certificates would be issued "solely on the basis of a signed and sworn statement to the effect that the Vow of Chastity has been adhered to in full and without any review of the applicant films!" *Dogme Certification. Press Release*. 9 March 2000. <<http://www.dogme95.dk>>.
6. Stevenson, Jack. *Dogme Uncut: Lars von Trier, Thomas Vinterberg and the Gang That Took on Hollywood*.
 7. Hjort, Mette. "A Small Nation's Response to Globalization." Hjort, Mette, Scott MacKenzie. *Purity and Provocation*: pp. 31-47.
 8. Conrich, Ian, Estella Tincknell. "Film purity, the Neo-Bazinian Ideal, and Humanism in Dogma 95." *P.O.V. Filmtidskrif.: A Danish Journal of Filmstudies*. no. 10, and "Aspects of Dogma." December 2000. <http://imv.au.dk/publikationer/pov/Issue_10/section_4/artc7A.html>.
 9. Stevenson, Jack. *Lars von Trier*. London: BFI, 2002.
 10. Von Trier, Lars, Thomas Vinterberg. "The Dogme95 Manifesto."
 11. Kelly, Richard. *The Name of This Book is Dogme95*. London: Faber & Faber, 2000: p. 4, p. 10.
 12. Truffaut, François. "Une certaine tendance du cinéma français." *Cahiers du Cinéma*. no. 31 (January 1954): pp. 15-28.
 13. In the Futurist Manifesto one finds phrases like: "Museums; cemeteries!" and "You have objections? Enough! Enough!" Marinetti, F.T. "Manifesto of Futurism." *Le Figaro*. no. 20 (February 1909).
 14. Marx, Karl, Friedrich Engels. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Paris, 1848.
 15. Von Trier, Lars, Thomas Vinterberg. "Frequently Asked Questions. In general to Dogme95." <<http://www.dogme95.dk>>.
 16. Idem.
 17. Idem. The full paragraph out of which these quotes come reads:
 "There is an implicit duplicity in The Dogme95 Manifesto. On one hand it contains a deep irony and on the other it is most serious meant. Irony and seriousness is interlinked in inseparable. What we have concerned ourselves with is the making of a set of rule. In this sense it is a kind of play, a game called 'rule-making'. Seriousness and play goes hand in hand. A clear example of this is that the very strict and serious Dogme95 Manifesto was actually written in only 25 minutes and under continuous bursts of merry laughter... Still, we maintain that we are in earnest. Dogme is not for fun. It is, however, liberating, merry, and almost fun to work under such a strict set of rules. It is this duplicity which is the magic of 'dogme.'"
 18. At the time of writing this paper it was reported that Sony had bought MGM. According to CNN, "The purchase of MGM is in keeping with Chief Executive Nobuyuki Idei's vision of creating synergies between Sony's consumer electronics products and music, movies and games."
 19. Von Trier, Lars, Thomas Vinterberg. "The Dogme95 Manifesto."
 20. Idem.
 21. Bazin, André. "Montage interdit." *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma? Édition définitive*. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1975: p. 53. Original French: "comme un petit chien!"

22. Bazin, André. "The Virtues and Limitations of Montage." *What Is Cinema? Essays Selected and Translated by Hugh Gray*. Vol. 1. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2005, p.46.
23. Idem.
24. Gaut, Berys. "Naked film. Dogma and its limits." Hort, Mette, Scott MacKenzie. *Purity and provocation*: p. 98. Bazin himself described the effect of his preferred stylistic devices, *profondeur du champ* and *plan séquence*, the use of which results in "photographic respect of the unity of space" as:
"That depth of focus brings the spectator into a relation with the image closer to that which he enjoys with reality. Therefore it is correct to say that, independently of the content of the image, its structure is more realistic." Bazin, André. "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema." *What Is Cinema?*: p. 35.
25. Gaut, Berys. "Naked film:" p. 99.
26. See Schepelern, Peter. "'Kill your darlings.' Lars von Trier and the origin of Dogma 95." Hjort, Mette, Scott MacKenzie. *Purity and provocation*: p. 65.
27. Järvinen, Aki. "Making and breaking games. A typology of rules." Copier, Marinka, Joost Raessens, eds. *Level Up. Digital games research conference*. Utrecht: University of Utrecht/DIGRA, 2003: p. 70-71.
28. Juul, Jesper. *Half-real. Video games between real rules and fictional worlds*. Diss. IT University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, 2003: p. 55.
29. Idem.
30. MacKenzie, Scott. "Manifest destinies. Dogma 95 and the future of the film manifesto." Hjort, Mette, Scott MacKenzie. *Purity and provocation*: p. 56.
31. Von Trier, Lars, Thomas Vinterberg. "FAQs."
32. Kelly, Richard. *The name of this book is Dogme95*: p. 113.
33. The "Selma Manifesto" can be found on the official website of DANCER IN THE DARK: <<http://www.tvropa.com/channels/dancerd/>>.
34. Schepelern, Peter. "'Kill your darlings.'" pp. 59-60.
35. Von Trier, Lars, Thomas Vinterberg. "The Dogme95 Manifesto."
36. Von Trier, Lars, Thomas Vinterberg. "FAQs."
37. In the "FAQs" Von Trier and Vinterberg explicitly state that "... Dogme films don't have to be improvised" but that it has been an inspiration for the Dogme director "because it fits so perfectly with the freedom of the handheld camera."
38. "Shearing away detail is the very essence of model building. Whatever else we require, a model *must* be simpler than the thing modeled." Holland, John. *Emergence: From chaos to order*. Cambridge, Ma.: Perseus Books, 1998: p. 24.
39. Holland, John. *Emergence*: p. 27.
40. Costikyan, Greg. "I have no words & I must design." *Interactive Phantasy&2*, 1994. Also available on: <<http://www.costik.com/nowords.html&Color>>. On computer games as simulations see also: Frasca, Gonzalo. "Simulation versus narrative. Introduction to ludology." Wolf, Mark, J.P., Bernard Perron. *The Video Game Theory Reader*. London: Routledge, 2003: pp. 221-235.
41. On algorithmic art see Stephen Wilson, *Information Arts: Intersections of Art, Science, and Technology*. Cambridge, Ma: MIT Press, 2002, pp. 312-339.
42. Thomas Vinterberg. Von Trier, Lars, Thomas Vinterberg. "FAQs."
43. For a description of this production method see Stevenson, Jack. *Lars von Trier*: p. 84 a.f.

44. Castells, Manuel. *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture, Vol 1. The Rise of the Network Society*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996: p. 327 ff.
45. Holland, John. *Emergence*: p. 34.
46. Stevenson, Jack. *Lars von Trier*: p. 84.
47. Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2001: p. 143.
48. One might think of the virtual as described by Sanford Kwinter:
"The so-called emergence and evolution of form will no longer follow the classical, eidetic pathway determined by the possible and the real. Rather, it will follow the dynamic and uncertain processes that characterize the schema that links a virtual component to an actual one. What is most important to understand here is that unlike the previous schema where the "possible" had no reality (before emerging), here the virtual, though it may yet have no actuality, is nonetheless fully real. It exists, one might say, as a free difference or singularity, not yet combined with other differences into a complex ensemble or salient form. What this means is that the virtual does not have to be realized, but only actualized (activated and integrated); its adventure involves a developmental passage from one state to another. The virtual is gathered, selected – let us say incarnated – it passes from one moment-event (or complex) in order to emerge – differently, uniquely – within another. Indeed the actual does not resemble the virtual, as something preformed or preexisting itself. The relation of the virtual to the actual is therefore not one of resemblance but rather of difference, innovation, creation (every complex, or moment-event, is unique and new)." Kwinter, Sanford. *Architectures of Time: Toward a Theory of the Event in Modernist Culture*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2001: p. 8.