

THREE SHORTS IN COMPETITION

Three Danish children's short films are selected to compete in Generation Kplus: Louise N.D. Friedberg's *Blood Sisters*, Esben Toft Jacobsen's *Having a Brother* and Niels Bisbo's *The Girl Through the Telescope*.

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DANES IN THE OSCAR RUN

Susanne Bier's feature film *After the Wedding* is nominated in the category of Best Foreign Language film, and Søren Pilmark's short fiction *Helmer and Son* in the category of Best Short Film (Live Action).

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THINK TANK ON EUROPEAN FILMS

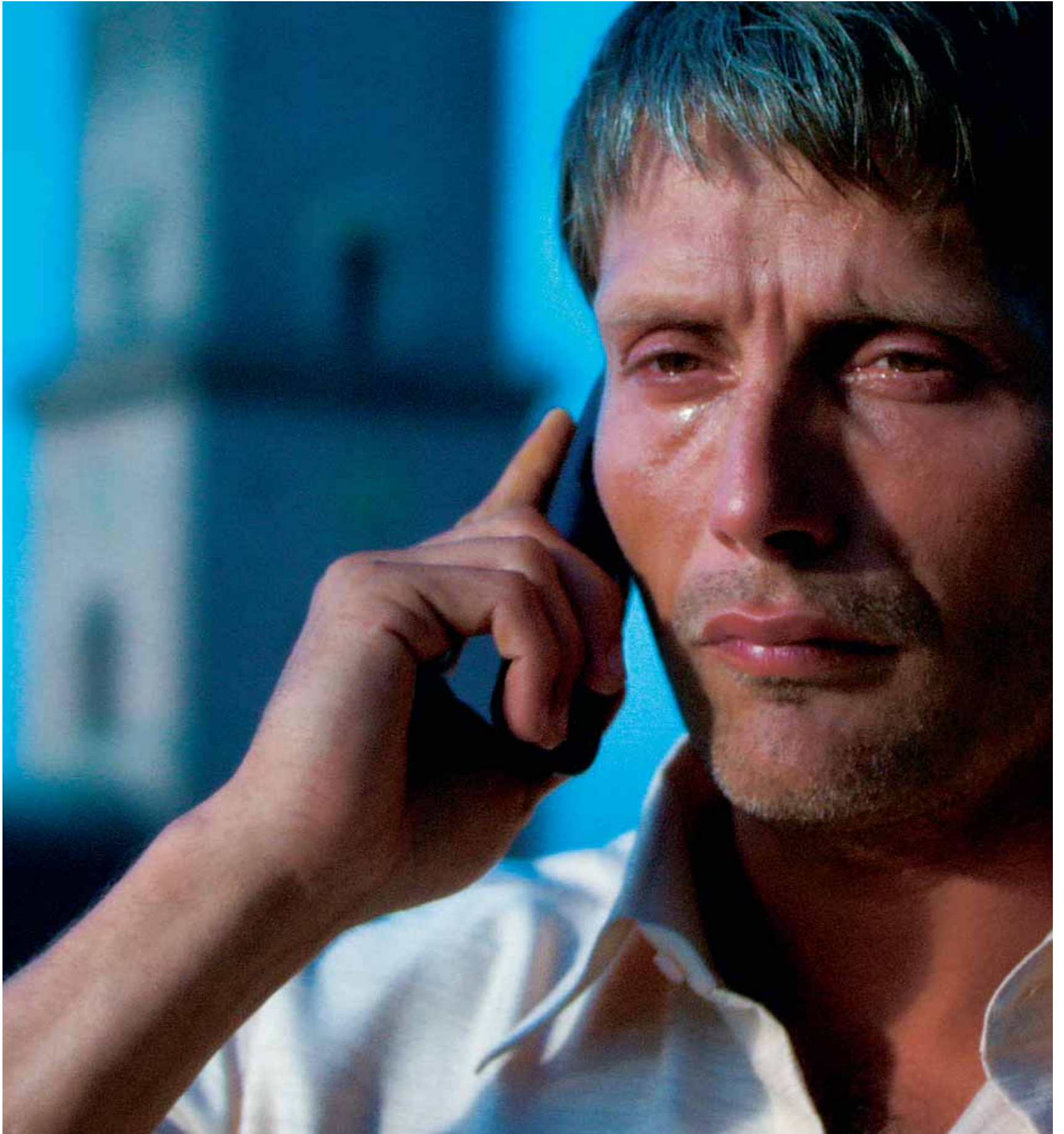
The ThinkTank on European Film and Film Policy has come about because of a suspicion that there are several serious problems with film in Europe, and perhaps a few things to be done to remedy those problems.

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./FILM./

#55

FILM IS PUBLISHED BY THE DANISH FILM INSTITUTE / FEBRUARY 2007



./FILM./
FILM#55/ BERLIN ISSUE



FILM #55 / BERLIN ISSUE
 February 2007

PUBLISHED BY Danish Film Institute
EDITORS Agnete Dorph Stjernfelt,
 Susanna Neimann
EDITORIAL TEAM Lars Fiil-Jensen,
 Vicki Synnott
TRANSLATIONS Glen Garner
DESIGN Rasmus Koch Studio
ART DIRECTOR Anne Hemp
TYPE Cendia, Milton, Underton
PAPER Munken Lynx 100 gr.
PRINTED BY Schultz Grafisk
CIRCULATION 10,500
ISSN 1399-2813
COVER *After the Wedding*.
 Photo: Ole Kragh-Jacobsen

FILM is published by the Danish Film Institute (DFI). 8 issues annually, 3 are in English and published prior to the festivals at Cannes, Amsterdam and Berlin.

All articles are written by freelance film critics and journalists.

The Danish Film Institute is the national agency responsible for supporting and encouraging film and cinema culture. The Institute's operations extend from participation in the development and production of feature films, shorts and documentaries, over distribution and marketing, to managing the national film archive and the cinematheque. The total budget of the DFI 2007 is DKK 373 m / EURO 50 m.

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GENERATION KPLUS COMPETITION

In *Having a Brother*, Esben Toft Jacobsen used animal characters, as he discovered that human characters in the parts would be too unpleasant. "When we use animals instead, the kids get into the story and it takes the harsh edge off," says Toft Jacobsen. **PAGE 6-7**



The Girl Through the Telescope

GENERATION KPLUS COMPETITION

In his film *The Girl Through the Telescope*, Bisbo was inspired by his own experiences. "I once asked a girl if she wanted to go out with me," Bisbo says. "I wasn't very old and I gave her a note and then hid under my bed. I wanted to build my graduate film on that feeling and deal with this kind of embarrassment." **PAGE 6-7**



Island of Lost Souls

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Nikolaj Arcel's second feature is a large-scale children's action and adventure genre piece, jammed with digital effects made by the Danish digital production house Ghost. **PAGE 8-9**

VON TRIER'S BIG GENRE GAME

Roughly a decade ago, Lars von Trier wrote the Dogme manifesto and sent shockwaves through the international film community by setting out rules for his films as a way to unleash fresh creativity. After *Dogville* and *Manderlay*, he thought the time was ripe for a new remedy - he had once again become too accomplished and, consequently, too slick. **PAGE 10-11**



After the Wedding

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RISK AND RENEWAL IN DANISH CINEMA / ESSAY

David Bordwell: Excellent performers, sophisticated directors, and well-carpentered scripts are the mainstay of recent Danish film. This is yet another unintended consequence of the Dogme manifesto, which called for a break with conformity. **PAGE 16-19**



The Boss of it All

INTERNATIONAL DISTRIBUTION

Ninety-nine percent of all Danish films sold abroad are handled by two Danish players: Nordisk Film International Sales and Trust Film Sales. **PAGE 20-21**

THINKTANK ON EUROPEAN FILM AND FILM POLICY

How could public funding more effectively support European film creatively and commercially? Leading European producers and filmmakers, distributors, public funding bodies and decision makers are gaining forces in this new initiative with a view to strengthening the European market for European films. **PAGE 22-23**

TWO DANISH FILMS COMPETING IN THE OSCARs

Two Danish films are competing for an Oscar: Susanne Bier's feature film *After the Wedding* is nominated in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences' category of Best Foreign Language film, and Søren Pilmark's short fiction *Helmer and Son* in the category of Best Short Film (Live Action).

Produced by Sisse Graum Jørgensen for Zentropa Productions, *After the Wedding* captured Danish audiences and sold some 400,000 tickets. Internationally, Bier's *After the Wedding* also met with great success. It opened at the prestigious Toronto International Film Festival in Canada last September, and was welcomed by an enthusiastic public. The film will be released by IFC in the US in spring, and is secured distribution in some 45 other territories.

Bier has directed a number of critically acclaimed feature films, all backed by a large Danish audience: *Brothers* (2004), *Open Hearts* (2002), and *The One and Only* (1999). During recent years, she has also achieved international renown, bringing her to the US where she is currently in post-production with the feature film *Things We Lost in the Fire* (release to be announced), with Halle Berry and

Benicio Del Toro.

Produced by Leila Vestgaard and René Ezra for Nordisk Film, *Helmer and Son* is directed by renowned Danish actor, Søren Pilmark. The film is one of the productions under Nordisk Film's strategic pool which develops new talents, thus the director, producer and scriptwriter behind *Helmer and Son* are newcomers in their respective fields to Danish film. Managing Director at Nordisk Film, Kim Magnusson is himself, as producer, an Oscar-winner and thrice nominee.

OSCARs WON BY DANES

On two occasions Denmark has won an Oscar in the category of Best Foreign Language Film: Gabriel Axel's *Babette's Feast* won an Academy Award in 1988, and *Pelle the Conqueror* by Bille August won in 1989.



Helmer and Son. Framegrab



After the Wedding. Photo: Ole Kragh-Jacobsen

AFTER THE WEDDING/ REVIEWS

"... new film by Danish helmer Susanne Bier manages to be both emotional and engaging (...) pic has definite potential to travel."

(Gunnar Reblin in *Variety* / Mar. 27, 2006)

"A filmmaker who excels in peeling back those delicate layers of human frailty, Denmark's Susanne Bier returns (...) with another powerful family portrait (...) Once again Bier demonstrates just how misleading appearances can be, as she artfully removes the veneers concealing the dark truths locked away by her intriguing characters."

(*The Hollywood Reporter* / Sept 8, 2006)

AUGUST COMPETING AT THE BERLINALE

Danish director Bille August returns to the Berlin Film Festival with *Goodbye Bafana*, the story of a white South African racist whose life was profoundly altered by the black prisoner he guarded for 20 years. The prisoner's name was Nelson Mandela.

August's new film *Goodbye Bafana* is based on a book of the same name by James Gregory and Bob Graham. The prison guard, James Gregory, was a typical South African who looked at black people as less than human.

Gregory's loyalty slowly shifted from racism to direct support of Mandela's struggle for a free and democratic South Africa.

August last entered a film in Berlin in 1997, the thriller *Smilla's Sense of Snow*. His new film, *Goodbye Bafana*, marks a return to the festival circuit for August who first won international acclaim in 1987 for *Pelle the Conqueror*, which took home the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival and later earned the director an Academy Award.

STENSGAARD JURY MEMBER

Film editor and film consultant Molly Malene Stensgaard is a member of the Berlinale International Jury 2007.

Molly Malene Stensgaard, 40, a DFI feature film consultant, has been named a member of this year's Berlinale Jury.

A 1993 graduate in editing from the National Film School of Denmark, Stensgaard has cut a number of standout Danish features and documentaries from the past decade,



Molly Malene Stensgaard. Photo: Jan Buus

including *In Your Hands*, *Dogville*, *Dancer in the Dark* and *The Idiots*.

In recent years, she has worked with the Binger Institute in Amsterdam, teaching a series of intensive master classes in storytelling at the treatment level.



Blood Sisters. Photo: Lars Reinholdt

Children want to recognise themselves in films. We need to take their conflicts seriously and not just dish out feel-good stories with empty calories, Louise N.D. Friedberg says. Her new short film, *Blood Sisters*, describes a love triangle between seven-year-old girls. *Blood Sisters* is one of the fruits of New Danish Screen.

RAW PRINCESS DRAMA

BY EVA NOVRUP REDVALL

On the surface, *Blood Sisters* is an idyllic princess universe, all white and pink ruffles and tulle. But inside, little princesses have feelings that are not so rosy or free of thorns. When seven-year-old girls close the door to their room, it's not

all peaches and cream. Especially not if someone feels left out and is afraid of losing her best friend. In her 29-minute children's drama *Blood Sisters*, Louise N.D. Friedberg goes behind the facade of a children's birthday party. Dea, the birthday girl, is popular and her faithful friend Sidsel feels threatened by a new girl who has moved into their building. How do you deal with that when you are seven years old and afraid of losing your best friend?

To grownups, this may sound like a trifling conflict, but to the children involved it's deadly serious, and Friedberg thinks it's essential to keep that in mind when making films for children. We should never underestimate their conflicts or their insights, and we should give them stories they can recognise themselves in.

"There's nothing worse than being teased or losing your best friend and then seeing a film where it's cool to talk about it but everything ends well anyway. That means *you* must be a failure," Friedberg says. "The whole thing about children not being able to recognize themselves, leads to the fact that their problems are not taken seriously. It's leaving them to deal with them on their own. For me, an important part of watching films is feeling you're being recognized. That somewhere another person has gone through the same things you're going through, and that you're not alone; which goes for both children and adults."

LOSING INNOCENCE IS TOUGH

Among the films that were most important to Friedberg when she was little were some pretty raw and weird stories, as she describes them, including a collection of Russian shorts about love.

"The films were about children and teens and I particularly remember one as completely amazing: a boy is in love with a girl who will have nothing to do with him. She draws a chalk line outside her window and tells him if he can stand there for 24 hours she will talk with him. Then she forgets all about him, standing out there in the rain, until she returns the next morning and sees him. That film is still inside me, while a lot of empty calories have vanished again instantaneously," Friedberg says.



Blood Sisters. Photo: Lars Reinholdt

“Children deserve good, artistic, fascinating, complex, weird, personal stories. You can tell children almost anything and I think childhood is an incredibly interesting subject to deal with, because it’s really just a natural development. We all have to go through some tough things, sadly, to become people and develop our identity. I’m fascinated by the point in life where you acknowledge the bottom line: that you’re alone with yourself and you have to take care of yourself. I have an immediate attraction to stories that deal with that kind of lost innocence,” the director says.

WITH CHILDREN, FOR CHILDREN

Blood Sisters is Friedberg’s first film since she graduated in direction from the National Film School of Denmark. Made in collaboration with fellow filmmakers from the school, the film has many things in common with her student films, which all featured children. Among them was her graduate film *Departure* written by Rikke de Fine Licht who also scripted *Blood Sisters*.

“My past films all had something in them with children, but they weren’t made for children,” Friedberg says. “When I decided to make *Blood Sisters*, I first told myself it doesn’t have to be a children’s film just because it’s about kids. But we gradually realized that it was more interesting to make it for kids. I then had to think the audience into the story in a different way than I had before, because the story originally had a pitch-black ending, but children need some little ray of hope and light to take with them. It was exciting to specifically deal with addressing children that way, though in the screenwriting process we actually never gave much thought to the lead characters being children. Rikke de Fine Licht and I thought of it as a love story. A love triangle, like when two men fight over the same woman. That’s a pretty banal thing, of course – basic emotions that can be expressed in more or less refined ways, depending on a person’s level of language and insight” ■

For further information, see catalogue section in back of this issue.

Blood Sisters will compete in the Generation KPlus Competition at Berlinale 2007.



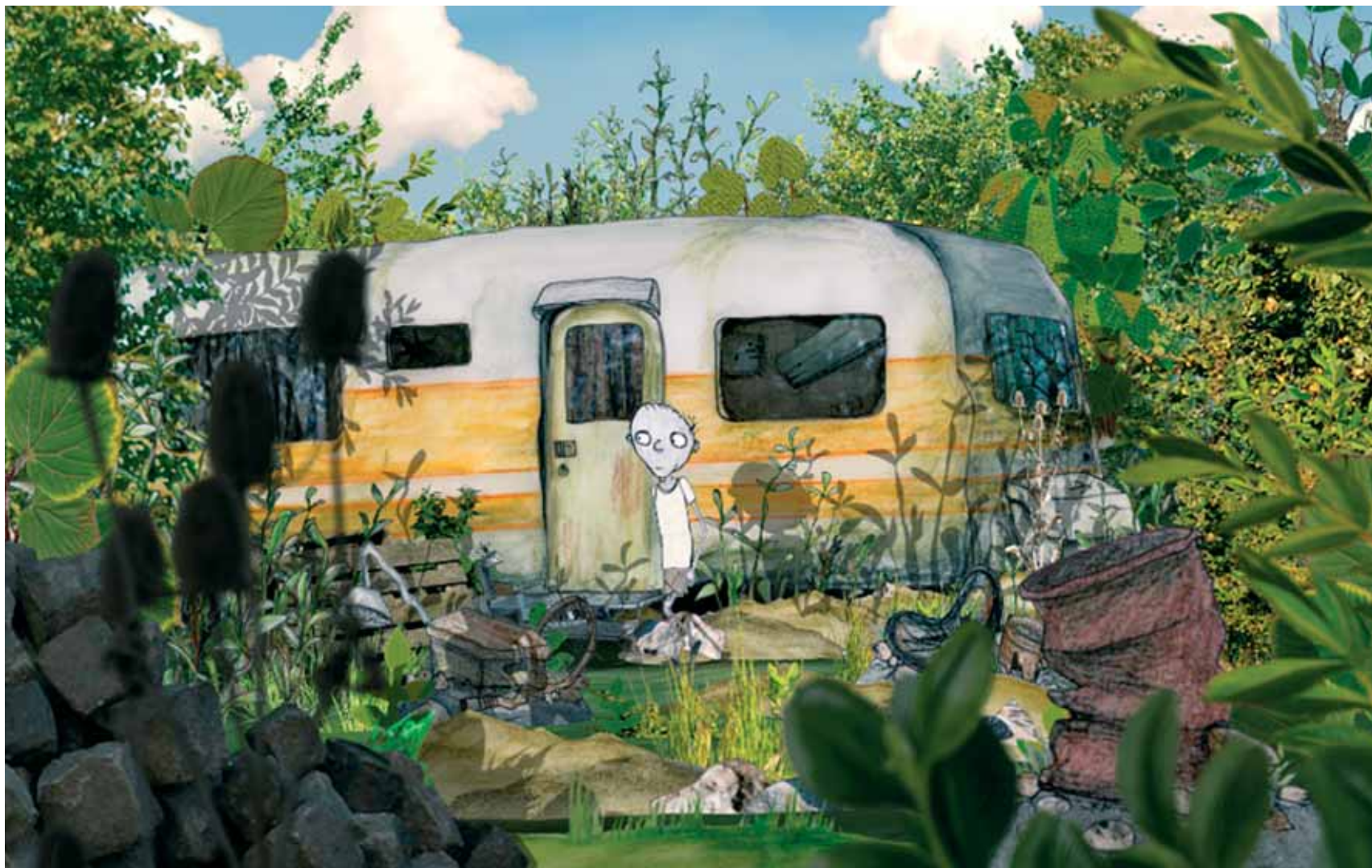
Louise Friedberg. Photo: Robin Skjoldborg

LOUISE N.D. FRIEDBERG

Born 1973, Denmark. Graduated in direction from the National Film School of Denmark, 2005. Has worked as a scripter and assistant director since 1995. *Blodsøstre/Blood Sisters* is Friedberg’s directorial debut.

NIMBUS FILM

Founded 1993 by producers Birgitte Hald and Bo Ehrhardt. Were later joined by director Thomas Vinterberg. The company is considered a major player in Danish cinema, having attained success in seeking out new talents and emphasizing innovation. Major credits include Dogme films, *Festen/The Celebration* (Thomas Vinterberg, 1998) and *Mifunes sidste sang/Mifune* (Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, 1999); the short fiction and Oscar nominee *Bror, min bror/Teis & Nico* (Henrik Ruben Genz, 1998); Nikolaj Arcel’s thriller *Kongekabale/King’s Game* (2004), Dagur Kári’s comedy *Voksne mennesker/Dark Horse* (2005), selected for Un Certain Regard at Cannes. Recent films: Pernille Fischer Christensen’s debut *En Soap/A Soap* (2006), a double-winner at Berlin, and Ole Christian Madsen’s *Prag/Prague* (2006).



The Girl Through the Telescope. Framegrab

GUT FILMS ROCK

Two Danish animation directors straight out of film school have their graduate films, *The Girl Through the Telescope* and *Having a Brother*, selected for Generation Kplus in Berlin.

BY CHRISTIAN MONGGAARD

"It's all a little bigger than I thought," Niels Bisbo says. *The Girl Through the Telescope*, the Danish director's graduate film from the animation programme at the National Film School of Denmark, has been selected for the Berlin Film Festival, more specifically, the children's film section Generation Kplus, formerly known as Kinderfilmfest.

Bisbo's classmate Esben Toft Jacobsen was just as floored when his graduate film, *Having a Brother*, was selected for Generation Kplus, though, for his part, Jacobsen, always had his sights set on Berlin. "I want to have my film shown at the Zoo Palast and hear a thousand children react to the film at once," he says.

Both films are 3D-productions running seven minutes, and appealing to a youthful audience. They are stories about little things that can swell to enormous proportions in a child's mind. But that's as far as the similarity goes.

A LIFE OF ITS OWN

The Girl Through the Telescope is about love: a boy admires a girl from afar, but he's afraid to speak to her. The story is inspired by the director's own experiences. "I once asked a girl if she wanted to go out with me," Bisbo says. "I wasn't very old and I gave her a note and then hid under my bed. I wanted to build my graduate film on that feeling and deal



Having a Brother. Framegrab

with this kind of embarrassment about the opposite sex.”

Bisbo, who wrote the script with Paola Pellettieri, says it was important during the filmmaking process to be open to what he calls “the inexplicable.” “You get these little rewards. Maybe you see someone on the street and things change. Something big might happen,” he says. “The film gets its own life. You have to respect that and just try to keep up. If you fight it, it hurts the film. Then the film is just for the head; it doesn’t hit you in the gut.”

2D MEETS 3D

Gut films rule, Bisbo says. That’s how he judges a film: Can he feel it? “As the American screenwriting expert Christopher Vogler said, you should be able to plug into the film. That’s a very physical metaphor and I like it, plugging into the film. But making that kind of film is the hardest thing to do. It takes humility and a willingness to listen.”

Bisbo uses a variety of techniques and materials in *The Girl Through the Telescope* – “photography, drawing, watercolours.” His 2D-characters inhabit a 3D-universe. “The flat inside the modelled,” he says. “My sophomore film had a cut-out universe, too, but it was 2D. In my graduate film, I wanted to try and bring that technique into 3D, give it depth. I like how animation lets you tone down naturalism. Most 3D-films look good, but I want to see something figurative and graphic. The world in between sketchy and realistic is exciting. The style isn’t naturalistic, but the story really is. That’s a cool clash.”

SIBLING RIVALRY

Esben Toft Jacobsen is more classic in his use of 3D-

animation, even if he initially wanted *Having a Brother* to look more raw and Russian-inspired. The film is about Morten, a hedgehog who feels neglected by his parents when he gets a younger brother.

“We actually designed human characters first,” he says. “But it simply became too harsh and unpleasant with humans. The film was supposed to be for five-year-olds; it’s about them. When we use animals instead, the kids get into the story and it takes the harsh edge off. Also, hedgehogs are a good match for the story. When the mother turns her back, she’s prickly. But when she turns her belly, she’s soft.”

When Jacobsen and his creative sparring partners started working on the film, they thought about their own childhood. “What could we remember and feel in our gut? One of the things we discussed was sibling rivalry. That’s a pretty big thing. It’s like your girlfriend picking up another guy and saying, ‘He’ll be sleeping with us in our bed now.’ Powerful emotions are involved,” Jacobsen says.

MEETING THE AUDIENCE AT EYE LEVEL

For Jacobsen, it was important to have the humour and the emotions come from within. “There is often an external humour in animation that comes from punch lines and visual gags,” he says. “We wanted our story to be dead serious. This kind of thing isn’t funny, and what humour there is should come from the characters themselves. A film has to be about something that matters. What do we have that the Americans don’t? A tradition of children’s movies. The stories come from within and we meet our audience at eye level!” ■

For further information, see catalogue section in back of this issue.



Niels Bisbo. Photo: P. Wessel



Esben Toft Jacobsen. Photo: P. Wessel



Island of Lost Souls. Photo: Rasmus Videbæk

GROUNDING IN REALISM - WRAPPED IN THE FANTASTIC

It's been more than two years since Nikolaj Arcel started working on his second film, following his critically acclaimed box-office hit *King's Game*. Opening this February, *Island of Lost Souls* is a large-scale children's action and adventure genre piece, jammed with digital effects.

BY CHRISTIAN MONGGAARD

In brief, the plot for Nikolaj Arcel's *Island of Lost Souls*, involves a 14-year-old girl, Lulu, who moves with her mother and brother to a small town in the provinces where they find themselves in battle with evil forces – a scarecrow and a sinister shadow frightening, to name two – threatening existence as we know it.

Arcel (co-writer with Rasmus Heisterberg on *Lost Souls*) originally didn't think he'd be directing the film, but "I gradually fell in love with the idea of doing an adventure film, a high-spirited, pleasure-filled genre piece. It suddenly seemed like the only right thing for me to do."

The Danish director is a die-hard Spielberg fan and, like so many others of his generation – people in their early to mid-thirties – he is a *Star Wars* kid. "That whole universe, the aesthetics and the way of telling a story, which is also seen in the *Indiana Jones* movies, is grounded in the realism of the characters no matter how fantastic the wrapper," Arcel says. "That was our biggest inspiration for the script. *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings* have advanced the genre, too, of course."

The film is an attempt to Americanize Danish genre films without losing the national idiom. "*Island of Lost Souls* had to be plot-driven. The characters shouldn't take up too much space. They should be small elements in a big complex action plot. I wanted to have the same exuberance Americans use to tell a story, because," he says, "there's no getting around it, no one in the world does this kind of film better than the Americans."

Island of Lost Souls was originally supposed to be a "medium-budget film using some special effects," Arcel

says. However, he ended up cramming the script with one big, effects-heavy scene after another. "All kinds of impossible stunts, tractor chases, flight sequences. I just thought, 'Fine, some poor dude will solve this cheaply.' Then, when it turned out that I would be directing the film myself, it really hit me – the film had grown huge."

The Danish digital production house Ghost came onto the production from the beginning, ensuring ideal conditions for the effects work, though no one expected that the film would end up having as many effects shots as it did – 623 in all.

"In this kind of film, you quickly find that suspense is a funny thing to work with. Timing is everything, of course, and when you don't have certain visual elements available in the editing process, because they have to be made first on a computer, you need to be really sharp," Arcel says. Many scenes in the film were shot on a green screen and the real backgrounds – everything from angry seas to stormy skies, plus creepy fantasy creatures – were created digitally and not added until the



Nikolaj Arcel. Photo: Jeppe Gudmundsen-Holmgreen

NIKOLAJ ARCEL

Born 1972, Denmark. Graduate of the National Film School of Denmark, 2001. His graduation film *Woyzeck's Last Symphony* won top awards at Munich and Clermont-Ferrand. In Tel Aviv, Arcel received the award for Most Promising Director. He wrote the screenplay for the award-winning children's film *Klatretøsen/Catch That Girl* (2002). His feature film debut *Kongekabale/Kings Game* (2004) brought in over half a million admissions at the Danish box office. The film won a number of national awards including Best Screenplay at Viareggio.

De fortabte sjæles ø/Island of Lost Souls is a joint effort by Zentropa Entertainments17 ApS, Pain Unlimited Filmproduktion GmbH, Nimbus Rights ApS and Memphis Film International AB.

See Zentropa, page 15; Nimbus, page 5.

editing had been completed.

"At least, the production outfit, Ghost, was cool about giving us some rough animations, so we could at least see something in the shots we were editing," Arcel says.

The film is largely a product of Arcel's imagination. Many of the things we see and hear in the film don't exist in real life. Accordingly, the director was involved in every decision in the process. "I can't say to the sound guys, 'Find out what the scarecrow sounds like.' It's all in my head, so I was involved in every step all the time. I was never that detail-oriented before."

The score by the British composer, Jane Cornish, is heavily inspired by Spielberg's regular collaborator John Williams. "She really hit the right note in *Island of Lost Souls*. That's an enormous boon to the film," Arcel says. "It's practically Wagnerian. The film has 70 minutes of symphonic, bombastic music" ■

For further information, see catalogue section at back of this issue.

DREAM COME TRUE

The dream of making spectacular visual effects drove Jeppe Nygaard Christensen, Martin Gårdeler and Aksel Studsgarth to start up their own 3D effects company, Ghost Digital Production House. Since 1999, Ghost has made commercials and worked as a subcontractor on big American productions. The company recently handled all the effects for Nikolaj Arcel's *Island of Lost Souls*.



Jeppe Nygaard Christensen, Martin Gårdeler and Aksel Studsgarth. Photo: P. Wessel

BY CHRISTIAN MONGGAARD

Ghost Digital Production House is working full throttle to put the finishing touches on the digital, visual effects for Nikolaj Arcel's adventure film *Island of Lost Souls*, which, with its 623 effects shots, is the most effects-heavy Danish film ever.

Ghost got involved in the project two years ago and for the past 18 months, the company's 39 employees have worked hard to realise Arcel's visions. Jeppe Nygaard Christensen, effects supervisor on the film and a director at Ghost, show me clips from *Island of Lost Souls* and samples of some of the commercials Ghost has done. He and producer Jesper Waldvogel Rasmussen, who was hired in 2001 to promote Ghost in Denmark and the rest of the world, talk about their company, which recently landed subcontracts to do effects on two major Hollywood productions.

The Ghost story began in the late 1990s in Lego's computer-animation department, where Nygaard met Martin Gårdeler and Aksel Studsgarth, his future partners in Ghost. All three were getting tired of plastic building blocks and they shared a boyhood dream to work with spectacular movie effects. So when they got a call from Thomas Borch at Radar Film, who had an assignment to do the visual effects for Åke Sandgren's *Beyond*, this was just the opportunity they had been waiting for to take the plunge out of the security of the Lego world. The Ghost boys worked six months for Radar Film and, ironically, immediately after landed a big job for Lego, doing 3D animation for a Bionicle commercial.

Since then, Ghost has worked on a long string of commercials – for Smirnoff and Carlsberg, among many others – and subcontracted on major studio productions, including the Bond film *Die Another Day*, *Tomb Raider* and *Alien vs. Predator*.

When Nygaard was offered the job of effects supervisor on *Island of Lost*

Souls, he didn't hesitate for a second. It was a dream come true, he says. "I only had to read the introduction to the script, where Nikolaj wrote, 'I take off from the films I watched in my childhood: *E.T.*, *The Goonies*, *Back to the Future.*' Nikolaj and I are the same age (mid-30s, *ed.*) and have the same frames of reference. At Ghost, we were ready to do anything to make it happen, because the project was so appealing and Nikolaj was so enthusiastic about it. That's contagious and our enthusiasm was never hard to miss, either."

The effects budget for *Island of Lost Souls* was 550,000 euros, Nygaard says, although he is unwilling to reveal what Ghost actually spent to do the effects. "It's an investment in our future," he says, "We've been saving up to be able to do something like this," adding that Ghost will have a comfortable profit for the 2006 fiscal year after all.

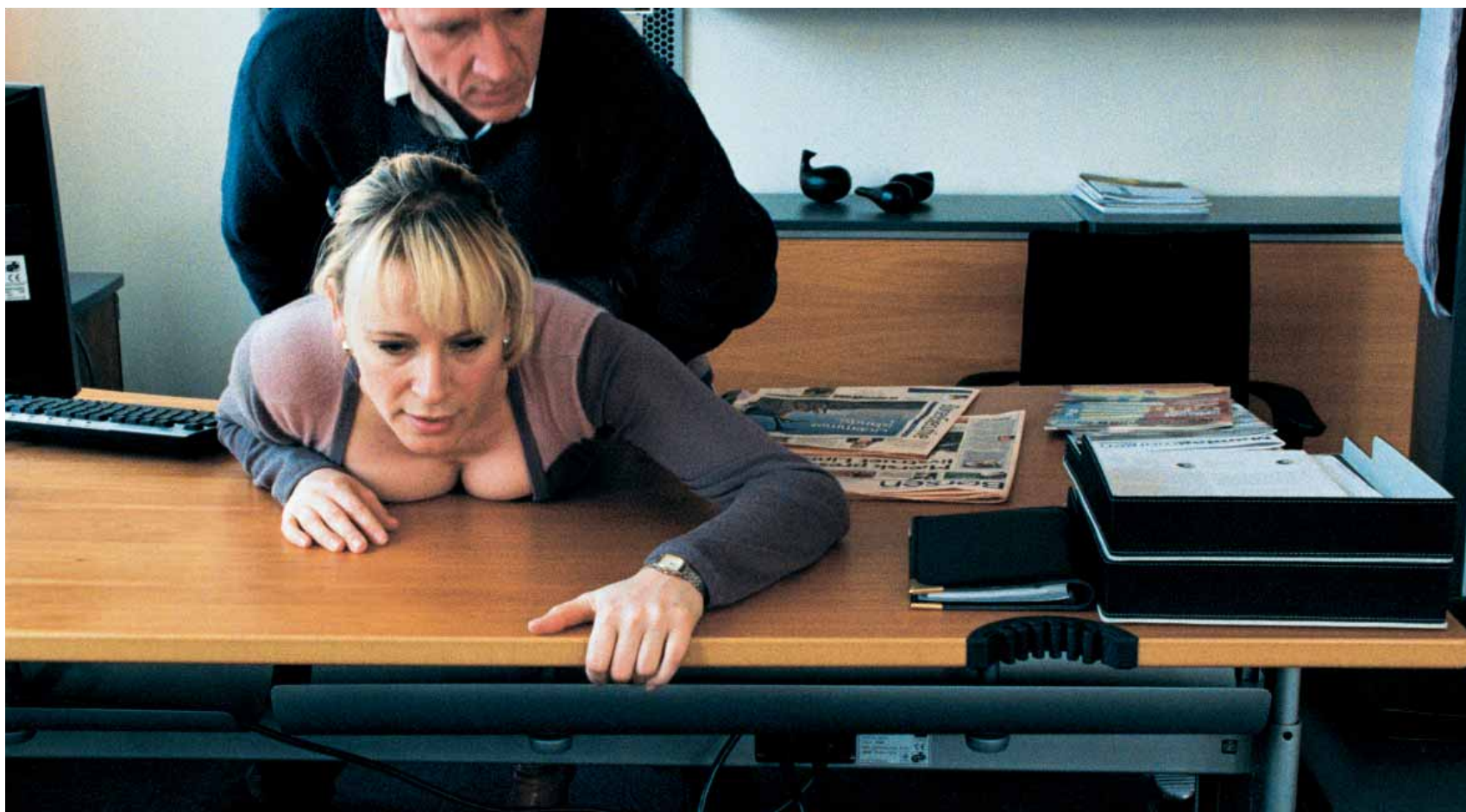
Ghost had the opportunity to be involved in the film from the get-go and "establish what effects were necessary, what effects could be made another way – and also influence Nikolaj creatively," Nygaard says. "In the process of working on the film, we built up an efficient infrastructure and a huge database system that can handle large volumes of shots and revisions of shots. We can always see where an individual shot is in the process. If Nikolaj says, 'Add more red up here,' we key it in, hit a button and everyone working on the shot receives an e-mail saying that Nikolaj has seen the shot and what he thinks about it."

Consequently, Ghost is geared to carry big assignments in the future, both in Denmark and elsewhere. Internationally, Ghost is competitive on price because its daily overhead is considerably lower than for the big effects houses in London.

"Making films abroad is not an ambition in itself, but we certainly have an ambition to get to do more of this kind of thing, because it's super cool," Jeppe Nygaard says. ■

GHOST DIGITAL PRODUCTION HOUSE

Founded in 1999 by Jeppe Nygaard Christensen, Martin Gårdeler and Aksel Studsgarth, who each own a third of the company. Ghost employs a staff of 39 people from around the world. Their first commission was for the effects for Åke Sandgren's *Dykkerne/Beyond*. Their bread-and-butter work is commercials, running the gamut from Smirnoff vodka and Omo detergent, Tuborg and Carlsberg to Lego and the weekly newspaper *Weekendavisen*. They are effects subcontractor on *Tomb Raider*, *Alien vs. Predator*, *Die Another Day*, and in charge of all the effects for Nikolaj Arcel's adventure film *De fortabte sjæles ø/Island of Lost Souls*, which by Danish standards has a staggering number of effects shots, 623 in all. Ghost has landed subcontracts on two new Hollywood films. Read more at www.ghost.dk



The Boss of It All. Photo: Automavision

VON TRIER'S BIG GENRE GAME

Roughly a decade ago, Lars von Trier wrote the Dogme manifesto and sent shockwaves through the international film community by setting out rules for his films as a way to unleash fresh creativity. After *Dogville* and *Manderlay*, he thought the time was ripe for a new remedy - he had once again become too accomplished and, consequently, too slick.

BY JACOB WENDT JENSEN

Lars von Trier, the experimenter, has set up new rules in his laboratory, this time using a computer hooked up to a camera and microphones. At the click of a button, the computer randomly picks a frame among eight pre-programmed options and the sound recording likewise jumps between different microphones. This adds a unique, accidental element to the Danish director's new film, *The Boss of It All*, which otherwise is constructed a lot like a classical American screwball comedy.

"The film was like a stint of R&R (rest and recreation). That it wasn't a big international production really provided some peace and quiet. It felt great not to have a crew around as far as the eye could see," von Trier says.

Von Trier presents *The Boss of It All* as a "comedy that leaves no one behind," but the comedy cake has many layers. For one, he is poking fun at himself, since he in a way is *The Boss of It All*.

Why have you turned to comedy just now?

"I wanted to make a film with a less heavy work process. So I chose one genre, comedy, instead of mixing up genres or trying to think up something new. In a way, *The Boss of It All* may be the only film I ever made in a genre context. At least, that was the intention.

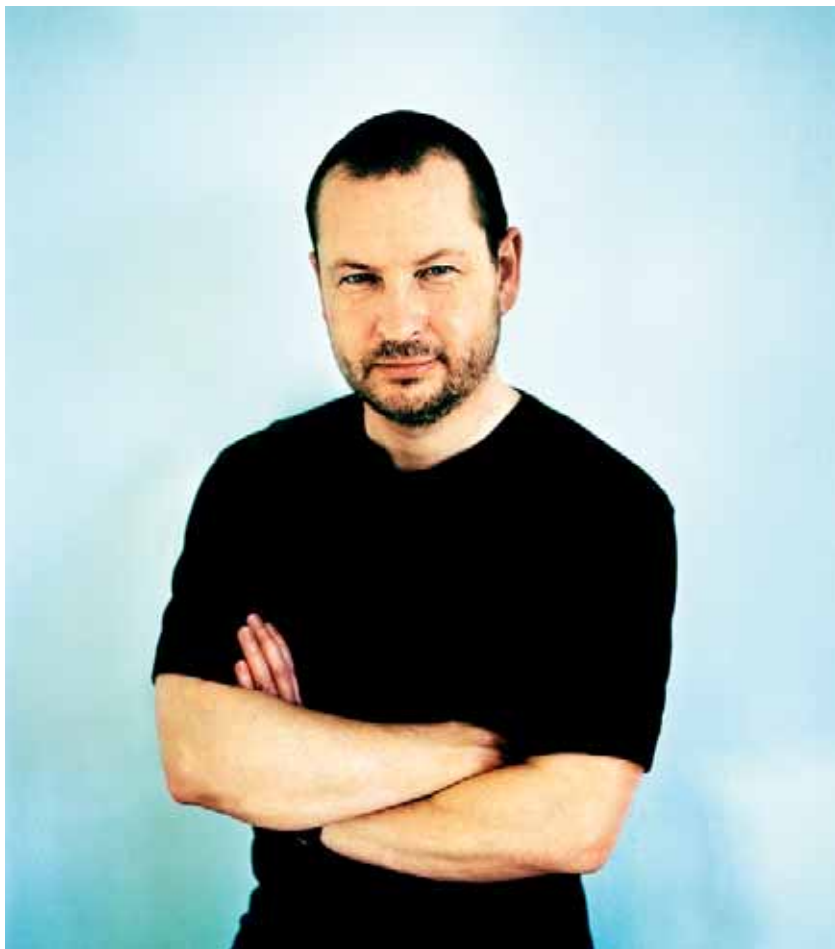
"I'm inspired by the highly text-based screwball comedies, and to some extent the story is based on something that happened to me. But when you do comedy, you have to create characters that are parodies."

The parodied characters in von Trier's comedy

include Ravn (Peter Gantzler), the owner of an IT firm who wants to sell out. The trouble is that when he established his firm he invented a non-existent company president as a front when unpopular steps needed taking. When the potential buyer insists on negotiating directly with the 'president' face to face, the owner hires a washed-up actor, Kristoffer (Jens Albinus), to play the part. All manner of mix-ups and confusion ensue, in part because Ravn is tight-lipped about the information he feeds the actor who has to improvise his way out of some impossibly tight spots. In effect, the film is a lot about what it takes to be an actor on the job.

Can you give examples of different types of actors?

"There are, roughly speaking, two different types of actors. There is the type who never hits a wrong note and then there's the type that gives you 100,000 different things to choose from. Both types are extremely interesting. Jens Albinus gives you an insane amount of choices. He had a small supporting part in *Dancer in the Dark* where he had to hand over a box to Björk. There was no reining



Lars von Trier. Photo: Jan Buus

“Comedies are made with an audience in mind. The Automavision style is guaranteed to activate the audience in whole new ways. Because they cannot rely on spotting the protagonist in the golden section, it makes them more alert. What interests me most, however, is that all cuts in a way become ‘jump cuts’. I’ve worked with that a lot before, so I was delighted when I thought of using it”.

LARS VON TRIER

Born 1956, Denmark. Graduate of the National Film School of Denmark, 1983. His graduation film “Befrielsesbilleder”/“Images of Relief” (1982) evoked the attention of the critics, who declared there was nothing comparable in Danish cinema since Dreyer. Trier soon became an internationally acclaimed auteur director. He is also innovator and partner of Zentropa, and cofounder of the concept Dogme95, which has inspired filmmakers worldwide. With some seven films selected for the official competition in Cannes, Trier has received major awards at this festival for four titles: *Forbrydelsens Element/The Element of Crime* (1984), *Europa* (1991), and *Breaking the Waves* (1996), while *Dancer in the Dark* (2000) received the Palme d’Or. Trier’s major films fall into three trilogies: E-Trilogy (*Element of Crime*, *Epidemic*, *Europa*), the Goldlocks-Trilogy (*Breaking the Waves*, *The Idiots*, and *Dancer in the Dark*), and his US-Trilogy (*Dogville*, *Manderlay* and the yet to be made *Washington*).

him in. It was like putting Ernst-Hugo Järegård (lead in *The Kingdom*) in the back of a frame and watching him do anything to manoeuvre to the centre. Jens Albinus and his box were impossible, because he gave too much information while just handing over a box. The scene ended up with him only looking up when he wasn’t saying anything. Otherwise he stayed hidden. Temperament-wise, Jens Albinus and Peter Gantzler both fit their roles pretty well. When they sat around discussing how to play their parts, Albinus always said something like, ‘But it’s hard to keep it all straight,’ while Peter said, ‘Just do it.’ They are very close to their characters that way.

“I have nothing against an actor ‘asking his character.’ All actors bring in their own technique and you have to be open to that. My way of working is to ask the actors for as many different variations on a scene as possible. The more experience you have as a director, the more you have seen and the more open you are to all sorts of different actors.”

RANDOM FRAMES

You use a randomness principle, Automavision, both for the shots and the sound. What does it involve?

“The way it works is I frame the shot the way I usually would want it to be and then hit a button on the computer. The programme then picks one of eight different frame variants. The most important part is programming the settings for how much a frame can vary. You can’t have the camera turning 180 degrees, of course, because then there is no shot. We spent a lot of time experimenting with the variables. The idea is to make the shots imprecise. And why is that? Well, I’m the kind of person who likes to control things. If I’m not controlling things, I’d rather have no influence at all. After *Europa*

(released as *Zentropa* in the US, *ed.*), which had very tight setups that were all planned in advance down to the smallest detail, I was tempted to try something completely different and started using a handheld camera. I actually hate framing shots and to take things even further I thought up the new system. Individual shots are framed by a machine, and the idea is that the audience have to be on their toes a bit more to locate the actors in the shot. The amazing thing about hitting a button on the computer is that it eliminated the need for endless discussions about where to put the camera. The first few days we laughed a lot about the accidents that emerged, but that quickly faded. The only problem was an elephant in the zoo that we couldn’t control, so I wouldn’t recommend the system for wildlife shows,” he laughs.

What do you think the audience will get out of this experiment?

“I think about possible audience reactions, of course. Comedies are made with an audience in mind. The Automavision style is guaranteed to activate the audience in whole new ways. Because they cannot rely on spotting the protagonist in the golden section, it makes them more alert. What interests me most, however, is that all cuts in a way become jump cuts. I’ve worked with that a lot before, so I was delighted when I thought of using it. Originally, a jump cut corresponds to wiping the slate clean. We also Automavisioned the sound. All cuts, then, become jump cuts and we get all the advantages. We can cut various psychological development stages away and have peaks all the time.”

ANTICHRIST AND HORROR

Lars von Trier works fast and generally finishes a

script within a few weeks. A few hours before the world premiere of *The Boss of It All*, he announced that his next film would be called *Antichrist*. This project was first announced two years ago, but he later withdrew it after Zentropa co-owner and producer Peter Aalbæk Jensen revealed parts of the plot to a reporter. Now, von Trier has rewritten the script.

“Peter is great for my films in general. He is a friend in need, but this time he will probably get a bit less information about the film than last time,” von Trier says.

These days, the Danish filmmaker is watching horror movies from around the world, though he has a particular fascination with Korea and Japan.

“I’ve come to realize that the horror genre is a lot freer than I thought. Anything can happen in a horror film. I expect to start shooting next summer with three lead actors, so if we can get the financing together this will be another English-language film.”

Meanwhile, he will not rule out that the third film in the US trilogy, after *Dogville* and *Manderlay*, is underway.

“I’m pretty sure that it will be made one day, but the story has to manifest itself a bit more assertively than it does now,” von Trier says. ■

For further information, see catalogue section in the back of this issue.

See also David Bordwell’s comment ‘Another Pebble in Your Shoe’ (about the editing technique in The Boss of It All) at his blog: www.davidbordwell.net.

“It’s an odd paradox. Every time we try doing something for the money, we end up losing a bundle. Every time we have been involved in a genre film, it has failed. Not that I think there’s anything wrong with genre films - personally, I like them a lot - but we simply don’t know how to make them. We don’t make them well enough”.

THE MERCHANT OF ZENTROPA

The boss of it all, Peter Aalbæk Jensen, puts down his cigar and clown mask to talk about Zentropa - the leading film company in Denmark, bringing us Dogme films and the work of Lars von Trier - and how it operates in the day to day.

BY MORTEN PIIL AND LISELOTTE MICHELSEN

Lars von Trier has been the company’s driving force, while other well-known directors have fuelled the Zentropa engine, including Lone Scherfig (*Italian for Beginners*, *Wilbur Wants to Kill Himself*), Susanne Bier (*Open Hearts*, *Brothers*, *After the Wedding*), Per Fly (*The Bench*, *Inheritance*, *Manslaughter*) and Annette K.

Olesen (*Minor Mishaps*, *In Your Hands*, 1 : 1).

All along, the man pulling the strings at Zentropa, Denmark’s biggest, most successful production company in recent years, has been Peter Aalbæk Jensen, now 50.

Peter Aalbæk - or “Ålen” (The Eel), as he has often been called - comes from a cultured background. Aalbæk is the son of Erik Aalbæk Jensen, a respected author, minister and periodic head of television drama at the national broadcaster. Peter Aalbæk was 30 and had tried his hand as a roadie for rock bands and a teacher for maladjusted kids, before he finally got a toe in the door of the movie business. A somewhat awkward young man from the country, he sidled into the National Film School of Denmark



as a sound student, but soon - in a characteristic break with tradition - he was allowed to switch to the production track. The school’s otherwise strict director, Henning Camre, (now chief executive of the Danish Film Institute) took pity on him. “I will always be grateful to Henning Camre for that,” Aalbæk says today. “Making that switch was crucial to my future.”

AN IDEALISTIC SPECULATOR?

In years since, Aalbæk has often appeared to be a paradoxical personality, branding himself as the prototype of a brash, cigar-wielding studio head.

Of course, the reality is not that simple. Aalbæk recently appeared on Denmark’s biggest broadcaster



Producer Peter Aalbæk Jensen. Photo: Per Morten Abrahamsen

in a contest to see who could make the most money on a stock investment. True to his past on the extreme left and requisitely tongue in cheek, Aalbæk invested exclusively in “green” companies – Danish windmills, for instance – and he won!

The episode is characteristic of this media-savvy producer who has made himself familiar to the public as a shrewd businessman. Meanwhile, the episode illustrates a point that is at least as important in terms of film – Aalbæk’s willingness to gamble on something very specific: what he considers quality.

No matter how hard Aalbæk has worked over the years to adopt the mask of a pure merchant, the roughly 100 features his company has produced or co-produced tell a different story. To be sure, many

of the films – notably, Scherfig’s Dogme comedy *Italian for Beginners* and von Trier’s *Breaking the Waves* and *Dancer in the Dark* – have turned a handsome profit, but the fact remains that Aalbæk from day one of his career has wagered on films that strive to make a difference artistically. It is a consistently implied standard of quality that initially almost bankrupted his and von Trier’s company (and besides not always successful films), but which over the last 14 years has turned Danish film upside down.

More than any other production company, Zentropa has been the international face of Danish film, driving an artistic flowering that was impossible to predict in the early 1990s. Zentropa moreover has been a partner in establishing

Filmbyen in Avedøre. Since 1998, this cluster of unpretentious, low buildings, a former military barracks, has been a centre of film production, an internationally admired frame-work for creative forces of all colours, from von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg to the team of 25 untested, hopeful trainees Zentropa insists on keeping as a conveniently inexpensive workforce – and a mortgage on the future.

THE PRODUCER - THE PRIMARY TALENT

If someone approaches Zentropa with a screenplay, what is the procedure? And who decides if a film gets made?”

“If a director hands me a screenplay, I wouldn’t

dream of reading it! First of all, the written word means nothing to me. And in my experience, for a film to succeed, it has to happen through a close collaboration between three people: a screenwriter, a director and a producer.

“So, if I think the director looks like he or she has something to offer, I hook him or her up with one of our producers – we have about 10 of those out there.

“If the producer is burning to make the film, he or she doesn’t have to ask the company for permission but can just go ahead and do it. Unlike other film companies, the sales and marketing department don’t evaluate a project. Such assessments may be the sensible thing to do, but if all our competitors are doing it, we precisely should not be.

“The producer is solely responsible for the film’s earnings potential corresponding to the money the company puts into the film.”

Do producers get a fixed annual amount to invest?

“No, there are no designated amounts for how much someone should produce. Some producers make a film every other year, and that suits them. Others make as many as three films a year. It’s a question of temperament, and that’s fine with us as long as they can make the earnings match the expenses. The most important thing for us is maintaining the right talent in all positions. And, here with us, producers are the primary talent. If we have the right producers, we also get the right directors.

“The producers get a regular salary and have their own staff, of 4-5 people sometimes. The number of producers we have here is always changing, because we obviously can’t keep producers who don’t produce. As a rule, we fire a producer or two a year. There is a lot of pressure on them.”

Producers are key, you say. How does someone get to be a producer here?

“The standard qualifications are not to have attended the National Film School and being a woman. Women are simply better and more persistent performers in this field, while men tend to noodle around too much. And you have to put in the hours. Many of our producers started out here as 20-year-old trainees, working as drivers, then assistant receptionists, etc.

“We constantly have 25 trainees here – *småtter* (wee ones), as I call them – and 8-10 of them come from abroad. The only thing we require of foreigners is that they learn Danish in four months. If they have the drive it takes to sit in Australia and learn Danish in four months, we believe they also have the potential to become good producers. Trainees start on the ground floor – without pay for the first six months – and are kept underfoot in a tough system with boot-camp discipline for three years. That way, we beat the company’s values into them over an extended traineeship and that’s why, later on, we dare let employees who are only in their late twenties manage 7-8 million euros without supervision.”

You graduated as a producer from the National Film School of Denmark. Is it a principle with you not to hire people from there?

“No, we have had a few employees from the Film School. But our own trainees go the extra mile,

because they have to prove that they are so much better. That kind of dedication impresses me. For instance, two of our most prominent producers – Meta Louise Foldager, who works with von Trier, and Sisse Graum Jørgensen, who is Susanne Bier’s producer – never even saw the front door at the National Film School.”

TRIER’S DOMAIN - AND MINE

How is the distribution of responsibilities at Zentropa between you and von Trier?

“Very simple, fortunately. Lars gets to make the films he wants to make and I get to run the company the way I want to run it. That’s the deal. The few times Lars and I have had an argument is when the deal hasn’t been respected.

“In Zentropa’s first years, we both had a lot of ideas on artistic and administrative issues, but that resulted in far too many bad films. Zentropa’s current structure is a product of recognizing that the top-down management *the two of us* could do was no good.

“Lars is a genius, visionary businessman and we are interested in one another’s domain and enthusiastically put in our two cents. But the final decision in either domain is our own.

“In the fall of 2006, von Trier and I sold half the company to our employees, including, of course, directors, writers and producers. Von Trier and I own the other half.”

Zentropa rarely makes any genre or real mainstream films. Why is that?

“It doesn’t pay for us. We always go for quality, because, in our experience, that’s what sells best. Especially abroad. We are very dependent on selling our films abroad, because it’s hard to make a living off the box office in Denmark, although we have had a few home-market hits in recent years.

“It’s an odd paradox. Every time we try doing something for the money, we end up losing a bundle. Every time we have been involved in a

“If a director hands me a screenplay, I wouldn’t dream of reading it! First of all, the written word means nothing to me. And in my experience, for a film to succeed, it has to happen through a close collaboration between three people: a screenwriter, a director and a producer.

genre film, it has failed. Not that I think there’s anything wrong with genre films – personally, I like them a lot – but we simply don’t know how to make them. We don’t make them well enough.

“What matters to me is having a talented troika behind every production, consisting of a director, a writer and a producer. Then they can do whatever they want, as far as I’m concerned – genre films or broad comedies or whatever.

“Our films always end up having something of the same basic tenor, a kind of consonance. It might have something to do with the fact that employees from all aspects of the production process are always rubbing elbows, since we have practically every production facility and service they need here in Filmbyen from start to finish. Because of that, directors spend almost uncannily long stretches of

time here, yakking it up at the coffee machine and influencing each other.”

Can Zentropa films be defined as films with an edge and generally unpredictable?

“Yes, we specifically ask for films that are somehow different from the mainstream, in terms of both content and how they are made. Certainly the latter, but preferably both. Our market to a large extent is international art houses and they could not care less about your typical Danish mainstream film, no matter how well it’s made. Everything should be entertaining, of course, but the films should also have an edge that sets them apart from the usual run of films.”

DIRECTORS - A LONG-TERM INVESTMENT

When Aalbæk and Trier founded Zentropa in 1992, the company’s prospects did not look good. Aalbæk was heavily in debt from a debut production that flopped and von Trier did not have a reputation as a cash cow. Instead of going to a bank for money, they invested in film equipment and kept their nose above water by producing commercials. Although the company’s first features failed to make a dent, many promising young filmmakers were already regulars at Zentropa’s then quite modest offices. Moreover, there was limited financial risk in making features back then because government subsidies were higher.

“The big turning point for us was von Trier’s *The Kingdom* (1994-96), which was actually made to finance *Breaking the Waves*. This TV mini series made Lars a better director of actors, which subsequently made *Breaking the Waves* so much better. The Lord was with us when he saw to it that things happened in that order.

“With its handheld camera, rudimentary lighting and jump cuts, *The Kingdom* was a precursor to Dogme. The series also proved that it was possible to sell a Danish-language product that wasn’t big and impressive looking. It sold all over the world in a

four-hour film version.”

Some of your directors are almost like house directors – Susanne Bier, Lone Scherfig, Per Fly, Annette K. Olesen. Are they on a regular salary, too, like the producers?

“No. Nor do we have long-term contracts with them. Directors sign a contract for each film and they can leave anytime they want to. Now they are co-owners of the company – but only after many years of faithful service. Our collaboration with them is enormously important to us, of course, but that has been reciprocal. Take Susanne Bier, for instance. The first film she made for us was far from a hit. But, on principle, we never kick out directors because they have a flop. Of course, they may leave on their own accord – as Niels Arden Oplev did, whose last film, *We Shall Overcome*

(2005), just managed to pay us back for what he cost us with *Portland* (1996) and *Chop Chop* (2001). He simply got sick of Zentropa and left for Nordisk Film. These things happen and we will welcome him back with open arms if he ever decides to return. Obviously, the core of the company is our long-term relationships with the talents that work for us. We spent 8-10 years building up a sound foundation, because, statistically, it takes most directors two-three films to make something that is really successful.

"We may not always be that good at handling sensitive first-time filmmakers. We meet them head on with rigid deadlines and demand they have new projects lined up when their first one has been realized. Still, in 2007, we are launching a small wave of debut directors, following Christian E. Christiansen, who made the successful *Life Hits* for us last year without support from the Danish Film Institute."

LOW SALARIES

You are notorious for paying everyone a low salary. Is that a fixed principle?

"Yes, you better believe it! I don't think there is a single employee at this company who couldn't be making 30-40 percent more elsewhere. But if someone points that out to us, our answer is: Well, why don't you say goodbye and go work for more money somewhere else?"

If these are highly sought-after and talented actors we're talking about, can't that hurt a film?

"Yes, and of course there have been exceptions when we caved in to salary demands. However, when some of the actors from *Italian for Beginners* demanded a substantial pay hike for Lone Scherfig's next film, *Wilbur Wants to Kill Himself* (2002), we killed the discussion by producing the film in Scotland instead.

"The best of our producers make approximately what Lars and I make - that is, 7,500 euros a month. The rest Lars and I put back into the company. That's not a bad paycheck, but as CEO I could probably get a decent raise somewhere else. Still, being in the top Danish tax bracket would probably wipe that out anyway, plus I would have to raise everyone else's salary, too. We don't belong to any union, so the only person who negotiates salaries is me. Everyone is welcome to ask for a raise at any point, but it may also be the case that the staff gets a pay cut. If you can get a raise because you do well, you have to accept a lower paycheck if you do poorly. But this kind of performance-based salary is a bitter pill to swallow for many Danish wage earners.

"The philosophy behind the low salaries is that it's better to make several films on low budgets than fewer, more expensive films. We also think that will give most people a higher annual income in the long run."

PARTNERSHIPS

For more than a decade, Zentropa had a partnership with Nimbus Film, which produces films by Thomas Vinterberg, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen and Ole Christian Madsen and has altogether more elegant offices right next door to Zentropa in Filmbyen. The agreement involved Nimbus renting Zentropa's film

equipment, but starting this year, Nimbus will go it alone. Plans for a joint distribution company never panned out either.

"Instead, we will be founding our own distribution company," Aalbæk says. "We have a new employee, Maja Giese, who comes from the Danish Film Institute, and she wants to start it up. That's how we tend to do things here - initiatives come not so much from management as from staff members consumed with a holy fire.

"But we like Nimbus Film and I consider them our only true competitor. Competition is an advantage for both Nimbus and Zentropa. Every day, we grind our swords. The only place we have business together now is in a company, OS, that sells broadcasting rights in the Nordic countries."

Zentropa puts out around ten films a year, half of which are independent productions. The rest are co-productions with European partners, who generally have had a working relationship with Zentropa for years. A few years back, Zentropa founded a company to cultivate co-productions with American partners, but it was later shut down. The American rule of thumb that putting money into a film equals creative input clashed too harshly with Zentropa's philosophy of the trio of director, producer and writer having sovereign control of a film.

ARTISTIC COURAGE - FINANCIAL SAVVY

What above all makes Zentropa unique, not just in Danish but in Scandinavian film, is commercial know-how combined with an eye for quality and a desire to run risks. In the film industry, this blend of artistic courage and financial savvy is rarer than you might think, at least in Denmark.

Although Aalbæk has toned down his colourful personality a bit in recent years, he still has a devil-may-care, anarchic air about him. True to form, he ends this interview by imploring us to slap his company around a bit, and not to be too gushing. Aalbæk's powers of persuasion are greater than most people's, but in this case it's hard to take him up on his offer after what has been, by all appearances, a very openhearted talk.

Zentropa has a powerful presence in Danes' consciousness, in part because you and von Trier work the media so well. Have you done so mainly for commercial reasons or because you enjoy it?

"Because I enjoy it. When we metaphorically drop our pants, it always happens very spontaneously. On this point Lars and I have meshed well. We haven't thought deeply about it. It's simply amused us to act out. And we have repeatedly been amazed that the press would care what we do to amuse ourselves."

You have created an image as a cigar-chomping mogul. How did that happen?

"By accident. I was always an off-hours cigar smoker, but no more than that. The first time I had to do an interview, I happened to have a cigar in my desk drawer. I was nervous, so I grabbed the cigar to have something to hold on to, swung my feet up on the desk and that's how it all began" ■

ZENTROPA

Founded 1992 by director Lars von Trier and producer Peter Aalbæk Jensen. One of the largest production companies in Scandinavia. Establishing a platform for young filmmakers and veteran directors alike, Zentropa covers feature film production and a range of services within DVD manufacture, digital communications and concept development. TV and documentary are managed by Zentropa Real, animation by Zentropa GRRRR. Zentropa is greatly acknowledged for having reinvigorated the industry with Dogme 95.

The company received an international breakthrough after Trier's *Breaking the Waves* (1996). Lone Scherfig's Dogme film and Berlin winner, *Italiensk for begyndere/Italian for Beginners* (2000) is undoubtedly one of Zentropa's greatest successes with a record-breaking number of admissions and sold worldwide. Other prominent works: Trier's *Dancer in the Dark* (2000), winner of the Palme d'Or, Cannes; Susanne Bier's awardwinning films *Elsker dig for evigt/Open Hearts* (2002) and *Efter brylluppet/After the Wedding* (2006) running for an Oscar 2007 in the category of Best Foreign Language Film; Annette K. Olesen's *Små ulykker/Minor Mishaps* (2002), recipient of Der Blaue Engel in Berlin, and her *1:1* (2006); and Per Fly's internationally acclaimed trilogy on modern-day Danish society, *Bænken/The Bench* (2000), *Arven/Inheritance* (2003) and *Drabet/Manslaughter* (2005). *Princess* (2006), a Zentropa GRRRR production, was a winner at Barcelona and Ghent and was selected for Directors' Fortnight, Cannes.

ZENTROPA PRODUCERS 2007

Meta Louise Foldager, Marie Gade, Peter Garde, Ib Tardini, Peter Bech, Mikael Olsen, Louise Vesth, Peter Engell, Sisse Graum Jørgensen, Ida Marie Harder Jeppesen.

PETER AALBÆK JENSEN

Born 1956, Denmark. Graduated as a producer from the National Film School of Denmark in 1987. Co-owner and CEO of the Danish film production company, Zentropa.



Producer Peter Aalbæk Jensen. Photo: Per Morten Abrahamsen

RISK AND RENEWAL IN DANISH CINEMA

The centrality of melodrama has helped Danish cinema attain what is in effect a Cinema of Quality - perhaps the first full-blown one since the French tradition of the 1950s. Excellent performers, sophisticated directors, and well-carpentered scripts are the mainstay of recent Danish film. This is yet another unintended consequence of the Dogme manifesto, which called for a break with conformity.



Efter Brylluppet/After the Wedding. Photo: Ole Kragh-Jacobsen

BY DAVID BORDWELL

In the comedy *Clash of Egos* (2006), the conceited Claus has just directed a very arty film. On its opening day it sells seven tickets. The producer worries that they can't go on. "But it's a trilogy!" Claus protests. Thanks to a legal settlement, Tonny, a violence-prone father who just wants a movie for his kids to watch, takes a hand in Claus's next film. Tonny turns Claus' symbolic personal allegory into an American-style extravaganza called *Explosive Bomb*, showcasing machine-gun fire and actors saying "Fuck" as often as possible.

Clash of Egos is built on the cliché that European filmmakers think too often of personal expression and too seldom of their audience. The movie proposes a middle way: Stick to what Danes do well, the gentle character-driven comedy. There is also a trace of the Danish suspicion of pretension: Claus, who puts himself above everyone, must be humiliated and eventually learns some decency.

It would be wrong to read too much into this populist satire of both Hollywood and Danish film. Yet satire has a way of detecting when certain habits need to change. More than once in the history of art, parody has opened up new pathways; by mocking chivalric romance, *Don Quixote* helped initiate the European novel. We might, then, take *Clash of Egos* as revealing a sense that Danish cinema, despite a decade of triumphs, needs some renewal. That conclusion is borne out by other films of 2005 and 2006. Ten years after the Dogme manifesto, filmmakers seem to recognize that they may fall into a rut, however comfortable that rut may be. They're taking the chance to rethink things.

GENRE CINEMA AND THE WELL-CARPENTERED SCRIPT

It would be easy to be complacent, for Danish films have had strong successes at home and overseas. In 2004, about one-quarter of cinema ticket sales went for local films and in 2005 the figure jumped to 32%. The twenty-one films released in 2006 drew a total of 3.1 million admissions, in a country of 5.4 million

people. Many of the local successes, such as *Manslaughter* and *Adam's Apples*, sold briskly to other territories, and those with lower grosses at home, such as *Manderlay*, *Dear Wendy*, and *Dark Horse*, still found overseas buyers. More generally, Danish filmmaking has helped propel Nordic filmmaking. "Dogma has had a great influence on Nordic cinema," notes Dieter Kosslick, indicating that it has "revolutionized" the regional industry (*Variety*, 15-21 August 2005). In 1996, Norwegian and Finnish films garnered less than 3% of national admissions. By 2004, in these and other Scandinavian countries, local films were capturing between ten and thirty percent of the market.

How long local prosperity can be maintained is uncertain, of course, but the Danes have a solid base. Not only have their performers become well-known stars, but they have a flourishing genre system. In 2005-2006, out of about forty-five releases, there were thrillers, family dramas, children's films, animated films, psychological studies, and comedies of many sorts. The advantages go beyond diversity, however. Danish cinema benefits from a worldwide tendency to raise the production values of genre pictures.

Until quite recently, no one thought that a film from Europe or Asia could compete in production values with the US product. But now it can. For one thing, many of the currently popular genres, such as horror and urban crime thrillers, are relatively low in cost. These are more easily imitated than the musicals, historical spectacles, and costume pictures that Hollywood produced well into the 1960s and 1970s. Hong Kong helped blaze the way: its 1980s cop-and-crook movies included action scenes of a bravado that surpassed their American sources. Japan showed that the low-budget *The Ring* could create a horror franchise by treating a simple concept with rising tension, rather than an array of slaughter scenes. In addition, the plunging prices of sophisticated software have put digital effects within the reach of many filmmakers. For such reasons, a French exercise in computer animation (*Arthur*), a Russian horror film (*Day Watch*), and a Korean monster movie (*The Host*) can become both local and international hits. Today, many film industries can produce very polished products.

Thanks to the same factors, Denmark's genres have become competitive in look and feel with top international standards. Slick digital effects are on display in the children's fantasy *Skymaster* and in the adult animation *Princess*, which blends *bande-dessinée* imagery with *anime* violence. The second and third installments of *Pusher* are as abrasive and visceral as any crime saga from Hong Kong.

Another internationalizing factor owes something to American independent cinema. In the 1980s and 1990s, Hal Hartley, Jim Jarmusch, and their peers borrowed from the European modernist tradition. A new generation of European filmmakers has returned the favor by drawing inspiration from the US independents. For example, the "network narrative," which connects the lives of many people by chance, has roots in both America (*Nashville*) and Europe (films by Iosseliani, Kieslowski, Haneke). It became a more popular format for US indies after Altman's *Short Cuts*, and while American independents were ringing variations on the format, we saw filmmakers all over the world reworking it as well: *Night Shapes*, *Free Radicals*, *Happenstance*, *Les Passagers*, *Once Upon a Time*

More importantly, Danish genre entries have set international standards for solid screenplays. With running times of 90-100 minutes, the films can snugly accommodate the three-act structure beloved of Hollywood. The leading figure in this trend is Anders Thomas Jensen. With more than thirty screenplays to his credit, he has become one of the finest script craftsmen in world filmmaking today.

Jensen has written exhilarating action comedies (*In China They Eat Dogs*), a Chabrolian thriller (*Murk*), and black comedies that recall the dottiness of Ealing Studios, though with a grimmer shade of grotesquerie. The Sweeney-Todd premise of *The Green Butchers* harks back to British guignol, and the maniacally optimistic priest in *Adam's Apples* might in the 1950s have been played by Alec Guinness. (If, that is, we can imagine Alec Guinness surviving a gun blast to his eye.) The humor is broader in Jensen's script for *Clash of Egos*, but its premise has an Ealing-like whimsicality: What if an ordinary person were allowed to direct a movie?



Fidibus/Easy Skanking. Photo: Thomas Marott



Sprængfarlig bombe/Clash of Egos. Photo: Ole Kragh-Jacobsen



Prag/Prague Photo: Alzbeta Jungrova

in *Triad Society*, *Hawaii*, *Oslo*, and on and on. The most prominent Danish efforts I know are Susanne Bier's *The One and Only* and Lotte Svendsen's *What's Wrong with This Picture?*

Granted, sometimes a filmmaker can rely excessively on American indie models. Too many Danish films introduce their characters with freeze-frames and character names scrawled on the screen, guided by a laconic voice-over. The druggy hallucinations of *Angels in Fast Motion* seem to recycle *Trainspotting*, *Spun*, and *Requiem for a Dream*. But sometimes a new spin is put on some commonplaces. Tarantino's fingerprints can be found on Hella Joof's *Fidibus* (*Easy Skanking*), but the film's surprisingly sweet romance and the Danish movie references (even to Dreyer!) are wholly local. The slacker drama *Dark Horse* begins along some well-worn grooves, but it detours unpredictably to reveal how a pillar of the establishment, a stern judge, becomes the biggest slacker of all.

Every Jensen comedy has a finely tuned structure, starting with a robust central situation that reveals characters through battles of wits and passages of ego-deflation. The tone swings between humor and the macabre, with abrupt flashes of emotion. Jensen is especially gifted at handling sentiment without creating the feel-good tackiness of Hollywood. Few directors could have resisted the chance to create an exchange of warm smiles and camaraderie at the end of *Adam's Apples*, when the Bee Gees are crooning, "How deep is your love?" It's the tune that Ivan routinely switches on when driving, and it's served as a comic motif to define Adam's rage at the priest's obstinate optimism. Now, with Adam installed as his assistant, Ivan cheerfully switches on the song again.

Jensen climaxes this comedy-drama with a superbly delayed reaction shot. As Ivan starts to sing along, Adam frowns slightly. He stares at the road ahead, then at nothing at all, then at Ivan. He turns almost completely from the camera. Only

after thirty seconds does he start, as if against his will, to mouth the song's words. As he does, Jensen cuts the shot off. Adam's struggle to stay a hard guy is fully played out on his face, and we can merely glimpse the victory of mild fellow-feeling. As there was the Lubitsch touch and the Wilder touch, we can now speak of the Jensen touch - a twinge of pathos acknowledged quietly, relying on our sympathy for characters' bizarre frailties.

THE CONSOLATIONS OF MELODRAMA: A NEW TRADITION OF QUALITY

It's ironic that Danish cinema has gained so much of its strength by cultivating genres. "Genre movies are not acceptable," the Dogme Vow of Chastity declared. Presumably in accord with the tenet that barred "superficial action" involving murders and weapons, this prohibition presumed that the only genres were crime thrillers, war pictures, and the like. But when you ban "genre films," you may in effect fall back on another genre, a very pervasive one: melodrama.

I don't use the term disparagingly; *melodrama* can be as neutral a term as

Breaking the Waves to *Manderlay*. But other directors have relied on the format's conventions. A family gathering discloses unpleasant secrets. Husbands and wives may betray one another. The commitment to melodrama extends to the use of age-old devices: announcements of pregnancy, secret liaisons, messages that go astray, and sudden revelations of fatal diseases. So many characters wind up in hospital that one must conclude that being a character in a Danish movie can be dangerous to your health. That's also suggested by Claus's art movie seen at the start of *Clash of Egos*, which shows the hero wrapped in bandages.

In this genre too the screenwriting skill of Anders Thomas Jensen has been pivotal. His melodramas are as solidly built as his comedies, and his stratagems for deflecting sentiment work very well in the fraught emotional atmosphere of *Open Hearts* and *Wilbur Wants to Kill Himself*. A climactic scene in Susanne Bier's *After the Wedding* shows Jacob asking the Indian orphan boy Pramod if he wants to come to Denmark with him. Earlier Pramod had been fascinated to learn of a land where everyone is rich, but now Pramod hesitates to go there.



1:1/One to One. Photo: Per Arnesen



Der var engang en dreng, der fik en lillesøster med vinger/Skymaster, A Flying Family Fairytale. Photo: Ole Kragh-Jacobsen

Western or *musical*. Melodramas characteristically focus on personal relationships between lovers and within families. The genre highlights the suffering triggered by impulsive action or powerful social forces. It dramatizes the clash of innocence and power, and it poses difficult moral choices. Characters are plunged into a swirl of misunderstanding and bad luck. They must keep secrets and mislead others, sometimes reluctantly. They must sometimes betray their loved ones, or sacrifice themselves even though they have done nothing wrong. Melodrama's most pervasive form in today's media is the soap opera, but in much of Hollywood cinema it emerged, in Eric Bentley's phrase, as "bourgeois tragedy."

Over the last decade, much of the most accomplished Danish cinema has cast its lot with melodrama. Perhaps most explicit is von Trier's recurring tales of how innocent women suffer at the hands of a misunderstanding society, from

In an American film, Pramod would probably have accepted Jacob's offer, joining him and his daughter in Copenhagen and embarking on a better life. But Pramod declines. "I don't think so," he says. "Everything is so good here now." Bier has sharply contrasted the bare-bones poverty of the orphanage with the luxury of Danish country houses and full-service hotels, so Pramod's line carries a special poignancy. He has no conception of how good life can really be. At the same time, his refusal allows Jacob no easy compromise. He must give up the intimate relationship with the boy that came from casting off his dissolute past and working for the sake of others. In Copenhagen, administering a vast charity fund, Jacob can save all the Pramods. But he will lose the human connection that made his life in India meaningful. In melodrama, happiness exacts its costs. Here Jensen's sparsely written scene, ably played and given visual resonance by Bier's direction, creates subtle interplays of emotion without succumbing to bathos.

The strategy of sentiment-inoculation has been picked up in Kim Fupz Aakeson's screenplay for Annette K. Olesen's *1:1*. In this social melodrama, ethnic suspicions flare up in a neighborhood of housing estates. The final shots open the possibility of a happy ending, but that turn of events will in turn precipitate more problems in the lives of characters we have come to care about. Similarly, Pernille Fischer Christensen's *A Soap* juxtaposes its central romance with the TV series that holds the gender-switching Veronica spellbound. At the climax, lines that would sound overblown coming from our protagonists – "Love is a promise....," "You saved me with your love..." – are channeled through the TV monitors they watch fairly impassively. It's not that the lines voice their feelings, but we have to consider that they *might* feel these very things. Pathos, again, is deflected. The movie is itself a soap, but it's also aware that soap-opera emotions, though strong and genuine, are sometimes too simple for the complications thrown up by real life.

The centrality of melodrama has helped Danish cinema attain what is in effect a Cinema of Quality – perhaps the first full-blown one since the French tradition

“Danish genre entries have set international standards for solid screenplays. With running times of 90-100 minutes, the films can snugly accommodate the three-act structure beloved of Hollywood. The leading figure in this trend is Anders Thomas Jensen. With more than thirty screenplays to his credit, he has become one of the finest script craftsmen in world filmmaking today.”

of the 1950s. Excellent performers, sophisticated directors, and well-carpentered scripts are the mainstay of recent Danish film. This is yet another unintended consequence of the Dogme manifesto, which called for a break with conformity; of such ironies is history made.

The problem with a Cinema of Quality is that it can become sleek, stodgy, and predictable. Danish filmmakers, I think, recognize this risk and are moving in new directions. One option is to “theatricalize” melodrama quite overtly. This is most apparent in von Trier's stagebound *Dogville* and *Manderlay*. In a dark vacuum with only the sketchiest indications of place, these films evoke not only Brecht but (another irony) the Thornton Wilder play *Our Town*, a classic of American middlebrow theatre. A milder form of theatricality is found in *A Soap*, which by confining its action to a few apartments recalls the *kammerspiel* aesthetic of silent cinema and, further back, of Scandinavian drama. Yet another instance is *How We Get Rid of the Others*, a bold drama of ideas that could easily be a stage play but gains intensity from its hard-edged cinematic treatment.

BACK TO THE TRIPOD?

There's another sign of renewal, and it's more technical. Since at least Italian Neorealism, filmmakers seeking a more realistic cinema have called for a roughening of technical standards. France's Nouvelle Vague, New York filmmakers like Cassavetes, and the documentarists of *cinéma direct* and *cinéma vérité* are forerunners of what is today called the run-and-gun aesthetic. There's location shooting, often with little supplementary lighting. The editing is jarring, offering throwaway shots, jump cuts, and mismatches. Above all, there's the bumpy handheld camerawork.

This ragged look became in the 1990s the choice of first resort for many filmmakers all over the world. It had the advantage of being cheap and easily imitable on the smaller budgets available in Europe and Asia. In retrospect, the Dogme signers came along at just the right time to articulate and accelerate the trend. Dogme gave Danish cinema a trademark and brand name, so successfully that many viewers think of this jerky filmic texture as “the Dogme style.” Steven Soderbergh notoriously called *Traffic* his Dogme film. The down side is that the Vow of Chastity called for a revolution in technique with no corresponding

change in dramaturgy. As a result, the films' loose, nervous surface may conceal their solidly constructed plots, making them seem less a continuation of dramatic traditions than they are.

Not that the run-and-gun look is everywhere; plenty of films avoid it. But the style has become one signature of ambitious Danish cinema. Take Ole Christian Madsen's *Prague*. The premise calls to mind the high period of Euromodernism, the golden days of Antonioni. Christoffer, a workaholic businessman, and his wife Maja go to Prague to claim the body of the father whom Christoffer never knew. He undergoes three voyages of discovery: into his father's past, into his wife's secret life, and into his own rather empty existence.

In the 1960s, the inertia and anomie of Christoffer's life would have been rendered in prolonged takes, abstractly composed long shots emphasizing architecture, and long passages of “dead time”. But in *Prague* the editing pace is rapid – on average, a shot lasts only five seconds – and Madsen's jumpy camera seems to catch everything on the fly. “We were very dynamic about the expression,” he explains, “with a free camera – as has been the practice for the last ten years in Denmark.” Familiar as it is, the technique works to prepare for the physically and emotionally violent climax. An Antonioni husband would stifle his distress, but our Dane goes ballistic in a very public way, and the camera dives and whirls to capture the awful embarrassment of it.

Still, one has a lot of sympathy for the working-class aesthetics of Tonny in *Clash of Egos*. When Claus directs a scene using the handheld camera, Tonny, who has veto control over *Explosive Bomb*, objects. Is the cameraman drunk? It looks like home video. Claus explains that this is the style. Tonny demands a tripod, and the cameraman says he hasn't used one since film school. “Keep that shit steady,” Tonny warns, “or I'll call my lawyer.”

The danger is that the ragged visual texture risks becoming today's academic style. How to renew the look and feel of movies? I'd argue that von Trier, ever willing to break with what is currently cool, began to rethink the role of the camera in *Dancer in the Dark* and, more radically, in *The Boss of It All*. The latter film avoids the un-Steadicam aesthetic but takes Hollywood's multiple-camera strategy in a different direction than we saw in *Dancer*. Automavision™ leaves choices of framing and focus to computer programs, opening the film to chance in a way that refreshes our sense of shot design.

From a different angle, Simon Staho's *Day and Night*, in the wake of Kiarostami's *Five*, confined its imagery to what could be recorded from only two locked-down camera positions, both angled on the front seats of a car. *Bang Bang Orangutang* shrewdly expands the premises of this aesthetic. Now Staho allows shots from a few other positions, as long as the action is played out in or near the car. (With one brief and striking exception, there are no shots inside buildings.) The result is, as with von Trier, exhilarating: a pictorial style that works both with and against the drama, reminding us that the camera's eye can not merely record a performance but also creatively shape what we see. Both dramatic actions and trivial everyday urban life flit by outside the car's windows, and we're reminded of one of cinema's powers: to recreate the world within a fixed frame, at once narrower and deeper than the one yielded by everyday vision.

Efforts toward renewal have gained important institutional support from the Danish Film Institute. The New Danish Screen pool funded several of the films I've discussed, under the rubric of providing a small but reasonable budget for noncommercial features. The undertaking, remarks the administrator Vinca Wiedemann, makes room for the “interesting failure.” The task is to maintain creative innovation as central to the historical identity of this national cinema.

In the 1910s, the production company Nordisk was one of the most powerful film companies in the world. The firm's trademark, a massive polar bear surmounting the globe, became the emblem of the little nation's dynamic cinema. It can't be coincidental that *Clash of Egos*, a Nordisk release, ends with Tonny and his children at the zoo. His final line sums up the challenge facing the Danish film community: “Let's go see if the polar bear is still alive” ■

See also David Bordwell's blog www.davidbordwell.net, including his comments ‘Another Pebble in Your Shoe’ (about the editing technique in Lars von Trier's new film *The Boss of it All*), and ‘The Best Danish Films I saw at the End of 2006’.

DAVID BORDWELL,

Professor Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin – Madison, is the author of several books on film aesthetics and film history, including a book on Carl Th. Dreyer. He studies storytelling and visual style in the cinemas of Hong Kong, Japan, and the US. With his wife Kristin Thompson he has written two widely-used textbooks, ‘Film Art: An Introduction’ and ‘Film History: An Introduction’.

99% OF ALL DANISH FILMS SOLD ABROAD ARE HANDLED BY TWO DANISH PLAYERS:

NORDISK: BEEFING UP ON INDEPENDENT FILMS

For years, Nordisk Film International Sales has had a dominant position in children's films, family entertainment and commercial genre pictures. Now, the company is expanding its scope to include more specialised films.

BY DORTHE NIELSEN

Founded in 1991, Nordisk Film International Sales is a subsidiary of Nordisk Film, the movie studio that turned 100 last year. Considering its filmmaking pedigree and the growing interest in Danish films abroad, Nordisk Film thought it was time to start the first international sales company in Denmark.

On the strength of Nordisk Film's own productions in the various Nordic countries, the company quickly attained a dominant position in children's films, family entertainment and more commercial genre films, especially by selling to TV and video distribution. But during the past year art house films, such as Camera d'Or winner *Reconstruction*, and Academy Award nominee *Evil*, have had considerable success.

Today, the company's back catalogue numbers 600 titles, including Klaus Härö's *Mother of Mine*, Tomás Gíslason's *Overcoming*, and Erik Skjoldbærg's *Insomnia*, Jacob Thuesen's *Accused* and Anders Thomas Jensen's *The Green Butchers*. In children's and family films, Nordisk Film International Sales offers Klaus Härö's *Elina*, Morten Kølbert's *Little Big Girl*, Henrik Ruben Genz's *Someone like Hodder* and the 3D-animated *Terkel in Trouble*.

Now, the company is in the process of beefing up on independent films, as well.

"In the future, we intend to maintain our position in children's and family films, and genre films, while doing more with independent films and new talents," Kenneth Wiberg says. Wiberg has been the director of Nordisk Film International Sales since 1997.

THREE BASIC LABELS

The structure for the future will offer three basic labels: children's and family films; commercial genre films, primarily for TV and video distribution; and independent films, covering also art house films.

The new three-pronged structure is a step in the parent company's overarching strategy now that Nordisk Film has started investing in local production companies in the Nordic countries. In Denmark, Nordisk Film has bought into a young company, Copenhagen-Bombay Productions, headed by Anders Morgenthaler and Sarita Christensen. To bolster the new focus on independent film, Nordisk Film International Sales last year hired two former employees of its competitor, Trust Film Sales. Tine Klint started as sales executive in April 2006 and Nicolai Korsgaard has been PR and marketing manager since November 2006.

NEW PLATFORMS

Meanwhile, Nordisk Film International Sales is putting a major focus on new platforms like video on demand. In Denmark, Nordisk manages film aspects at Sputnik, the new digital channel of the TV2 broadcaster.

"Everyone is talking about video on demand and digital distribution, how to do it and make sure to get as much money as possible coming in. Our work in TV2 Sputnik has already given us a lot of unique experiences,"

Wiberg says.

Nordisk Film International Sales and its staff of eight work closely with Nordisk Film Digital Distribution and Nordisk Film TV Distribution. Their total staff numbers 16 people, half of whom are dedicated to international sales.

Every year, Nordisk Film International Sales puts 30-35 new films on the programme, primarily from the Nordic countries. In Denmark, these films are Nordisk Film's own productions or come from deals with companies like M&M Productions, Fine & Mellow and ASA. Nordisk Film also does its own productions in Norway and has deals with 4 1/2 and Maipo. In Finland, Kinotar and Matila & Röhr supply productions. In Sweden, Heppfilm, Bobfilm and Bredablick. Nordisk likewise has co-production partners in all three countries.

"Our focus is primarily on Nordic productions and that's what it will continue to be. Having that base is what gives us our edge. It's what we are here for: securing international revenue for local producers, either Nordisk Film's own or external producers," Wiberg says.

Nordisk Film is a division of the Egmont media group ■



Kenneth Wiberg. Photo: Nordisk Film

TITLES IN BERLIN 2007

Clash of Egos / Tomas Villum Jensen
Ghosts of Cité Soleil / Asger Leth
The Last Treasure of the Knights Templar II / Giacomo Campeotto
Marush / Marius Holst

TOP 10

Pusher Trilogy
Reconstruction
Johnny Was
The Last Treasure of the Knights Templar
Evil
Tsatsiki
Beyond
Adams Apples
The Green Butchers
Wolf Summer

TERRITORIES/COUNTRIES

54
 41
 39
 38
 37
 30
 29
 27
 26
 22

NOTE: Count of territories/countries: In some instances, the count of one can include a territory as large as Latin America or the Middle East.

TRUST: STRONG RELATIONSHIPS & DIVERSITY

Zentropa founded Trust Film Sales in 1997 on the strength of Lars von Trier's productions.

The company also have children's and family films, as well as thrillers in the line up, but to find and present the unique and original talent will always be the main focus.

BY DORTHE NIELSEN

Featuring films by such iconic Danish directors as Lars von Trier, Thomas Vinterberg, Susanne Bier, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen and Lone Scherfig, Trust Film Sales has had a big hand in putting Danish and Scandinavian films on the map.

Zentropa founded the sales company back in 1997. A mounting output of films combined with international interest in von Trier's work convinced Zentropa it was time to reap the fruits from the international sales of its films. Von Trier's films were the foundation for a flourishing sales company with a clear focus on arthouse films and auteur-driven vehicles distinguished by the directors' in-depth involvement in both directing and scripting.

FILMS WITH AN EDGE

"We are a company with a strong focus on quality and edgy films. We like to present art films that are different, and give the world challenging films," Maja Dyekjær Giese says. Giese has been president of Trust Film Sales since August 2006. Dogme films like *The Idiots*, *Mifune* and Scherfig's *Italian for Beginners* solidified international awareness of the growing Danish company.

Though Trust Film Sales is Danish, the company has always cast a wide Nordic net and Nordic filmmakers like

Lukas Moodysson and Josef Fares have scored big hits for the company. Apart from selling Zentropa's own films, Trust Film Sales has a deal with the Swedish production company Memfis Film and also works with Sonet Film, among others. Trust's main focus has been on Denmark and Scandinavia, but in the future the company would like to expand its scope. "The core clients are big Nordic directors, established names, as well as new talents that we seek to cultivate and put out there on the world map. But we would like to pick up films from all of Northern Europe," Giese says.

TALENTED DIRECTORS - SKILLED DISTRIBUTION

"Trust's business stands on two legs: one is directors whose talent and originality gives them international appeal. The other is our network of relationships with skilled distributors across the world," Giese notes.

"Relationships are important, of course, and a bit of a mantra in our company. That's why we decided to dedicate 2007 to our producers and directors. We want to be the first choice, not just for producers but also for directors looking for a sales agent.

"The way we see it, with mutual loyalty to producers and directors, we can use already well-known and established talent to take risks with art films and directors the world should obviously see. Help build names and make people aware that a talented director's best film may not be his first," Giese explains.

"Considering our position on the market today, we face the natural choice of expanding our product. We have a goal of taking 30 to 35 films on sales consignment a year against 20 to 25 before. We want to be more outgoing outside the Nordic

TOP 10

Dogville
Dancer in the Dark
It's All About Love
Italian for Beginners
Manderlay
Dear Wendy
Open Hearts
Wilbur Wants to Kill Himself
Mifune
Lilya 4-Ever

TERRITORIES/COUNTRIES

Sold out
 67
 64
 64
 62
 59
 56
 55
 53
 49

NOTE: Count of territories/countries: In some instances, the count of one can include a territory as large as Latin America or the Middle East

countries as well. In November, we hired Thomas Mai to be our new sales executive and co-production manager tasked with finding new partners and talent for the company's future line-up," she adds.

Trust Film Sales' vision for the future also calls for putting more muscle into children's films and genre films. "We have a declared goal of selling alternatives to the American mainstream, and such alternatives naturally also include children's and family films, thrillers and genre film not made in Hollywood," she says. Moreover, Trust Film Sales plans to focus more on the documentary film genre. "As a sales company, we want to embrace all genres of cinema art, and documentaries are an important genre. And as we build our business on long time relations we should be able to take all films by the directors and producers we work with regularly, and give them the best treat on the marketplace" Giese points out.

A big challenge today and in the future is posed by the many new platforms for digital distribution. Trust Film Sales is currently discussing opportunities with partners in the US, Sweden and France. "We're keeping a sharp eye on the area to avoid selling out any rights," she proclaims.

Trust Film Sales has picked up

TITLES IN BERLIN 2007

Danish films: *Island of Lost Souls*; *How to Get Rid of the Others*; *Life Hits*; *Skymaster*; *A Flying Family Fairytale*; *AFR*
Icelandic films: *Myrin*; *Jar City*; *Baltazar Komakur*
Swedish films: *When Darkness Falls* (Panorama); *Kidz in da Hood* (Generation Kplus)

172 films since 1997, including 105 Danish, 33 Swedish and 12 Norwegian films. The rest are from countries like the US, Iceland, Holland, Finland and Germany. Trust Film Sales currently employs a staff of 17. Latest sales hits are *After the Wedding*, and *Princess* ■



Maja Dyekjær Giese. Photo: P. Wessel

THINK TANK... ON EUROPEAN FILM AND FILM POLICY

Witnessing the major manifestations of cinematic art in Berlin, Cannes, Venice etc., it is easy to banish from your mind the idea that there is anything wrong with the world of film, or anything we could do better. But the ThinkTank on European Film and Film Policy has come about precisely because we have a suspicion that there are several serious problems with film in Europe, and perhaps a few things we could do to remedy those problems.

BY HENNING CAMRE AND JONATHAN DAVIS

The ThinkTank on European Film and Film Policy was launched at the 2006 Berlin Film Festival. Working with an advisory team appointed by Henning Camre, CEO of the Danish Film Institute and Chair of the ThinkTank, an inaugural three-day event was organised. This event, the Copenhagen ThinkTank, took place in June 2006. 166 people attended, representing film the film industry, funding bodies and national governments in 32 countries. Keynote speeches were given by Lord David Puttnam and Geoff Gilmore. Participants took part in working groups to consider the objectives of funding film and how these could best be achieved.

Exactly one year on, the process has begun to establish a permanent organisation to take forward the work of the ThinkTank. The Danish Government has committed core funding, and discussions with potential partners – national and regional film funds as well as other institutions dedicated to film and to the development of public policy – are under way. In the course of 2007, we will be putting in place the work programme of the ThinkTank. First and foremost stands a series of events to advance the debates about access to film and the positive impact of film in society, and how to maximise the effectiveness of public film policy. The work includes setting up research and publication activities, and generally assisting in the development of the knowledge, skills and ideas we need to strengthen film-making. At the 2007 Berlinale, we are presenting the first fruits of the work of the ThinkTank, *The Copenhagen Report*. More than a record of the Copenhagen ThinkTank, *The Copenhagen Report* is a prospectus for the ThinkTank going forward. Consistent with ThinkTank philosophy, *The Copenhagen Report* is a discussion document. It poses questions, it throws down challenges and it invites argument.

BUILDING COMMON UNDERSTANDING

The response to the Copenhagen event has been very positive and there has been great encouragement for us to continue what we have started. People keep asking when the next meeting of the ThinkTank will be. Our thinking is that we could, of course, do another meeting with lots of new people and some of the same people, and we could have the same discussions over again without advancing anything very much. Any ThinkTank activity must at its core aim at change.

We are therefore thinking about how to best address the key issues and how to involve different countries and a variety of people from all areas of the film industry: the creators, producers, distributors, festival organisers, scholars and public administrators and policy-makers, not necessarily all from the film world. The obstacle we face is that we want everyone to take part, and not just people from the 27 EU countries, but gathering all those people in the same place at the same time and ensuring that there is the opportunity for real dialogue would demand a much bigger space and more time than anyone can realistically afford. Moreover, in Copenhagen we made an uncomfortable discovery: people are not ready yet to have the discussions they would like. They do not have the information, the relevant intelligence – especially the intelligence to enable them to compare and understand what is common and what is distinctive about their industries, their markets and their cultures – to make sense of what is and is not working, what is necessary and useful. Without this intelligence, the film industry cannot thrive and public policy for film will miss the mark. We need a much greater understanding of what our common goals and differences are. The current debate is fractured and people who should be taking part in the debate – notably the creators – are mostly absent.

FOCUS & AIM

In 2007 the ThinkTank will begin to address these challenges. We need to secure the commitment and the support of the organisations and the people, of governments, film agencies and industry. We need to conceive and refine our ways of working. Can we, for example, help convene discussions that draw on a sufficient breadth and depth of experience and perspective, while remaining focused enough to permit practical, constructive thinking? What is the appropriate focus? Can we base the discussion on a particular country or a limited number of countries?

Can we start from a specific problem? We have in mind, perhaps, discussions involving 10 countries, brought together because they share problems rather than because they are in a particular region.

As we seek solutions that are manageable, it is important that we stick to the original aim of the ThinkTank. This is how we have summarised that aim:

“The overall aim of the initiative is to assure the conditions for filmmaking, to create a space in which the films can work, and to realise the value to society of cinema. This involves

- filmmakers better harnessing the opportunities for matching artistic endeavour with attractiveness to audiences
- film-funders taking greater responsibility for their creative, commercial and political decisions
- film-funders developing a strategic approach to their work which matches the resources at their disposal with the objectives they are pursuing.
- producers and industry organisations optimising the effectiveness and cohesion of the industrial framework.”

THE NEED FOR RENEWAL

One basic assumption is that we need to work towards improving the different systems for supporting film, rather than towards one “best system.”

We want to respond to the challenges David Puttnam and Geoff Gilmore posed in Copenhagen. They both considered the sources of success, and failure, of European cinema: its ability to connect with audiences and to address the issues that really matter, and its willingness to “speak the truth to power”, to re-ignite its “moral purpose”. Puttnam wondered whether “we in Europe have lost our vision”, whether “we have been so obsessively focussed on getting films made and, in particular, finding the money to get the films made, that we have neglected our sense of what kind of European cinema – or cinemas – we actually want.” Gilmore spoke of the need for renewal if film is to continue to reach its audience in the face of the economic and technological upheavals currently taking place in the market place. He proposed that our “sense of film culture, which is such an important part of film art in what exists in Europe, is also one of the anchors holding back the revitalisation that Europe so desperately needs. Because there needs to be a break. There needs to be a separation from the past.” European film “centres itself in a film culture that is not relevant anymore.”

OBJECTIVES FOR THE THINK TANK

- I Improvement in the operation of public funding, for example, working with funding bodies and governments to develop and implement better processes of support
- II Promotion and dissemination of solid and informed arguments in defence of public funding of film
- III Encouragement and dissemination of high-quality research relating to public funding
- IV Integration of creative people into the process of policy development and implementation.

DEVELOPING THE THINK TANK

The ThinkTank is conceived as an international organisation funded by multi-year contributions from national public film bodies like the Danish Film Institute, industry bodies and charitable foundations, ideally through endowments. In this way it would enjoy long-term political independence.

The ThinkTank secretariat will initially be based in Denmark. The ThinkTank will pursue three main activities:

- a Organisation of ThinkTank workshops and major events
- b A research and publication programme
- c An advisory programme of projects to help establish/structure/re-structure film agencies

GETTING TO GRIPS WITH REALITY

The ThinkTank wants to get to grips with the realities of our industry rather than to perpetuate the illusions that often function as the basis of our rhetoric and the policies pursued through it. To prepare the Copenhagen event, we carried out a survey of the national film funds in 29 European countries. This survey revealed how in all but one of the cases, the main funding objectives were to secure national film production and the production of quality films. More than three-quarters of the funds cited the objective to support the building of a sustainable film industry. Half invoked the objective of stimulating employment and commercial activity. However, in response to the question of how they evaluated success, the funds put most weight not on the level of audience response, not on whether the films made money, not on whether the films were distributed to other countries, but on festival selections and awards.

Other research prepared for the Copenhagen ThinkTank considered the extent to which co-producing films made it easier for the films to travel. This research, based on a sample of 344 European films selected for Berlin, Cannes, Toronto and Venice, suggests that co-productions fare no better - and probably fare worse - in the market place. For example, of 21 French films distributed in Germany, three were Franco-German co-productions. Of 11 German films distributed in France, none were Franco-German co-productions. The 344-film sample covered the period 2001-2005; over the five years there were 45 official Franco-German co-productions.

DATA & RESEARCH

In its first year, the ThinkTank took only tentative steps to contribute to the collection and analysis of

data about European film. But it has already become very clear that we do not make good use of the data we have and the data we have are inadequate. This point is driven home in the paper prepared for the Copenhagen ThinkTank by André Lange of the European Audiovisual Observatory.

The ThinkTank is also about highlighting the need for high-level research. The European Audiovisual Observatory can only be as helpful as the national data they get. The Observatory needs, the industry needs, and national film agencies need for there to be consistency and comprehensiveness in our information. How can we be sensible when, for example, we know so little about DVD markets?

In the planning for the ThinkTank, we have decided that we want to reflect on how systems can be developed in countries that have still to put film policies in place. We want to formulate solid arguments that justify public funding of film and explain why and how we protect and promote film. We need to get beyond the discussion that we tend to hear from producers about the need for more money and faster and easier access to funds. Instead we want to concentrate on what is important to society and important to film culture because this has tended to be the weakness in the argument for film.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR DEVELOPING POLICY

At the core of ThinkTank thinking is that we do not only want to discuss funding but rather what films we make, how we make them and why we make them. It is a discussion that needs to involve creative people more - we have always known this and understand it is not easy to achieve. It is not just a question of inviting lots of writers and directors; we need to identify a range of people who can contextualise and generalise their experience.

When we began the work to set up the ThinkTank in July 2005 we did not know if it would fly. We now think that it can fly and we are realising how important it is. The ThinkTank is an opportunity to take more responsibility for developing policy: some people think that it is up to Brussels to decide what we should and should not do. But we need to talk about what we make and national film agencies must work with industry to find more useful ways forward. Together we can take control of the discussion.

The current opportunity arises from the four-year agreement for film funding we have just reached in Denmark. The ThinkTank has been identified as a priority. At the start, the Danish Film Institute could initiate and drive the ThinkTank on its own but future action will depend on support from the other national agencies, foundations and industry. It will be easier to identify funding for events than for the daily and preparatory work. The Institute is happy to provide the framework for the ThinkTank but this is not about the Danish view of the world; the ThinkTank has to be genuinely international and of benefit to us all.

REACHING & CONNECTING WITH AUDIENCES

The ThinkTank is a new way of strengthening contributions to the formation of European film policy itself. As with society as a whole, film is subject to the fundamental technological, economic and social shifts associated with globalisation. Maintaining and adapting Europe's social and cultural values means that European film policy needs to continue to evolve. For European films to prosper there need to be rich and diverse film cultures which are receptive to films from other countries. European film-makers need to strengthen their ability to reach and connect with audiences

To maintain public, political and economic support for film - without which there would be no film industry - film culture has to deliver more effectively in more areas that the public consider important. A film policy purely based on the twin pillars of national culture and economic competitiveness lacks in ambition. Increasingly questions such as how different cultures and countries can respect one another, how to achieve social cohesion and prevent communities - inside and outside a given country - becoming alienated and antagonistic must be addressed. Film's ability to contribute to dealing with these questions may ultimately be as significant as its contribution to the national culture and economy ■



A Soap. Photo: Lars Wahl

AN EYE FOR OUTSIDERS

Dencik made his breakthrough playing a transsexual in *A Soap*, winner of last year's Silver Bear in Berlin, but he also masters the comedy genre and more macho roles.

BY MORTEN PIIL

David Dencik is an actor with a cross-border background – his roles tend to cross boundaries as well. Dencik won awards and critical acclaim for his engaging, sympathetic characterization of a transsexual, Veronica, in Pernille Fischer Christensen's two-person drama, *A Soap*. The film, which took home the Silver Bear at the 2006 Berlin Film Festival, is wholly concentrated on Dencik's and Trine Dyrholm's lead performances.

Dencik's Veronica is no ordinary accomplishment for a young actor. In Denmark, Dencik first drew notice for an overtly macho turn in *The Fighter*, a short film from 2003, but his life and career do not fit the usual Danish mould. His family is Jewish and comes

from Czechoslovakia. Born in Sweden, he lived most of his life in Denmark before moving back to Sweden eight years ago to study acting at Dramaten in Stockholm.

VERONICA'S DIGNITY

Dencik, who has equal command of Danish and Swedish, has played roles on stage and screen in both countries. But his breakthrough came in *A Soap*, playing Veronica, who lives alone with her small dog and obsessively dreams of having a sex change operation.

Veronica unexpectedly befriends her downstairs neighbour Charlotte, an attractive 32-year-old (played by Trine Dyrholm). Men pursue her, but she wants none of them. In withdrawn Veronica, Charlotte finally finds the resistance she needs, tentatively at first, as solidarity slowly builds and turns to budding love.

Under Christensen's sensitive, subtle direction, Dencik's Veronica becomes a fleshed-out character oozing melancholy from her bottomless, dark eyes, while demonstrating paradoxical personal dignity amid the humiliating situations she constantly finds herself in. A fragile person who often succumbs to self-pity, she still finds the strength to overcome her loneliness.

PROCESS OF SOLIDARITY

Dencik gives a deeply serious, intensely involved performance that is miles from the comedy clichés that tend to come with the character of a “woman trapped in a man's body.” The two central characters in *A*

Soap were partly improvised into being by Dencik and Dyrholm in an extended eight-month process. Dencik did extensive research (at one point consulting with a real-life transsexual) and did everything he could to get into the part. In pre-premiere interviews, Dencik, in a gesture of solidarity, insisted that reporters refer to Veronica as a “she” not a “he,” because that's how the character sees herself.

“It's a very difficult psychological process trying to remake yourself as a woman. It took pains to always go around thinking ‘It's a girl.’”

“She is all alone in the world. Not even her dog sees her as a woman,” he said. “It's a very difficult psychological process trying to remake yourself as a woman. I took pains to always go around thinking ‘It's a girl.’”

GIDDY COMEDY - HARSH REALISM

The humour in *A Soap* is understated. It's anything but in the short comedy *Being Holger* (2005). Starring Dencik as a geeky, daydreaming postman who is mistaken for a fast-moving womanizer, the film showcases Dencik's mastery of a more conventional comedy style.

DAVID DENCIK

Born 1974, Sweden. Lived most of his life in Denmark before moving back to Sweden as an adult to study acting in Stockholm. He became well known to Swedish audiences as the lead in *Lasermannen*, a television series. He played a part in Christoffer Boe's Camera d'Or winner *Reconstruction* (2003), and his big breakthrough came as the transsexual, Veronica, in Pernille Fischer Christensen's Berlin Silver Bear winner, *A Soap* (2006). Dencik plays in a number Danish films to be released in 2007 and 2008: the leading role in Daniel Espinosa's *Ghetto*, a part in Simon Staho's *Daisy Diamond* and Jacob Thuesen's *Erik Nietzsche*.

Being Holger and *The Fighter* were both graduate films from the National Film School of Denmark, a form that has often afforded new young actors a chance to shine. Tough, realistic, with a dash of Scorsese, *The Fighter* stars Dencik as a weakling who is buoyed by his friendship with a much stronger peer from the same rough neighbourhood, but who falls short when it really counts – another powerful, uncompromising portrayal of an outsider.

The Fighter was directed by Daniel Espinosa, a young filmmaker who also made Dencik's new feature film. *Ghetto* stars Dencik as Shmuli, a single father raising a five-year-old boy while living at home with his parents. Working as a security guard to finance his dream of moving to America, Shmuli falls in love with a young, beautiful woman, Amina, but their love is beset by obstacles: he is Jewish, she is Pakistani.

Ghetto was written by Dencik's brother, Daniel Dencik, and produced by Thura Film. It will premiere in Denmark in 2007 ■

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